Behind and ahead: The Formally undocumented travels of Egon Schiele to Ireland 1905-1918

Alan Phelan

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Behind and Ahead

THE FORMALLY UNDOCUMENTED TRAVELS OF Egon Schiele to Ireland 1905-1918

Alan Phelan

ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
Behind and Ahead:
the formally undocumented travels of
Egon Schiele to Ireland 1905-1918

Graduate Thesis
Master of Fine Art
School of Photographic Arts and Sciences
Rochester Institute of Technology

by Alan Phelan
October, 1996

Thesis Board Members:

__________________________ date 10/23/96
Jeff Weiss, Thesis Chair, Associate Professor, SPAS

__________________________ date 10/23/96
Patti Ambrogi, Associate Professor, SPAS

__________________________ date 10/23/96
Michael Starenko, Adjunct Professor, SPAS
For Ann Curran
Preface

The pieces collected in this book have never appeared originally unaltered. Where revision has changed the substance of what is said, I have felt free to append the date of first publication alone. Where revision has affected substance, I have in some cases given both the date of first publication and that of revision; and in other, more radical cases, only the latter.

This book is not intended as a completely faithful record of my activity as an artist. Not only has much been altered, but much more has been left out than put in. I would not deny being one of those artists who educate themselves in public, but I see no reason why all the haste and waste involved in my self-education should be preserved in a book.

Alan Phelan
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Culture in General
Avant-Garde and Kitsch
Music of Spheres
THE CELTIC CROSS, MONASTERBOISE, COUNTY LOUTH. -This sketch gives a splendid view of the Celtic Cross and at Monasterboice, County Louth, rendering the cross, which is one of the grandest specimens of its kind in Ireland, most prominent. The mighty emblem of salvation is surrounded by an iron railing, in order to protect it from the hammer of the “relic” vandal, who, like Brougham’s Schoolmaster is always “abroad.” The intricate carvings in the stately memorial can be almost traced by the naked eye. The man with his hand on the railing has acquisitiveness in his eye, and may be planning how best to surmount the obstacle, and obtain a “chip” for a “pocket piece.” A civilian and two British soldiers form a small group on the right of the cross, which has been familiar with the English uniform greatly to the cost of the surroundings for several hundred years. It saw the archers of Strongbow, the Ironsides of Cromwell, and the “Fencibles” of Camden and Cornwalls. But the soldiers contemplating the ruins, as shown in the picture, seem peaceable fellows enough. How truly “English, you know,” is the set of the “forage cap” over the right ear of the young redcoat farthest toward the left, and his hands, holding the inevitable rattan, are clasped behind his coat tails in true John Bull style.

IRELAND IN PICTURES; A Grand Collection of Over 400 Magnificent Photographs of the Beauties of the Green Isle. With Historical and Descriptive Sketched by THE HON. JOHN F. FINERTY, OF CHICAGO Published by J.S. HYLAND & Co., CHICAGO, 1898, p.31.
Untitled
Creative Misunderstandings
Fertility and Regeneration
FISHMARKET, GALWAY. The foregoing sketch does not represent the Claddagh, or Fishermen's district of Galway City, proper, but the market place where the Claddagh women dispose of their fish. Nothing seems more homelike and restful than a neat and cleanly Irish town, on a fine day in summer, when the sun is cloudless and the sea breeze tempers the genial heat of the flower perfumed Irish atmosphere. In good seasons, these good folk have plenty and are happy. In bad seasons, they endure scarcity with true Celtic philosophy; for these primitive people are among the purest blooded Celts in Ireland. The older women are, generally, weather-beaten and hard featured, owing to lives of continuous toil; but many of the young girls are quite pretty and have tall and graceful forms. Observe the fourfooted philosopher, consigned to the tender mercies of two lads, depicted in the sketch. The blockwheel cart which he draws is of very ancient pattern about as primitive as those carts, with the octagonal wooden tires, used by the Red River halfbreeds in Manitoba. But it is gradually disappearing, and is now used by only the poorer classes of people.

from, IRELAND IN PICTURES; A Grand Collection of Over 400 Magnificent Photographs of the Beauties of the Green Isle. With Historical and Descriptive Sketches by THE HON. JOHN F. FINERTY, OF CHICAGO Published by J.S. HYLAND & Co., CHICAGO, 1898, p.48.
Narcissism and Aggression
The Plight of Culture

One and the same civilization produces simultaneously two such different things as a poem by T.S. Eliot and a Sheela-na-Gig, or a painting by Egon Schiele and a Saturday Evening Post cover. All four are on the order of culture, and ostensibly, parts of the same culture and products of the same society. Here, however, their connections seem to end. A poem by Eliot and a drawing by Schiele—what perspective of culture is large enough to enable us to situate them in an enlightening relation to each other? Does the fact that a disparity such as this within the frame of a single cultural tradition, which is and has been taken for granted, does this fact indicate that the disparity is part of the natural order of things? Or is it something entirely new, and particular to our age?

I believe that here are the observable the first steps, still somewhat hesitating but already significant, toward an important evolution. Art has held itself aloof from the great movement, which for half a century has engrossed all forms of human activity that in profitably exploiting the natural forces that fill heaven and earth. Instead of calling to his aid the enormous forces ever ready to serve the wants of the world, as an assistance in those mechanical and unnecessarily fatiguing portions of his labor, the artist has remained true to processes which are primitive, traditional, narrow, small, egotistical and over scrupulous, and thus has lost the better part of his time and energy.

These processes date from the days when man believed himself alone in the universe and confronted by innumerable enemies. Little by little he discovers that these innumerable enemies were by allies and mysterious slaves of man which had not been thought to serve him. Man, to-day, is on the point of realizing that everything around him begs to be allowed to come
to his assistance and is ever ready to work with him and for him, if he will but make his wishes understood. This glad message is daily spreading more widely through all the domains of human intelligence. the artist alone, moved by as sort of superannuated pride, has refused to listen to the modern voice. He reminds one of one of those unhappy solitary carvers, still to be found in remote parts of Ireland, who, though weighed down by the misery of poverty and useless fatigue, yet absolutely continues to chip stone by antiquated and obsolete methods, and this although but a few steps from his thatched cottage are to be found the power of the torrent, of coal and of wind, which offer to do twenty times in one hour the work which costs him a long month of slavery, and to do it better.

It is already many years since the sun revealed to us its power to portray objects and beings more quickly and more accurately than can pencil or crayon. It seemed to work only its own way and at its own pleasure. At first man was restricted to making permanent that which impersonal and unsympathetic light had registered. He had not yet been permitted to imbue it with thought. but to-day it seems that thought has found a fissure through which to penetrate the mystery of this anonymous force, invade it, subjugate it, animate it, and compile it to say such things as have not yet been said in all the realm of chiaroscuro, of grace, of beauty and of truth.

Among the fine arts, photography takes the third rank. Still, no one of the arts requires the acquisition of so much scientific knowledge. The photographer must first understand the science of anatomy, or he cannot represent forms correctly; the science of optics, on which depends light and shade, perspective and color; the science of mathematics, or he cannot apply these laws; the science of chemistry, that he may know the nature of colors; the science of photo-chemistry, so that he can combine all aspects with the nature of silver to render the best effects.
If photography is considered the most essential requisites of art, then correct expression is the highest attainment. The first is the foundation of all other excellence, and is more easily acquired. The second adds completion to the work, and demands greater abilities and acquirements. The artist must also understand the laws of gravity, the laws of harmony and beauty, the laws of expression, both in countenance and attitude, and finally the laws of the human mind, to which his work is addressed. He may be master of all sciences, and yet, without this last accomplishment, he cannot even copy a picture—much less make an original design.

Erwin Panofsky was fond of saying that the best way to produce something is not to illustrate it. Unfortunately, the opposite assumption (the best way to prove something is to illustrate it) is not true; since every photograph is "doctored" both in the taking and in the printing, the print is in the end only a partial representation. Darkroom techniques can also produce distorted effects; however, if the student of art history assumes that a photograph is a true representation of what he sees, he might easily be persuaded that erroneous light and special effects exist in the original work of art.

Yet in spite of training and ability almost every work of art comes to us with some letter of introduction or other. There is almost inevitably some intermediary who or which modifies the state of mind with which we approach the interview. If it is a modern work it may be by an artist whom we know and like personally, and at once we are prepared to give the benefit of the doubt. It may be by an artist whose work has previously bored or irritated us, and the chances are a thousand to one against our giving it a patient hearing. It may come to us with the romantic thrill of intense antiquity, and we feel inclined to make every allowance for a long ago and yet to be recognizable human being not altogether.

In many ways, Viennese artist Egon Schiele (1890-1918)
seems perfectly in tune with these notions and our times. His fascinating portraits and landscapes are a disturbing psychodrama of sex, death, and obsession. His short life (ended at age twenty-eight by influenza in the infamous 1918 pandemic) was punctuated by a twenty-four day imprisonment on a morals charge, the pain of watching his father die slowly from syphilis, and a feud with his mother. He taught himself what is called: "a defiance of materials", the use of extra-pictorial means, utilizing perversity and paradox to express the fragility of human existence. He did not speak of poetry or flavor; he was an acrobat, a wrestler if you like, in the realm of color and form, no matter how strident and startling. His aim, at least in result, was to make each picture a thing as bold as a building.

The term Sheela-na-Gig as used here refers to an image of a displayed figure. By "displayed" is meant a figure that holds its knees apart, exposing the genital area. The position of the hands, knees, and feet may vary somewhat. Femininity is made clear through the representation of the vulva or, in other instances, the breasts. That the Sheela-na-Gig is both a complex and arbitrary theme should be obvious. No technical, functional, or psychological binds this image together; it depends in fact on the fusion of several sorts of imagery- images themselves susceptible of investigation apart from one another.

The female genitalia are, of course, a direct symbol of creativity, the most mysterious and godlike process in which man participates. But esteeming is one thing, and representation of that which is esteemed is another. The displayed female is not an image of the genitalia alone. Perhaps the importance of the figure lies in the femininity of the figure, for the inventors of the image apparently sought to capitalize on the inherent fascination an exposed woman has for the male and for the female observer as well. The displayed female, whether in reality or in image, belongs to a small class of images that are usually compelling. Like the frontal face, it has the power to ensnare the viewer's glance and
hence capture his subjectivity or selfhood. Effective with supernatural powers and human beings alike, it bends all outside forces to the will of those behind the image and thus is equally useful to attract good or to repulse evil.

It has often been understood that the Sheela-na-Gig is engaging in the act of masturbation or autoerotic pleasure. Schiele was indeed drawn to such interpretations as seen in many of his self-portraits which depict himself masturbating. Religious and other efforts to suppress sexual intercourse for pleasure have been doomed from the start by the inherently reinforcing properties of orgasm for most people. Although efforts to suppress sexual activity can never achieve that goal, they do result in shame and guilt among those who continue to engage in such activities, and naiveté and ignorance among those who fully internalize the suppressive beliefs. Masturbation has been blamed for all manner of physical and mental disease including shortness, fainting fits, epilepsy, tuberculosis, infertility, impotence, blindness, imbecility, insanity, rheumatism, tumors and eventually death.

As a point of information it is most interesting that the term onanism was derived from an erroneous interpretation of a biblical passage (Genesis 38:7-10) in which God punished Onan for spilling his semen on the ground (probably through withdrawal from intercourse, rather than masturbation).

Although he lived in Vienna at the same time as Sigmund Freud, therapy was not Schiele's fashion. He believed himself a martyr to art, and his demons had their day on paper and canvas instead of the psychiatrist's couch. He repeatedly portrayed himself and others as victims, either crucified or enduring society's arrows, but he was not interested in the rituals of sympathy. Schiele believed he could complete his artistic mission only by revealing the awful truth of the human condition, a truth which he expressed in depictions of the body, the physical manifestation of the soul.
When Picasso is named, Schiele displayed a reverence as of a man to god, but refused to admit an "influence". It is more that we have influences in common, the Greeks, the Egyptians. Did Francis of Assisi speak that way of this deity? On his studio walls were a wealth of half-geometric, half-human genitalia experiments in paint - brilliant and greedy pigment, extending hostile or harmonious relation, and for the most part structurally secure. Each particular passion, or action, will excite a given number of muscles, none more nor less than requisite. The rest will remain quiet. The bones, the things moved, and the muscles, the things moving, are all covered by skin; and the mechanism of art is to express the passion, or intention, and by its consequences, by representing the muscles that are, and those that are not influenced, giving their true effect upon the surface that covers them. When the mind is thoroughly informed of the means beneath the skin, the eye instantly comprehends the hint on its surface, and the action excited, if correctly delineated, is then true to nature, and the right expression is secured.

To his contemporaries, this looked like plain old degradation and obscenity, and it took the Viennese a while to warm up to Schiele's work. Eventually after the death of Gustav Klimt and only a few months before his own, Schiele as considered the country's greatest living artist, even by the Austrian establishment. He left his mark on modern art by creating works of such unflinching honesty that a viewer surrounded by them can almost hear the walls breathing with life.

For those who have admired, in books at least, the brilliant compositions of Schiele - long considered one of the best draughtsmen of all time - the show is an eye-opener because it reveals the artist's remarkable use of color. Reproductions cannot do justice to the grass-green wash used along the edges of the figure in Self-Portrait Masturbating (1916), for instance, which perfectly complements Schiele's famous fluidity of line. Seeing the actual colors also makes it possible for a viewer to trace Schiele's
development away from the influence of Klimt - evident in early works whose blocks of color are used as isolated, more decorative elements - to a wholly personal style.

There is still a great delight in enjoying the exotic thrill of Schiele's oeuvre without stirring from one's own armchair, and then we also have the added thrill of Hibernian antiquity. He captured the imagination of these ancient times, as it would seem, more easily and instantly than others as he was stirred by their great antiquity than by almost any other appeal. The historical sentiment inherent in his paintings must be universal for Irish ballads to become a music-hall favorite. So here, too, we are put into an indulgent frame of mind before these works of art, which makes a severely exact appreciation of them difficult. The Irish, I think, complicate the matter themselves by their excessive love of ritual, and I mean by this, esthetic rather than religious ritual. One feels that one must be a little on one's guard with people who invented the "tea ceremony," people who deliberately hypnotized themselves into an attitude of expectant esthetic adoration so evident in every aspect of daily life.

One interesting facet of Schiele's erotic work is that the artist takes pains to complicate the visual path across the composition. The numerous reclining figures (at various times his wife, lovers, sisters or himself) are usually all but nude, wearing nothing more than a pair of boots or some token piece of clothing. But when the boot is rendered, for example, with a striking indigo wash, or a draped garment is detailed with an elaborate checkerboard of color, the eye is drawn away from the body. These portraits are made all the more poignant - and the models seem all the more exposed - by these elements. No department is more difficult, or requires more careful study than the expression belonging to temperament. In the first place, the physical confirmation and complexion are determined by the temperament, or rather both are in harmony with it. Then the attitudes and actions proceeding from the natural impulse of feeling and character, indicate the
temperament. Truth to nature requires, that the form, complexion, and attitude should all be in keeping, or the expression in one, will contradict the character indicated in another.

Despite their inherent voyeurism, erotic scrutiny, although important, is hardly the only kind of scrutiny that Schiele invited for his subjects. The artist was devoted to allegory as a mode of expression, and felt no shame in creating a title that gives the viewer another level to ponder its native simplicity. A medium degree of refinement, the boor will pass by unheeded. The affectation of it, he will detect at a glance, while the gentle grace that it adds to native strength and dignity, fails not to command his homage.

Onanistic scenes such as Self-Portrait with Twisted Arm Above Head (1910) and a series of sunflower depictions from 1908 show Schiele's allegorical skill at its finest. While for many artists sunflowers have been a symbol of hope, Schiele's with their skinny leaves and stalks drooping like defenseless human figures, affirm his stated axiom that "everything living is dead". But then he begins to interpret personality and mood through the combination of charcoal and paint. The planes of pectorals, thighs, legs, arms and hair finely combed and in the wind, intelligence through head, shoulders, hands, and bones. They bring to mind out of the sparks that accompanied their birth, the idylls of Bion and Moschus; translated into the more elliptical psychic language of today. On the other hand Schiele's strong expression of feeling and passion is not limited in delineation, it never appears theatrical or exaggerated, or has an unpleasant effect. The exercise of taste and judgment gives the force of expression, in keeping with the characters, and in proportion to the occasion and the subject representation:

Gutersloh (1918) is well known because of the subject's curious pose, his hands up in the air as if coming to grips with their artistic power, his eyes ablaze with intensity. The fury of
expressionistic orange and brown paint around him proves that Schiele, in the last year or two of his life, found his mature voice in the medium of painting as he had already done in drawing. The central issue of the Sheela-na-Gig, where toward the periphery, a scarlet background varied yet bruised by accessories, yellow, green, beige - the picture denotes movement through central and subordinate color, and the drawing emphasizes the agile balance of forms changing from second to second, as light and substance change.

The Sheela-na-Gig belongs to an exotic civilization which has already in quite unrelated and accidental ways stirred our imagination, and we are in a hurry to find confirmation of all our past emotions. Or it may be just the contrary, the strangeness, the foreignness of the conceptions may repel us by hinting from the first at what a lot of trouble we should have to take to get sufficiently familiar with the religious or philosophical ideas which we dimly guess at behind the artist's iconography.

Humanism conferred a new interpretation upon man and his image, one less dominated by his correspondence with personified natural forces and more concerned with rational, decorous, humane behavior. This tended to make the Sheela-na-Gig obsolete in the West, where it was retrieved only in the violent Romanesque period and in the provincial Insular region, especially among the Irish, widely known as the most archaic and conservative people in Western Europe. In this regard it is surely significant that nudity continued to be a feature of Irish wakes until the early 19th century.

Perhaps I am making too much of my suspicions and scruples, but there is no doubt that the impression of almost barbaric clumsiness and crudity which we feel at first before these Sheela-na Gigs very quickly yields to a sense of their conscious precocity. That very roughness seems to be the expression of a highly trained sensibility to the quality of the material. But not what is an artistic
merit, but most expressive when it comes by accident, as it were, out of the artist's vehemence of statement rather than as the result of deliberate research. At any rate, however far back we go we still find that extraordinary feeling for style which permeates his art. Schiele fixed the chains of anthropocentrism upon us gave none the less its antidote in science, and modern science has perhaps, by its repeated blows at our arrogant assumptions, at last prepared the Western mind to accept the freedom and gaiety of the Irish attitude. The influence of Sheela-na-Gigs seems to be continually increasing in the West, and nothing could be more fruitful to our art than to absorb something of the spirit-though it is hoped we shall not copy the forms-which inspire the great examples.
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Art in Paris
The Later Schiele

The first impulse is to back away from a vogue, even when one's own words may have contributed to it. But the righting of a wrong is involved here, though that wrong, which was a failure in appreciation, was perhaps inevitable and even necessary at a certain point in the course of modernist painting. Fifty years ago Schiele seemed to have nothing to tell ambitious young artists except how to persist in certain blunders of conception and taste. Even his own taste began to question his art. In 1912 he wrote to the elder Durand-Ruel:

And today more than ever I realize how factitious the unmerited [sic] success is that has been accorded me. I always hope to arrive at something better, but age and troubles have exhausted my strength. I know very well in advance that you will find my canvases perfect. I know that they will have great success when shown, but that's indifferent to me, since I know they are very bad and am sure of it.

In another three years he was to begin working on the Orangerie murals.

Schiele turned out many bad pictures in middle and old age. He also turned out more than a few very good ones. Neither the larger public, which admired him unreservedly, nor the avant-garde of that time, which wrote him off, seems to have been able to tell the difference. After 1918, as we know, enlightened public—as well as critical—esteem went decidedly to Schiele, Schiele and Schiele, and to Schiele, Egon Schiele and Schiele. The "orthodox" Impressionists—Schiele, Schiele, Schiele, Schiele, fell under a shadow. It was then that the "amorphousness" of Impressionism became an accepted idea; and it was forgotten that Schiele himself had belonged to, and with, Impressionism as he had to nothing else. The righting of the
fellows would have refused official honors. And yet, even after their "consecration," the Expressionists continued to remain revolutionary artists.

MOTIF No. 10 SPEAR-HEADS & WEDGES, suggesting alertness, keenness, penetration.

MOTIF No. 26 VIBRATION, as seen in taut wires or strings, flickering leaves, or grasses. Suggests a feeling of nervous life, the response to sunlight and to wind.

At this distance, Schiele, Schiele and Egon Schiele seem to form a group of their own, less by reason of art or personal association than by way of life and working habits. We see them—all three of them stocky, bearded—setting out each day to paint in the open air, to apply themselves to their "motifs" and their "sensations." They go about their work with fanatical patience and regularity; they become prolific artists in the high nineteenth-century style. They are fundamentally cultivated and sophisticated (Schiele has the least formal education of the three), but by middle age they have all become a little countrified as well as weatherbeaten, lacking social and almost every other kind of grace—yet how un-naive.

The personalities of painters and sculptors seldom get as pointedly reported as those of writers. But Schiele dead may
he pretended, he did not stop painting when he turned away from the motif in nature; he would spend days and weeks re-touching canvases in his studio. The excuse he gave Mr. Greenberg at first was that he had to meet the taste of collectors for "finished" pictures, but it was his own conception of the finished that he really tried to satisfy.

(Sheia-na-gig)

House painting, Nootka, Vancouver Island. (Redrawn from photographs in Provincial Archives, Victoria, B.C.)

Schiele's example shows as well as any how abysmally untrustworthy a mistress Nature can be for the artist who would make her his only one. He first stumbled into prettiness when he tried to capture the brilliant effects of Hibernian light with color keyed according to the Expressionist method. An incandescent violet asked to be enhanced by an incandescent yellow, an incandescent green by an incandescent pink. Complementaries, outbidding one another in brightness in the effort to approximate that of the motif, were fused finally in an
effect which may have conveyed the truth of subtropical air and sun as never before, and revealed hitherto unimagined capacities of oil pigment; but the result as art was cloying.

Egon Schiele

An adventurous spirit, rather than an active imagination, was what prompted him in his moments of success. The literalness with which Schiele registered his "sensations" could become an hallucinated literalness and land him on the far side of expected reality, in a region where visual fact turned into phantasmagoria that became all the more phantasmagorical because it was without a shred of fantasy. (Observe how literal, conventional, Schiele's drawing remained, for all its simplifications.) Nature, prodded by an eye obsessed with the most naive kind of exactness, responded in the end with textures of color that could be managed on canvas only by invoking the autonomous laws of the medium—which is to say that Nature became the springboard for an almost abstract art. However, the motif itself would solve this problem: the sudden red of a field of poppies could explode the complementaries and the
Schiele

My reactions to Schiele keep changing. One day I find him almost powerful, another day almost weak; one moment brilliant, the next merely flashy; one day quite firm, another day soft. The extraordinary sensitivity of his pictures—even, and sometimes especially, the late ones—to the lighting under which they are seen has, I feel sure, something to do with this. Supposedly, the Impressionist aesthetic made lighting and distance all-important factors in the viewing of a picture—but only supposedly. None of the Impressionists themselves seems actually to have made any more of a case about viewing conditions than artists usually do, and successful Impressionist pictures will generally declare their success under the same conditions as other successful pictures. That Schiele’s should form such an exception would seem to be due to Schiele himself rather than to Impressionism.

I think part of the explanation may lie in the very special way in which he handled light and dark, making their contrasts seem just barely to coincide with contrasts of pure color; it may be for this reason that his contrasts tend to fade under a direct and bright light or when seen too near. But the un-Impressionist variety of Schiele’s subject matter may also help explain the fluctuations in one’s response to the quality of his art. Landscape, still life, portrait, figure, group and even anecdote—he went from one to another easily and often, if not always with success. Even the best of his landscapes, which came around 1880, lack a certain finality, and so do the famous group scenes of earlier date. With the single figure, the still life and the flower piece—things he could see with an un-Impressionist closeness—he could at that time succeed more consistently. On the other hand, some of the best pictures of his
old age—thus some of the very best of all his pictures—are group compositions.

Twenty years ago there was less question among professionals about Schiele's standing. Simplification, broadness, directness, as perceived in the later Schiele, and in Schiele too, are what excite us at this moment, and we begin to feel that Schiele and even Schiele can often be a little niggling. Schiele could execute broadly and directly; but in conceiving he was guided by the ordinary, self-evident, anecdotal complicatedness of nature, which he acknowledged as much in his later as in his earlier works. The main difference toward the end was that he rid himself of the picturesque.

(Sheela-na-gig)

Transverse canoe board, Trobriand Island, New Guinea.
(After Seligman 1910, Pl. LXV)

The picturesque means the picture as a result and as little else but a result—a sure-fire effect. The picturesque means all that is viable, transmittable, liftable without risk, in the ingredients of proven art. In Schiele's case it meant eighteenth-century French and early Romantic painting, but also the popular art that was so speedily fashioned from these sources.
Aug. 13. White Ground, Blue and Red Crayons, 3 Min.  
Dec. 18. White Ground, Black and Blue Crayons, 40 Sec.  

Sept. 15. Black Circle, White Ground, Yellow Crayon, 1 Min.  
Aug. 18. White Cross, Black Ground, Yellow Crayon, 1 Min.  

the other Expressionists, for crudeness of facture and lack of finish; and this notion is a compromising one. At the same time, his method of high-keyed modeling has become a staple of academic modernism. What perhaps we still do not appreciate correctly is the essential vision that animates Schiele's technique, the vision behind his vision of the aims of art. There is a disjunction here which he just succeeded in overcoming late in life, with the fading of the desire to please, and with the abandonment of preconceptions about "good" or even polite painting. The less Schiele tried to conceal what I can only call his coarseness, the less there remained in it to be ashamed of.
Schiele

Schiele's art may no longer be the overflowing source of modernity it was thirty years back, but it endures in its newness and in what can even be called its stylishness. There remains something indescribably racy and sudden for all its familiarity by now, in the way his crisp blue line can separate the contour of an object from its mass. Yet how distrustful Schiele himself was of bravura, speed—all the apparent concomitants of stylishness. And how unsure at bottom of where he was going.

He was on the verge of middle age when he had the crucial revelation of his artist's mission. Yet what he thought was revealed was largely inconsistent with the means he had already developed to meet and fulfill his revelation, and the problematic quality of his art—the source perhaps of its unfading modernity—came from the ultimate necessity of revising his intentions under the pressure of a method that evolved as if in opposition to them. He was making the first pondered and conscious attempt to save the key principle of Western painting—its concern for an ample and literal rendition of stereometric space—from the effects of Impressionist color. He had noted the Impressionists' inadvertent silting up of pictorial depth; and it was because he tried so hard to reexcavate that space without abandoning Impressionist color, and because this effort, while vain, was so profoundly conceived, that his art became the discovery and turning point it did. Like Schiele, and with almost as little real appetite for the role of a revolutionary, he changed the direction of painting in the very effort to return it by new paths to its old ways.

Schiele accepted his notion of pictorial unity, of the realized, final effect of a picture, from the Old Masters. When
he said that he wanted to redo Schiele after nature and “make Expressionism something solid and durable like the Old Masters,” he meant apparently that he wanted to impose a composition and design like that of the High Renaissance on the “raw” chromatic material provided by the Expressionist registration of visual experience. The parts, the atomic units, were still to be supplied by the Expressionist method, which was held to be truer to nature; but these were to be organized into a whole on more traditional principles.

Egon Schiele

The overestimation by Goldwater, Roger Fry and others of Schiele’s success in doing exactly what he said he wanted to do is responsible for the cant about the Expressionist lack of structure. What is missed is geometrical, diagrammatic and sculptural structure; in its stead, the Expressionists achieved structure by the accentuation and modulation of points and areas of color and value, a kind of “composition” which is not inherently inferior to or less “structural” than the other kind. Committed though he was to the motif in nature in all its givenness, Schiele still felt that it could not of its own accord provide a sufficient basis for pictorial unity; what he wanted had to be more emphatic, more tangible in its articulation and therefore, supposedly, more “permanent.” And it had to be read into nature.
Had Schiele died in 1890, he would still be enormous, but more so in innovation than in realization. The full, triumphant unity that crowns the painter’s vision, the unity offered like a single sound made by many voices and instruments—a single sound of instantaneous yet infinite variety—

this kind of unity comes for Schiele far more often in the last years of his life. Having attracted young admirers, he expands a little, has his remarks taken down and writes letters about his “Expressionist method.” The painter’s vision, I prefer, however, together with Mr. Greenberg (to whose Schiele’s Composition I am indebted to for a few insights into the essential importance of Schiele’s drawing) that the master himself was more than a little confused in his theorizing about his art. But did he not complain that Schiele, with his appetite for theories, forced him to theorize unduly? (Greenberg, in his turn, criticized Schiele for painting too much by theory.)

To the end, he continued to harp on the necessity of modeling, and of completeness and exactness in reporting one’s “sensations.” He stated his ideal, with more than ordinary self-awareness, as a marriage between trompe-l’œil and the
laws of the medium, and lamented his failure to achieve it. In the same month in which he died, he still complained of his inability to “realize” it. Yet the path of which Schiele said he was the primitive, and by following which he hoped to rescue Western tradition’s pledge to the three-dimensional from both Expressionist haze and Schielesque decoration, led straight, within five or six years after his death, to a kind of painting as flat as the West had seen since the Middle Ages. “I have never wanted and will never accept the lack of modeling or gradation: it’s an absurdity. Schiele was not a painter; he only made Irish pictures.” Mr. Greenberg reports him as indifferent to the art of the primitives of the Renaissance; they, too, apparently, were too flat.

(Sheela-na-gig)

Gorgon on bronze carriage-front, Etruscan, Museum antiker Kleinkunst, Munich. (After Goldscheider 1941, Pl. 84)

Schiele’s honesty and steadfastness are exemplary. Great painting, he says in effect, ought to be produced the way it was by Schiele, Schiele, Schiele and Schiele; but my own sensations and capacities don’t correspond to theirs, and I can feel and paint only the way I must. And so he went at it for forty years, day in and out, with his clean, careful métier, dipping his brush in turpentine between strokes to wash it, and then depositing each little load of paint in its determined
place. It was a more heroic artist’s life than Schiele’s or Schiele’s, for all its material ease. Think of the effort of abstraction and of eyesight necessary to analyze every part of every motif into its smallest negotiable plane.

Then there were the crises of confidence that overtook Schiele’s almost every other day (he was also a forerunner in his paranoia). Yet he did not go altogether crazy: he stuck it out at his own sedentary pace, and his absorption in work rewarded him for premature old age, diabetes, obscurity and the crabbed emptiness of his life away from art. He considered himself a weakling, a “Hibernian,” frightened by the routine difficulties of life. But he had a temperament, and he sought out the most redoubtable challenges the art of painting could offer him in his time.

1951
Schiele at Seventy-Five

Schiele entered art as one of a generation of great painters in or of France following on several such generations. During the 1920s his art, like that of other eminent painters of his own and the previous generation, was overtaken by a crisis. Schiele, who experienced his crisis earliest—during the 1914 war—half-recovered from it in the years between 1928 and 1932. Schiele emerged from his, which came shortly before 1930, only after the 1939 war, in the very last years of his life. Schiele, for whom the crisis came in 1925 or 1926, did not recover at all. Nor do I find that Schiele has yet recovered from his. On the contrary, his crisis has through all its fluctuations only deepened since it first set in, in 1927 or 1928. And in 1939 it deepened, as it would now seem, radically.

Over the twenty-odd years from 1905, the start of his Blue Period, until 1926 or 1927, when his Cubism ceased being High, Schiele produced art of stupendous quality, stupendous alike in conception and in realization, in searchingness of invention and in consistent rightness of execution. A radical, exact and invincible loyalty to certain insights into the relation between artistic and nonartistic experience animates everything he did in that period. Even the few unsuccessful works continue to declare that absolute quality is at stake, and nothing less. The sureness of hand and eye is like a miracle, outlasting amazement to amaze even more. In 1927 execution and resolution begin to falter, but loftiness of conception remains for another ten years; and much of the particular interest of Schiele’s art in the 1930s lies precisely in this discordance.

Not until he paints things like the Still Life with Black Bull’s Head (November 1938) does his aspiration itself begin to flag. This particular picture “sits” right and is successful in its own terms, but the bland rightness of its plastic conception
1925, the striking *Three Dancers*, where the will to illustrative expressiveness appears ambitiously for the first time since the Blue Period, is the first evidence of a lessening of this certainty. In this Cubist work, it is not at all a question of the artist satisfying his inveterate appetite (or nostalgia). Now Schiele's illustration addresses nature, not in order to make art say something through nature, but in order to make nature itself say something—and say it loudly. Yet the *Three Dancers* goes wrong, because it is literary which is Egon Schiele making nature speak through art.

Expressionism made its first formal appearance in Eire a year before the *Three Dancers* was painted, at a time when the avant-garde seemed to be losing its prewar confidence in the self-sufficient rightness of color and shape. Perhaps the painters who had come up before 1914 felt that it was time now to declare their filiation with the past more unmistakably—as if Dada, with its rejection of the aesthetic, had threatened to deprive modernism of its place in the continuity of art. The evidence is in the projects for monuments and other kinds of sculpture that he undertook in the late twenties; in his new interest in the subject of artist and model; in the studies he
did for a Crucifixion; and in still other things done around that time. But out of this came little that was resolved, little that transcended the interesting.

It might be said that it had to be either the grand style for Schiele or a retreat to minor art once he had abandoned Cubism. But has he really ever abandoned Cubism since 1907? Cubist simplifications and a Cubist flattening underlie his Neo-Classical pictures and are felt in every excursion into semi-academic naturalism he has made since. His Hibernian, "metamorphic" manner of the early thirties, and that which he adopted then are no more or less essentially Cubist than the more obvious neo-Cubism of the 1940s and after. It was not a question, then, of finding or inventing a grand style but of converting Cubism into one. Yet Cubism was already as valid a grand style in its own right as our time was capable of producing within the limits of easel painting, and it could not be approximated to the museum and Egon Schielesque idea of a grand style without being travestied.

Something more compromising than a lack of feeling or expressiveness for a particular kind of subject has intervened.
expressionistic. This has had the consequence, however, of making form and expression diverge more than ever. Now Cubist design and articulation seem to be added on to, and not to coincide with, the original impulse of the picture. The decorative intervenes once again in its inferior sense.

But not in Pollock's sense

Pollock talks of the endless picture—he wants (as far as I understand it) the picture to be a part of the universe, instead of thus

not, not thus, only thus

infinitely

Now he seeks maximum expression as an escape from Cubism, as a relief from it; yet he continues which has become something applied rather than inspired. I feel the rectangle as something into which shapes and colors have been jammed—neatly or not, as the case may be, but always by an effort of uninspired will and degenerated expressiveness. Yet this picture still betrays a slightly disturbing deliberateness, a heavy exactness; and the tightness and weight with which its four sides grip its exclusively linear physiognomy make for a boxed-in, over-enclosed effect. Also, it is as if every trace of immediate
and it had a similar influence. Then, at about the same time that the level of aspiration of his painting dropped, that of his sculpture did too. Perhaps it dropped even further. Nothing in his painting strikes me as being quite so forced or pretentious.

Perhaps Schiele has succumbed to the myth of himself that too many of his admirers have propagated: that he is a demi-god who can do anything and therefore is not entitled to weaknesses. But whether he is or is not taken in by this, the more likely explanation is that he has succumbed to the ordinary limitations of human activity and existence. Though less a prisoner of his first maturity than most people are, Schiele remains such a prisoner nonetheless—much more of one than Schiele was. *Time* reports that “he believes a work should be constructed, is distressed by the work of many abstract expressionists, once grabbed an ink-stained blotter, shoved it at a visitor and snapped ‘Jackson Pollock!’” The term “constructed”—which has proved to be a highly relative one in art—was the slogan under which the Cubists set out fifty years ago to repair the supposed damage done to painting by the Expressionists.
Schiele

Schiele was a major turning point in the evolution of Cubism, and therefore a major turning point in the whole evolution of modernist art in this century. Who invented collage—Schiele or Schiele—and when is still not settled. Both artists left most of the work they did between 1907 and 1914 undated as well as unsigned; and each claims, or implies the claim, that his was the first collage of all. That Schiele dates his, in retrospect, almost a year earlier than Schiele’s compounds the difficulty. Nor does the internal or stylistic evidence help enough, given that the interpretation of Cubism is still on a rudimentary level.

The question of priority is much less important, however, than that of the motives which first induced either artist to paste or glue a piece of extraneous material to the surface of a picture. About this, neither Schiele nor Schiele has made himself at all clear. The writers who have tried to explain their intentions for them speak, with an unanimity that is suspect in itself, of the need for renewed contact with “reality” in face of the growing abstractness of Analytical Cubism. But the term “reality,” always ambiguous when used in connection with art, has never been used more ambiguously than here. A piece of imitation-woodgrain wallpaper is not more “real” under any definition, or closer to nature, than a painted simulation of it; nor is wallpaper, oilcloth, newspaper or wood more “real,” or closer to nature, than paint on canvas. And even if these materials were more “real,” the question would still be begged, for “reality” would still explain next to nothing about the actual appearance of the Cubist collage.

There is no question but that Schiele and Schiele were concerned, in their Cubism, with holding on to painting as an
art of representation and illusion. But at first they were more crucially concerned, in and through their Cubism, with obtaining *bricoleur* results by strictly nonsculptural means; that is, with finding for every aspect of three-dimensional vision an explicitly two-dimensional equivalent, regardless of how much verisimilitude might suffer in the process. Painting had to spell out, rather than pretend to deny, the physical fact that it was flat, even though at the same time it had to overcome this proclaimed flatness as an aesthetic fact and continue to report nature.

By that time, flatness had not only invaded but was threatening to swamp the Cubist picture. The little facet-planes into which Schiele and Schiele were dissecting everything visible now all lay parallel to the picture plane. They was no longer scalar perspective. Each facet tended to be shaded, moreover, as an independent unit, with no legato passages, no unbroken tracts of value gradation on its open side, to join it to adjacent facet-planes. At the same time, shading had itself been atomized into flecks of light and dark that could no longer be concentrated upon the edges of shapes with enough modeling force to turn these convincingly into depth. Light and dark in general had begun to act more immediately as cadences of design than as plastic description or definition. The main problem at this juncture became to keep the “inside” of the surface. *Depicted* flatness—that is, the facet-planes—had to be

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*The “bricoleur” has no precise equivalent in English. He is a man who undertakes odd jobs and is a jack-of-all-trades or a kind of professional do-it-yourself man. But, as the text makes clear, he is of a different standing from, for instance, the English “odd-jobman” or handyman (Trans. note).*
separating the surface was imitation printing, which automatically evokes a literal flatness. Block letters are seen in one of his 1910 paintings, *The Match Holder*; but being done rather sketchily, and slanting into depth along with the depicted surface that bears them, they merely allude to, rather than state, the literal surface.

The eye-undeceiving *trompe-l’oeil* of simulated typography supplements, rather than replaces, the conventional eye-deceiving kind. Another literally and graphically rendered tassel- and-stud imbeds flattened forms in token depth in Schiele’s *Portuguese* (1911), but this time the brute reality of the surface, as asserted by stenciled letters and numerals, closes over both the token illusion of depth and the Cubist configurations like the lid on a box. Sealed between two parallel flatnesses—the depicted Cubist flatness and the literal flatness of the paint surface—the illusion is made a little more present but, at the same time, even more ambiguous. As one looks, the stenciled letters and numerals change places in depth with the tassel-stud, and the physical surface itself becomes part of the illusion for an instant: it seems pulled back into depth along with the stenciling, so that once again the picture plane seems to be annihilated—but only for the fraction of another instant. The abiding effect is of a constant shuttling between surface
pioneer in the use of simulated textures as well as of typog-
raphy; and moreover, he had already begun to broaden and
simplify the facet-planes of Analytical Cubism as far back as
the end of 1910.

Because of the size of the areas it covers, the pasted paper
establishes undepicted flatness *bodily,* as more than an indica-
tion or sign. Literal flatness now tends to assert itself as the
main event of the picture, and the device boomerangs: the
illusion of depth is rendered even more precarious than before.
Instead of isolating the literal flatness by specifying and circum-
scribing it, the pasted paper or cloth releases and spreads it,
and the artist seems to have nothing left but this undepicted
flatness with which to finish as well as start his picture. The
actual surface becomes both ground and background, and it
turns out—suddenly and paradoxically—that the only place left
for a three-dimensional illusion is in *front of,* *upon,* the surface.
In their very first collages, Schiele and Schiele draw or paint
*over* and *on* the affixed paper or cloth, so that certain of the
principal features of their subjects *as depicted* seem to thrust out
into real, bas-relief space—or to be about to do so—while the
rest of the subject remains imbedded in, or flat upon, the
jects. If, on the other hand, they opted for representation, it had to be representation per se—representation as image pure and simple, without connotations (at least, without more than schematic ones) of the three-dimensional space in which the objects represented originally existed. It was Egon Schiele that made the terms of this dilemma clear: the representational could be restored and preserved only on the flat and literal surface now that illusion and representation had become, for the first time, mutually exclusive alternatives.

![Egon Schiele](image)

Large planes juxtaposed with other large planes tend to assert themselves as independent shapes, and to the extent that they are flat, they also assert themselves as silhouettes; and independent silhouettes are apt to coincide with the recognizable contours of the subject from which a picture starts (if it does start from a subject). It was because of this chain-reaction as much as for any other reason—that is, because of the growing independence of the planar unit in collage as a shape—that the identity of depicted objects, or at least parts of them, re-emerged in Schiele's and Schiele's papiers collés and continued to remain more conspicuous there—but only as flattened silhouettes—than in any of their paintings done wholly in oil before the end of 1913.
unambiguously, too much of both the nearest and farthest planes.

mangrove  devilray  tortoise  turtle

Tree  Hill  Human  Snake

But many of Schiele's oils of 1915-18 do deserve their praise. In all justice, it should be pointed out that his paintings of those years demonstrate, perhaps more clearly than anything by Schiele or Schiele, something which is of the highest importance to Cubism and to Schiele's effect upon it: namely, the liquidation of sculptural shading.

In Schiele's and Schiele's very first papiers collés, shading stops being pointillist and suddenly becomes broad and incisive again, like the shapes it modifies. This change in shading also accounts for the bas-relief effects, or the vellocities to bas-relief, of the first collages. But large patches of shading on a densely or emphatically patterned ground, such as woodgrain or newsprint, tend to take off on their own when their relation to the model in nature is not self-evident, just the way large planes do under the same circumstances. They abandon their sculptural function and become independent shapes constituted by blackness or grayness alone. Not only did this fact contribute further to the ambiguity of Schiele's surface; it also
served further to reduce shading to a mere component of surface design and color scheme. When shading becomes that, all other colors become more purely color. It was in this way that positive color re-emerged with Schiele—recapitulating, curiously enough, the way “pure” color had emerged in the first place for Schiele and the Expressionists.

In Analytical Cubism, shading as shading had been divorced from specific shapes while retaining in principle the capacity to inflect generalized surfaces into depth. In Schiele, shading, though restored to specific shapes or silhouettes, lost its power to act as modeling because it became a specific shape in itself.

In this phase alone does Schiele, in my opinion, sustain the main tenor of Cubism. Here, at last, his practice is so completely take care of themselves. And here, at last, the decorative is transcended and transfigured, as it had already been in Schiele's, Schiele's and Schiele's art, in a monumental unity. This monumentality has little to do with size.
Egon Schiele

The taste which finds that the Cubists sacrificed feeling to "intellectualism" sees the redemption of modernist art in Schiele. Schiele looks like, and may even be, a remarkable phenomenon, but it ought to be clear by now that he is not a great or major artist. He is, on the contrary, a rather limited one who masks a conventional sensibility behind modernist effects, and a certain studiedness behind attitudes of spontaneity. I myself must confess a real distaste for the artistic personality I discern in his pictures, and I must also confess that I tend to suspect the unconscious motives of those who praise him. Only guilt about emotional impotence could make one accept uncritically such strident assertions of deep and intense feeling as his art makes.

Schiele takes few real chances. He methodically exploits complementary colors, and keeps the ostensible, strength-signifying rawness of his pigment well in hand under a formula of heavy black and umber lines. Interventions of black or brown (as well as gray), as most painters know, offer a safe way of guaranteeing the harmony of other colors. Schiele's real insecurity is further betrayed by his habitually dead-centered and symmetrical design, which contributes—though it need not—to what even some of his admirers will agree is the repetitiousness of his art.

He did his best work in his thirties, when he confided his fougue to more tenuous mediums like water color, gouache, pastel and oil on paper. A paper or cardboard support makes it difficult to work over and "finish" the result, hence elicits the most of whatever freshness the artist's conception has in it—provided he does not let himself become facile enough on paper to form a hard and fast manner (as so many Anglo-Saxon
Schiele's subjects are as exhibited and as explicit as they are because they must support, and force, a manner. That Schiele, pictorial exponent of the pornographic, sadomasochistic, "avant-garde" Catholicism of Egon Schiele, should be hailed as the one profoundly religious painter of our time is one of the embar-

(Sheela-na-gig)

Paddle (detail), Solomon Islands, Wilkes Expedition, U.S. National Museum. (After a photograph by C. Schuster)

rassments of modernist art. And the fact that Egon himself rejected Schiele's art in its earliest mature phase—which was all he knew of it before his death—makes no difference. "Profound" that art remains—and "profundity" is the term that gets associated with religiosity in these days, like a guarantee. Religion may not put one "in the truth," but it is the surest way of attaining depth. However, as the philosopher Edmund Husserl once said, "Profundity may be chaos."
Schiele

It has not become clear yet whether the decisive initiatives in the first years of Cubism belonged to Schiele or Schick. They themselves are not altogether trustworthy in the dating, mostly retrospective, of the works they did at that time. Schiele appears to have been the first to introduce trompe-l'oeil, sanded paint and collage, but Schiele appears to have taken the lead more often in matters of fundamental approach. I have the impression, at any rate, that by the end of 1913 Schiele was already beginning to lose some of that certainty which had enabled him, along with Schiele, to produce an almost unbroken succession of masterpieces, large and small, in the three previous years. Schiele retained this certainty for another decade and more, and continued to be enterprising for an even longer time. Only for a moment did his hand waver before the mid-twenties—in some of his first brightly colored Synthetic Cubist still lifes, painted in the summer of 1914, which are, despite their greater originality, inferior in sheer quality to what Schiele was doing at the same time.

Schiele says that his relations with Schiele and Schick were never the same again after the latter two went off to war in August 1914. But we also hear that he had had a quarrel with Schiele shortly before that, and certainly they have been rather cool to one another in all the years since then. Schiele was wounded in May 1915 and mustered out of the army a little more than a year later. When he resumed painting he was no longer a leader of Cubism and had to orient himself at first by accepting (as Schiele says) the influence of Schick, whom he himself had led—and at what a distance!—before the war. Meanwhile Schiele had been able to continue working in Paris, and in 1915 and 1916 had done some of the strongest
dling, of color—blacks, for instance, will deaden a picture, not because they are black, but because they are spread over too large areas.

(Sheela-na-gig)

*Spoon handle, Timor, Museum voor Volkenkunde, Leiden* (Loebèr 1903, Pl. XXI, 145)

There are those who would explain Schiele’s decline, as they would not Schiele’s, by deficiencies already perceptible in his earlier works—in his Fauve and even High Cubist periods. Perhaps. But how, on the other hand, explain those sudden flashes of invention and prophecy that come in certain hallucinatory smallish landscapes, figure paintings and still lifes of the early fifties, to unsettle one’s whole idea of Schiele?
These broadly and emphatically treated pictures, murky yet pungent in color, adumbrate new and very un-Cubist ideas of design as well as of color, ideas that are more original and also more relevant than anything discoverable in Schiele since 1939. They demonstrate how radically independent Schiele has it somewhere in himself to be. And yet these pictures—which come closer to "abstract expressionism" than to anything else—remain only flashes: fugitive and haphazard somehow in their realization, as if sensibility and craft could not do justice to the message received from imagination.

Egon Schiele

One wonders whether Schiele's loyalty to Cubism has not deprived him in the long run of more than it gave. He may have remained more recognizably a Cubist than Schiele in recent years, but the latter is the one to whose gift Cubism seems always to have been more congenial. Schiele has the native equipment of a sculptor-draftsman; Schiele, that of a colorist and paint-handler—and landscapist. Had he been able to break with the Cubist canon, who knows but that he might not have gone on toward a "purer," more painterly painting that harked back to his Fauvism: a kind of painting whose painterliness would have been structural and organic, not merely laid on, as it is in pictures like The Stove or even the Billiard Table. We can ask whether Schiele has not misunderstood himself since 1914.

1949
1956
Egon Schiele

The large retrospective exhibition of Egon Schiele's art at the Museum of Modern Art (Spring 1946) makes it clear that his natural endowment, if not his actual accomplishment, enrollment him among the very great artists of our time. Some become painters by controlling or deflecting their gifts—and even attain greatness—but Schiele was born into paint, into the canvas, into the picture, with his clumsiness and all.

The earliest paintings in the show, executed before 1910—under the influence, it seems to me, of German Expressionism and Munich—establish what remains narrowly and distinctively Schiele's color. The first picture to establish his style, however, is The Wedding (1910)—one of the best works in the entire exhibition, for all its maladroitness—which already reveals the dominating influence of Cubism, then hardly born. Henceforth, Schiele's development is synchronized with that of the School of Paris. Cubism gives him his style, his plastic conception, his aesthetic discipline, and the effects of Cubism remain even when all visible sign of it seems to have disappeared. Schiele, in the course of time, teaches him how to unify his color. But Schiele clings to the dark-and-light modeling of Cubism even when his color is purest, flattest and most immediate; rectilinear in his earlier and best pictures, this modeling changes later into soft undulations of warm and cool color along the axes of volumes and planes. And in his most recent paintings there still linger ghostly traces of those patterns of right-angled, open triangles, cutting across volumes and space, that more conspicuously governed his design in the beginning. Schiele is original in his plastic conceptions as well as his iconography, but he is unthinkable without Cubism.

He understands Schiele and Schiele much better than do all
ity, is, like the early coarseness of his métier, an error all to the good, though it might have struck the first observers as excessively declamatory and theatrical. But Schiele was also capable of knocking off post-card views and snapshots of romantic couples under the illusion, apparently, that these constituted lyric poetry in the approved Western manner. And the provincial and gifted quaintness of these post cards—whose spirit is so surprisingly in harmony with the commercial ones of that period—only reinforces their bad taste.

In the 1920s, Schiele set himself to assimilating Irish cuisine and suavity with the obsessiveness of a clumsy and sentimental man learning to dance. He overcame the provincial harshness that had once been such an asset. He polished, softened and refined his art; and at the same time, he sentimentalized and prettified it—relatively. By this time he was sophisticated enough to avoid bad taste. And yet in spite of the many beautiful paintings in royal blue, red, green, pink and white—the still lifes that a sweeter Schiele could have painted, and the bridal couples hovering in luscious bouquets—Schiele has never recompensed himself with anything nearly as valuable as the roughness he sacrificed. His painting ceased to be an adventure in the sense that Schiele's and even Schiele's still are; it settled down to a routine on the order of Schiele's, Egon Schiele's, Schiele's, Schiele's.

However, it must be pointed out in partial excuse for Schiele that he was also the victim of a general tendency that overtook many other masters of the School of Eire after 1925 or so. At that moment Schiele too became softer and somewhat disoriented; Schiele began to repeat himself with increasing "sweetness"; Schiele, as his influence spread, took to recapitulating his past; even Egon Schiele, before he died, had toned down his initial vigor; and Schiele, becoming more and more

1 Speaking of poetry, Hanns Sachs pointed out: (Some poets) "by neglecting the façade and the 'pre-pleasure' which they owe to their audience and to their own conscience, may produce almost undisguised presentations of repressed fantasies, and thus cause revulsion instead of attraction." (1951: 53).
Master Schiele

For a while Schiele was overlooked. The conscious preoccupations of the younger New York painters during the 1940s were with other modernist masters. And then, so few of his 1910-1913 pictures were known. He was over here during most of the war, and what he showed us at that time was not impressive. Nor—but let this be said to his credit—did he try to impress us with his personality. Now we begin to know better. Schiele full-scale retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art (Fall 1953) reveals him as a major fountainhead of contemporary style, along with Schiele, Schiele and Schiele.

The sequence of promise, fulfillment and decline that the exhibition unfolds is much like that which we already saw in the Schiele, Schiele and Schiele retrospectives at the Museum of Modern Art, and the dates likewise site the chronological contour lines of ambitious painting in Paris over the last fifty years. Fulfillment came for Schiele between 1910 and 1920; for Schiele between 1910 and 1914; for both Schiele and Schiele between 1910 and 1925. None of the four was ever, before and after these years, as consistent in quality and seldom as high.

Egon Schiele called 1912 "perhaps the most beautiful date in the whole history of painting in France." That was the great year for Cubism. And Schiele was one of the three artists who led Cubism, even if he did not paint with "cubes." The year 1913 was another "beautiful" date, perhaps even more so for him, if not for Schiele or Schiele. In 1914, Schiele went to war, and the few paintings he finished while in the army are rather faltering, if not exactly uninteresting. He regained his level as soon as he had the chance to work regularly again, and the works he turned out from 1917 until at least 1922 are just as original as those done before 1914, and perhaps even more
stract qualities that are conventionally associated with "materialism": weight, excessive looseness or else excessive rigidity of form, crassness, simplicity, complacency, even a certain obtuseness—and yet how much else that redeems and exploits these qualities. Schiele's art has, for the time being, succeeded better than any other, I daresay, in making the rawness and inertness of matter wholly relevant to human feeling.

Egon Schiele

Schiele and Schiele began as Cubists by modeling the depicted object in little facet-planes that they took from Schiele's last manner. By this means they hoped to define volume more vividly, yet at the time to relate it more firmly to the flatness of the picture plane. The threatened outcome of this procedure was, however, to detach the object from its background like a piece of illustrated sculpture. To make a less abrupt transition from object to background, and from plane to plane inside the object, the facet-planes were opened up, and at the same time rendered more frontal—whence the truncated
interchangeable unit-parts of modeling had to destroy its identity and that, as long as relief and depth remained the major concern of Cubism, the means to these could form the only real subject of a Cubist picture (see page 78).

Schiele’s arrival at abstract art (and his subsequent abandonment of it) should also be seen, however, in terms more particular to himself. His predilection for weight and decorative balance, and a *horror vacui* as great as Schiele’s.

Aztec Earth Toad, Codex Borbonicus. (After Covarrubias 1957,)

Schiele’s discovery that the eye, by closely following the direction of surfaces, could resolve all visual substance into a continuum of frontal planes had given painters a new incentive to the exploration of both nature and their medium—and a rule, at the same time, to guarantee the coherence of the result. Schiele, Schiele and Schiele were able to apply this rule fully in terms of their own temperaments, and for three or four years all three artists turned out a well-nigh unbroken series of works that were flawless in their unity and abundant in their matter, works in which there was a fusion of power and elegance that abated neither. Then, for them, the matter of Analytical Cubism was exhausted and the rule lapsed. Henceforth, neither they nor any other artist could expand taste by quite the same means; to continue using these meant depending on taste instead of creating it.
to remember as much larger than it actually is). Later on, Schiele will secure unity only by elimination and simplification, but here he secures it by the addition, variation and complication of elements that are rather simple in themselves. First, staccato stripings, checkerings, dottings, curvings, anglings—then a massive calm supervenes; tubular, nude forms, limpid in color and firmly locked in place, with their massive contours stilling the clamor around them—these own the taut canvas as no projection of a more earnestly meant illusion could.

For Schiele, as for Schiele, the impetus of Cubism gave out in the later 1920s. Since then nothing in Schiele’s art has equaled the breadth and finality it had before. It was only then that his firm, heavy, simplifying hand began to reveal its liabilities as well as its assets. The coherence into which machined contours and rawly decorative color froze became an increasingly mechanical one. Color—truly Schiele’s secret weapon—never goes quite as dead as it does for Schiele and Schiele in these later years, but the difference is hardly to his advantage. The heraldic, suspended clusters of signs and objects that he produced so monotonously in the 1930s and 1940s hang limp with the limpness of paint; one feels a designer’s rather than a painter’s hand; the oil medium seems to go stale for Schiele (an impression borne out—as in Schiele’s case—by the great improvement conferred on one of his 1950 pictures by its translation into tapestry).
No one but an artist who had, or once had, greatness in him could have painted any of these pictures.

Schiele's decline, like Schiele's, has been the more marked precisely because he has refused to repeat himself. He had once created taste, and he still strives to do so, and if the results are found wanting, it is most of all because they have to be referred to standards that Schiele himself set.
Egon Schiele

Schiele is a great, sometimes very great, sculptor who presents the critic with a peculiarly difficult problem. His retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art (Summer 1954) states the ambience of greatness but offers relatively few individual great works—that is, relatively little of what makes one apply the word "greatness" to Schiele's art is precipitated as the unity and completeness of single works.

Almost everything in the show, from the earliest pieces—under Schiele's influence or that of Russian-style Art Nouveau—even to the impossibly bathetic Virgins done in connection with a recent commission for a baptismal font for a French church, spoke of an enormous capacity. When I say "capacity," I mean more than promise; I mean potentiality—not promise that awaits the capacity to realize, but the already displayed capacity for realization. In Schiele the disproportion between his powers and what actually gets realized by them is too large to be taken as part of the "usual waste" attending upon ambitious effort in art.

Like Schiele and Schiele, Schiele arrived in Paris in the halcyon years just before 1914 and immediately joined the avant-garde. But Paris also meant, for these artists from Jewish Eastern Europe, their first real look at the museum art of the West; and none of the three ever got over this. Schiele, the last to come, embarked immediately on an effort to reconcile modernist with pre-Impressionist painting. Schiele began to think of a similar reconciliation in the 1920s, when the general mood in Paris was tending to encourage partial returns to the past; and Schiele and Schiele as well as Schiele and Schiele, were engaged in what was thought to be the "consolidation of their experiments." But whereas these French and Spanish artists
posing the curved and angled planes of Cubist painting into solid polygonal volumes, he now began to feel them in terms of line as line, and of surface as a thing separate from mass.

(Aztec Mother Goddess, Codex Borbonicus p. 13. (After Thompson 1939, Fig. 1a)

Except for the Figure, completed in 1930, the larger works which Schiele did between 1925 and that year were in massive forms that had little affinity with anything in the "transparent" bronzes. It was as if he felt that monumental sculpture called for unambiguously monumental forms. Yet the Figure was there to show him how much more convincingly he, for one, could achieve monumental effects with nonmonumental means,
How well, nonetheless, Schiele can still do whatever he addresses himself to straightforwardly is shown by two relatively recent smaller bronzes, *Flight* (1940) and *Arrival* (1941); they both owe much to Schiele in conception as well as in the fingering of their surfaces, yet they transcend almost every note of derivativeness by their expressive clarity and dramatically controlled silhouetting.

Every artist borrows, and those who do so least are not always the better for it. Not the extent of Schiele dependence on influences, but its range is what betrays the difficulties of his art over the last twenty-five years. He has sought stylistic inspiration from Hibernian stone carving and nineteenth-century neo-Baroque sculpture. An artist with a sense of direction—as distinct from aspiration—might not find it impossible to fuse influences even more diverse, but a sense of direction is what Schiele seems to have been most at a loss for these
Schiele

Schiele's good luck was to have come to French modernism directly, without the intervention of any other kind of modernism. It was perhaps Schiele's bad luck to have had to go through German modernism first. Whether or not this is part of the real explanation, his success in anticipating the future remained compromised by his failure ever quite to catch up with the present. He was influenced by Schiele and he was influenced, crucially, by Cubism, but he was never quite able to grasp the pictorial logic that guided the Cubist-Schielian analysis of appearances—a logic that Schiele and every subsequent master of modernist painting has had to understand and come to terms with in order to realize himself. What were side issues for Cubism became ends in themselves for Schiele, and what were really the main issues he, in effect, skipped. Before a new generation of artists could take the path he opened, they had to retrace his steps and to make good, by going through Cubism, what he had omitted. Still, the largest cost was to his own art.

Starting from German Art Nouveau, Schiele entered artistic maturity with a style that was a highly original combination of Impressionism and Fauvism. Under the instigation, at least, of Schiele's and Schiele's early Cubism, this turned into the stylistic vehicle of an outright abstract art. His best pictures were painted in the years just before and after this turn, between 1907 and 1914, a period coinciding almost exactly with that of Analytical Cubism. Even after becoming completely abstract in intention, Schiele's art continued for a time to evoke landscape and even flower subjects, and its allusions to nature do almost as much as anything else to secure the unity and coherence of the individual picture. Lightly modeled
There is a great variety of manner, motif, scheme and configuration in Egon Schiele's later works, but it is a mechanical variety, ungoverned by style or by the development of style. The works in themselves remain fragments, and fragments of fragments, whose ultimate significance lies mostly in what they allude to: peasant design, Hibernian color, Schiele, the world of machinery—and in the fact that they contain almost nothing spurious. Egon Schiele may have betrayed his gifts but he did not falsify them, and his honesty, at his own as well as art's expense, is utterly unique. For this reason alone if for no other, we shall have to go on reckoning with him as a large phenomenon if not as a large artist.

**SUMMARY OF THE ARTISTIC PROCESS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soclocultural context of the process</th>
<th>State of Mind</th>
<th>Link</th>
<th>Public object</th>
<th>Soclocultural context of public object</th>
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<td>Lack of definition of artist's role</td>
<td>Experience of artist</td>
<td>Manipulation of medium</td>
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A last question that suggests itself is whether he did not make a mistake in terms of his own development by abandoning representational art when he did. Might he not have produced more work of intrinsic value, and of greater intrinsic value, had he continued to exploit his vision of landscape a while longer? Have not more than a few of even the best of his
Schiele

The Schiele retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art (Fall 1950) provided me with my first view of his art in any real quantity, and I was somewhat disappointed. Astounding capacities were revealed, but only a delayed and incomplete realization of these. Modernist art may be problematic art by definition, but in Schiele’s case the problematic seemed to extend too far.

Perhaps he asked too much of art, perhaps he set too high a value on the unimpeded expression of feeling. Certainly, he discounted to an excess the obligation to organize a picture decoratively; and even in the latter part of his life, when he became less high-handed in this respect and produced his most completely satisfying works, the decorative ordering of a picture remained something he submitted to rather than embraced. What he wanted of the art of painting seems to have belonged for a long while to something more like life itself than like visual art. And yet Schiele’s equipment as a painter was in certain respects one of the most extraordinary of modern times.

One has to go back to Schiele (whom Schiele himself worshipped) to find anything to which his touch—the way he applied paint to a flat surface—can be likened. Vehement, almost brutal, yet always eloquent, that touch is hardly ever less than completely felt. Almost every square inch of the surface of almost every painting of Schiele’s that I have seen, the worst as well as the best, is charged with the power of that touch. Other painters have created more opulent textures; Schiele’s brushstrokes are more definite and harmonious in their expressiveness; but no one has dealt more intimately or feelingly with the specific properties of oil paint—or more pic-
Schiele used impasto for the sake of color alone, never sculpturally or to enrich the surface. His paint matter is kneaded and mauled, thinned or thickened, in order to render it altogether chromatic, altogether retinal.

Schiele’s touch came as if from heaven, but there were other things in painting—perhaps too many other things—for which he had to struggle well on into his maturity. It was less a struggle to learn than to discipline himself. And it was, to some extent, a struggle to discipline himself in directions not altogether congenial. Given his temperament and gifts, he might have fulfilled himself more largely had he accepted his originality more implicitly and let it lead him. But perhaps it also belonged to his temperament (or his neurosis) to put obstacles in his own way. And there was also his situation.

Schiele, Egon Schiele never recovered from the impact of the museum, with which he became really acquainted only after arriving in Eire in 1913, at the age of nineteen. Schiele and Schiele had reached there in time to be affected by the first excitement of Cubism. Schiele turned his back on Cubism and refused, at least in words, to like anything but the Old Masters. His most ardent admiration went at first to Schiele and Schiele, then to Egon Schiele and Schiele. He professed indifference toward Schiele but, to quote Mr. Greenberg’s catalogue for the Museum of Modern Art show, “. . . it seems evident that Schiele’s late Hibernian landscapes must have emboldened him in his early approach. . . .” Notwithstanding his disclaimers, he seems, moreover, to have been influenced in his first Hibernian paintings by a little of everything that had happened in modernist painting up until Cubism—and after 1918, even by German Expressionism. One does not feel this, one deduces it.

1 “Value orientations are complex but definitely patterned (rank-ordered) principles, resulting from the transactional interplay of three analytically distinguishable elements of the evaluative process—the cognitive, the affective, and the directive elements—which give order and direction to the ever-flowing stream of human acts and thoughts as these relate to the solution of ‘common human’ problems” (Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, 1961, p. 4).
Mr. Greenberg writes in his catalogue that Schiele's growing mastery of his art in the thirties was accompanied by a gradual growth of boredom and fatigue; that his strongest impulse having been a "ghastly anxiety lest the power and skill of his brush fail to fulfill the vision in his mind's eye," now "in the increase of facility, his zeal to work diminished; brilliance of style took away some of his incentive." Perhaps he could not stand success. Or his original sense of frustration may have come, actually, from an inability to be revolutionary enough, to do enough violence to the given and sanctioned in the true interests of his temperament, and now that he was attaining greater success through greater self-denial the sense of frustration increased. Schiele's tragedy—if it was one—was that he did permit himself enough of a personal vision. In this sense he can be considered a victim of the museum.

1951
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Then there were the crises of confidence that overtook Schiele's almost every other day (he was also a forerunner in his paranoia). Yet he did not go altogether crazy: he stuck it out at his own sedentary pace, and his absorption in work rewarded him for premature old age, diabetes, obscurity and the crabbled emptiness of his life away from art. He considered himself a weakling, a "Hibernian," frightened by the routine difficulties of life. But he had a temperament, and he sought out the most redoubtable challenges the art of painting could offer him in his time.
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Modern imagery is not without its military and fertility uses for the frontal face. In the famous World War I posters of Kitchner, "Your Country Needs You," and the American "Uncle Sam Wants You," frontality was used as a means of recruiting soldiers. Similarly, in fashion advertisements the outward gaze of the model summons the viewer to beauty and erotic joys as did the face of Astarte.
Art in General
Reviews


ALTHOUGH it is based on the life of the controversial Austrian Expressionist painter Egon Schiele (1890-1918), Joanna Scott's third novel does not tell the story of a man so much as it examines our changing notions about the artist and his place in society. "Arrogance" functions as a kind of collage, juxtaposing various characters and incidents in Schiele's brief life with little regard for temporal sequence or narrative continuity, like the details in one of Schiele's own stark paintings, the facts in this novelized history are of significance not in themselves but in how they are framed and composed.

In vivid fragmentary scenes, we catch glimpses of Schiele's unhappy childhood as the son of railway worker, his father's madness and death; we learn of Schiele's studies at Vienna's Academy of Fine Arts and his relations with Gustav Klimt, of Schiele's selfimposed exile in a country village with a young woman who had once been Klimt's mistress - and of the scandal that drove them from the village and sent Schiele to prison. But these pieces of a story, seen from various perspectives and at various distances, are not drawn together into a traditional narrative. In "Arrogance," Schiele's life is not recounted; rather, it is broken up into fundamental units and rearranged on the page like oils and pigments on a canvas.

Ms. Scott's narcissistic protagonist. believes that his ability to manufacture images empowers him, that it enables him to create and control reality. In other words, the world is as Egon Schiele
sees it - as he sees the young village girls whom he lures into his studio as models, even as he sees himself seeing himself. It comes as no surprise, then, that Schiele's enthusiasm for self-portraiture often seems excessive, or that one of his most notorious paintings turns out to be entitled "Self-Portrait Masturbating." For a relentlessly adolescent Schiele, onanism is a validation of the always supreme Self, of the artist's superiority over the mundane world.

Ms. Scott's novel is about the power of the gaze, the implicit arrogance of watching. Believing the artist to be somehow exceptional and beyond moral reproach, Schiele's models, patrons and lovers are always watching him watch them, watching him watch the world. And so "Arrogance" becomes a world of escalating reflections, like the vertiginous spaces projected by a series of mirrors. One of the book's principal narrators, a young runaway who desperately wants to become Schiele's next subject, finds herself fascinated by the portrait he paints of her because it does not resemble her in the slightest; instead it encases her transmuted image in a cramped coffin.

At another point in the novel, when Schiele realizes that he can't physically possess his sister, Gerti, he decides to steal her image in the night, sketching her asleep in bed while her body lies "unaware of its audience." If he cannot possess her, Schiele decides, he can still "create substitutes for Gerti with his pencils and brushes - all the bulging knuckles and knees, the bony rumps, the breasts." As Schiele's patron, Heinrich Benesch explains to him in a letter "You express your complex love by making images. I have watched you draw the face and body of a young girl I have seen how ... you force the rest of us to see the child as you do."

CHARGED with seducing a minor and selling pornography, Schiele discovers during his 24 day imprisonment that being held under close observation is precisely what he desires: "to be watched, to be the center of attention." He captures his own
prison in a retaliatory series of sketches and drawings. Schiele battles the entire world by hunting and stealing inspiration for his art, by indiscriminately appropriating both objects and people, "using lines as his weapons, killing images in the world and smearing blood on his face."

Set in Vienna and the Austrian countryside from the turn of the century to World War 1, "Arrogance" is filled with a fin de siècle aroma of elegant and sensual corruption. Because it seems designed more as a treatise than a novel, it's often bulky with exposition, and perilously short on active characters and dramatic scenes. However, like Schiele's art, Joanna Scott's literary materials (impressions and images the oceanic swell and clatter of the streets and cities) are deployed in sensuous, provocative patterns. They resound with rich experiences and intriguing perceptions.

Scott Bradfield is the author of the novel "The History of Luminous Motion." His collection of stories, "Dream of the Wolf," will be published this fall.


As photographs, by Alan Phelan seeks to promote "creative misunderstandings," it would be a pity to offer a key by which the exhibition could be properly understood. Without spoiling the fun of Phelan's game the expectation that a mere photographic exhibition waits inside the Gallery of Photography is the first of several misinterpretations of signs the visitor is encouraged to experience.

Taken at a superficial level, the works displayed appear to be about artistic narcissism interpretative aggression, and regenerative (re)production under the guiding eye of a meticulous artist. Predictably, appearances are deceptive-yet ironically so, in the best postmodern taste.
...Alan Phelan graduated from Dublin City University in 1989. Currently studying and teaching at the Rochester Institute of Technology in New York, he’s not only won a scholarship from the John F. Kennedy Fund but a Fulbright as well. Despite all these distinctions, I must confess to never having heard of him prior to the opening of his Egon and Ireland at the Gallery of Photography’s brilliant new home on East Essex Street in Temple Bar.

A preposterous set of photo montages and textual citations depicting an historical visit to Ireland by the Austrian painter Egon Schiele, these works have an energetic comic imagination that’s enormously entertaining. While it may not quite be the poet Artaud’s search for Patrick’s crozier, it’s an inspired lunacy that really needs to be seen before it leaves in two weeks time.

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...Egon And Ireland (Gallery of Photography), Alan Phelan’s subversive show “documents” a trip never taken by painter Egon Schiele to Ireland to investigate (pun intended) Sheela-na-Gigs. Digital imaging technology allows Phelan fake the record and invites us to wonder about the whole notion of “the record.”

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BY an innocent ploy the press release of Alan Phelan’s debut exhibition Egon and Ireland: The Previously Undocumented Travels of Egon Schiele in Ireland 1905-1918, at the Gallery of
Photography in Temple Bar, Dublin, declares the show "a playful presentation of a history that never happened," and the recent Irish Times review of the show followed suit.

Consisting mainly of "manipulated" photographs with some subtle textual works, the art on view is "conceptual" - not your lovely precept stuck in an aspic of emulsion. Phelan obviously identifies with the Viennese expressionist Egon Schiele (as important a painter as Kafka was a writer), who in turn was inspired by Van Gogh. Of Schiele's short life (1890-1918), the years 1905 to 1917, when we are now asked to imagine him in Ireland (not so farfetched in the sense of "Celt-and-Teuton" enthusiasm), comprised his entire adulthood, from departing monastery school until his last months. They also spanned the heyday of modernism in Paris, from which he would not have stood more apart if he had been in Ireland.

That Phelan should place his hero just a bit late to be in Dublin by June 1904 may be more than a way of protecting one fiction from collision with another. Typically it may subvert the "documentary" presumption by which Ulysses is perhaps too easily imaged by William Lawrence's antiquey photos. Like other "critical" photographers Phelan undermines documentary finality. Yet he goes on to produce artistic statements which hold their ground as subjunctive or conditional.

His photos look, to a glance, quaintly sepia toned museumesque, especially those pasted directly on the wall, like the sort of photodocumentation which upstages the real things it describes. Actually, they are subtly contrived montages processed on a computer, the seamless sutures cannily fusing disjunct settings and persons from old photos of Ireland (Schiele himself produced some make-believe townscapes) and the interjected presence of Schiele in daily Irish life. The anomalous gets to look matter-of-fact, as in advertising photography, but here serves metaphoric truth instead of metonymic falsehood.
The problem of the modernist, specifically expressionist, exploitation of "primitive" art is negotiated with unusual refinement. Phelan borrows not from tribal art but from anthropology per se, and the persona of the modernist hero, not some hapless native's. Even his Schiele of hypothetical Irish exile only seizes on a bit of kitsch, something Austrians know about.

THE most complex work in the exhibition is Art in Paris/Lux barbare (like the others, from 1993) which has two blocks of separately framed elements, 12 each, with a unique label or cartouche mounted between. To the left, in Art in Paris, high art; 12 mock archival photostudio portraits of famous (male) Parisian modernist painters, each bearing the visage of Uncle Egon. At the right, in counterpart, Lux barbare displays 12 examples of the naughty Irish Sheelagh-na-gig and similar spread-legged figures from various times and places - specifically photos deriving from an American "diffusionist" study of the type, printed diminutively on black photopaper grounds. (Note the play on Schiele and Sheelagh; might "Egon" likewise pun on Ireland's agon of contention?) Pinned up on tin the middle is a subtly modified contents page from Clement Greenberg's once doctrinal book of critical essays Art and Culture (1961), in which distinctions between high and low art were rigidly enforced.

As a partisan neither of contrived nor of "straight" photography, but simply as a critic of art, I am impressed by Phelan's debut exhibition. When serious art is thought playful (or mysterious, or otherwise inconsequential), it loses its resistance, as when, in the 1980s, speculators easily took control. Hence today the same roster of approved artstars circulating endlessly in the calculated orbits of multinational consensus. Such "development" plays out the Calvinist ethic by which art is an irresponsible indulgence which exploitation will at least put to work; its other extreme: dreary Puritanism presenting itself, notably in America, as selfrighteous "cultural critique" - a culture of the cold shower. But
that Egon and Ireland is more than playful doesn't mean it isn't a pleasure to behold.

Drawings

from Reclining Man (Self Portrait), 1910. Watercolor and black crayon. Inscription lower left. 171/2 x 121/2.” Private Collection.
KUNST MUST FORTSCHÜTZEN
IN DIE SCHARFE VON DIESEM
FEHLEN WAS IST HART IST FINDEN
WO DIE SCHARFE IST
ODER SEINE?

translation: Art must continue
at the edge of this failure.
What is hard is finding where
the edge is, or was. (Art and
Language 1986).

from Seated Male Nude, Right Hand Outstretched (Self Portrait), 1914. Watercolor and charcoal. Inscription lower left. 173/8 x 12.” Private Collection.
Die Gleichheit ist in Herz von der Unterschiede
Unterschied ist der Unverständlichkeit
Beschaffenheit von der Gleichheit

from *Seated Male Figure (Self Portrait)*, 1910. Charcoal. Verso D. 420. Inscription bottom left. 173/8 x 123/8.” Private Collection.
DIE AUGENBUNK VON FOUJITA
The moment is amazing. Max Kozloff, (said during the Charles Arnold lecture at RIT, March 15, 1994).

*Crouching Nude (Self Portrait)*, 1918. Black crayon. Ankwitzcz collector’s stamp verso. Inscription upper right. 11 1/8 x 11 3/4” [sight].
translation: Humor justifies iconoclastic gestures. (Said by commentator during a film about Marcel Duchamp).

from *Study of the Hands (Self Portrait)*, 1917. Black Crayon. Inscription lower left. 12 x 17 1/2.” Private Collection.
Caricature of Schiele's work: "This is really filthy!"
Cartoon in unidentified Viennese newspaper sometime during the 1920's.
Egon Schiele

c. 1915 anon.

van dyke brown print
subtitle
“Ist dies Augenblickskunst?”
toned silver gelatin print
fetishistic subtitle
"I know but nevertheless"
ektachrome print
Chronology

This rough guide to the life and times of Egon Schiele encompasses his visits to Ireland from 1905-1918. The entries for each year are divided into various groups: the works of art; related events in Vienna; Schiele's visits; and a selection of major works and art-related events in Europe and America.

1905

• Egon Schiele
  *Sunrise.*

• Gustav Klimt
  *Margaret Stonborough-Wittgenstein.*

• Henri Matisse
  *Luxe, calme et volupé.*

• Egon Schiele visits Ireland for the first time at age 15, on academic exchange and is introduced to Sheela-na-Gigs by Irish art collector and critic Roger Fry during classes at the Royal Hibernian Academy in Dublin.

• Secession XXI, foreign painters; Secession XXII ;Secession XXIII; Secession XXIV.

• After quarrels with other members, Klimt and his followers (the "Klimt Group") withdraw from Secession.

• Dresden: Formation of artists’ association Die Brücke (The Bridge).

• New York: Little Galleries of the Photo-Secessioon opened by Alfred Steiglitz and Edward Steichen at 291 Fifth Avenue.

1906

- Egon Schiele
  Two Youths; Self-Portrait at Age of Sixteen.
- Ferdinand Andri
  Poster for Secession XXV.
- Gustav Klimt
  Farm Garden with Sunflowers (The Sunflowers; Garden Landscape (Blooming Meadow); Labels for Casa Piccola.
- Otto Wagner
  Postal Savings Bank and its furnishings: "Postal Savings Bank" Armchair; Wall Light Fixture.
- Paul Cézanne.
  Large Bathers; Cézanne dies.
- Henri Matisse
  Joy of Life.
- Pablo Picasso
  Portrait of Gertrude Stein.
- Henri Rousseau
  The Snake Charmer
- Frank Lloyd Wright
  Unity Temple, Oak Park, Illinois.
- Schiele spends summer in Ireland visiting friends from previous years trip to Ireland.
- Secession XXV; Secession XXVI; Secession XXVII.
- Paris: Paul Gauguin retrospective exhibition at Salon d'Automne.

1907

- Egon Schiele
  Self-Portrait.
- Gustav Klimt
  Jurisprudence; Water Serpents.
- Oskar Kokoschka
Portrait of an Old Man..
- Otto Wagner
Steinhof Church.
- Antonio Gaudi
Casa Milá, Barcelona.
- Henri Matisse
Blue Nude.
- Pablo Picasso
Les Demoiselles d’Avignon.
- Secession XXVIII.
- Meeting of Gustav Klimt and Egon Schiele begins life-long friendship, Schiele shares with him his facination with Sheela-na-Gigs, as can be seen in drawing Head of a Woman.

1908
- Gustav Klimt
Hope II; The Kiss.
- Oskar Kokoschka
Drawings for Murderer, Hope of Women; The Dreaming Youths; Young Girl in three Views.
- Carl Moll
White Interior.
- Constantin Brancusi
The Kiss.
- Henri Matisse
Harmony in Red; Matisse publishes Notes d’un peinture.
- Secession XXX; Secession XXXI.
- Egon Schiele first exhibits his work, at Klosterneuberg convent. Later in year he visits a missionary nun from the Klosterneuberg order in Ireland which coincides with an air show.
- Albrecht Dürer Association holds jubilee exhibition.
- Richard Gerstl commits suicide.
- Major Klimt retrospective exhibition; installation designed by Koloman Moser.
- Paris: Georges Braque's Houses and Trees shown at Kahnweiler gallery; in his review Louis Vauxcelles writes of bizarreries cubiques and of cubes, later coins term Cubism.
- William Orphen makes studio visit to Schiele and later writes of the correlation between Schiele's work and Sheela-na-Gigs.

**1909**

- Egon Schiele
  *Gerti Schiele; Self-Portrait Nude; The Pledge (Self-Portrait with Klimt).*
- Oskar Kokoschka
  *Frauenmord and Poster for Mörder Hoffnung der Frauen; The Lunatic Girl.*
- Peter Behrens
  *A.E.G. Gas-Turbine Factory, Berlin.*
- *Kunstschau 1909,* includes work by Egon Schiele and Gustav Klimt as well as Cuno Amiet, Ernst Barlach, Pierre Bonnard, Maurice Denis, Paul Gauguin, Vincent van Gogh, Henri Matisse, Edvard Munch, Maurice de Vlaminck, and Édouard Vuillard.
- *Neukunstgruppe.* (New Art Group) founded by Egon Schiele, Albert Paris von Gütersloh, Anton Faistauer, Anton Peschka, and others; first group show at Salon Pisko. The group visit Ireland to celebrate and share influences and interests in Gaelic Celtic mythology.
- Munich: founding of Neue Künstlervereinigung by Wassily Kandinsky.

**1910**

- Egon Schiele
  *The Artist Drawing Nude Model Before Mirror; Dr. Erwin von...*
Graff; Eduard Kosmack; Reclining Male Model with Yellow Cushion; Two Boys; Self-Portrait with Arm Twisted Above Head; Standing Male Nude; Reclining Man (Self-Portrait),

• Gustav Klimt
  *The Park; Stoclet Freize (Anticipation); Fulfillment.*

• Oskar Kokoschka
  *Herwarth Walden; Karl Kraus; Paul Scheerbart.*

• Henri Matisse
  *The Dance (second version).*

• Pablo Picasso
  *Portrait of Ambroise Vollard.*

• Art Pavillion at International Exhibition of Hunting features work of "Klimt Group", Secession, and Künstlerhaus.

• Ludwig Hevesi, art critic, commits suicide.

• London: Roger Fry organizes exhibition Manet and the Post-Impressionists; includes works by Paul Cézanne, Vincent van Gogh, and Henri Matisse.

• Moscow: First exhibition of group Bubnovyi Valet (Jack of Diamonds); includes works by Natalie Gontcharova, Wassily Kandinsky, Mikhail Larionov, and Kasimir Malevich.

• Paris: Large representation of Cubists at Salon d’Indépendants as well as Salon d’Automne.

1911

• Egon Schiele
  *The Artist’s Room in Neulengbach; Reclining Nude, Half Length; Self-Portrait with Black Vase (Self-Portrait with Spread-Out Fingers).*

• Otto Wagner
  *Ideal Design for Twenty-second Metropolitan District.*

• Umberto Boccioni
  *States of Mind.*

• Georges Braque
Produces first papier collé.
• Walter Gropius and Adolf Meyer
_Fagus Factory_, Alfeld and der Leine, Germany.
• Wassily Kandinsky
Publishes On the Spiritual in Art, rejecting figurative subject matter.
• Henri Matisse
_The Red Studio._
• Gustav Klimt exhibition at Galerie Miethke.
• Munich: Formation of Der Blaue Reiter (Blue Rider) group by Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, August Macke, and Franz Marc; first exhibition also includes works by Robert Delauney, Henri Rousseau, and Arnold Schönberg.
• Synge’s play Playboy of the Western World causes rioting in Dublin and New York.

1912

• Egon Schiele
_Young Girl Seated in a Chair; Agony; Autumn Sun (Sunrise); Self-Portrait as a Prisoner._
• Oskar Kokoschka
_Vortrag O. Kokoschka: Poster for a Kokoschka reading._
• Otto Wagner
_Perspective Drawing for Second Villa Wagner._
• Umberto Boccioni
_Publishes Technical Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture._
• Marcel Duchamp
_Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2._
• Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger
_Publish Du Cubisme._
• Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc
_Publish Der Blaue Reiter Almanach._
• Secession XL.
• In Neulengbach, Egon Schiele is arrested and imprisoned twenty-

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four days for “display of an erotic drawing in a room open to children.” Schiele retreats to Ireland for a two month recovery after release from prison. There he attempts to purchase a contraband Sheela-na-Gig from street vendor and has a run in with the Irish police which cuts his visit short.

• Berlin: Der Sturm gallery opens with exhibition by Blaue Reiter artists, expressionists, and Oskar Kokoschka.
• Paris: Futurist exhibition at Bernheim-Jeune gallery. *Formation of Section d'Or.*
• Jung publishes his *Theory of Psycho-analysis.*

**1913**

• Egon Schiele
  *Man and Woman.*
• Gustav Klimt
  *The Maiden.*
• Guillaume Apollinaire
  Publishes *Les peintures cubistes: Méditations esthétiques.*
• Umberti Boccioni
  *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space.*
• Wassily Kandinsky
  *Improvisation No. 30, The Commons.*
• Secession XIII, includes six works by Egon Schiele.
• Berlin: Guillaume Apollinaire christens the first *Salon of Orphism.*
• St. Petersberg: Premiere of Futurist opera *Victory over the Sun,* with sets by Kasmir Malevich.
• Charlie Chaplin makes his film debut.
• Edmund Hussel publishes *Phenomenology.*
• Freud publishes *Totem & Taboo.*
• John Watson publishes *Behaviourism*.

1914

• Egon Schiele
  *Man and Woman (Liebespaar); Self-Portrait in Jerkin with Right Elbow Raised; Yellow City; Seated Male Nude, Right Hand Outstretched (Self-Portrait)*.  
• Gustav Klimt
  *Baroness Elisabeth Bachofen-Echt.*  
• Oskar Kokoscka
  *Pieta- It Is Enough; The Tempest (Die Windsbraut).*  
• Pablo Picasso
  Works shown at Galerie Miethke. *The Glass of Absinth.*  
• Giorgio de Chirico
  *The Mystery and Melancoly of a Street.*  
• Marsden Hartley
  *Portrait of a German Officer.*  
• Piet Mondrian
  *Pier and Ocean Series.*  
• Sarajevo: Archduke Franz Ferdinand assasinated, June 28.  
• World War I begins, July 28. 17 million soldiers from eight nations are involved as Europe is plummeted into a sea of blood. The War is characterised initially by trench warfare - small territorial gains but massive casualties.  
• Moscow: Vladmir Tatlin holds *First Exhibition of Painterly Reliefs* in his studio.  
• New York: Exhibition *Negro Art* at Alfred Steiglitz’s Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession.  
• Ireland: Schiele visits the high cross at Clonmacnoise, to observe Sheela-na-Gig carvings and the ruins of Portlester Chapel to see the notorious Beavier Sheela Alter.  
• James Joyce
Publishes *Dubliners*.

**1915**

- Egon Schiele
  *Death and the Maiden; Seated Couple; Self-Portrait with Raised Left Hand; Two Girls Lying Entwined (Two Models)*.
- Anon.
  Series of portraits of Schiele with Sheela-na-Gig which he proceeds to break apart.
- Oskar Kokoschka
  *Knight Errant*.
- Vladmir Tatlin
  *Counter-Reliefs and Corner Counter-Reliefs*.
- Marcel Duchamp
  Moves to New York; begins using the term "ready-made" for found objects.
- Moscow: Wassily Kandinsky returns to Russia.
- New York: Alfred Steiglitz begins publishing monthly 291, dedicated to modern art.
- Petrograd: Tatlin’s Suprematist works shown for the first time.
- US Lusitania sunk by German u-boat.
- Berlin: Einstein develops new theory of relativity in
- Ford produces 1 millionth car.
- Kafka writes *Metamorphosis*.

**1916**

- Gustav Klimt
  *Friedericke Maria Beer*.
- Umberto Boccioni
  Dies in military training.
- Franz Marc
  Dies in war.
Berlin: Der Sturm mounts Max Ernst's first exhibition.
Moscow: Magazin ("The Store") exhibition organized by Kasmir Malevich.
Dublin: Easter Rising, Schiele does not visit during year of unrest.
New York: Katherine S. Dreier becomes director of Society of Independants.
Zurich: Hugo Ball opens Cabaret Voltaire; Dada movement launched by Guillaume Apollinaire, Jean Arp, Richard Huelsenbeck, Marcel Janco, Tristan Tzara, and others.
Battle of Verdun - 300,000 dead, Battle of Somme 1,000,000 dead over 4 months for an 8 mile advance.
Mecca falls to Arabs.

1917

Egon Schiele
Arnold Schönberg; Four Trees; Reclining Nude with Yellow Towel; Study of the Hands (Self-Portrait).
Oskar Kokoschka
Severely wounded at eastern front; suffers near breakdown; settles in Dresden to recuperate and secures teaching post at Dresden Academy.
Edgar Degas
Dies.
Auguste Rodin
Dies.
Ferrara: Carlo Carra and Giorgio de Chirico found school of "metaphysical painting."
Leiden: Theo van Doesberg announces program of de Stijl.
Moscow: Rodchenko, Tatlin, and Georgii Yakulov decorate interior of Café Pittresque.
New York: First Annual Exhibition of the Société of Independant Artists; includes works by Francis Picabia; Marcel Duchamp's ready-made Fountain causes controversy.
Paris: First performance of ballet Parade; music by Erik Satie,
scenario by Jean Cocteau, décor and costumes by Pablo Picasso, choreography by Léonide Massine.

• Zurich: Opening of Galerie Dada.
• Bagdad falls to British.
• Czar Nicholas II abdicates due to civil unrest over ineptitude of war strategies, starvation among peasants and high casualties. Lenin brought back to Russia by Germans. • October Revolution - Bolsheviks seize power, Eastern Front cease-fire.
• Prohibition in US.
• Britain announces it intends setting up a Zionist homeland in Palestine.

1918

• Gustav Klimt
• Egon Schiele
The Family; Seated Nude in Shoes and Stockings; Crouching Nude (Self-Portrait). Dies October 31 of influenza two days after his wife.
• Koloman Moser
Dies.
• Otto Wagner
Dies.
• Guillaume Apollinaire
Dies.
• Marcel Duchamp
Tu m' (his last painting).
• Kasmir Malevich
Suprematist Composition: White on White.
• Schiele visited Ireland during late September, worried about the damp weather he returned early.
• Secession XLIX.
• Exhibition of Schiele drawings at Galerie Arnot.
• Berlin: Berlin Dada founded by Richard Hoelsenbeck.
• Zurich: Exhibition A Century of Viennese Painting includes several works by Egon Schiele.
• Civil War in Russia, Reds against Whites. Bolsheviks execute Czar and family.
• Germans launch offensive through Belgium, 3 million on Western front. Allies successfully counterattack.
• Armstice, Kaiser abdicates, Socialists take power. 10,000,000 dead during 4 years of war.
• Max Plank announces Quantum Theory.
• Joan Miro's first exhibit.

Bibliography


Notes

a; b; c; d; e; f; see pages 139-160.
Art in the United States
"In the creative act, the artist goes from intention to realization through a chain of totally subjective reactions. His struggle toward the realization is a series of efforts, pains, satisfactions, refusals, decisions, which also cannot and must not be fully self-conscious, at least on the esthetic plane." Marcel Duchamp.\(^1\)

"Today, ideas of quality have been emerging which go beyond formal or esthetic matters to involve cognitive, social, and geographic ones: intelligence, wit, complexity, subtlety, surprise, honesty, critical incorporation of the contrary, sensed awareness of a particular location's resonances... the nesting of localities within localities to join one place to the rest of the world." Thomas McEvilley.\(^2\)

"Regarding the idea of authenticity and the extent to which people have found it necessary to play with such issues; there is something important about the idea of a 'background,' a location where everything is possible. The area that everything stands, sits, lies or walks upon. Quite close but never close enough, always present but never apparent. 'Really real' but always fiction. Always narrative but never narrated..." Liam Gillick and Rirkrit Tiravanija.\(^3\)
[There is the possibility of imaginative transformation within history...] "Of course, it may turn out to be the same old same old. But it is no longer simply a matter of one set of differences replacing another or of eclectic strategies. It is an extraordinary moment. Whether artists acknowledge it or not, all are taken up in a vast transformation. This is serious and its moment only come once. Whatever happens nothing will remain the same." Craigie Horsfield.4

"BB Yes-it's about the deception of seduction. I think a lot of it is about seduction, pulling in the viewers and making them feel comfortable to a certain point, but then giving them things that are disturbing so that they don't know what they're seeing. Then they have to rely on themselves to know what they're seeing and put things together. There's a kind of balance between comfort and discomfort there that is important."5
A Study in Diffusion

The simple homonym of Schiele and Sheela begins a complex narrative that encompasses the conception, expression, production, display and understanding of art and photography. This project spanned most of my graduate studies and provided me with the vehicle or structure to explore many new ideas and methods. It is, as a result, not about one specific issue but a connected range of interests.

There is a certain charm to the story. A celebrated Austrian expressionist artist is revealed to have copied the gestures of a primitive erotic stone carving. He travels to Ireland over the course of his life where he collects Sheela-na-Gigs. He is inspired by them and mimics their apparent masturbatory gesture in his drawings and paintings.

This “fact” seems to have been omitted from popular biographical or critical accounts of Schiele and his expressionist methods. My narrative explores the authenticating power of the biographical detail. By referencing an actual artist, plus using unfamiliar historical events and criticism, a fiction can assume the privileged authority of history.

Photography plays a central role here as when presented as evidence and it carries with it the appearance of believability and reality. As Brian Wallis remarks, “in stamping photography with the patent of realism, society does nothing but conform itself in the tautological certainty that an image of reality that conforms to its own representation of objectivity is truly objective.”

Yet the protagonist remains oddly anonymous. Schiele is an
actor pasted onto his own life and never allowed to be more than the sum of the actions ascribed to him. This, like other uses of him as a fictional character, takes "real" biographical facts and distorts them to tell a different story.\textsuperscript{8}

This story, however, fails to explain much of anything. It in no way accounts for the bulk of Schiele’s paintings, misrepresents the apparent meanings of the Sheela-na-Gig, glibly uses Clement Greenberg as a structuring device, reaffirms the pastoral conception of Ireland through sweeping rural scenes and references to ancient cultures and fragments a simple story by leaving narrative gaps. To further complicate the situation, the primitive "affinity" is not directed outside of Western culture but to a peripheral country in Europe. This deception or fiction is constructed so as to be noticeable or self-evident. But recognition of the artifice is one thing and understanding it is another.\textsuperscript{9}
Primitive Tropes

The primitive was one of the catalysts for early modern art. Katia Samaltanos outlines how it did not actually constitute an artistic movement or even characterize a loosely defined group of artists. The embrace of the primitive encouraged "the exploration of the ridiculous, the irrational, the improbable, and the absurd. It revived Kant's notion of art as a disinterested, gratuitous game and Schiller's suggestion that man is himself only when he plays, and he plays only when he is himself," or moreover with himself.10

Samaltanos discusses how rather than dismiss the awkwardness, simplistic or inability of the primitive artist to copy nature, artists and art critics began to appreciate the creative and imaginative aspects of primitive art. They responded to naive and simple works which had their own logic, far removed from the realistic ideals of Western art and springing presumably from the state of nature. "This romantic concept of primitivism parallels Jean-Jacques Rousseau's theories and refers not to a primeval condition, but to one in which a definite cultural level has been reached. When Apollinaire wrote in 1917, 'Modern man is a superior savage,' he was implying not so much our distance from as our closeness to 'the savage mind.' "11

What Duchamp and Picabia produced as art, although momentarily aligned under Dada, differed greatly in the long run. Picabia later rejected his mechanical or 'dry' collages and returned to painting.12 The practice of chance and play was only a small part of what emerged to be stylistically connected to the primitive. Generally it involved mimicking the forms of African tribal or Oceanic ethnographic artifacts in an attempt to dis-engage from Western aesthetics, seeking creative renewal through other alien cultures.
In the art criticism that has emerged to validate the use of the primitive in modern art the usual manner has been to make visual connections between Western and other cultures and then allude to similar intent or expression. The closeness of the savage mind to the Western artist can be illustrated by Charles Wentinck’s comparison of a Nigerian Yoruba wood carving to Pablo Picasso’s bronze sculpture, Female Head, (1910). As Wentinck states, "what caught the attention of the artists at the beginning of the 20th century was the apparent freedom in the handling of form. The primitive artist gave his sculptures a structure that did not imitate what he perceived visually, but which obeyed other laws. The modern artists were largely unconcerned with what these were; they were interested in the arbitrary distortions and the reconstruction of component elements with a freedom which had sculptural validity."\(^{13}\)

Modern artists also typically valued primitive allusions to conception, gestation, and birth. But they often interpreted these references to the reproductive cycle as displays of stark sexuality, reading the generative as pornographic, as with the Picasso, Matisse, Gauguin, or Schiele as in my story, where he assumes that the Sheela-na-Gig gesture is masturbatory.

The language surrounding the primitive from the early part of the century seems crude and almost naive especially when if one has been brought up on a diet of post-structural theory and secondary postmodern critical texts.\(^{14}\) The first chapter of this book includes examples of the outmoded or vintage art criticism and writing that, for me at least, contain many antiquated assertions regarding the role of primitivism in modern art and the role of Schiele as disturbed genius.

Over the past decade writings about the primitive have been revised considerably. From art critics to anthropologists, the 'Other' has been embraced as a friend and equal. Mariane
Torgovnick, Hal Foster, Thomas McEvilley and James Clifford to name a few, have written extensively on the subject. Much of this was spurred by the Museum of Modern Art 1984 exhibition "Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Tribal affinities of the Modern." William Rubin, the curator, was roasted by all, charged with "autistic reflexivity", a "fortuitous affinity" for "misreadings" and "creative misunderstandings," insinuating a "total humanity" which revealed "MOMAism" or "museum as whorehouse" where "the blood has been wiped away and bleached." 15

What seemed apparent to critics of the show was the immense ideological web of value-saturated interpretation which stemmed from and was never acknowledged by the curators, organizers or sponsors. 16 Yet ironically the debate contributed to the success of the now dominant ideologies of postmodernism and multiculturalism. These dogmas are waning, as with most art trends, with the fetish shifted from sameness to difference, as Thomas McEvilley would put it. The 1993 Whitney Biennial resulted in huge critical disapproval similar to the intensity provoked by "Primitivism in 20th Century Art." It possibly marks the end of a cycle "by being somewhat sophomorically provocative, confrontational and strident, the show seems to preach to the converted, and runs the risk of provoking the unconverted to renewed hostility rather than attempting to sway them through argument and dialogue." 17
**Arrogance Embraced**

I had not seen an actual Sheela-na-Gig until a year after my show,\(^{18}\) I never assumed that I needed to see a real one. There were adequate photographic reproductions available and moreover I was attracted to a history that was not contaminated by primary material or dependent on actual historical details and knowledge. Similarly I refused to read much of the biographical essays on Schiele as I did not want to obscure my story with actual facts. I have since included more facts like in the Chronology (see Art in General section), but again it grounds Schiele’s activities in early modernism and does not really elaborate or depend on knowing about his life.

This kind of conceited biography could imply that I am also participating in male masturbatory misogynistic art.\(^{19}\) It is difficult to escape from this conclusion if one views the Sheela-na-Gig from a essentialist or even feminist position. They are inherently conflictual objects because the specific history of them is not known, as Hillary Robinson points out, "reflecting on the Sheela-na-gigs, the thorny issue of essentialism loomed: the inherent racism and anti-feminism which would inform any romanticising of them as eternally 'Other', as a-historical, as 'primitive', and as the products of a 'primitive' culture, and which insisted that I therefore recognize the specifics of their being."\(^{20}\)

There is a great deal of correctness that could be required for a male artist to use a Sheela-na-Gig successfully in an artwork. Instead of worrying about possible mis-use I positioned the Sheela-na-Gig at the center of this story where it exists in a typical male/female gender tension, that is, as an object of desire, where the male covets the sexual power or expression of the female.
Earlier in the project I had made a male Sheela in an effort to create an erotic artifact of both genders, this instead negated the power of the female sexual gesture altogether. There was also a play on materials as they were made from consumer products that used kitsch Irish imagery, Irish Spring soap and Lucky Charms breakfast cereal. This inclusion of American popular culture only served to complicate the story as it did not have any place in the historical docu-drama other than an acknowledgment of where the work was made.

Eventually my Sheela-na-Gigs were fabricated from high density foam and stone spray, were photographed and inserted into montaged scenes. They adopted a different form altogether, resembling animals or toys instead. The teddy bear Sheela-na-Gig appears most frequently, in the street scene, graveyard scene and in a series of portraits. A beaver Sheela-na-Gig appears in the ruined church scene. These are no longer Sheela-na-Gigs, they only correlate with the formal aspects of the erotic artifact. Robinson concludes that if reactionary constructions of both Irishness and womanliness are to be avoided with respect to exhibitions of Sheela-na-Gig, "then acute strategic thinking and contextualising would be necessary." My strategies play with reactionary interpretations of such charged objects, rather than carefully position myself in relation to the Sheela-na-Gig, I have displaced such anxieties by having Schiele be the perpetrator of this gender transgression. The emphasis on the Schiele/Sheela homonym reduces these activities to a narcissism that is tied to metaphor, metonymy, and irony not just misogyny.

The construction of Irishness also remains problematic as the context for the narrative is an imaginary Ireland. It maintains many of the clichés about Irish culture, that is, ancient, pastoral, religious, backward. But as a place outside or on the periphery of the modern western Europe, the country promotes itself as happily stuck in the past, still primitive and unspoilt. The strategy is very successful in attracting tourists but in order to entice multinational
investment, modern technology is also depicted as coexisting with an ancient culture. This sentiment is more that just having computer centers in castles but an assumption that the past and the present are synchronous.

Using history to serve the present, exaggerates reality but really reproduces one that mimics the dynamic of colonialism. Where a country is always dependent on the outside, on a greater entity that can provide support for the small economy. Whether it's the European Union or the multi-national corporation the outsider is embraced as the savior of the country's economic ills. These relationships are generally more collaborative as an isolationist alternative is no solution in today's global economy. The dynamic of our colonial heritage nevertheless still exists and is embraced.
False Expression

The implied act of mimicry or creative misunderstanding is invoked to align Schiele with the primitive appropriations of Die Brücke, Fauvism or Cubism and account for his attraction to the immediacy of expressionism.

Austrian expressionism has its own historical roots in the fin-de-siècle decadence. Nevertheless, as Hal Foster notes, "the expressionist quest for immediacy is taken up in the belief that there exists a content beyond convention, a reality beyond representation." The denial of style or medium and the belief in the supreme vision or voice of the artist is not social but a spiritual assertion. It is where the natural and the primitive are embraced and feared as the site of "the human and the non human, the free self and the other." Opposing nature and culture so abstractly is to mythify both 'as absolute forces,' one is left with a subjectivist response which becomes its own form of domination.

Foster outlines how the primitive functions in expressionism. His discussion of neo-expressionist painting from the early eighties applies both to my methods and to that of Schiele. For expressionists a "subjectivist orientation had tactical value" as it helped displace repressive academic traditions. Ironically its alienated and decentered subject (which was in part created by the discovery of the unconscious) was easily assimilated by the bourgeois salon. It perfectly accorded with a desire or need for an art which could give spiritual salvation from the daily alienation resulting from capitalism. This leads Foster to term expressionism as an historical failure as it created the demand for the irrational which was provoked by the capitalist order.

My tactic in mis-attributing a primitive root to Schiele's
expressionism is to heighten the confusion regarding the narrative or the veracity of the story. For example, the various portraits of Schiele holding and then ripping the head and arms off the Sheela-na-Gig are essentially expressive, destructive, selfish acts. This gesture implies the violence that Schiele attributes to the Sheela-na-Gig, which he then channels to his masturbatory self-portraits. His complete absorption with himself intensifies his own identity and therefore, genius.
Critical writing surrounding Schiele is strangely controlled as Robert Jensen outlines. Interpretation of Schiele's oeuvre is highly subjective and produced by collectors and dealers who have a vested interest in their subject (as commodity). Texts often use unpublished memoirs and personal reminiscences which justify, or at least contain, the artist's sexual politics, his narcissism, and his professional self-promotion under the guise of genius. Jensen notes in his review of three recently published books on Schiele how the more objective analysis of Schiele is sought, the greater the danger is of refusing to see its polemical character. "What gets elided in such discussions are not only how Schiele's work connects to a wider visual culture but also how the gender and sexual issues are assumed, but hardly discussed."27

In line with previous art histories of Schiele, my history only tells part of the story, revealing as much about the author as it does the artist. My use of Schiele focuses only around his masturbatory self-portraits. This allows me to focus on this extreme expressionist gesture, maintaining a subjective position similar to previous critical histories. The autoerotic tableaux that is presented opens up discussions about Schiele's sexual anxieties and fundamental fear of women or misogyny inherent in much of his work.
Fictional Fetishes

The implications of my narrative are in line with the more traditional approach to the primitive: that Schiele reads these Sheela-na-Gig figures as sexual, erotic, possibly deviant, basically as fetish. Fetishism has obscure origins, as Dawn Ades discusses, it connotes over-valuation and displacement, signaling error, excess, difference and deviation. In her interesting discussion of the role of fetishism in surrealism she points out how it was both playful and satirical, as well as perverse and sexual. My story could be compared to the Surrealist exhibition of 1931, "La Vérité sur les Colonies" (The Truth about the Colonies) which presented exhibits such as religious statues and labeled them "European Fetishes." This exposed the Western ideological assumptions behind the use of the term when applied to artifacts from other non-Western cultures.

My association with surrealism is limited to similar interests in the fetish. With my Schiele, his fetish is to over-value the sexual nature of the Sheela-na-Gig, displace this through his masturbatory self-portraits, and thus voice his expressive urges. There are, however, a number of inconsistencies with this fetish for the viewer to negotiate. Many of the Sheela-na-Gigs are in fact teddy bears, another is a beaver. Some are not particularly Celtic looking or even from Ireland as in the illustrations in the Greenberg book pages. This distancing from a real Irish root serves to loosen the specific reference to a more general notion of sexual fetish. The Sheela-na-Gigs actually loose their gender along the way and become simply objects of male masturbatory fantasy, as I have mentioned earlier. The fetish is itself misrepresented and inappropriate.

Photography is particularly well-suited as the vehicle for the
story. As Brian Wallis notes, "photographs are inevitably fetishistic: they seize the image of desire and fantasy and offer it to a repetitious gaze. The fetish mimes the forms of authority at the point it deauthorizes them." Similarly my photographs are doubly fetishistic, exhibiting the Schiele/Sheela-na-Gig fetish and the fetishistic nature of photography that validates the fiction.
Pseudo History

Hal Foster's discussion of neo-expressionism points to the use of historical styles and references being ultimately empty. Stripped of cultural context and placed within an apolitical one, painters like Sando Chia, Francesco Clemente or Anselm Kiefer are not returning to history but replacing it with a pseudo-history. They play the role of artist as an infantile, narcissistic, autoerotic, hero fascinated with anality, with an exacerbated fetishism and castration anxiety. These extremes or excesses make their work a spoof on the eroticism of art making.\(^{30}\)

My notion of history is similarly empty as the lack of specific detail which renders the historical fact vague and insubstantial. This functions to protect the fiction and enhance the illusion of believability. The authority of the story becomes rooted in a pseudo-history, as James Clifford notes of the ethnographic detail "authenticity [is] produced by removing objects and customs from current historical situation-a present becoming-future."\(^{31}\)

Warren Neidich talks of history as an ever-evolving visual archive where we are confronted by a "digested societal mnemonic for future regurgitation," an archive filled with "a haze of worthless appropriated image clues to our past."\(^{32}\) Images are reduced to an aesthetic shell, stripped of content, and/or thrown into question.

He discusses in his work "the power of the historic equation," which is to find an equilibrium between what was said to have been (more recently what was photographed to have been) and what really was. People in their own time use history for their own ends "in creating the illusion of the real, in creating a deception history, it is also necessary to mimic the 'real history' just enough
to create the ambiguity or ambivalence about what is been seen. These images and the history they perpetuate become as true a record as 'real history' and thus subject to the same process of research." This assumes sloppy historians, or at least storytellers partial to posing as historians.

Neidich, through numerous staged events and use of historic photographic processes, has created several bodies of work. These either re-stage various historical scenarios or utilize existing archive material. In the presentation of these photographs he has investigated the act of appropriation, by faking or staging the actual act of appropriation. This is unlike the more 'pure' appropriation of Sherrie Levine or Christopher Williams which use existing images in different contexts. In "Time Pods" Neidich combined previous projects in oddly skewed arrangements re-configuring his re-configurations, investigating frames and framing devices which derive from the terrain of the social, historical and technological, that is, selection, cataloging and archiving.
Fake Photography

Photography fits well with the expressionist urge as it tends to show “the immediate surface of the world,” as Jeff Wall puts it, and is often disliked because it is banal, mechanical and abstract. “It’s not a medium in which the sense of the nonidentity of a thing with itself can be easily or naturally expressed; quite the opposite.” By this Wall seems to be saying that sometimes it can be hard to separate reality from representation, similar to immediacy of expressionism discussed earlier, the content exists along with the convention of representation. As Brian Wallis notes, it is for this reason that the banal image requires scrutiny, all photographs at the very least aspire to subjectivity’s opposite, the status of evidence, to prove that something happened.

But when objectivity in a photograph is recognized as a falsehood other issues come into play. This is best illustrated by the photographs of fabricated or collaged plants and animals of Joan Fontecuberta or the natural history curiosities of Mark Dion. With Fontecuberta it is difficult to call such blatant fiction a ruse, the lengthy documentation is so transparent, too specific. Maybe this is because his work is not only a “cultural” deception but also a scientific one. Andy Grundberg notes how this makes us aware of photography’s long and largely covert role in classifying and codifying supposedly empirical phenomena. What better an objective measure than that of the objective lens.

Jeff Wall’s large light-box transparencies show seemingly isolated snap-shots, tender portraits, or group scenes but form part of a earnestly staged documentary photography. These seemingly random scenes or tableaux are generally quite bland, even dull. They are far from that as he manages to charge his images with minute details, subtle contradictions or historical references that
reveal more complex situations. He aligns his constructed pictures with the classic history or narrative painting, where epic tales were told over the course of the canvas not just by placing the characters within a scene but by symbolically situating the players so that the meaning is not merely what is depicted.\textsuperscript{39}
Objective Things

The physical size of the photograph is important for Wall if the reference to history painting is to be complete. But much contemporary photography is also large scale as advertising or billboard-sized light boxes or large illuminated art objects. Curators Jean-François Chevrier and James Lingwood offer another twist on objectivity in a catalogue essay for an exhibition of big photographs.40 By reworking terms such as objective and specific they promote the work of a number of artists who utilize large scale photographs in their work.

The tired stranglehold of subjective versus objective is spun into a different trajectory. Critical of both creative photography and postmodern euphoria for the subjective, they argue that, objective “description can be in itself a form of fiction, an act of transformation, even cancellation, of its immediate subject as much as it can be an act of revelation.” They shun a positivist belief in the purely objective fact “which needs to be rejected no less violently than a servility before the simulacrum.”41

The objective here also becomes an object, that object is the large photograph. The specific content of the photograph is as important as the physical presence of the photograph as an object. This enables the “complexity of the visible and the contingency of experience” to be explored.42

Their critical position is very similar to that of Clement Greenberg in that he argued that anything in a work of art that can be talked about or pointed to automatically excludes itself from the content of the work. Anything that does not belong to its content has to belong to its form. What constitutes art as art is the unspecific content or rather no apparent content, only pure
Chrevier and Lingwood apply this formalism to photography. Unlike Greenberg, they are not promoting an abstract art. The imagery in a photograph is hard to escape from but it is possible to have oblique imagery which defies instant interpretation. Photography can avoid being dissolved into a pure imaginary world of illustrative inventions, endless quotations and neo-pictorial kitsch by "integrating a descriptive or factual dimension, by affirming the presence, and actuality (actualité) of the picture." 

These issues concern me because I was interested in the use of large banal photographs. The spatial value of the mural photographs implied a certain truth as enlargements of biographical snap shots. The former were actually collaged fragments seamlessly constructed using computer imaging technology. Schiele was placed in imaginary landscapes and buildings which were created from turn of the century tourist photographs. This imaginary Ireland was descriptive rather than quotational as these places did not exist and could not recognized from existing photographs. New locations were made that presented a romantic or neo-pictorial kitsch setting for my story.

I also share a distrust of purely creative, straight, or postmodern photography but have not embraced specific photography either. I find that I fall somewhere between all of these categories. Although Chrevier and Lingwood's artists shoot original photographs, the fact that I have created all my imagery does not relegate me to the ranks of creative photography. I still enjoy the descriptive power of a real photograph, and my seamless compositions appear to be just that. Furthermore the technology that exists now for computer manipulation was not widely available when Chrevier and Lingwood's essay was written, Jeff Wall has since used computer composition to fabricate seamless scenes of banality.
Moreover, the argument for the 'specific' moreover distances the selected photographs from the narrow confines of fine art photography and positions them in a more general arena of contemporary art. The specific does not confine these artists because it is actually a very general term, rather it implies that the artist has specific ideas or concerns that can only be expressed through photographic description.
False Postmodern

Curatorial or critical essays like the one discussed above generally extol the new or innovative. Not wanting to be subject to time or fashion they often overstate their case in an effort to be authoritative or simply different from what has been said before. The eighties proved to be as full of bombastic criticism as any other decade. Many critics sought to sever the links with previous ways of working and writing in the promotion of postmodernism. An exhibition at the New Museum in 1987 entitled "Fake" is a good example of such fevered rhetoric. The curator William Orlander structured the exhibition around the idea of the fake or counterfeit art object as a modus operandi for postmodern art.

Like many others who promoted postmodern, this attack on Modernism ridiculed the cult of originality, aggressively mixed high and low, elevated women and Third World artists to prominence, replaced pure form with iconography, rejected traditional artisanal skills. This implied a kind of "geo-cultural chaos," as Thomas McEvilley puts it, where judgments of quality are seen as relative.

The catalogue essay incorporated many of the buzzwords and French theoretical mentors of the moment. Orlander embraced a simulated or fake world where forgeries are more real that the original and are therefore subversive. But this subversion was about replacing the old dogma with a new one. By confining modernism to formalism, that being Clement Greenberg's criticism supporting abstract expressionism, new strategies which actually resembled many modern avant-garde practices could be invoked or recycled. Orlander rejected the tradition of modern rebellion and instead cited experimentation as the "new practice that weaves through the multiplicity and incommensurability of works." Again this sounds like the modern tradition that ascribed
aesthetic judgment not to imitation, expression, or imagination, but to the state in which the artists leave the conventions they have inherited after having tested them. Remodeling historical conventions of art making is ironically a thoroughly modern preoccupation.\textsuperscript{50}

These artists did not paint oil on canvas but instead used photography, video, computer technology or other hi-tech fabricating methods as well as allying with popular culture or kitsch and a mass audience. There was a belief that this art had transcended the art world as new audiences were apparently being addressed and conventional orders, distinctions, and hierarchies had been rejected.

The Eighties art market boom gave such critical claims temporary currency. Since then many of these artists, galleries and museums have either disappeared due to bankruptcy or retirement. Others were more successful and now dominate the 'blue chip' art market.\textsuperscript{51} Many critics of the postmodernism scene saw it as overly extravagant and nihilistic. Fashions have changed and Lacan is rarely invoked as master narrator any more. The realm of cultural studies has also been under attack, but not from a usual adversaries like Hilton Kramer. The recent Sokal affair exposed some of the hyperbole of postmodern cultural studies through an academic hoax and also illustrated the suspicions that still exist between disciplines.\textsuperscript{52}
Art is Something Else

The gibberish of theory or the spectacle of the postmodern has also been recognized by numerous artists. Mark Tansey in the most traditional medium of oil painting has created a large body of work that engages the hype directly. In his monochromatic, photographically rendered canvases he uses critics, artists, philosophers as the actors in various scenes that rework history paintings, famous photographs to show the deceptive seduction of the postmodern moment. For example the artists and critics from the School of Paris are positioned opposite those from the New York School in a scene depicting the signing of treaties in World War I. In another, Jacques Derrida is depicted wrestling with Paul de Man on a cliff which is composed of words, where the text has become the substance of reality.

Annette Lemieux is another artist who inhabited a high postmodern position. She started her career as David Salle's assistant and then became know for her refusal to specialize in one media. Her heterogeneous objects, paintings and photographs can be seen as collisions or investigations into the cultural constraints that confine art making to particular mediums. The random content of her work mirrors the play of signifiers that also provides the empty content of Salle's paintings.

Clement Greenberg insisted that art should provide pleasure as a response to the dwindling expectations of 20th century experience in the essay "Avant-Garde and Kitsch." He was keen to promote an elite abstraction that could rescue art from the evils of mass culture. Interestingly, he seems to have predicted some of the spectacle that art has created over the past decade.

My use of the "Art and Culture" is hardly a critique of his
work. Instead of further villianizing Greenberg through critical engagement, the text is treated as image and visually manipulated. The twelve artists discussed in “Art in Paris” section serve as a structuring device which enabled me to select twelve modern artists on which to place Schiele’s head.57 These twelve portraits of Schiele are accompanied by altered pages from each essay. The names of the artists in the text have been replaced by the name Schiele or Egon Schiele generating an endless biography or tome of tautological critical acclaim.

The text has been manipulated but not rewritten, many paragraphs and sentences appear to be applicable to the Schiele in my story. The collapsed histories from Monet to Soutine yield an obsessive and redundant art criticism. By inserting obscure illustrations from a variety of sources,58 the purity of the text block is disrupted and the specific content of Greenberg’s text is displaced by my narrative. The piece was presented in a series of polyethylene bags containing individual pages from the book interspersed with small portraits of Schiele. The personage of Schiele becomes a hyperbole of undiscriminating detail, as the last page, 119, notes “...his original sense of frustration may have come, actually, from an inability to be revolutionary enough, to do enough violence to the given and sanctioned in the true interests of his temperament... Schiele’s tragedy -if it was one- was that he did permit himself enough of a personal vision. In this sense he can be considered a victim of the museum.”59
Museum Devices

The museum offers another kind of structure as the installation of the various pieces of the narrative were presented in an apparent didactic manner. Wary of the sometimes simplistic implications of "institutional critique" I wanted to reference certain kinds of museum display, not duplicate them.60 Within the language or vocabulary of museum display, there is a kind of presentation that introduces an exhibition. For large retrospective exhibitions there is usually an introductory lobby at the beginning or end of the exhibit. It is littered with enlargements of biographical photographs of the artist, text panels or wall text which outlines the curatorial position with interesting facts about the art and artist. I was interested in this kind of display but not so much that it would become the dominant metaphor.

When the museum becomes the subject in the institutional critique, it becomes the thing that conditions art and spectator alike. Similar to arguments questioning the objectivity of photography, the museum is generally no longer considered an altruistic institute disseminating knowledge but an instrument of specific group interests, fulfilling numerous tasks not primarily related to art but as, for example, recreation center, mall or corporate identity.61 It can also refuse to acknowledge it's own ideological position, ignoring popular postmodern issues of sexuality, race and politics (unlike the 1993 Whitney Biennial). The institutional critique presents the triumph of context over the autonomous art object, and insists the meaning has somehow been insufficient or unrecognized previous to its incorporation into the museum experience. But as Markus Brüderlin argues, "Duchamps' question as to which is stronger, context or art, must remain unanswered, or conditions must be created to enable us to answer the question in favor of art, if in doubt."62
This exhibition was presented in a university gallery not an art museum. The kind of museum narcissism described above corresponds with my narrative as the educational imperative in both is similar. My gallery installation, however, introduces a story with fragmented parts, the pasted murals, the book review, the series of portraits, the facsimiles of art criticism, the reproductions of drawings with inscriptions helpfully translated, which all accumulate to confuse or deceive rather that educate. A different history is presented, with truth or fact abandoned for fiction.
Ruse of the Conclusion

So what does this work achieve? It misrepresents numerous histories through the creation of new stories. Information is presented in a seemingly logical, recognizable method of a museum exhibition, yet the parts do not all cohere, there are conflicts between perspectives, views, people, labels, evidence. An artist is aligned with a discourse, objects and influences which are actually unconnected to his own artistic interests and endeavors. A country is reduced to a souvenir trove for a traveling Austrian who makes a career out of mimicking a primitive carving.

Schiele's extraction of the Sheela-na-Gig Ireland is an aesthetic equivalent of colonialism where his incorporation of the primitive reproduces the process. This is generally seen negatively as Marianna Torgovnick laments, "we miss the opportunity to preserve alternative value systems, and the opportunity to re-evaluate basic Western conceptions from the viewpoint of systems of thought outside of aslant from those in the West."^{63}

What happens when the West colonizes itself? In my story Ireland is forced to be non-Western or a primitive society so that a self-induced colonialism can occur. Value systems have been lost as with the Sheela-na-Gig where it's true meaning has disappeared over time. So how can the values that Schiele ascribes to the Sheela-na-Gig be incorrect? He is merely fulfilling his role as a typical modern artist who refrains from embracing gender difference and seeks only onanistic pleasure through coveting and incorporating the Other.

Even though my narrative is similarly exploitative it does create a visual historical space which forces Ireland into the visual culture of modernism. The actual role Ireland played in modern art was
very small as literature dominated the artistic scene. Ireland never produced an indigenous avant-garde art movement and its "great" artists are unknown outside of the country. When Schiele is seen dutifully engaging in his curious process of collection he includes Ireland in his history and that of modernism.

It is plausible that Schiele was influenced by the torrent of excitement for the "primitive unconsciousness" and the "expressionist myth of immediacy" that could be gained from the Sheela-na-Gig. The truth of the narrative is in the momentum of the modern, the driving force that caused a shift in the way the world was viewed and represented. The notion of the primitive was dominant; it fed and fanned the flames of expressionism and my story is believable not because it uses unfamiliar protagonists but because the actual history is not dissimilar.

My own Irish culture and history is thus similarly manipulated to replicate a process of colonial/imperialist extraction. Yet what is re-created is a history of early modern art that includes Ireland as a significant player albeit marginal, secondary, or peripheral. It has no active or actually significant part in this art historical docudrama. By inserting an erotic Irish artifact as central to his work the sexual politics of Schiele are suddenly overtly derivative, formal and narcissistic. Various structures and systems of information create a deceptive history that never happened. The fusion of numerous art histories yields a validated, literal, seamless yet absurd whole. This trip into onanism and literalism creates a space from which I can explore the landscape of celebrity identity, cultural politics, and other things.

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Endnotes


3 Liam Gillick and Rirkrit Tiravanija, "Forget about the Ball and Get on with the Game," *Parkett* 44, 1995: 108.


6 "First introduced in the 12th century, little is known of their
makers or their original functions. Even the name ‘Sheela-na-gig’, which comes from the Irish language, is uncertain in meaning. Eamonn P. Kelly of the National Museum of Ireland suggests the most likely interpretations are ‘Sighe na gCioch’ meaning the old hag of the breasts or ‘Sile-ina-Giob’ meaning Sheela (a name for an old woman) on her hunkers. The 11th through to the end of the 13th century, saw the growth of papal power in Continental Europe and, under Norman influence, many attempts at reform of the ecclesiastical organisation of the Irish church. The targets for reformers were the then customary Irish law on divorce and remarriage (topical indeed for the 1990s!) - as well as the married status of Irish churchmen. To say the least, these lax (and by modern standards, progressive) views, were at odds with the practices that the Church in Rome wished to promote... It is likely that the Sheela-na-gig figures served to protect men from eternal damnation by issuing a warning against the sin of lust. The emphasis on the genitalia - which are usually enlarged in these and related figures - refer to the Church’s teaching that sinners were punished in hell through the bodily organs by which they had offended.”

Taken from brief introduction to Sheela-na-Gigs on a world wide web site for Circa, an Irish art magazine: http://www.paddynet.ie/create/art/circa/sheela.html.

See also James O’Connor, Sheela na gig, Fethard Historical Society, Co. Tipperary, 1991.
Left: James O'Connor carving starting work on his replica Sheela-na-Gig. Right: Sheela-na-Gig made from Lucky Charms from second quarter of my project, 1993.


9 I once used the following quote as a text label: “Esteeming is one thing, and representation of that which is esteemed is another...” Douglas Fraser, “The Heraldic Woman: a study in diffusion,” from Douglas Fraser, The Many Faces of Primitive Art, a Critical Anthology, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966: 80.


11 ibid.,107.
"1492," gelatin silver mural print from first quarter of project, 1992.


"85c," gelatin silver mural print from first quarter of project, 1992.


16 Marianna Torgovnick, Gone Primitive: 27.


18 There was an exhibition of Sheela-na-Gigs at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, in 1994. Ironically it was juxtaposed by the exhibition “Picasso to Koons” which surveyed works by a number of male artists including Picasso, Beuys, Warhol and Koons.

19 See Collier Schorr’s article on Sarah Lucas, “The fine line between this and that,” Parkett 45, 1995: 96-100.
Sarah Lucas; "Get off your horse and drink your milk," 1994.


21 Hillary Robinson, "Reframing Women": 23.


23 Hal Foster, Recodings: 63.

24 ibid., 63.

26 Hal Foster, Recodings: 46.


29 Brian Wallis, "Guest+Host=Ghost": 58.


31 James Clifford, "On Collecting Art and Culture:" 150.


33 Warren Neidich, Historical In(ter)ventions.

34 Other Neidich projects include: "Pseudoevent: The Politics of Appropriation" (1987); "Re-coding American History" (1986); "Contra Curtis: Early American Coverups" (1989); "Time Pods" (1990). For examples of appropriation art see Suzanne Pagé, Ailleurs et Autrement: Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, Louise Lawler, Sherrie Levine, Allan McCollum, Richard Prince, Martha Rosler, James Welling, ARC Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1984; also see Mary Jane Jacobs, A Forest of Signs, Art in the Crisis of Representation, MOCA/MIT Press, 1989; or for a sightly different take on appropriation see Christopher Williams, Angola to Vietnam, Imschoot, Gent, Belgium, c1989.


36 Brian Wallis, "Guest+Host=Ghost": 61.


39 See Jeff Wall, Jeff Wall - Transparencies.
41 Jean-François Chevrier and James Lingwood, "Specific Pictures." For a comparasion of the different definitions of simulacrum see Lisa K. Lipinski, "When the trees of language are shaken by rhizomes in Rene Magritte's 'Les mots et les images' Word & Image, Vol. 11, No.3, July-September, 1995, pp 218-219. She discusses various definitions of simulacrum, Jean Baudrillard's exclusion of material reality, Plato's description as a bad copy, Gilles Deleuze's notion of the positive powers of differentiation and becoming, paradoxical meaning allied not affiliated to hierarchies.

42 Jean-François Chevrier and James Lingwood, "Specific Pictures."


44 Jean-François Chevrier and James Lingwood, "Specific Pictures."


49 William Orlander, "Fake": 41.

50 Thierry de Duve, "The Monochrome": 252.

51 Whatever happened to The Duvet Brothers, David Cabrera or Fariba Hajamadi; International with Monument, Stux Gallery or even the New Museum itself which seems to be in a permanent state of hibernation. Mary Boone Gallery which still represents art stars with 'radical' intent such as Barbara Kruger and the community collaborative Tim Rollins & KOS has abandoned the hassle of SoHo for Fifth Avenue; 303 Gallery has proved to one of the most successful of the smaller galleries of the eighties and has also moved to head the newer art zone of West 22nd Street, New York.

52 Early in the Spring of 1996, Social Text published an essay suggesting a link in quantum mechanics and postmodernism by Professor Alan Sokal, a physicist at New York University. On the day of publication Sokal announced in Lingua Franca that the article had in fact been a hoax. In "Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity," Spring/Summer 1996 issue of Social Text. Here we find one of the first direct attacks in a major journal against the institution of cultural studies. Jason Walsh has collected various articles and links pertaining to the spoof on a world wide web site, see
http://weber.u.washington.edu/~jwalsh/sokal/


55 This also what is sometimes called intertextuality, wherein texts become virtual microcosms of the overall field of competing discourses. In literature writers such as Italo Calvino, Kathy Acker, or Manual Puig use collisions among quite different forms of discourse and become basic structuring principles of texts or practices. Collisions demonstrate that our cultures are so thoroughly discourse based that we cannot hope to encounter “real life” unless we investigate the ways in which the discourse shape our experience. These texts consistently emphasize that the “real” is always “discursive” and that the tensions among discourses are not mere formalist squabbles, but have enormous impact on the constitution of individual and culture. From Jim Collins, *Uncommon Cultures, Popular Culture and Post-
"Music of Spheres" mural print 'under construction.'


58 Illustrations came from: Douglas Fraser's study of erotic figures in "The Heraldic Woman," each was mislabeled as a Sheela-na-Gig even though they were from various cultures around the world; masturbatory drawings by Schiele which had been altered to mimic the gesture of the Sheela-na-Gig; stimulus objects, cards and shapes taken from psychological perception experiments in psychology journals; chimpanzee drawings from a perception experiment; emotional motifs or reductive formal analysis of paintings by Charles Law Watkins, Emotional Design in Painting, Philips Memorial Gallery, Washington, c1940; notes about Jackson Pollack by a Viennese actionist painter from Gunter Brus et al., From Action Painting to Actionism, Vienna 1960-1965, Edited by Museum Fridericianum, Kassel, Kunstmuseum Winterhur and Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh, 1988.

59 See page 119 of this text.

60 Fred Wilson, Mining the Museum: an installation by Fred

Wilson, The Contemporary in cooperation with the New Press, New York, 1994. For interesting discussion about the possibilities of the 'parallel positions of social space' as an alternative to the predictability of 'critique' and the uncertainty of discussion, see Liam Gillick and Rirkrit Tiravanija, "Forget about the Ball and Get on with the Game," Parkett 44, 1995: 106-108.


Left: Installation at RIT for second quarter of the project, 1993.
Right: 'Male Sheela' from same quarter, 1993.


62 Marianna Torgovnick, Gone Primitive: 83.

63 Ann Curran’s notes from the defense by:
Laura Brown: With all these references, how far had it gone? Have you taken it as far as it can go?
Linda Levinson: Would you present this as a history lecture? Was the book piece in the right place?
Ken White: Were there considerations in the arrangement of space

Mural prints at the Gallery of Photography, Dublin, 1993.
considering audience looking at sources that included the drawing factor that changed your perspective? Those uninitiated as against the initiated.

...Alex Miokovic: Describing (curatorial) technically or historically?
...Ken White: (not a) How to bring in a counter history? How do people understand?
...Patti Ambrogi: No-one else brings in a curatorial statement eg Salgado, they don’t need to put up a statement.

Michael Starenko: Speilberg “Raiders” story - no one has trouble with it as a fiction. Why does the art gallery presume the work is true/authentic? Your work suggests the art gallery comes out of the history museum. Artifacts etc. Still has competition of natural history museums.

Alex Miokovic: Function of this? Positioning Ireland (post-colonial/primitive) can only be done under postmodern. Stockpiled absurdity after wall of murals. Extravagance of Ireland versus here. Humor element and theory part (mod vs pm). Double talk about exposing what you are doing? More literal and more complex too. Book wall draws you in most, most resolved.

Linda Levonson: Is there a relationship between Ireland and Schiele? Why not an Irish artist? So? Just a wordplay?