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NOTE

This contribution is part of a larger dialogue of three articles and one responding piece that form the current issue of *JOLCEL*. The other contributions are “Two Styles More Opposed’: Harriet Hosmer’s Classicisms between Winckelmann and Bernini” by Melissa L. Gustin (pp. 1–31) and “Winckelmann in Nineveh: Assyrian Remains at the Age of Classics” by Yannick Le Pape (pp. 58–78). The response piece is “Bodily Exclusions? Winckelmann’s Victims and the Paradox of Form” by Rosa M. Rodríguez Porto (pp. 80–87).

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The Future of Winckelmann's Classical Form: Walter Pater and Frederic Leighton*

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ABSTRACT

Winckelmann's thought and writing are routinely acknowledged to have had a profound influence on the artistic practices of the half-century after his death, known under the label 'Neoclassicism.' Standard accounts of modernism in the arts, however, assume that this influence came to an abrupt end around 1815. According to such accounts, the anti-classical reaction that followed the Battle of Waterloo and the demise of Neoclassicism was itself a motive force in the generation of modern art and modernism. This paper argues, on the contrary, that Winckelmann's ideas not only remained relevant, but gained in power through the generations after the fall of Napoleon. Mediated by critics and artists among whom Walter Pater and Frederic Leighton serve as the principal examples, Winckelmann's thought made a decisive contribution to twentieth-century modernism. In particular, the articulation in both criticism and artistic practice of ideas about classical form, indebted to Winckelmann, had a subtler and more complex impact on the modernist doctrine of 'formalism' than literary or art historians have acknowledged. A renewed attention to classical form will help future scholars to write a more nuanced account of modernism in the visual arts. More importantly, it will call attention to artistic projects that have been excluded from histories of modern art due to reductive assumptions that classicism and modernism are inherently contradictory. The paper concentrates on Frederic Leighton

* I thank Michael Squire for inviting me to give an early version of this research as the Rumble Fund Lecture in Classical Art (King's College London, 2017); Elisabeth Décultot for providing the opportunity to explore Winckelmann's legacy as part of a lecture series celebrating the 300th anniversary of his birth (Germanistisches Institut, Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg, 2017); Wim Verbaal, Tim Noens, and Paolo Felice Sacchi for inviting me to speak in the conference, *Winckelmann's Victims. The Classics: Norms, Exclusions, and Prejudices* (Ghent University, 2018); Martin Dönike for guiding me around the exhibition he co-curated with Elisabeth Décultot and Claudia Keller, *Winckelmann. Moderne Antike* (Klassik Stiftung, Weimar, 2017); Cora Gilroy-Ware, Elizabeth Tyler, and Caroline Vout for illuminating discussions. The inspiration of Charles Martindale and his careful criticism have shaped my work at every stage.

as a case study of an artist whose historical importance and aesthetic merit have been occluded by reductive thinking of this kind.



Figure 1: Frederic Leighton, *Elijah in the Wilderness*, 1878, oil on canvas, 234.3 x 210.4 cm, National Museums Liverpool (Walker Art Gallery).

Elijah in the Wilderness made its first public appearance at the Exposition Universelle held in Paris in 1878, when its painter, Frederic Leighton, also served as President of the jury for the British section; later that year, Leighton was elected President of the Royal Academy of Arts, the principal professional body for artists in England. *Elijah* reappeared at the Royal Academy's annual exhibition the next year, 1879. The painting has every historical credential to be considered one of the more important works of European art of the later nineteenth century. It is also, as this paper will argue, exemplary in its presentation of classical form, despite its Old Testament subject.

As one would expect for a work with that exhibition history, *Elijah* is a large painting, its figures life-sized. Less to be expected, given the date and intended audiences, is the representation of the nearly nude male figure in exhaustion or anguish, his face obscured by the heavy beard and a sharply foreshortened view. An olive-green drapery prevents the viewpoint from being over-explicit (as in a work often mentioned as a prototype, the *Barberini Faun* of the Glyptothek in Munich), but the drapery nonetheless follows the contour of the hips and thighs. Its grand-manner folds contrast with the rippling gauzelike material that clings to the body of the angel. In nineteenth-century painting it is not unusual to see angels that are obviously based on female models, but this angel's muscular arm

and sturdy feet appear male. The pale flesh and the nuanced pastel shades of the wings might, however, be called 'feminine' next to the more rugged chiaroscuro of Elijah, or perhaps that contrast simply marks the difference between divine and human natures. The application of paint is surprisingly varied, for a painting that some might call 'academic'. The impasto of the angel's white drapery and the sketchy, variegated texture of the rock surface contrast with the evanescent handling of the flesh, the modelling of which is so subtly graduated that the transitions are invisible; as if by magic, the heels and the shoulder round themselves into three-dimensional volume. Throughout the painting, outlines are clear, and the range of hue is severely restricted to shades of green, grey, brown, and white—the colours of stone.

The subject-matter recalls a striking moment from Felix Mendelssohn's oratorio *Elijah*, first performed in Birmingham in 1846 and overwhelmingly popular in Victorian England. We see the prophet Elijah in his greatest despair, cast out into the wilderness, exhausted, and longing for death; he has not yet glimpsed the angel who comes to give him food and drink. This corresponds to the passage in Mendelssohn's oratorio, just after Elijah cries out to the Lord: "It is enough!"—a moment of stillness when the angels begin to sing the hauntingly beautiful trio, "Lift up thine eyes unto the hills." Leighton is known to have been interested in ideas of synaesthesia, from sources in both German and French aesthetics, and it is likely that he meant his painting to evoke that thrilling moment in viewers' memories.¹

In this painting the human body is the vehicle of expression. The bearded face is scarcely visible, which leaves the rugged musculature of the body to convey the force of the prophet's character. The visible forms conjure up memories of the art of the past. As already noted, previous scholars have seen the torso as an imitation of the Hellenistic sculpture known as the *Barberini Faun*.² If so, it is one where a leaner chest and tenser musculature transform the connotations of the Faun's drunken slumber to suit the different context of Elijah's exhaustion after religious struggle. At the same time the forms of body and legs recall Michelangelo, and perhaps particularly the Christ of the unfinished *Entombment* that entered London's National Gallery in 1868.³ The rude strength of the pagan body is united with Christian pathos to characterize this Old Testament prophet. Perhaps there is also an echo of the same painting by Michelangelo in the rocky background and subdued colouring, a sublime effect, intensified in the Leighton by the dramatic point of view and luminous sky.

It is difficult to explain how so austere a painting as Leighton's *Elijah in the Wilderness* can be experienced as beautiful, although I have attempted to suggest, in the preceding paragraphs, that the way it conjures the sound of Mendelssohn's music, as well the forms of ancient and Renaissance art, are thrilling to me. Of

¹ On Leighton's interest in philosophical aesthetics, see Prettejohn, *Art for Art's Sake*, chap. 5 ("The Classicism of Frederic Leighton").

² See for example Jones et al., *Frederic Leighton*, 185 (catalogue entry by Christopher Newall); Østermark-Johansen, "The Apotheosis of the Male Nude," 123.

³ Jones, "Leighton's Debt to Michelangelo," 37.



Figure 2: Frederic Leighton, *Athlete Wrestling with a Python*, 1877, bronze, height 174.6 cm, Tate, London (NO1754), photo by Andreas Praefcke.

course, I cannot predict that you too will hear that music in your imagination, nor can I force you to experience the classical forms of these bodies as beautiful. Rather, I am *inviting* you to engage in a free play of imagination and thought around ideas of classical form, of musicality and rhythm, of pathos and strength—the kind of experience that inspired Johann Joachim Winckelmann to write his most stirring descriptive passages about works of ancient sculpture.⁴

In 1877, the year before *Elijah* appeared in Paris, Leighton had exhibited his first work in sculpture, *Athlete Wrestling with a Python*, which clearly relates to the *Laocoön*, the sculpture so closely associated with Winckelmann since his first work, *Gedancken über die Nachahmung der Griechischen Wercke in der Malerey und Bildhauer-Kunst* (*Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture*) of 1755.⁵ While there is no such obvious ‘quotation’ in *Elijah*, the contour-line around the forms of a body in stress show Leighton continuing to think about the *Laocoön*, and much in Winckelmann’s terms. Arguably the painting makes an advance on the slightly earlier sculpture in showing how a figure may express both violent pain and quiet grandeur at once—Winckelmann’s famous, and still so intriguingly paradoxical, insight about the *Laocoön*.

Leighton was educated at the Städelsches Kunstinstitut in Frankfurt between 1846 and 1852; he was a fluent German speaker with a special interest in the

⁴ For this formulation of aesthetic experience as the ‘free play’ of imagination and understanding, and its communicability to others, I draw on Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, §§8–9.

⁵ Winckelmann, *Reflections on the Imitation*, 32–35. For Winckelmann’s response to the *Laocoön* see also Prettejohn, *Beauty and Art*, 22–27.

philosophy and history of art. His artworks provide *prima facie* evidence that he thought deeply about Winckelmann—or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that he thought deeply about Greek art with Winckelmann as a kind of cicerone. Although Winckelmann's works were not separately catalogued in the posthumous sale of Leighton's extensive library, it would be surprising if they were not among his books, which included a complete Goethe, in the Stuttgart edition of 1857, and an impressive selection of more recent German books on ancient art.⁶ In this paper, however, I argue that he had another cicerone, one who interpreted Winckelmann for him as Goethe and Hegel interpreted Winckelmann himself, and as Winckelmann interpreted Greek art through the ancient authors: Walter Pater, whose essay of 1867 on Winckelmann played a more crucial role in transmitting Winckelmann's ideas to the worlds of modern art and literature than previous scholars have acknowledged, or even suspected.

One influential Anglo-American art historian has claimed that Winckelmann's influence lasted about half a century—that is, through the period conventionally called 'Neoclassical'.⁷ On this view, the anti-classical reaction that followed—as inexorably as day follows night—was what generated modern art and modernism. This corresponds to a standard narrative in art-historical survey texts, in which the authority of Neoclassicism, represented by Winckelmann and his painter-friend Anton Raphael Mengs, is overthrown in the Romantic generation of Eugène Delacroix. Modern art then proceeds through a familiar sequence of 'isms' from the Realism of Gustave Courbet, through Edouard Manet, Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, and on to the modernist movements of the twentieth century. Under such circumstances, Winckelmann and his writings on ancient art must necessarily become increasingly irrelevant, and indeed the specialist literature on Winckelmann has tended to concentrate on his impact in the years immediately following his death in 1768.⁸

This paper presents a different view. I argue that Winckelmann's ideas not only remained relevant, but gained in power through the generations after the fall of Napoleon, and that—mediated by critics and artists among whom Pater and Leighton were particularly important—they made a decisive contribution to twentieth-century modernism in both theory and practice. It is possible, then, to propose an alternative narrative for modern art in which classical form, far from being discarded, generates a sequence of new possibilities in successive generations. An alternative genealogy may then be traced, for example from Jean-Auguste-

⁶ *Catalogue of the Valuable Library of the Right Hon. Lord Leighton of Stretton*, auction catalogue, Messrs Christie, Manson & Woods, 15 July 1896, lots 42, 48, 76, 130, 235. Many of the lots include unidentified books, and some of Leighton's books may have been kept by family and friends. On Leighton's holdings of German works on classical art and mythology, which correspond closely to the texts Walter Pater used for his essays on classical subjects, see Prettejohn, *Art for Art's Sake*, 152 and 307, n. 90.

⁷ Potts, "Introduction," 28–29; see also 2–3.

⁸ For an excellent recent example see Harloe, *Winckelmann and the Invention of Antiquity*. An enterprising exhibition on the occasion of the 300th anniversary of Winckelmann's birth surveyed aspects of his reputation and legacy up to the present day; see Décultot et al., *Winckelmann. Moderne Antike*.

Dominique Ingres, through Leighton, to Pablo Picasso.⁹ I stress at the outset that my argument is not a teleological one: it was not inevitable, or somehow pre-programmed, that Winckelmann's account of classical form should continue to generate powerful aesthetic ideas in the generations after neoclassicism, and through to modernism. The story is genealogical, not teleological; but that is no reason to omit it from the record, as our art-history books currently do.¹⁰

One reason for that neglect is the recidivist tendency to confine art-historical writing and research within nationalist schools, so that the German classical tradition is considered separately from the so-called 'classical revival' in Victorian Britain, from 'academic classicism' (again so-called) in France, and again from French and Anglo-American modernism. That nationalistic bias results in false history and unimaginative art history. A constant undercurrent to my argument, then, is the premise that it was the fully internationalised art-world of the nineteenth century—exemplified by the presentation of Leighton's *Elijah* at the Exposition Universelle—that enabled the genealogical (not teleological) flourishing of classical form from Winckelmann into the future of Pater, Leighton, and modern art.

1 Walter Pater's 'Winckelmann'

Pater's essay of 1867 was published in the intellectually and politically radical journal, *The Westminster Review*, and it conformed to the conventions of that journal both in being anonymous and in being presented as a review.¹¹ It was not unusual for the authors of such articles to take the books they were ostensibly reviewing as mere pretexts for ideas they wished to discuss, although Pater perhaps goes farther than most since he never even refers to the two books listed at the head of the article: the first instalment of G. Henry Lodge's English translation of Winckelmann's *History of Ancient Art*, the part on the Greeks first published in 1849,¹² and Otto Jahn's *Biographische Aufsätze* of 1866 (a collection of biographical essays that begins with Winckelmann). In fact, when Pater quotes from Winckelmann on Greek art, he ignores the Lodge translation and makes his own—to good effect, for although Lodge must be applauded for his perseverance in translating Winckelmann's text, Pater's writing is finer by far.

⁹ Picasso's interest in classicism of both subject and style has been widely acknowledged. See Blunt, "Picasso's Classical Period;" Florman, *Myth and Metamorphosis*; Cowling, *Picasso*, 141–52, 537–51, and *passim*; Madeline, *Picasso Ingres*; Riopelle, "Return to a Kind of Order."

¹⁰ Several exhibitions have explored classical revivals in artistic modernism, although (like the studies of Picasso's classicism cited above) they have interpreted these in relation to twentieth-century concerns (particularly the desire for a return to tradition after the First World War), rather than placing them in an intellectual history of classicism. See Cowling and Mundy, *On Classic Ground*; Green et al., *Modern Antiquity*; Silver, *Chaos and Classicism*.

¹¹ [Pater, published anonymously], "Winckelmann." On the review essay see Himmelfarb, *Spirit of the Age*, 18–22.

¹² Pater was reviewing the first London edition, *The History of Ancient Art Among the Greeks* (1850). Giles Henry Lodge (1805–88), a Boston medical doctor, brought out his translation in four volumes, with three different Boston publishers, between 1849 and 1873; a complete edition was published by James R. Osgood of Boston in 1880. Lodge's was the first translation of the *History* into English.

When Pater reprinted the article, as the last essay in his volume *The Renaissance*, he omitted any trace of the pretence at reviewing.¹³ In that form the essay on Winckelmann reached countless people who never read a word of Winckelmann's own writings. It is impossible to overstate the importance of Pater's essay in transmitting Winckelmann's thought to the Anglo-American world and beyond it, to the many countries where Pater's volume was read and discussed.¹⁴ The Lodge translation remained the only English version of Winckelmann's *History of Ancient Art* until 2006,¹⁵ but it was never widely accessible; throughout the twentieth century, before internet archives made historical books available, Anglophone readers were limited to excerpts from Winckelmann's writings, unless they had access to a good research library.

On the other hand, many more people read Pater's essay than would have taken an interest in a long and scholarly book on ancient art in any language. Its readers certainly included writers, artists, and intellectuals of the first modernist generation, among whom Pater's reputation remained high.¹⁶ If Winckelmann is important to the art and literature of modernism, that has much to do with Pater. Moreover, the influence goes beyond the essay of 1867. Pater's ekphrasis on Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*, for example, which appears elsewhere in the volume on *The Renaissance* and remains the most famous passage of writing on a work of visual art in English, is profoundly indebted to Winckelmann's way of writing about works of art. W.B. Yeats, editor of *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* of 1936, printed the passage on the *Mona Lisa* in lines of free verse and placed it first in the anthology.¹⁷ By implication this passage, inspired by Winckelmann's artwriting, becomes the founding work of modern English poetry.

That suggests one reason why an essay on an eighteenth-century German classical scholar belongs within Pater's volume on the art and literature of the Italian and French Renaissance of the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries. As I have argued elsewhere, the essay on Winckelmann was the intellectual germ from which Pater's exploration of the Renaissance as an aesthetic and theoretical concept grew.¹⁸ It follows, historically and logically, that Winckelmann, as mediated by Pater, is a crucial, indeed foundational, influence on modernist art and literature in the Anglo-American and related traditions.

'Winckelmann' is much the longest essay in *The Renaissance* and it is complex in structure and argumentation. This paper will concentrate on a single aspect: the way the essay transmits Winckelmann's ideas and observations to the

¹³ Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (London: Macmillan, 1873). The essay appeared in the same position in all subsequent editions of the volume, which was retitled *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* from the second edition (1877) onwards. Subsequent references will be to the scholarly edition: Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry: The 1893 Text*.

¹⁴ See Bann, *Reception*.

¹⁵ The translation by Harry Francis Mallgrave, published by Getty Publications in 2006, is of the first edition (1764), interesting for students of Winckelmann's life and intellectual development, but of limited value for the study of his reception, since it was superseded by the much more comprehensive second edition of 1776.

¹⁶ See further McGrath, *Sensible Spirit*; Prettejohn, "Pater and the Classics."

¹⁷ Yeats, *Oxford Book*, 1.

¹⁸ Prettejohn, *Modern Painters*, 139–47.

'modernist' future. Pater specifically theorises how such transmission may take place at the beginning of the extended middle section of the essay, where he introduces the term 'classical tradition'. That is now a very familiar term, the title of many a university course and at least two authoritative recent volumes.¹⁹ It was, however, new in 1867, evidently a coinage of Pater's, and one to which he gives a very specific meaning. It is not a synonym for 'classicism' and it does not denote, in vague or indiscriminate fashion, just any reference to the classical world. In Pater's usage, 'the classical tradition' is altogether unlike other inheritances from the past that have been absorbed or amalgamated into our general culture. Rather, it is something 'conscious' and 'intellectual' that each generation takes from the previous one. To quote Pater:

The supreme artistic products of succeeding generations thus form a series of elevated points, taking each from each the reflexion of a strange light, the source of which is not in the atmosphere around and above them, but in a stage of society remote from ours.²⁰

The classical tradition is not, then, a dead weight or compulsion; rather it is freely chosen, and that free choice is unique to the intellectual tradition that originates in ancient Greece. In Pater's narrative of Winckelmann's life story that choice of the Greek tradition happens in biographical reality, as Winckelmann frees himself from what Pater calls "the tarnished intellectual world of Germany in the earlier half of the eighteenth century" and "divines" or "penetrates" the world of Greek antiquity—or, in words from Goethe that Pater quotes and then translates, his "*Gewahrwerden der griechischen Kunst*, his *finding* of Greek art."²¹ But the free choice of the Greek tradition is also a radical extension of Winckelmann's own account of Greek political freedom. As Pater insists, it is *only* the 'classical tradition,' originating in ancient Greece, that is conscious, intellectual, and freely chosen in later generations.

Pater's phraseology is always similarly precise. He uses the word 'classicism' with a pejorative adjective—"artificial classicism" or "false classicism"—to denote a classical tradition gone wrong, one that has somehow lost its connection to ancient Greece.²² These phrases are used in strict antithesis to what Pater calls "the genuine antique"—or, as he puts it, "the clear ring, the eternal outline, of the genuine antique."²³ Those phrases echo Winckelmann's emphasis on contour or outline in artistic form.²⁴

In the first version of the essay, published in the *Westminster Review*, Pater states the idea this way: "The service of Winckelmann to modern culture lay in the appeal he made from the substituted text to the original. He produces the

¹⁹ Silk, Gildenhard, and Barrow, *Classical Tradition*; Grafton, Most, and Settis, *Classical Tradition*.

²⁰ Pater, *Renaissance*, 159. The imagery echoes that of the lighthouses or beacons of artistic tradition in Baudelaire's poem "Les Phares" (published in Baudelaire's collection of 1857, *Les fleurs du mal*).

²¹ Pater, *Renaissance*, 142, 146–47.

²² *Ibid.*, 144, 150.

²³ *Ibid.*, 144. The phrases "genuine antique" and "eternal outline" recur frequently.

²⁴ On contour, see Winckelmann, *Reflections on the Imitation*, 24–27. The emphasis on contour or outline as a key aesthetic principle is also evident throughout the sections on Greek sculpture in Winckelmann's *History of Ancient Art*.

actual relics of the antique against the false tradition of Louis XIV.” He then refers to “the rehabilitation of Homer” as the “clearest note of this new criticism.”²⁵ As a Classics don himself, he was no doubt acutely aware of how expertly Winckelmann deployed every scrap of textual evidence to help construct his history of art. But when he came to reprint the essay, Pater deleted those phrases. Perhaps he wanted to mute the specificity of the references to the age of Louis XIV and to Homeric criticism, but a more important motive may have been to focus attention on Greek art, on what he calls the “actual relics” of the antique. Winckelmann’s distinctive innovation, as Pater presents it, is his finding of the Greek ideal not in a text, or a theory, or in the imagination, but in the concrete. This is described in a stirring passage early in the essay:

Filled as our culture is with the classical spirit, we can hardly imagine how deeply the human mind was moved, when, at the Renaissance, in the midst of the frozen world, the buried fire of ancient art rose up from under the soil. Winckelmann here reproduces for us the earlier sentiment of the Renaissance. On a sudden the imagination feels itself free.²⁶

Pater’s phrase, “the buried fire of ancient art,” refers to the ancient sculptures discovered in the Renaissance and already famous before Winckelmann invented them anew in the descriptive passages that taught Pater how to write about art. But here there is a difficulty, one which Pater makes no attempt to gloss over: in almost every case, subsequent scholarship had debunked the claims of these sculptures to represent the celebrated Greek originals of the ancient canon.²⁷ As Pater writes, Winckelmann “had seen little or nothing of what we ascribe to the age of Pheidias... For the most part he had to penetrate to Greek art through copies, imitations, and later Roman art itself; and it is not surprising that this turbid medium has left in Winckelmann’s actual results much that a more privileged criticism can correct.”²⁸ Pater solves the problem by choosing the examples for his own essay from works discovered since Winckelmann’s day, but which had secure credentials as genuinely Greek. From the “age of Pheidias,” for example, he emphasizes the sculptures from the Parthenon, which Winckelmann had never seen, and which became available to artists only when they entered the British Museum in 1816: “If a single product only of Hellenic art were to be saved in the wreck of all beside, one might choose perhaps from the ‘beautiful multitude’ of the Panathenaic frieze, that line of youths on horseback, with their level glances, their proud, patient lips, their chastened reins, their whole bodies in exquisite service.”²⁹ Leighton seems to have agreed with this estimate; he had a cast of that section of the Parthenon frieze embedded in his studio wall, and also placed it behind his own head in the self-portrait he made for the Uffizi Gallery.

Pater illustrates his argument about Winckelmann, then, almost entirely with works that Winckelmann did not himself discuss. That cannot, however, be

²⁵ Pater, “Winckelmann,” 107.

²⁶ Pater, *Renaissance*, 146.

²⁷ See Prettejohn, *Modernity*, 2–3, 7–27.

²⁸ Pater, *Renaissance*, 155.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 174.

ascribed merely to expediency. The paradox is that it is Winckelmann's innovation, in Pater's account—his demonstration that one must *see* Greek art with one's own eyes—that drives future generations of archaeologists to excavate in Greece itself, on the Greek islands, and in Asia Minor.³⁰ Implicitly, Pater is crediting Winckelmann with inspiring the great expansion in archaeology, which would eventually lead to the discoveries of archaic Greek art that would make so profound an impact on the modernist generation of the early twentieth century.

Those objects had not yet appeared when Pater wrote the essay on 'Winckelmann,' although he does have interesting, and important, things to say about archaic art in his later writings.³¹ In 1867, though, his key example is a work unearthed on the island of Melos in 1820, and thus unknown to Winckelmann, but genuinely Greek. Pater's description makes an almost miraculously succinct summary of the 'classical art-form' as Hegel had crystallised the idea from his own study of Winckelmann. Here is Pater:

But take a work of Greek art,—the Venus of Melos. That is in no sense a symbol, a suggestion, of anything beyond its own victorious fairness. The mind begins and ends with the finite image, yet loses no part of the spiritual motive. This motive is not lightly and loosely attached to the sensuous form, as its meaning to an allegory, but saturates and is identical with it.³²

A little later Pater notes that "The actions selected [for Greek sculpture] are those which would be without significance, except in a divine person—binding on a sandal, or preparing for the bath."³³ One wonders whether he could have known of the painting that Leighton was working on at the time of the essay's publication in January 1867, *Venus Disrobing for the Bath*; the painting was not publicly exhibited until a few months later, in the Royal Academy exhibition that opened in May that year, but the figure is both preparing for the bath and playing with her sandal.³⁴ The body type and pose recall contemporary French paintings of the female nude such as Ingres's *La Source* (Paris, Musée d'Orsay), which had been seen at the London International Exhibition in 1862 and made a great impression on progressive artistic circles in London.³⁵ Leighton's painting, which appeared 'Ingresque' to contemporary critics, took the lead in an initiative of the later 1860s to present the nude figure at public exhibition; notable examples include Albert Moore's *A Venus* (1869, York Art Gallery), which closely imitates the Venus de Milo.³⁶

Whether or not Pater had actually seen Leighton's *Venus Disrobing for the Bath* before the 'Winckelmann' essay went to press, the emphasis on the unclothed

³⁰ For this nineteenth-century expansion see Michaelis, *A Century of Archaeological Discoveries*; Marchand, *Down from Olympus*.

³¹ See Prettejohn, "Pater on Sculpture."

³² Pater, *Renaissance*, 164.

³³ Pater, *Renaissance*, 173.

³⁴ On Leighton's painting, now in a private collection, see Smith, *Victorian Nude*, 115–17.

³⁵ The painting, begun in 1820, was not completed until the 1850s, with the help of studio assistants. On its impact in London in 1862 see Prettejohn, *Art for Art's Sake*, 44–45, 112.

³⁶ On the flourishing of the nude in the late 1860s see Smith, *Victorian Nude*, 101–61; Prettejohn, *Beauty and Art*, 131–41.

human form in the essay runs parallel to the new exploration of the nude figure among artists at exactly the same date. This soon extended to the male figure. Leighton, again, took the lead with his *Daedalus and Icarus* (Faringdon Collection, Buscot Park), shown at the Royal Academy in 1869, but soon there were others, such as Edward Burne-Jones's watercolour *Phyllis and Demophoon* and Simeon Solomon's painting *Love in Autumn*.³⁷ It has sometimes been said that these artists used classical reference in order to legitimise or sanitise their exploration of the nude at public exhibition, but that may be to reverse the causality. It was the artists' primary interest in classical form that impelled them to explore the nude figure in their work. Moreover, that interest was inspired to a significant extent by Winckelmann, either directly or through Pater's essay of 1867—or, more likely, in both ways.

That is by no means to deny the importance of sexual desire in this artistic project, or in Pater's fascination with Winckelmann. The classical and the erotic are bound together in complex ways in these artistic projects, as they are in Winckelmann's writings. Thus it is scarcely possible to understand the erotic element unless one takes the classical one seriously, and not just as a pretext. Pater refers repeatedly to the beauty of the human body throughout the essay. He uses the phrases "beautiful body" and "fair body" on occasion, but much more often he uses the phrase "human form."³⁸ This cannot be regarded as a euphemism; Pater is quite frank about Winckelmann's love-relationships with other men. However, it appears that the phrase, "human form," does signal his concern with the aesthetic or artistic representation of the beautiful body, particularly among the Greeks, and that concern is shared at the most profound level with Winckelmann.

2 Leighton, Ruskin, and the human form

The same concern is evident in a statement by Leighton from 1873 where he describes a change in his artistic aims over the previous decade or two:

By degrees, however, my growing love for Form made me intolerant of the restraint and exigencies of costume, and led me more and more, and finally, to a class of subjects, or, more accurately, to a set of conditions, in which supreme scope is left to pure artistic qualities, in which no form is imposed upon the artist by the tailor, but in which every form is made obedient to the conception of the design he has in hand. These conditions classic subjects afford, and as vehicles, therefore, of abstract form,

³⁷ Burne-Jones's *Phyllis and Demophoon*, exhibited in 1870 at the Old Watercolour Society, is now at Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery; Solomon's *Love in Autumn*, exhibited at the Dudley Gallery in 1872, is in a private collection. On these paintings see the catalogue entries by Robert Upstone and Alison Smith in Smith, *Exposed*, 142, 104–5 (cat. nos 66, 39).

³⁸ Pater, *Renaissance*, 153 ("beautiful body"), 167 ("fair body"), 145, 152, 158, 165, 168, 169 ("human form," twice on p. 169); cf. 153 ("beauty of living form"), 168, 182 ("bodily form"), 169 ("pure form," repeated three times).

which is a thing not of one time but of all time, these subjects can never be obsolete, and though to many they are a dead letter, they can never be an anachronism.³⁹

Leighton is explaining the change in his artistic practice since his triumphant debut at the Royal Academy exhibition of 1855, with his monumental painting, more than five metres wide, *Cimabue's Celebrated Madonna Is Carried in Procession through the Streets of Florence* (Her Majesty the Queen, on loan to the National Gallery, London). The subject-matter is literally Pre-Raphaelite, in that it features an event from the history of art before Raphael, and Leighton's attention to accuracy of period detail owes something to the work of the contemporary Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (founded in 1848 and still controversial at the London exhibitions), although the primary points of stylistic reference are to the historical works of the German Nazarenes and French artists of the Romantic generation; in 1855 the German-trained Leighton moved his primary residence from Rome to Paris, and he was no doubt more conversant with continental than with English art. Royal Academy critics marvelled at the ambition of this first exhibit by a hitherto unknown artist, and particularly noted the meticulous historicism of the costumes. As one critic opined: "If those frizzled heads, top-knots, long draggled cloaks, and glaring colours, were in vogue in the thirteenth century, we do not sigh for the period when the whirligig of fashion shall bring them back to us."⁴⁰ Leighton clothes nearly 50 figures in costumes that display every ingenuity that a Florentine "tailor" of the fourteenth century might have devised, from the head-dresses down to the pointed slippers; Cimabue, the hero of the painting, is resplendent in white silks, and sports a gold leg-bracelet just below the knee of his spotless white tights.

In the next years Leighton moved decisively away from that mode in a shift he described elsewhere as "the passage from Gothicism to Classicism."⁴¹ The change has often been treated as a mere question of subject-matter, but it is worth taking seriously the exact words that Leighton chooses in his letter of 1873. Like Pater, he emphasises the word "form" with the clear implication that he means the form of the human body untrammelled by what he calls "the restraint and exigencies of costume." He notes that this led him to "a class of subjects" but then immediately revises the phrase: "or, more accurately, to a set of conditions" in which "pure artistic qualities" may take priority over the requirements of historicised costume, or as he succinctly phrases it, "in which no form is imposed upon the artist by the tailor."

By the later 1860s, Leighton was exhibiting works in which the "human form," and not the costume, is the principal vehicle of expression, whether the ostensible subject-matter is drawn from Greek antiquity—as, for example, in *Electra at the Tomb of Agamemnon* (fig. 3)—or not, as in *Jonathan's Token to David* (fig. 4). In either case, Leighton was exploring what it might mean to 'imitate' the

³⁹ Letter from Frederic Leighton to Joseph Comyns Carr, 27 November 1873, printed in Carr, *Some Eminent Victorians*, 98. The word 'abstract,' which does not yet have the connotation of 'non-representational,' is also a favourite for Pater in the essay on Winckelmann; see Pater, *Renaissance*, 141, 146, 169, 172, 178–79.

⁴⁰ W. G. C., "On Some Pictures," 710.

⁴¹ Letter from Frederic Leighton to Emilia Francis Pattison (later Lady Dilke), 1879, quoted in Barrington, *Life*, 2:118.



Figure 3: Frederic Leighton, *Electra at the Tomb of Agamemnon*, 1869, oil on canvas, 150 x 75.5 cm, Ferens Art Gallery, Hull.



Figure 4: Frederic Leighton, *Jonathan's Token to David*, 1868, oil on canvas, 171.5 x 124.5 cm, The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, the John R. Van Derlip Fund.

ancient Greeks, not in the superficial sense of choosing a subject from Greek history or mythology, but in the more significant sense recommended so powerfully by Winckelmann, first in the *Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture* of 1755: by presenting the natural beauty of the human form, the contours of the body, and drapery as distinct from costume.⁴² Leighton might be responding to such a passage as this one, from the translation by the painter Henry Fuseli most familiar in Leighton's day: "In their dress [the Greeks] were professed followers of nature. No modern stiffening habit, no squeezing stays hindered Nature from forming easy beauty; the fair knew no anxiety about their attire."⁴³

This helps to explain Leighton's impatience with "the tailor," in the letter of 1873: he wants the human form *itself* to convey the whole message of the work, without relying on the anecdotal or illustrative details that clothes or accessories might introduce. In *Electra* the sweeping draperies, akin in their simplicity to the fluted funerary column beside her, convey the monumentality of her grief. In *Jonathan's Token to David* the composition revolves around the contrast between the manly forms of Jonathan and the boyish limbs of the "little lad" who carries the arrows in the Biblical story, as a sign to David, in hiding.⁴⁴ David is not represented in the painting, but perhaps the love between David and Jonathan is expressed visually, so close is the bodily form of Jonathan, in Leighton's painting,

⁴² Winckelmann, *Reflections on the Imitation*, 2–33.

⁴³ Winckelmann, *Reflections on the Painting*, 7.

⁴⁴ 1 Samuel 20:35–39.

to that of David in Michelangelo's celebrated sculpture in Florence. Leighton's Jonathan is draped rather than clothed, and the artist is using 'imitation' to enhance the expressiveness of the bodily forms without relying on either costume or facial expression. Indeed, it is possible that Leighton has 'corrected' the contrapposto of his Renaissance prototype in the direction of the Greeks. Rather than the balletic loose leg of Michelangelo's *David*, Leighton uses a more contained pose reminiscent of the Polykleitan types that were just coming to the attention of classical archaeologists in the 1860s; a good example is the sculpture in the Naples Museum, identified by the German scholar Karl Friedrichs in 1863 as a marble copy of the celebrated bronze Doryphoros by Polykleitos.⁴⁵

I am arguing, then, that Leighton, with Pater's guidance, takes his cue from Winckelmann for an artistic development that goes far beyond the superficial adoption of classical subject-matter. It may sound strange, on Leighton's part or indeed on Winckelmann's, to keep harping on about costume or clothing—are not the clothes merely superficial, too? However, there is more to the question of nudity *versus* clothes, or in Leighton's terms the artist *versus* the tailor, and it is enough to cite Thomas Carlyle's novel of 1836, *Sartor Resartus* ('the tailor re-tailored') to remind us of the connection to German idealist philosophy. The binary pair, body and clothes, makes an exceptionally supple or flexible figure for other binaries such as form and matter, spirit and flesh, essential and superficial, or in the case of the visual arts design and colour.

One critic for whom Leighton's devotion to the nude body was perplexing was John Ruskin:

I have no right whatever to speak of the works of higher effort and claim, which have been the result of [Leighton's] acutely observant and enthusiastic study of the organism of the human body. I am indeed able to recognize his skill; but have no sympathy with the subjects that admit of its display.⁴⁶

To demonstrate the better qualities of Leighton's art, Ruskin produces for his audience two delicate drawings from the very beginning of Leighton's career, before his shift to the classical: one a pencil drawing of a Byzantine well-head, the other, the now-famous drawing of a lemon tree made on Capri in 1859.⁴⁷ Both of these are stunning displays of technical skill and compositional elegance—but with no human figure. It would be easy enough to dismiss this move of Ruskin's as an extreme or eccentric example of the moral or sexual discomfort with the nude so often attributed to 'the Victorians,' but—even if that is the case—Ruskin has something more in view. The context is the third lecture in Ruskin's series of 1883 on *The Art of England*, the lecture ostensibly devoted to 'Classic Schools of Painting,' but in fact structured around a large-scale opposition between Gothic and Classic that turns, precisely, on *clothes*.

⁴⁵ See Vout, *Classical Art*, 4, 202–3; Prettejohn, *Modernity*, 113–16.

⁴⁶ Ruskin, *Works*, 33:318 (paragraph 76).

⁴⁷ Both drawings are in private collections. See the catalogue entry in Jones et al., *Frederic Leighton*, 102–3. On the *Lemon Tree* see further Martin et al., *A Victorian Master*, 50–51 (catalogue entry by Christopher Newall).

Ruskin begins with a standard-issue characterization of classical art, something like diluted Winckelmann: “you find from the earliest times, in Greece and Italy, a multitude of artists gradually perfecting the knowledge and representation of the human body, glorified by the exercises of war.” Then he introduces Northern art, seemingly by way of contrast:

[...] innumerably and incorrigibly savage nations, representing, with rude and irregular efforts, on huge stones and ice-borne boulders, on cave-bones and forest-stocks and logs, with any manner of innocent tinting or scratching possible to them, sometimes beasts, sometimes hobgoblins—sometimes, heaven only knows what; but never attaining any skill in figure-drawing, until, whether invading or invaded, Greece and Italy teach them what a human being is like; and with that help they dream and blunder on through the centuries [...]

Yet somehow the fable takes a turn and among these Northerners, says Ruskin, there emerges a Holbein, “and, in the end, for best product hitherto, Sir Joshua [Reynolds], and the supremely Gothic Gainsborough.”⁴⁸

Somehow a reversal of values has taken place. The heroic classical body has come to seem overblown, and the northern paintings delightful for the supposedly superficial element of costume. Ruskin goes on to cite famous works by the eighteenth-century artists, all of which feature figures elaborately clothed in the dress of their period: “Take, as types of the best work ever laid on British canvas ... Sir Joshua’s *Age of Innocence* ...; Gainsborough’s *Mrs. Graham*, divinely doing nothing, and *Blue Boy* similarly occupied; and, finally, Reynolds’ *Lord Heathfield* magnanimously and irrevocably locking up Gibraltar.”⁴⁹ Then he asks his audience to imagine those works as they would appear if they had been painted in classical style:

Suppose, now, under the instigation of Mr. Carlyle and *Sartor*, and under the counsel of *Zeuxis* and *Parrhasius*, we had it really in our power to bid Sir Joshua and Gainsborough paint all these over again, in the classic manner. Would you really insist on having her white frock taken off the *Age of Innocence*; on the *Blue Boy*’s divesting himself of his blue; on—we may not dream of anything more classic—*Mrs. Graham*’s taking the feathers out of her hat; and on *Lord Heathfield*’s parting,—I dare not suggest, with his regimentals, but his orders of the Bath, or what else?⁵⁰

The clothes, as Ruskin is at pains to acknowledge, are the superficial element—he refers in the next paragraph to “frillings and trimmings, cuffs and collarettes.” Yet the listener or reader is in no doubt that a reversal of values has occurred, and Ruskin is delighting in the art of the tailor: the superficial has taken the moral high ground.

⁴⁸ Ruskin, *Works*, 33:308–9 (paragraph 62).

⁴⁹ Ruskin, *Works*, 33:311–12 (paragraph 66). The paintings cited are Sir Joshua Reynolds, *The Age of Innocence*, c. 1788, Tate, London; Thomas Gainsborough, *The Honourable Mrs Graham*, 1775–77, Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh; Thomas Gainsborough, *The Blue Boy*, c. 1770, Huntington Art Gallery, San Marino, CA; Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Lord Heathfield of Gibraltar*, 1787, National Gallery, London. Lord Heathfield led the British defence of Gibraltar against Spanish and French forces ending in 1782.

⁵⁰ Ruskin, *Works*, 33:312 (paragraph 66).

Ruskin's lecture reads as engagingly eccentric, but he has a deceptively firm grip on the conceptual structure, based on large-scale oppositions between the Gothic and the classic, the clothes and the body. The two antitheses seem parallel. Which term, however, is the essential one, and which the superficial? The very energy of the vocabulary with which Ruskin declares the superficiality of the Gothic and the clothes turns the tables and persuades the hearer that the moral weight is, after all, on that side.

That is so, it must be stressed, for Ruskin, not for Leighton. It is worth noting that Leighton's Presidential Addresses to the Royal Academy, delivered biennially from 1879 onwards and therefore contemporary with Ruskin's lectures on *The Art of England*, take a determinedly anti-Ruskinian position, particularly in their forthright and uncompromising rejection of an ethical or moral aim for art.⁵¹ One aspect of the difference of outlook between the two men is worth emphasis in the present context: Ruskin is concerned with a national art, as his title *The Art of England* indicates. He is also the author of *Modern Painters* (1843–60), and his concern with clothes, fashion, and nationality bears comparison with Baudelaire's famous essay of 1863 on 'The Painter of Modern Life'. Leighton's lectures, on the other hand, are thoroughly international and cosmopolitan. He deals confidently with Islamic, Egyptian, and Assyrian art—or what might now be called 'global art history.' Although the series was curtailed by his death in 1895, its scope and ambition were to cover the art of all times and all places. That helps to make sense of his remark, in the letter of 1873, about form as "a thing not of one time but of all time."

These writings by Leighton and Ruskin demonstrate a stark difference of opinion not merely on the propriety of presenting the nude figure at public exhibition, but also on much larger social and political debates, for example about the relative claims of nationalism and international cooperation, or of modernist innovation *versus* respect for tradition. Which position, however, is the 'radical' one, and which the 'conservative?' As President of the Royal Academy and 'academic classicist,' Leighton has often been taken for a conservative, at least in art-politics, and it is even assumed, entirely without evidence, that he must somehow have been a political or social conservative as well.⁵² In this complex clash of ideas, however, a commitment to classicism cannot be taken straightforwardly to represent adherence to conservative values; nor, on the other hand, does a call for modernity simply signify an openness to revolutionary change.

Ruskin represents a nineteenth-century modernity, nationalistic and romantic or (as he puts it) "Gothic." However, it is Leighton's 'classical form' that, in my view, contributes to the theorisation of artistic modernism. Like Pater, and like Winckelmann (in Pater's interpretation), Leighton consciously chooses Greek

⁵¹ *Addresses*; see especially the second Address (1881) on "the relation in which Art stands to Morals and to Religion."

⁵² Leighton's letters and his Presidential *Addresses* demonstrate his antipathy to any form of authoritarian politics, as well as a perhaps naïve, but certainly heartfelt, enthusiasm for Greek principles of democracy. His only known interventions in contemporary politics were in support of the Italian Risorgimento. See Prettejohn, *Art for Art's Sake*, p. 308, n. 104. Pater's early essays were published in radical or progressive journals (*Westminster Review* and *Fortnightly Review*) and as a young man he was described as a 'Liberal in politics'; see Wright, *The Life of Walter Pater*, 1: 216.

art, centred on the “human form,” as his inspiration. That, though, may sound like a paradox: how can a return to the “genuine antique,” in Pater’s phrase, make a route to modernism and modernity?

3 Classicism, romanticism, modernism

In the first version of the ‘Winckelmann’ essay, Pater cites a work by the Pre-Raphaelite artist William Holman Hunt, *Claudio and Isabella* of 1853 (Tate, London), as his key example of a ‘modern’ painting. In this scene from Shakespeare’s play *Measure for Measure*, the young nun Isabella visits her brother Claudio, imprisoned and sentenced to death for getting a girl pregnant, and tells him that she can win his freedom if she agrees to sleep with Angelo, the corrupt ruler of Vienna. Pose, gesture, facial expression, costumes, and accessories are all expertly nuanced to convey the dramatic tension, psychological complexity, and moral ambiguity of this situation. A contre-jour light effect puts Claudio’s face in shadow as he turns away in vexation mixed with fear, while it catches Isabella’s earnest glance and clear blue eyes as she pleads with him not to sacrifice her honour to his self-interest. ‘Modern’ art here is Hegel’s ‘romantic’ art-form, and in Pater’s brilliantly succinct exposition of Hegel’s sequence of art-forms it necessarily supersedes the classical art-form, associated with ancient sculpture.⁵³

But Pater, unlike Hegel, has no desire to predict the end of art, and the essay already contains hints of what a future art might look like—what might be called a ‘Post-Romantic Modern Art’. Moreover, as we have already seen, in the passage on the ‘classical tradition’ Pater had made it clear that the Greek element does not become absorbed or superseded in the historical process. Rather it remains a conscious choice for the artist to pick up at will in succeeding generations, so that the “series of elevated points” may extend indefinitely. The essay on Winckelmann, as previous scholars have often noted, is Pater’s most detailed exploration of Hegel’s historical scheme for the arts.⁵⁴ In this respect, however, he is taking issue with Hegel, quietly but unmistakably. We may then ask whether the ‘romantic’ art-form need *not* be seen as the last phase in the historical development of art, after all, and whether the next, ‘post-romantic’ phase might renew the ‘classical tradition’—not, of course, a false or artificial classicism, but one genuinely antique, genuinely Greek.

Pater deleted the reference to Hunt’s painting when he reprinted the essay in his volume of 1873 on the Renaissance. Was that because the painting no longer seemed the last word in modern art as soon as 1873—also the year of Leighton’s statement about his “growing love for Form?” That year, at the Royal Academy, Leighton exhibited *Weaving the Wreath*, a single figure, expressionless, engaged in the trivial activity of making a laurel wreath, seated on a Persian carpet before

⁵³ Pater, “Winckelmann,” 100. Pater omitted the example, but retained the discussion of Hegel’s sequence of art-forms in the later versions of the essay; see Pater, *Renaissance*, 167–79.

⁵⁴ See for example Shuter, “History as Palingenesis,” 411–21; McGrath, *Sensible Spirit*, 118–39.



Figure 5: Frederic Leighton, *Weaving the Wreath*, 1873, oil on canvas, 63.7 x 59.9 cm, National Museums Liverpool (Sudley House).

a white marble bas-relief with a Bacchanalian scene. There is nothing here of the dramatic and moral complexity seen in Hunt's picture. The painting clearly has classical things in it, but also non-classical things. It would be hard to describe it as a classical subject or indeed to say what the subject is at all: does the laurel wreath refer to poetry and poetic fame or achievement? What then is the role of the Bacchanalian dance on the bas-relief? Perhaps the figure's draperies are of the Renaissance, but is it a girl or a boy? I experience the figure as beautiful, whatever its sex, and the painting with its simplified colour scheme and incisive outlines is very beautifully crafted. This is not a classical-subject painting, but it is reasonable to call it an exploration of classical form in the more extended sense of Leighton's statement or of Pater's essay on Winckelmann: it displays what Pater calls "the clear ring, the eternal outline, of the genuine antique."

Leighton's painting departs abruptly from the 'Pre-Raphaelite' dramatization and pictorial style of Hunt's *Claudio and Isabella*. In Hegelian terms that departure could be described as a retreat or a regression from the 'romantic art-form' and modernity back to an outmoded 'classical art-form' that ought to have been superseded forever. Some such view has dominated discussions of artistic modernism, and it has led to a paranoid rejection of any kind of 'classicism'—the so-called 'academic classicism' of such as William Bouguereau and Alexandre Cabanel in France, as well as the classical-subject painting, again so-called, of Victorian England.

In this paper I have been arguing instead for a longer history of modern art from Winckelmann through to our own times, in which the classical tradition (in Pater's sense) remains active as a conscious choice for artists. In my book of 2012, *The Modernity of Ancient Sculpture*, I presented data to show that twentieth-century artists made reference to specific Greek sculptures far more extensively than

the historiography of modern art has acknowledged. Now I would like to extend that empirical insight into a larger argument about classicism in modern art: the ideas of ‘form’ and ‘formalism,’ as they are inflected and debated in modernist theory, criticism, and art practice, are fundamentally related to ways of thinking about classical form first explored in Winckelmann’s writing. ‘Related’ does not mean ‘identical,’ and in their *Nachleben* these ways of thinking developed along widely divergent, and often contested, lines. However, standard art-historical accounts of modernism are too ‘romantic,’ in Hegel’s sense. It is important, then, to recuperate the classical aspect centred on clarity of contour or outline, on the body as it occupies space—neither too meagre nor too flabby⁵⁵—and on the rejection of superficiality. The ‘classical’ or Winckelmannian aspect of form may be more apparent in some works of modernist art than others, and perhaps it is easiest to spot in the artistic practices that early twentieth-century critics called “abstract,” “geometrical,” or “all dry and hard” (to quote a famous phrase of T.E. Hulme).⁵⁶ I do not, however, wish to propose a new binary, or any division of modernism into ‘romantic’ and ‘classical’ strains. We need in my view to acknowledge the ‘classical’ or Winckelmannian aspect as integral to thinking about artistic form in modernism as a whole.

What role, then, does Frederic Leighton play in this longer history? Winckelmann had to make do with Anton Raphael Mengs as his exemplary modern artist, but Mengs was not able fully to grasp the implications of Winckelmann’s new ways of experiencing and conceptualising classical art. Leighton, a century later, had both the intellectual capacity and the sheer technical skill to make classical form the basis for an art that is genuinely modern. As well as reflection and skill, it took hard work, applied to every finely crafted painting, and over a lifetime. It is appropriate, then, to conclude with Leighton’s final masterpiece, now also his most famous painting: *Flaming June* of 1895.

Flaming June is a very ‘romantic’ painting in one aspect, its endless profusion of subtly differentiated hues—orange, red-orange, gold, amber, saffron, all relieved against the blinding white impasto of the sunlit background. There seems to be no subject-matter apart from the representation of the body for its own sake; part of the picture’s fascination is a face that is beautiful without having any character or expression at all. The face is the thinnest and most evanescent part of the painted surface, seeming almost to vanish into its own dreamworld, and it is the whole body that carries the expressive weight.

Yet this is also a very learned painting, one that stirs the viewer to recall countless other works of art, including classical ones: the *Discobolus* with its coiled pose, together with late-fifth-century relief sculpture for the drapery and the foot peeping from the hem. Again, though, Leighton unites classical with Renaissance sculptural form, as though to encourage the viewers’ imaginations to roam

⁵⁵ Winckelmann, *Reflections on the Imitation*, 6–9.

⁵⁶ “Romanticism and Classicism” (1911), in Hulme, *Speculations*, 126. Hulme’s essay can productively be read alongside Pater’s discussion of the same antithesis (or dialectic) in “Romanticism,” first published in *Macmillan’s Magazine* (November 1876), revised and reprinted as the “Postscript” to Pater’s volume, *Appreciations*. For this vocabulary see also Worringer, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung*; Wilenski, *Meaning of Modern Sculpture*.



Figure 6: Frederic Leighton, *Flaming June*, 1895, oil on canvas, 119.1 x 119.1 cm, Museo de Arte de Ponce, Puerto Rico.

through the history of art seeking associations. Michelangelo's *Night* (in the Medici Chapel of the Basilica of San Lorenzo in Florence) and the *ignudi* and Sibyls of the Sistine Chapel come immediately to mind; Leighton seems to condense the experimentation with twisting and turning bodies, male and female, into a single body. Nor should we forget the massive body forms of the Parthenon sculptures, casts of which Leighton kept near himself in his studio.⁵⁷

Classical, Renaissance, Romantic: Leighton's immensely learned painting makes a good lesson in art history, and in art theory to boot. The President of the Royal Academy, at the end of a lifetime's striving for perfection, distils everything he knows into this final image, square in shape, centred on the human body. According to the argument presented in this paper, that amounts to a realisation, at least within the conditions of its time and place, of Winckelmann's call for a modern art based on the imitation of the Greeks. Yet all the science, all the training and practice, cannot quite account for the experience of the painting—the thrill, simultaneously sensuous and intellectual, that we associate with the beautiful. In the end, as Leighton and Pater would surely agree, that is Winckelmann's most important legacy to modern art.

In Fuseli's translation of Winckelmann's *Reflections*: "There is but one way for the moderns to become great, and perhaps unequalled; I mean, by imitating the ancients."⁵⁸ That sets the standard high: the work of modern art must be as powerful in its effect as the greatest Greek sculpture. In other words, it must be capable of inspiring the kind of experience that Winckelmann had when he

⁵⁷ For these art-historical references, as well as further information about the painting and its reception history, see Pérez d'Ors et al., *Flaming June*.

⁵⁸ Winckelmann, *Reflections on the Painting*, 2, spelling modernised.

contemplated the Apollo Belvedere—the experience that made his breast seem to swell with the spirit of prophecy, and which transported him in imagination to the groves of Apollo.⁵⁹

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⁵⁹ Winckelmann, *History*, 2:312–13 (Book XI, Chapter III, paragraph 11).

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