Piero della Francesca and British art

'That unfinished *Adoration* in the National Gallery has produced many descendants in our times!'

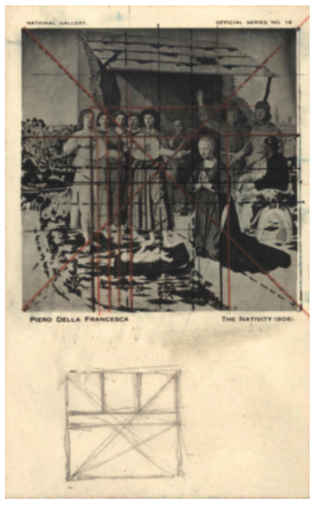
Susanna Avery-Quash and Sacha Llewellyn

The Baptism of Christ and *The Nativity* by Piero della Francesca (*c*1415/20–1492) are two of the best-loved works in the National Gallery. This article considers the wide range of 20th-century artists, born or resident in Britain, who have been inspired by Piero's work. Extending the scholarship of Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, Luciano Cheles, Caroline Elam and Larry Witham, which has explored Piero's influence on 20th-century art, and in particular on the British Modernist School centred around Roger Fry,[1] this article examines the impact of Piero's work across other artistic movements in Britain in the first half of the 20th century, from the avant garde to the Tempera Revival painters and the more reactionary members of the Royal Academy, with special emphasis on the first generation of scholars at the British School at Rome.

Writing in the *Studio* magazine in 1922, the painter and theatre designer George Sherringham considered that people should be divided into 'those who know and love Piero [della] Francesca's *Nativity*, and those who do not'.[2] By the 1920s, Piero was a central figure of intellectual and artistic circles in Britain. After almost four centuries of neglect, he had been introduced to British audiences in the late 19th century by a few pioneering connoisseurs, museum officials and collectors, the purchase and display of three paintings by the National Gallery playing a seminal role in this first wave of new interest.[3] Charles Eastlake, appointed first Director in 1855, purchased Piero's *Baptism of Christ*, painted after 1437, in 1861 (Pl 1); his successor, William Boxall, was responsible in 1867 for buying *Saint Michael*, a work completed in 1469; while Frederic Burton, the third Director, secured in 1874 the National Gallery's final Piero, *The Nativity*, dating to 1470–75 (Pl 2), for 2,300 guineas, a large sum indicative of the high standing which the painter now enjoyed.[4]

At first, Piero's perceived idiosyncrasies had disturbed many commentators, given that his notion of beauty was not of the Raphaelesque kind so much admired in late Victorian Britain. His figures' lack of emotional expression and use of dramatic sense was also queried. For instance, in 1875, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* stated: '*The Nativity* has been praised somewhat beyond its deserving on aesthetic grounds.' Writing about *The Baptism* in his seminal book *Angels' Wings* of 1896, the socialist philosopher Edward Carpenter complained: 'The wings come straight through the pink gown without the least little hole or wrinkle to show how they came through.'[5] This made the author 'sick and miserable and to disbelieve in the existence of angels altogether'. From the 1920s, however, in a second and sustained wave of interest, certain writers and poets eulogised about the silent and spare look of Piero's paintings and his mastery of colour, geometry and form. For instance, in 1925, Aldous Huxley, in his book *Along the Road: Notes and Essays of a Tourist*, declared Piero's *Resurrection* to be 'the greatest picture in the world'.[6] The art world was of the same opinion; in 1923, Charles Holmes, the Director of the National Gallery, was happy to pronounce that Piero's paintings were among the 'greatest treasures in the collection',[7] and when, as part of the Gallery's centenary celebrations of 1924, certain leading artists were asked by *The Guardian* to name their favourite painting in the National Gallery, several chose Piero's *Baptism* (Muirhead Bone, William Rothenstein, Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon) and several others Piero's *Nativity* (Charles Aitkin, George Clausen and Wilson Steer).[8] The art market also reflected such opinions when, in 1929, Piero's *Crucifixion* (The Frick Collection, New York) made headline news as the most expensive picture ever sold at public auction, when it was bought by the Duveen Brothers at $375,000 for the wealthy American private collector, John D Rockefeller, Jr.[9] Interestingly, the same art dealership had purchased the work just 14 years before for a mere £5,000 (they made an early, hefty profit, when they sold it the following year to the New York industrialist, Carl W Hamilton for £65,000).

1 *The Baptism of Christ* by Piero della Francesca (about 1415/20–1492), after 1437. Egg on poplar, 167 x 116 cm. National Gallery, London



2 *The Nativity* by Piero della Francesca (about 1415/20–1492), 1470–75. Oil on poplar, 124.4 x 122.6 cm. National Gallery, London

3 Postcard of *The Nativity* by Piero della Francesca, annotated by Percy Horton, 1920s. Private collection

4 *Some Later Primitives and Madame Tisceron* by John Currie (1883–1914), 1912. Tempera on canvas, 46 x 127 cm. Image courtesy of The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent

Writings by Roger Fry and the Bloomsbury Group

What was it that shifted Piero's status such that he became, like no other artist before him, a 'Patron Saint of modern art', to use Larry Witham's fitting phrase?[10] The groundswell of interest in Piero on the part of British artists of all persuasions owed something to the promotion of a new aesthetic in the work of the influential French painter, Puvis de Chavannes (1824–1898), whose sparseness of palette and monumental figures showed the profound influence of Piero (Puvis's *Beheading of Saint John the Baptist* of about 1869 entered the National Gallery's collection in 1917). Arguably, however, the most important factor in this extraordinary story is the part played by Roger Fry. An expert in renaissance art, and one of the most distinguished art critics of his age, after encountering Piero's frescoes in Arezzo in 1897 he declared him to be 'the greatest artist in Italy after Giotto, incomparable beyond the men of the high Renaissance … an almost pure artist'.[11] From 1900, Fry assigned Piero a major role in his Cambridge extension lecture course, dedicating one talk entirely to the National Gallery's *Baptism* and *Nativity*.[12] When Fry began to defend Modernism, and to champion the progressive art of Van Gogh, Gauguin, Seurat and especially Cézanne – notably through two ground breaking exhibitions of Post Impressionism in London in 1910 and 1912 and through a series of lectures at the Slade School of Fine Art – he ushered Piero into modern art criticism. Referring to 'the modernness of Piero's attitude',[13] Fry evolved a theory that the modern movement was essentially a reassertion, via figures such as Cézanne and Seurat, of the primacy of structure, emphasis on geometric order and simplification of form as exemplified in Piero's art. He said the mood of Seurat's paintings echoed Piero's motionless groups and that the monumental quality of Cezanne's art had similar roots. By the time the painter critic André Lhote made the claim in 1929 that Piero was the 'first Cubist',[14] the die was cast.

Such was Piero's popularity that some British art students not only read Giorgio Vasari's account of the life of Piero and other early Italian artists and learnt the techniques of fresco and tempera painting but went so far as to impersonate the figures from Piero's paintings. The writer Gerald Brenan recalled meeting Dora Carrington (1893–1932), when she was studying at the Slade, before the war: 'With her gold brown hair cut in a straight page boy bob … she suggested to me one of the lute–playing angels, the fourth from the left, in Piero della Francesca's *Nativity*.'[15] What would have been perceived as her radically short and boyish crop was recorded by her fellow student Mark Gertler (1891–1939) in his *Portrait of a Girl in a Blue Jersey* (1912, The Huntington Library). Similarly, looking back at her years at the Slade during the 1920s, the engraver Clare Leighton (1898–1989) recalled: 'Living, with my fellow students, in the world of early Italian painters, even to the point of dressing like figures from the world of Piero della Francesca, we did not need to search for other stimulation.'[16]

Art students of this era were encouraged by their teachers to visit the National Gallery to study its ever-expanding collection and to see paintings face to face, in full colour and at full scale. Such activity was an inspiring and vital supplement to the mostly monochrome reproductions then available as lantern slides or reproductions in books.[17] Evidence of the analysis of the formal elements of Piero's work appears in such items as a deconstruction of Piero's *Nativity* made by Stanley Lewis (1905–2009) (private collection) during his time as a student at the Royal College of Art between 1926 and 1930, and an annotated postcard of the same painting produced at a similar time by Percy Horton (1897–1970), when studying at the Royal College of Art (Pl 3). Another way in which the students were encouraged, indirectly at least, to make use of their studies of Piero's works was through the choice of subject, style and scale set for the Slade School's annual painting prizes, which often focused on figures within a landscape setting. For instance, Elsie McNaught (1886–1987) produced a work called *Frieze of Figures standing in a Landscape* (UCL Art Museum, London) for the 1910 summer competition, and one does not have to look too far to notice obvious references, such as in the naked feet, semi-nude bodies and long dresses, to Piero's work, especially his *Baptism*.

The movement which first particularly revered Piero in Britain was the Bloomsbury Group, of which Fry was in many ways the visionary leader. For Duncan Grant (1885–1978), a central figure of the group, Piero's visual and cultural inheritance would inform his life's work. As a student, he travelled round Italy, where he copied Piero's frescoes at

Arezzo and made in 1904 a study (which still hangs in Charleston Farmhouse) of the portrait of Federigo da Montefeltro in the Uffizi. When, two years later, the painter Maxwell Armfield (1881–1972) saw Grant, on his return from Italy, copying the angel musicians in Piero's *Nativity* at Trafalgar Square, he wrote that Grant 'even appeared like a Piero person'.[18] Grant also admired the Post-Impressionists Cézanne and Seurat, and their influence, along with that of Piero, is apparent in his own take on Piero's *Baptism* (*c*1919, private collection) although the silence, stasis and sobriety of Piero's work is overwritten by a brighter, sensual and fluid exoticism.[19] By contrast, it was the gravity and stillness of Piero's art that found expression in the paintings of Vanessa Bell (1879–1961), another member of the Bloomsbury Group. In *Studland Beach* (*c*1912, Tate Britain), which emphasizes what Bell's critic husband Clive called 'significant form', echoes of Piero's *Virgin of Mercy* at the Museo Civico, Borgo Sansepolcro, are seen in the simplified bodies and reductive geometric shapes as well as in certain colours which dominate the composition, notably the tawny gold and oxblood.

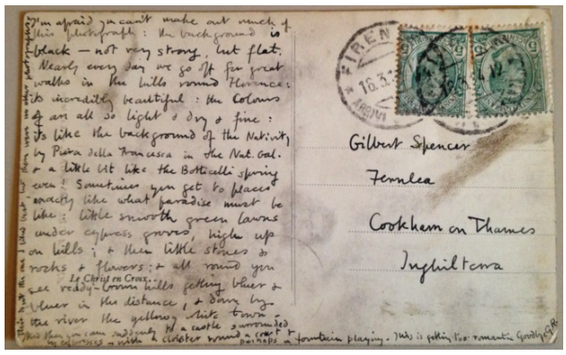
The quattrocento-inspired work of Grant's and Bell's near contemporary, Augustus John (1878–1961), had a discernible influence on British artists in the years leading up to the First World War. John made his first visit to Italy in 1910, and the impact of early Italian art and particularly of Piero – whom he referred to as 'my darling Piero'[20] – quickly appeared in his acclaimed paintings. The critic of the *Daily News* in 1911 saw such links in John's *Forza e Amore* (destroyed), describing the feet of the characters in it as 'recalling that of [Piero's] wonderful *Nativity* in the National Gallery'.[21] In John's decorative scheme *Lyric Fantasy* (Tate Britain), one of four murals commissioned in 1909 by the Irish art dealer Hugh Lane, the figures and setting once more allude to quattrocento art. For instance, the figure of Dorelia, the painter's wife, playing a lute, is almost a direct quotation from the lute playing central angel of Piero's *Nativity*.

William Orpen (1878–1931) was another figure who exerted an enormous influence as a teacher, artist and arts activist in Britain and Ireland, particularly in the years leading up to the war. A fellow student at the Slade and lifelong friend of John, Orpen was described in the *Yorkshire Post* in 1915 as 'a kind of Irish Piero della Francesca'.[22] His allegorical pictures, such as *The Holy Well* (National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin) of 1916 and his lost work *A Western Wedding*, painted the following year, being so full of quattrocento influences, were unsurprisingly described by the *Yorkshire Post* as 'bringing to mind such a painting as Piero's *Nativity*', adding for good measure, 'which by the way, is one of the most charming things in the National Gallery'.[23]

Teaching at the Slade School of Fine Art and the Neo-Primitives

At the Slade, during the early 1910s, a self styled group known as the 'Neo Primitives' (previously the 'Coster Gang') was influenced, initially at least, by both John and early Italian art, even if by 1915 *The Burlington Magazine* perceptively noted: 'Some of the younger painters seem to have exchanged the influence of Mr Augustus John for that of Piero della Francesca.'[24] The latter's impact is seen in numerous works by group members at this time, including a multi figure portrait by John Currie (1883–1914) showing him and close friends including Mark Gertler (1891–1939) and CRW Nevinson (1889–1946) together with the owner of the Petit Savoyard in Soho, a café that the art students used to frequent. Not only is the setting Italianate but the technique is pure tempera while its title, *Some Later Primitives and Madame Tisceron* (Pl 4), is clearly suggestive of an artistic lineage stretching back to painters like Piero. This deliberate connection was not lost on the critics; PG Konody in the *Observer* for June 1912 commented: 'An interesting newcomer ... whose frieze like composition of the heads and shoulders … is based on Pier dei Franceschi [*sic*] and his Italian contemporaries.'[25] Around this time, Gertler declared in an interview with *The Jewish Chronicle* that Piero's *Nativity* was 'assuredly one of the finest pictures in the world, filled with music and rhythm of colour' and that until modern artists could 'paint in the same sincere spirit' as earlier masters, they had 'no chance of approaching them as painters'.[26] In turn, Gertler's own *The Fruit Sorters* (Leicester Museum and Art Gallery) of 1914 can almost be read as a parody of Piero della Francesca. Not surprisingly, when the Neo Primitives exhibited their work alongside John's at the Chenil Gallery, Chelsea, in 1912, the *Observer*'s critic wrote with irony that 'when their modernity is closely investigated it seems to belong more to the fifteenth century than to the twentieth century. Indeed, the most "advanced" of the exhibits take us back to the days of Giotto'.[27] The connections ran so deep that soon people started thinking of modern British art when they looked at work by Piero. A comment in the *Athenaeum*'s review of the New English Art Club's exhibition of 1920 is a case in point: 'When a Slade student applies the term "good" to Piero della Francesca's *Baptism* he means that it reminds him of things he has seen at the New English Art Club.'[28]

Of the Neo Primitives, Stanley Spencer (1891–1959) was the artist who remained the most committed to early Italian art; famously, when he was asked about his allegiance to Picasso, he replied, 'I haven't got past Piero della Francesca yet.'[29] His love of early Italian art was encouraged by certain friends such



5 Postcard depicting Castagno's *Christ on the Cross*, from Gwen Raverat to Gilbert Spencer, post mark: Florence, 16.03.1914. UCL Art Museum, London

6 *Mud Bath* by David Bomberg (1890–1957), 1914. Oil on canvas, 152.4 × 224.2 cm. Tate Britain

7 *The Baptism of Christ* by Margaret Gere (1878–1965), 1924. Tempera on board, 23.8 x 18.5 cm. Private collection

as Gwen Raverat (1885–1957), the granddaughter of the naturalist Charles Darwin and a fellow Slade School student, who provided Spencer with books and postcards as inspiration.[30] Interestingly, on one postcard written from Italy about 1913 to Spencer's brother Gilbert (Pl 5), who also attended the Slade, she noted: 'Nearly every day we go off for great walks in the hills round Florence: it's incredibly beautiful: the colours are all so light & dry & fine: it's like the background of *The Nativity* by Piero della Francesca in the Nat. Gal.'[31] During the First World War Spencer's time as a medical orderly was made bearable by constant reading about early Italian art. In a letter of 1914 to fellow artist Henry Lamb, Spencer asserted: 'If I go to war I go on condition I can have Giotto, the Basilica of Assisi book, Fra Angelico in one pocket, and Masaccio, Masolino and Giorgione in the other,'[32] and to boot he also took with him a book on Donatello. It was after the war that Spencer produced his monumental mural cycle for Burghclere Chapel, Hampshire, based in so many ways on Giotto's Arena Chapel in Padua. Of all Spencer's pictures, arguably the one most influenced by Piero is his *Nativity* of 1912 (UCL Art Museum), which was produced for the Slade summer competition of that year. Presumably the idea for an outside setting was inspired by Piero's *Nativity* and the curve of the fence and the baby in its isolated crib likewise bring the National Gallery's painting to mind, with Botticelli another likely early Italian source.

Responses from Modernism

Formed in 1914 and named by the American poet and critic Ezra Pound (1885–1972), the short lived Modernist group Vorticism, with its roots in Cubism and Futurism, was an attempt to represent the vitality and energy of the modern urban and industrial age, its use of harsh colours and sharp lines in direct opposition to the colourful palette and semi-abstract designs championed by Fry and Bell. As an originator of art that stressed architectural elements as fundamental parts of a painting's composition, Piero was appropriated by the Vorticists. Pound explained:

> Vorticism … was a renewal of the sense of construction. Colour went dead and Manet and the impressionists revived it. Then what I would call the sense of form was blurred, and vorticism, as distinct from cubism, was an attempt to revive the sense of form – the form you had in Piero della Francesca's *De Prospettive Pingendi* [*sic*], his treatise on the proportions and composition.[33]

TS Eliot (1888–1965), who became associated with Vorticism through his friendship with Pound, celebrated Piero's *Baptism* in his poem of 1916, *Sunday Morning Service*,[34] while Percy Wyndham Lewis (1882–1957), who became the central figure of the movement, likewise drew on Piero's work for his own. In *The Crowd* (Tate Britain), for example, Piero is undoubtedly the inspiration, in particular his *Flagellation of Christ* in Urbino. The schematic arrangements of rectangular and grid-like blocks create enclosures, some containing groups of figures, with those to the left, as in Piero's painting, functioning as repoussoir figures, gesticulating towards the centre of the canvas. In the case of fellow Vorticist David Bomberg (1890–1957), his *Mud Bath* of 1914 (Pl 6), a major exhibit in his London show of that year, recalls Piero's *Baptism* with the figures enlivening the right half reminiscent of the lithe, semi-naked bather in Piero's painting while both compositions are cut in half by a tree. Apparently, the work was inspired by Schevzit's Vapour Baths in Whitechapel's Brick Lane which locals frequented for 'purification', a notion that appealed to Bomberg, who claimed he had, in similar vein, simplified his artistic vision and 'stripped it of all irrelevant matter'.[35]

8 *Orphan Girls entering the Refectory of a Hospital* by Frederick Cayley Robinson (1862–1927), 1915. Oil on canvas, 196 x 335.5 cm. Wellcome Collection, London

Britain's tempera revival movement

While Piero cast his shadow over the Modernist school, he also spoke to artists of a more conservative bent. Piero's technique of using the egg based medium of tempera – as in his *Baptism* – was intriguing to some who were keen to revive this ancient method of painting that from the 15th century had largely been replaced by oil painting in western Europe. Europe's tempera revival movement, which took place at the end of the 19th century, was given impetus in England by Christiana Herringham (1852–1929), who produced faithful copies of early Italian art using the technique, published a new English translation in 1899 of *Il libro dell' arte o trattato della pittura* (Cennino Cennini's celebrated 15th-century treatise on artistic techniques), and founded The Society of Painters in Tempera in 1901.[36]

Among Herringham's contemporaries, several deepened their knowledge of Piero's work through their own technical investigations. For instance, Margaret Gere (1878–1965), having been to Italy and studied Piero's Montefeltro portrait diptych of 1465–72 in the Uffizi, Florence, made a copy of the verso with *The Triumph of Battista Sforza* in 1905, and her own *Baptism of Christ* (Pl 7) is clearly inspired by Piero's version. Likewise, Joseph Southall (1861–1944), another key figure in Britain's tempera revival movement, made several study trips to Italy in 1890, and Piero's influence is apparent throughout his oeuvre, including in a portrait of his mother in 1902 (Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery), where the clouds in the background appear to have been repurposed from Piero's *Baptism*. A pupil of Southall, Maxwell Armfield (1881–1972), who published *Tempera Painting Today* in 1946, painted several works similarly influenced, notably *San Gimignano* of 1915 (Victoria Art Gallery, Bath) and *Pacific Portrait*, *c*1920 (private collection).

Another leading exponent of tempera was Frederick Cayley Robinson (1862–1927). In 1898, following his marriage to the artist Winifred Lucy Dalley, Caley Robinson moved to Florence for three years. During his stay in Italy, he discovered at first hand the monumentality of Piero's work and the linear grace of Botticelli, for which his close study of Puvis de Chavannes' work in Paris, his visits to London's National Gallery and his making of copies of Renaissance art, had already prepared him. Additionally, he studied the technique of tempera, and in 1904 was elected a member of the Society of Painters in Tempera. Although he was most influenced originally by the work of Giotto, Mantegna and Michelangelo, his later work shows how indebted he became to Piero and Botticelli.

Piero's influence is seen, for instance, in a World War One memorial that Cayley Robinson was commissioned to produce for Heanor Grammar School about 1919 (South East Derbyshire College), where figures circle round a tall, pale barked tree in a way that recalls the compositional arrangement of Piero's *Baptism*. Yet more obviously it is manifest in his major decorative work, the *Acts of Mercy*, a sequence of four large-scale allegorical works (forming two pairs), painted in oil on canvas, for Middlesex Hospital, commissioned in 1912 and completed in 1920 (Wellcome Collection, London).[37] For instance, in *Orphan Girls* (Pl 8), the uniformed orphan girls – who are depicted filing into the hospital's refectory – recall the monumentality and stillness of Piero's figures, with each one appearing suspended in motion, her features set in serene resignation. The whole is painted in subdued flat colours, the matt surface reminiscent of fresco. In the adjacent scene, *Doctor* (1916), a physician is thanked by a kneeling woman and the daughter he has treated. The mother's pose is one traditionally associated with an Adoration scene such as Piero's *Nativity*.

Cayley Robinson's emulation of Piero did not attract universal praise. One particularly hostile reviewer was Roger Fry, who noted disparagingly in 1928:

> Mr Cayley Robinson was far less innocent [than Ambrose McEvoy]. He had acquired the fine flavour of Garden-city culture: he knew

9 *Morning* by Gladys Hynes (1898–1958), *c*1916.
Oil on canvas, 117 x 98 cm. Private collection

> all about Puvis de Chavannes and Piero della Francesca, and his knowledge was used to 'hold high the banner of the ideal'. Everything is idealized and monumentalized and stylized with firm and unshrinking determination. Wounded soldiers, hospital nurses, beggars all emerge with the same fixed smile from his Procrustes' model-stand. Perhaps in some happier better world where sentimental dishonesty is regarded as more offensive than an open drain, this kind of monumental art will be thought less hygienic than at present.[38]

Also worthy of notice in the current discussion is a rather overlooked painter, Louisa Hodgson (1905–1980), who was a student in the early 1920s at Newcastle (then King's College Durham). She won an Abbey Scholarship in Mural Decoration in 1928 and spent three years at London's Royal College of Art, where she specialised in mural decoration. Her profound interest in the National Gallery's collection of works by Piero (and Paolo Uccello) can be traced in her subsequent work, including a lunette for the Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle, which illustrates the *Shipwrights' Guild passing along the Quayside around 1450*. Having joined the staff of Newcastle's Armstrong College art school in 1931, Hodgson specialized in tempera painting and undertook much research into pigments.[39]

Royal Academicians and the Summer Exhibition

The vogue for early Italian painting had also been much in evidence from the early 1910s in the contemporary work displayed at the Royal Academy's prestigious and long-standing annual Summer Exhibition. In fact, during his opening speech in 1911, the then Royal Academy President, Edward Poynter (also Director of the National Gallery), noted the overwhelming presence of qualities he defined as characteristic of Italian renaissance art, namely 'dignity of aspect' and 'beauty of form and colour'.[40] Art critics, however, while recognising the prerogative of artists to seek inspiration in the art of different times and places, became increasingly concerned that the reappropriation of renaissance art was leading to futile pastiches. For instance, DH Banner, reviewing the 1924 Royal Academy Summer Exhibition, noted 'the recurrence of the same clichés' and regretted that the exhibitors had not learnt 'the real power of the Florentines whom they profess to follow [which] lies in a union of a mystical imagination with a scientific zeal for the forms of nature. … They copy – but weakly – the accidental mannerisms, the peculiar marks … and when their memory of the oddities of … Piero fails them they are very insipid'.[41]

Banner may well have had in mind an artist such as Gerald Leslie Brockhurst (1890–1978), a prominent society portraitist of the interwar years. First as a student at the Royal Academy and then during a trip through Italy in 1913, Brockhust was captivated by Italian renaissance painting and even went so far as to place his paintings in Italianate frames. Borrowing the aesthetic modes of the quattrocento, his resulting work, such as a female portrait entitled *Ranunculus* of 1914 (Sheffield Museums), remained staunchly traditional in an era defined largely by departures from convention. *The Burlington Magazine* described Brockhurst's admiration for Piero as an instance 'of this amusing tendency',[42] while another critic in 1921 was more perturbed that while 'at first glance his pictures look as attractive as any early Renaissance paintings' on closer inspection their 'simplicity is not as expressive' and the Italianate landscapes in the background were 'meaningless' for a modern day audience.[43]

The art of Harry Morley (1881–1943), again a Royal Academician and major figure in the tempera revival movement, is yet another example of borrowing props from Piero's work without a deeper understanding of the fundamentals of his vision. PG Konody, writing in 1926, felt that Morley's paintings were 'laboriously constructed exercises in the manner of the Italian Early Renaissance … careful and scholarly, but altogether lacking in spontaneity and invention'.[44] His remarks certainly suit Morley's *Wayside Madonna* (Leicester Museum & Art Gallery), produced the following year, which abounds with obvious references to Piero's *Nativity*. Similarly, Victor Hume Moody (1896–1990), another frequent exhibitor at the Academy, filled his paintings with visual references to Piero's work. A case in point is Moody's portrait of *Girl with a Cittern – Portrait of Catherine Moody*, *c*1934 (private collection), which recalls the lute-playing angels in Piero's *Nativity*, while Moody's own picture of *Crossing the Brook* (Harris Museum & Art Gallery, Preston), displayed on the back wall, is a secular response to Piero's *Baptism*. *The Madonna and Child and Angels* by (Mark) Lancelot Symons (1887–1935) (private collection), exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1925, is yet another example of the by now well-established practice of using Piero as a 'go-to' visual repository: the baby lying on the folds of the Madonna's blue robe is almost a cut-and-paste from Piero's *Nativity*, while the lute appears once more, in this case abandoned on the ground to the left.

Several female contemporaries similarly referenced Piero's work in their paintings. One of those who yielded to none in her deep love for Piero (combined with the influence of Botticelli) is Dorothy Hawksley (1884–1970), another product of the Royal Academy Schools, and her own *Nativity* of 1924 (Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery) is interestingly peopled almost entirely by females. Arguably more successful in its assimilation of Piero is the work of Gladys Hynes (1898–1958), a frequent exhibitor at the Summer Exhibition. In Hynes's *Morning* (Pl 9), the River Jordan has been transformed into a public lido, the girl with the pink skirt a nod to the disrobing figure in Piero's *Baptism*.[45]

10 *Allegro* by Colin Gill (1892–1940), 1919.
Oil on canvas, 117 x 228.5 cm. Private collection

The British School at Rome and the first generation of Rome Scholars

It was not only on small-scale painting that Piero exerted an important influence in the first half of the 20th century. His art also had an impact on larger-scale public mural art, and it was a particular group of aspiring young painters who were especially indebted in this regard: the Rome Scholars – the British art school students in receipt of scholarships in Decorative Painting (or mural painting) at the British School at Rome (BSR). In 1913, the dream of several generations of British art educators that they might be able to nurture a new school of native painting in the renaissance tradition came closer with the creation of three scholarships at the BSR in 'monumental art', comprising architecture, sculpture and mural painting. Some 250 years after France and 18 years after America, the artistic establishment of Edwardian England looked to Italy to inspire the ornamentation of buildings back home through paintings and sculptures. One of the chief promoters of the scheme, Sir Rennell Rodd, British Ambassador to Italy, envisaged the school as 'a great National and Imperial centre of culture' and 'a training ground for the humanists of a new Renaissance'.[46]

Dominated by award winners from London's Slade School of Fine Art in the scheme's early days, the Rome scholars produced much highly original work, which demonstrated a truly rigorous and profound understanding of Piero's art and technique. That Piero would become the single most identifiable influence on the first and golden generation of Rome Scholars during the 1920s is ironic when one recalls that the BSR's location was intended to foster the influence of classical and baroque Rome which it had on its doorstep,- through first hand study of classical antiquity and the 17th-century work of Bernini *et al*. Alan Sorrell (1904–1974), the award-holder for 1928, explained: 'All we scholars gave our entire attention to the Quattrocento, we delighted in the austere rigidity of the primitives. We were ridiculously immature and intolerant. I do not think we ever noticed the Baroque artists.'[47]

In practice, Rome itself offered little inspiration to British painters of the 1920s, and it was to Tuscany and Umbria that they were drawn, the home of their already acknowledged hero Piero. Having already encountered Piero in the National Gallery and during lectures at their respective art schools, as discussed above, the Rome scholars set off on personal pilgrimages to discover the rest of Piero's oeuvre, especially his fresco cycle in the church of San Francesco, Arezzo. Visits to Arezzo, Sansepolcro and Urbino were *de rigueur*, and scholars could feel that they were discovering a still neglected genius who was not on the tourist trail. Confronting Piero's monumental vision on a grand scale and in the original settings proved deeply inspirational.

The first Rome Scholar was Colin Gill (1892–1940), a former Slade student and a friend of both John and Gertler, who, before the First World War broke out, managed a brief tour round Italy, and filled several notebooks with drawings of the frescoes he most admired. The work he went on to produce as an official war artist from 1918 was influenced by his exposure to early renaissance art and especially Piero. *Heavy Artillery* of 1919 (Imperial War Museum, London), one of a series of paintings commissioned by the British War Memorial Committee for a never realised Great Memorial Gallery, immediately recalls Piero's *Battle between Heraclius and Chosroes* from the fresco cycle at San Francesco, Arezzo, not least the semi-circular pieces of corrugated iron reminiscent of the gilded canopy structure in Piero's painting. When Gill returned to Rome after the end of the war in 1919, Italy seemed, more than ever, like a wonderland. Spending the summer in the artists' colony of Anticoli Corrado, he began

11 *The Marriage at Cana* by Winifred Knights (1899–1947), 1923
Oil on canvas, 200 x 184 cm.
Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa, New Zealand

12 *Santissima Trinita* by Winifred Knights (1899–1947), *c*1924.
Oil on canvas, 102 x 112 cm. Private collection

13 *The Altruists* by Alfred Kingsley Lawrence (1893–1975).
Whereabouts unknown

his final-year envoi painting *Allegro* (Pl 10), filling it with the sunshine and natural beauty of the landscape, untainted by industrialization, modernity and warfare.[48] Through it, Gill attempted to paint out four years lost to the war, but he was ultimately unable to regain the sense of youth and optimism promised by the title, derived from John Milton's pastoral poem of 1645. When PG Konody saw it, he considered that Gill 'had taken from the early Italians as much as he could without falling into an affected primitivism'.[49] That the painting would be a key exhibit at the Exposition des Arts Décoratifs in Paris in 1925, suggests that, in its reappropriation of renaissance principles updated for the modern world, it was considered to be representative of the best of British contemporary art.

Winifred Knights (1899–1947) became, in 1920, the first woman to be awarded the Rome Scholarship.[50] Introduced to the work of Piero when a pupil at the Slade by the art historian Carl Tancred Borenius, she won the Rome prize with her submission *The Deluge* (Tate Britain). It was described by critics as 'based on the study of the [Italian] primitives, flat in treatment and angular in design',[51] but it was her assured adaptation of renaissance pictorial design to make her own contemporary statement that most impressed them. 'The picture might be Cubist or Futurist', proclaimed one critic, who went on, 'it is an example of anarchy in art, original, tragic and inspiring and something distinctly new and compelling in its treatment of a great theme.'[52] Soon after Knights arrived at the British School, her letters home conveyed a sense of disappointment: 'I am exasperated by this beastly school, how I hate it and all the people in it'.[53] It was during her travels through Italy that she found inspiration, writing from Orvieto to the BSR's secretary Evelyn Shaw, 'I feel happier and more sure of the course I am going to take in painting now.'[54] As Gill had done, she was discovering first-hand the early Italian frescoes and paintings that up till now she had seen only in books. She was amazed to find that the countryside in the background depicted in these centuries-old paintings, peopled by rustics and peasants, still existed, unchanged. Spending long summers in the Abruzzi region, she was deeply affected by what she perceived to be a lotus land, and began increasingly to recoil from modern life as well as Modernism in art. Consequently, while Knights always retained the conventions of the Early Renaissance in her art, she never again employed the modernist vocabulary of *The Deluge*.

Her changing outlook is signalled in *The Marriage at Cana* (Pl 11) of 1923, the first major painting Knights produced in Rome. Already familiar with Piero's work from Slade lectures and visits to the National Gallery, she was particularly impressed by his murals in San Francesco, Arezzo. She wrote, 'I want to see these frescoes before starting to paint my design for a Decoration,'[55] and she succeeded in visiting Arezzo in May 1922 in the company of a fellow Rome scholar, the dashing John Benson. This unauthorized trip almost resulted in her being expelled from the school. Luckily for Knights, Piero saved the day: 'Will you please be so kind as to explain to the Committee that I am very sorry to have gone away, contrary to the rules of the school', Knights explained in a contrite letter to Shaw, 'but there are some very lovely frescos by Piero Della Francesca at Arezzo which I very much wanted to see … I took the opportunity of travelling with Benson who had already decided to go to Florence. I had to make up my mind and also pack up in a hurry.'[56] She was particularly impressed by the dual narrative of *The Queen of Sheba in Adoration of the Wood* and *The Reception in Solomon's*

Palace, purchasing some Alinari photographs of this section of Piero's fresco. From memory and such study aids, Knights assimilated the air of stillness that pervades Piero's scene into her *Marriage at Cana*, and reworked certain formal elements, including the combination of an idealized landscape (in her case the Borghese Gardens) with an interior architectural setting and the arrangement of a group in circular depth around a central figure (in her case the figure of Christ).

The following year, in 1924, Knights began another composition, on which she would work for the next six years. This was *Santissima Trinita* (Pl 12), depicting peasants resting among the mountains on a pilgrimage to the Festival of the Santissima Trinità at Vallepietra in Lazio. Knights, who appears twice in the composition's foreground, once clutching a pillow and elsewhere sleeping peacefully beneath a fawn-coloured blanket, undertook the pilgrimage on two occasions. When *Santissima Trinita* was exhibited at the Imperial Galleries, London, in the Spring of 1927 the critic of the *Manchester Guardian* noted that 'many are comparing it in its sweetness and ecstasy to Piero della Francesca'.[57] Indeed, the treatment of the setting has much in common with Piero's carefully observed landscapes, apparent, for example, in his Montefeltro portrait diptych. In notes she made while working out her composition, Piero's name appears alongside a description of the river she aimed to depict, of 'exquisite, indescribable delicacy' with 'shadows gold-grey-green (milky)', an indication that she sought to reproduce the reflective qualities and mood of tranquillity that characterized Piero's rendering of water.[58]

A third important BSR scholar (of 1922) whose work shows the impact of Piero is Thomas Monnington (1902–1976). Apparently, it was seeing Piero's *Nativity* in the National Gallery when he was a teenager that compelled him to become an artist, and the spell Piero exerted over him lasted a lifetime, even after he turned to Abstraction.[59] In an early work such as *The Wine Press* (*c*1923, private collection), the pristine spinal curve of the man bending to trample grapes echoes that of the figure shedding his shirt in Piero's *Baptism*, while the baby nestled in a crib below the wine-barrel clearly references the Christ Child in Piero's *Nativity*. The principal picture that Monnington produced in Italy was *Allegory* (Tate Britain), an intensely personal project closely bound up with his marriage in 1924 to Winifred Knights, his love for Italy and admiration for Piero. In terms of its iconography, there are connotations of the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve, Apollo and Daphne and even the Fountain of Youth, and there are stylistic references to Piero, but the composition as a whole seems much more than a reworking of quattrocento motifs and styles. Even so, when the critic Cecil French saw it at the Leamington Art Gallery in 1939, he considered it 'a most capable, stylistic exercise, a pastiche of Piero della Francesca', going on to state that 'the unfinished adoration in the National Gallery has produced many descendants in our times!'.[60]

While Alfred Kingsley Lawrence (1893–1975), the Rome Scholar for 1923, himself declared, 'we do not want to establish a school which will merely give us imitations of the Italians', his now lost masterpiece, *The Altruists* (Pl 13), which filled the apse at the Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924, is one of the more literal borrowings from Piero by any Rome Scholar. It was an attempt by the artist to sublimate the losses of war and depicts First World War soldiers together with quattrocento figures either side of the risen Christ, in an assemblage recalling both Piero's *Discovery and Testing of the Cross* from the Arezzo cycle and his Urbino *Flagellation*. Even though the BSR's Faculty noted with exasperation of this picture, 'Piero della Francesca does not need to be the model for every style of building, he might be too formal for a restaurant or theatre,'[61] Lawrence seems in contrast to have felt that you could never have too much of Piero. His surviving portraits of the period, including *Head of a Girl* and *Head of an Italian Girl* (1925 and 1926, both Kirkcaldy Galleries), only underscore such an attitude.

Sorrell, the Rome Scholar from 1928 to 1931, was again captivated by Piero's frescoes.[62] Provided with an easel at Arezzo by the priest, 'a stalwart Friar Tuck of a man', he made a copy of a section of *The Victory of Heraclius over Chosroes*, observing that 'the wounded screaming soldiers are drawn with a terrible accuracy, and the swords and axes are rising and falling with a threshing machine rhythm',[63] although once back in his studio in the BSR, Sorrell struggled to reconcile his discovery of Piero with the desire to create original works of art: 'Italy's painting is in its element only on Italian soil',[64] he wrote. It was the timely discovery in the School's library of Clive Bell's *Art*, published in 1914, that marked the beginning of a new direction for Sorrell. In his book, Bell had asked, 'What quality is common to … Piero della Francesca and Cezanne? Only one answer seems possible – significant form.'[65] *The Annunciation* (whereabouts unknown) is a composition that demonstrates the stylistic advance that took place in Sorrell's art at this time, and his response to Bell's notion of 'significant form'. [66] Describing the figures of the Virgin and Angel Gabriel as 'coldly intellectual arrangements of abstract forms',[67] Sorrell combined Cézanne's bold use of contouring lines with Piero's statuesque conception of form. Sorrell wrote: 'Piero's forms are always massive and voluminous and he achieves these qualities by the application of almost flat tints of colour between enclosing edges that are so simplified and stripped of inessentials that arms become almost mere tapering cylinders and heads all but gently rounded egg shapes … Clive Bell would murmur how well Piero sugars the pill of Pure Form!'[68] Predictably, this new artistic direction was the antithesis of the BSR's assertion of the lasting value of the classical tradition and was therefore met with harsh criticism.

The Rome scholars' work back in Britain

The Rome Scholarships were in part founded on an assumption that public commissions back in Britain would materialize for the scholars, which explains the emphasis on large-scale mural painting at the BSR. While in reality such opportunities proved few and far between, two major projects – St Stephen's Hall in the Palace of Westminster and the Bank of England – as well as some murals for cruise ships, town halls and schools – did employ some former Rome Scholars in the type of work for which they had been trained.[69] Melancholic and dreamlike in their highly finished realism, and with controlled colour harmonies, these murals were invariably tempered and approached through the eyes of Piero and quattrocento art. Far removed from the advocacy of 'abstract' form which had led Fry or Bell to their appreciation of Piero, the use of Piero for murals by Rome Scholars was in the service of the rigorously classical realism upheld by the BSR. For example, *The Parliamentary Union of England and Scotland* by Monnington for St Stephen's Hall is a clear reinterpretation of *The Meeting of the Queen of Sheba and Solomon* from Arezzo. Likewise, Gill's *King Alfred's Longships Defeat the Danes, 877*, has many elements in common with Piero's *Battle of Chrosroes*. At the Bank of England, Monnington's attempts to see Bank of England officials though the eyes of Piero met with criticism: 'Our Bank pictures have had a most uncomplimentary reception at the Academy', Monnington complained to his brother on 6 May 1932.[70] Piero is also an ubiquitous influence in Lawrence's *Queen Elizabeth reviewing her Troops at Tilbury*, a commission for the Essex County Headquarters in Chelmsford, which is closely related in

14 *Scenes from the Life of Saint Martin of Tours* by Winifred Knights (1899–1947).
Oil (or possibly tempera) on canvas, 73 x 159.5 cm (with glazing), between *c*1928–*c*1933.
Milner Memorial Chapel, Canterbury Cathedral, Canterbury

composition and colouring to Piero's *Battle between Constantine and Maxentius* at Arezzo.

For her depiction of *Scenes from the Life of Saint Martin of Tours* (Pl 14), a reredos for the Milner Memorial Chapel in Canterbury Cathedral, Winifred Knights once again turned to Piero's Arezzo cycle and in particular *The Adoration of the Holy Wood* and *The Meeting of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba*. Similarities are discernible in the division of space between exterior and interior scenes, the continuous backdrop of figures in static spatiality, as well as the arresting view of the rear of the pale horse and the prominently placed tree in the middle ground. Furthermore, Knights's painting shares Piero's restricted palette of flat colours in blues, greens and browns punctuated by whites and reds, colours which are at their most intense in the acutely observed draperies which softly envelop the bodies.

Interestingly, when Monnington turned to abstraction in the last 25 years of his life, his interest in Piero's principles of perspective and his hallmark soft muted colours and subtle control of light provided a vital link with his earlier work. For his monumental ceiling of over 4,000 square feet at the new Council House in Bristol, Monnington resolved the problem as Piero might have done, with a design whose perspectives are governed by geometry and whose forms are irradiated by subtle effects of light (Pl 15). Unsurprisingly, Monnington chose to paint his ultra-modern looking work in the old-fashioned fresco technique, insisting on the daily delivery of hundreds of fresh eggs to enable him to execute his work according to Cennino's recipe for tempera. His friend the painter Gordon House concluded, 'For Monnington the Golden Mean of Piero reconsidered with the experience of the 20th century had brought him to the fringe of modernity.'[71]

As the storm clouds of war began to gather (again) over Britain in the late 1930s, Piero's art – his qualities of calm dispassion and stability – seemed to provide a timeless and all embracing sanctuary. The British painter John Armstrong (1893–1973), whose art became increasingly political in the late 1930s because of his deep concern over the events of the Spanish Civil War, conveyed his sense of dread in his oil painting entitled *Pro Patria* (Pl 16) of 1938. This painting was his response to a visit to Rome where he saw Mussolini's political slogan 'Pro Patria' all over the city. The fragments of classical statuary, posters of shouting faces, bomb-damaged buildings and twisted trees are metaphors for the destruction of European civilization and human values. The sole naked figure disrobing provides the only sign of life and perhaps hope; surely, it is telling that it is a direct quotation from Piero's *Baptism*.

Such was the enduring popularity of the National Gallery's *Nativity* and *Baptism*, that both works were selected in 1938 as being among seven masterpieces of outstanding importance to save for the nation in the face of war. It was in the middle of the Second World War that the Scottish artist David Young Cameron (1865–1945) wrote to Knights, 'how often I think of those times of enchantment with you in the N[ational] G[allery standing] before … Piero. … [A]rt today is all disturbed, brutal, vulgar as never before and often in the grip of evil and with the spirit crushed'.[72] When the National Gallery reopened after the end of hostilities in 1945, Vanessa Bell marvelled at seeing Piero's *Nativity* again: 'I cannot tell you how lovely [it] looked, simply dazzling in its airiness and light.'[73] And writing a few years later, in 1951, art historian Anthony Bertram wrote of Piero as a Christian, mathematician and artist: 'A steady light above our dark turbulence, a certain star, knowing his own way with such assurance.'[74]

Coda: the ongoing influence of Piero on the British art scene after 1945

Although it was, arguably, British art up to the end of the Second World War that was most consistently in dialogue with the work of Piero, his influence continued for the rest of the century in various ways, not least thematically. One thinks of the work of Hans Feibusch (1898–1998), the German artist of Jewish heritage, who, having escaped to Britain in 1933, thereafter produced numerous murals, many for Anglican churches. Despite Feibusch's early on developing an Expressionist use of intense colour, his compositions recall Piero's work: for instance, his *Baptism*, unveiled in Chichester Cathedral in 1951, is clearly inspired by Piero's version in the National Gallery, while his *Resurrection* (Pallant House Gallery) makes the viewer think of Piero's depiction of the same subject now in the Museo Civico, Sansepolcro. Another painter of Jewish descent is Marie-Louise von Motesiczky (1906–1996), who fled from Austria after the Anschluss. Her

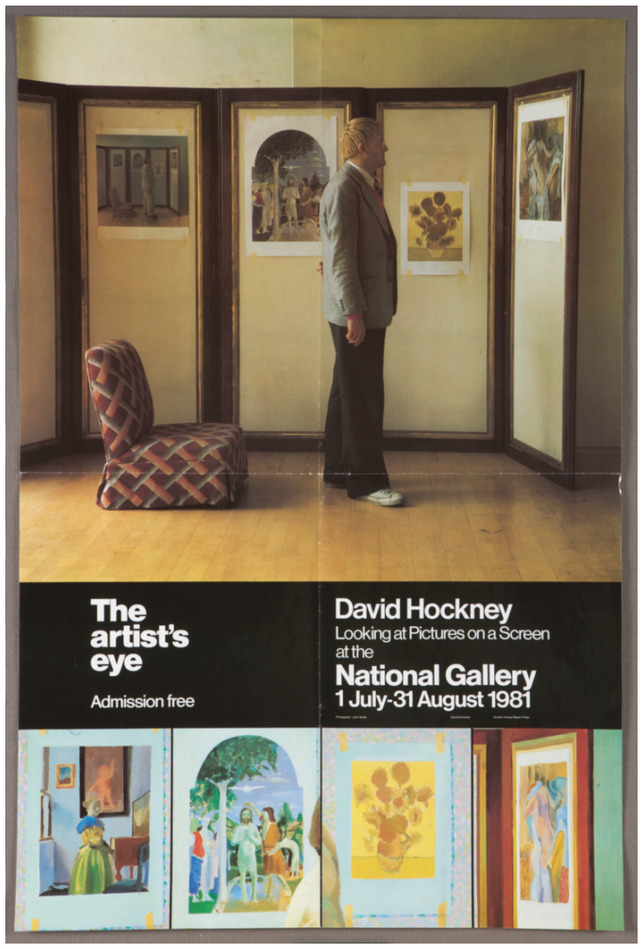
15 Ceiling at Bristol Council House by Thomas Monnington (1902–1976), 1953–4; unveiled in 1956. Emulsion of eggs, chalk and water, 2895.6 x 28163.5 cm. Bristol Council House, Bristol

16 *Pro Patria* by John Armstrong (1893–1973), 1938. Tempera on board, 75.8 x 93.6 cm. London, Imperial War Museum. © The Estate of John Armstrong / Bridgeman Images

paintings most obviously reveal debts to the 20th-century German-speaking artists Max Beckmann and Oskar Kokoschka, but in one painting that records her attendance in the late 1960s at adult art appreciation classes in Swiss Cottage, London, her interest in Piero is evident through its intriguing title: *Piero della Francesco Slide Show* (*c*1970; Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust, London). She has mischievously adapted the episode of 'The Procession of the Queen of Sheba' from Piero's *Legend of the True Cross* such that the Queen of Sheba appears to kneel devoutly before a horse rather than King Solomon.[75]

Perhaps David Hockney (b 1937) is the artist most associated with Piero and the National Gallery in the post-Second World War era. Hockney, for more than 60 years, has been breaking boundaries through his distinctive use of painting, drawing, print, photography and video. Central to his approach has been his abiding interest in the art of the past. Often commented upon is the fact that his use of acrylic mimics the effect of tempera, while the juxtapositions of figures in frontal and profile poses in some of his double portraits are reminiscent of Piero's work. When he was asked in 1981 to curate one of the National Gallery's 'Artist's Eye' exhibitions,[76] a centrepiece was a version of his *Looking at Pictures on a Screen* of 1977, which depicts him standing before photographic reproductions of four iconic Old Masters from the National Gallery (Pl 17).[77] One of them is Piero's *Baptism*, a painting that reappears as a reflection in a mirror in the background of his portrait of his parents (Tate Britain), another production of 1977.

Notable also is a group of painters who became particularly interested in Piero's use of geometry and perspective. The influence of Piero on the work of Louisa Hodgson, already mentioned, in turn had an impact on the next generation of artists including Richard Hamilton (1922–2011), whom Hodgson worked with at Newcastle in the 1950s and early 60s, and Rita Donagh (b 1939) whom Hodgson had taught.



17 Poster advertising 'The Artist's Eye' exhibition at the National Gallery, which ran from 1 July to 31 August 1981

18 *The Art of the Game* by Michael J Browne (b 1963), 1997.
Oil on canvas, 305.5 x 254 cm.
The Eric Cantona Collection at the National Football Museum

According to Richard Talbot:

> Perspectival grids remained very present in Rita's work throughout her life. Louisa, I understand, helped Hamilton with his reconstruction of Duchamp's *Large Glass* made while at Newcastle, as well as his drawing *Five Tyres Abandoned*. There seems to be a recurrent theme here – that of gaining understanding and insight into the practice of other artists through the act of reconstruction. ... It is also there in the many attempts by art historians and others to grasp the perspective constructions of paintings by Piero *et al*.[78]

At the opposite end of the spectrum is *The Art of the Game* by Michael J Browne (b 1963) of 1997 (Pl 18), now in Eric Cantona's collection. This image – which took 10 months to complete – was inspired by the Manchester United striker's 'resurrection' as he got his football career back on track after a nine-month ban from playing in 1995. Browne used Piero's *Resurrection* as his starting point, also incorporating elements from Mantegna's *Triumphs of Caesar*. 'The themes reflect back onto the original artworks', Browne explains, adding '[they are a] kind of reappraisal of the original stories in history, with their metaphors etc.'[79]

Many post-Millennium artists working or exhibiting their work in the UK continue to be inspired by Piero. Several are former BSR Fine Arts award holders, including Richard Talbot, Director of the Institute for Creative Arts Practice at the University of Newcastle, who has been constantly inspired over his long career by Piero's use of geometry and perspective.[80] Two more recent BRS award holders are Nicholas Hatfull (b 1984) and Gabriel Hartley (b 1981). Hatfull describes a revelatory research trip he made to see Piero's frescoes of the *Legend of the True Cross* in situ in February 2018 and its influence on his own subsequent paintings:

> The fiendishly complex compositions of the battle scenes are made serene by the limpid, eerily perfect, elegantly restrained modelling. The waving banners and flags seem gently animated by a breeze within the painting, which creates a silent music. … I think the wintry Umbrian hillside in *Siberian Wind (Driving to Arezzo on a Sunday in February)* is inflected by the beautifully mysterious landscapes in the background of, for instance, *The Adoration of the Holy Wood*.[81]

Meanwhile, Gabriel Hartley's work uses carved surfaces which, in the artist's opinion, 'take on the presence of water or clouds' which reflect 'the relationship to nature and the connections, echoes and reverberations' that he finds in Piero's work.[82]

It may not be inappropriate to end this survey of the influence Piero della Francesca's work has had on the British art world with an astonishing 'hyperphoto' or photographic collage, made in 2018 by the French photographer Jean Francois Rauzier (b 1952), best known for his digitally altered portrayals of cities or public galleries. His work, *National Gallery, London* (Pl 19), first exhibited at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art in 2019, offers multiple perspectives of all the galleries with their publicly displayed pictures at Trafalgar Square. What is pertinent to the current discussion is that the painting given pride of place at the very apex of the composition is none other than Piero's *Baptism of Christ*. Piero had a gift for being timeless and of his time, a man of the moment and one for all seasons. Little surprise, then, that his shimmering masterpieces in the National Gallery's collection continue to offer contemporary artists much in the way of inspiration.

19 *National Gallery, London* by Jean François Rauzier (b 1952), 2018.
C-Type print mounted on aluminium, 150.2 x 249.9 cm.
Waterhouse & Dodd

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1 See Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, *Piero della Francesca's Baptism of Christ*, New Haven CT 1981; ibid, ed, *Piero della Francesca and his Legacy*, Washington DC, and New Haven CT 1995; Luciano Cheles, 'Les recyclages de Piero della Francesca', in Luciano Cheles and Georges Roque, eds, *L'image recyclée*, Pau 2013, pp57–75; Caroline Elam, *Roger Fry and the Re-Evaluation of Piero della Francesca*, New York 2004; ibid, 'Roger Fry e l'amore per Piero della Francesca in Inghilterra: Cambridge, Bloomsbury e la Slade School', in Antonio Paolucci, ed, *Piero della Francesca: Indagine su un mito*, Milan 2016, pp315–323; Larry Witham, *Piero's Light: In Search of Piero della Francesca: A Renaissance Painter and the Revolution in Art, Science, and Religion*, New York 2014 (= Witham).

2 George Sherringham, 'Piero della Francesca's Picture of The Nativity', *The Studio*, vol 84 (December 1922), p297.

3 See Nicholas Penny, 'Piero della Francesca in the National Gallery', in Cecilia Prete and Raniere Varese, eds, *Piero interpretato: copie, giudizi e musealizzazione di Piero della Francesca*, Ancona 1998, p188 (= Prete and Varese, eds); ibid, 'Journey to Arezzo', *London Review of Books*, vol 25, no. 8 (17 April 2003); Luciano Cheles, 'Piero della Francesca in Nineteenth-Century Britain', *The Italianist*, vol 14 (1994), pp239–40 (= Cheles).

4 Other paintings were acquired by the National Gallery as works by Piero but were subsequently downgraded: Italian, Florentine School, *Portrait of a Lady in Red* (NG585), purchased in 1857, and Alesso Baldovinetti, *Portrait of a Lady* (NG758), purchased in 1866; for discussion on this point, see Cheles, p241.

5 Edward Carpenter, *Angel's Wings: A Series of Essays on Art and its Relation to Life*, London 1898, p26.

6 Aldous Huxley, *Along the Road: Notes and Essays of a Tourist*, London 1925, p178.

7 Charles Holmes, *An Introduction to Italian Painting*, London 1929, p62.

8 'The National Gallery Centenary: Pictures that please me most', *The Guardian* (1–3 April 1924).

9 See, for instance, 'Auction Record: Americans pay £75,000 for a Painting', *Northern Daily Mail* (9 May 1929). See also Nathaniel Silver, ed, *Piero della Francesca in America: From Sansepolcro to the East Coast*, New York 2013.

10 Witham, p193.

11 Virginia Woolf, *Roger Fry: A Biography*, New York 1940, p197.

12 See Caroline Elam, 'From Giotto to the Bushmen: Roger Fry at the Slade 1909–1913', *The Burlington Magazine*, CLX (September 2018), pp727–33.

13 Caroline Elam, *Roger Fry and the Re-Evaluation of Piero della Francesca*, New York 2004, p36. See also ibid, *Roger Fry and Italian Art*, London 2019 (= Elam 2019), with Fry's texts about Piero della Francesca reproduced, pp213–38.

14 André Lhote, *La Nouvelle Revue Française* (January 1930), quoted in Roberto Longhi, ed, and trans David Tabbat, *Piero della Francesca*, New York 2002, p256.

15 Gerald Brenan, *South from Grenada: Seven Years in an Andalusian Village*, London 1957.

16 Claire Leighton, *The Growth and Shaping of an Artist-Writer*, The Estate of Clare Leighton, 2009, pp8–9.

17 Several illustrated publications about Piero were produced from the turn of the century; see, for instance, WG Waters, *Piero della Francesca* (Great Masters Series), London 1901 (reviewed by 'ARJ' in *The Architectural Review*, vol 9 (April 1901), p192); and Hans Graber, *Piero della Francesca*, Basel 1921 (reviewed in *The Studio*, vol 82 (December 1921), p299, which noted: 'In the 80 plates of this quarto volume is exhibited the entire oeuvre now extant of that great primitive Piero della Francesca, and though colour is absent, the monochrome reproductions are so excellent that the student of early Italian painting will be grateful for this valuable aid.') The Arundel Society produced a coloured print after Piero's fresco of *The Resurrection* in the Palazzo Communale at Borgo San Sepolcro at 'one quarter size'. It was 'executed in water-colour, a medium which renders most admirably the effect of fresco work' by ER Hughes in 1896; see 'Arundel Society', *The Artist*, vol 18, no. 6 (December 1896), p544.

18 Quoted in Prete and Varese, eds, p36. For Grant's copy after *The Nativity*, see *Duncan Grant: A 90th Birthday Exhibition of Paintings*, exh cat., Edinburgh, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art 1975, ppix–x. Clive Bell, another member of the Bloomsbury Group, likewise thought that Grant's paintings were inspired by Piero; see Clive Bell, *Since Cézanne*, London 1922, p106: 'Duncan Grant's ancestors are Piero della Francesca, Gainsborough, and the Elizabethan poets.'

19 Duncan Grant's *Baptism* is reproduced in colour as pl 5 and discussed briefly in Frances Spalding, *Duncan Grant*, London 1997, p498.
20 Michael Holroyd, *Augustus John: A Biography*, London 1976, p289.
21 *Daily News* (23 November 1911).
22 *Yorkshire Post* (12 March 1915).
23 *Yorkshire Post* (12 March 1915).
24 *The Burlington Magazine*, vol 27 (1915), p127. For Roger Fry's teaching at the Slade School 1909–13 about Piero della Francesca and other early Italian painters, see Elam 2019, especially pp72–74.
25 PG Konody, *Observer* (2 June 1912). See David Boyd Haycock, *A Crisis of Brilliance: Five Young British Artists and the Great War*, London 2009 (= Haycock), pp91–92.
26 Quoted in John Woodeson, *Mark Gertler: Portrait of a Painter, 1891–1939*, Toronto 1973, p335.
27 PG Konody, *Observer* (15 December 1912). See Haycock, pp183–86.
28 'Exhibitions of the Week', *The Athenaeum* (9 January 1920), p138.
29 Quoted in Gilbert Spencer, *Memoirs of a Painter*, London 1974, p99. See Haycock, especially pp92–93, 132, 135, 137.
30 Susanna Avery-Quash, 'Gwen Raverat, 1885–1957', in Amanda Bradley, *Patron Saints: Collecting Stanley Spencer*, exh cat., Cookham, Stanley Spencer Gallery, 2018, pp18–23.
31 Letter from Gwen Raverat to Gilbert Spencer, UCL Art Museum.
32 Paul Gough, *Stanley Spencer: Journey to Burghclere*, Bristol 2006, p25.
33 Interview with Ezra Pound; see Donald Hall, *Writers at Work: Second Series*, New York 1963, p44.
34 TS Eliot, *Sunday Morning Service*: 'A Painter of the Umbrian school/ Designed upon a gesso ground/ The Nimbus of the Baptized God/ The Wilderness is cracked and browned./ But through the water pale and thin/ Still shine the unoffending feet/ And there above the painter set/ The Father and the Paraclete.'
35 See Gallery label, January 2019, on Tate's website https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/bomberg-the-mud-bath-t00656 (accessed 6 January 2022).
36 For Herringham's discussion of Piero's technique in *The Baptism* and *The Nativity*, see CJ Herringham, 'Methods of Tempera as exemplified in a few pictures at the National Gallery', *Papers of the Society of Painters in Tempera*, vol 1 (1903), p18. In fact, Herringham wrongly describes the medium of Piero's *Nativity* as tempera in this article – it is a work produced in oil on poplar: see Elam 2019, pp110–11, n 170, where Elam quotes Herringham as saying, 'It has the exquisite coolness and freshness of tempera.'
37 Cayley Robinson's *Acts of Mercy* series from the Middlesex Hospital were exhibited at the National Gallery in in the Sunley Room (14 July–17 October 2010), where they were hung with three works by painters who had influenced him: Puvis de Chavannes's *Summer*, Botticelli's *Four Scenes from the Early Life of Saint Zenobius* and Piero's *Baptism*: see https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/about-us/press-and-media/press-releases/frederick-cayley-robinson-acts-of-mercy (accessed 25 February 2022). We are grateful to Sarah Herring, who assisted Robert Upstone, curator of the exhibition, for discussing these paintings and the influence of Piero more generally on Cayley Robinson with us, and for sharing the exhibition texts.
38 Roger Fry, 'Burlington House Winter Exhibition', *Nation and Athenaeum*, vol 42 (28 January 1928), pp6484–9. In this exhibition works by recently deceased academicians were shown with Old Masters from the Iveagh Bequest. We are grateful to Caroline Elam for drawing this quotation to our attention. Individual panels were, however, well received. MaryAnne Stevens, 'Frederick Cayley Robinson', *Connoisseur*, vol 196 (September 1977), pp23–35, notes: 'The first finished panel [Orphan girls entering the refectory], painted as the other three panels were to be, in fairly dry oil on absorbent canvas, received high praise both from the critics who reviewed it when it was exhibited at the New English Art Club prior to installation and from the hospital's Weekly Board who inspected it on 14 April 1915.'
39 See https://artuk.org/discover/artists/hodgson-louisa-19051980 (accessed 6 January 2022). We are grateful to Prof Richard Talbot for drawing our attention to the life and work of Louisa Hodgson.
40 *The Observer* (30 April 1911).
41 DH Banner 'The Royal Academy', *The Nineteenth Century and After*, vol 95 (June 1924), p874.
42 *The Burlington Magazine*, XXVII (1915), p127.
43 *The New Age* (14 April 1921), p286.
44 *The Observer* (24 April 1926).
45 Sacha Llewellyn, '*Morning* by Gladys Hynes', *The Flagstaff*, Issue 45 (Summer 2020), pp5–8.
46 'Sir Rennell Rodd on the British School at Rome', *RIBA Journal* (26 November 1910), p6I.
47 *The Artist*, vol 44, no. 3 (November 1952).
48 Sacha Llewellyn, 'Colin Gill – *Allegro* 1921', in Alan Powers and Sacha Llewellyn, eds, *British Murals and Decorative Painting, 1920–1960: Rediscoveries and New Interpretations*, Bristol 2013 (= Powers and Llewellyn), pp141–58.
49 *The Observer* (19 February 1922).
50 Sacha Llewellyn, *Winifred Knights*, exh cat., London, Dulwich Picture Gallery 2016.
51 *The Observer* (13 February 1921).
52 *Daily Graphic* (8 February 1921).
53 Letter from Winifred Knights to her mother, 22 March 1921.
54 Letter from Winifred Knights to Evelyn Shaw, 30 March 1921, BSR Archive.
55 Letter from Winifred Knights to Evelyn Shaw, 22 June 1922, BSR Archive.
56 Ibid.
57 *Manchester Guardian* (13 April 1927).
58 Winifred Knights' notebook, Private Collection.
59 Judy Egerton, 'Sir Thomas Monnington', exh. cat, London, Royal Academy of Arts 1977; Paul Liss and Sacha Llewellyn, *Sir Thomas Monnington: British School at Rome*, London 1997.
60 *Royal Leamington Courier and Warwickshire Standard* (29 August 1930).
61 Clare Wilsdon, *Mural Painting in Britain, 1840–1940,* Oxford 2000, p.69.
62 Sacha Llewellyn, 'The British School at Rome, 1928-1930: The Stirring Up Process', in *Alan Sorrell: The Life and Works of an English Neo-Romantic Artist,* Sacha Llewellyn and Richard Sorrell, eds, exh cat., London, Sir John Soane's Museum 2014, pp71–83.
63 Alan Sorrell, *Barbarians in Rome,* 1936–7, unpublished MS.
64 Ibid.
65 Clive Bell, *Art*, London 1914, p8.
66 Illustrated in ibid, p87.
67 Alan Sorrell, *Barbarians in Rome,* 1936–7, unpublished MS.
68 Ibid.
69 Sacha Llewellyn, 'What Sort of Truth?', in Sacha Llewellyn and Patrick Elliot, eds, *British Realist Painting Between the Wars*, exh cat., Edinburgh, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art 2017, pp23–53.
70 Letter from Thomas Monnington to Meredith Monnington, 6 May 1932, private collection.
71 Letter from Gordon House to Paul Liss, 1997, private collection. See also Sam Smiles and Stephanie Pratt, *Two-Way Traffic: British and Italian Art, 1880–1980*, Plymouth 1996, p26, who point out, 'In moving away from figuration Monningon was not necessarily abandoning his admiration for the Renaissance. Piero della Francesca was an abiding inspiration and Piero's *Treatise on Perspective in Painting* (1482) demonstrated the relevance of geometry to art.'
72 Letter from DY Cameron to Winifred Knights, 10 June 1943, National Library of Scotland, Papers of the Earls of Crawford and Balcarres.
73 Quoted in Pamela Todd, *Bloomsbury at Home*, London 1999, p125.
74 Anthony Bertram, 'Piero della Francesca and the 20th Century', *The Studio* (1951), pp120–3.
75 See Ines Schlenker, *Marie-Louise von Motesiczky, 1906–1996: A Catalogue Raisonne of the Paintings*, London 2009, cat. 241, pp406–7.
76 The exhibition, 'The Artist's Eye: David Hockney', was held in the Board Room of the National Gallery, London (1 July–31 August 1981), and attracted 163,063 visitors.
77 In another version of *Looking at Pictures on a Screen*, Hockney included an image of Henry Goldzahler looking at reproductions including Piero's *Baptism* (The David Hockney Foundation). The Goldzahler painting was reproduced in the National Gallery's poster for 'The Artist's Eye' exhibition, and the National Gallery pictures which appear in the Goldzahler version were the ones included in the 'Artist's Eye' exhibition.
78 Email from Richard Talbot to Susanna Avery-Quash, 9 February 2020.
79 Email from Michael J Browne to Sacha Llewellyn, 29 January 2022.
80 See https://research.ncl.ac.uk/sacs/fine_art/staff/richardtalbot/ (accessed 6 January 2022).
81 Email from Nicholas Hatfull to Susanna Avery-Quash, 1 February 2020. *Siberian Wind (Driving to Arezzo on a Sunday in February)* was shown in Hatfull's solo exhibition 'Thermals of the Heart' at The Club, Tokyo, in Summer 2019.
82 Gabriel Hartley's solo show 'OF' took place at Seventeen, London, in February 2020, where he discussed his work and its connections with Piero's oeuvre with Susanna Avery-Quash.