

Reconfiguring the exotic and the modern: a study of some British artists' engagement with empire in the 1920s

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Abstract

Through a close study of the manner in which empire was visually imagined during the 1920s, this thesis addresses an imbalance in the expanding historiography dealing with the theme of British art and empire. This decade, which has escaped a concentrated art-historical analysis of the British art that addressed the subject of empire, is, I argue, significant because it features the production of official views of empire commissioned by domestic and colonial governments that project it as prosaically westernised and modern. This conception ran counter to that being widely produced by British artists in the twenties. Generally, artists heeded an established art-historical mode of representation desired by a contemporary strong market, and imagined the overseas empire as a picturesque and timeless othered site. Such was the hold of this market over the jobbing artists who visualised empire at this time that it was, I maintain, primarily due to the intervention of patronage that empire was dramatically re-imagined in the twenties.

Focusing on three different moments I map the continuing and novel ways in which empire was depicted during the course of the decade. I highlight the pictorial tension, evident in some work dating from this time, as artists sought to reconcile a traditional notion of the picturesque with a new expression of the overseas empire's modernity. I detail the subtle reconception of the overseas empire as intrinsically linked to British life and values - seen in work produced independently by artists in the early twenties - before focusing on two specific case-studies – Edith Cheesman's paintings of the modern Gold Coast, commissioned by the colony's government in 1923; and Gerald Spencer Pryse's watercolours of West Africa from 1927, produced as studies for posters promoting a unified trading empire, commissioned by the British government organisation, the Empire Marketing Board.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Retrieving empire as a theme in 1920s British art

'The central premise of the essays collected here is that the concept of *empire* belongs at the centre, rather than in the margins, of the history of British art'.¹ So wrote Tim Barringer, Geoff Quilley and Douglas Fordham in their 'Introduction' to *Art and the British Empire* - a compilation of twenty essays whose subject-matter spans an historical period ranging from the sixteenth- to the twenty-first-century - which was published in 2007. It is a bold assertion, though in an age increasingly marked by 'cross-nationalism', multiculturalism and global connectivity, one that arguably deserved to be made, especially as the historiography (including recent additions then being made to it) has invariably ignored or paid little attention to empire as a theme in British art.² This historiography, the authors argued, has typically been 'conceived as work produced in Britain and overwhelmingly representing subjects in the British Isles'.³ *Art and the British Empire*, therefore, makes a meritorious contribution in extending the parameters of the material deemed to constitute British art. Meritorious, because, as a result of the authors' initiative, a previously marginalised body of work is now not only incorporated, but, more significantly, repositioned within the fold of British art history so that it forms an integral and meaningful component of the art which, in conjunction with other modes of cultural production, is deemed to play its part in the construction of Britishness at specific historical moments.⁴

Art and the British Empire does not, nor does it attempt to, provide an exhaustive chronological survey of the British art that makes reference to empire. Instead, it gathers together narratives that detail how the locations and subject peoples that constituted the British Empire have been visually conveyed at particular moments in its history: a format that results in a compendium of distinct historical snapshots. An upshot of the book's episodic structure is that certain moments in the history of empire's visual representation are excluded;

¹ Barringer *et al*, 2007: 3. Other writers have similarly pointed out the separation in the historiography of British history between Britain's domestic and imperial history. In *Ornamentalism* for example, David Cannadine argues that 'the history of the British Empire is still all too often written as if it were completely separate and distinct from the history of the British nation'. Cannadine, 2001: xvii.

² Elleke Boehmer has argued that movements (I insert the structure of British art history within the framework of her analysis) 'may be both nationally focused ... and yet cross-or transnational in their range of reference and reception of influence'. Boehmer, 2002: 3.

³ Barringer *et al*, 2007: 3.

⁴ Relevant to the timespan covered by this thesis is Andrew Thompson's essay 'A Tale of Three Exhibitions': Portrayals and Perceptions of "Britishness" at the Great Exhibition (1851), Wembley Exhibition (1924) and the Festival of Britain (1951)' which includes a discussion on how Britishness was projected and perceived at the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924 and 1925. See Thompson, 2006: 91 – 102.

an understandable consequence either of editorial choice or perhaps a lack of relevant material. One such omission is British artists' engagement with empire in the decade that followed the First World War.⁵ Is it though of any significance, as far as British art history is concerned, that the volume makes no reference to the manner in which empire was imagined during this brief ten year period? Well, initially, it is worth bearing in mind that in the immediate aftermath of the war, as a consequence of the peace settlement that broke up the Ottoman Empire and confiscated Germany's colonial holdings in Africa, the British Empire reached its maximum geographical extent. A further outcome of the conflict was that a greater number of Britons gained first-hand experience of countries that were either already part of, or were soon to be assimilated into, the empire.⁶ At no other time in its history had empire impinged in such a direct manner upon the lives of the British population. If we pay heed to the notion that people are inclined to maintain an interest in situations and locations they have directly or indirectly experienced, then for artists producing images of empire in the 1920s, the audience and market for their work was potentially at its greatest.

Equally worth considering is that empire was diametrically characterised at various moments during the decade; on the one hand, by differing levels of discontent, expressed by indigenous colonised populations, and, on the other, by the projection of empire in Britain as a united, family-oriented entity.⁷ As visual material, empire, it could be argued, presented rich and varied subject-matter yet, noticeably, British artists failed to engage with it in all its complexity. Notably missing is evidence that British art of the twenties adopted a critical or questioning stance towards empire that mirrored the discontent then being expressed in some of the colonies and by individuals and groups in Britain.⁸ I argue in this thesis that a possible

⁵ Essays included in the volume by Michael Hatt, who discusses the representations of empire that circulated in the Edwardian period, and by Julie Codell, who takes as her subject-matter the British feature film *Rhodes of Africa* which dates from 1936, flank the void that is the 1920s.

⁶ Historians have set a variety of time-spans to cover the highpoint of empire. David Cannadine, most broadly, fixes the 1850s to the 1950s as the 'heyday' of the British Empire. For Nicholas Thomas, 'empire and the late nineteenth-century connote one another', as it does for Bernard Porter who considers that 'in 1900 the British empire was approaching its zenith, ostentatiously and noisily'. Keith Jeffrey designates the first half of the twentieth-century as 'encompass[ing] the apotheosis of the British Empire, the moment when it reached its zenith and was more unified, coherent and powerful a world system than at any other time in its existence', whilst Porter, in a later work, stipulates that around 1920 empire reached its 'greatest extent'. See Cannadine, 2001: xix, Thomas, 1994: 9, Porter, 1968: 1, Jeffrey, 2002: 13 and Porter, 2004: 282.

⁷ For details of the various uprisings and calls for independence from the colonised populations that occurred in the 1920s, see Porter, 2004: 280.

⁸ This was not the case in other of the arts. Literary figures, for example, expressed concern. For E.M. Forster, in *A Passage to India* (1924), criticism was conveyed in relatively gentle terms: 'no sympathy lay behind' the British presence in the country. Leonard Woolf, however, was more vociferous in his condemnation of the British Empire, demanding, in a 1922 parliamentary election address, the 'complete abandonment of the policy of imperialism and economic penetration and exploration'. Forster, 1950: 301. Woolf, 1967: 39. Woolf stood as a Labour candidate for the Combined English Universities Constituency in 1922 (35). For an overview of attitudes antipathetic to empire in the early twentieth-century, see Howe, 1993.

explanation for this omission lay in British art's engagement with empire being, by the 1920s, incorporated within well-established parameters that many artists, primarily because of economic reasons, may have felt disinclined to breach. So although artists antipathetic towards empire may well have existed, the dominant visual tropes for painters imagining empire – as far as the art market was concerned – failed to encompass images deemed critical of the institution: a major consideration to bear in mind for artist-travellers seeking to make a professional living through selling their work.

A contemporary discourse circulating in Britain was also attempting to reposition empire and distance it from its late nineteenth-century more militaristic characterisation. Unsurprisingly, this discourse ignored any stirrings of discontent and sought instead to convey empire as a family-oriented and peaceable trading union. This conception was widely expressed both by government, through, for example, the work of the Empire Marketing Board (EMB) - established in 1926 to promote trade within the 'large family' of empire⁹ – and by contemporary commentators such as Percy Hurd, who, in 1924, described the British Empire as 'a family affair'.¹⁰ Hurd further referred to empire as 'a great experiment in progressive civilisation', and the social 'progress' ensuing under British guidance in the colonies (as it was widely proclaimed) equally characterised the projection of empire in the 1920s.¹¹

Thus, the situation facing artists at this time was not only the repositioning, or in modern parlance, the 'rebranding' of empire which opened it up to possible fresh interpretation and visualisation, but the existence of a potentially large audience with recent first-hand experience of its disparate character. Both factors, it could be argued, provided powerful incentives for artists to have engaged with empire as subject-matter in the 1920s.

1.2 'Structures of Signification'¹²

My intention in this thesis is to explore that engagement, to unearth what Tim Barringer, in his study of Victorian artists' visualisation of labour, has called 'the archaeology of a particular and significant era', and, in so doing, help to redress an imbalance in the expanding historiography dealing with the theme of British art and empire.¹³ In his analysis, Barringer

⁹ Constantine, 1986: 12.

¹⁰ P. Hurd *The Empire: A Family Affair (being a Popular Survey of the Self-Governing Dominions, Crown Colonies and Protectorates and Mandated Territories under the British Crown and Recital of Empire Policy)* (London, 1924), 5 - 6, 179 – 80, quoted in Bush, 2004: 78.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Geertz, 1993: 9.

¹³ Barringer employs this term in his study *Men at Work: Art and Labour in Victorian Britain*. He indicates that he rejects a chronological surveying view of his subject in favour of a close study 'of visual formulations of work at a particular historical moment', specifically the mid-Victorian period of 1850 – 1875. Barringer, 2005: 13. Aside

acknowledges the 'agency of individuals', and it is an approach that I have similarly adopted in this study.¹⁴ Although eschewing extensive biographical accounts of the main protagonists that feature in this thesis, I have, nonetheless, drawn upon their life stories at what I deem relevant moments so as to more richly contextualise my analysis. It is, I believe, a necessary requirement; 'behaviour', as the anthropologist Clifford Geertz has argued, 'must be attended to [a]nd with some exactness ...' if we are to fully understand the cultural forms of a particular era.¹⁵ Geertz's choice of the term 'exactness', is important. A concentrated analysis of images produced within the limited time-span of a decade needs to be informed by *precise* examination of the social behaviour that directly and indirectly realised that work, especially if a nuanced and meaningful account is to be achieved. Geertz further argues that it is necessary when analysing material or data to '[sort] out the structures of signification ... and [determine] their social ground and import'.¹⁶ It is an argument I heed, especially as this study is not solely concerned with images of empire, important though they are to it (evidenced by the considerable formal analysis invested in them), but equally with the frameworks within which they were created. The attention I pay to these frameworks extends beyond those traditionally pertaining to the production and dissemination of art itself – here, I am alluding to artists' training, the materiality of their work, the art-historical traditions upon which they draw, and contemporary exhibition practice - to incorporate structures of patronage and class, both of which feature in my narrative. As I detail, the visualisation of empire demanded by certain patrons in the 1920s was often at odds with that entrenched within an art historical tradition which, by this time, had established that empire was primarily imagined within the relatively narrow confines of the topographical, the picturesque or the exotic.

Evidence derived from numerous commercial exhibition catalogues dating from the 1920s indicates just how widely British artists, when speculatively producing images of empire, adhered to these types of visualisation. The preponderance of artist-traveller exhibitions held at this time, some of which are detailed in appendices, suggest the existence of a strong market for the work they produced. What is encountered, when leafing through the

from *British Art and Empire*, recent additions to this historiography include Hermoine de Almeida and George Gilpin (eds.) *Indian Renaissance: British Romantic Art and the Prospect of India* (Aldershot, 2005); Jordana Pomeroy (ed.) *Intrepid Women: Victorian Artists Travel* (Aldershot, 2005) and Simon Faulkner and Anandi Ramamurthy (eds.) *Visual Culture and Decolonisation in Britain* (Aldershot, 2006). British artists' engagement with empire, notably the paintings Richard and Sydney Carline produced in the newly mandated territories of Palestine and Iraq at the end of the First World War, featured in the exhibition 'The Lure of the East: British Orientalist Painting, 1830 -1925' organised by the Yale Center for British Art in 2008.

¹⁴ Barringer, 2005: 13.

¹⁵ Geertz, 1993: 17.

¹⁶ Ibid: 9.

exhibition catalogues, are numerous references to exotic or picturesque landscapes and peoples. Notably conspicuous is evidence of British artists' acknowledgment of a western presence in the colonial empire. Instead, as the catalogues inform us, empire is depicted as unchanged and unchanging; as a world devoid of the modernity so pervasive in the West.

If British art's visualisation of empire in the 1920s had solely been characterised in such narrow terms, if empire was only imagined as a static, othered world, a valid argument could be maintained for there being little need to single out the decade as 'a significant era' especially worthy of analysis. Indeed, as I outline in chapter two, those British artists who, in the 1920s, conceived of empire as picturesque or exotic were working, by this time, within a well established tradition. This, however, was not the entire story. Significantly, we also see in the twenties a few artists, atypically, picturing empire as a site of modernity in which western notions of economic and social progress are explicitly present. In a decade when mechanical reproductive technologies, such as photography and, more especially, the increasingly popular medium of film, were utilised to disseminate evidence of the modernity that was transforming parts of the colonial empire, this would appear understandable. The notion that the colonial empire remained a static, purely picturesque or exotic entity, as many artists continued to convey it, was surely unsustainable.

Likewise, the representation of the landscape of empire in terms of the picturesque or the topographical was similarly threatened by recent historical events. In an aerial view of Mesopotamia, painted by Sydney Carline in 1919, both these art-historically established modes of representation are forsaken. In their place, Carline conveys the landscape as bleak and unknowable; an upshot of his wartime experience of viewing landscapes that had been blasted out of all recognition. The Mesopotamian landscape he represents is thus imbued with a contemporary modernity. An artist conveying the landscape of empire in this manner in the 1920s was, though, an exception, as equally were those painters who projected the colonial empire as a site of modernity. Why, then, did artists generally continue to reproduce a restricted and arguably outdated conception of a picturesquely static empire in the 1920s?

We must heed the significance that economic factors played when seeking an answer to that question. These were likely to have remained to the fore for jobbing artists, such as those featured or referred to in this study, who sought to make a professional living from commissions and exhibitions. By continuing to visualise empire in a picturesque manner established by art historical and commercial convention, artists served the taste of a section of the art-buying public, and, therefore, enhanced their prospects of earning a living. In a decade

over which the spectre of unemployment loomed large, it is, I argue, imperative that the economic dimension involved in the production of art at this time be paid due heed.¹⁷

I also pay attention, in my discussion of the art that imagined British West Africa, to the significant role performed by colour in the representation of this region. Artists' capacity to produce colour images – something not replicated in the films and photographs of West Africa dating from the twenties – featured in a contemporary discourse. Colour was deemed essential in conveying an accurate impression of the tropical colonies. As I relate in chapter four, in my discussion of Gerald Spencer Pryse's West Africa watercolours dating from 1927, colour was vital in conveying, for him, the region's highly aestheticised quality: a factor he considered a laudable and defining characteristic.

Having argued that due attention be paid to the economic factors that sustained artists' imagining of the colonial empire as statically picturesque and exotic, I equally maintain that an economic rationale determined its representation as a site of modernity in the 1920s. I argue that it was as much due to individual and institutional patronage, as to the initiative of artists working independently, that the colonial empire was re-imagined in this way. The patrons who performed such a key role in the alternative expression of empire that emerged at this time, had, as I will show, their own economic motivation for conveying empire as an increasingly modern entity.

A clear sense of distinction between the contrasting visualisations of empire produced in the 1920s is, however, not explicit. As I will demonstrate, what is apparent in some work is visual evidence of ambivalence, at times even tension, as artists sought to accommodate the often competing demands of the structures within which they worked. They did not entirely abandon notions of the picturesque or the exotic, imposed on them by an art historical tradition and an omnipotent market, in their commissioned depictions of the modern empire, but reconfigured these elements to produce an image of empire more attuned with its contemporary socio/economic construction. And for their private, institutional and government patrons, this was not unwelcome. The retention of picturesque qualities, within work ostensibly devoted to conveying empire's often more prosaic modernity, meant that these

¹⁷ Although acknowledging evidence of rising living standards in Britain during the inter-war years, especially away from the regions traditionally associated with the staple industries of coal, textiles, engineering and shipbuilding, Keith Laybourn argues that 'unemployment was the dominating issue of British society' at this time, with 'every election, apart from the one in 1918 [being] fought over the problems of the unemployed'. Laybourn, 1990: 1, 151. More recent histories of the inter-war years, such as Martin Pugh's *We Danced all Night*, also note that this was not a period of 'continuous depression'. Pugh details that a brief economic boom from 1919 to 1920 was quickly followed by a sharp slump in the latter part of 1920 and 1921, and that after this there was a period of partial recovery, so that by 1929 unemployment had fallen back to 1.1 million, yet this figure still represented over ten per cent of the working population. See Pugh, 2008: 97.

novel images of empire had greater potential to be assimilated into an established art historical tradition. This, I argue, was important for patrons. Enscorced within a wider and more historically rooted body of work, their commissioned images of the modern empire were bestowed with a cultural validity, which, in turn, helped validate, through the process of recording, the modernisation being implemented in the colonial empire under British rule.

To provide a theoretical base for my argument I draw in chapter three upon Peter Cain's and Anthony Hopkins' *British Imperialism 1688 – 2000*.¹⁸ In their magisterial study, the authors formulate the concept of 'gentlemanly capitalism', and isolate a 'gentlemanly order' that permeated not only Britain's non-industrial forms of capital, but also the nation's political and administrative circles, from which the senior officials who served in the overseas empire were drawn: officials, who 'were inevitably infected by [the 'gentlemanly order's'] perspectives and ... values'.¹⁹ Here, then, is the further structure – that of class – which informs my analysis of artists' images of empire produced in the 1920s. As an intrinsic element of the high culture with which the elite ruling class was familiar, it is, I argue, not unsurprising that painting was prioritised by a member of that class, Sir Gordon Guggisberg (the Gold Coast governor responsible for commissioning in 1923 the artist, Edith Cheesman, to paint a number of scenes conveying the colony's modernity), over the more modern, though culturally less esteemed, mediums of film and photography, as the means through which to officially record his colonial government's achievements. Although by the twenties photography and film had supplanted graphic art as a widespread medium of record, for Guggisberg, and the elite class into which he was assimilated - it was, after all, members of this class who were most likely to attend art exhibitions or purchase pictures - oil and watercolour painting retained a privileged role in this respect.

In this thesis I fully examine links between the structures of class, patronage and art production in analysing some of the British art that records empire in the 1920s; art that is all the more interesting because it reveals evidence of tension and ambivalence as artists struggled to accommodate the conflicting demands of the structures within which they operated.

1.3 Lost records

It is only through the picture titles listed in contemporary exhibition catalogues that we retain a link to many of the paintings that visualised empire in the 1920s. In many instances the

¹⁸ See Cain and Hopkins: 2002.

¹⁹ Ibid: 24, 47.

pictures themselves – often the work of long-forgotten painters who merit just a one or two line entry in dictionaries of twentieth-century British artists - are unlocated. Even work that constitutes a significant part of this thesis, Edith Cheesman's watercolour paintings of Mesopotamia dating from 1922, and her Gold Coast pictures of a year later, survives in the public domain only in reproduced formats; the former as colour photographic reproductions in a slim volume entitled *Mesopotamia Watercolours (Iraq) by Edith Cheesman*, published by A. & C. Black Ltd. in 1922, and the latter as colour postcards produced by the British Empire Exhibition authorities in 1924.

The sparse representation in British public collections of empire-themed work dating from the twenties may in part be due to the contemporary critical reception it received; critical approval is often a crucial factor in determining a picture's public acquisition. As I will detail, critical response was invariably uneven, and many of the visualisations of empire produced by British artists in the twenties were either ignored by contemporary art writers and critics or else received only cursory attention. On the rare occasions that there was more sustained critical comment, such as that accorded to Alfonso Toft's paintings of Newfoundland and Cheesman's pictures of Mesopotamia, both exhibited in London in the early 1920s, it was not solely the formal characteristics of the pictures that were discussed, but equally their role in promoting contemporary imperial ideals and objectives. Specific images of empire were perceived by some commentators as, effectively, unofficial imperial propaganda. Attitudes towards propaganda were not unanimously hostile in the twenties, but for contemporary art commentators, perhaps influenced by the writings of a dominant figure such as Clive Bell, who, as early as 1913, had posited art as 'beyond the reach of the moralist',²⁰ propagandistic images of empire may have seemed outmoded: a factor that may explain the scarcity of critical engagement with the genre, despite the clear evidence that empire was re-imagined in some British art of the 1920s.

The lack of access to many relevant pictures dating from this time presents problems when conducting art-historical research. The dimensions of much original work remain unknown, leaving us to speculate as to the scale on which empire was imagined by the many artist-travellers who exhibited. The watercolour medium in which, so the exhibition catalogues inform us, many of them worked, suggests they visualised empire on a domestic scale. This, in all likelihood, would have made their pictures not only more accessible, in terms of price, but better-suited, in terms of size, to the contemporary smaller living spaces in which many art

²⁰ This quote is taken from Clive Bell's *Art* (London, 1914), quoted in Harrison, 1994: 18.

collectors were living.²¹ Conversely, the publicly displayed and widely disseminated images of empire commissioned by the EMB towards the end of the twenties were reproduced on the type of epic scale – the largest EMB posters measured forty by sixty inches – that had characterised some of the empire-themed art of the late eighteenth-century.²²

The decade also saw artists drawing upon a range of fine art practices. In addition to the traditional elite mediums of oil and, especially, watercolour, other artists utilised more contemporarily fashionable and, due to their relatively low price, democratic mediums, such as colour woodcut, to produce a record of empire.²³ And, of course, more democratic still were the EMB's lithographic posters and the postcard reproductions of original work aimed, not, at the small minority of art buyers, but at the mass of the general public. Today, however, British art's engagement with empire in the 1920s, in all its many forms, has largely disappeared from the public domain. At best, some images can be found in the storerooms of public collections and archives – a sizeable number of EMB posters are lodged in the National Archives, Kew and in Manchester Art Gallery – but, more typically, domestic-scale pictures of empire dating from the twenties seldom adorn the walls of Britain's public art galleries.²⁴

Neither, in present day Ghana and Nigeria, do Edith Cheesman's or Gerald Spencer Pryse's pictures, which record the economic and social transformation in the region in the 1920s, form part of the national art collections. This was not a situation intended at the time of the pictures' production. Then, pro-imperialist commentators urged the retention of both bodies of work to form the basis of national collections within the tropical colonies. Of course, their omission may be easily explained by the question of ownership. Spencer Pryse retained possession of the West Africa watercolours, so an economic dimension must again be

²¹ Claude Flight, who specialised in the production of lino-cuts in the 1920s, linked the suitability of his work to the changed conditions in which many people lived. He wrote in 1925 that as more 'people live in smaller rooms ... the pictures they buy must necessarily be smaller...'. Flight's quote is taken from 'The Modern Colour-Print', *The Arts and Crafts Quarterly* 1, No.2, April 1925.

²² William Hodges', *A Camp of a Thousand Men formed by Augustus Cleveland three miles from Bhagalpur, with his mansion in the distance*, 1782, Pym's Gallery, London, Oil, measures 122 x 160 cm. Reproduced as Plate 1 in Barringer *et al.* 2007.

²³ 'The Woodblock Colour-Print: A Democratic Art' by Frank Morley Fletcher, a pioneer of colour woodblock printing in Britain in the early twentieth-century, was published in *Original Colour Print Magazine* (May, 1924). The British artist Mabel Royds produced throughout the 1920s twenty-two colour woodcuts depicting scenes in India that she worked up from sketches made whilst travelling in the country in 1913 and 1916. One of these colour woodcuts, *The House Top*, exhibited at the Royal Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts in 1924, was priced at a relatively affordable £5. See Billcliffe, 1992: 4, 75. Royds' translation of her original material into a medium that in the 1920s was fashionably in vogue further suggests that, as a theme in British art, empire maintained a topical relevance for some collectors at this time. For a more detailed analysis of Royds' depiction of India in the early twentieth-century, see Buck, 2009.

²⁴ A notable exception is the extensive collection of drawings and paintings produced by Richard and Sydney Carline in the mandated territories of Iraq and Palestine in 1919 held by the Imperial War Museum, London, some of which are on permanent display.

considered when speculating as to why the present day situation prevails – perhaps in the late 1920s the West African colonial authorities did not deem their purchase an economic priority. Of greater intrigue, is the whereabouts of Cheesman's Gold Coast pictures. The archives reveal no details of a contract between her and the Gold Coast government. As to whom retained ownership of the work, after it had been exhibited at the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924, is unknown, and it must remain a matter of conjecture as to how the paintings were disposed of.

Despite its omission from West African and, indeed, British public art collections, what should not be lost sight of is the importance that imperialists in the twenties attached to Cheesman's and Spencer Pryse's paintings in conveying imperial achievement. A large part of my analysis focuses on the work itself, but I also discuss its dissemination (both artists' work was disseminated in the twenties through readily accessible or affordable formats, so, undeniably, their conception of empire was aimed at a wide audience) and reception. Paying due attention to these last two factors, illuminates the changing role assigned to some of the art that visualised empire in the 1920s. Spencer Pryse's West Africa watercolours were reproduced and discussed in *Commercial Art*; a publication primarily concerned with art's effectiveness as a publicity or advertising vehicle, and they were exhibited at the Imperial Institute, as were Cheesman's paintings of Iraq; an institution established to promote imperial ideals and endeavours. The readership of *Commercial Art* and the audience likely to attend the Imperial Institute, perhaps differed from the cliental that attended the type of London commercial gallery in which Cheesman's Iraq paintings were originally offered for sale, or the readership of the *Studio*, which also reviewed Spencer Pryse's watercolours. Art that imagined empire was now being aimed at potentially different sectors of the British public, and the objectives assigned to it had been widened. It could no longer be solely considered the preserve of a small art-buying public with a fairly entrenched notion of how empire should be aesthetically envisaged. Now, images of empire were directed towards other audiences, those engaged in imperial trade or supportive of imperial development, who were, perhaps, more amenable to an alternative, more modern, conception. My discussion of the dissemination of Cheesman's and Spencer Pryse's West Africa pictures brings to light a previously unresearched episode in the history of British art's engagement with empire.

1.4 Registering modernity

Adhering to the structure of *British Art and Empire*, I provide in this thesis a further snapshot of a particular moment in the history of this engagement. My snapshot reveals evidence of

continuity, but also change – often found, paradoxically, within bodies of work produced by the same artist – in play in the 1920s. I concentrate, however, for reasons that will become apparent, upon pictures that, in their evocation of the contemporary modern empire, register change.

The conception of empire in a wider socio/economic sense had by the 1920s, clearly altered, and it was increasingly projected as a progressive entity. Artists who recognised this, and conveyed empire as a site of modernity, accordingly, responded to a contemporary view - or at least a view held by those who supported the imperial mission. Within a more limited art historical context they were also producing novel work. The picturesque representation of empire as a static, unpenetrated and untransformed locale, firmly established by recent tradition, was still very much in play. This body of work, now largely unavailable for examination, dwells in the shadows that surround the spotlight I train on representations of a modern empire, atypically produced in the 1920s, where it provides a valuable comparative point of reference.

The registering of modernity is clearly manifold. It can be expressed blatantly, as in pictures that depict western technology in colonial West Africa in the mid and late twenties produced by Edith Cheesman and Gerald Spencer Pryse, but equally with greater subtlety. The Newfoundland landscape depicted as sublimely primeval, but equally as a site of economic opportunity, revealed in paintings exhibited by Alfonso Toft in 1920; a wide thoroughfare in early 1920s Baghdad, painted by Cheesman; or the hairstyle worn by a young Sierra Leonean woman living in London at around the same time, depicted by Beatrice Bright, also constitutes work that acknowledges empire's modernity.

The manner in which they represented the empire's modernity in the twenties may have differed, but what unites the artists featured in this study is their formal practice. David Peters Corbett, in his perceptive and subtle evaluation of English art's engagement with modernity from 1914 to 1930, discusses the role performed by academic art; a category in which we could loosely bracket the work produced by the artists I discuss. Corbett argues that academic art's 'engagement with the modern was hampered and partial', adding, that 'in the twenties' its 'halting, almost undeclared depictions of modernity were part of a wider cultural sense that modernity [was] to be resisted and denied'.²⁵ Evidential support for his argument is found in Spencer Pryse's watercolours which reveal him, if not denying – he was, after all, specifically commissioned to convey colonial West Africa's modernity - then invariably

²⁵ Corbett, 1997: 215.

marginalising its impact upon the region. Cheesman, though she generally conveys the modernity she finds in Ghana with less ambivalence – she seems to have more wholeheartedly complied with her patron's wish to explicitly convey the progressive measures initiated by his government – also occasionally attempts to limit its presence. Of course, essentially, both artists were working to commission; commissions which, rather than seeking to resist or deny modernity, actively sought through cultural means to project it as a 'civilising' benefit of Britain's imperial rule.

Leaving aside these commissioned images of the modern empire of the twenties, there is evidence that naturalistic artists working independently at this time, rather than resisting or denying modernity, also embraced its presence in their imagining of empire. Two pictures referred to above, Cheesman's painting of Baghdad's urban landscape, which I discuss in chapter two, and Bright's portrait of a Sierra Leonean woman, the subject of analysis in chapter three, undoubtedly project the modern empire. 'Halting' – and here I accept Corbett's argument - though their acknowledgement of empire's modernity may be – in both works its presence remains enmeshed within a more traditional conception of empire's exoticness - both artists, nevertheless, select subject-matter that challenges an established perception of the 'fixed' and unchanging colonial empire. Arguably, we see in these two examples of naturalistic British art from the twenties not so much a cultural resistance to, or denial of, modernity, but a celebration of its transformative power. Here, empire, rather than viewed as timeless and fixed, is imagined as contemporary and dynamic.

I demonstrate in this thesis that some naturalistic artists who engaged with the theme of empire in the twenties did not, unlike many of their counterparts who imagined domestic life in Britain at this time, entirely shy away from forcefully recording modernity and registering its impact upon the landscapes and peoples of the empire. That impact can, though, be conveyed positively or negatively. As I outline in chapter four, Gerald Spencer Pryse certainly had misgivings about the modernity he encountered in West Africa and was commissioned to record. In his watercolours, its presence is frequently marginalised as he favours, instead, an evocation of West Africa's picturesque character. Spencer Pryse's less than wholehearted embrace of West Africa's modernity can be situated within a contemporary modernist discourse that criticised aspects of modern western life. Richard Overy has recently defined inter-war Britain as a 'morbid age', when notions of 'civilisation in crisis' were mainstream concerns.²⁶ Overy contends that 'intellectual endeavour[s]', amongst which he includes the

²⁶ Overy, 2009: 2, 3.

artistic and the literary, were affected 'in some form or other by the prevailing paradigms of impending decline and collapse'.²⁷ To read notions of decline and collapse into Spencer Pryse's images of a modernising West Africa may seem incongruous, yet it is, I argue, his positioning of the modern within his compositions that impels this reading. Commissioned by the EMB to convey colonial West Africa as an efficient and increasingly modern contributor to the trading empire, Spencer Pryse's posters, prominently displayed throughout Britain on the Board's custom-made hoardings, undoubtedly, met his employer's requirements. However, as I will demonstrate, the numerous watercolours he produced whilst in West Africa reveal, more, his apprehension of modernity. He believed modernity had been responsible for destroying aesthetic qualities in the West, and now feared that it similarly threatened West Africa's intrinsic aesthetic character which he held so dear. Accordingly, I argue that the watercolours, rather than celebrating the economic transformation of West Africa, function as critiques of contemporary western life.²⁸

1.5 Featured artists and work

In view of the general invisibility, today, of British art that visualised empire in the 1920s, it is necessary to explain why I have alighted upon the artists, and the particular examples of their work, that figure in this thesis. I focus upon a small number of atypical, but, nevertheless, historically significant pictures. For some of these images their significance lies not only in the conception of empire they convey but equally in the context that determined their production. Edith Cheesman's hitherto unresearched pictures of the Gold Coast are the first 'official' representations of empire in twentieth-century peacetime, and, as such, they uniquely bear testimony to a colonial government of the 1920s willed projection of a peaceable, increasingly modern, trading empire. Gerald Spencer Pryse's images of West Africa – the posters he produced for the EMB and the watercolours he made on his tour of the region – were also the result of an 'official' commission. Although widely exhibited and reproduced in art journals in the late twenties and early thirties, the original watercolours have escaped public view for the best part of a century. Their significance partly lies in the act of historical retrieval that has once more brought some of these pictures into the public domain. Through contact with Spencer Pryse's daughter, the artist Tessa Spencer Pryse, I have gained access to paintings that provide an invaluable insight into how a British artist in the late twenties recorded West

²⁷ Ibid: 15.

²⁸ Overly argues that the discourse of decline and collapse 'was sustained through public expressions of uncertainty, irrational anxiety and loss'. Ibid: 20.

Africa as it underwent dramatic economic and social transformation. More widely, though, the significance of the work I discuss resides in the degree of complexity that this work reveals – a complexity not hitherto realised – about the re-imagining of empire as a contemporarily modern entity in the 1920s. Artists, I argue, whether producing commissioned or speculative work, though registering empire's modernity found it hard to entirely forsake its historically entrenched conception as exotic or picturesque. Exoticism either lingers at the margins, or, as in Spencer Pryse's work, performs a more dominant role within pictures that conceptualise the empire as modern. Over the course of this thesis I bring to light historically neglected artists who, in reconfiguring elements of the exotic and the modern, produced a temporally novel view of empire in the 1920s.

I finish by outlining the structure of this thesis. Generally, I track a chronological path through the decade, though there are occasions when, temporally, I retrace my steps and compare similar visualisations of empire produced by the same artist at different times so as to explore their specific resonance. This occurs, notably, in chapter four when I contrast Gerald Spencer Pryse's West African watercolours and EMB posters of 1927 and 1928, respectively, with earlier visualisations of empire that he produced for the 1924 Wembley Empire Exhibition.

In chapter two, after initially establishing, empirically, the popularity of artist-traveller's work in the early twentieth-century, I trace the near origins of empire's predominantly picturesque visualisation in the 1920s by detailing artist-travellers' response to India from the 1890s to the end of the First World War; a period in which we see subtle shifts in the imagining of the country as artists increasingly privilege the representation of indigeness over the depiction of an imperial presence. Next, so as to convey the geographical breadth of the work available for view by a British audience at this time, I discuss paintings produced by six artist-travellers who worked in, or ventured to, different parts of the empire: Charles Worsley, who depicted the life and landscapes of New Zealand; Dorothy Vyvyan, who painted views of Natal in South Africa; Alfonso Toft, who recorded the establishment of the paper processing industry in Newfoundland; Richard and Sydney Carline, who produced aerial views of the Middle East, and Edith Cheesman, who painted scenes and portraits in Iraq.

Each of these artists in the early twenties produced pictures that registered a modern conception of empire, and, notably, were contemporarily recognised as doing so. There is, however, no seismic shift in their visualisation of empire which still draws upon the picturesque tradition demanded by the market at which their speculative work was aimed. Indeed, their pictures conveying the modern empire were stealthily inserted in exhibitions

alongside more obviously picturesque renderings of empire that they also produced. Market power, I maintain, determined that, economically vulnerable, jobbing artists could not wilfully abandon an art-historically established conception of empire, even when conveying it is as more modern. Significantly, however, neither did those writers who critically engaged with this conceptually novel work. At times, their writing, though recognising innovation, still seeks to situate these pictures within an established tradition. My assimilation of this commissioned and independently produced work as a comprehensive case study serves to illustrate the tentative manner in which both artists and critics reconfigured empire as a modern entity in the early years of the 1920s.

In chapter three I concentrate upon British art's engagement with colonial West Africa in the mid 1920s, partly because a relatively rich, and previously unresearched, body of work survives (albeit only in reproduced format), but also because a discussion of some of this art takes note of the special circumstances under which it was made. A formal analysis of Edith Cheesman's Gold Coast paintings, commissioned by the colony's government and shown at Wembley in 1924, constitutes much of my discussion, though I also devote attention to two independent artists who produced images of West Africa in the early twenties, Rose Chicotot Stinus and Beatrice Bright, so as to provide a comparative context in which to situate Cheesman's 'official' work. In comparison with the tentative recognition of the empire's modernity, that was a feature of my discussion in chapter two, Cheesman's expression of the modern empire is generally more forceful and direct. This, I argue, was due to the structures of patronage and class in which her work was enmeshed. My discussion on her visualisation of the Gold Coast, thus, encompasses analysis of patronage, class structure, and the dissemination of imperial ideals and endeavours which, I argue, played a crucial role in determining how empire was imagined at a specific moment during the decade.

Cheesman's oils and watercolours occupied a privileged position in the Gold Coast pavilion at Wembley, but indigenous artefacts, including examples of West African carving, were also shown. Within a discussion on cultural hierarchies, I examine the display of these artefacts, and assess the contemporary reaction they provoked. Intriguingly, because there were individuals in the 1920s declaring that Africa had no tradition in the graphic arts, graphic art produced by a Nigerian artist, Aina Onabolu, was seen at Wembley. I discuss Onabolu's poster design within the context of a West African 'answering back' to the colonisers through a medium granted privileged status in the West. And I return to this theme in chapter four when evaluating drawings by Ghanaian art students that were exhibited at the Imperial Institute in 1929.

Chapter four, however, is primarily devoted to an analysis of Gerald Spencer Pryse's watercolours and posters of West Africa. The images developed by Spencer Pryse into a published poster format, were strictly vetted by the EMB to ensure they projected their desired propaganda message. As visual propaganda their potential as negotiable images, as pictures open to alternative interpretation, is lessened, though, I argue, not entirely lost. The watercolours, however - in effect unmediated visual notes - provide evidence of Spencer Pryse's more immediate and personal response to West Africa. As such, they invaluablely widen the theoretical space in which to explore his imagining of empire.

Spencer Pryse's commissioned record of West Africa in late 1927, followed closely on the heels of the initial 'official' projection of the region produced by Cheesman in 1923. Despite their temporal proximity and their shared classification as government sanctioned work, I include both as case studies because each separately informs a narrative detailing British art's engagement with empire in the 1920s. Discussion of Cheesman's work can be extended into an examination of a colonial government's motivation to commission art to convey an idea of empire in the mid twenties. Spencer Pryse's work, though ostensibly, too, confined within parameters defined by a government organisation, nevertheless, provides, in the format of the watercolours, the scope to explore a highly personal response to empire. That exploration is informed by a greater biographical enquiry. Today, we might deem Spencer Pryse a contradictory character. A Labour Party sympathiser who designed election posters for the party; an entrepreneurial farmer of cattle in Morocco in the 1920s; the author of an article published in the November 1925 edition of *Blackwood's Magazine* – a staple publication of 'Club' reading rooms throughout the colonial empire – that recounts his romanticised experiences in the Riff region of Morocco at a time of civil unrest; an artist who twice in the decade accepted commissions promoting contemporary ideas of empire, yet whose work registers his disquiet about the modernity he encounters in British West Africa, and an individual who, in contemporary interviews, expresses ambiguous, arguably even contradictory, views on empire. Yet in the 1920s were the attitudes and patterns of behaviour encompassed by Spencer Pryse so untypical? Was it incongruous that a Labour supporter could, in his professional life as an artist, take such an active role in promoting imperial ideals? Exploring Spencer Pryse's motivation, and analysing the images of empire he produced, provides an effective means through which to bring to light the often complex relationship between British art and empire in the 1920s.

2. Imagining empire: The role of the speculative artist in the early 1920s

2.1 Introduction

Henry Blackburn's 1892 book, *Artistic Travel – A Thousand Miles towards the Sun* – a narrative compiled from separate journeys made by the author over a thirty year period through Normandy, Brittany and Spain that eventually terminate in Algeria – is described by Kenneth McConkey as by this date already 'curiously old-fashioned'.²⁹ McConkey's conclusion is based not only on an evaluation of the book's picturesque narrative, but also upon its images. These take the form of black and white lithographic reproductions of steel engravings depicting ancient architecture and 'conventionally pleasing topography'.³⁰ There is, however, evidence that picturesque images of the sites and landscape of foreign lands, and also their 'exotic' indigenous populations, continued to feature in work produced by subsequent artist-travellers.³¹ It is, therefore, perhaps more the black and white format of the images that illustrate Blackburn's travel narrative which explains McConkey's use of the term 'old-fashioned'. Certainly, many illustrated travel books of this period reveal evidence, in their use of colour-lithographic reproductions of original paintings, of the more modern printing processes that had been utilised by the publishing industry since the 1870s.³² Indeed, prominent publishers in the field, such as A. & C. Black Ltd., highlighted their use of colour reproduction in advertising their publications.³³ The commitment on the part of publishers to replicate as closely as possible the artist's original work accorded with a demand, expressed in contemporary exhibition catalogues and travel magazines, for authenticity from painters and travel writers, considered reporters as much as artists.³⁴

²⁹ McConkey, 2003: 25.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Mortimer Menpes' *India* serves as an exemplary example. Accompanying Flora Annie Steel's text, detailing the country's history and contemporary life, are seventy-five colour reproductions of Menpes' watercolours that provide supportive images of historic sites, such as *The Banks of the Holy River*, *Benares* and *King Babar's Tomb*, as well as numerous studies of India's contemporary life and indigenous population. See Menpes, 1905.

³² See Aswin, 1978: 360 – 61. Menpes' *India* belonged to a range of travel books featuring high-quality colour reproductions that A. & C. Black Ltd. began publishing in 1901. See <http://www.acblack.com> - Accessed on 22/5/09. Other titles in the series included Menpes' *The Durbar*, containing one hundred full-page colour reproductions, published in October 1903, and R. Talbot Kelly's *Burma, painted and described*, containing seventy-five full-page reproductions, from 1905.

³³ In advertising for their travel book series, A. & C. Black Ltd. emphasised their use of colour reproductions by employing Ruskin's homily: 'Of all God's gifts to the sight of man, colour is the holiest, the most Divine, the most solemn', as an over-arching slogan. See 'A. & C. Black Ltd.'s List of Books Illustrated in Colour' in Menpes, 1905.

³⁴ The 'Prefatory Note' in *Catalogue of an Exhibition of Drawings illustrating the Durbar and Indian Life by L. Raven-Hill and Inglis Sheldon Williams* (London, Fine Art Society, 1903) expressed the artists' belief 'that greater value attached to rapid actualities than to more careful, but necessarily less truthful, studio compositions'. Paul Fussell quotes from an editorial note in *Wide World Magazine*, a travel periodical first published in 1917, which invited submissions from 'travellers, explorers, tourists, missionaries and others', but insisted that narratives must

The illustrated travel book was not the only means by which late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century artist-travellers could disseminate their work to the British public. A commercial exhibition of original work was equally as important. Indeed, the two formats enjoyed a symbiotic relationship. Book sales were boosted by publicity arising from an initial exhibition of the original paintings, and these, in turn, achieved greater significance by their subsequent reproduction.³⁵ The marketing of artist-travellers' pictures proceeded along separate lines as it responded to differing clienteles: that of the collector, who sought exclusive ownership of original work, and was prepared to pay a correspondingly higher price; and that of a wider and growing professional middle-class, who wished to acquire reproductions at a substantially lower cost.³⁶

Oliver Brown, Director of the Leicester Galleries, a London commercial gallery established in 1902,³⁷ recalled how English taste in the twentieth-century's first decade favoured romantic and topographical landscape painting: a predilection to which the gallery responded by regularly featuring such work in their monthly exhibitions.³⁸ The formation of this

be 'strictly true in every detail'. See Fussell, 1980: 60. McConkey describes artist-travellers as 'reporters on exotic events and locales, times and spaces'. McConkey, 2003: 27.

³⁵ Menpes' paintings of the 1902 Delhi Durbar in India were exhibited at the Dowdeswell Galleries, London in June 1903 prior to the publication of *The Durbar* (London, 1903), and Talbot Kelly's views of Burma could have been seen at the Leicester Galleries in June 1905, in advance of the publication of *Burma, painted and described* (London, 1905). Anne Helmreich's research into the commercial practices pursued by the Goupil Gallery in the late nineteenth-century reveals that the staging of exhibitions also coincided with the release of prints of the exhibited paintings. See Helmreich, 2005: 36.

³⁶ McConkey argues that publishers in their production of illustrated travel books responded to the appetite of 'a bourgeois, professional, middle class clientele, for whom there was much more to be seen and recorded'. McConkey, 2003: 25. The late Victorian period saw an expansion of the professional class as new types of business and occupation emerged. This is evidenced, tellingly, in the growing number of professional organisations – some thirty-nine, representing, amongst others, chartered accountants, estate agents, insurance brokers, town planners and hospital administrators – that were established between 1880 and the outbreak of the First World War. See Perkin, 2002: 79. The two volumes by Menpes and Talbot Kelly were each priced at twenty shillings, and though significantly cheaper than an original art work were, nonetheless, marketed as highly-collectable works in their own right. In reviewing Talbot Kelly's book on 3 February 1906, the *New York Times* promoted its desirability by considering it 'a worthy member of a very attractive series'. The expansion of a market for reproductions was arguably bolstered by the emergence of art magazines such as *The Studio* in 1893 which disseminated art to a wider audience partly through its own extensive use of mechanically reproduced images. The magazine commented on this democratising process that it was helping to foster, praising the camera, in its 'Lay Figure' column in August 1893, for its capacity to bring copies of artworks to those who can 'only afford coppers for their art'. See Brothers, 1993: 29.

³⁷ Windsor, 1998: 197.

³⁸ Brown, 1968: 34 – 45. David Croal Thomson, manager of the Goupil Gallery from 1885 to 1897, was condescending towards the popular taste for topographical views. In a letter to James McNeil Whistler dated 25 June 1892, he described Mortimer Menpes' views of Venice as 'in the old Birket Foster style and eminently suited to the taste of the ordinary British buyer', before proceeding to traduce Menpes' painting of the 'Church of Venice' by comparing it unfavourably to Whistler's own view of the subject: 'It has every detail showing and in every sense and chiefly in quality at the opposite extreme from yours. He got about £150 for it and it is truly dreadful'. Croal Thomson to Whistler, 25 June 1892, Glasgow University Library, MS Whistler T96, quoted in Helmreich, 2005: 39. Myles Birket Foster (1825 – 99) was described in the *Times* on his death as 'the most popular watercolour artist of our time', whose 'neat, pretty drawings' always contain 'some touch of sentiment dear to the ordinary English mind'. *Times*: 29 March 1899.

taste may well have been due to the influence exerted by the widely-read art magazine *The Studio*. It not only regularly reproduced on its pages images of romantic rural scenes, but, more generally, served as 'a much needed guide to what was appropriate, fashionable and above all correct taste'.³⁹ Other London galleries operating at this time, notably the Modern Gallery, also had an exhibition programme biased towards artist-travellers' work.⁴⁰ Between 1900 and 1915 it staged forty-nine exhibitions of this type (as detailed in Appendix 1).⁴¹ In addition to shows that recorded the typical European holiday destinations of the elite class, such as the Italian Lakes, Venice, Florence, Rome, the French Riviera and Swiss mountain resorts, the gallery also staged exhibitions that focused upon Britain's Dominions, colonies and protectorates. Egypt was especially popular, the subject of twelve exhibitions, as was Ireland, which featured in eight shows, but pictures depicting South Africa, India, New Zealand and the West Indies constituted the focus of other exhibitions.

During this fifteen year period forty-three male (some more than once) and twenty-six female artist-travellers exhibited at the Modern Gallery, an indication that by this date the role could not be defined in gendered terms.⁴² Although many of the women artists recorded nearby European destinations, others, such as Gertrude Hadenfeldt, who exhibited paintings of India in May 1913, and Ella Du Cane, who showed watercolours of the Nile in November 1913, provide evidence that women artists were travelling as far afield as their male counterparts in pursuit of the picturesque and topographical material that remained popular with the art-buying public, and, consequently, commercially viable for institutions such as the Modern Gallery and the Leicester Galleries to exhibit.⁴³

³⁹ Brothers, 1993: 6, 12. Ann Brothers records that in 1903 when *The Studio* was probably approaching its peak circulation of 60,000, it was able to carry a self-promoting advertisement claiming 'the largest circulation in the world of any magazine devoted to the arts' [22].

⁴⁰ Edward Freeman is recorded as the lessee and secretary of the Modern Gallery, 61 Bond Street, London in the 1890s and 1900s. See <http://www.exhibitionculture.arts.gla.ac.uk> – Accessed on 30/9/09.

⁴¹ The National Art Library, London holds a collection of Modern Gallery catalogues covering the period 1898 to 1916.

⁴² This statistic helps confirm Janet Woolf's assertion that there is nothing inherently masculine about travel. See Woolf, 1993: 224 – 39. The journeys undertaken by female artists can be situated within the greater mobility of British women at this time. James Hammerton records that between 1880 and 1914 a number of female emigration societies were founded in Britain. Additionally, female emigration to the Dominions and colonies was widely publicised in sectors of the press, and supported by eminent politicians, such as Joseph Chamberlain, the Colonial Secretary, and Lord Milner, the South African High Commissioner. See Hammerton, 1979: 148, 162, 171.

⁴³ Based upon analysis of Ernest Brown & Phillips Ltd.'s index of exhibitions held at the Leicester Galleries between July 1902 and November 1910, it is possible to derive from the listed exhibition titles that, in addition to eleven shows featuring romantic and topographical landscapes of the United Kingdom, a minimum of twenty-four exhibitions were based upon work produced by artist-travellers' venturing further afield. Exhibitions featured work resulting from artists travelling in nearby European destinations, such as Holland, France, Spain, Italy and Austria, but also from more extensive journeys to Japan and to Britain's eastern colonial possessions. See <http://www.ernestbrownandphillips.ltd.uk> – Accessed on 22/12/2006. The Leicester Galleries and the Modern

The pre-First World War period marked the high-point in the staging of artist-traveller shows at the Leicester Galleries, and to my knowledge there is no record of exhibitions being staged at the Modern Gallery beyond 1916.⁴⁴ Other London commercial galleries, however, maintained an interest in the genre, specifically Walker's Galleries in New Bond Street which specialised in landscape exhibitions. In the three years spanning 1920 to 1922, thirty-nine of the eighty-one exhibitions staged by the gallery were artist-traveller shows (as detailed in Appendix 2).⁴⁵ Of these thirty-nine shows, twenty-one included work depicting Britain's protectorates and empire possessions. This latter number included all the countries, excepting the West Indies, that had featured in exhibitions staged by the Modern Gallery, but now to these were added Palestine, Australia, Newfoundland, Sierra Leone, Malaysia, Burma and Iraq as destinations visited by artist-travellers. Many of these exhibitions featured watercolour views. As a spontaneous rather than 'worked' medium - one considered by contemporary commentators as best suited 'for depicting the subtle yet often fierce beauties of an Eastern scene' - it helped grant these on-the-spot records a desired authenticity.⁴⁶

An indication of British artists' greater interest in depicting the empire in the early twenties can be gauged by comparing it to the situation a decade earlier. Then, only six of the twenty-four artist-traveller exhibitions staged by the Leicester Galleries in the decade up to 1910 featured work resulting from travel to British empire possessions, specifically Egypt, India and Burma.⁴⁷ Such an increase in figures prompts the question: Why were more

Gallery were not alone in showing work by artist-travellers in the years prior to the First World War, and the Dowdeswell Galleries, the Fine Art Society and the Chenil Galleries also featured such shows during this period.

⁴⁴ Although the Leicester Galleries continued to exhibit artist-travellers' work in the immediate post-war period, it constituted a much reduced contribution to a varied exhibition programme. Building upon war-time shows by C.R.W. Nevinson, Paul Nash and Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, the gallery intensified its focus upon modern British and French painting at the expense of the more traditional romantic and topographical landscape exhibitions. Only three artist-traveller shows appear to have been staged between the end of the war and April 1921, offering clear evidence of the Leicester Galleries declining interest in the genre at this time. By the mid-1920s, however, artist-travellers' work was again featuring more prominently, as modernist painters, such as Nevinson, Edward Wadsworth and Richard Wyndham, joined the exodus of younger artists leaving England. Wyndham's and Wadsworth's paintings, resulting from travel in southern France and Italy in 1924, were shown in June and November 1926 respectively, and Nevinson's Paris paintings in October 1928. For a detailed analysis of the modernist work produced by English artist-travellers c. 1925 - 1931, see Stephenson, 2003.

⁴⁵ Walker's Galleries' commitment to showing artist-travellers' work continued throughout the 1920s. Of the 227 exhibitions staged by the gallery between 1923 and 1929, 123 featured the work of artist-travellers. Throughout the 1920s the genre also featured in the exhibition programmes of galleries more associated with formally progressive work than Walker's Galleries, such as the Chenil and Goupil Galleries. Thirteen artist-traveller shows were staged by the Chenil Galleries between 1921 and 1927, and eleven by the Goupil Gallery between 1920 and 1928. Although these figures are small in comparison to the numbers associated with Walker's Galleries, they indicate that artist-travellers' work remained commercially viable even for galleries whose focus generally lay in other areas. The exhibition catalogues published by Walker's Galleries, Chenil Galleries and Goupil Gallery are held by the National Art Library, London.

⁴⁶ *The Studio* Vol. 49, No. 203 (February 1910): 47.

⁴⁷ See <http://www.ernestbrownandphillips.ltd.uk> - Accessed on 22/12/2006. Between 1900 and 1915, twenty-eight of the artist-traveller shows staged by the Modern Gallery featured work depicting Britain's Dominions,

exhibitions, depicting a wider number of Britain's protectorates and empire possessions, being staged by commercial galleries, such as Walker's, just over ten years later? Certainly, improved transportation to Britain's African colonies, and the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, which greatly reduced the journey-time to India and the eastern colonies and Dominions, enabled more artists to travel further and wider afield.⁴⁸ Additionally, awareness of the more distant parts of empire as tourist destinations, nurtured by guidebooks published by travel firms such as Thomas Cook, arguably contributed to the interest in artists' depictions of empire. These factors may help explain the proliferation of such shows in the early 1920s, but they were though long-standing by this time so cannot be singled out as determining reasons. A more significant explanatory factor is likely to have been the enduring and omnipresent shadow of the First World War which had brought British protectorates and mandated territories in the Middle East, such as Egypt, Palestine and Iraq, more directly into the nation's consciousness, as the region became for many Britons a specific site of memory and experience. This is not to diminish the degree to which the Middle East had previously captured the imagination of British artists and the wider public. It had been a chosen destination for a number of nineteenth-century British painters, and Assyrian antiquities, exhibited at the British Museum from the 1850s, had been the subject of widespread public interest.⁴⁹ In the immediate aftermath of the war, however, an added topical value could be assigned to the region. This is evident from a 1921 review in the *Manchester Guardian* of Richard and Sydney Carline's paintings of the Middle East which referred to the area's attraction for a British audience: 'Because more John Smiths have travelled in the East during the last few years than ever before both they and their friends are interested in the record of what they have seen'.⁵⁰ The work produced in the Middle East in the aftermath of the war by the Carlines and Edith Cheesman, constitutes a later more detailed discussion, but it indicates more generally that artist-travellers responded to temporally related interest in newly-acquired empire territories by visiting and producing a visual record of these regions.

As I have outlined in my analysis of the exhibition programmes implemented by the Leicester Galleries, Modern Gallery and Walker's Galleries, artist-travellers' depictions of

colonies and protectorates. By comparison, the twenty-one such shows staged by Walker's Galleries in only a three year period (1920 to 1922) represents an explosion in interest.

⁴⁸ The Elder Dempster Line, operating out of Liverpool, sailed on alternate Wednesdays (later weekly) to the West African coast, and the British India and the Union Castle lines embarked from Tilbury for the East African coast. See Allen, 1979: 33, 44.

⁴⁹ For a concise overview of British artists involvement with the Middle East, see *The Lure of the East: British Orientalist Painting, 1830 -1925*, exh. cat. (Yale Center for British Art, 2008), and for the reception accorded Assyrian artefacts in Britain, see Bohrer, 2003.

⁵⁰ B.D.T., 1921: unpaginated.

picturesque landscapes and populations remained enduringly popular during the course of the twentieth-century's first three decades.⁵¹ It is, therefore, not surprising that both male and female artists seeking a professional livelihood were drawn to a genre from which, judging by the frequency of exhibitions, there was the likelihood of sales.⁵² Of course, in the early 1920s there was nothing inherently new in artists exhibiting work of popular and commercial appeal. The subject had been broached in the *Studio* as far back as 1904 when opposed sides of an argument regarding art specifically aimed at the popular market were presented in a Lay Figure column entitled 'On Art Exhibitions'. Taking a typically non-controversial stance, the magazine concluded, through the voice of the fictional 'Critic', that although the large number of exhibitions being staged could be deemed as having 'a bad effect on artists', they were necessary for 'bringing together the workers and the buyers ... in these modern times'.⁵³ It would appear that in the early 1920s, in what was an increasingly speculative profession, many artists mitigated risk by aiming at an established and strong element of a generally more buoyant art market.⁵⁴ Neither is it surprising that newly-acquired protectorates, as well as longer-held colonial possessions, to which the elite art-buying public may well have had emotional, experiential or intellectual attachment, were utilised as source-material by commercially focused artists keen to provide the market with material of interest to potential buyers. It would appear that for artist-travellers working in the early 1920s, as for government and business, Britain's empire possessions and protectorates were viewed as a rich source of raw material capable of being transformed into higher-value products.⁵⁵

I have deemed commercial motivation an important factor in the production of images of empire by artists in the early twenties. In the remainder of this chapter I explore the manner in which they visualised empire. As I will demonstrate, British artist-travellers continued to depict empire in relatively narrow picturesque terms already deemed 'old-fashioned' by the 1890s. The genre, however, also elicits evidence of an alternative response by some artists to empire at this time: one more attuned to its wider socio/economic construction as an exploitable

⁵¹ In 1926 the art critic and writer Frank Rutter differentiated Robert Bevan's work from that of many contemporary artists by its avoidance of 'the obvious prettiness which still attracts the popular mind'. See Rutter, 1926.

⁵² The thirty-nine artist-traveller shows staged by Walker's Galleries between 1920 and 1922 featured work by twenty-two male and eighteen female artists. The near equality between the sexes is an indication of the growing number of professional women artists working in the 1920s. See Deepwell, 1991: 56.

⁵³ 'The Lay Figure: On Art Exhibitions', *The Studio*, Vol. 32 (1904), 90.

⁵⁴ C.R.W. Nevinson writing about the art market described a 'boom that set in towards the end of the war and lasted until about 1920'. 'Down and Out Artists', *Westminster Gazette*, 28 September 1925, quoted in Malvern 2004: 220.

⁵⁵ Stephen Constantine has argued that in the 1920s 'the extraction of economic benefit for Britain from colonial connections ... was set by all the major political parties and endorsed by the Federation of British Industry and the TUC'. Constantine, 1986: 192.

economic resource, and as a symbol of Britain's paternalism. Before considering this work, I will briefly survey some images of empire (specifically of India - the richest source of material) dating from the late nineteenth-century to the time of the First World War, so as to establish a context that will inform a reading of the early 1920s material.

2.2 Depicting India in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century

By the 1920s the landscape and population of many parts of the British Empire ostensibly retained little novelty value as source material for British artist-travellers. India, for example, had been translated into a picturesque and romanticised landscape by William Hodges in the 1780s, and was reproduced a decade later in a more sober topographical fashion by Thomas and William Daniell who revisited many of the sites that Hodges had painted.⁵⁶ And in the nineteenth-century the country's landscape continued to draw British artists, amongst others, William Simpson and Edward Lear.⁵⁷ Landscape, however, was not the only attraction for visiting artists: India's indigenous population exerted its own lure, constituting, for example, the subject of ethnographic focus in the late eighteenth-century when Arthur William Devis sketched the occupations of villagers in Santipur, a community sixty miles north of Calcutta.⁵⁸

Pratapaditya Pal and Vidya Dehejia have argued that the 'romance with the "Indian" India withered as rapidly in the second half of the [nineteenth] century as it had begun in the first half', due in part to the 1857 uprising which altered the British perception of the country, and to photographs of the 1876 and 1877 famine victims that revealed a land afflicted by poverty and starvation.⁵⁹ However, late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century artist-travellers, nourished by earlier visual and textual accounts, continued to produce work that reinscribed sites and people, already constituted in the western mind as embodying a timeless exotic India, at the expense of images that could have evoked a more modern industrialised country. In 1913 and 1916, Mabel Royds, on tours of India with her husband, the etcher E.S. Lumsden,

⁵⁶ See Pal and Dehejia, 1986: 100, 105.

⁵⁷ William Simpson (1823 – 1899) was commissioned by the London-based publishers Day and Son in 1859 to make a series of drawings for a proposed work of 250 lithographs recording the 1857 Indian Mutiny. He ultimately produced a record of the country that extended beyond his original brief, as he sought out the 'vast spaces' between Bombay, Calcutta, Benares, Agra and Delhi that 'the ordinary traveller who "does" India ... sees nothing of'. Quoted in Archer, 1986: 94. Simpson's work, including images such as *Indigo Factory, Bengal*, which records a modern India utilising imported western technology, was reproduced in *India Ancient and Modern: A Series of Illustrations of the Country and People of India and Adjacent Territories Executed in Chromolithography from Drawings by William Simpson with Descriptive Literature by John W. Kaye* (London, 1868). Edward Lear travelled in India between November 1873 and January 1875 producing around 3,000 picturesque topographical drawings and watercolours. See Pal and Dehejia, 1986: 124 – 29.

⁵⁸ Devis produced a series entitled *Occupations in India* that was based on the sketches he produced in 1792, though this proved commercially unsuccessful. See Pal & Dehejia, 1986: 136.

⁵⁹ Ibid: 16. Captain Willoughby Hooper's photographs of the 1877 Madras famine were widely disseminated. Ibid: 209 – 11.

travelled a similar path to that taken by Devis some 120 years earlier when she too recorded Indian men and women engaged in a range of traditional, pre-industrialised occupations.⁶⁰ In a similar vein, Herbert Olivier's two studies of the steps or ghats rising from the banks of the Ganges up to the temples of the ancient sacred city of Benares, *A Ghat at Benares* and *The Ghats of Benares*, included in an exhibition of his Indian drawings at the Fine Art Society, London in 1885, also suggest, judging by their titles, a reinscription of a traditional, unchanging India, previously painted by William Hodges in 1787, and later described in numerous nineteenth-century travel journals.⁶¹

Of greater interest, in that it indicates an alternative projection of the country, is the catalogue description of another Olivier work - the geographically related study *The Approach to Benares* - which hints, conversely, at the acknowledgment of imminent change in the area, thereby simultaneously destabilising the established artistic evocation of the timeless city to which he too contributed. Olivier is presumably describing an aspect of the drawing when stating: 'The piles on which the New Bridge is being built are as deep below the water as the distant minars are high above it'.⁶² The opening of the bridge that spanned the Ganges at Benares was reported on by Rudyard Kipling in the *Civil and Military Gazette* in 1887, and its construction inspired his short story *The Bridge Builders* published in the *Illustrated London News* in 1893, so Olivier's drawing and his commentary in the exhibition catalogue can be viewed as an early cultural recognition of this specific technological intrusion into the Indian landscape.⁶³ His capitalising of 'New Bridge' in the description emphasises modernity's incursion into a site previously translated by Hodges into a version of the sublime. It was an incursion given devastating imagined force in Kipling's story, when Findlayson, the bridge engineer, looks 'over the face of the country that he had changed for seven miles around'.⁶⁴ In Kipling's tale, the unfinished bridge is threatened by the Ganges in full spate, and during the night as the water rises a dialogue ensues between India's traditional Gods over the rights

⁶⁰ For an analysis of Royds' drawings, see Buck, 2009.

⁶¹ I have been unable to trace any of these drawings so am drawing upon the textual evidence in *Catalogue of a Collection of Drawings by Herbert A. Olivier Illustrating life and landscape in India and Cashmere* (Fine Art Society, London, 1885). William Hodges' *The Ghats of Benares* (1787, Royal Academy, London, Oil,) was one of a number of paintings that he made of the city. Hodges described the riverside scene as 'extremely beautiful; the great variety of buildings strikes the eye, and the whole view is much improved by innumerable flights of stone steps'. See Hodges W. *Travels in India during the Years 1780, 1781, 1782 & 1783* (London 1793), 60, quoted in de Almeida and Gilpin, 2005: 119. Fanny Parks, who went to India in 1822 as the wife of a civil servant stationed at Allahabad, recorded a description of the stone ghats in her journal. She considered them 'beautiful', but that their beauty was 'greatly increased by the native women, in their picturesque drapery, carrying their vessels for water up and down the cliffs, poised on their heads'. See Parks, 1975: 1: 333 - 34.

⁶² Olivier, 1885: 4. The 'New Bridge' to which Olivier refers was the Duferrin Bridge that was then being built, and the minars, or minarets, were probably those of the city's Aurangzeb Mosque.

⁶³ Wilson, 1977: 93. The bridge was renamed the Malviya Bridge in 1948.

⁶⁴ Kipling, 1990: 32.

and wrongs of its construction. The debate concludes not only with the Gods ceasing to question the bridge's validity, but now accepting the inevitability of further bridge-building. So, as the water level drops, mythic India secedes to the rationality of the imperial present, and though Kipling permits a contesting voice to be heard, it is, of course, he who structures it, and, predictably, as a supporter of the imperial project, he quietens it into servile acquiescence.⁶⁵ Olivier's catalogue description can also be read as supportive of the imperial project. In comparing the depth of the piles to the height of the minarets, he equates the British impact upon India with the material legacy of the country's earlier Mughul rulers. Through his choice of subject-matter, Olivier grants this demonstration of imperial technological achievement an equivalent cultural validity to that bestowed upon the ancient sites of Benares in many other representations of the city. In this instance he escapes the lure of reinscription, to which he too succumbed, and produces a fresh view of Benares that acknowledges the impact of imperial modernity.⁶⁶

The catalogue description of *The Approach to Benares* makes only an oblique reference to the imperial presence in India. Two exhibitions in 1903, however, recorded an event expressly designed to demonstrate British power and prestige in the country. The Delhi Durbar of December 1902, staged in celebration of the King Emperor Edward VII's coronation, drew upon the theatrical pageantry associated with India's former Mughal rulers in positioning the British monarch as their natural heir.⁶⁷ In addition to the exhibition of Mortimer Menpes' 'Durbar' watercolours at the Dowdeswell Galleries in June 1903, L. Raven Hill and Inglis Sheldon-Williams also exhibited drawings of the 'Durbar and Indian Life' at the Fine Art Society in May of that year.⁶⁸ Menpes and Sheldon-Williams both exhibited paintings of the Viceroy, Lord Curzon, the supreme personification of British power in India, who, accompanied by his wife, is shown making a State Entry seated upon an elephant onto the Delhi parade ground. A portrait of Curzon also occupies the frontispiece of Menpes' book, *The Durbar*, thereby further visually prioritising British imperial rule. Dorothy Menpes, the artist's

⁶⁵ For a detailed analysis of *The Bridge-Builders*, see Sullivan, 1993: 119 – 127.

⁶⁶ Edward Lear, who had visited Benares as part of his Indian tour in the early 1870s, wrote of it on his return to England in terms that contradicted its earlier representation. When looking again at Thomas Daniell's 'pallid, grey and solemn' views of the city, he considered: 'I had always supposed this place a melancholy, or at least a staid and soberly-coloured spot, a record of bygone days. Instead I find it one of the most startlingly radiant places full of bustle and movement. Constantinople or Naples are simply dull and quiet by comparison'. Quoted in Archer, 1986: 136.

⁶⁷ Edward VII did not attend the Durbar, the Indian word for a royal court, but the power of the British throne was personified and magnified through the Viceroy of India, Lord Curzon, who was carried in grand procession by an elephant, seated in a golden howdah and shaded by a golden parasol. See James, 1997: 316 – 17.

⁶⁸ Raven-Hill's humorous pencil drawings of the Durbar formed only part of a body of work that he produced on a wider tour of India, but Sheldon-Williams, 'dazzled with the infinitude of the colour schemes' focused entirely upon a watercolour record of the event. See Anon, 1903: 5.

daughter, and author of the volume's text, equally adopts an unequivocally pro-imperial tone throughout her summarising chapter, 'Reflections', in which she provides a profile of Curzon supportive of Mortimer Menpes' portrayal. The Viceroy is eulogised for his 'energy, eloquence, immense persuasive powers and vigour', all of which were brought to bear upon 'every detail of the Durbar'.⁶⁹ Dorothy Menpes reserves specific praise for the Durbar ceremony ultimately making 'clear and concrete' the might of the British Empire, and never more so than in a telling sentence which describes India's 'great' past rulers as realising that they had been supplanted by the 'eminently greater ... Ruler of England and the Indies and much else of the world besides'.⁷⁰

We are left in no doubt as to the virtues of the imperial project in *The Durbar*. A more ambivalent tone is struck by the unknown author of the prefatory note in Sheldon-Williams' exhibition catalogue who concentrates upon one component of the Durbar ceremony, the Review of the Native Chiefs' Retinues which features in over half of the artist's exhibited works.⁷¹ The author praises the procession of squadrons of turbaned troopers and 'columns of infantry in every imaginable hue and shape of uniform' for producing scenes that appealed 'most strikingly to the artistic eye': scenes that s/he considered possessed a 'bizarre picturesqueness' and 'a vivid tumult of ... colour' created by 'wave upon wave' of 'intense sequences of the primary colours' to which nothing else could compare.⁷² This spectacle additionally commands attention because, paradoxically, in an event designed to magnify imperial rule, it produces scenes through which the author can imagine 'the apotheosis of traditional Asia', and erase 'the history of centuries' so that 'British rule had never existed'.⁷³ The comments are revealing. In spite of the increasing consolidation of imperial power by the early twentieth-century, a desire for an exotic pre-imperial empire, capable of producing a picturesque aesthetic, is still seen to endure.

Frederick Bohrer has argued that exoticism 'thriv[es] on difference', and that it looks 'toward and beyond the edges of western awareness'. He maintains, however, that for exoticism to succeed, artefacts or individuals deemed exotic by the West must 'employ terms of reference from the particular, historically specific western audiences they address'.⁷⁴ It is an assessment that neatly encapsulates Dorothy Menpes' description of an Indian militia that

⁶⁹ Menpes, 1903: 206.

⁷⁰ Ibid: 204.

⁷¹ Thirty-two of the fifty-seven paintings exhibited by Sheldon-Williams feature the various Indian militias who paraded at the Durbar, and they constituted the subject-matter in sixty-five of the one hundred watercolours reproduced in Menpes' *Durbar*.

⁷² Anon: 1903: 6, 7.

⁷³ Ibid: 6.

⁷⁴ Bohrer, 2003: 10.

paraded at the Durbar. Despite the overtly pro-imperial tone of her writing, Menpes also expressed a longing for the romance and colour of the past – which she believed could still be ascribed to indigenous India - over the more prosaic and monochrome reality that, for her, typified present day western life. Describing Mortimer Menpes' painting, *Armoured Horsemen of Kishengarh*, she considered that 'these men with their coats of chain armour and metal helmets remind one of the warriors of the Middle Ages, and strike far greater terror into the hearts of their enemies than would our modern khaki soldiers'.⁷⁵ Her comparison of the Kishengarh horsemen to the temporally distant armour-clad mounted knights of the Middle Ages, and her contrast of them with their modern-day western equivalents – prosaic ranks of khaki-clad infantry - provides two of Bohrer's terms of reference. The exotic, temporally dislocated Indian militia can be situated within an historical context with meaning for a British audience. Dorothy Menpes' longing for an aesthetically pleasing past, embodied by the Indian militia, is, however, outweighed by her celebration of the present-day British imperial authority that prevails in the country. The unknown author's reverie, too, remains only temporary, as the writer's thoughts return to the imperial present to remember that the reason for 'this pageant of Asiatic feudalism' is to parade 'before the representative of a European King-Emperor'.⁷⁶ For both authors it is ultimately prosaic British authority that takes precedence over exotic, indigenous India.

Paintings produced by artists such as Menpes and Sheldon-Williams re-imported to Britain the ceremonies staged in the overseas empire and 'construct[ed] comforting and familiar ... equivalencies and affinities'.⁷⁷ The images of the 'Durbar' exhibitions can be read as celebrating a transnational social structure.⁷⁸ They undercut and domesticate frequently represented imperial concepts of otherness by depicting exotic others, such as the *Armoured Horsemen of Kishengarh*, as loyal overseas subjects demonstrating support for the British Crown, and they permit the peripheral empire to be viewed as a mirror image, albeit distorted by indigenous characteristics, of the mother country.⁷⁹

The highlighting of a transnational link - one it must be remembered which was imposed by Britain upon India – that can be observed in Menpes' and Sheldon-Williams' Durbar images ran contrary to other near-contemporary representations of empire. A further show of Indian watercolours by Menpes at the Dowdeswell Galleries in April 1905 depict an India

⁷⁵ Menpes, 1903: 182.

⁷⁶ Anon, 1903: 6.

⁷⁷ Cannadine, 2001: 122.

⁷⁸ Steven Vertovec defines transnationalism as the 'multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states'. See Vertovec, 1999: 447.

⁷⁹ See Cannadine, 2001: xix.

devoid of any explicit imperial presence, whilst R. Gwelo Goodman's Indian watercolours, exhibited at the Leicester Galleries in June 1906, were praised in the *Studio* for their strictly indigenous picturesque character resulting from a focus upon 'the strong sunlight effects of the country and the colour notes of costume'.⁸⁰ The *Studio*'s comments were echoed a few years later by H.G. Wells in a foreword written for the exhibition catalogue of William Rothenstein's Indian drawings held at the Chenil Galleries in February 1911, when he, too, admitted to having previously 'felt the wonder and splendour of [India's] colour' and 'the glittering romance in its atmosphere'.⁸¹ But, for Wells, such surface evocations of India ultimately failed as they prevented him from penetrating 'the mystery of the immense and multitudinous silence of [India's] innumerable crowds' so as to obtain 'some sense of the personalities of its people'.⁸² He sought something other than a 'conception of countless slender brown men in loin cloths as undifferentiated as the men in a boy's box of soldiers, and of city crowds in garments of white and every conceivable brilliant colour as empty of humanity as bunting in the sun'.⁸³ Wells' comments can be construed as not only criticising a picturesque distancing, but equally as revealing his own socialist position. As a member of the Fabian Art Group, established by fellow Fabian Holbrook Jackson in 1907, he was amongst those members of the Society who, as Ian Brittain has argued, considered that art could perform corrective roles in redressing capitalism's imbalances, and in actively fostering greater social democracy.⁸⁴ For Wells, Rothenstein's outline pencil drawings achieved this democratic function. They bridged the gap between the 'spectacular, marvellous [and] inaccessible' India and brought it 'into the proximity of a personal acquaintance', primarily through their focus upon the individual, now represented as an egalitarian subject than formerly as a picturesque object.⁸⁵ Rothenstein's drawing *A Thibetan Lama* eschews the

⁸⁰ *The Studio* Vol. 38, No. 160 (July 1906), 162.

⁸¹ Wells, 1911: 3.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*: 4. Judging by Flora Annie Steele's exasperation, expressed in her accompanying commentary to the reproductions of Menpes' watercolours in *India*, Wells' desire to penetrate the skin of India was not unanimously held. She commented on the lack of desire for knowledge of indigenous Indian life that was displayed by many of her countrymen and women, and singled out for criticism those Englishwomen who returned from the country 'absolutely untouched by its influence'. See Menpes, 1905: 198.

⁸⁴ See Brittain, 1982: 9, 253.

⁸⁵ Wells, 1911: 4. Rothenstein was initially seduced by India's spectacular character. On arriving in Bombay he described the 'brilliant, bustling crowd' that he was soon amongst, and he initially found Benares 'bewildering' and the 'beauty and variety of colour overwhelming'. The question he poses on seeing the city for the first time: 'How was I to choose among the thousands of subjects I saw during a single journey down the river?' suggests he aimed to escape a familiar objectifying portrayal of India and her people. See Rothenstein, 1932: 233, 242, 243. Rothenstein's portrait studies of, amongst others, *Asit Kumar Halder* and *Srijut Rabindranath Tagore*, most obviously brought Indian subjects into the realm of a 'personal acquaintance' for Wells. Many of his other figure studies were not specifically named; any degree of individualisation being achieved through title designations of occupation and location as in, for example, *Studies of young Priest*, *Chhatarpur*. See *Catalogue of Drawings*

notion of 'spectacular' India for a quiet, understated realisation of a solitary figure set against a blank background. The drawing's avoidance of superfluous background 'noise' enhances the viewer's focus upon the individual. It was, perhaps, just such a drawing that enabled Wells to forge a closer relationship with India, and make sense of the shrines and temples that he felt were too frequently depicted as little more than picturesque components of 'a different world', and it allowed him to proclaim: 'This is it. This is what I wanted to know and what I ought to have known was there'.⁸⁶

Wells' praise for an alternative expression of empire was premised upon his own psychological and political desire to 'know' the Indian people: a desire that equally underpinned Rothenstein's artistic endeavours in the country.⁸⁷ Rothenstein's memoirs are littered with his attempts to evade the western influence in India. In Bombay, though spending most of his time in the city's native quarters, he is keen to 'get away from a semi-European city'.⁸⁸ Jaipur is unattractive to him, because in plan it too closely resembles a French or Italian city, but Jodhpur is praised for the 'thoroughly Indian' character of its streets and the dress of its people.⁸⁹ It is in Benares, the magnetic site that inexorably attracted British artist-travellers, that Rothenstein discovers his idea of India's essence. He gains access to the 'Matts', a place where pilgrims and ascetics visiting Benares could stay, and here is given the opportunity to sketch these individuals. And he revels in his discovery of the different character that befalls the ghats in the afternoon and evening when they become quiet, in stark contrast to 'the crowded, noisy, passionate mornings', and so different from 'the life the tourist is shown'.⁹⁰

Despite Rothenstein's search for, and discovery of, for him, the authentic India, and his frequently expressed disregard for the western influence upon the country, he does not eschew entirely, nor does he appear to wish to, the imperial presence and influence. This is evident when he confesses to feeling grateful for 'the ample comfort of a well-ordered English

made in India by William Rothenstein (London, Chenil Gallery, 1911). A further work, *A Bengali Sannyási*, listed no. 16 in the catalogue, may well be a portrait of Narasingh Sharmi, 'a majestic bearded Bengali', who befriended Rothenstein in Benares. See Rothenstein, 1932: 243.

⁸⁶ Wells, 1911: 4. Wells' fellow Fabians, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, visited India as part of a world tour undertaken between 1911 and May 1912. Based on her first-hand experience, Beatrice Webb unfavourably compared the British ruling class to the Indians, who she considered superior 'in spirituality, in subtlety of thought and in intellectual humility'. She damningly concluded that: 'A stupid people find themselves governing an intellectual aristocracy'. Quoted in MacKenzie, 1984: 170.

⁸⁷ This political desire to 'know' the indigenous population of the colonial empire had been expressed by Ramsay MacDonald in *Labour and the Empire*. He criticised imperialists who 'seeing and seeking only surface results' could not 'see below the surface of things' so as to 'conceive the mind of the Indian or live in idea the life of the Chinaman'. MacDonald, 1907: 18.

⁸⁸ Rothenstein, 1932: 234.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*: 237, 238.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*: 244 - 245.

household' that he found in Calcutta after leaving Benares, 'wonderful as [it] was'.⁹¹ This explicit attribution of comfort, and more importantly order, to England is only one instance of his expression of British racial superiority over India. For example, despite his reverence for the 'remarkable' religious men that he met in Benares, a reverence that had developed through personal relationships, he was still capable of stigmatising India by way of generalising assumptions. He is critical of the gurus' disregard for the exploitation of visiting pilgrims, and attributes to the West a higher form of social civilisation; one which he thought would take a long time to develop in India.⁹² Such attitudes of racial superiority remained prevalent even amongst those prepared to ask critical questions of imperialism.⁹³ Ramsay MacDonald, stating in 1907 that the Labour Party did not believe in the subjection of other nationalities, still found it impossible to extricate himself from a widely-held position that it was inherent for the more developed nations to act as guardians and teachers of the less developed countries.⁹⁴ The contradiction between Rothenstein's explicitly visual representation of indigenous India and the textual account of his journey, in which he accepts, and indeed welcomes, the British imperial presence was, therefore, not untypical.

Ultimately, Rothenstein's expression of an indigenous India, though it succeeded for Wells in getting under the skin of the country, was perhaps not so distant from earlier attempts by Menpes and Sheldon-Williams to also convey the native character. The work they produced in celebration of the Durbar conveys a more explicit imperial India, but equally they remained drawn to the country's powerful and threatened indigenous aesthetic. Rothenstein, too, was fearful of the threat imperial India posed to this native aesthetic, recounting that

someday the dark interiors of Benares will be swept and garnished, marigolds will no longer be left to decay in the temples, and the bright saris of the women, the *chaddurs* and the *dhotis* of the men, and the apricot garments of the Sanyasis will be exchanged for dingy clothes of western cut, and with sanitation and universal suffrage, beauty will leave India, as she has left Europe.⁹⁵

He acknowledges the doubt in his own mind as to what originally attracted him to a characterising element of ancient India, personified, for him, in the holy men of Benares, and he remains unclear as to whether it was the religion and philosophy that he heard them

⁹¹ Ibid: 249.

⁹² Ibid: 245.

⁹³ Rothenstein criticised the lack of sensitivity shown by Britain to the intellectual and creative needs of India. He believed that if more attention was paid to these areas a more profound understanding of India and Indians would ensue. Ibid: 252.

⁹⁴ See MacDonald, 1907: 99.

⁹⁵ Rothenstein, 1932: 247.

discuss, or simply their aesthetic appeal, that moved him more, only acknowledging that whatever it was, it produced, in him, 'a profound happiness'.⁹⁶

Alongside a demand for art that conveyed a more intimate construction of empire, the recognition of formal originality within the genre also featured in contemporary criticism. P.G. Konody, reviewing E.S. Lumsden's pictures of India at the Dowdeswell Galleries in December 1912, considered his pastels 'different from the crude and highly coloured representations of India that are the outcome of many another artists' sketching tour', and conferred upon them a 'distinction and delicacy of the Whistler touch'.⁹⁷ And Lumsden's formal qualities were similarly praised by Malcolm Salaman in the *Studio* in 1914, when he highlighted the evocation of tropical sunlight in his India etchings, achieved through printing the plates with warmer-toned ink.⁹⁸ Although Lumsden's preoccupation in capturing the specific quality of Indian light was, for Salaman, a primary motive of his etching, Salaman also placed importance upon Lumsden's growing interest in recording the Indian population. Just as Wells had praised Rothenstein for going beyond a superficial expression of the picturesque diversity and colour of the Indian population, so Salaman credited Lumsden in seeking out 'the actualities ... of native life and character'.⁹⁹

This brief survey indicates how the production and reception of empire imagery, specifically that relating to India, remained unstable over three decades straddling the end of the nineteenth- and beginning of the twentieth-century, and it confirms the intrinsically heterogeneous character of the work produced by artist-travellers.¹⁰⁰ Although many pictures shared a common naturalistic visual language, and remained rooted in picturesque evocation, the nuances perceived in individual works, such as Olivier's *The Approach to Benares*, in which modernity briefly performs a disrupting role, is indicative of the diverse articulations of empire.¹⁰¹ In other instances, voices converge, as in Menpes' and Sheldon-Williams' paintings of the 1902 Durbar, where despite their representation of British imperial might, it is, paradoxically, the picturesque qualities of the event's Indian participants to which both artists are primarily drawn. Menpes' and Sheldon-William's inclination to depict indigenous India then

⁹⁶ Ibid: 244.

⁹⁷ See P. Konody 'Art & Artists: The Dowdeswell Galleries', *Observer* (8 December 1912).

⁹⁸ See 'The Etchings of E. S. Lumsden, A.R.E. by Malcolm C. Salaman', *The Studio*, Vol. 62, No. 256 (August 1914), 185 – 86.

⁹⁹ Ibid: 186.

¹⁰⁰ See Pratt, 1994: 215.

¹⁰¹ Twenty-five years after Olivier had indicated the incursion of modernity upon Benares with his description of the 'New Bridge', the city remained for Rothenstein, who visited in 1910, a 'vision of the antique world'. He departed the city by train, and as it crossed the bridge that had ignited Olivier's imagination, Rothenstein admits to being 'miserable' as he sees for 'the last time that great sweep of the river, with its rich border of temples and palaces'. See Rothenstein, 1932: 247, 249.

becomes the focus of artist-travellers in search of the picturesque. That focus is then modified as a distancing picturesque treatment is replaced, in the work of artists such as Rothenstein and Lumsden, by a greater concentration upon individual characterisation.

Informed by the diverse nature of this pre-First World War work, I now turn to those artist-travellers exhibiting at Walker's Galleries and other commercial galleries in the early twenties, and examine if their response to empire equally elicits evidence of alternative constructions.

2.3 Artist-traveller exhibitions at Walker's Galleries

Three catalogues produced by Walker's Galleries in 1922 reveal the names of Ben Browne, who exhibited watercolours of Burma and Kashmir in June; Lucy Pelling, who showed watercolours of India in May, and Charles Worsley, an exhibitor of watercolours of New Zealand in April. These three exhibitions, staged over the course of a three month period that year, offer evidence of the contrasting manner in which empire was being projected at this time. The names of Browne and Pelling barely register in a roll call of twentieth-century British artists. Indeed, the *Dictionary of British Artists, 1880 – 1940* has little to offer on them in the way of biographical detail, describing them only as watercolour landscape painters.¹⁰² This paucity of biographical information is matched by a corresponding lack of visual knowledge regarding the work they exhibited at Walker's Galleries, none of which was reproduced in contemporary art periodicals or, to my knowledge, acquired for public collections. Consequently, it is only the titles of the works listed in the exhibition catalogues that offer any clue as to how these two artists recorded specific sites of empire.

Ben Browne, it would seem, concentrated almost exclusively on depicting the Burmese and Kashmiri landscape. Titles listed in the exhibition catalogue also indicate Browne's fascination with the character of Southern Asian light – perhaps an outgrowth of the interest in light effects expressed in previous decades by British impressionists - and he recorded its affect on the same location at different times of the day.¹⁰³ Amongst the catalogue's many landscape titles appears only one figure study, *Burmese Girl*, to offer evidence that Browne produced anything other than a distanced view of empire, though the objectifying title arguably imposes its own distance. Lucy Pelling, too, recorded the differing quality of light in India,

¹⁰² See Johnson and Greutzner, 1976.

¹⁰³ Judging by the catalogue titles, Browne exhibited three pairs of work recording the same view of a location differentiated only by the time of day. An example is *The Salween, near Defile – Morning* and *The Salween, near Defile – Evening*. See *Water-Colour Drawings of Scenes in Burma and Kashmir by Ben Browne*, exh. cat. (London, Walker's Galleries, 1922).

evidenced by a number of her titles that refer to dawn or sunset. Unlike Browne, who appears to have favoured the rural landscape as subject-matter, Pelling focused more on the urban environment, and produced numerous watercolours depicting street scenes and life in the bazaar. Titles such as *Crowded Bazaar, Gwailior; Busy Bazaar, Jodhpur; Market Day* and *A Crowd in Jodhpur*, suggest a view of Indian life in which the individual continues to perform a subjugated role in essentially picturesque evocations of bustling India: a format criticised as 'empty of humanity' a decade earlier by H.G. Wells.¹⁰⁴ The titles of the work exhibited by Browne and Pelling in 1922 suggest that their paintings of Burma and India remained confined within well-established parameters. Both artists, in their depiction of Britain's South Asian empire, appear to have revisited previously explored formal and thematic territory to produce essentially distancing images that convey the region's otherness. The act of re-inscribing established conceptions of India and its environs was, as I have earlier outlined, not unusual. What is of greater relevance, in the context of this study, is that Browne and Pelling were not averse to reiterating empire's essential alterity in the work they aimed at the art-buying public in 1922. This suggests that their conception of an exotic, othered empire remained popular, despite earlier critical voices, such as Wells', who had argued against this limited and limiting view, and it shines some light upon the generally conservative character of the market that artist-travellers served.

It is to the third of the three exhibitions staged at Walker's Galleries in the spring of 1922 that we must turn to find evidence that an alternative view of empire was also in circulation at this time. In contrast to Browne and Pelling, a more extensive biographical account exists of Charles Worsley (1862 – 1923). Born in Devon, by the mid 1880s he had adopted the role of an artist-traveller and was sketching and painting in Portugal and Spain, whilst a decade later Germany, Switzerland and Majorca had become favoured destinations. In 1896 Worsley left England for Australia accompanied by his wife and eventually settled in New Zealand in 1898. Here, he quickly established his reputation as a painter, and by the 1900s had become one of the country's most popular artists through exhibiting paintings recording his European travels: work that at this time contrasted strongly with 'the constant appearance at exhibitions of stilted views of remote parts of New Zealand'.¹⁰⁵ For a British audience it was, however, Worsley's paintings of New Zealand that were showcased in two London exhibitions; at the Modern Gallery in August 1909 and at Walker's Galleries in April

¹⁰⁴ See *Water-Colour Drawings of India (Chiefly Kashmir and Central India) by (Mrs.) Lucy Pelling Sultan Ahmad*, exh. cat. (London, Walker's Galleries, 1922).

¹⁰⁵ See Neal Roberts' 'Introduction' in *C. N. Worsley*, exh. cat. (Christchurch, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, 1994), and also the biographical account of Worsley's life in the same publication.

1922.¹⁰⁶ This situation is revealing of different attitudes emanating from the centre and the peripheries of the empire. Both can be described as constituting desire. At the periphery that desire can be interpreted, judging by the popularity of Worsley's bustling European street scenes, depicted with 'colour and vigour', as a longing for a forsaken way of life.¹⁰⁷ Conversely, for an audience at the centre of empire in Britain a desire still existed for work conveying exotic people and places. Worsley's New Zealand paintings, many of which depicted the peripheral empire's untamed landscape, would, too, have played a part in fulfilling that need.

This is particularly true of the watercolours Worsley exhibited at the Modern Gallery in 1909 which earned him the praise of the *Morning Post*, who considered him an 'extremely clever [artist], especially in the rendering of snow-touched mountains ... and great clouds scattering light and shade on hill, valley and river'.¹⁰⁸ The catalogue introduces the exhibition, simply titled 'New Zealand', as 'Under the Patronage of the New Zealand Government', suggesting that Worsley's work, which, judging by the titles, primarily depicted the New Zealand landscape's extreme geological features - its mountains, gorges and glaciers - effectively carried official approval.¹⁰⁹ This may well have been due to the reputation Worsley had acquired as an exemplary exponent of New Zealand art - he had been awarded gold medals for two watercolours, *Cape Foulwind* and *Mount Cook from Hokitika*, at the New Zealand International Exhibition in Christchurch in 1906.¹¹⁰ But his work may have also elicited government approval not just for its cultural value, but for subtly conveying New Zealand's economic potential to a British audience that the administration was keen to attract as immigrants and investors. For, in addition to his views of a primordial landscape, Worsley also depicts in a number of works New Zealand's many natural harbours - a key capillary of the trade upon which the country's growth would depend.

The theme of a raw, undeveloped country emerging as a fully functioning member of a modern economic empire is even more apparent in the work Worsley exhibited at Walker's Galleries in 1922. By this date he would have been known in Britain for his New Zealand

¹⁰⁶ See *New Zealand: water-colour drawings by Charles N. Worsley*, exh. cat. (London, Modern Gallery, 1909) and *Water-Colours of New Zealand by C. N. Worsley*, exh. cat. (London, Walker's Galleries, 1922).

¹⁰⁷ Roberts, 1994: unpaginated. Ysanne Holt has detailed how work evoking the British landscape, produced by artists such as George Clausen and Philip Wilson Steer, was bought in the early twentieth-century by museums established in major Australian, New Zealand and South African cities. This work, argues Holt, served as 'archetypal reminders for colonials of the *ideal* landscapes and organic social relations of their native country and ultimate models for those they now occupied'. See Holt, 2003: 7, 155 (note 36).

¹⁰⁸ The quote from the *Morning Post* was used in the advertising of Worsley's exhibition at the Modern Gallery. See *Times*, 19 July 1909.

¹⁰⁹ See Worsley, 1909: unpaginated.

¹¹⁰ See Roberts, 1994: unpaginated.

landscapes, not only through his previous Modern Gallery exhibition, but by his inclusion in a 1916 survey, *Art of the British Empire Overseas: Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa*, in which he was described as 'a most accomplished technician, painting with facility either seascape or landscape'.¹¹¹ E.A.S. Killick, Secretary of the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, who contributed the essay on New Zealand landscape art to the survey, described the country 'as a land of contrasts ... from dense bush, deep valleys and boulder-clad streams to the open seaboard, from raupo swamps and Maori settlements to the homesteads and cultivated paddocks of the European'.¹¹² We garner evidence of the 'land of contrasts' merely from reading the titles listed in Worsley's exhibition catalogue produced by Walker's Galleries. Landscape studies titled *Franz Josef Glacier* and *Dragon's Mouth, Geyser Valley*, suggest the country's primordial character. But works titled *Partly Felled Bush, North Island* and *A Bush Road, North Island* indicate a wild landscape being tamed: a transformative process whose culmination is recorded by Worsley in paintings presumably depicting the European homesteads, such as *Sheep Mustering, Bay of Plenty* and *Driving Cattle*.¹¹³ These probable images of domesticated livestock bear testimony to a source of New Zealand's economic development, evidence of which is further confirmed by Worsley in his studies of the country's major urban centres at Napier, Dunedin, Wellington and Auckland, which mark the apogee of a civilising process engendered by imperial intervention. A painting falling within this final category is the exhibited *Symonds Street, Auckland* (Fig. 1) which shows a brightly lit urban scene, partially darkened in the foreground by dappled shade created by overhanging foliage. Within this shaded area to the left of the painting can be seen the supporting columns of a portico that is obscured by the foliage. Shadow and foliage combine to partially conceal the tentative intrusion of old-world civilisation into the new world. In the background of the painting, to the right of a small clump of trees that occupy the left middle ground, is depicted one of the many volcanoes in the Auckland region.¹¹⁴ As the eye travels down the uneven outline of primordial New Zealand it is arrested by the depiction of a church tower, decorated with Ionic half-columns and topped by an elongated pepper-pot cupola, rising above the trees that obscure a view of the buildings lining the far side of the street.¹¹⁵ Starkly outlined against

¹¹¹ See Killick 1916: 87. Charles Holme, who edited the survey in which Killick's article appeared, explains in his prefatory note that his aim was to bring to light artists who, though well-known in the Dominions, had yet to enter the British public's consciousness. One of Worsley's watercolours, *Otira Gorge*, was reproduced in the volume.

¹¹² Ibid: 85.

¹¹³ See Worsley, 1922: unpaginated.

¹¹⁴ Within a 20 kilometre radius of Auckland are forty-nine volcanoes. See Smith E. and Allen S. *Auckland Volcanic Field*. <http://www.gns.cri.nz> – Accessed on 29/06/09.

¹¹⁵ Worsley depicts St. Andrew's First Presbyterian Church. Designed by Walter Robertson, it opened in 1850. Its tower, added in 1882, is not dissimilar in its basic design to that employed by Sir John Soane at St Peter's

the sky, the painting's most prominent architectural structure, replete with classical references, bears unequivocal testimony to the civilising process that New Zealand has undergone. To the right of the church tower, and at the top edge of the painting's shaded foreground, is depicted a red pillar box in bold primary colour, its visual impact accorded greater prominence by a surrounding light ochre tone that represents the fall of sunlight onto the wide expanse of road. This symbol of sophisticated urban living, one that could have been transplanted from any British town or city, terminates the painting's visual narrative which juxtaposes the empire's refined and undeveloped elements. Further, it visually and metaphorically connects the peripheral empire to its metropolitan centre, and bestows upon New Zealand a reassuring familiarity that helps dispel fear of the otherness that lingers in the background of the painting.¹¹⁶

Worsley's view of Auckland reveals a serene urban environment – personified by the two foreground figures engaged in leisurely conversation – in which man's intervention is presented as barely impinging upon nature's fecund resources. It is nature, epitomised by the overhanging foliage in the foreground, which obscures not only the portico to the left of the picture, but also encompasses the distant church tower within its ambit, that dominates the picture plane. Equally, the bay and mountain that close the view down the street remind the viewer of the city's proximity to a dominant and wilder natural environment. The painting's few diminutive figures – only seven can be counted within Worsley's broad encompassing view – have minimal impact, their presence largely masked by shadowed areas. Through his depiction of widely-spaced figure groups, a wide expanse of near traffic-free road, and generally low-lying architecture, Worsley reveals an environment in which space has not been compressed by the exigencies of urban living. The result is a conception of Dominion life that could be perceived by a British audience at this time 'as a more wholesome version of society than could be found in the metropolis'.¹¹⁷

In contrast to Worsley's 1914 painting of New Zealand city life, Robert Bevan's near-contemporary painting of a London street scene, *From the Artist's Window* (c. 1915) (Fig. 2), despite sharing similar compositional features, conveys a different, arguably more negative, impression of urban living. Bevan's wartime view of Adamson Road in the north London

Walworth in 1823 and at Holy Trinity, Marylebone in 1824. See <http://www.standrewschurch.org.nz> – Accessed on 29/06/09 and Hibbert, 1988: 86, 206.

¹¹⁶ By 1914, the date of *Symonds Street, Auckland*, nearly one-third of the empire's white population was living in the Dominions of Australia, Canada, South Africa and New Zealand. Julia Bush has argued that for early twentieth-century imperialists 'the strength and moral worth of the Empire lay emphatically with its British minority', and that imperialists sought to construct a 'Greater Britain' in the Dominions. See Bush, 2000: 6. 9.

¹¹⁷ Cannadine, 2001: 12.

suburb of Swiss Cottage, where he lived with his wife and family from the early 1900s to the end of his life, was one of a number of street scenes that he painted in this part of London during the war years.¹¹⁸ Bevan (1865 – 1925) had earlier been a member of the Camden Town Group, and in 1914, along with Harold Gilman and Charles Ginner, formed the Cumberland Market Group, which perpetuated themes that were developed in the earlier group.¹¹⁹ David Peters Corbett has argued that, amongst other things, the urban scenes produced by the Camden Town painters are marked by ‘the curious absence of crowds, bustle, or sometimes even evident human actors’.¹²⁰ It is a statement that largely serves in describing Bevan’s London street scenes which are generally sparsely populated, although *From the Artist’s Window* somewhat stands apart in its depiction of twelve figures within the scene’s limited vista.

Compositionally, the left hand side of *From the Artist’s Window* is marked, as is *Symonds Street, Auckland*, by the depiction of foliage, though it does not intrude into the picture plane to the extent seen in Worsley’s painting. Bevan, too, depicts a tree-lined street, though his skeletal trees, denuded of leaves, are, in contrast to those shown by Worsley, dominated by overbearing architecture that additionally blots out a view of much of the sky. And Bevan also shows horse-drawn carriages and wagons, and what appears to be the rear view of a motor vehicle exiting the scene to the left, though more than Worsley. The figures Bevan depicts walking on the pavement, the ‘uncelebrated’ and ‘unglamorous’ people that populated Camden Town-type painting, are more numerous and closer-spaced than those seen in *Symonds Street, Auckland*, their demeanour more urgent as, head-bowed, they battle the coldness of the grey wintry day evoked in the painting.¹²¹ When viewed alongside each other, Worsley’s projection of New Zealand’s urban life, with its pleasant climate, its civilised

¹¹⁸ See Bevan, 1965: 13. Other Bevan street scenes dating from this time include *Houses in Sunlight*, 1915, Oil, 20 x 24 in. (this is also a view of Adamson Road and a squared preparatory drawing in coloured chalks and wash is held by Cecil Higgins Art Gallery, Bedford); *Queen’s Road, St John’s Wood*, 1918, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, Oil, 50 x 60cm. and *A Street Scene, Belsize Park*, 1917, Museum of London, Oil, 75 x 90cm.

¹¹⁹ For a history of the Cumberland Market Group, see Yeates, 2008: 41 – 46.

¹²⁰ Corbett, 2008: 33.

¹²¹ Harrison, 1994: 38. Information included in John Rimmer’s unpublished essay ‘Robert Bevan, Swiss Cottage and Urban Landscape’, 1993 (held in the *From the Artist’s Window* history file in Leicester Museum and Art Gallery), provides an opportunity to speculate as to the background of the ‘uncelebrated’ figures that populate Bevan’s painting. Rimmer cites some of the occupations listed in the 1911 census of those residing in Hampstead, of which Adamson Road was part. From a total working population of 22,308, in addition to 770 ‘Artists and Sculptors’, there were 13,734 domestic female servants, 1,515 merchants, 1,790 commercial clerks, 898 bankers and 285 male domestic servants.

ambience, and open space, contrasts favourably to the climatically harsher and spatially more claustrophobic atmosphere conveyed in Bevan's London street scene.¹²²

Symonds Street, Auckland, with its evocation of civilised urbanity, marks the culmination of a narrative that can be deduced from the titles listed in Worsley's exhibition catalogue. These read as chapter headings of an historical account that traces New Zealand's development under imperial rule, as it is transformed from wilderness to economically productive land. The narrative that emerges is historically important, because it pre-empts a similar British Government-endorsed representation of New Zealand that appeared two years later. In the 1924 British Empire Exhibition Official Guide emphasis is placed upon New Zealand's economic potential which is derived from an ideal climate and an abundance of raw materials. Readers are informed that the New Zealand Pavilion is decorated externally with scenes of timber-felling, sheep-shearing, milking, harvesting and fruit-picking that are typical to the country.¹²³ The land of opportunity, implied in Worsley's visual record, is explicitly stated in the guide. New Zealand is described as 'extraordinarily progressive', where 'the climate is delightful and very healthy, the scenery and vegetation lovely, and life in general easy and agreeable'.¹²⁴

Worsley's representation of empire departs from the picturesque and distancing view that seems to characterise Browne's and Pelling's work. Although a number of Worsley's landscapes undoubtedly show the peripheral empire's otherness, such images are countered by pictures depicting economic development, initiated by Britain's imperial intervention, which undercut New Zealand's alterity, and imbue it with a reassuring, though arguably idealised, familiarity. This projection of the empire's economic potential corresponds to contemporary socio/economic constructions in which the peripheries were viewed as a rich source of raw materials, and as a site to which the metropole's manufactured products and excess population could be exported. And it echoes similar more obviously imperialistic projections of

¹²² Bevan's street scenes received critical acclaim for their formal characteristics when first exhibited. *Houses in Sunlight*, shown in the London Group exhibition in June 1916, was praised by Frank Rutter in the *Sunday Times*, and *The New Witness* commended Bevan's 'quiet colouring and the rather prim lines of his composition ... all used with effect'. Quoted in Stenlake, 2008: 148.

¹²³ See *The British Empire Exhibition 1924 Official Guide* (London, 1924), 29. The Exhibition Guide describes the pavilion's furniture and interior fittings as being made from native timbers (29), a resource which had also provided subject-matter for Worsley in *Cedar Trees, Mount Egmont*, a painting included in the 1922 exhibition. See Worsley, 1922: unpaginated.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*: 30. The titles of two Worsley watercolours, *Nature's Wash Tub* and *Hot Waterfall, Wairakei*, hint at the health-inducing properties of the New Zealand landscape. See Worsley, 1922: unpaginated.

empire produced slightly earlier by artist-travellers.¹²⁵ Two years prior to Worsley's exhibition, Dorothea Vyvyan's watercolours of Natal and Zululand, exhibited at Walker's Galleries in June and July 1920, similarly conveyed the peripheral empire as an exploitable economic entity attractive to would-be emigrants.

Born in 1879, Vyvyan studied at the Slade between 1898 and 1899,¹²⁶ also acquiring further training at Westminster School of Art and Frank Brangwyn's London School of Art, which opened in 1904.¹²⁷ In 1910 she travelled to Natal, where she kept a diary which records her account of the region. Early in her memoir, Vyvyan prioritises South Africa as a site of colonisation over a more conventional conception of empire as the location of aesthetically picturesque landscape. She recounts an overheard conversation in a station waiting room between an MP and a farmer. The latter complains about the suffering, brought on by uncompensated losses, that men such as himself have endured since the end of the Boer War. Siding with the farmer's plight, Vyvyan firmly nails her imperialist colours to the mast, considering that the 'British colonist has been very badly treated by the Home Government'.¹²⁸ Later in her account, when seeing the church and mission station at Rorke's Drift, she equates the imperial mission in South Africa to a 'struggle for progress and civilisation': a civilising mission which, after watching children playing football on part of the former battlefield, she considers 'had taken root'.¹²⁹ Further evidence of Vyvyan's support for Britain's imperial objectives is found in the preface that she wrote for the exhibition catalogue. Here, she promotes South Africa as an ideal home for potential emigrants, highlighting its 'wonderful' climate and 'wonderfully hospitable' people. It is a country where, she continues, 'with an income of £300 or £400 a year one can live ... much more comfortably than in England' as 'things are cheaper and servants easier to get, if one does not mind black faces'.¹³⁰ Vyvyan conveys an impression of South Africa as a place where land and people can readily be exploited for the benefit of enterprising settlers, and states, unequivocally, that the intention of her work is to express the reality of the greater part of the country, its 'rolling plains dotted about with plantations and fields', and dispel a limited perception of Natal and

¹²⁵ An Overseas Settlement Department was established as part of the Colonial Office in 1918 as a result of findings produced by the Dominions' Royal Commission. It had argued that emigration to the Dominions would play a role in post-war reconstruction. See Bush, 2000: 196.

¹²⁶ University College London, Records Office.

¹²⁷ See Dorothea Vyvyan Papers, Campbell Collection of the University of Kwazulu Natal, South Africa – henceforth Vyvyan Papers.

¹²⁸ 'Accounts of travel in Natal and Zululand, 1910 – 1912', Vyvyan Papers, File 1, p. 2.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 9, 10. Vyvyan accounts for the African children playing association football 'by the fact that the Bishop and Davies who preceded him in charge of the Mission are Old Carthusians!'

¹³⁰ Vyvyan, 1920: 1.

Zululand as a picturesque region of 'cliffs and crags'. Hence, when she refers to an 'exquisite valley, flanked, perhaps, with great cliffs, beautiful at all times', such as that depicted in *Champagne Hostel Valley, The Last of the Setting Sun*, (Fig. 3), it is also described more prosaically as an ideal place in which to shelter cattle in winter. Her watercolours recording the changing character of the land, for example, the burning of old grass in September and the luxuriant growth of the new crop that follows, serve as enticing visual advertisements in support of her 'hope that more people will come out from the homeland, not only to see, but to settle in our beautiful and fertile country'.¹³¹

Vyvyan's was not the only exhibition staged at Walker's Galleries in 1920 to convey empire in more obviously imperialistic terms. In October and November an exhibition of oils and watercolours of Newfoundland by Alfonso Toft (1871 – 1964) similarly represented the colonial empire as a site of burgeoning economic development.¹³² An article in the *Times* referred to Toft as a pioneer - 'the first British artist of note to select that country as his subject' - and described how he was largely restricted by the heavily forested terrain from painting the picturesque views of open spaces and distant prospects that generally characterised his landscapes – work such as *Near Shap, Cumberland*, (Fig. 4).¹³³ The character of the Newfoundland landscape did not appear to deter Toft and he is quoted in the *Times* article as being struck by the 'wonderful clearness of [Newfoundland's] atmosphere' which he found 'extremely stimulating [for] my work'.¹³⁴ Of equal interest, especially for a study contextualising artists' evocation of empire at this time, is a further view that he expresses in the article. He describes the Newfoundland town of Grand Falls as a place where twelve years previously 'there was not a shack or habitation of any kind'. Now, he continues, it has a population that exceeds 5,000, leading him to conclude that this 'is a country with a future'.¹³⁵ So although picture titles in Walker's Galleries' catalogue, such as *Icebergs: Coast of Newfoundland* and *The Gorge below Grand Falls*, suggest that in common with many of his peers Toft too produced views of empire's alterity, other titles, such as *The Dam at Grand Falls*, *Logs on the Exploit River*, and *The Great Paper Mills: Grand Falls*, reveal

¹³¹ Ibid: 1, 2.

¹³² Toft trained at the Birmingham Schools of Art and at the Royal College of Art. During the course of a long exhibiting career (1892 – 1940) he exhibited work at a number of London's commercial galleries, including the Chenil, Goupil and Walker's Galleries, as well as the Royal Institute of Oil Painters. See Johnson and Greutzner, 1976: 504.

¹³³ 'A British Artist in Newfoundland: Mr Toft's Pictures', *Times* (25 October 1920), 8.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

that he also depicted an explicit imperial intervention.¹³⁶ Britain's oldest and poorest colony was being transformed by that intervention; Toft's work records that process.¹³⁷

So as to shine greater light upon Toft's visual record of empire it is necessary to examine in greater detail the circumstances that lay behind its production. If the *Times* article is to be believed, Toft could be numbered amongst those romanticised artist-travellers who continued to traverse the globe in search of previously little-recorded landscapes and people. The truth is somewhat different, as the prefatory note in the exhibition catalogue makes clear. P.G. Konody, the note's author, reveals that Toft was in Newfoundland as the guest of Lord Rothermere, and that 'he was given ample opportunity for seeing the rapid development of the great industry started in the Dominion by English newspaper enterprise'.¹³⁸ His work ultimately bears visual testimony to the paper production enterprise at Grand Falls, Newfoundland initiated by the press barons Alfred and Harold Harmsworth, the Lords Northcliffe and Rothermere, respectively.¹³⁹ Northcliffe, the driving force behind the project, subscribed to a view prevalent in the early twentieth-century that Britain had a moral obligation to develop the colonies.¹⁴⁰ He took an active role in overseeing every facet of Grand Falls' development, and sought to run the town 'on lines which will not only ensure a profit, but will also promote the welfare and well-being of the people engaged in this large undertaking'.¹⁴¹ Toft's Newfoundland paintings can be viewed as contributing to the aggrandisement of Northcliffe's imperial venture in bestowing upon the press baron's project a cultural stamp of approval. The work itself is then validated, by dint of Konody's generous praise in the exhibition catalogue's prefatory note and in the review in the Northcliffe-owned *Times*, resulting in a perfectly

¹³⁶ Toft exhibited thirty-one paintings of Newfoundland at Walker's Galleries, nine of which, based solely on a reading of their titles, record the imperial intervention at Grand Falls.

¹³⁷ See Taylor, 1996: 92

¹³⁸ Konody, 1920: 1.

¹³⁹ By 1920 Lord Northcliffe controlled 110 titles in his publishing empire, including the *Daily Mail*, which he had founded in 1896, the *Daily Mirror*, founded in 1903, and the *Times*, acquired in 1908. By the early 1900s Northcliffe was already spending £180,000 a year on newsprint from Scandinavia, a figure that had increased by a third because of inflation caused by the Boer War. Fearful of spiralling costs and a threat to his supply from increased political tension in Europe, Northcliffe sought an alternative source for his newsprint. On 7 January 1905 the Harmondsworth brothers formed the Anglo Newfoundland Development Company through which they controlled a holding of 3,100 square miles. Construction of the paper mill at Grand Falls began in June 1907, and it eventually opened on 9 October 1909. See Brendon, 1982: 113, 119, 122 and Taylor, 1996: 92, 94.

¹⁴⁰ This view had been expressed officially by Joseph Chamberlain as Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1895, though he argued for greater state intervention in achieving this aim. But, as Anne Phillips has argued, whether achieved through public or private finance: 'The consensus in the last years of the nineteenth-century was for European capital as the agent of change', and that 'capitalist relations were taken as the criterion of progress'. Phillips, 1989: 66.

¹⁴¹ Northcliffe to Mayson Beeton, President of the Anglo-Newfoundland Development Company. Quoted in Taylor, 1996: 96.

squared circle that sees Northcliffe's imperial venture recorded in pictures deemed to 'have historic as well as artistic interest'.¹⁴²

Toft's recording of Newfoundland's economic transformation, engendered by Northcliffe's imperial intervention, seemingly resulted in a corresponding transformation in his own work. Konody initially describes Toft as a painter 'who loves the tender, lyrical aspects of Nature, which he interprets in adequately quiet and tender notes of colour', producing 'English landscapes dominated by atmosphere and associations' that are 'daydreams of a beautiful reality'.¹⁴³ Konody's remarks suggest that Toft's English landscapes can be tied to a late nineteenth-century and Edwardian landscape tradition, which, Kenneth McConkey has argued, resulted less in the production of 'snapshots of particular places' and more in deliberate constructions designed 'to appeal to the memory'.¹⁴⁴ McConkey adds that landscapes could 'function as a soporific to the increasingly disconsolate labouring masses by providing a vision of the heaven to which they might aspire'.¹⁴⁵ English landscapes, titled *An Autumn Afternoon* and *Old Mill and Cottages*, exhibited by Toft at Walker's Galleries alongside his Newfoundland paintings, suggest that his work provided an opportunity for viewers to imaginatively retreat into idealised English rural idylls, such as that conveyed in *Country Lane* (Fig. 5).¹⁴⁶

Konody considered that Toft's visit to Newfoundland 'acted upon him like an invigorating cold bath' which removed 'the last trace of somnolence' as he found himself in 'a land for work and not for dreaming', resulting in 'a decisive vigour of statement which his brush had not known in the peaceful rural charm and romance of the old country'.¹⁴⁷ We certainly see evidence of this more vigorous handling in his Newfoundland painting *The River below the Falls* (Fig 6) when it is compared to *Country Lane*. Although the latter work provides instances of relatively dynamic brushwork – in the small section of impasto visible in the top left corner; in the representation of the foliage on the tree to the left of the lane; and in the treatment of the hedgerow that runs into the left foreground – these pronounced expressions

¹⁴² Konody, 1920: 1. Konody did not contribute to any of the other Walker's Galleries catalogues of work depicting the empire. Indeed, few of their catalogues relevant to this genre include an introduction. Konody's role in writing the prefatory note for Toft's catalogue may well have been due to his position as a Northcliffe employee: he was art critic of the *Daily Mail*.

¹⁴³ Konody, 1920: 1.

¹⁴⁴ McConkey, 2002: 84.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Toft, 1920: 3, 4.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. The *Observer's* unnamed critic (though this may well have been Konody who regularly reviewed exhibitions for the paper) also comments on the transformation in Toft's style apparent in the Newfoundland paintings, highlighting a new 'invigorating and stimulating directness and breadth of handling' which has 'invested [his] artist's brush with unwonted vigour'. See 'Pictures of Newfoundland', *Observer*, (31 October 1920), 10.

of painterliness are not the norm, rather they are aberrations that do little to disrupt the overall quietude of the picture's surface. Toft is seemingly compelled by his evocation of a tranquil and idyllic rural scene to employ correspondingly restrained brushwork. Such a constraint is lifted when he arrives in Newfoundland. The 'wonderful clearness' that he attributes to the colony effectively erases, for him, well-established ideas of what landscape, and specifically English landscape, should express. Landscapes depicting the peripheral empire are, for him, not similarly obliged to function as images conveying an imagined 'soporific' retreat. They can, however, evoke alternative notions of escape, for instance, to a wild and untamed frontier: an evocation that can be expressed in a suitably more dynamic painterly fashion. In *The River below the Falls* Toft produces a tumultuous sky through aggressively juxtaposed tones executed in vigorous brushwork; expresses the white foaming mass of the river occupying the middle ground in impasto, whilst in the foreground depicts, almost cavalierly, in loosely-daubed strokes of paint, the forbidding rocks littering the river that imperil the lives of those who venture onto it. No longer aberrations, these expressions of painterly dynamism now characterise the entire surface of a picture that reveals the raw, threatening, but also invigorating, atmosphere of the colonial empire.

The language Konody uses to describe the more energised painting style of Toft's Newfoundland paintings bears remarkable similarities to that employed by Lord Curzon in a 1907 lecture, when he, too, ascribed to the outskirts of empire an 'ennobling and invigorating stimulus' that could 'counter the corroding ease ... of Western civilisation'.¹⁴⁸ *The River below the Falls* offers evidence that Toft responded in his painting to the charged environment of the colonial periphery by abandoning the quieter brushwork that characterised his English landscapes for a more energetic and assertive facture. Konody, however, did not attribute this change solely to the invigorating stimulus of Newfoundland's natural environment, but credited the imperial intervention in the colony, in the form of the 'gigantic' mills that featured in a number of paintings, as equally visually stimulating for Toft as the 'seething, roaring waterfalls' depicted in other works.¹⁴⁹ An awe-inspiring imperial intrusion is, therefore, deemed worthy of celebration, as on a par with the magnificence of primordial nature that continued to characterise many artists' (Toft included) impressions of empire.

C.J.W.L. Lee has argued that early twentieth-century imperialists, such as Curzon, drew upon the primitive vitality of the imperial frontiers in their quest for England's national regeneration. It was through taming and harnessing these colonial boundaries that

¹⁴⁸ Lord Curzon *Frontiers* (Oxford, 1908) 56, 57, quoted in Lee, 2003: 80.

¹⁴⁹ 'Pictures of Newfoundland', *Observer*, (31 October 1920), 10.

imperialists believed 'the lost vitality of a modern and industrial England could be recaptured'.¹⁵⁰ Evidence of this harnessing process, of the exertion of control over the colonial frontier, is apparent in Toft's *Low Tide near an Estuary, Newfoundland* (Fig 7). The picture shows a peaceful river scene, with a handful of huts lining the shoreline to suggest a human presence within the landscape. The landscape is inhabited, we assume, because of its productive capacity - demonstrated by the sawn logs shown drifting towards the shore on the tide - and we are reminded of the region's abundance of timber and future source of wealth by the trees that protrude into the picture in the foreground, and by a dark mass on the distant shoreline that may well be read as dense forest. The control of the natural environment manifest in the picture is mirrored in Toft's control of his brush. Although the picture retains elements of undoubted vigorous, even loose, brushwork, seen in the depiction of the foreshore in the foreground of the painting, generally it is marked more by a tighter, more restrained, though no less decisive, application of paint. Konody's praise for the greater assertiveness of Toft's Newfoundland paintings fits snugly within a discourse regarding the regenerative capacity of empire.

The coverage Toft's exhibition received in the serious press stands in stark contrast to the neglect shown the Browne, Pelling, Worsley and Vyvyan shows.¹⁵¹ Newspapers, such as the *Times* and *Manchester Guardian*, failed to review any of these artists' exhibitions; a situation which has contributed to their erasure from the public memory. There was, then, in the early 1920s, an uneven critical response to artist-travellers' paintings: a genre which, by this date, was deemed to offer little in the way of formally progressive work.¹⁵² This is clearly illustrated by the reception accorded an exhibition of Robert Burns' watercolours of Morocco held at the Leicester Galleries in April 1921. As was the gallery's common practice, Burns' show was one of two that were simultaneously staged. Occupying their other room were Wyndham Lewis' 'Tyros and Portraits'; an exhibition extensively reviewed in both the *Times* and *Observer*. In the *Times* review Burns' paintings are granted a mere six lines at the end of

¹⁵⁰ Lee, 2003: 125.

¹⁵¹ This disparity in coverage may be explained by the fact that Toft's work was probably more widely-known than that of Browne, Pelling and Vyvyan (Worsley's work, as I have indicated had been critically acclaimed in the press and other publications). Toft had exhibited with the Royal Institute of Painters from 1898, being elected a member in 1917; had exhibited at the Royal Academy from 1901 and had had a one-man exhibition at the Bruton Gallery in 1906. See Coombs, 1996: 37.

¹⁵² Although ignoring these exhibitions, the serious press did review artist-traveller shows at this time. The *Times*, for example, reviewed Hilda May Gordon's exhibition of watercolours of Palestine at the Forum Club, London in December 1921. Somewhat typically the writer focused on the artist's travels and the historic biblical sites she recorded, rather than the formal character of the painting. See *Times*, 19 December 1921, 8. Conversely, a *Times* review of Charles Collings' paintings of the Canadian Rockies, exhibited at the Carroll Gallery, London in June 1924, untypically emphasised the paintings' formal qualities - 'simple and highly-wrought into a "precious" quality of both colour and surface' - over their subject-matter. *Times*, 17 June 1924, 22.

an article primarily devoted to a discussion of Lewis' work, and then they are effectively damned with faint praise. Their description as skilful 'tourist impressions of unfamiliar scenes' carries the implication that though Burns records a Morocco generally unknown to the West, his observations remain trapped within a superficial gaze which results in work lacking in both formal development and an expression of original vision.¹⁵³ P.G. Konody, reviewing Lewis' show in the *Observer*, similarly gave only sparse attention to Burns' work at the conclusion of his article. He, too, considered that Burns conveyed 'a Morocco unknown to the tourist and untouched by European civilisation', and though more positive in his praise of the paintings, describing them as 'fresh' and 'animated', he felt them generally 'insipid' in comparison to Lewis's 'spicy fare'.¹⁵⁴

The small space accorded to Burns' work in the reviews of both the *Times* and *Observer* is an indication of the limited interest that critics had for topographical painting in the early 1920s.¹⁵⁵ However, as I have outlined in the introduction to this chapter, the art-buying public displayed a more positive response to artist-travellers' work. Unlikely to receive much in the way of critical acclaim, artist-travellers were at least compensated by the likelihood of making sales, if the continuing display of their work in some of the London galleries is taken as a measure of its commercial success. Reviews of artist-travellers' work, when they did occur, often focused less on the formal character of the painting, which generally remained naturalistic, and more on the hardships endured by the artists on their travels. Consequently, the clichéd image of the romantic and intrepid artist-traveller, armed only with a sketchbook and tin of watercolours, endured into the early 1920s. For instance, a review in the *Times* on 30 April 1921 of Richard and Sydney Carline's paintings of the Middle East reported, breathlessly, on the adventures that befell the artists as they travelled through the region:

Northwards through Palestine the artists used a captured German motor-car for some of the way, until the car broke down in the swamps ... Once when they were about ten miles from Nablus they were stranded at nightfall, and had to find

¹⁵³ *Times*, 14 April 1921: 8. Andrew Stephenson summarises the critical response to Nevinson's 'Paris Scenes' exhibited at the Leicester Galleries in October 1928, and argues that they were praised 'for penetrating behind the superficialities of the tourist gaze to the heart of the travel encounter'. See Stephenson, 2003: 84.

¹⁵⁴ P. G. Konody 'Art and Artists: Mr Wyndham Lewis's "Tyros and Portraits"', *Observer*, 10 April 1921: 8. Prior to the opening of Burns' exhibition his work was discussed by E. A. Taylor in the *Studio* who painted a romanticised picture of the artist-traveller venturing into areas in which 'few artists, if any, had before penetrated'. Taylor considered that in the numerous drawings Burns produced 'nothing essential escaped his brush or pencil', though his definition of 'essential' is one that confirms the East as exotic and picturesque. See Taylor, 1921: 87 – 90.

¹⁵⁵ A short review in the *Times* of Miss A. F. Wood's 'Paintings of Palestine' at Walker's Galleries in February 1926 negatively characterises topographical work in general. Wood's watercolours are criticised for 'never getting beyond a certain level attained by most topographical painters', and though her oil paintings are more positively received – 'a certain felicity in colour' – it is only this that 'raises them above pictures which are interesting only because of their subject'. *Times*, 9 February 1926: 9.

their way to the town in the dark on foot ... Bands of Beduin marauders threatened them from time to time, even firing at them from behind cover during the daytime on several occasions.¹⁵⁶

The 'fixed' perception of the artist-traveller, but more importantly the general critical neglect of the genre, meant that with a few exceptions, such as the review in the *Times* of Toft's work, there was a failure on the part of many critics to recognise the changing response of some artists to empire at this time. Although picturesque evocations of the peripheral empire's otherness proliferated and endured, even amongst those artists producing an alternative conception, what can be seen in the early 1920s is a limited, though historically significant, representation of empire as an economic entity. This is evident in the work that Toft, Vyvyan and Worsley exhibited at Walker's Galleries between 1920 and 1922: work that in its highlighting of the peripheral empire's abundant natural resources can arguably be viewed as unofficial propaganda for the political conception of an economic empire.

2.4 Imagining Mesopotamia: the work of Richard and Sydney Carline

The political fallout from the First World War resulted in an increase in the size of Britain's empire, and by the early 1920s it accounted for twenty-three percent of the world's land surface. Mandated territories, such as Mesopotamia and Palestine, acquired after the break-up of the Ottoman Empire, became 'de facto colonies', and destinations for her artist-travellers.¹⁵⁷ Two such artists were Richard and Sydney Carline who exhibited paintings of Mesopotamia in two shows staged in 1920 and 1921.¹⁵⁸ The first of these exhibitions, "The East": Egypt, Palestine, Mesopotamia, Persia, India', opened at the Goupil Gallery in March 1920, and the remnants of this show transferred in May 1921 to the City of Manchester Art

¹⁵⁶ Anon, 1921: 7.

¹⁵⁷ Mesopotamia was the ancient Greek name given to the fertile region that lay between two major rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates. Christopher Catherwood provides a concise historical overview of the region up to the outbreak of the First World War. See Catherwood, 2004: 19 – 40. At the San Remo Peace Conference in April 1920 Britain was granted protective mandates for Palestine and Mesopotamia. The system of Mandates, an outcome of the formation of the League of Nations in 1919, had three classifications to reflect the differing levels of civilisation, determined by the western nations, of the 'world's backward members'. Mesopotamia was deemed to merit the highest form of Mandate as one of the communities which had 'reached a stage of development where their existence as independent nations can be provisionally recognised subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory Power until such time as they are able to stand alone'. See *Times*, 6 June 1919: 14. For an account of the British Mandate in Iraq, see Tripp, 2000: 30 – 65. Niall Ferguson uses the term 'de facto colonies' to describe the mandated territories acquired by Britain at the end of the First World War. See Ferguson N. 'A World on the Brink of Violence' in 'The Second World War, Day 1: Origins', 10, *Guardian*, 5 September 2009.

¹⁵⁸ Sydney Carline (1889 – 1926) studied at the Slade from 1907 to 1910 and later at Tudor-Hart's Academie de la Peinture in Paris. Richard Carline (1896 – 1980) also trained at Tudor-Hart's in Paris in 1913, at the Academie's new Hampstead address from 1913 to 1915, and at the Slade between 1921 and 1924. See <http://collections.iwm.org> – Accessed on 4/09/09.

Gallery where the work was exhibited under the title 'Lands of the Bible'.¹⁵⁹ The Carlines' pictures resulted from their employment as war artists by the Air Force Section of the Imperial War Museum (IWM) which sent the brothers to the Middle East in 1919 'to record ... their impressions of the Empire's activities in the air'.¹⁶⁰ In Egypt, their first point of call, after taking flights along the Suez Canal and the Sinai Desert neither brother considered the region conducive to pictorial representation: an indication of the problem they faced in transforming factual events and material into works of art.¹⁶¹ Moving on to Palestine in January 1919 they made sketches recording the region's air battles during flights over Jerusalem, the Dead Sea and Gaza before arriving in Mesopotamia in June 1919, where Sydney Carline believed that their earlier work would enable them to quickly complete their aerial views of the country as 'our experience of the East in Palestine enables us to know what to look for'.¹⁶² Carline's knowledge of knowing 'what to look for' resulted in two antithetical views of Mesopotamia; one that fractures and the other that affirms the manner in which empire largely continued to be depicted in the early 1920s.

Sydney Carline's *Flying over the Desert at Sunset* (Fig. 8) was one of the few oil paintings that he worked-up from sketches made in Mesopotamia.¹⁶³ Depicted, beneath the setting sun's explosive light, is a monotonous and barren desert landscape, puddled by a lake's glistening surface, and cut by zigzagging rivers. Carline emphasises the vast emptiness of the landscape which reaches to the horizon, by including in the painting's foreground a small bi-plane hurriedly escaping the unwelcoming environment. The viewer looks down, as if sitting in that plane, upon the opaque surface of the desert, defined in the foreground by

¹⁵⁹ Copies of both exhibition catalogues are held in the National Art Library, London.

¹⁶⁰ Wood, 1920: unpaginated. The Carlines worked for the IWM from 1918 until 1920. Initially, as Richard Carline recalled, they were assigned to paint 'subjects relating to the air war' in Europe, Richard in France and Sydney in Italy, and both produced 'air views' based on observations made from aircraft. See Carline, 1973: 6 - 7. The brothers received their service pay as war artists and an additional £77 per annum from the IWM to cover studio rent and the cost of artist materials. See Colonel MacLean, President, Air Force Section, IWM to Secretary, IWM, 18 July 1918: IWM, First World War Artists Archive: Richard Carline 81/3 (hereafter R. Carline Archive). After demobilisation the Carlines were paid £700 per annum to paint for the IWM, which covered everything except the framing of pictures. See Memo dated 12 December 1918: R. Carline Archive.

¹⁶¹ 'We managed to each include a flight along the Suez Canal and the Sinai Desert which did not appear very favourable pictorially, though we will again consider it when we do our Egyptian tour'. R. and S. Carline to General MacLean, 26 January 1919: R. Carline Archive.

¹⁶² Sydney Carline to MacLean, 25 June 1919: IWM, First World War Artists Archive, Sydney Carline 73/3 (hereafter S. Carline Archive). In a letter to MacLean in July, Carline listed three views of Baghdad, Kut, and Samara that Richard intended to comprise his Mesopotamia work, and the planned subjects of his four paintings – A pilot approaching his objective over Hit; A dog-fight over Kirkuck; An aircraft returning in the evening and An aircraft dropping food on Kut during the siege. See Sydney Carline to MacLean, 11 July 1919: S. Carline Archive.

¹⁶³ After their return to Britain the Carlines completed only seven large oils from the numerous sketches they made in the Middle East. See Carline, 1973: 7. The Carlines' work kept by the IWM was selected by Alfred Yockney, an art writer who dealt with the administration of war artists' work. See Malvern, 2004: 38 and Yockney to Lt. Insall, 23 January 1920: R. Carline Archive.

brown daubs of paint that lighten in tone towards the picture's horizon. There appears to be an indiscriminate character to these painted marks. They blemish the picture surface, and conceal, rather than reveal, information about the depicted desert on which we gaze. Are the darker tones that disrupt the flatness of the painted surface indicative of recesses in the land's surface? Is the dark tone that shadows the river's course suggestive of vegetation growing in more fertile ground? We can speculate as to this being so, but cannot say categorically. Stripped of extensive topographical detail, Carline depicts a landscape that is largely unknowable, one that corresponds to the European battlefields of the First World War that he had also viewed from above and described as 'just bare desolated ground'.¹⁶⁴ His choice of Mesopotamia's empty desert landscape as subject-matter, and his rejection of a more typical picturesque or topographical interpretation of the country, was, perhaps, born out of his experience of the European battlefields. As Richard Carline recalled, for those younger artists who had experienced the war, 'the bare stark crudity of the landscape constituted the new visual material'.¹⁶⁵ Landscape, as far as Richard Carline was concerned, now lacked the clearly decipherable detail that had previously been reproduced in topographical studies. It had become, like the still prevalent perception of empire itself, othered.

Another of Sydney Carline's aerial views, *British Maurice Farman attacked by German Fokker while Dropping Sacks of Corn on Kut-el-Amara during the Siege of 1916*, (Fig. 9), shows, however, Mesopotamia in a more ordered and topographical fashion. The unquantifiable otherness of the desert is here largely banished - a mere hint of it intrudes at the top of the painting - whilst in the top left hand corner Carline defines the landscape in greater detail, showing lush vegetation lining the course of a river. In his depiction of the besieged town he further embellishes the scene, including a number of trees, shown protruding from amongst the matrix of densely packed buildings. Constrained by his subject-matter, which demands the visualisation of a specific historical moment that had resonance

¹⁶⁴ Carline, 1973: 5.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. It is interesting, however, that a young modernist artist, C.R.W. Nevinson (1889 – 1946), who had also personally experienced the horror of the battlefield, chose to retain a topographical element in his aerial view of wartime France, *Banking at 4000 Feet* (1917, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Lithograph, 40.2 x 31.6cm.), by depicting a patchwork of cultivated fields seemingly undisturbed by the bombardment that transformed much of the northern European landscape, and which Nevinson, himself, had powerfully expressed in a non-aerial view, *The Harvest of Battle*, (1919, Imperial War Museum, London, Oil, 183 x 317.5cm), which shows a devastated landscape comprised of mud and putrid water-filled craters. This telling contrast in Nevinson's conception of the wartime landscape begs the question as to whether he succumbed to the novelty of his elevated viewpoint in constructing an idea of landscape that retained a degree of imaginable comprehension for an audience largely denied his privileged panoramic view of the earth's surface.

for a British audience, Carline is less able to escape the shackles of topographic depiction.¹⁶⁶ Here, painting serves more as a visual aide-memoir, recalling the siege for a minority who experienced it first-hand, and for a majority for whom Kut-el-Amara was a distant, unseen and unknown city read of in newspaper coverage of the war in Mesopotamia. In Carline's painting Kut becomes a little more knowable, still distant – an inevitable consequence of such an elevated view – but, nevertheless, more comprehensible than the featureless landscape depicted in *Flying over the Desert at Sunset*.

When compared to other artist-travellers' work of this time, there is something tangibly 'new', certainly with regard to *Flying over the Desert at Sunset*, in Sydney Carline's depiction of the Mesopotamian landscape. Generally, however, his conception of the country, and the wider Middle East, remained in line with the more widely-expressed imagining that prevailed in the West. Referring to the Middle East's historic sites, he is quoted in the *Times* in 1921: 'Seen from the air, historic places seem to take on their more permanent aspect, since one's attention is not disturbed by the modern and incidental details'.¹⁶⁷ His reference to modernity's disturbing presence in the region, which his aerial views permit him to exclude, or at least reduce in impact – it is modernity in the form of the bi-plane that is departing the scene in *Flying over the Desert at Sunset* - betrays a willingness to fix the East within a timeless vacuum. And it is this focus upon permanence or fixity that to some degree marks his depiction of the East as conventional despite its more modern formal character.¹⁶⁸

Sydney Carline's adoption of a more modern idiom in his painting differentiated his work, though to a great extent only superficially, from that of other artist-travellers producing images of Britain's protectorates and empire territories at this time. It resulted in him encountering opposition. As an official war artist his work had to be submitted for inspection.¹⁶⁹ A letter addressed to the Carlines from the Chairman of the Air Force Section provides evidence of the criteria their paintings were expected to meet:

¹⁶⁶ British forces under General Charles Townshend were forced to surrender to the Turkish army after being besieged for four months in the city of Kut, on the southern edge of the Baghdad province, in April 1916. A newly-formed and larger British army, the Mesopotamia Expeditionary Force, eventually captured Baghdad in March 1917, and the signing of the armistice in October 1918 ultimately brought the northern province of Mosul under British control. See the historical overview in *Iraq Administration Reports 1914 – 1932* (Cambridge, 1992).

¹⁶⁷ 'Painting in the Air: Artists' Tour of the Middle East', *Times*, 30 April 1921: 7.

¹⁶⁸ Of the eighty-seven works exhibited by the Carlines in Manchester, twenty-four, judging by the catalogue descriptions, specifically depict historic sites in the Middle East. In other instances, descriptions of particular works evoke and maintain a romantic image of an exotic Middle East. For example, the side streets of Damascus, the subject of Sydney Carline's *Under the Harem Windows, Damascus*, are described as supplying 'more vividly than those of any other Arabian city the atmosphere of the Arabian Nights stories'. See Carline, 1921: 8.

¹⁶⁹ An unsigned letter from the IWM to Richard Carline dated 4 November 1919 confirmed that the Museum required three paintings of Mesopotamia from him, and also informed Carline that the work should be submitted

Would you please note that the RAF Section is not prepared to exhibit, in the Museum, pictures showing any extreme forms of art. It should be borne in mind that only true records, faithfully depicting places, incidents, etc., will be accepted. All extremes should be carefully avoided, it being essential not to overlook the fact that the impression of one individual may perilously clash with the impression of others. With the photographs at your disposal, you should be able to produce absolutely correct records of the various places selected for your pictures. A point which has been criticised by flying people visiting the [Royal Academy] is the hard appearance of anti-aircraft smoke in those pictures by [Sidney (sic) Carline], and the treatment of this anti-aircraft smoke in the Damascus picture suffers from the same fault, viz – a hardness and unnatural formation. If these points are not lost sight of, it will save a lot of further work when your pictures come before my Committee.¹⁷⁰

Accommodating the demands of their employers at the IWM, who sought an official record of the empire war, may have been frustrating for the Carlines, but they were demands that had to be satisfied if they were to receive payment for their work. They also, however, exhibited pictures resulting from their Middle East travels in commercial galleries with the hope of making sales to the public.¹⁷¹ In this environment the criteria expected of artist-travellers' work may not have been unequivocally stated, as it was by an official body such as the IWM, but, nevertheless, the market had established the type of work – naturalistic studies of exotic, picturesque and topographical material – that was commercially successful. In disregarding the demands of the market, specifically in departing, however slightly, from a naturalistic idiom, the Carlines were entering uncertain territory.¹⁷²

At the Goupil Gallery in 1920 the Carlines exhibited 138 pictures depicting the Middle East. These comprised seventeen oils, 113 watercolours, and eight drawings. When their second exhibition of Middle East work opened in Manchester a year later, only eighty-seven of the pictures previously shown at the Goupil Gallery, comprising eight oils, seventy-eight

for inspection when sufficiently advanced. See IWM, Air Force Section to Richard Carline, 4 November 1919: R. Carline Archive.

¹⁷⁰ Chairman RAF Section, IWM to S. and R. Carline, 6 February 1920: S. Carline Archive.

¹⁷¹ In a letter to Lieutenant Insall, Curator of the Air Force Section Paintings, Alfred Yockney, having selected the paintings for the IWM, expressed his view regarding the release of the remaining work to the Carlines: 'Much of this remainder is in the form of rough notes of no value except as material for the pictures which will be painted from them for the IWM. The few other examples have no war interest, to the best of my recollection, and in my judgement they should be placed at the disposal of the artists'. Yockney to Insall, 23 January 1920: R. Carline Archive. Richard Carline corresponded with Yockney a fortnight later informing him that the IWM had kept in all nearly 300 sketches, 'so that the surplus – which are not of interest or use to the Museum and which have been handed over to us for our disposal – do not amount to many'. R. Carline to Yockney, 6 February 1920: R. Carline Archive.

¹⁷² Sue Malvern rightly points out that four artists who produced official war art – David Bomberg, William Roberts, Wyndham Lewis and C.R.W. Nevinson – were key players in the avant-garde era prior to the First World War. Sydney Carline was not part of that pre-war avant-garde, but, nonetheless, some of his Middle East paintings display characteristics – the 'hard' edges that provoked criticism from the IWM – which reveal the possible influence of that period. See Malvern, 2004: 109.

watercolours and one drawing, were featured.¹⁷³ The Manchester exhibition's reduced scale suggests that a number of pictures, possibly as many as fifty-one, were sold at the Goupil Gallery, representing a relatively successful show, and indicating a degree of acceptance on the part of the art-buying public for the Carlines' more modern work. Nonetheless, Lawrence Haward, in the 'Prefatory Note' of the Manchester exhibition catalogue, felt the need to warn the exhibition audience that: 'One or two of the oils to some slight extent sacrifice representation to decorative effect but are neither abstract nor abstruse', adding, as if by way of compensation, that 'the watercolours are simple, direct and literal'.¹⁷⁴ As the two commercial exhibitions largely comprised of these more 'literal' watercolours, the formal character of the Carlines' sketches perhaps did not diverge as far from the period's typical artist-traveller work as a painting such as Sydney Carline's *Flying over the Desert at Sunset* would suggest.¹⁷⁵ Indeed, the *Manchester Guardian* critic who reviewed the 'Lands of the Bible' exhibition considered that a major attraction of the sketches lay in the knowledge they imparted of the East: 'Their purpose is to appeal to the intelligence quite as much as to the sense of beauty. They have been done to satisfy curiosity and to give information as to what the East is like'.¹⁷⁶ This was a description that could readily be applied to much of the artist-traveller work exhibited in the early 1920s.

It is difficult to concur with the *Manchester Guardian* critic's assessment when viewing *Flying over the Desert at Sunset* in which facts are subjugated to decorative effect, though in fairness to the critic this painting was not exhibited in Manchester, and neither, judging by the catalogue's descriptions, were many other works of this type.¹⁷⁷ The critic's judgement was more likely to have been formed by viewing sketches similar in character to Richard Carline's

¹⁷³ The overwhelming majority of the paintings shown for the second time in Manchester were reduced in price, some quite considerably. For example, Sydney Carline's oil, *Persians having tea in the cool of the evening*, priced at forty-five guineas in the Goupil Gallery exhibition, was now available for thirty guineas.

¹⁷⁴ Haward, 1921: 5. James Wood, in the 'Prefatory Note' of *The East* exhibition catalogue, similarly referred to the 'direct manner' of the Carlines' sketches. Wood, 1920: unpaginated.

¹⁷⁵ Sue Malvern has argued that the war 'gave modern artists unprecedented scope to address their work to the needs of the nation state and to create new audiences for their work'. Malvern, 2004: 149. The large number of 'literal' watercolours that featured in the Carlines' two commercial exhibitions perhaps displays a reticence on their part to fundamentally challenge the parameters that defined the market for artist-traveller's work.

¹⁷⁶ The imparting of information or 'facts' was for the *Manchester Guardian* critic an intrinsic element of 'the most modern painting [which] has renewed interest in things for themselves', and s/he considered that the Carlines had been influenced enough by this modern movement 'to qualify them admirably to satisfy curiosity as to what the East is like – its houses, valleys, cities, fields, and the rest'. 'The City Art Gallery: "Lands of the Bible"', *Manchester Guardian*, 2 May 1921.

¹⁷⁷ Possible exceptions include Richard Carline's oil painting, *The wilderness of Judea and the Dead Sea*. The catalogue description refers to: 'Barren ridges with no vestige of vegetation form the country ... Between the peaks of the wilderness occasional glimpses can be had of the cerulean blue of the Dead Sea and across to the gaunt hills of Moab'. Carline, 1921: 9. Sydney Carline's *Sea of Galilee from above the clouds* was perhaps also a work in which decorative effect was to the fore. He described viewing the Sea of Galilee from the air and realising 'its curious pear-like shape and other unique characteristics'. See *Times*, 30 April 1921: 7.

The River Tigris at Mosul (Fig. 10).¹⁷⁸ Here, we look down upon a group of figures gathered at the river's edge. Some are shown washing and swimming in the water and others are seen in small groups upon the riverbank. The simply drawn figures bear testimony to the conditions under which the sketches were produced, as Sydney Carline outlined: 'In the air one has to work very quickly, because of the rapidly changing scene. Our plan, therefore, was to fly to and fro over the selected view till one had sufficient details to complete the picture on landing'.¹⁷⁹

The fleeting impression that a watercolour such as *The River Tigris at Mosul* conveys, caused the *Manchester Guardian* critic to consider the sketches 'comparatively light' and 'a little disappointing on a too close examination', although s/he did praise their 'clear, bright' colouring and compositional arrangement.¹⁸⁰ Their spontaneous quality would, though, have helped to confirm them as desired on-the-spot records, and, furthermore, their aerial viewpoint probably still retained novelty value in a genre not regarded by art writers of the time as formally innovative.¹⁸¹ Despite the novel viewpoint, the impression of Mesopotamia that Richard Carline conveys remains inherently traditional. His aerial view results only in a distancing picturesque treatment: a hackneyed approach by this date, and one not best suited to providing the information on the East that the *Manchester Guardian* critic considered such an important element of the Carlines' work. Richard Carline's watercolour showing as it does a woman carrying a basket on her head and others washing clothes in the river, 'fixes' Mesopotamia as an ancient, unchanging civilisation. For those unaware of the painting's date of production, the elevated view of Mesopotamia that it reveals would be difficult to date. The aeroplane, the element of modernity that enabled Carline to produce the view, is left unseen. For Richard Carline, as for his brother Sydney, it is more often empire's otherness that holds sway over disruptive modernity. Their work remains rooted in a traditional imagining of empire, and they ignore the more modern conception of empire that was emerging in the work of other artists at around this time.

¹⁷⁸ This work was not shown in Manchester, but Richard and Sydney Carline both exhibited works depicting this subject. Richard showed *Washing Clothes on the Banks of the Tigris* and Sydney, *Washing and Bathing at Mosul*, a subject that is described in the catalogue as: 'The banks of the river are lined all day with women washing clothes and children keeping cool in the water'. See Carline, 1921: 7, 12.

¹⁷⁹ *Times*, 30 April 1921: 7.

¹⁸⁰ B.D.T., *Manchester Guardian*, 2 May 1921.

¹⁸¹ In June 1920 Walker's Galleries staged an exhibition of E.W. Powell's watercolours of 'France and Egypt from the Air'.

2.5 Imagining Iraq: the work of Edith Cheesman

A further show of work depicting Mesopotamia/Iraq, Edith Cheesman's 'Five Months in Iraq', was briefly staged at Walker's Galleries in November 1922.¹⁸² The exhibition was ignored by the serious press, but merits attention because not only does a sizeable visual record of Cheesman's work survive, enabling a detailed analysis, but her images of Mesopotamia/Iraq can be contrasted with the near contemporary impressions of the country produced by the Carlines, so as to highlight evidence of an alternative response to this part of the empire.¹⁸³

Florence Edith Cheesman (1877 – 1964) was born into a farming family in Westwell, Kent and brought up in a 'curious rambling old house' alongside four brothers and sisters and attendant nursemaids and governesses.¹⁸⁴ Her sister Evelyn relates that Edith received her initial art training through *Vere Foster* drawing books supplied by a governess, from which she copied rustic scenes, flowers and figures.¹⁸⁵ As Evelyn further recalls, much of the knowledge acquired from these initial desultory lessons had to be re-learned 'when [Edith] could pay for the special courses that she craved'.¹⁸⁶ These 'special courses' were presumably part of the formal art training Cheesman received at a number of different art schools, notably the Byam Shaw School of Art, the Kemp-Welch School of Painting and Chelsea School of Art, where she was enrolled on a full-time basis in 1912 taking life drawing and design classes.¹⁸⁷ By this

¹⁸² The Kingdom of Iraq, the old Arabic name for the region, formed out of the Ottoman *vilayets* or provinces of Mosul - a mountainous region in the north, adjoining the border of modern Turkey; Baghdad - a central province that faced out to the Syrian desert to the west and to the Persian, modern Iranian, border to the east; and Basra - the southernmost province that stood at the head of the Persian Gulf, was established by a British Cabinet decision taken in March 1921. See Karsh, 2002: 55. The name *al-Iraq* had been used by Arab geographers since the eighth-century to describe the fertile plain of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. See Tripp, 2000: 8.

¹⁸³ The exhibition ran from only 15 to 18 November 1922, but a further show of Cheesman's 'Paintings of Mesopotamia' that presumably drew on the same material was staged at the Imperial Institute, South Kensington between 10 June and 31 July 1923. The catalogue produced by Walker's Galleries lists the ninety-five exhibited paintings, drawings and photographs under a series of generic headings. These include 'Portraits and Types', 'Landscapes', 'The Desert' and a number of specific Iraqi cities, notably Baghdad, Fallujah, Kut el Amara, Hit and Ctesiphon. See Cheesman, 1922: unpaginated.

¹⁸⁴ Family life in the Cheesman household was subsidised by extended family members. The Cheesman sisters' education was paid for by an aunt, and an uncle also provided financial support for the family. See Cheesman, 1957: 11, 32.

¹⁸⁵ In the late 1850s the educationist and philanthropist Vere Foster (1819 – 1900) designed a series of writing and drawing copy books that were to become a mainstay of education in Ireland and beyond for the best part of half a century. See Gray, 2004.

¹⁸⁶ Cheesman, 1957: 30.

¹⁸⁷ An article based upon an interview with Cheesman, 'The Woman who Designed Iraq's Postage Stamps', in the South African newspaper, *The Highway Mail* on 11 August 1950, records her studying at the Byam Shaw School of Art and under Lucy Kemp-Welch, who taught her animal painting. The Byam Shaw School opened in May 1910 and was the subject of an article, 'Where to Study Art' by Gladys Beattie Crozier that appeared in the 1910 edition of *Every Woman's Encyclopaedia*. Crozier detailed in the article the availability of a daily women's life class and a draped model sketching class available jointly to male and female students. In 1907 Lucy Kemp-Welch (1869 – 1958), who specialised in painting horses, took over the running of the Herkomer School, established at Bushey in Hertfordshire in 1883 by Hubert von Herkomer. See Windsor, 1998: 152, 180. By 1908 the Chelsea School of Art had become a significant faculty of the South Western Polytechnic that had opened in Chelsea in 1895. The polytechnic was originally established with the aim of improving the standard of technical

date Cheesman had already exhibited with the Society of Women Artists in 1909 and at the Royal Academy Summer Show in 1911. Her study at these three institutions is illustrative of the 'fragmentary' nature of some women's art training in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century which was often 'patched together' by attending different classes when circumstances permitted.¹⁸⁸ So prior to her visit to Iraq, the little that is known of Edith Cheesman reveals an artist who had publicly exhibited only a handful of works, and was still availing herself of training opportunities.¹⁸⁹ The apparently limited success of her professional career up to this point would appear to justify the warnings, conveyed in contemporary publications to women seeking careers as artists, which stressed not only the considerable cost of an art education, but also the unpredictable nature of any income that could be generated.¹⁹⁰

The exhibition of Cheesman's Iraq paintings and drawings at Walker's Galleries coincided with the publication by A. & C. Black Ltd. of *Mesopotamia Watercolours (Iraq)* by *Edith Cheesman* as part of their 'Water-Colour Series'.¹⁹¹ The majority of the series' forty-five titles were devoted to the pictorial representation of the counties and tourist sites of the British Isles, with only four, including Cheesman's work, referencing the wider world.¹⁹² Four other volumes, *Burns Country*, *Dickens Country*, *Scott Country* and *Hardy Country*, evoke

education available to working-class men, but, in addition to a Day College for Men, it also provided a Day College for Women and numerous evening classes in a range of subjects. Cheesman enrolled on 23 September 1912 in the Women's Day College. Aged thirty-five, her occupation in the college records is listed as 'artist'. See Chelsea College Records: Fees Books 1912 - 1913, Kings College Archives CA/SFB I, CA/SFB II. For women artists, life classes only became widely available in the latter part of the nineteenth-century, and in the 1890s were still largely confined to studies based on the draped model, though by the date of Cheesman's study women too had access to the nude model. See Deepwell, 1991: 73; James, 2007: 22; and for a comprehensive overview of women's art education in the late Victorian period see Cherry, 1993: 53 - 64. Notable female artists and contemporaries of Cheesman, Gwen John (b. 1876), Laura Knight (b. 1877) and Vanessa Bell (b. 1879), also benefited to some degree from the greater provision of women's art training at this time. John and Bell studied at the Slade in 1895 and 1904, respectively, and Knight was a student at Nottingham Art School between 1890 and 1894. See Gerrish Nunn, 2006: 13 - 15.

¹⁸⁸ Cherry, 1993: 54. Evelyn Cheesman relates that after leaving school Edith took teaching courses and spent a year in Germany learning the language, after which she became governess to the only girl of a Surrey-based family. This may explain why she was still pursuing an art education in her mid-thirties. See Cheesman, 1957: 32. The early years of the twentieth-century generally saw a greater breadth in the range of higher education opportunities available to women, but Edith's sister Evelyn, later to find fame as a naturalist, explorer, broadcaster and author, was thwarted by gender discrimination in her educational ambitions. Intent upon becoming a vet she was denied entrance to the Royal Veterinary College around 1906 because of its no women policy. See Hobsbawm, 1987: 202, and Cheesman, 1957: 58.

¹⁸⁹ Cheesman exhibited further works with the Society of Women Artists in 1916 and 1918. See Johnson and Greutner, 1976: 105.

¹⁹⁰ Katy Deepwell cites Miss H. Gloag *The Painter's Careers 5th Edition: A Guide to the Professions of Educated Women and Girls* (London, 1919), 240.

¹⁹¹ This series, produced between 1914 and 1936, ran to forty-five titles: the majority being published in the late teens, with a further flurry dating from the 1920s, and then only sporadic volumes appearing up to 1936. Information obtained in a conversation with Linda Lambert, an employee of A. & C. Black Ltd. on 23/6/09.

¹⁹² *Switzerland*, *The Nile*, and the *Holy Land* were the other three volumes of watercolours dealing with sites beyond the British Isles.

landscapes that have become imaginatively and historically 'fixed' through the poetry and fiction of associated literary figures.¹⁹³ In a similar vein, the title of Cheesman's book, in which prominence is given to the region's ancient name, is also initially suggestive of 'fixing' in the public consciousness an historic, unchanging landscape and people. This possible intention on the publisher's part is, however, immediately undermined by their inclusion, as a bracketed sub-title, of the region's alternative name that was then emerging in the western lexicon. These alternative designations create tension: the contemporary nomenclature 'Iraq' - the name featured in the exhibition catalogue - indicates change, whilst the ancient name 'Mesopotamia' - that given prominence in the book's title - reinforces fixity.

What, though, was the actuality of the country that Cheesman encountered in 1921? Does her work reinforce more the notion of Mesopotamia - the timeless land that the Carlines had depicted three years previously - or can we read into it evidence of the disrupting emergence of a more modern Iraq?¹⁹⁴ Should Cheesman be bracketed amongst those artists, such as Browne, Pelling and the Carlines, who remained drawn to empire's picturesque otherness, or are there indications in her work of empire being depicted as a more modern, but pictorially prosaic, political entity? I tackle these questions in my following discussion of Cheesman's Iraq paintings.

2.6 Cheesman's Iraq paintings

The country Edith Cheesman visited for a five month period in 1921 was in the throes of a political transformation under British supervision, though the policy being enacted had received less than unanimous support in Britain. A leader in the *Times* in June 1920 had questioned the cost to the taxpayer of Britain's intervention in Mesopotamia, and criticised the profligate spending of public money on schemes that, it argued, far exceeded the 'theory of administrative advice and assistance' set out in the mandate.¹⁹⁵ Winston Churchill, as the Minister with responsibility for the region, was, at a time of rising anger over levels of public

¹⁹³ The *Hardy Country* volume, published in 1920, featured the work of Walter Tyndale. A similarly themed exhibition 'Thomas Hardy's Country' by W.W. Collins was staged at Walker's Galleries in June 1924. Collins was praised in the *Times* for successfully bringing 'home the places and atmosphere' that inspired Hardy's stories, and his drawings were described as being 'full of the spirit of place'. *Times*, 17 June 1924: 22.

¹⁹⁴ The region's former name of Mesopotamia continued to be used after the formation of the new state, even within government circles. The Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill was forced to issue a memo reminding his officials to adopt the new name. See Catherwood, 2004: 20.

¹⁹⁵ The *Times* article expressed concern that the British Government was treating Iraq more as a conquered land than one being guided to self-government, and it criticised the cost of such an approach: 'At this moment a distinguished air officer is roaming about Mesopotamia seeking for sites for new aerodromes, while the unhappy British taxpayers are wondering how they can pay the second instalment of this year's income tax'. *Times*, 1 June 1920: 17.

expenditure, equally concerned with reducing Britain's financial burden.¹⁹⁶ However, as he stated to the Commons on 15 December 1920, he had to balance this desire with the responsibilities imposed by the mandate:

It would certainly be in the highest degree imprudent to let it be thought that this country, having accepted the mandate, having entered into territory of that kind, having incurred, accepted, and shouldered responsibilities towards every class inhabiting it, was in a moment of irritation or weakness going to cast down those responsibilities, to leave its obligations wholly uncharged, and to scuttle from the country regardless of what might occur. Such a course would bring ruin on the province of Mesopotamia, and it would also impose a heavier expense on the British taxpayer than I believe would be incurred if we actually and firmly resumed the policy of reducing our garrisons, of contracting our commitments, and of setting up a local government congenial to the wishes of the masses of the people.¹⁹⁷

It was, therefore, a politically contentious environment into which Cheesman stepped in 1921. As to whether she was directly commissioned by A. & C. Black Ltd. to produce a visual record of Iraq at a pivotal moment in its history remains unknown. Although the publisher did commission artists to produce work for their 'Water Colour Series', it holds no records directly pertaining to Cheesman's *Mesopotamia*.¹⁹⁸ A probable compelling factor in Cheesman visiting Iraq was that her brother Robert Cheesman (1878 – 1962), later to find fame as an explorer and naturalist, was then serving in the country as private secretary to Sir Percy Cox, the British High Commissioner.¹⁹⁹ Certainly, Robert Cheesman's position close to the centre of power appears to have given Edith Cheesman privileged access to the leading players in the political drama that was then unfolding in the country. None more so than Iraq's newly crowned King Faisal, whose portrait, *Faisal I (1885 – 1933) King of Iraq* (Fig. 11), Cheesman painted.²⁰⁰ Access to such key individuals gave her work a topical relevance which did not go unnoticed. H.T. Montague Bell, in his 'Introduction' to the exhibition catalogue of Cheesman's Iraq paintings, considered that: 'At a time when, to many people in Great Britain, Mesopotamia conjures up the vision of a far-off and unprofitable venture' it is advantageous 'to have a glimpse of the country at closer quarters'.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁶ See *Times*, 23 June 1920: 16.

¹⁹⁷ Quoted in Catherwood, 2004: 93.

¹⁹⁸ Information obtained from a conversation with Linda Lambert.

¹⁹⁹ See Beckingham, 2004.

²⁰⁰ The Amir Faisal, third son of Hussein ibn Ali, Grand Sherif and Emir of Mecca and senior descendent of the Prophet Mohammad, was elected King on 23 August 1921. See Tripp, 2000: 47 – 50. His election has been the subject of relatively recent research which has disclosed the key events and individuals that helped determine his nomination. See Karsh, 2002: 55 - 70 and Paris, 1998: 773 – 93.

²⁰¹ Montague Bell, 1922: unpaginated.

Faisal's name had been brought to the attention of the British public in articles written by T.E. Lawrence that appeared in the *Times* in November 1918 and August 1920.²⁰² From the outset Lawrence conveyed Faisal as an heroic figure, never more so than in his description of an attack led by the Arab leader:

The Arabs wavered and then took cover in the gardens. Faisal rode up to the first line on his horse and called to them to follow him. Their chief refused saying it was death to cross the plain. Faisal laughed and turning his horse forced it at a walk through the Turkish fire till he had gained the shelter of the opposite gardens. Then he waved to the men behind him, who charged across to him at a wild gallop, losing only about twenty men on the way.²⁰³

Evidence of the myth-making of which Lawrence was later accused is apparent in his attribution of near supernatural qualities to Faisal: qualities that enable him at a walking pace to evade Turkish bullets that later account for twenty of his more mortal Arab comrades.²⁰⁴ In addition to aggrandising Faisal's personal bravery, Lawrence, in a subsequent article, also credits him with rare tact and diplomacy: qualities that enabled Faisal to end the blood feuds that had been rife amongst Arab tribes from Damascus to Mecca, and transform 'a mob of Beduin into a small but well-made force'.²⁰⁵

In articles published in the *Times* in August 1920, as part of a concerted campaign by Faisal's supporters to promote his candidature for the Iraqi kingship, Lawrence sought to put flesh on the bones of a man whose 'character and personality remained a closed book to the Press which saw only a picturesque figure'.²⁰⁶ He attempted to dispel a stereotypical aura of otherness by stressing qualities in Faisal that the West had claimed as their own, namely his 'elaborate modern education', his tolerance, his strategic mind and his diplomacy - experience of which he had gained in Constantinople and Paris. These qualities, Lawrence argued, gave Faisal a wider perspective than the majority of his Arab counterparts.²⁰⁷ The thrust of this argument was maintained in Lawrence's final article which concluded with an

²⁰² Timothy Paris names T.E. Lawrence as author of the unaccredited articles which appeared on 26, 27 and 28 November 1918. See Paris, 1998: 778. Lawrence was later described in the *Daily Mail* as 'the greatest British authority on the Arabs'. In addition to the press acclamation he received, Lawrence was also frequently invoked as an authority on Middle East affairs in Parliament, and his opinions on the region were given official weight when he was appointed, by Churchill, as an advisor in the new Middle East Department in January 1921. See Paris, 1998: 783, 784, 790.

²⁰³ *Times*, 26 November 1918: 5.

²⁰⁴ Richard Aldington's *Lawrence of Arabia: A Biographical Enquiry* debunked many of the myths, often of Lawrence's own making, that had grown up around him. See Aldington, 1969.

²⁰⁵ *Times*, 27 November 1918: 7.

²⁰⁶ *Times*, 7 August 1920: 9.

²⁰⁷ *Times*, 7 and 11 August 1920.

assessment of Faisal as a vigorous, democratic and charming man.²⁰⁸ The Faisal that emerges in Lawrence's profile is thus imbued with western traits that characterise him as a 'modern' man from the East.²⁰⁹

In turning now to Cheesman's portrait of Faisal (Fig. 11), we see that the western-influenced, modern Arab, conveyed in Lawrence's writing, is not obviously revealed.²¹⁰ By November 1922, when the painting was shown at Walker's Galleries, Faisal had been King of Iraq for over a year, and the British Government had a man considered amenable to British advice as their desired Arab ruler.²¹¹ The propaganda campaign, to which Lawrence's articles contributed, had succeeded, and any political need to maintain the image of an obviously modern Arab ruler had arguably abated.²¹² Certainly, Cheesman's portrait of Faisal, showing him dressed in Arab robes as opposed to the British military uniform which he also wore at this time, ignores any superficial western influence.²¹³ Instead, it is the grandeur of Faisal's Arab dress – the gold-crowned headdress and the gold-coloured robe – which Cheesman emphasises in this cultural confirmation of the seemingly independent Iraqi monarch.²¹⁴ I say 'seemingly' because, as Charles Tripp argues, Faisal was effectively 'sovereign of a state that was itself not sovereign', and 'was regarded with suspicion by most of the leading sectors of Iraq's heterogeneous society, for his association with the British'.²¹⁵ In reality, the ostensibly independent monarch portrayed in Cheesman's painting had to pay heed to resident British

²⁰⁸ *Times*, 11 August 1920: 9.

²⁰⁹ It must be remembered that Lawrence promoted Faisal because he was the British Government's desired candidate for election to the Iraqi throne. Lawrence's advocacy may well have been rooted in his primary wish for Arab self-determination in Iraq, but it also served less noble purposes, specifically the British Government's desire to reduce their expenditure in Iraq: a condition they believed was more likely to be achieved with Faisal's election. In a letter to Lloyd George, dated 14 March 1921, Churchill expressed the belief that 'Faisal offers far away the best chance of saving our money'. Chartwell Papers 17/18. Quoted in Catherwood, 2004: 132.

²¹⁰ A series of articles titled 'Noted Natal Women' in the South African newspaper, the *Sunday Tribune*, commenced on 20 March 1938 with a profile of Edith Cheesman. The article details that Cheesman was granted three sittings, each an hour long, in order to paint Faisal's portrait. See Cowley H. 'Noted Natal Women: No. 1 – Miss Edith Cheesman', *Sunday Tribune*, 20 March 1938.

²¹¹ See Tripp, 2000: 47.

²¹² The British Government also took practical steps to help ensure Faisal's victory, for example, deporting from Iraq Sayyid Talib al-Naqib, a possible opponent to Faisal as ruler. See Tripp, 2000: 48.

²¹³ A photograph of Faisal, probably dating from 1922, included in *The Letters of Gertrude Bell Vol. II*, shows him in western military uniform picnicking with British officials. Gertrude Bell, Oriental Secretary to Sir Percy Cox, refers to Faisal accompanying them on a picnic in a letter to her parents dated 27 August 1922. See Bell, 1927: 648.

²¹⁴ The portrait, along with a work entitled *The Marjun Mosque, Baghdad*, was, at one hundred guineas, the most highly-priced of the ninety-five paintings exhibited at Walker's Galleries – a possible indication of the cultural significance that was attached to it. See Cheesman, 1922: unpaginated. So as to give a degree of perspective to the price charged for the Faisal portrait, in 1920 a solicitor's annual salary was £1,096, whilst a doctor earned £756 and a teacher £500. See Newman and Foster, 1995: 50.

²¹⁵ Tripp, 2000: 49.

political masters, and negotiate a path amongst the disparate Iraqi communities in his attempt to forge a national identity for the country.²¹⁶

The political weakness of Faisal's position is mirrored by Cheesman's portrayal of a diminished presence occupying a visual space as ill-defined as his monarchical role. Faisal's figure fills the painting's frame, but Cheesman fails to utilise conventional visual devices, such as an obviously low view point or a dominant pose, to emphasise his status. The full grandeur of Faisal's gold-coloured robe – the most obvious signifier of his elevated position – is restricted by being largely concealed by his passive, seated pose and by the gentle folds of his overlying brown robe that merge quietly into the similarly coloured background.²¹⁷ Certainly, the heroic warrior leader idealised by Lawrence is far from evident. Instead, Cheesman's portrait, showing a man with slightly downturned eyes that avoid the viewer's gaze, and prominently-placed delicate hands that effeminately clasp an object resting in his lap, can be viewed, from one position, as evoking Faisal's more feminine characteristics – the charm, tact and tolerance that Lawrence attributed to him – but, from another, as alternatively reinscribing a nineteenth-century western construction of the effete Arab.²¹⁸ Such a reinscription does not, however, accord with the position Montague Bell adopted with regard to Cheesman's Iraqi portraits. He considered an Iraqi different 'from other Arabs in having a greater capacity for getting things done', and attributed to Cheesman's portraits (these primarily consisted of members of the Iraqi ruling class) the capacity to provide a possible 'explanation of the unexpected rapidity with which the country promises to pass out of its mandatory tutelage'.²¹⁹ If we can see past Montague Bell's racial stereotyping, characteristic of the time, and ignoring his inaccurate generalisation (Faisal, for example, was a Hashemite born in Arabia and not a native Iraqi), the significant theme of the 'Introduction' is his plea to view the subjects of Cheesman's Arab portraits as the principal conduits of change in the country. He argues that it is perhaps possible to discern from the portraits the energy that is inherent to the country's population which would, 'provided it is directed along the right channels', ultimately produce change. Readers are urged to understand the portraits, not as

²¹⁶ Faisal was though fully aware of his position and his reign, which lasted until 1932, 'was marked by his attempt to give some strength to an office characterised chiefly by its weakness'. See Tripp, 2000: 49 – 58. We see an echo of the reality of imperial British control over the role of the individual in the way that the Carlines had to submit their images of Mesopotamia for inspection by committee, which could reject or pass the work as it considered fit.

²¹⁷ For a discussion of royal portraiture, see Acton, 1997: 142.

²¹⁸ In a brief discussion of Jean Léon Gérôme's *The Snake Charmer* (c. 1876), Emily M. Weeks refers to the dance featuring a snake and a naked boy that is depicted in Gérôme's depiction of an Eastern scene as suggestive of 'the homo-erotic tendencies ... of the region'. See Weeks, 2007: 252.

²¹⁹ Montague Bell, 1922: unpaginated.

all too familiar picturesque evocations of Eastern otherness, but as more meaningful portrayals of dynamic individuals who 'find themselves on the threshold that leads through progress to prosperity'.²²⁰ Montague Bell invests these subjects with the same dynamism that was believed to differentiate the progressive West from the static East, thereby disrupting established conventional readings of Eastern portraiture.²²¹

But is that dynamism really evident in Cheesman's portrait of Faisal? I would argue that in her prosaic portrayal we see an emasculated individual. Faisal's gentler, more feminine, diplomatic qualities, better-suited to the political situation prevailing in Iraq in 1922, and examples of Montagu Bell's correctly channelled energy, are brought to the fore in Cheesman's portrait, but pictorially they fail to inspire her. Faisal's elected position as peaceable ruler of a nascent modern nation-state, distances him from a temporally specific, western imagining of the Arab, as an exotic, hyper-masculine, warrior emerging from out of the desert – an image that in the aftermath of the war would have had a particularly strong resonance for a western audience – and it means that Cheesman is unable to draw on such recent inscriptions to inform her portrayal.²²² Stranded in unexplored territory, she fails in her portrait of Faisal to re-imagine an alternative construction of the Arab that is specifically relevant to the early 1920s. Consequently, Faisal, the progressive Arab ruler, now more a diplomat than a warrior, and, as such, more aligned with the contemporary peaceable idea of empire, is denied an adequate visual representation.

By contrast, another of her Iraqi portraits, *Hassan Sagarr or Hassan of the Hawks* (Fig. 12), reveals Cheesman on more secure ground. She portrays the falconer Hassan, shown dressed in a full-length brown and ochre-coloured robe, in an ill-defined setting similar to that seen in Faisal's portrait. Light, falling softly on his face and more harshly upon the ochre stripes on the front of his robe, helps, in addition to the striking redness of his shoes, give him a more powerful presence than Faisal. As also does his pose. Sagarr is depicted standing, legs slightly apart, in a manner that emphasises strength. His downturned eyes proudly

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Edward Said has argued that because of the First World War 'the Orient was made to enter history', and that 'competition between the European Powers caused them to prod the Orient into active life', turning it from a state of 'passivity into militant modern life'. See Said, 2003: 240.

²²² T.E. Lawrence's widespread fame in Britain had been generated by a film lecture, 'With Allenby in Palestine', that opened at Covent Garden on 14 August 1919. Written by Lowell Thomas, the American journalist who had reported on his exploits in Arabia during the First World War, it met with great success, eventually running for just under six months at a number of different London venues. The lecture, utilising images of 'sweeping cavalry, Arabs, camels, veiled women [and] Holy cities', helped create the romanticised image of Lawrence of Arabia, and would have cemented in the British consciousness a powerfully masculine image of the Arab. See Aldington, 1969: 284 – 85. Edward Said describes Orientalism as 'a library or archive of information commonly, and in some of its aspects, unanimously held'. The effect of such an 'archive' encouraged, in his view, the reinscription of the Orient as unchanging. See Said, 2003: 41.

survey the pair of coveted hawks – a further symbol of overt masculinity - that perch on his right arm, whilst in his left he carries their slain prey.²²³ It is a timeless image that imaginatively fixes Sagarr more as an ancient Mesopotamian than a modern Iraqi. Ostensibly a subject, Sagarr is also a type - the exotic Arab familiar in the West's imagining of the East - and Cheesman's study is, therefore, as much a reinscription as a portrait.²²⁴ Able to draw upon previous inscriptions, denied her in her imagining of Faisal, Cheesman portrays Sagarr as a more compelling and dynamic individual.²²⁵

The dynamism conferred by Montague Bell upon Cheesman's portrait subjects – the ruling elite in whom he detected the capacity to transform the country – would, according to the logic of his argument, appear to be threatened by the figure of Hassan which elides Mesopotamia with Iraq. But, instead, the portrait characterises, for him, Iraq's contemporary dynamic character because 'inspiration and uplift can hardly be lacking in a country with the atmosphere and colouring of Mesopotamia'.²²⁶ Montagu Bell is thus able to transform a portrait in which Iraq appears held within Mesopotamia's timeless grasp into contemporarily relevant material. He embroiders the past into the present and envisages a progressive future, though one which is dependent upon 'wise guidance in the administration', as in previous times the region's unique characteristics had been of little material benefit to the people.²²⁷

In 1921, Britain, under the terms of its mandate, remained actively involved in guiding the Iraqi administration, a situation that Cheesman acknowledges by alluding to the British presence in some of her work.²²⁸ Extraordinarily, this is so with her portrait of Hassan Sagarr, ostensibly an undiluted evocation of Eastern otherness, but in actuality a work that directly

²²³ The exhibition catalogue describes the two hawks as Sakir Falcons, most commonly used for hunting the Houbara Bustard, found in great numbers on the Iraqi plains. See Cheesman, 1922: unpaginated.

²²⁴ Cheesman included eight other portraits of Iraqis in the exhibition: *Saiyid Ja 'Far Ataifah*, a wealthy Shiahi landowner and mayor of Khadimain; *H.M. King Faisal of Iraq*; *Ja 'Far Pasha Askari*, the Minister of Defence in the Iraqi Government; *Zarun*, a Sabeian, or starworshipper, who is described as head of the Amara silversmiths, famous for their engraved work on silver; *Hassan Sagarr or Hassan of the Hawks*; and *Fahud Beg Ibn Hadhdhal*, Paramount Sheikh of the Amari Section of the Anaitzeh tribe. These six named individuals are listed in the exhibition catalogue under the heading 'Portraits and Types', thereby rendering ambiguous the distinction between subject and object. See Cheesman, 1922: unpaginated.

²²⁵ Cheesman's retreat into an ancient evocation of Mesopotamia, evidenced in her portrait of Sagarr, was not unusual in western imagining of the country. In a letter to her parents, Gertrude Bell, describing the Baghdad that she encountered at the end of the First World War, expresses a longing for the Mesopotamia that existed prior to the British occupancy: 'There is a great bend in the Tigris below the town which is my favourite resort. It makes a huge peninsula full of gardens and cornfields, and almost empty of soldiers, and there I go and remember that I am really part of Mesopotamia and not part of an army of occupation'. Bell to Hugh and Florence Bell, 31 January 1918. See Lady Bell, 1927: II, 442.

²²⁶ Montague Bell, 1922: unpaginated.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ As she travelled through Iraq during the course of her five month visit, Cheesman recorded some of the sites directly linked to the British occupation, namely *The Political Officer's House, Hillah*; a view of *Fallujah*, executed 'From the site of the camp of the 15th Division' and *The Residency River Steps, Baghdad*. See Cheesman, 1922: unpaginated.

links East and West. Because, as the catalogue informs, Hassan is 'Falconer to Sir Percy Cox'.²²⁹ Cheesman's evocation of hunting in Hassan Sagarr's portrait reconnects the transformed Iraq that Montagu Bell foresees to an established, more conservative and pastoral past: one reassuringly familiar to certain sectors of British society.²³⁰ The portrait could have been read by an elite British audience in the 1920s as confirmation that the Iraqi nation emerging under Britain's guidance was based upon secure foundations, and characterised by desirable British qualities made universal through her empire.²³¹

Britain's presence in Iraq is discerned in another of Cheesman's oils, *Gertrude Bell's House in Baghdad* (Fig. 13).²³² Gertrude Bell (1868 – 1926), Cox's Oriental Secretary, had a reputation extending far beyond that usually associated with a British civil servant. On her death in July 1926 the *Times* described her as 'perhaps the most distinguished woman of our day in the field of Oriental exploration, archaeology and literature and in the service of the Empire in Iraq', and in a later article considered that her knowledge of the region surpassed even that of T.E. Lawrence!²³³ There is evidence to suggest that Cheesman admired an even more intrepid female traveller than herself, for, in addition to acquiring Bell's signature, she was proud that during her stay in Iraq she emulated a journey earlier made by Bell, when she became only the fourth European woman to visit the ancient city of Hit.²³⁴ Adopting a narrow

²²⁹ See Cheesman, 1922: unpaginated. That Cox (1864 – 1937), a representative of the British elite – he was son of a Deputy Lieutenant of Essex and was educated at Harrow and the Royal Military College, Sandhurst – is directly associated with an ancient pastime of the Iraqi elite is perhaps not surprising (particularly a pursuit such as hunting which remained inextricably linked to the British upper class) as he would have come into regular contact with this strata of Iraqi society and been exposed to their way of life. Incidentally, Cox died whilst hunting at Melchbourne, near Bedford in 1937. See Pearce, 2004: 859 – 61.

²³⁰ James Ryan argues that images 'composed, reproduced, circulated and arranged for consumption within particular social circles in Britain ... reveal as much about the imaginative landscapes of imperial culture as they do about the physical spaces or people pictured within their frame'. See Ryan, 1997: 19.

²³¹ Britain drew upon established hierarchal power structures in Iraq, similar to those that had originally underpinned British society, so as to maintain stability in the region. Charles Tripp has argued that Faisal's vision for Iraq was not 'egalitarian' and 'was marked by a strong sense of privilege' which resulted in political marginalisation for those excluded for socio-economic reasons from his power base in Baghdad. See Tripp, 2000: 50 – 51. The imperialist, Alfred Milner, argued that duty and responsibility impelled the British to sustain their imperial burden, 'less perhaps for the material benefits which it brings us, than for its effect upon the national character – for it has helped to develop some of the best and most distinctive qualities of the race'. See Milner, 1913: xxxii, xxxiii.

²³² This work is listed under a slightly different title, *Miss Gertrude Bell's Bungalow, Baghdad*, in the exhibition catalogue. See Cheesman, 1922: unpaginated.

²³³ *Times*, 13 July 1926: 10, and 5 April 1927: 17. Bell had achieved a degree of fame after the success of her travel book, *The Desert and the Sown*, published in 1907 which recorded a journey through Syria made two years previously, but, as is made clear in a letter to her stepmother, it was a fame that remained unwelcome: 'Please, please don't supply information about me or photographs of me to newspaper correspondents ... I hate the whole advertisement business'. Gertrude Bell to Florence Bell, 6 Sep. 1917 in Lady Bell, 1927: II, 424. For a fuller biography, see Lukitz, 2004: 930 – 34.

²³⁴ Regarding Cheesman acquiring Bell's signature, see 'The Woman who Designed Iraq's Postage Stamps', *The Highway Mail*, 11 August 1950, and for her visit to Hit, see Cowley H. 'Noted Natal Women: No. 1 – Miss Edith Cheesman', *Sunday Tribune*, 20 March 1938. Bell, in a letter to her stepmother dated 9 May 1918,

focus, Cheesman's painting of Bell's home and garden can be viewed as an expression of her personal admiration for a fellow British woman.

As is evident from her letters, Bell's Baghdad home, and more especially her garden, was extremely important to her.²³⁵ She describes how in 1917 she 'tumbled [upon] a rose garden with three summer houses in it, quite close to the Political Office' and 'decided at once that this was the thing'. Initially, it did not meet her needs, 'a kitchen had to be built and a bathroom, and sunblinds ... put up – a thousand things', but 'after five days work I'm in ... and it promises very well', adding, in conclusion, that 'my roses I must tell you are glorious'.²³⁶ To the garden's existing planting Bell adds 'seven pots of geraniums and four of carnations' in addition to 'sowing carnations' and 'a clump of chrysanthemums [that are] coming into bloom'.²³⁷ Five years later, in 1922, the increasingly anglicised garden remained for Bell an evolving project: 'Daffodils, marigolds and wall-flowers are blooming in my garden and the rose trees coming into bud'.²³⁸ The pots of carnations and geraniums, which Bell refers to in her letter, are depicted by Cheesman in serried ranks either side of the circular water basin. Their affect is to embellish, but also impose an imported order upon, the original garden. By widening our focus, Cheesman's depiction of Bell's thriving, well-tended and ordered garden, in a country contemporarily defined in antithetical terms, could have been read by a 1920s audience as symbolising the wider benefits that Britain was bringing to bear upon Iraq.

The three oils discussed above were in all likelihood based upon preparatory studies as is indicated by the three sittings that Faisal granted Cheesman in her execution of his portrait. By contrast, the sixteen watercolours included in *Mesopotamia* are noticeably less 'worked', and conform to the desired eyewitness account. Cheesman most notably performs this role in recording, as Sydney Carline had done earlier, the city of Kut which remained synonymous as the site of a British defeat during the 1916 Mesopotamian campaign. Her watercolour, *A Street in Kut (General Townshend's House)* (Fig. 14), reveals a harshly lit scene from which

described Hit as 'the strangest place, unlike any other in Mesopotamia – set on a high steep mound, made of some 6,000 years' of former Hits'. See Lady Bell, 1927: II, 457.

²³⁵ In a letter to her father and stepmother dated 31 January 1918, Bell described 'the space and freedom' provided by her house and garden as 'invaluable boons'. See Lady Bell, 1927: II, 442.

²³⁶ Bell to Hugh Bell, 20 April 1917. Ibid: II, 405.

²³⁷ Bell to Florence Bell, 26 October 1917. Ibid: II, 429.

²³⁸ Bell to Hugh Bell, 26 February 1922. Ibid: II, 634. 97. The imposition of order upon untamed or uncivilised territory by the creation of a little piece of England was not unusual in Britain's peripheral empire territories in the early twentieth-century. In Newfoundland, Lord Northcliffe commissioned Grand Falls House (c. 1910) to be built in the style of a Sussex farmhouse. The house had a typically English garden, planted with hollyhocks and marigolds in soil imported, by Northcliffe, from Devon. See Taylor, 1996: 97, 108.

colour has leached away.²³⁹ We see a generally unprepossessing building with a large first floor window of more elaborate design overhanging a narrow street, in which are depicted five loosely-sketched figures in Arab dress. The scene's otherness is disrupted by the reference in the painting's title to Townshend which invests Cheesman's view with an imaginative force that would have resonated with a British audience.²⁴⁰

Gertrude Bell had similarly felt the need to visit Kut, that 'poor tragic little place' with 'its shelled walls and shattered palm trees', in April 1917, as she journeyed to Baghdad. At this time the city remained empty, but Bell was determined that 'we [the British] are going to clean it out and build it up as soon as possible'.²⁴¹ The Kut described as empty and devastated by Bell in 1917, had by 1921, as is evident from Cheesman's depiction of Iraqis walking in the narrow street, resumed active life. Her watercolour reveals no obvious indication of the wartime devastation, and, for Cheesman, Kut is seen less negatively as the tragic site of collective British memory, and more positively as a city being revived under a benign, overseeing British presence: a presence metaphorically represented by Townshend's overlooking house.²⁴²

For Montagu Bell, an important element of Cheesman's sketches was their 'understanding'.²⁴³ By 'understanding' he infers to Cheesman's awareness of, for him, the country's prevailing situation, an inference he later clarifies when stating that her pictures serve as a reminder 'that there is much to be done and that progress, with the means at the

²³⁹ The extraordinary heat in Iraq created problems for artists working in watercolour, drying the paint almost as soon as it was put on paper. Sydney Carline, describing his time in the country, told the *Times*: 'When flying over the deserts ... during midsummer the heat tended to dry up the paint too quickly'. 'Painting in the Air: Artists tour of the Middle East', *Times*, 30 April 1921: 7. We also get an indication of the extraordinary heat from a letter Bell wrote in pencil to her parents because it was 'hot enough to make a fountain pen rather a nuisance - it dries up so fast'. Bell to Hugh and Florence Bell, 24 May 1918. See Lady Bell, 1927: 458.

²⁴⁰ In recording a site in which her fellow countrymen had suffered, Cheesman followed a tradition established by earlier artist-travellers. James Ryan has argued that the 1857 Indian uprising was 'the single most important influence on the making of British images of India in the nineteenth-century', and sites of British military engagement and loss continued to stir the imagination of twentieth-century artist-travellers. Dorothea Vyvyan recorded sites of British loss in the paintings of South Africa that she exhibited at Walker's Galleries in 1920, of which *The spot where Rorke's Drift Battle took place* resonates most strongly. See Ryan, 1997: 197, and Vyvyan, 1920: 3.

²⁴¹ Her sentiments chimed with a commonly held belief, especially amongst those of the elite political class, that it befell Britain to help develop the countries under its jurisdiction. Bell to Florence and Hugh Bell, 15 April 1917. See Lady Bell, 1927: II, 405.

²⁴² Sydney and Richard Carline depicted Kut during their time in the Middle East and produced two very different views of the city. In Sydney Carline's painting, *British Maurice Farman Attacked by a German Fokker while dropping Sacks of Corn on Kut-el-Amara during the Siege of 1916* (1919, Imperial War Museum, London, Oil, 40.5 x 30.1cm), Kut occupies a secondary role in relation to his depiction of a British aircraft flying over it. Here, the city merely provides a backdrop for the recording of a specific moment in British aviation history. By contrast, in Richard Carline's *Kut-el-Amara and the Tigris, Mesopotamia* (1919, Imperial War Museum, London, Watercolour, 36.6 x 26.9cm) the focus is on the city. Unlike Cheesman's view of Kut, which records a past British presence, Richard Carline eschews an imperial connection in a painting that solely records the city's indigenous life.

²⁴³ Montague Bell, 1922: unpaginated.

people's disposal, must necessarily be slow'.²⁴⁴ A watercolour such as *New Street, Baghdad* (Fig. 15), exhibited at Walker's Galleries and reproduced in *Mesopotamia*, through its evocation of the slow nature of that progress, appears to encapsulate his argument. Ostensibly, the title's use of 'New', to describe the street depicted by Cheesman, clashes with the visual evidence presented in the painting. At the left we see a row of market stalls, their haphazard architectural character compounded by the makeshift nature of their protruding awnings. To the right the street is bounded by buildings of greater architectural integrity, but behind them looms the elaborately decorated dome and minaret of a mosque that reinforces Mesopotamian tradition over any nascent modernity. Advancing down the centre of the wide street, towards the painting's foreground, Cheesman depicts two donkeys carrying heavily-laden panniers. Walking away from them we view a man bent double by a load that he carries on his back, whilst in the distance is seen a horse-drawn wagon. It is a scene more medieval than twentieth-century, but Cheesman's record of this wide thoroughfare, at a time when Baghdad was characterised for western observers by its deeply shadowed narrow streets, establishes her painting as a modern representation of the city.²⁴⁵ However, Iraq's progressiveness, conveyed in this picture, is, at the same time, undermined by Cheesman's depiction of a seemingly ossified society, evidenced in her focus upon the primitive means of transporting goods. It is the painting's juxtaposition of progress and stasis that would, presumably, have informed Montagu Bell's argument that in Iraq much remained to be done.

Cheesman, too, depicted a side of Baghdad that more readily constituted its popular construction in the West's imagination. Her watercolour, *A Street in Baghdad* (Fig. 16), shows a group of figures cloaked in shadows, formed by the enclosed environment through which they pass. It provided the frontispiece of *Mesopotamia*, and is indicative of the enduring attraction for western artists of sites that exaggerated the East's mysterious character where time appears to have stood still. Conversely, her depiction of the expansive, *New Street, Baghdad*, in which shadow performs a less dramatic and concealing role, can be viewed as her equally reflecting a more open and modern aspect of the city: characteristics that could have been read by a 1920s audience as attributable to Britain's guiding role in the country.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Gertrude Bell wrote to her father in 1918 describing Baghdad's old 'incredibly narrow crooked streets' where 'the leaves almost touch overhead' and where in the heart of the city no street is wider than six feet. Bell to Hugh Bell, 15 February 1918 and 19 April 1918. See Lady Bell 1927: II, 445, 456. Richard Carline exhibited a watercolour, *Baghdad: the City of the Arabian Nights*, at Manchester in 1921. Baghdad was referred to in the catalogue as consisting 'largely of narrow covered-in-bazaars and alley-ways, and hitherto had no street down which a motor could pass'. See Carline, 1921: 12.

Other watercolours of the type reproduced in *Mesopotamia* are used by Montagu Bell in the construction of his argument. He derives from Cheesman's conventional picturesque views of ancient Iraqi sites, such as *The Arch of Ctesiphon* (Fig. 17), evidence that Iraq can build upon its past achievements: 'The ruins of the past are also here to serve as a reminder that what once has been can still be improved upon'.²⁴⁶ In a similar vein her watercolour, *Fallujah*, depicting a peaceful scene of Iraqi fishermen casting a net into the wide expanse of the Euphrates, exemplifies the tranquillity that Montagu Bell considers 'the appropriate and natural condition of the land'.²⁴⁷ His deployment of Cheesman's work to support a thesis, which at times appears tenuous, merits careful evaluation. The picturesque scenes that comprise *Mesopotamia* remain, I would argue, primarily just that, and an interpretation of these paintings as providing evidence of the country's potential is difficult to sustain. The fact remains, however, that, for Montagu Bell, Cheesman's picturesque views, in addition to her Iraqi portraits, successfully conveyed the concepts he expressed in his pro-imperialist essay. We see evidence in Montagu Bell's account of Cheesman's work, as we did in P.G. Konody's critical reception of Toft's Newfoundland paintings, of art being appropriated as unofficial propaganda in the service of empire. This is not to say that Cheesman was an unwilling victim of such a venture. Some of her pictures, as I have outlined, allude to the British presence in Iraq: a presence that she conveys in a wholly positive light at a time when doubts were being raised over Britain's role in the country.²⁴⁸

Cheesman's work demonstrates the uncertain nature of empire's depiction in the early 1920s. She oscillates between a confident and explicitly picturesque depiction of Mesopotamia's otherness, seen in her portrait of Hassan Sagarr, and a tentative, more subtle expression of Iraq, the nation being ushered into existence under British guidance, evident in

²⁴⁶ Montague Bell, 1922: unpaginated. The Ctesiphon Arch is described in the exhibition catalogue as the remains of the Audience Hall of King Chosroca's Palace that emulated the design of Belshazzar's Palace at Babylon. The innovatory structure is highlighted (perhaps as evidence of the country's golden past), and reference is made to it being built without supporting trusses and a keystone. As a subject it would have worked on a number of levels for a British audience. In addition to its obvious appeal as an ancient picturesque site, the name Ctesiphon would also have resonated as the place where General Townshend's expedition had been turned back by the Turkish Army in 1916. Its choice may also have been an indication of Cheesman's close link to the country's British administrators, for at the time of her visit Ctesiphon was a cause of concern to the British. Gertrude Bell wrote to her father on 22 May 1921 and informed him: 'We're debating what we can do to strengthen the foundation of Ctesiphon so as to save the great façade wall. There's no immediate prospect of its falling but it has a very marked list outwards'. See Lady Bell 1927: II, 597.

²⁴⁷ Montague Bell, 1922: unpaginated.

²⁴⁸ Julia Bush has argued, that in a largely masculine empire, elite Edwardian women offered influential support to the imperial project. Cheesman and Bell in their different roles in Iraq both performed this task. See Bush, 2000: 1 – 15.

her portrait of Faisal.²⁴⁹ I use the terms 'tentative' and 'subtle' because in Cheesman's paintings of Iraq the British presence emerges indirectly, either through the title or catalogue description of a work, or through a metaphorical representation. Hence, Gertrude Bell's presence in Baghdad is represented through her anglicised garden, and the British military presence, through the architecture of Townshend's former billet in Kut. Cheesman appears caught between two stools in her wish to convey the beneficial results of Britain's occupation of Iraq, but still maintain a picturesque evocation of the country's otherness. It is as though she fears the depiction of an explicit western presence would shatter Mesopotamia/Iraq's alterity, and jeopardise a well established conception of empire that retained commercial value for artist-traveller's in the early 1920s.

2.7 Conclusion

I have argued in this chapter that artist-traveller's work remained popular and commercially successful in the early 1920s despite a general lack of critical acclaim. Reviews, when they did occur, invariably prioritised a romanticised account of the artist's travel over a detailed discussion of the work itself, often deemed of little formal interest. As, for the most part, artist-travellers' work was largely defined by long-established picturesque and topographical modes of expression, it was an unsurprising response on the part of critics more concerned with formally advanced production. The enduring commercial success of the picturesque seems to have imposed a restraint upon artist-travellers, and few in their work ventured beyond the formal limits that the market would bear. Consequently, it was empire's exotic otherness, revealed through a naturalistic idiom, which typically constituted the focus for artist-travellers at this time.

As the wider socio-economic construction of empire began to change - a process that was well under way in the early 1920s - so artists faced the challenge of conveying an alternative, more contemporary attuned conception. A small minority responded to the greater political focus on empire as an exploitable economic entity and produced work that explicitly acknowledged, or more subtly alluded to, the impact of Britain's imperial intervention. Significantly, perhaps because of the commercial need to concur with the demands of the market, those few artist-travellers who engaged in the re-imagining of empire did not abandon

²⁴⁹ Even as late as 1936 the lure of the name 'Mesopotamia' remained as strong as ever for those imagining the region, as is evidenced in the publication that year of Agatha Christie's novel *Murder in Mesopotamia*. Set in 1933, over a decade after the formation of Iraq, the action is based at an archaeological excavation - the descriptive details based upon Christie's own visit to the Royal Cemetery at Ur with her husband, the archaeologist Sir Max Mallowan - which, alongside the use of the country's ancient name, doubly inscribes the region with a picturesque antiquity.

more typical picturesque or topographical representations. Rather, in their exhibitions they continued to feature such work alongside more modern formulations: an indication, perhaps, that because of the market's omnipotence, freelance artists trapped within its thrall, could only tentatively respond to changing conceptions of empire then in circulation.

3. An official view of empire: Guggisberg, Cheesman and the modern Gold Coast

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I focused upon artist-travellers' engagement with Britain's expanding empire in the early decades of the twentieth-century: an empire that by this date included long-established possessions, such as India and Newfoundland, but also more recently acquired territories, such as Iraq. Their creative response to the empire territories they visited may have differed, but what united the endeavours of these artist-travellers (with the exception of the commissioned work produced by the Carlines and Alfonso Toft) was the speculative nature of their venture. I have argued that in order to limit the inherent financial risk of their expeditions, British artists depicted empire in a manner that largely conformed to the demands of a well-established market for picturesque views of exotic lands and peoples. Accordingly, in the early 1920s empire continued to be conveyed, in the work of many artists, as a site of otherness.

Conversely, as is evidenced in paintings exhibited by Charles Worsley, Alfonso Toft and Dorothea Vyvyan, empire was also projected in the early 1920s as a site of economic opportunity and development. In the work of these artists an evocation of a picturesque or exotic empire partly succumbs to its expression as the site of existing or future colonised domestication: an expression that resonated with the contemporary political imagining of empire as an economically exploitable resource. Other work, notably Edith Cheesman's paintings of Iraq, conveyed an idea of empire that chimed with a further contemporary political conception, being interpreted by a commentator of the day as relaying the 'civilising' aspect of Britain's imperial intervention. The partial re-imagining of empire, apparent in the work of Worsley, Toft, Vyvyan and Cheesman, generally remained the exception. Judging by the titles of artist-traveller's work exhibited at this time, there is scant evidence of widespread representation of an explicit imperial presence, or any economic or 'civilising' benefits accruing from that presence. Whilst the art-buying public remained drawn to a specific, arguably outdated, perception of a timeless, exotic empire, there was little commercial motivation for independent freelance artists to produce an alternative, more modern, conception that resonated with its contemporary political positioning.

Much of the work mentioned up to now, again with the exception of that produced by the Carlines and Toft, was independently conceived by artist-travellers. The only constraint

imposed upon the character of that work (though a significant one for freelance artists) was that enforced by the demands of the market at which it was aimed.²⁵⁰ By way of comparison, I turn in this chapter to a further body of work depicting empire, also dating from the early 1920s, which was not constrained by market-led demands. It resulted from the employment of an artist, Edith Cheesman, by an official institution, the colonial government of the Gold Coast (modern day Ghana), in West Africa. Cheesman's paintings of Ghana hold historical significance in constituting the first officially commissioned work relating to the British Empire in twentieth-century peacetime. They provide an opportunity to contrast an 'official' view of empire, specifically colonial West Africa, with representations of the region being independently produced by other artists at this time.

My discussion of Cheesman's work is premised upon the establishment of a contextual background that helps situate her images of empire within the contemporary socio/political climate. I initially seek an explanation for why a woman artist was selected to produce 'official' paintings for a colonial government. In search of that answer, I begin my analysis with an overview of the roles performed by British women in West Africa in the early 1920s. As a woman artist working in the tropical West African colonies, Cheesman was certainly in select company. She was, however, one of an increasing number of British women for whom in the interwar period West Africa provided active roles in a variety of capacities. Recent feminist scholarship has drawn attention to this situation, whilst arguing that in spite of the greater influx of white women into the region, West Africa, and empire generally, remained a male-dominated bastion. In spite of its continuing patriarchal character there was, however, a sea change regarding the conception of empire in the interwar period. A former predominantly masculine characterisation partially gave way to a more feminised idea of empire in which Britain's 'civilising' role was emphasised. It is in the light of this alternative projection that I discuss Cheesman's employment by the Gold Coast government.

The Gold Coast government's decision to utilise painting to convey to the British public their aims and achievements can be specifically contextualised within a contemporary, localised discourse that called for artists and writers to visit West Africa and record its life and character. Discussing this discourse, I outline the constraints that it imposed upon artists, in contrast to writers, in their imagining of the region. I argue that Cheesman's paintings of the Gold Coast breached the discourse's narrow parameters, and that through her work she

²⁵⁰ In the Middle East, Sydney and Richard Carline undoubtedly worked within the constraints of a brief, yet the pictures released to the Carline brothers by the IWM as superfluous to its needs, and which were then shown in commercial exhibitions in London and Manchester, tended to emphasise the picturesque character of the region: a conception that accorded with the demands of the market.

made available to a British audience in a self-evident, widely visible way, a conception of empire in which notions of western-imposed progress were prioritised over a romantic expression of an untransformed entity.

As 'official' work, Cheesman's paintings arguably fall within the realm of propaganda art. Today, mention of this term is likely to elicit a negative response, yet in the early 1920s views on propaganda were mixed and reactions ranged from hostility to an acceptance of it as a benign tool of government. I discuss this climate of opinion so as to effectively situate the Gold Coast government's decision to commission art with a propaganda purpose at this time. My designation of Cheesman's work as 'official' further impels an examination of the motives of those responsible for commissioning it. Here, I utilise Peter Cain's and Anthony Hopkins' theoretical structure of 'gentlemanly capitalism' which exposes the interconnecting social networks (to which colonial governors belonged) that linked Britain's elite capitalist, political and administrative classes.²⁵¹ Commonly recognised amongst this group was the ideological value derived from elite western cultural production. I argue that the Gold Coast government, personified in the form of the governor, utilised the work of a professional western artist – an exponent of elite western cultural production – to validate the imperial project in the colony. Further evidence of the significance that was attached to Cheesman's work is apparent in its prominent display at Wembley – a factor that forms part of a wider discussion concerned with the display of 'primitive' and western material culture at the Exhibition.

Throughout this chapter I introduce individual works, produced by Cheesman and other artists imagining West Africa at this time, to illuminate the themes under discussion. I utilise these paintings to not only expose differences, but equally to reveal continuities. I further use them to show the blurring of characteristics that occur in conceptions defined, on one side, by the imagining of a 'progressive' West Africa, and, on the other, by projections of a static region. As I demonstrate, neither conception is uniquely marked, or uniquely stable. Artists, as I have demonstrated in chapter one, invariably draw upon previously iterated ideas and concepts in the process of reimagining, or upon topical material in the process of restating. A well-established picturesque imagining of an exotic West Africa is, therefore, not entirely forsaken by Cheesman in paintings that primarily convey the processes of modernity, and, conversely, work produced by her peers that ostensibly positions West Africa as 'fixed' now also reveals evidence of disrupting aspects of western modernity. Despite, therefore, the intentions of discourse, and the stipulations of a propaganda brief to determine a particular,

²⁵¹ See Cain and Hopkins, 2002.

often narrowly constituted, projection, images invariably reveal disruptive ambiguities. They are prone to alternative interpretations, and can be read as much in terms of what they conceal as of what they reveal. In this chapter I 'open up' early 1920s images of West Africa to analysis as I further examine the projection of empire by British artists at this time.

3.2 British women and West Africa in the twenties

Daniel Stephen has argued that the British Empire Exhibition, staged at Wembley in 1924 and 1925, demonstrated a shift in Britain's attitude to empire, from one characterised by explicitly masculine ideas of 'conquest and domination', to a more feminised concept of duty that remained, however, underpinned by a 'masculine ability to command and control'.²⁵² The exhibition, despite retaining an 'essentially masculine' character, reflected the increasing variety of roles undertaken by British women within the realm of the colonial empire.²⁵³ Stephen offers no explanation for the increased number of British women residing in the West African colonies after the First World War, but this situation can partly be explained by modern ideas of companionate marriage - in which notions of affection and companionship were highly valued²⁵⁴ - and a Colonial Office policy that encouraged the wives of officials to live alongside their husbands during their term of service in the region.²⁵⁵ This 'official' call for a greater female presence in West Africa found an echo in newspaper articles of the time, such as that entitled 'The Need of the White Woman in Nigeria', which appeared in *West Africa* in July 1922. The article's author, Eric Thong, responding to a previous correspondent who had argued that Nigeria was no place for white women, countered by saying, that those women who had visited the colony did not regret the experience. Thong, however, did not gloss over what awaited the British woman in West Africa, and cited disease and a rough life with few amusements as likely hardships to be faced. Adopting an outdated conception of white middle-class femininity that continued to constrain women of this social class to a domesticated environment, Thong warned prospective female visitors that they would

²⁵² Stephen, 2009: 106.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ See Procida, 2002: 50 - 51.

²⁵⁵ Although the early years of the twentieth-century saw a greater number of 'incorporated wives' in the tropical colonies, they still remained relatively few. For example, on the eve of the First World War it was reported that there were only four white women in Accra, the most Europeanised part of Ghana. See Callan and Ardener, 1984 and Hugh Thomas' unpublished, untitled autobiography, p. 12, (Oxford University Colonial Records Project, Rhodes House Library) cited in Kuklick, 1979: 123. An article titled 'European Women on the Coast: By one of Them', published in the newspaper *West Africa*, 10 December 1921, provides a deliciously cynical slant upon the Colonial Office policy. According to the author it was to 'create the idea that West Africa is healthy' - an impression that the authorities were keen to promote. The reality, for the correspondent, was that though she could envisage a time when West Africa becomes 'decreasingly unhealthy ... at present life on the Coast is a severe trial for any woman'.

encounter populations, both white and black, 'of a ranker growth' than that encountered in a 'sheltered, street-bred life'. He believed, however, that despite West Africa's capacity to appal and revolt, ultimately British women would find it 'fascinating'.²⁵⁶ Thong maintained that in West Africa the British woman could perform key roles in humanising her husband's work and in 'keep[ing] his thoughts English'.²⁵⁷ Without female support the British men serving in the colonial empire were, he argued, susceptible to its 'murk and coarseness', which in the long-term could undermine 'purer' English values.²⁵⁸ The white woman's presence would, he considered, provide a necessary regulatory control over alien and subversive elements that threatened not only the personal morality of British men, but the ultimate success of the 'civilising mission'. It was, therefore, British women whom Thong believed could make a vitally different contribution to the implementation of a central tenet of British imperial policy: a contribution that, it has been argued, strengthened their 'ideological stake in the continuing success of British imperialism'.²⁵⁹

A wide body of scholarship has challenged traditional ideological constructions of a male-dominated empire by highlighting the 'civilising' role performed by the type of woman to

²⁵⁶ See Thong E. 'The Need of the White Woman in Nigeria', *West Africa*, 29 July 1922.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.* Thong's association of Africa with descriptive terms that evoke a dark, uncivilised world reiterates, by the date he was writing, well established western constructions of the continent. In *Darkest England and the Way Out* (London, 1890), the social reformer William Booth had posed the provocative question: 'As there is a darkest Africa is there not also a darkest England?' Booth, 1890: 11. One of the best known fictional accounts of the West's encounter with Africa remains Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, published in 1899. In Conrad's story Marlow, the book's central character, describes a journey into the Congolese interior: 'The reaches opened before us and closed behind, as if the forest had stepped leisurely across the water to bar the way for our return. We penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness'. Conrad, 2007: 43. West Africa in particular continued to inspire similar negative associations in accounts published after the appearance of Thong's article. Early in his record of a journey made through Liberia, Graham Greene writes in *Journey Without Maps*, published in 1936, that he was attracted to the country because 'there seemed to be a seediness about the place you couldn't get to the same extent elsewhere, and seediness has a very deep appeal'. By the date Green was writing, the European imperial presence in Africa was well established and, for him, Africa could be conceptualised in different ways: 'to the words 'South Africa' my reaction, I find is immediate: Rhodes and the British Empire and an ugly building in Oxford and Trafalgar Square. After 'Kenya' there is no hesitation; gentlemen farmers, aristocracy in exile and the gossip columns. 'Rhodesia' produces: failure, Empire Tobacco, and failure again. It is not then any part of Africa which acts so strongly on this unconscious mind, certainly no part where the white settler has been most successful in reproducing the conditions of his country, its morals and its popular art. A quality of darkness is needed, of the inexplicable'. It was, for Greene, only West Africa, and specifically a part not under European colonial rule, which could, in the 1930s, provide the 'quality of darkness' for which he romantically searched. Green, 1978: 7, 8.

²⁵⁹ Procida, 2002: 2. Julia Bush has argued that 'women's contribution to empire-building was believed to be innately different from that of men, and its value lay in those differences' as they promoted an 'emergent vision of a nurturing, familial empire' in place of its earlier masculine conception as a site of conquest. She details the role played by women in late nineteenth-century organisations, such as the Girls' Friendly Society (1874), the Primrose League (1883), the British Women's Emigration Association (1884) and the Victoria League (1901), which supported imperial aims. See Bush, 2000: 3. Barbara Bush refers to a survey of items that appeared in the Royal Commonwealth Society's journal, *United Empire* from 1919 which reveals the role played by women in activities, such as the staging of conferences, public speaking engagements and the organisation of educational schemes, to promote empire. See Bush, 2004: 88.

whom Thong alluded in his article.²⁶⁰ Philippa Levine has identified pragmatic economic reasons to account for the increased British female presence in West Africa in the interwar period, although it is important not to lose sight of the ideological implications involved for those women (and men) who utilised Britain's imperial dominance for their own financial and professional gain.²⁶¹ She has argued that for some single women the tropical colonies offered possibly more lucrative employment and/or enhanced professional status than was available to them in Britain.²⁶² Employment options were, however, limited by male domination of the colonial empire's job market, so that women in search of salaried positions in West Africa were largely restricted to nursing or the teaching opportunities provided by the Mission Societies operating in the region.²⁶³ West Africa did, though, offer a potential source of income for women working outside the established professions in a freelance capacity, as, for example, writers and, as in the case of Edith Cheesman, commissioned by the Gold Coast government in 1923 to 'paint scenes of the country and the life of its inhabitants' – paintings that were subsequently exhibited at the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924 – as artists.²⁶⁴ Cheesman's story elicits evidence, not only of the Exhibition's acknowledgment of

²⁶⁰ See, for example, Chaudri and Strobel (eds.), 1992 and Bush, 2004: 77 – 111.

²⁶¹ 'As participants in the historical process of British expansion, they benefited from the economic and political subjugation of indigenous peoples'. Strobel, 1991: xiii.

²⁶² See Levine, 2004: viii. Women were not the only beneficiaries of the better employment opportunities that empire offered during the interwar period. Charles Allen quotes a male Cambridge graduate who considered that the 'salary ... offered to colonial cadets [in the early 1930s] was very good indeed when you think that a schoolmaster was lucky to get £200, and we were on the princely sum of £400 a year'. See Allen, 1979: 36. There were though factors other than pay that encouraged women to seek work in the colonies. For example, the Colonial Nursing Association, established in 1896, did not suffer from a shortage of nursing applicants despite offering wages at the lower end of the scale for a similar position in Britain. As Dea Birkett has argued, for this group of women it was not obvious material gain, but rather the hope of enhanced professional and social status, engendered by imperialism's emphasis upon inherent British superiority over the populations it ruled, that may be considered a motivating factor in their seeking employment in the colonies. See Birkett, 1992: 185.

²⁶³ A poem 'To the Nurses in West Africa' by J.D.S., published in *West Africa*, 12 November 1921, defined the British women, who as nurses supported Britain's imperial role in West Africa, as heroic – '[they] dare the Tropic's deadly powers' – and self-sacrificing – 'until in time/ Their strength shall fail – but there are others yet'. The Gold Coast's governor, Sir Gordon Guggisberg, in a speech to the African Society in November 1921, praised the efforts of Mission Societies, such as the Scottish Mission and the Wesleyan Mission, in providing education for 'the Native Races', but bemoaned their small staffs and hoped that the situation would soon change as 'there can be no worthier object to which to devote ... lives than this form of work'. See Guggisberg, 1922: 84.

²⁶⁴ 'Speech by his Excellency the Governor on opening the exhibition of Miss Edith Cheesman's paintings at Accra on the 31st January 1924', *Gold Coast News*, 31 January 1924: 1. In contrast to the dearth of scholarship on British women artists working in West Africa in the early twentieth-century, there has been considerable scholarly attention paid to the work of British women writers who travelled or lived in the region during or just before this time. Mary Kingsley, author of *Travels in West Africa: Congo Francais, Corisco and Cameroons* (London, 1897), has been the subject of research carried out by Alison Blunt and Constance Larymore's, *A Resident's Wife in Nigeria* (London, 1908) has been discussed by Cheryl McEwan. See Blunt and Rose, 1994: 51 – 72, and 73 – 100. Susan Blake has discussed Daisy Chown's geographically wider African narrative *A Woman's Wanderings from the Cape to Cairo* published in 1927. See Blake, 1992: 19 – 34.

increased female participation in the colonial empire, but also the empire's capacity, limited though that was, to absorb members of Britain's female workforce at this time.

Mary Procida has argued that 'a growing approximation of femininity to masculinity' was a factor in the increased active participation of women in the realm of the colonial empire.²⁶⁵ Sir Gordon Guggisberg (1869 – 1930), the Gold Coast Governor responsible for commissioning Cheesman, certainly evokes supposedly 'masculine' characteristics – then still widely believed to constitute the foundation stones of empire – in his description of her at work in the colony: 'Seated on her little sketching stool by the side of dusty African motor-roads, or perched high on the roof of some building, worried by sand flies, mosquitoes, the intense heat of the equatorial sun – I can imagine nothing more trying than mixing paints under these conditions'.²⁶⁶ For Guggisberg, Cheesman appeared ideally suited to colonial life. Equipped with 'masculine' qualities of resilience and fortitude – deemed essential in maintaining Britain's ruling presence – she demonstrated, for him, the requisite characteristics. Cheesman's 'masculine' attributes, however much Guggisberg prioritised them, fail to detract from the obvious fact that it was a professional British woman to whom he was referring. How, and why, as a female artist, Cheesman was chosen by Guggisberg's administration to produce work destined for the Gold Coast's display at Wembley is the issue that I next address.

3.3 Edith Cheesman's engagement by the Gold Coast government

A profile of Edith Cheesman, published in the South African newspaper *Sunday Tribune* in March 1938, recounts that, in addition to her engagement by the Gold Coast government, she also received commissions from three other British colonial or protectorate governments.²⁶⁷ A later article in another South African newspaper, *The Highway Mail*, dating from August 1950, provides further detail regarding these commissions. Prior to her visiting the Gold Coast, the article reports that in 1921 Cheesman had produced a set of designs for postage stamps for the newly established state of Iraq, then a British mandated protectorate,²⁶⁸ and that following her Gold Coast commission she painted publicity pictures for the Rhodesian government, and

²⁶⁵ Procida, 2002: 6.

²⁶⁶ *Gold Coast News*, 31 January 1924: 1. H.T. Montague Bell, writing in the exhibition catalogue of Cheesman's Iraq pictures, had similarly stressed her fortitude, praising her 'amazing industry' which had resulted in the production of nearly a hundred pictures in less than five months. See Montague Bell, 1922: unpaginated. For a discussion of masculinity in relation to the formation of empire, see Sinha, 1995.

²⁶⁷ See Cowley H. 'Noted Natal Women: No. 1 – Miss Edith Cheesman', *Sunday Tribune*, 20 March 1938.

²⁶⁸ The article's author describes that the first painting s/he saw on entering Cheesman's studio was a large oil of a standard-bearer of the Desert Camel Corps (a military force formed in 1921 with responsibility for policing Iraq's nomadic desert tribes). This work, which was exhibited at Walker's Galleries in 1922, was chosen with three other paintings as a design for Iraq's first postage stamps. See 'The Woman who designed Iraq's Postage Stamps', *The Highway Mail*, 11 August 1950.

a large 'propaganda' canvas, some twenty-one feet by six feet, depicting cloves and copra, for the government of Zanzibar.²⁶⁹ These government commissions undertaken by Cheesman suggest willingness on her part to engage with projects that promoted Britain's imperial objectives in the 1920s. This is made transparently clear when reading the unpublished manuscript of her travel guide, *Roaming round Rhodesia with a paint box: Off the beaten track*, which begins with her recalling her work for the Rhodesian government: 'I was asked to go to Southern Rhodesia under the aegis of the Government to paint pictures for propaganda purposes - 'How tobacco is grown', 'Scenery', 'Cattle', etc. Of course I was delighted'.²⁷⁰ Cheesman's 'delight' may simply be explained by the prospect of paid employment – as a freelance artist she was unlikely to turn down work - but that same 'delight', and her lack of noticeable disquiet at being asked to produce 'propaganda', also suggests her innate ideological support of empire, evidence of which, I have already argued, is to be found in the pro-imperialist character of the work that she produced in Iraq.²⁷¹

In the absence of official documentary evidence to explain the Gold Coast government's employment of Cheesman, it falls within the bounds of possibility that the work resulting from her visit to Iraq may have had a bearing upon their decision. Certainly, when taking into account the short time-span that separated the initial exhibition of her pictures of Iraq at Walker's Galleries in London in November 1922; the publication in the same month of her *Mesopotamia (Iraq) Watercolours* by A. & C. Black Ltd.; a further show of her Iraq work under the banner 'Paintings of Mesopotamia' at the Imperial Institute, South Kensington in June and July 1923, from her departure for the Gold Coast in October 1923, there is an indication that the events were linked.²⁷² It can certainly be stated with confidence that prior to

²⁶⁹ *The Highway Mail* article does not provide dates for the Rhodesian and Zanzibar commissions but implies that they came later than the work produced for the Gold Coast government. See *The Highway Mail*, 11 August 1950.

²⁷⁰ On 18 February 1964 Cheesman wrote to the Longman publishing house in Cape Town enquiring if they were interested in publishing her travel guide. See Edith Cheesman Papers, Campbell Collection of the University of Kwazulu Natal, South Africa.

²⁷¹ Helen Callaway and Dorothy Helly in their study of Flora Shaw, colonial correspondent for the *Times* from 1890 to 1900, pose the question: 'As a woman imperialist, does she stand in contrast to other women of her generation or were her basic attitudes more or less shared by other prominent women and by many others not in the political limelight?' Cheesman's pro-imperialist painting produced in the 1920s reveals that, beyond the field of politics, some early twentieth-century British women chose to engage in endeavours that actively supported imperial objectives. See Callaway and Helly, 1992: 79, 92.

²⁷² In his discussion of the Imperial Institute, John MacKenzie details that between 1917 and 1923 the Institute was threatened with closure. It survived, he argues, because it acquired a new role as a source of public propaganda on the empire. Although MacKenzie attributes this to the appointment of Sir William Furse as director in 1926, the exhibition at the Institute in 1923 of Cheesman's 'Paintings of Mesopotamia' can still be viewed in the light of empire propaganda, especially as one of the purposes of the Institute listed in the 1902 Imperial Institute Act was to display the resources of the empire. See MacKenzie, 1984: 128, 130, 132. A leading article in *West Africa* in November 1923 described the Imperial Institute as 'a compendium of the Empire, wherein the untravelled Briton can gain an idea of the natural features, peoples and products of the great and

her engagement by the Gold Coast government Cheesman's name had not long entered the public domain as that of an artist experienced in producing images of Britain's empire territories in a range of different media.²⁷³

The selection of Cheesman was in all likelihood decided upon by the organising committee established to coordinate the colony's contribution to the Wembley Exhibition.²⁷⁴ As a contemporary interview with John Maxwell, Secretary of Native Affairs in the colony at this time reveals, it was economic life in the Gold Coast, and the beneficial impact of British rule in the colony, which the committee intended to prioritise in the Wembley display. Maxwell details that a clear outline of the Gold Coast's intended contribution to the Exhibition emerged at a meeting held on 14 August 1922 when membership of the committee was widened to include the administration's various departmental heads.²⁷⁵ They were given responsibility for the elements that were to comprise that contribution which, as Maxwell recalls, included 'Foods of the Empire', 'Timber and Forest Products', 'Minerals', 'Post, Telegraphs and Telephoning' and 'Railways'.²⁷⁶

These areas of focus indicate the emphasis that was placed upon the colony's economic output and its modern technological infrastructure in the planning of the exhibition content. This prioritisation was deemed necessary by the Gold Coast government as

little and exotic Britains with which the enterprise of his countrymen has studded the world'. See 'The Imperial Institute', *West Africa*, 3 November 1923. Miss F.E. Cheesman is listed in *West Africa*, 6 October 1923 as a passenger aboard R.M.S. *Appam* that had recently departed Liverpool for Accra, and is similarly listed as a passenger aboard T.M.S. *Aba* bound for England, which sailed from Accra on 29 March 1924. See *West Africa*, 19 April 1924. She thus appears to have spent six months in Ghana.

²⁷³ In his speech to mark the opening of Cheesman's exhibition at the Technical School in Accra on 31 January 1924, Guggisberg commented upon her 'varied technique' and 'versatility ... shown by oil paintings, water-colours, copper plate etchings and pen-and-ink drawings'. Cheesman had demonstrated this 'versatility' when exhibiting oils, watercolours and pen-and-ink drawings of Iraq at Walker's Galleries in November 1922. See *Gold Coast News*, 31 January 1924: 1 and Cheesman, 1922: unpaginated.

²⁷⁴ A meeting was convened on 21 February 1922 to discuss the Gold Coast's participation at Wembley with those present including the colony's governor, Sir Gordon Guggisberg, his wife, Lady Decima Guggisberg, who was appointed chairwoman of the committee, and the colony's Colonial Secretary, A.R. Slater. See 'Gold Coast at Empire Exhibition. Mr. John Maxwell outlines a practical and comprehensive programme', *West Africa*, 5 May 1923.

²⁷⁵ There was a hiatus after the initial meeting in February when it became known that the Exhibition, originally planned for 1923, was not to be staged until the following year, but momentum picked up later in 1922 when a West Africa Group Committee was formed consisting of representatives from all the British West African colonies, including Decima Guggisberg who was co-opted on to the committee at their first meeting held in London on 29 September 1922. Decima Guggisberg, in addition to chairing the local committee in the Gold Coast, was also chairwoman of the Gold Coast's London Committee which included representatives of the mercantile and business community that traded with the Colony. As Maxwell recalls, although the 'organisation [for the Exhibition] was started by the Government the committees have recognised that without the co-operation, and the sympathy and support of the mercantile and other interests they would fall far short of the success which it is hoped the Gold Coast exhibits will obtain'. See 'Gold Coast at Empire Exhibition. Mr. John Maxwell outlines a practical and comprehensive programme', *West Africa* 5 May 1923 and Goldsmith H. 'The work of Organisation in England. The West African Group Committee and its record', *West Africa*, 24 May 1924.

²⁷⁶ See 'Gold Coast at Empire Exhibition. Mr. John Maxwell outlines a practical and comprehensive programme', *West Africa*, 5 May 1923.

expenditure for 'development' projects, such as education, was dependent upon custom revenue generated by trade. Guggisberg, in a speech to the African Society in London in November 1921, was, however, at pains to define the promotion of trade not as an end in itself, but as providing the means to wider objectives associated with Britain's 'civilising mission' within the country.²⁷⁷ As is evident from comments that Guggisberg later made, it was primarily the colony's development, both economic and social, that the Gold Coast's exhibits were expected to convey to the Exhibition's audience:

We hope that the exhibits, especially those showing the development of the country, will lead the British public to abandon their old notion that West Africa is the White Man's Grave. We want to show them that the conditions of life for the White Man are reasonable, and that the country is a valuable possession of the British Empire, and, though small as it is, is able to contribute an appreciable amount of raw materials to the Empire and to take in return an appreciable amount of imported manufactured goods.²⁷⁸

Guggisberg went on to add, and here we see specific evidence of his promotion of the 'civilising mission', that a second objective of the exhibits was 'to show the British public what we are doing to help the African along the road to progress'; something that he believed would be achieved by 'means of pictures [and] models'.²⁷⁹ His comments indicate the importance he attached to the role of visual material in promoting this objective. And it was visual material, Cheesman's oils and watercolours, which he singled out for specific praise on another occasion. In the speech he delivered to mark the opening of her exhibition in Accra in February 1924, Guggisberg explained that he had asked Cheesman to achieve two objectives. Firstly, 'to show that the native of the Gold Coast is ... a very progressive person who, without endangering the best of his native customs, is steadily adapting himself to the changes brought by modern civilisation', and secondly to 'boom the Gold Coast' by showing

²⁷⁷ Guggisberg announced to the meeting that the provision of education in the Gold Coast would entail an annual expenditure of £250,000. See 'The Goal of the Gold Coast. The Governor addresses the African Society', *West Africa*, 12 November 1921.

²⁷⁸ See *West Africa*, 24 May 1924. An earlier report in *West Africa* giving details of the intended display had stated that cocoa, in view of its great economic importance, was to be the colony's major exhibit. Other products to be displayed under the heading of 'Food of the Empire' were to include shea-butter, baobab trees, cassava and cassava starch, flour and meal, farine, sugar canes and copra. A section headed 'Raw Materials' was to include minerals, such as manganese and gold, timber and other forest products, whilst a further section devoted to the colony's infrastructure was to cover subjects such as town planning, decoration, lighting, heating, ventilation, sanitation and hygiene. See *West Africa*, 23 June 1923.

²⁷⁹ See *West Africa*, 24 May 1924. The notion of 'social progress' was demonstrated with the inclusion amongst the exhibits of a model of the Gold Coast Native Hospital which had opened in Accra in October 1923. See 'West Africa and the Empire Exhibition', *West Africa*, 22 March 1924. Models were also employed in demonstrating the Colony's economic progress in areas such as the mining of manganese. A meeting of the Gold Coast's Exhibition Committee in London on 30 October 1923 was informed that the manganese exhibit included a working model of a mine measuring 10ft. by 6ft. See *West Africa*, 10 November 1923.

'the people at home what wonderful buildings we were making, what comfortable bungalows and nice gardens we have, what a fine hospital [and] what good schools'.²⁸⁰

Guggisberg's comments hint at a possible reason for the Gold Coast government's selection of a woman artist to convey their imperial achievements. His reference to hospitals and schools - conspicuous sites of employment for women outside of the domestic environment - reveal the emphasis he placed upon an increasingly feminised idea of colonial life. Likewise, the notion of 'comfortable bungalows and nice gardens'²⁸¹ - a mental image charged with dispelling entrenched ideas of primitiveness and unfamiliarity associated with empire - similarly falls within the ambit of traditionally constituted middle-class feminine territory.²⁸² More specifically, such an image was likely to be perceived at the time - evidenced, for example, by the enduring popularity of Helen Allingham's paintings of cottages and gardens - as the preserve of women artists.²⁸³ Cheesman's earlier depiction of Gertrude Bell's bungalow and 'English' garden in Baghdad (Fig. 13) - a scene conveying feminine domestication of empire - demonstrated that she was comfortably ensconced within this gendered domain.²⁸⁴ The Gold Coast government's desire to convey through painting an impression of civilised/feminised colonial life perhaps established in the mind of the exhibition committee that this was work best suited to a female artist, whilst familiarity with Cheesman's Iraq pictures, some of which conveyed the idea of Britain's civilising mission, would have furnished them with evidence that she was ideally suited to express the 'civilising' project being implemented in the colony.

²⁸⁰ *Gold Coast News*, 31 January 1924: 1. Guggisberg's emphasis on visual material to promote the aims and 'achievements' of the Gold Coast government chimes with that of Major E.A. Belcher, Assistant General Manager of the Exhibition, who, in an address to the Royal Society of Arts in March 1923, had stressed the visual importance of the message that each of the exhibitors would seek to convey in promoting their Dominion or colony. See 'British Empire Exhibition (1924). Major Belcher's Word-Picture', *West Africa*, 10 March 1923. A report on the role of the Imperial Institute in *West Africa* in November 1923 also considered that visual material would convey 'more vivid impressions of Britain overseas than mere reading can impart'. See 'The Imperial Institute', *West Africa*, 3 November 1923.

²⁸¹ Romita Ray points out that the creation of English gardens by the English population in India 'constituted a retreat from an otherwise foreign landscape [and a] longing for a homeland left behind'. She argues that this imported 'aestheticisation of landscape indicates the fragile character of imperial identity as it struggled to cope with the slippages between the familiar and the unfamiliar'. See Ray, 2005: 52.

²⁸² Sarah Mills has argued, in regard to women's writing on empire, that 'the parameters of ... possible textual structures' were shaped by gender. Mills, 1994: 30.

²⁸³ The late nineteenth-century painter Helen Allingham's work features the subject-matter of rural homes and gardens: visual material that served a preservationist discourse in which the countryside was viewed 'as a rural idyll lost to the present'. Of greater relevance to this study is that her watercolours of tumbledown cottages and flower-filled gardens, that she had begun painting in the 1880s, remained popular in the early twentieth-century when they were reproduced in *Old English Country Cottages* (1906) and *The Cottage Homes of England* (1909). See Cherry, 1993: 175 - 83 (180).

²⁸⁴ Susan Casteras makes the valid point that for women artists, as much as men, the commercial need to remain within the mainstream, so as to appeal to potential buyers and critics, influenced choice of subject-matter. See Casteras, 2005: 14.

Cheesman ostensibly replicates the concept of a feminised/civilised empire, evident in her painting of Bell's single storey home and garden, in a further depiction of a bungalow and garden that constituted part of her work for the Gold Coast government. *A Government Officer's Bungalow, Gold Coast* (Fig. 18) was produced at Guggisberg's request in order to convey to the British public the pleasant living conditions of government officials working in the colony.²⁸⁵ Despite, as Guggisberg acknowledged, the limited 'artistic possibilities' of many of the subjects that Cheesman was directed to paint (amongst which this work could easily be numbered), he believed that she diligently and, in an 'artistic fashion', delivered the Gold Coast government's propaganda objective.²⁸⁶ In this instance, however, Cheesman's execution of Guggisberg's straightforward brief results in a surprisingly complex image that introduces an element of uncertainty into a work commissioned to convey a positive view of imperial intervention.

As in her painting of Bell's garden, in *A Government Officer's Bungalow, Gold Coast* Cheesman similarly emphasises 'English' planting - a flower bed redolent of that seen in a Gertrude Jekyll designed garden dominates the foreground of the picture - to convey the domestication and Anglicisation of an alien environment.²⁸⁷ The blooms appear to emerge, miraculously - a small oasis of abundant life - out of the surrounding arid red earth, representing, perhaps, the flowering of imported 'civilising' British values. But despite the pictorial prominence accorded to this manifestation of Britishness, it is impossible to escape the unremitting barrenness of that enveloping hostile earth which thwarts further propagation.²⁸⁸ The arid soil, symbolising, perhaps, indigenous resistance to Britain's intervention in the country serves as an explicit reminder that despite the picture's intended artifice this is neither an authentic nor a comprehensive transplantation of England that is being conveyed. If it were would Cheesman not have shown, for instance, verdant lawn surrounding the flowers? The lack of imperial control, symbolised by the expanse of uncultivable earth, is equally manifest in her depiction of the duller, more threatening

²⁸⁵ See *Gold Coast News*, 31 January 1924: 3.

²⁸⁶ Ibid: 1, 3. Guggisberg recalled, light-heartedly, in his speech to open Cheesman's exhibition, how on returning from a visit to a newly-constructed market in Accra, Cheesman complained: 'How can I paint a lot of grey stones and ugly cement?' This, continued Guggisberg in an ironic vein, was her 'disrespectful' way of referring 'to our wonderful work of art - the ferro-concrete, highly sanitary Selwyn Market'. Ibid: 1.

²⁸⁷ Alexandra Harris has described the decades up to the First World War as marking 'the heyday of [the garden designer] Gertrude Jekyll's bright swathes of perennials', but adds they 'would never lose their popularity'. Harris details how Jekyll used white-grey planting to formalise the edges of her flower beds, and we perhaps see evidence of her influence in the type of planting Cheesman depicts. See Harris, 2010: 228 - 29.

²⁸⁸ By contrast, in her painting of Bell's Baghdad garden Cheesman ameliorated the reality of Iraq's unforgiving climate, typified by the bare earth path running between the planting up to the door of the house, by dappling it with protective and welcoming shade.

indigenous vegetation - note the sharper edges of the foliage in contrast to the rounded leaves of the imported flora - that lingers ominously at the left of the picture, and, despite the crushing presence of the bungalow, boldly intrudes around the front of the residence, thwarted, perhaps only temporarily, in its enveloping quest by the rising flight of steps. To the right of the steps her depiction of coloured blooms in the border differentiates this planting from its nearly adjacent neighbour, and links it to the flora that dominates the foreground. Within the painting Cheesman thus evokes a sense of tension, opposition even, that raises a question-mark over the transformative success of the imperial mission. The conveyance of such doubt is, however, unexpected from an artist who, judging by the earlier pro-imperial paintings she produced in Iraq, and the later entry in her memoir recalling being asked to produce imperial propaganda ('Of course I was delighted'), seemed to willingly inhabit the same world of shared imperial values as her colonial government employer. Perhaps then it is problematic to read the tension that permeates Cheesman's image of Ghana as a negative response on her part to the imperial presence within the country. Rather, it could be argued that she introduces an element of tension within her picture so as to convey the idea of a continuing project, one that still had opposition to counter and much to achieve before the colony could take its place among the world's 'civilised' nations. Envisioning the implementation of the 'civilising mission' as an ongoing project unconstrained by time limits would certainly have corresponded with an imperialist view of empire at this time.²⁸⁹

I have in this section put forward reasons to explain Cheesman's employment by the Gold Coast government in 1923. Next, I address why the administration turned to an artist to help convey an idea of life in the colony. It was, as I will outline, a decision that was arguably born out of a wider contemporary demand that life in colonial West Africa should be represented in the work of western cultural producers.

3.4 European cultural projections of West Africa in the early twenties

The exhibition of Edith Cheesman's paintings in Accra in February 1924, some four months prior to their display at the British Empire Exhibition, may have been indirectly connected to a plan, originally proposed by the Gold Coast's Agricultural and Commercial Society, that exhibits destined for Wembley should also be shown at an exhibition in the colony. A report in *West Africa* in September 1923, outlining the proposal, stated that the Society had previously

²⁸⁹ As late as the mid thirties there were those in Britain who did not envisage the imminent end of the British Empire. George Sinclair, who trained for the colonial service at this time, recalled 'Few if any of us on the Colonial Services Course at Oxford in 1935 - 36 thought that we should run out of time'. Allen, 1979: 40.

held a number of shows dedicated to promoting the Gold Coast's agricultural products. Reporting that the proposed exhibition would 'serve a useful purpose' if its scope was widened to give 'encouragement to local arts, crafts and industries, which are on the increase', the article suggested that the exhibition should remain open for at least three weeks 'to enable people from all parts of West Africa to visit'.²⁹⁰ The exhibition's proposed length was considered important in maximising attendance (previous exhibitions in West Africa had only remained open for a week at most), but so also was a long-term objective that it could deliver.²⁹¹ The article noted a report submitted to the General Exhibition Committee by the Agricultural and Commercial Society that recommended the Committee should look beyond the exhibition's short-term promotional and educational objectives, and 'provide funds and suitable exhibits' to form the nucleus of a collection in a future Gold Coast Museum, a venture which the article's correspondent considered 'worthy of every encouragement'.²⁹²

In justifying support for this 'worthy' venture, the correspondent quoted from a contemporary article on museums by Sir Ray Lankester:

The first and most commanding duty of those who set up and maintain a public museum is to preserve actual things as records ... records of prehistoric man, his weapons and art ... records of modern times. These collections are the absolutely necessary foundation for the building-up of our knowledge of Nature and of man.²⁹³

We can deduce from the inclusion of the Lankester passage that the correspondent placed a high value upon the establishment in Ghana of a permanent repository, not only of indigenous, pre-colonial artefacts, but also the cultural production that recorded contemporary life. The article, however, does not make a specific plea that a Gold Coast Museum should also act as a repository of British-made cultural artefacts relating to the country. Indeed, the concluding passage appears to support more the promotion of the country's indigenous culture. It highlights a plan to hold a conference during the exhibition which would 'discuss the protection and encouragement of local industries and also the employment of skilled

²⁹⁰ See 'Africans and the Empire Exhibition and a Gold Coast Exhibition', *West Africa*, 29 September 1923. The article reported that the idea of an exhibition was conceived because prohibitive travel costs meant only a tiny minority of West Africa's population – 'a tenth of one per cent' – would be able to visit the Wembley Exhibition. Initially it was intended to hold the Gold Coast exhibition prior to Wembley, though this idea was abandoned because of fears that it would clash with the busy cocoa season (further evidence of the Colony prioritising economic considerations over cultural matters), and instead a date some time in early 1925 was proposed.

²⁹¹ The exhibition of Cheesman's work did not meet this three week criteria, remaining open for only ten days between 1st and 10th February 1924. See *West Africa*, 26 April 1924.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Ibid.

craftsmen in the [exhibition] pavilions to give practical demonstrations'.²⁹⁴ It is, rather, the editor of *West Africa*, who, in an addendum to the article, proposes that West African artefacts, 'together with a collection of British products', should, following the closure of the Wembley Exhibition, be displayed at a number of locations in the Gold Coast.²⁹⁵ Here, then, we encounter a call for the inclusion of British cultural output as part of a display of contemporary Ghanaian life: a call that was answered earlier than the editor proposed with the exhibition of Cheesman's paintings in Accra prior to their display at Wembley.

There had been calls earlier in the decade for producers of western high-culture – both painters and writers – to visit British West Africa and draw upon its life and atmosphere as material for their work. A series of articles focusing on this issue was published in *West Africa* in September and October 1921. They merit attention because the debate that unfolds reveals something of contemporary attitudes regarding the role of art in conveying the subject-matter of empire. The articles were initiated by the publication in the 10 September issue of an advertisement that had appeared in the *Times* a few days previously:

A gentleman who has returned from the Gold Coast and considers it the most picturesque Colony in the empire, with its historic marine castles, tropical scenery, and brilliant Native costumes, will pay the expenses of an artist of talent to make a tour and will arrange an exhibition. – Write Connoisseur, Box P. 1,591, The *Times*, E.C.4.²⁹⁶

The advertisement inspired a front page editorial, run under the banner, 'The Most Picturesque Colony in the Empire' in the 24 September issue, when it was used as evidence of changing perceptions of the Gold Coast.²⁹⁷ In the view of *West Africa* the colony was being transformed 'from ... the ugly duckling of the Empire, [to] ... an admired swan'.²⁹⁸ The editorial informed those artists intent on visiting the colony of the subject-matter to which they should attend. It is worth quoting at length because the Gold Coast it projects as best suited for artistic depiction differs markedly from the economically developed colony that, two years later, Guggisberg instructed Cheesman to convey:

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ 'A Coaster's London Log', *West Africa*, 10 September 1921.

²⁹⁷ The editorial cited further evidence of changing perceptions of the Gold Coast and West Africa generally that, it believed, was underway. It referred to an item in 'A Coaster's London Log' in the 10 September issue which mentioned a brother and sister who were going to spend a summer holiday with their father in Accra, and used it as evidence that the Gold Coast was no longer thought of as 'a "beastly hole" with "an awful climate", and "the white man's grave", but a place to spend a happy holiday'. It is worth noting that *West Africa* was owned by the shipping line Elder Dempster, who transported most of those travelling between Britain and West Africa, so it had its own economic motive for promoting the Gold Coast. See Adi, 1998: 26; 'A Coaster's London Log', *West Africa*, 10 September 1921; 'The most picturesque Colony in the Empire', *West Africa*, 24 September 1921.

²⁹⁸ 'The most picturesque Colony in the Empire', *West Africa*, 24 September 1921.

But the true field of the artist will be to depict the sea and sky, the land and the people; to put on his canvas adequate presentments of the rolling surf; the sparkle of the many-smiling sea; the sky awakening with the dawn, or glowing gorgeous at sunset; the brilliant sunlight and purple of the day; the black luminous darkness of the starlit night; the effulgence of the moonlight; and to bring to British home-staying people some reflection of the tropical day and night. The forests with their sombre depths broken by shafts of sunlight, the gigantic trees, the hanging orchids, the streams and the great rivers, the graceful palms, the tender greens of the young crops, the almost indolent beauty of the silk-cottons and the edums, with their slender-seeming stems, their spreading branches and heads of verdure towering above the mass of the forest, the grassy plains and the hills of the interior, will all call for record.

Let him also give us pictures of some great Native ceremonial gatherings, where many chiefs are assembled, with their gorgeous State canopies, their suites of sword bearers and drummers, their spokesmen and councillors, and the masses of the people looking on, clad in their "brilliant Native costumes", the men wearing the old Roman toga glorified with a wealth of colour and worn not like the stiffly arranged draperies of a modern "classical statue", but with the ease with which a man carries his daily habit, and the women in graceful draperies.²⁹⁹

The only hint of an economically productive land that emerges in the editorial is a brief mention of tender young crops; a reference that is overwhelmed by extensive descriptions of Ghana's native, abundant, and luxuriant flora which similarly threatens to obliterate this solitary example of human intervention in the natural landscape. Instead, the *West Africa* editorial offers further evidence of a prevailing attitude in the early 1920s; that, as far as painting was concerned, empire remained something conceived of as exotically picturesque.

One cannot fail to notice how frequently the word 'picturesque' occurs in writing concerned with the visual projection of empire in the 1920s, be that in a specific context of exhibition reviews and art writing, or more generally as, in the *West Africa* editorial, a descriptive term utilised to suggest a colonial environment rich with aesthetic delights. Although its use in the 1920s differed to some degree from its original application in the late eighteenth-century when it described an artificial, aesthetically pleasing construction of landscape, in other regards the early twentieth-century conception of the picturesque remained fundamentally similar.³⁰⁰ The realisation of an idealised picturesque landscape for artists in the late eighteenth-century necessitated the omission of scenes of rural labour or industrial production which would disrupt a desired aesthetic.³⁰¹ The editing out of these indicators of contemporary economic growth emphasises the artificiality and restrictive

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ See Lukacher, 1994: 119 – 22.

³⁰¹ Ibid: 120.

character of the picturesque, and a similar editing process informs picturesque constructions of empire in the 1920s.

The picturesque facilitated empire's decontextualisation. It permitted the colonies to be viewed as sites uncontaminated by history, and reduced to a mere assemblage of timeless aesthetic views and people to which artists could selectively respond. We see evidence in the *West Africa* editorial of vivid language being used to evoke temporally decontextualised views of Ghana – 'the sky awakening with the dawn'; 'the forests with their sombre depths broken by shafts of sunlight'. It is, in the view of the editorial, not just the Ghanaian landscape that serves this purpose, for the indigenous population in their "brilliant Native costumes" are also prized for their picturesque value. Moreover, the comparison of Ghanaian male dress to togas worn in Roman times, alongside talk of 'sword bearers', imposes stasis upon the population. This 'profoundly imperialist move' enabled the construction of an ossified empire that served the purposes of an imperial intervention designated as introducing progressive change to 'backward' regions of the globe.³⁰² Further, it falsely positioned Ghana and West Africa generally in opposition to the West, reducing the region to a site of seemingly unchanging otherness: one deemed by contemporary commentators as ideally suited to picturesque treatment by visiting European artists.³⁰³

The editorial concludes by arguing that colour is required to adequately convey the vividness of the tropical colonies. Despite, it continues, the numerous photographs of local scenery published in *West Africa*, these black and white images give no idea of 'the great splendour [that] comes from the glowing colour' of the region.³⁰⁴ This point though became an issue of contention. T. Gordon Cooper countered in an article, 'West Africa and the Painter', published in the 1 October issue, that it was an 'illusion that the predominant feature in West African scenery is its colour'.³⁰⁵ Although, he conceded, artists would initially be dazzled by the riot of colour they would encounter on their first sight of the West African coast – 'brilliantly painted boats'; 'fruits even more brilliant in hue'; 'variegated silks'; - especially in contrast to the 'dull, grey Liverpool sky' that they had left behind, this impression would fade once ashore when they would realise that there was a similar depressing monotony to the colour of West Africa, and that ultimately it could not provide anything as 'brilliant as a Kentish garden in July or Arundel Park in September'.³⁰⁶

³⁰² Mills, 1994: 42.

³⁰³ See Said, 2003: 1.

³⁰⁴ *West Africa*, 24 September 1921.

³⁰⁵ 'West Africa and the Painter', *West Africa*, 1 October 1921.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

A week later, in the 8 October issue, Gordon Cooper's negative assessment of West Africa's worth as source material for the painter was rejected by Captain J.F.J. Fitzpatrick in an article also published under the banner 'West Africa and the Painter'. In visually rich language Fitzpatrick described the material that awaited prospective visiting artists:

Is Sierra Leone mountain, clouded or flecked with floating streamers of snow-white mist, or stark in the sunshine, or bathed in moonlight; is that not strange, wonderful, beautiful, dismaying, entrancing? Is that not worth painting, if a man *big* enough to paint it can be found? And the sail canoes that flutter and swoop and swerve about the many-coloured waters in the sunshine? And the wicked old Gold Coast castles? And the lagoon at Lagos? ... Would a *big* man, were he ever to come our way, scorn our world? I think not.³⁰⁷

Fitzpatrick's writing reveals evidence of a traditional conception of empire. He limits the artist awaited by West Africa to being male and compounds this limitation by specifying that he must by necessity be 'a *big* man' – West Africa obviously deserves, in his view, an artist of reputation. And also she deserves a certain type of man – 'a venturesome man' – one who would not only visit the coast but travel inland; in short, the type of hyper-masculine male still generally deemed to personify the imperial project.³⁰⁸ Likewise, the image of empire that Fitzpatrick evokes to attract prospective visiting painters – one that echoes that expressed in the *West Africa* editorial – also restates previous imaginings. He, too, positions West Africa as a timeless – 'elders gowned as Abraham was' – and eminently picturesque – 'a riot of colour and life and romance and movement' – world.³⁰⁹ Such a world undoubtedly still survived in the northern regions of Nigeria to which Fitzpatrick specifically referred, but equally a more thoroughly westernised Africa existed in the coastal cities of Lagos and Accra: one that Fitzpatrick ignored, as had the *West Africa* editorial, presumably for lacking the picturesque exoticism that he believed would attract painters.

It would, however, be a mistake to too hastily dismiss Fitzpatrick for evoking, in common with his contemporaries, only a limited, uncomplicated, aesthetically picturesque West Africa – although he undeniably contributes to such a projection. What differentiates his conception of West Africa, what invests it with greater significance, is the introduction of a disruptive element in his projection of the region. Amidst the list of positive adjectives that he employs to evoke a picturesque Sierra Leone appears the jarringly negative 'dismaying'. Fitzpatrick's use of the term undermines the picturesque's function to produce an

³⁰⁷ Captain J.F.J. Fitzpatrick 'West Africa and the Painter', *West Africa*, 8 October 1921.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

'appearance of tranquillity',³¹⁰ and expands, for artists, the theoretical space in which to explore alternative, possibly more antipathetic, constructions of empire. That Fitzpatrick introduced such a disruptive term in describing West Africa is perhaps not surprising when considering that he began his article with the bold assertion that 'Nigeria awaits its painter, as it awaits its Kipling':³¹¹ reference to whom introduces an element of uncertainty and 'imperial self-examination' into any conceptualisation of empire.³¹² In citing Kipling, and in employing the term 'dismaying', Fitzpatrick opens up all of West Africa's 'rich fullness' of material to the artist's gaze, thereby making possible a more complex, multi-layered envisioning of the region: one not restricted to the picturesque imagining advocated in contemporary discourse.³¹³

The flurry of articles in *West Africa* debating the attraction of the region for painters, concluded on 15 October in a further front page report headlined 'The Picturesque Gold Coast'. It was reported that over fifty British artists had expressed their willingness to take up the advertisement's offer. One of the 'big' men that Fitzpatrick had called for, Frank Brangwyn, is quoted: 'I would give my ears to be able to go on this trip', whilst an anonymous 'famous' painter is recorded as saying 'the man who goes, if he is worth his salt, will make a reputation'.³¹⁴ The article concludes by stating that E.A. Cox - 'one of the most talented artists of the day, and a pupil of Mr Brangwyn' - is expected to leave for West Africa in the next month, and the paper hopes that his venture will not only 'add to his own reputation', but also benefit the Gold Coast, making it more 'worthily known to the world'.³¹⁵

³¹⁰ Nochlin, 1991: 50.

³¹¹ Captain J.F.J. Fitzpatrick 'West Africa and the Painter', *West Africa*, 8 October 1921.

³¹² Sullivan, 1993: 115. Kipling's stories of empire are populated with characters who express the uncertainty and lack of control that permeated the imperial mission. Jack Pansay, who features in Kipling's short story, *The Phantom Rickshaw*, whilst in Simla in India, experiences 'the lowest circles of the Inferno which it is permitted man to tread on earth', and watches himself 'faltering through the dark labyrinths of doubt, misery, and utter despair'. Kipling, 1994: 85.

³¹³ Captain J.F.J. Fitzpatrick 'West Africa and the Painter', *West Africa*, 8 October 1921.

³¹⁴ 'The Picturesque Gold Coast', *West Africa*, 15 October 1921. Frank Brangwyn (1867 – 1956), had been elected to the Royal Academy in 1919 and by the early 1920s had a considerable international reputation as a painter, printmaker and muralist. He had been the subject of a monograph – Walter Shaw Sparrow's *The Spirit of the Age* (London, 1905) – and his work regularly featured in art periodicals such as *The Studio*. Brangwyn visited Africa for the first time in 1888, stopping at Morocco en route to Turkey, and in late 1890 or early 1891 he was commissioned by Thomas Larkin of the Japanese Gallery, London to undertake a painting tour of South Africa, the results of which were exhibited at the Japanese Gallery in May 1892. A further visit to Morocco in 1893 resulted in the production of an oil, *Trade on the Beach*, based upon studies that he made in Tangier, which was bought by the French government for the Musée du Luxembourg. See Horner, 2006: 33, and Wilcox, 2006: 59.

³¹⁵ It is not stated as to whether Cox (1876 – 1955) was the beneficiary of 'Connoisseur's' largesse, and neither is he recorded in the passenger lists, published in *West Africa*, of those who left for the Coast around this time, so it is impossible to confirm if he actually visited West Africa. Cox did, however, produce work based upon the theme of empire. He was one of the artists commissioned by the EMB and completed a set of posters which included two large mural-like images titled *The Empire's Copra* and *Sugar Growing in Mauritius* (both 102cm x

What is there to draw from the brief, but intense, discussion of the painter's role in West Africa that appeared in *West Africa* in the autumn of 1921? The concluding sentence to the series of articles is telling. It underlines the economic dimension to empire that, I have argued, permeates much of its cultural projection in the early 1920s, be that at 'official' level, as in the Gold Coast government's emphasis upon the colony's economic life which it conveyed through its exhibits at Wembley in 1924 and 1925, or at the individual level of the cultural producer, who could realise a personal economic benefit from work that drew upon empire for its source material. So we see *West Africa* hoping that the Gold Coast's promotion through the work of an artist would realise additional benefits, including, I believe it is fair to say, economic benefits, and similarly hoping that the artist, E.A. Cox, would equally materially prosper from a rising reputation garnered from his work depicting the colony.

What additionally stands out in the *West Africa* articles is the restricted role that the contributors consign to painting in their projection of the region, with the exception of Fergusson's tentative opening up of a more comprehensive conception. In their directives to prospective visiting artists, West Africa is restrictively conceptualised by the contributors as a site of the exotic: a fantasy that is maintained by them ignoring the existence of a familiarising and perhaps more prosaic western presence in the tropical colonies.³¹⁶ In the case of the *West Africa* editorial this stance is particularly revealing. The paper's restriction of painting to a limited projection of an indigenous West Africa stands in stark contrast to its own employment of another visual medium, photography, which it used extensively to project the imperial presence in the region.³¹⁷ In a wider art historical context the contributors' attitude equally appears as regressive, especially when contrasted with earlier critical responses that tolerated an imperial presence in the graphic art that conveyed empire's picturesque character.³¹⁸

152.5cm) that were displayed on the EMB's purpose-built hoardings in March 1927. See Constantine, 1986b for a reproduction of *Sugar Growing in Mauritius*.

³¹⁶ Here the contributors concur with what, I have argued, was a commonly-held view at this time.

³¹⁷ Bound volumes of *West Africa*, held at the British Library's Newspaper Library at Colindale in North London, abound with photographs recording the British imperial presence in West Africa, whether that be in an official capacity, exemplified by countless photographs of Colonial officials from gubernatorial positions downwards, or in the equally large number of photographs recording the British indulging in numerous leisure pursuits such as cricket and football.

³¹⁸ In Thomas Daniell's *Views of Calcutta* - a series of twelve engravings produced and published between 1786 and 1788 that record life in what was then the new British capital of India - the artist combines imperial and indigenous elements to evoke the city's picturesqueness. In the engravings Calcutta's Indian and imperial architecture forms a backdrop to street scenes that reveal a cosmopolitan urban life in which English and Indian populations mix freely. Daniell's work was praised by the artist William Hodges for accurately conveying 'the mixture of European and Asiatic manners which may be observed in Calcutta' that 'form a sight perhaps more novel and extraordinary than any city in the world can present to a stranger'. Hodges' comments suggest that Daniell's recording of the imperial presence in late eighteenth-century Calcutta did not jeopardise his evocation

If the articles in *West Africa* are to a large extent united in their view as to what constituted suitable material for the painter visiting the region, another article concerned with the cultural projection of West Africa at this time is worthy of mention because it introduces a degree of ambivalence into the debate. Headlined, 'A Novelist of Nigeria', the article appeared in the 13 August 1921 issue and reported on two recently published novels by Robert Simpson that were set in the colony.³¹⁹ The piece begins by declaring: 'West Africa has long awaited a Kipling or a Haggard to come forward and reveal her true self to the world', before proceeding to compliment Simpson for partially fulfilling that role.³²⁰ What is noticeable in the article is an acceptance, within the format of the novel, that the disclosure of Africa's 'true self' in the early 1920s includes acknowledgment of the western presence in the region, something that a contemporary discourse attempted to deny to painters in their projection of empire. It stipulates the writer must take 'very great care ... to show facts in their true perspective, and not [express] a distorted idea of the conditions of life in Nigeria': an inevitable outcome if the focus is solely trained upon a region's indigeneness.³²¹

Both of Simpson's stories feature a European trader in a central role, and the western presence in the two novels is bolstered by the inclusion of English administrative officials. *Swamp Breath* features a conversation between a trader, Macara, and Barstow, a newly-appointed Provincial Commissioner. Macara, arguing for a closer relationship in the colony between trade and government, believes 'the day when trade in this part of the world can be regarded simply as a matter of profit is over'. 'The native', he continues, 'though he is still very much of a child in his impulses and fears and superstitions, is rapidly developing a keen sense of values – our standard of values, that is'.³²² Encapsulated within Macara's view is the rationale behind Britain's continuing imperial role. The economic exploitation of the colonies continues, but alongside the inculcation of 'civilised' values into the indigenous population as part of a development process. Simpson's expression, through the character of Macara, of this view, results in the projection of empire as something intrinsically linked to British life and values. Although the novel typically conveys empire's otherness, and, indeed, the article devotes considerable space to discussing whether Simpson 'has caught the Coast atmosphere' or 'whether he depicts the Native truly', this limiting conception of empire does

of the city's picturesqueness, rather, the juxtaposition of the city's different cultures that his work records was deemed to add to this effect. For the William Hodges' quote see Hodges W. *Travels in India, During the Years 1780, 1781, 1782 and 1783* (London, 1793), 16, quoted in de Almeida and Gilpin, 2005: 184.

³¹⁹ The two novels reviewed in the article are Robert Simpson's *The Bite of Benin* (London, 1919) and *Swamp Breath* (London, 1921).

³²⁰ 'A Novelist of Nigeria', *West Africa*, 13 August 1921.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² The passage from *Swamp Breath* is quoted in 'A Novelist of Nigeria', *West Africa*, 13 August 1921.

not constitute the central reason behind its production.³²³ Indeed, the article apports a similar amount of space to assessing Simpson's portrayal of the British 'types' that populate his novels, and he is criticised for producing negative stereotypes 'which jar the Coaster's sense of propriety'.³²⁴ Hence, for the article's author, it was important that fictional textual constructions, unlike their visual equivalents, accurately conveyed West Africa as much a site of transplanted Britishness as the location of an exotic other:

In March 1924, two months before Cheesman's pictures of the Gold Coast were shown at Wembley, an exhibition of paintings of Sierra Leone opened at Brook Street Galleries in London's West End. Paradoxically, it was not work by one of the 'big' men, urged to visit the region by J.F.J. Fitzpatrick, that was on view, but, instead, the paintings of 'a petite and dainty' female French artist, Rose Chicotot Stinus.³²⁵ *West Africa* reported that the exhibition resulted from Stinus' two year stay in the colony, five months of which were spent in the interior, and believed that it would provide a London audience with 'a new idea of Sierra Leone and its people'.³²⁶ A member of that audience included Decima Guggisberg, who was reported to be an early visitor to the show.³²⁷

Stinus' paintings were the subject of a short review in the *Times* which praised the work as that 'of a real painter with a feeling for quality as well as an eye for circumstantial interest'.³²⁸ Based upon the review's account, the exhibition comprised landscapes, judged to 'convey with intensity the glow and the luxuriance of Africa', and studies of the indigenous Sierra Leonean population. The figure studies, more so than the landscapes, were praised for evoking 'the subject of place'.³²⁹ Singled out was a work titled *Vierge Noire*. Classified as 'a monumental figure subject', the painting was described as showing a Sierra Leonean woman dressed in a dull crimson skirt and blue shawl seated 'Madonna-wise' with her baby in front of

³²³ Ibid. Simpson is praised in the article for accurately conveying the physical atmosphere of West Africa, specifically his description of a tropical storm, but is admonished for offensively characterising the Benin people as "a disgusting, disease-ridden spawn of barbarity", a description, the article's author, described as 'a Coaster', considers 'grotesquely untrue'.

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ 'A Sierra Leone Exhibition in London', *West Africa*, 8 March 1924. Despite her diminutive stature, an image of Stinus as a resilient individual – 'she started painting, practically every day, at 6 am, and worked steadily on for many hours' – is conveyed in the article. In spite of her gender, she is characterised, like Cheesman, as possessing the personal qualities necessary for colonial life, and is described as looking 'none the worse for her stay in West Africa'.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ As a member of the West Africa Group Committee responsible for overseeing the West African colonies' contribution to the Wembley exhibition, Decima Guggisberg was perhaps casting an 'official' eye over the work, some of which, the *Times* reported, had been selected by the Government of West Africa to be shown at the British Empire Exhibition. See 'Art Exhibitions', *Times*, 5 March 1924: 12.

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Ibid.

a large bronze-leaved shrub. It was a work that for the *Times*' reviewer embodied 'the emotional atmosphere of the Dark Continent'. Conversely, another painting, *Back from Fishing* (Fig. 19), was praised for exceeding the mere representation of a 'type' by revealing 'a sympathetic appreciation of dignity and mystery proceeding from race'.³³⁰ Yet, although for the reviewer, a degree of individuality was evident in the figures of the sparsely-clad fishermen, their sexually exotic portrayal arguably conforms to a European stereotype of black men that prevailed in English society during the first half of the twentieth-century which 'traditionally reduced them to their bodies and their sexualities'.³³¹ Indeed, what we see being emphasised in the foreground figure of the fisherman is, as Michael Budd has argued, that 'at the level of the body' black men were 'to some extent offered a promise of equality' with their white European counterparts, although, as he significantly adds, this did not extend to notions of 'cultur[al] and technological achievement'.³³² Evidence of a 'technological' lack is clearly apparent in Stinus' equally stereotypical representation of Africa's 'primitiveness'. Silhouetted against the ocean, the two fishermen, one carrying in a basket on his head the day's catch, the other, the 'primitive' oar that helped facilitate this reaping of the sea's harvest, epitomise 'primitive' man juxtaposed alongside primitive and abundant nature.³³³

The contradictory nature of the review demonstrates a lack of consistency in the writer's response to Stinus' work. On the one hand there remains a desire for the continuing conceptualisation of Africa as unknown and unknowable - the eternal 'Dark Continent' - yet, on the other, there is an equally strong need for painting to pierce Africa's concealing skin and produce something other than a stereotypical response to the region. *Back from Fishing* is heralded - though I argue incorrectly - for doing just this. However, just as homogeneity's barriers appear to have been breached, by the reviewer's ascription of individualising characteristics to the fishermen, this individuality is immediately undermined by the classification of these same characteristics as general attributes of race. Ultimately, Africa remains defined as an homogenised entity – dignified and still mysterious.

Neither in *Back from Fishing* does Africa escape a perpetuating and limiting representation as an environment devoid of a western presence. This is not to accuse Stinus of entirely conforming to the discourse's unrealistic projection of an unpenetrated Africa. Judging by other titles she appears to recognise the imperial presence in Sierra Leone in her

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Faulkner, 2007: 170.

³³² Budd, 1997: 90.

³³³ Madge and Cline-Cole have detailed that the 'overriding impression' conveyed in early western travel accounts of West Africa was not just one of 'exoticism or strangeness', but also 'Edenic plenty and fruitfulness'. See Madge and Cline-Cole, 1996: 385.

paintings of the colony. A view of the capital Freetown, briefly referred to in *West Africa*, and another landscape, *The End of Oxford Street*, listed in the *Times* review, hint at works that possibly either depicted or, evidenced by the latter's title, more certainly alluded to the colony's imperial presence and history. What is more the issue is that the work singled out for critical discussion in the *Times*, and the painting reproduced in *West Africa*, are images of Africa that conform to established, romantic conceptions of a continent untransformed by the incursion of western modernity. The prioritisation of such work positions – perhaps falsely – Stinus' paintings of Sierra Leone within a discourse that, for painters, consigned West Africa as a site of unchanging exoticness; one that failed to offer an alternative, more progressive, conceptualisation of the continent and its indigenous population in the early 1920s.

Evidence of an alternative projection of Africa at around this time is found in a portrait, *Miss Dove-Edwin of Sierra Leone* (Fig. 20), painted in 1922 by the British artist, Beatrice Bright.³³⁴ Gladys Dove-Edwin was described in *West Africa*. She was said to come from Sierra Leone and had been studying in London for three years alongside her brother.³³⁵ As a member of the wealthy and educated West African elite, she would in London in all likelihood have worn western clothes.³³⁶ However, Bright's portrayal of Dove-Edwin in dress that stylistically appears more African than European engenders for the time a 'comforting' spatial distance which undermines the disruptive actuality of the Sierra Leonean woman's presence in London – a situation that would have been exacerbated by her depiction in western attire – and helps confirm the binary opposition between self and other that constituted a central element of the imperial mindset.³³⁷ Moreover, the signifier of dress ostensibly helps convey her as a generic ethnographic 'type' – a designation which had traditionally placed 'colonial subjects in a subordinate position' to the European populace – and further causes her

³³⁴ Bright's portrait, priced at £52 10s, was shown at the *Daily Express* Women's Exhibition at Olympia in 1922, having been selected by a committee comprising Laura Knight, Sir William Orpen and P.G. Konody. See *West Africa*, 26 August 1922.

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ *West Africa* published numerous photographs of the elite black population of the West African colonies wearing western dress. For a discussion of the social background of West Africans who came to Britain to be educated, see Adi, 1996: 3 – 9.

³³⁷ This opposition was informed by an entrenched western view that had developed by the early twentieth-century which ridiculed West Africans who, in adopting European dress, breached a static western conception of them as primitive, but also exotic. Decima Moore-Guggisberg writing in 1909 considered there was 'an extraordinary difference ... between the West African native as one sees him in England, looking clumsy and unused to his tight European clothes, and as he looks in his own land in the garb of his people'. Moore, 1909: 24. And a colonial official differentiated between the contrastingly attired West Africans that he saw in Freetown, Sierra Leone in 1915 in more hostile terms, stating, that those 'in nothing but scanty trews and a coloured table cloth with a hole in the middle to put their head through' looked as though they were 'very good fellows' whilst 'the gentlemen in lounge suits and stiff collars looked nasty'. Colin Walker, unofficial diary entry (3 January 1915), Oxford University Colonial Records Project, Rhodes House Library, quoted in Kuklick, 1979: 106.

'threatening' individuality to be subsumed.³³⁸ Indeed, Bright was reported in *West Africa* as saying she was drawn to Dove-Edwin through admiration of her 'type'.³³⁹ Bright's use of this description is, however, at odds with her giving a name to the picture's subject, thereby firmly establishing her individuality, and the term is further compromised by the ambiguous visual evidence of the painting itself. The portrayal of Dove-Edwin conveys the subject's hybrid exoticism; a factor that differentiates Bright's exoticised image of West Africa from the strictly indigenous exoticism expressed in Stinus' *Back from Fishing*.³⁴⁰

Marianna Torgovnick, in her discussion of the primitive 'type', argues that 'to study the primitive is to enter an exotic world which is also a familiar world', because, she maintains, primitives represent the West's 'untamed selves'.³⁴¹ Gladys Dove-Edwin is certainly cast as exotic, and she perhaps through her partial nakedness also represents a version of the 'untamed self' in Bright's portrait of her, though her fashionably sophisticated appearance undermines notions of the primitive.³⁴² Bright does though emphasise nakedness – a pictorial and descriptive device traditionally used to differentiate the 'civilised' West from an Africa in need of 'civilising' – and, indeed, it is the blackness of Dove-Edwin's skin, given pictorial prominence by Bright, that helps establish her otherness.³⁴³ Black skin and nakedness would certainly have constituted the 'basic grammar and vocabulary' of the contemporary primitivist discourse that, as Torgovnick has argued, was 'fundamental to the western sense of self and other'.³⁴⁴ Undeniably, Dove-Edwin is portrayed as an exotic woman to be stared at by western eyes – her eyes look upwards from her slightly tilting head to acknowledge our gaze. Her exoticism, however, is not solely predicated upon her indigenesness because alongside the 'vivid colourings' of her 'African costume' she is portrayed wearing a fashionable western 'bob' haircut of the period that firmly positions her as an African woman familiar with the cultural

³³⁸ Stannard, 2009: 37.

³³⁹ See *West Africa*, 26 August 1922.

³⁴⁰ In March 1923, *West Africa* reported upon the work of the sculptor E. Whitney-Smith R.A. who, the paper stipulated, 'has been specialising in African subjects for the last eighteen months'. It was left to the reporter to provide additional information upon the subject of a Whitney-Smith bust generically titled *A Lady from the Gold Coast* that appeared in the 14 April edition of the newspaper. Denied individuality in the work's title, the subject was said to be a descendant of a King of Ashanti who resided in London and who 'has business interests in West Africa'. See *West Africa*, 31 March, 14 April 1923.

³⁴¹ Torgovnick, 1990: 8.

³⁴² The only visual evidence I have obtained of Bright's portrait of Gladys Dove-Edwin is a black-and-white reproduction, published in *West Africa*, which limits any meaningful discussion upon the artist's use of colour. A description of the painting in *West Africa*, however, refers to 'the vivid colourings of the African costume ... orange, gold and black' which must have contributed to the exotic lustre of the work. See *West Africa*, 26 August 1922.

³⁴³ Clare Madge and Reginald Cline-Cole have argued that images of West Africa in the nineteenth-century involved the 'use of representations which "darkened" nature and society' so as to 'emphasise the "moral wilderness" of West Africans'. See Madge and Cline-Cole, 1996: 387.

³⁴⁴ Torgovnick, 1990: 8.

minutiae of metropolitan life.³⁴⁵ Petra Rau has argued that attitudes towards foreigners residing in Britain in the early twentieth-century rested upon 'assumptions about clearly definable boundaries' which, she continues, 'made each category identifiable, and their transgression visible'.³⁴⁶ Dove-Edwin's portrait, however, breaches the constraints of the prevailing discourse that determined colonial exoticism as specifically indigenous. Her exoticism disrupts one aspect of Simon Faulkner's definition of the exotic that 'within the context of empire ... the exotic is constructed as if it stood outside of the economic and political relations of imperialism', but confirms a further part of his argument that 'exoticism mutated to meet new situations and cultural needs'.³⁴⁷ So although evidence of the racial 'definable boundaries', that marked western constructions of foreigners who resided in the West, remains apparent in Bright's portrait of Dove-Edwin - her non-western dress carries too powerful a visual charge for this not to be so - she is portrayed, albeit however tentatively, as a hybrid subject, one who reveals evidence of drawing upon two opposed cultures.³⁴⁸ In contrast to Stinus' projection of an untransformed West Africa, personified by the 'primitively exotic' Sierra Leonean fishermen seen in *Back from Fishing*, Bright conveys a more modern conception of the country through an exotic Sierra Leonean subject who reveals the intermingling of cultures; a conception that renders less stable the imagining of West Africans as distanced others, then in circulation.

The 'official' view of West Africa at this time also demanded an alternative and wider conception of the colonies than the narrower picturesque projection of a timeless region promoted in contemporary discourse; one in which the implementation of western ideas of progress, both economic and social, were also conveyed. In the following two sections, I initially explore the use of 'official' or propaganda art and contextualise its deployment in Britain in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, before exploring the colonial authority's ideological motivation for commissioning a British artist to convey an image of the Gold Coast in the early 1920s.

³⁴⁵ See *West Africa*, 26 August 1922.

³⁴⁶ Rau, 2009: 180.

³⁴⁷ Faulkner, 2006: 73, 71. For a detailed and fascinating discussion of exoticism see Faulkner, 2006: 72 – 75.

³⁴⁸ An expression of a clear demarcation between westerners and Africans which fixed an idea of the 'African' is found in interwar writing. In *The Empire in These Days*, Reginald Coupland believed it best that Africans remained 'rooted in Africa ... to help [them] become the best possible kind of African, not something half and half or hybrid, still less a synthetic European'. Coupland, 1935: 169.

3.5 Art and propaganda

Evonne Levy argues that the term 'propaganda', invoked in 'art historical literature as a sometimes more, sometimes less dismissive epithet', has resulted in the 'moral polarisation' of art labelled as such.³⁴⁹ Heeding Levy's comments, how should we proceed when encountering the following statement made by Sir Gordon Guggisberg in the speech he delivered to open Edith Cheesman's exhibition in Accra in January 1924?: 'Those who are artists, and who understand these things, will appreciate the way in which the difficulties of combining art and propaganda work have been overcome'.³⁵⁰ Guggisberg's words merit close attention. His choice of the term 'difficulties' hints at possible public consternation over art being used for such purposes at this time. Despite the possibility of a hostile public response, Guggisberg, in commissioning art with a specific propaganda purpose, obviously felt confident that such work would also be positively received. Therefore, to avoid reflexly dismissing Cheesman's paintings for the Gold Coast government as morally polarised, solely because Guggisberg imposed upon them in January 1924 a contemporarily perceived stigma, it is necessary to examine attitudes towards propaganda in the early 1920s.³⁵¹

The Gold Coast government's decision in 1923 to commission propaganda art for their pavilion at the British Empire Exhibition had recent precedents. Notwithstanding the 'unofficial' propaganda art produced a couple of years earlier by Alfonso Toft and Dorothea Vyvyan in support of Britain's imperial endeavours, the utilisation of art for propaganda purposes had been a strategy widely employed by the British government during the First World War. Sue Malvern has argued that the propaganda overseen by the War Propaganda Bureau under the leadership of C.F.G. Masterman from 1914 to 1917 avoided extreme views and exaggerated rhetoric in favour of more measured arguments. It was a policy given visual form in the restrained work of Muirhead Bone, employed, by the Bureau, as Britain's first Official War Artist. For Malvern, Bone's quiet work was in sympathy with 'Masterman's desire for reasonable and ethical propaganda'.³⁵²

Despite the low-key propaganda that had emanated from the Bureau's headquarters at Wellington House, London which enabled the playwright and novelist Arnold Bennett towards the end of the war to consider its benign potential, and pose the question: 'is not propaganda

³⁴⁹ Levy, 2004: 6, 62.

³⁵⁰ *Gold Coast News*, 31 January 1924: 1.

³⁵¹ For a good overview of attitudes to propaganda at this time, see Sproule, 1989.

³⁵² Malvern, 2004: 17, 18. For an account of the establishment of the War Propaganda Bureau, and the scope of their wartime activities, see Messinger, 1992.

education?’,³⁵³ there was generally little political desire in peace-time Britain to maintain the wartime propaganda agencies.³⁵⁴ The *Manchester Guardian* proclaimed in February 1919, that ‘propaganda ... should disappear wholly in peacetime with the flame projectors and the mustard gas’, and as part of the general mood of disarmament the propaganda agencies were quickly jettisoned by the government.³⁵⁵ As Bennett’s rhetorical question illustrates, however, as also an article in the *Observer* in May 1919 which argued that ‘an efficient propaganda seems to be indispensable if the responsibilities of Government are to be multiplied at the present rate of progress,’ public opinion on the subject remained mixed.³⁵⁶ Bertrand Russell condemned propaganda’s malign influence, and argued that the growth of literacy had made it much easier to spread misinformation, but others, C.F. Higham for instance, viewed propaganda more positively as a necessary and benign communication tool of government, arguing, that social change could not be enforced ‘unless the mind of the nation is clarified and focused first of all’.³⁵⁷ This did not mean, Higham maintained, that the public should be duped ‘with secretive, backstairs propaganda’ that merely acted as publicity, but that propaganda should serve a positive role in relating the ‘frank advertisement of facts’.³⁵⁸ As Mariel Grant has pointed out, the interchangeability of the words publicity, advertising, propaganda and education has muddled the water with regards to the meaning of these terms at this time.³⁵⁹ What is clear though is that the term ‘propaganda’ had entered the public realm, a state of affairs recognised in the entry on the subject in the 1922 supplement of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* which insisted, ‘there still exists a propaganda state of mind which differs from anything experienced before the war’.³⁶⁰

One of Cheesman’s Gold Coast paintings serves in illustrating the possible ways in which a propaganda work could be open to interpretation at this time: benignly, as an

³⁵³ See ‘Bennett to Beaverbrook, 24 October 1918’ in Hepburn, 1970: 75. The appointment of Arnold Bennett as Director of Propaganda at the Ministry of Information on 1 October 1918 was welcomed in the press. Bennett had earlier been associated with the dissemination of the type of subtle propaganda that was directed at neutral and allied countries, and the *Manchester Guardian* hoped that he would bring this experience to bear in changing the tone of home propaganda which had consisted ‘too much in the dissemination of the literature of hate’. See *Manchester Guardian*, 2 October 1918.

³⁵⁴ In his account of the dismantling of the wartime propaganda agencies, Messinger refers to public ambivalence over the continuing use of government propaganda in peacetime, but argues that Lloyd George ultimately considered there would be too high a political price to pay if it remained a tool of government. See Messinger, 1992: 251 – 56.

³⁵⁵ ‘Official’ Information’, *Manchester Guardian*, 25 February 1919.

³⁵⁶ The ‘Reconstruction’ Pamphlets and their Aim’, *Observer*, 18 May 1919.

³⁵⁷ Russell B. *Free Thought and Official Propaganda*, Conway Memorial Lecture, 24 March 1922, cited in Grant, 1994: 15. Higham C. F. *Looking Forward: Mass Education through Publicity* (London, 1920), quoted in Grant, 1994: 10.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*: 14.

³⁶⁰ See *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 3 of the supplement to the thirteenth ed. (1922), 235 – 36.

advertisement or educational image, or, malignly, as a censored representation. *A Ward in the Hospital for Africans Accra, Gold Coast* (Fig. 21) was described by Guggisberg as a 'propaganda picture to show the people at home how Britain provides for the care of the native peoples': a statement that clearly seeks to position the work within the realm of benign educational material.³⁶¹ Cheesman employs an unsubtle one-point perspective in the painting that opens out the interior scene and maximises a surveying view. Drawing the eye into the picture are two regimented lines of hospital beds, each depicted with matching blue covers, which stand beneath large windows, all uniformly opened. Cheesman's utilisation of repeated motifs, in addition to her employment of emphatic perspectival lines, establishes the painting's clear pictorial order, suggestive, perhaps, of the order that the British authorities believed they were imposing upon the country. British authority is personified in the picture in the figures of a white doctor and two white nursing sisters who, despite being relegated to the background of the painting, are nonetheless granted a dominating presence – their pictorial scale is out of proportion – as they look down upon a diminutive black figure occupying a hospital bed. Guggisberg defined one of the propaganda purposes of the painting as showing how 'white nursing sisters and black nurses combine together to look after the sick natives of the country'.³⁶² It is though the white medical staff's work that is read as intellectual, whilst the black nurses are shown fulfilling more menial physical tasks. Cheesman's depiction of labour as clearly demarcated along racial lines projects fundamental imperial tenets of guidance and supervision.

It could be argued, however, that her portrayal of Ghanaian women in western nursing uniform at least runs counter to the more typical visual projection of African exoticness in circulation at this time. Indeed, Cheesman's mundane representation of thoroughly westernised Ghanaian women seems almost ground-breaking, surpassing in visual impact Beatrice Bright's hybrid portrayal of Gladys Dove-Edwin. Additionally, Cheesman's favouring of low-key and washed-out colour, in her depiction of the hospital ward, better conveys the more prosaic modernity that was evident in West Africa by the early 1920s, further challenging the exotic, but static, conception of the region projected by other western artists through their

³⁶¹ *Gold Coast News*, 31 January 1924: 3. The hospital, built at Korle Bu, on low-lying land to the west of Accra, was opened by Guggisberg on 9 October 1923. At a cost of £180, 000, it was described in *West Africa* as 'one of the most magnificently equipped [hospitals] in the Empire overseas'. See 'Coast News and Comment', *West Africa*, 17 November 1923 and 'The New Hospital at Accra', *West Africa*, 7 July 1923. The planning of the hospital had commenced prior to Guggisberg being made governor. However, he transformed a modest vision of a 'native hospital' into an institution that he envisaged eventually incorporating a medical school. Guggisberg's ambitious plans for the hospital helps explain why, despite its limited artistic appeal, it was one of the subjects that he directed Cheesman to record. See Wraith, 1967: 236.

³⁶² *Gold Coast News*, 31 January 1924: 3.

employment of high-tone colour. But ultimately the Ghanaian nurses viewed in Cheesman's painting remain as much a construction as that of the exotic 'African' who continued to be reproduced in the work of her peers. Accordingly, the black nurses can equally be perceived as 'types', but 'types' that now serve imperial rather than aesthetic needs in exemplifying a desired political projection of the colony's indigenous population.

Guggisberg, in an address to the Gold Coast Legislative Council on 17 November 1919, had expressed his desire to employ greater numbers of Ghanaians in technical capacities: 'We want', he had stated, 'natives for higher appointments than artisans'.³⁶³ The opening of the hospital at Korle Bu assisted in the realisation of this policy because it was here that increased numbers of Ghanaian nurses, midwives and dispensers were to be trained.³⁶⁴ Cheesman's prominent positioning of a black nurse in the centre of the painting - a figure to whom the eye is immediately drawn - visually affirms the Gold Coast government's political objective. What is interesting, however, is that it is the figure of a black nurse that serves as the signifier of racial 'progress', for *West Africa* reported in November 1923 that 'three African medical men' were employed by the Gold Coast Medical and Sanitary Department.³⁶⁵ The portrayal of a black doctor would have more dramatically symbolised the racial 'progress' initiated by Britain's imperial intervention in the country, yet such a figure is absent from Cheesman's depiction of the hospital ward which begs the question: why?

Guggisberg had expressed his desire for more Ghanaian doctors. This, he maintained, was, however, dependent upon the development within the Gold Coast of a University College that would facilitate the training of medical students.³⁶⁶ Interviewed in 1923, he considered that 'the time [was] not yet ripe' for such an institution because of the widespread lack of secondary education in the colony that would provide the necessary pool from which students suitable for higher education could be drawn.³⁶⁷ In the same interview Guggisberg vented his spleen against the tradition incumbent amongst wealthy West Africans to send sons and

³⁶³ *The Gold Coast Legislative Council Debates*, 17 November 1919, quoted in Wraith, 1967: 222.

³⁶⁴ See 'Gold Coast Colony's Future', *West Africa*, 2 June 1923.

³⁶⁵ See 'Coast News and Comment', *West Africa*, 17 November 1923.

³⁶⁶ Regarding Guggisberg's desire for more Ghanaian doctors, see 'The New Hospital at Accra', *West Africa*, 7 July 1923. 199. Historically, due to a system instituted by the British whereby Africans could not occupy posts normally held by Europeans, African doctors, even though they may have had better qualifications than their European counterparts, were not permitted to practice in colonial West Africa, and if they were admitted to the medical service it was to a separate lower grade. See Crowder, 1968: 199.

³⁶⁷ See 'Gold Coast Colony's Future', *West Africa*, 2 June 1923. Guggisberg laid the foundation-stone of Achimota College in March 1924 and he officially opened it on 27 January 1927. See Goodhall, 1998: 121, 125. The College encapsulated all levels of education from kindergarten through to university, and sought to 'produce a type of student who is 'Western' in his intellectual attitudes towards life, with a respect for science and capacity for systematic thought, but who remains African in sympathy and desirous of preserving and developing what is deserving of respect in tribal life, custom, rule and law'. *Achimota College Report*, 1932: 14 cited in Coe, 2002: 29.

daughters to Britain to acquire a higher education, considering it 'a great evil' which gives these students 'ideas several hundred years in advance of the mass of people in the Gold Coast'.³⁶⁸ Cheesman's depiction, therefore, of a black doctor, who, in late 1923 when she produced her painting, could only have been educated in Britain, would have projected an image of Ghanaian progress that ran entirely contrary to ideas that Guggisberg was then expressing: a factor that may explain the censoring of such a figure from an 'official' painting of the colony produced at this time.

Displayed in the Gold Coast pavilion at Wembley, the non-declamatory character of *A Ward in the Hospital for Africans Accra, Gold Coast* would have quietly advertised imperial progress in the colony. It would have also served an educational role in helping convey to a largely British audience the colonial authority's message that the Gold Coast was no longer 'the White Man's Grave' of popular imagination, but a country that benefitted from modern medical facilities, the equal of those in Britain. In its advertising and educational roles, the painting would have fulfilled C.F. Higham's assessment of propaganda 'as a necessary and benign communication tool of government'. Yet, what should not be lost sight of is that Cheesman's picture is a selective construction determined by the agenda of the Gold Coast government: a factor that imposes upon this image a more malign quality.

Philip Taylor, in his analysis of British imperial propaganda, argues that 'it is necessary to determine the reasons why certain information is being released or *withheld* [my stress] ... for censorship and propaganda are inseparable and inextricable'.³⁶⁹ So the portrayal of a black doctor is omitted from the painting of a hospital ward because such a figure did not fit the Gold Coast government's desired modernising narrative. Instead, the results of its own more protracted modernising process are highlighted, and a Ghanaian nurse – a symbolic beneficiary of recently introduced government training – is granted pictorial prominence. Olu Oguibe has argued that colonial governments in their administration of the colonies 'institutionalise[d] a corridor of slippage that granted the colonised only partial access to the

³⁶⁸ See 'Gold Coast Colony's Future', *West Africa*, 2 June 1923. The importance of prestigious academic education was well established amongst the Ghanaian elite by the beginning of the twentieth-century. It was viewed as an essential foundation stone for work in the upwardly mobile worlds of the colonial service or commercial sector. See Coe, 2002: 25. Guggisberg referred to the educated Ghanaian elite in a short pamphlet entitled *The Keystone* (London, 1924) in which he set down his views on education. Describing the scene at the laying of the foundation-stone of Achimota College on 24 March 1924, he mentions that 'scattered thickly' amongst the onlookers 'were the European-clad Africans – barristers, doctors, teachers, traders – the pioneers of the progress of their race'. He then, however, proceeds to undermine their immediate worth to the colony when outlining that 'African professional men', all of whom had received their higher education in Europe, assisted in the laying of the foundation-stone, but that only two professions, which he does not name, 'could supply properly qualified members', a situation that, for him, constituted 'scathing comment on the inadequacy of our existing system of education'. See Goodhall, 1998: 129, 130.

³⁶⁹ Taylor, 1981: 4.

possibility of transition and transformation to a modern identity', and that 'as long as the colonised were precluded from acquiring full mastery of colonial ways ... colonial dependence could be guaranteed'.³⁷⁰ Cheesman's pictorial prioritisation of a Ghanaian nurse, rather than a Ghanaian doctor, can be viewed in propaganda terms as an image that confirmed the continuing need for the British presence within the country.

In studying art labelled as propaganda the field of analysis inevitably widens. Central as the efficaciousness and aesthetic quality of the work itself may be within the scope of any enquiry, of equal importance to that investigation are the motives of the individual or institution responsible for its commission. It is only through a close analysis of these motives that the full extent of the objectives envisaged for that art can be revealed. So at this point, in order to shed further light upon what the Gold Coast government hoped to achieve by exhibiting propaganda art as part of the colony's display at Wembley in 1924, I turn to the individual ultimately responsible for taking that decision: the Gold Coast's governor at the time, Sir Gordon Guggisberg.³⁷¹

3.6 'The Gentlemanly Order' ³⁷²

Lewis Gann and Peter Duignan, in their study of British governors in colonial Africa, indicate that a substantial proportion shared the same gentrified background and were linked through education - public school, Oxbridge or Sandhurst - and social connections to London and the Home Counties.³⁷³ Anthony Kirk-Greene, whilst acknowledging links to public schools and university, widens the field from which governors were drawn. He highlights that in addition to those recruited from the ranks of the gentry many more came from the professional and middle classes, though, he concedes, they shared the same ethical ideals of 'playing the game' and 'team spirit' that were traditionally associated with the elite class.³⁷⁴

³⁷⁰ Oguike, 2002: 35.

³⁷¹ In the speech he gave to open Cheesman's exhibition in Accra, Guggisberg mentions that the artist came out to the Colony 'at the request of the Gold Coast Government'. As I have earlier outlined, the colony's government established an organising committee to coordinate their contribution to the Wembley Exhibition. Despite the existence of these various bureaucratic tiers and the input they, in all probability, had with regard to commissioning Cheesman, it is Guggisberg, in the same speech who claims responsibility - 'my reason' - for employing her, to himself. See *Gold Coast News*, 31 January 1924: 1. A.E. Afigbo, in an overview of the governors of Britain's African colonies, describes them as 'authoritarian'. See Afigbo, 1978: 531.

³⁷² Cain and Hopkins, 2002: 47.

³⁷³ See Gann and Duignan, 1978: 2.

³⁷⁴ See Kirk-Greene, 1978: 212. The expression 'playing the game' was used within an imperial context by F.D. Lugard, a former governor of Nigeria who retired in 1919 and thereafter became a committed publicist for empire, whilst expressing his own views as to the appropriate form of colonial government. 'Playing the game' appears in his major work *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (London, 1922), where Lugard uses the expression when referring to the qualities demonstrated by those engaged in colonial service. He credits the public schools and universities for inculcating what he considers admirable qualities - 'an almost passionate conception of fair

Peter Cain and Anthony Hopkins draw upon this earlier research into the class backgrounds of Britain's colonial governors in Africa in their magisterial work *British Imperialism 1688 – 2000*.³⁷⁵ The basis of this comprehensive study is organised around their concept of 'gentlemanly capitalism', formulated as a means of drawing attention to the non-industrial forms of capital - the mercantile, financial and service sectors primarily based in London and the south-east of England - and its significant role in British economic history.³⁷⁶ The growth of these sectors were, Cain and Hopkins argue, a fundamental dynamic in Britain's imperial expansion.³⁷⁷ One aspect of their study focuses upon the 'social agents' of non-industrial capitalism, and reveals evidence of a 'gentlemanly order' which permeated not only this type of economic activity, but also political and administrative circles.³⁷⁸ Further, their analysis exposes 'the crucial link' between the worlds of commerce and government, as, they argue, the economy's service sector provided a fertile recruiting ground for senior administrative officials in Britain and the overseas empire who 'were inevitably infected by [the 'gentlemanly order's'] perspectives and ... values'.³⁷⁹ The 'imperial mission', they add, can, therefore, be defined as 'the export version of the gentlemanly order', with empire providing 'the ultimate testing ground for the idea of responsible progress [and] for the performance of duty and the achievement of honour'.³⁸⁰ As James Epstein has argued, one consequence of this transportation of the 'gentlemanly order' was that 'an aristocratic tone and style' came to

play, of protection of the weak and of 'playing the game' – into the 'English gentlemen' working in the tropical colonies. Lugard, 1922: 132. Peter Cain and Anthony Hopkins argue that despite the greater meritocracy in the recruitment policy of the professions that occurred during the nineteenth-century, gentlemanly status, traditionally the preserve of the landed elite, was maintained and even enhanced. This was achieved, they argue, by the expansion in the number of public schools which created gentlemen out of those who lacked property by instilling in them elite 'values of order, duty and loyalty'. See Cain and Hopkins, 2002: 42, 45. Guggisberg was one of those professional, middle class men who rose to the position of colonial governor in the interwar period, and as an officer in the Royal Engineers he indeed shared a similar military background as a number of them. See Wraith, 1967: 2. Kenneth Robinson details that 103 men served as governors of British colonies between 1919 and 1939. Forty nine of this number's first employment was outside the colonial service, with twenty eight initially serving in the armed services. Robinson further states that twelve of the British colonial governors appointed during the interwar years came directly from outside the colonial service, with eight of these, including Guggisberg, being professional soldiers. See Robinson, 1965.

³⁷⁵ See Cain and Hopkins, 2002: 421 – 26.

³⁷⁶ Ibid: 7. Cain and Hopkins date the emergence of their concept of 'gentlemanly capitalism' to the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries when there was a greater alliance between the ruling landed and military classes and the bourgeoisie, the main creators of wealth. As the ruling class changed their 'profession and function', so, they argue, emerged 'gentlemanly capitalism' from 'the union between land and the market'. Ibid: 32.

³⁷⁷ Ibid: 13.

³⁷⁸ Ray Dumett has criticised Cain and Hopkins for not always making clear a link between the generalising term 'gentlemanly order' and the narrower expression 'gentlemanly capitalist'. He argues that for Cain and Hopkins 'the 'gentlemanly order' appears to be a much wider and more amorphous socio-cultural category; and its connections with the 'gentlemanly capitalism' of the City of London are far from self-evident'. As I remain more concerned with the social and cultural characteristics that unified the 'gentlemanly order', rather than its links to capital, Cain's and Hopkins' theoretical model still suffices. See Dumett, 1999: 9.

³⁷⁹ Ibid: 24, 47.

³⁸⁰ Ibid: 47.

be imparted to colonial administration as its ranks were filled by those born or absorbed into the elite.³⁸¹ Guggisberg's biographer, Ronald Wraith, suggests that though Guggisberg was not born into the elite, and that his professional background as a Royal Engineer and colonial surveyor could have been deemed by his gubernatorial peers as not quite out of the top drawer, once occupying his senior administrative position he readily adopted an aristocratic style.³⁸² Wraith describes him in his role as Gold Coast governor – a position Guggisberg held from 1919 to 1927 – as 'almost too good to be true ... for he had assumed the highest authority with surprising naturalness and ease'.³⁸³

The analysis of Cain and Hopkins exposes the upper echelons of colonial government as a network of like-minded individuals sharing similar geographical, educational, economic, social and cultural backgrounds. Sarah Turner's work upon cultural and artistic networks, specifically her research into the India Society, founded by the painter William Rothenstein in 1910, reveals the existence within the early twentieth-century British empire of a cross-cultural and transnational network of artists and writers from Britain and India.³⁸⁴ Cain and Hopkins, by contrast, disclose in their analysis of the 'service class' a type of endogenous network that functioned within the empire at the same time, though here it was the interests – both economic and cultural – of its exclusively British members and the class from which they were drawn that were prioritised.³⁸⁵

It is in the light of Cain's and Hopkins' study that I turn again to the exhibition of Cheesman's paintings, staged in Accra early in 1924. Cheesman's work held additional propaganda value for Guggisberg beyond solely giving visual expression to the Gold Coast's economic achievements and the success of Britain's 'civilising mission' within the country: information that he had conveyed on previous occasions in published articles.³⁸⁶ This is

³⁸¹ Epstein, 2006: 253. Francois Bédarida provides a useful summary of the elite class's capacity to renew itself through a process of absorption and assimilation: 'It welcomed outsiders and, by investing them with its own aura, perpetuated itself. It knew how to inculcate its own norms and values on those it took under its wing'. Bédarida, 1979: 303.

³⁸² Guggisberg's background conforms to that characterised by Cain and Hopkins, Gann and Duignan and Kirk-Greene, as typical for those who achieved high office in the colonial service. His father, a trader, was part of the south-east's non-industrial economic sector, whilst Guggisberg was educated and trained in two institutions in which elite ideas of teamwork and duty would have been engrained: Burney's School, Gosport, otherwise known as the Royal Naval and Military Academy, which he attended in 1879, and the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich in which he was trained from 1886 to 1889 before being gazetted as a 2nd Lieutenant in the Royal Engineers. See Kirk-Greene, 1978: 248 and Wraith, 1967: 16, 17. For a discussion on the social cachet attached to specific regiments in the British armed forces and to particular colonial professions, see Wraith, 1981: 121.

³⁸³ Wraith, 1967: 244.

³⁸⁴ The India Society facilitated the 'intermingling of people, ideas and objects' as it sought greater recognition of Indian art and artists. See Turner, 2009: 22, 23.

³⁸⁵ Cain and Hopkins, 2002: 421.

³⁸⁶ In an interview with *West Africa* in June 1923, Guggisberg provided a detailed analysis of the Gold Coast's economy and its development of a western concept of social welfare encompassing a degree of state education

evident from his initial comments in the speech he delivered at the exhibition's opening: 'We may well consider this a unique event in the history of the Gold Coast, for it is the first exhibition of paintings held in this country by an artist. Indeed, I think it is probably the first exhibition of its kind in any tropical African colony'.³⁸⁷ The staging of an art exhibition – a cultural event in Britain at which both genders freely mixed – by the British authorities in Ghana arguably reflects the changing nature of colonial life in the interwar period as its earlier intrinsically masculine character was moderated by a growing British female presence in the colony.³⁸⁸ This is not to say, as I have earlier indicated, that a masculine conception of empire, one associated with a physical and primarily outdoor life, was erased as a result of the increase in numbers of British women residing in Ghana. A clear idea of its continuing and powerful presence is provided by Sir Ralph Furse, the figure who dominated the recruitment process of the Colonial Administration Service in the interwar period.³⁸⁹ Furse recalls in his memoir the qualities that he looked for in candidates applying to serve as colonial administrators in the West African colonies:

They should be of active bodily habits with a taste for games, sport, natural history or other pursuits, such as will enable them to take regular hard exercise with pleasure. Without hard exercise men in hot countries rapidly lose their health and often their mental serenity. We attach great importance to the possession of a strong and disciplined character, powers of initiative and self-reliance, imagination and sympathy, a keen sense of justice ...³⁹⁰

As Furse's recollection illustrates, character was deemed to stem primarily from physical endeavours.³⁹¹ That Guggisberg shared this position is evidenced by the strikingly similar views expressed in the Guggisbergs' account of their early experience of West Africa, *We*

and health provision. The aspects of the economy that he touched upon in the interview were the same components later recorded in Cheesman's work. So, for instance, his reference to the mining of manganese ore, which had shown 'a gratifying increase from 7,000 tons in 1921 to 61,000 tons in 1922', provided the subject-matter for one of Cheesman's paintings, as did the recently established trade schools described as 'an even greater success than was anticipated', which Cheesman similarly recorded. See 'Gold Coast Colony's Future: Interview with the Governor', *West Africa*, 2 June 1923.

³⁸⁷ *Gold Coast News*, 31 January 1924: 1.

³⁸⁸ Guggisberg drew only positive benefits from the greater number of officials' wives prepared to live in the Colony: 'A further advantage derived from marriage generally is that it creates civilised society. Those who remember West Africa twenty two years ago would scarcely believe the change for the better which has taken place in the condition of life owing to the presence of women'. *Gold Coast Dispatch* (20 March 1925), C.O. 96. 654, quoted in Kuklick, 1979: 124.

³⁸⁹ Furse entered the Colonial Service in 1910 and achieved responsibility for the selection of all colonial staff sent to the African colonies, the Malay States, Ceylon, Hong Kong, Fiji, Straits Settlements and the Western Pacific in 1919. See Kuklick, 1979: 19.

³⁹⁰ Furse, 1962: 64.

³⁹¹ Photographs of colonial life appearing in *West Africa* in the 1920s regularly included images of white colonists playing sport.

Two in West Africa, published in 1909.³⁹² The couple recall that on an early visit to Accra they found tennis, cricket and golf available as a means of exercise. Returning a year later they bemoan the poor state of these facilities, reclaimed by nature through lack of use. 'Europeans', they observe, 'instead of having an hour of healthy amusement and sporting recreation to take their minds from their work and the discomforts of the climate', now stroll 'slackly from bungalow to bungalow with no aim in life but to get to the dinner-hour'. This state of affairs is considered by the Guggisbergs as unworthy of the national character, for, they argue, 'all over the world Englishmen take their exercise after the day's work ... and they benefit by it'.³⁹³

Against such entrenched ideas on the formation of the 'national character' - more precisely the character deemed to define the 'gentlemanly order' - the staging of an art exhibition in colonial West Africa in 1924 appears on the face of it incongruous. Although Henrika Kuklick has argued that in the tropical colonies character was viewed as a quality associated with physical rather than intellectual endeavour, it must be remembered that in Britain, cultural pursuits, which would have undoubtedly included attending exhibitions, equally constituted part of the life of the 'gentlemanly order' and the non-gendered social class from which they sprang or into which they were subsumed.³⁹⁴ Therefore, Guggisberg's pride in opening the inaugural art exhibition to be held in British West Africa is perhaps not surprising. As an elite member of the colonial administrative class he had a significant personal investment in the 'civilising mission', that integral element of Britain's imperial policy.³⁹⁵ The exhibition of a professional artist's oils and watercolours - recognised as constituent elements of western high-cultural production - in an outpost of empire would likely have been perceived in the minds of the ruling administrative class as evidence that the 'civilising' process in Ghana was well under way, and that 'a colourable counterfeit of the mother-country' was being produced in West Africa.³⁹⁶ Guggisberg's boast that the exhibition

³⁹² *We Two in West Africa* (London, 1909) is an account of Guggisberg's work as a surveyor in Ghana, and of his travel around the country accompanied by his wife, Decima.

³⁹³ Moore and Guggisberg, 1909: 36.

³⁹⁴ See Kuklick, 1979: 21.

³⁹⁵ Guggisberg referred to this mission as a 'sacred trust that is imposed on us to lead backward nations under our control in the right way'. See 'Gold Coast Colony's Future: Interview with the Governor', *West Africa*, 2 June 1923.

³⁹⁶ Sir Richmond Palmer, a former colonial official who served as Resident in Northern Nigeria, used the phrase 'a colourable counterfeit of the mother-country' to describe the aims of the nineteenth-century colonial administrations, yet this intent equally applied, as is evidenced by Guggisberg's actions, to ideals pursued by their twentieth-century counterparts. See Palmer, 1934: 37. Lieutenant Colonel A.C. Duncan-Johnston, who served as a colonial official in Ghana under Guggisberg, considered that 'he brought a sort of renaissance spirit into the country'. Papers of Lieutenant Colonel A.C. Duncan-Johnstone, OUCRP, Rhodes House Library, cited in Wraith, 1967: 97.

constituted a unique event in the country's history, therefore, transforms the significance of Cheesman's paintings, from that of a selective visual record of Ghana in the early 1920s, into a transparent demonstration of colonial power by the British authorities at this time; a power manifested, in this instance, in their imposing upon the country a 'civilising' notion of British high-culture. As Cain and Hopkins argue, it was not only settlers and administrative officials that Britain exported to her empire, but 'political ideology and cultural values' to 'animate the imperial system' and 'endow it with a degree of coherence'.³⁹⁷

I have argued that Cheesman's work served a specific purpose when it was exhibited in Accra in January 1924, prior to it being shown at Wembley a few months later, in that it demonstrated an aspect of British cultural life in a colony projected by its government as increasingly 'civilised'. It was, however, for Wembley, and the eyes of a predominantly British audience, that the work was primarily commissioned. So I next focus upon issues of display at Wembley. I discuss the manner in which indigenous Ghanaian art (and African art generally) was presented and received at the Exhibition, highlighting the lesser status that it was accorded in comparison to the British art that projected the region. It is a narrative that further demonstrates the assertion of colonial authority in the cultural projection of West Africa.

3.7 Asserting colonial authority: the projection of the Gold Coast and Nigeria at Wembley

In 1924 Donald Maxwell recorded in prose and images his impressions of the British Empire Exhibition in an illustrated volume titled *Wembley in Colour*. Amongst the book's illustrations is a reproduction of a watercolour titled *The Courts of the Gold Coast* (Fig. 22). The picture shows the colony's indigenous material culture carelessly amassed around the bases of the massive columns which supported the roof of one of the seven courts that comprised the Gold Coast's 15,000 square feet of exhibition space.³⁹⁸ Bales of patterned cloth leaning against the foreground column are readily discernable in the painting, and it is also possible to identify, nearby, disparate pots and bowls, a number of small carved figures and what appears to be a

³⁹⁷ Cain and Hopkins, 2002: 5. See also Hopkins, 1999.

³⁹⁸ The three major British colonies in West Africa – Nigeria, Sierra Leone and the Gold Coast – were grouped together at Wembley within the confines of a walled city covering an area of over three acres. The exterior design of the Gold Coast pavilion was based upon one of the castles built by earlier European traders along the country's coastline, whilst the 'vivid' and 'exciting' interior was described in the official guide to the Wembley Exhibition as comprising of 'seven panoramic courts [that] enable us to make a tour of the country from the Coast to its most northern boundary'. See 'The work of organisation in England: The West African Group Committee and its Record', *West Africa*, 24 May 1924 and *The British Empire Exhibition 1924 – Official Guide* (London, 1924), 69.

harp-shaped musical instrument.³⁹⁹ Other artefacts, strewn like detritus across the floor of the court, are, however, less easily identifiable, as Maxwell subsumes detail within a romanticised evocation of a booty-filled chamber that, for him, provided 'a delightfully realistic vision of the Gold Coast'.⁴⁰⁰ Denied a format of display conventionally associated with the presentation of cultural artefacts, these examples of the Gold Coast's indigenous material culture are consequently denied the hierarchal status of 'art' that is bestowed upon their western equivalents through taxonomies of title and authorship.

Marianna Torgovnick has highlighted the insidiousness of rendering an artist, specifically one deemed to come from a primitive society, nameless and unidentifiable. It 'dissolves' individuality, she argues, and reduces the artist to an anonymous member of a western-perceived amorphous society.⁴⁰¹ Of course, as she points out, the category of anonymity is imposed by the West upon the primitive artist, and it remains 'phoney' because it exists only from the western perspective.⁴⁰² Judging by conflicting positions revealed in contemporary accounts of the Gold Coast's display, the identification of Ghanaian artists contributing to the exhibition appeared to be at the whim of the individual reporter. Further evidence of the disregard for authorship, evident in Maxwell's watercolour, is also found, not unsurprisingly, in an article attributed to an anonymous reporter described as a 'Man in the Street, who has never been to West Africa', published in *West Africa* in May 1924.⁴⁰³ The article, presumably conceived with the intention of conveying a 'fresh' view of the region, describes how the correspondent encounters in the Ashanti Court sculptures of the King of Ashanti and his chiefs 'carved in gleaming black wood by some African Epstein'.⁴⁰⁴ The artist is unnamed, and only the subject-matter and material of the carving is detailed, yet informed readers would assume the sculpture was of a 'primitive' nature by the reference to Epstein, cast as the exemplary producer of such work. As a consequence, ownership of an aesthetic form originating in Africa is passed to the West, and it is in comparison with work produced by a western artist that the Ghanaian sculpture is judged. By contrast, in April 1924 another *West Africa* article had also described the same carvings of the Ashanti King and his court, and a

³⁹⁹ Jonathan Woodham describes the court depicted by Maxwell as the 'Ashanti Court in the Anthropological section of the Gold Coast Pavilion'. See Woodham, 1989: 17.

⁴⁰⁰ Maxwell, 1924: 13.

⁴⁰¹ Torgovnick, 1990: 90.

⁴⁰² Ibid.

⁴⁰³ The article, titled 'The Strange, Alluring Fragment of Africa' by a Man in the Street, who has never been to West Africa, appeared in a special Empire Exhibition Supplement of *West Africa*, on 24 May 1924. It was printed alongside a number of articles written by those with first-hand knowledge of West Africa - F.D. Lugard contributed a piece titled 'Tropical Africa at Wembley' - and its premise was to presumably provide an interested but uninformed view of Ghana from the perspective of a member of the British public.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

connection is again made between western and Ghanaian artists, but here the tables are turned. Now it is a western artist, spied by the reporter 'showing an artist's interest' in the carvings, who is rendered anonymous, and though deemed 'distinguished', ultimately this artist appears as subsidiary to the Ghanaian artist responsible for 'a wonderful collection, that should arrest attention', who is named as Osai Abotrim.⁴⁰⁵

Abotrim's carvings, though not Abotrim himself, were referred to by the Head of the Anthropological Department of Ashanti, R.S. Rattray (1881 – 1938),⁴⁰⁶ in an article titled 'The Arts and Crafts of Ashanti', published in 1924.⁴⁰⁷ Rattray assigned a religious purpose to Ashanti wood-carving, arguing that figures were originally carved to 'satisfy the demands of the priestly class'.⁴⁰⁸ He, however, did 'not wish to encourage a revival' in the carving of these frequently exotic figures which, he argued, had caused West African religion to be branded as 'Fetishism'.⁴⁰⁹ Consequently, deploying his colonial authority, Rattray directed Abotrim's skill towards an area more conducive to a western notion of 'civilised' art and commissioned him to produce carvings of Ashanti royalty surrounded by their court: a group of some seventy figures which Rattray described as 'the history of Ashanti in wood'.⁴¹⁰ Yet the extent to which Abotrim's 'royal' figures, a manifestation of colonial hybridity,⁴¹¹ satisfied Rattray's intended objective of a more 'civilised' art, whilst still maintaining the 'distinctiveness and individuality' of Ashanti carving, is questioned by his own plea to the British public not to view the figures as 'heathen juju idols'.⁴¹² Rattray's plea highlights his anxiety of entrenched western perceptions of African carving that threatened the 'viable future' which he, as a representative of colonial authority, wished to shape for this aspect of Ashanti cultural production.⁴¹³

⁴⁰⁵ 'West Africa and the Empire Exhibition', *West Africa*, 19 April 1924. Maxwell depicts a small cluster of figures in the foreground of his watercolour but it is a matter of speculation as to whether these were some of Abotrim's carvings.

⁴⁰⁶ Rattray assumed this position in 1921. See Von Laue, 1976: 33.

⁴⁰⁷ Rattray had been appointed a section officer for the Wembley Exhibition and as part of his brief was responsible for 'fine and industrial art'. In his article, which was the text of a lecture that he delivered at a meeting of the African Society on 3 June 1924, he surveyed traditional Ashanti crafts of weaving, pottery, metal-working and wood-carving to ascertain the contemporary state of these crafts in Ghana. See Rattray, 1923 – 24: 265 – 70.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid: 268.

⁴⁰⁹ 'The Arts and Crafts of the Gold Coast and Ashanti' by Capt. R.S. Rattray, *West Africa*, 24 May 1924.

⁴¹⁰ Rattray, 1923 – 24: 268. In the Preface to *Ashanti* (Oxford, 1923), Rattray outlined his role as 'state' anthropologist: 'I have tried to make the people understand that we are here among them to help them by grafting on to their institutions such of our own as will enable them to take their place in the commonwealth of civilised nations'. See Rattray, 1923: 12. For a discussion of anthropology and power with specific reference to Rattray's work, see von Laue, 1976: 52.

⁴¹¹ Homi Bhabha writes of the 'cultural ... differences which emerge in the colonial discourse as the mixed and split texts of hybridity'. Bhabha, 1994: 113.

⁴¹² 'The Arts and Crafts of the Gold Coast and Ashanti' by Capt. R.S. Rattray, *West Africa*, 24 May 1924.

⁴¹³ Ibid.

The contrasting level of attention paid, in the above accounts, to the identification of Ghanaian artists and explication of Ghanaian art exposes the contrary attitudes that were in circulation regarding the positioning of African material culture. Rattray's view, in conjunction with the reports in *West Africa*, constitute part of the discourse on the evaluation of African material culture that existed in Britain in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century. Annie Coombes' detailed analysis of that discourse highlights how the attribution by contemporary commentators of certain artistic categories, most notably that of the less esteemed classification of 'decorative art', to the cultural artefacts of the colonies contributed to definitions of race.⁴¹⁴ Designating a country's cultural output as 'decorative', she argues, was closely linked to influential ideas about degeneration, in circulation in the 1890s and beyond, which were used to position African society at the time of Britain's colonial intervention. It resulted in West African cultural artefacts being viewed in some western minds as inferior to their own cultural production.

Evidence of the lowly status that was assigned to African art is apparent in its omission from the hierarchical positions that the Wembley organisers granted to the art from various parts of the empire. Display space within the Exhibition's Palace of Arts which, alongside the Palace of Engineering, comprised the Metropolitan Section at Wembley, was primarily assigned to British artists, but the work of their Canadian, South African, Australian and New Zealand counterparts was also displayed here. Sir Lawrence Weaver, Director of the United Kingdom exhibits, explained that his intention in including art from the Dominions within this Metropolitan space was 'to mark the relation of United Kingdom paintings to those [from] overseas ... so as to represent the widely divergent impulses which influence the art of the Dominions'.⁴¹⁵ He, however, considered that the most 'significant part about the Palace of Arts [was] that it made possible the assembling under one roof ... examples of art of the whole Empire'.⁴¹⁶ As Tom August has related, only two colonies, India and Burma, were granted exhibition space for contemporary art within the Palace of Arts, and that only because this

⁴¹⁴ Coombes, 1994: 5. The extent of Coombes' argument can be traced through the 'Introduction' and the chapters 'Material Culture at the Crossroads of Knowledge: The Case of the Benin Bronzes' and 'Aesthetic Pleasure and Institutional Power' in *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England*. See Coombes, 1994.

⁴¹⁵ Weaver, 1924: 10. The 'divergent' nature of the United Kingdom paintings to which Weaver referred is open to question. Although Weaver stated in his 'Introduction' in the *Illustrated Souvenir of the Palace of Arts* (Wembley, 1924) that the choice of work by living British artists was 'governed by the wish to show works representative of all modern schools', the Modern Loan Collection, selected by an eight man committee that included four Royal Academicians and an Associate of the Royal Academy, with only Bernard Adeney recognisable as an exponent of more modernist practice, primarily consisted of naturalistic, if not specifically academic work. Modernist painting constituted only a small percentage of the exhibition with work by Robert Bevan, Jacob Kramer, Nina Hamnett, Edward Wadsworth and Ethelbert White amongst the few examples.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.

work 'revealed the very favourable influence of the Greco-European tradition'.⁴¹⁷ It is, therefore, evident that Weaver's concept of the 'whole empire' was strictly limited when it came to granting the status of art upon the material culture on display at Wembley. Without evidence of a clear link to an established and dominant European tradition, West African material culture was sidelined and denied access to privileged display.

In an article published in the *Times* in September 1924, Weaver had, in a contradictory vein, argued that a function of exhibitions was 'to accustom the timid to new ideas'.⁴¹⁸ He illustrated his statement by referring to the 'bold and unashamed' use of reinforced concrete by the Wembley architects Sir John Simpson and Maxwell Ayrton in several of the exhibition buildings (Fig. 23) which 'challenged conservative practice'.⁴¹⁹ It was, he continued, the freedom engendered by the Wembley Exhibition that made possible the chance to experiment. Established western art practice was thus given the scope to breach traditional boundaries and challenge public perceptions of what constituted art. Significantly, though, as is evidenced by its omission from the Palace of Arts, indigenous African art was denied an equivalent role.

Attitudes to African art were, however, neither uniform nor stable in early twentieth-century Britain as is evidenced, for example, in the writing of Roger Fry. Fry's essays on primitive art, published in *Vision and Design* in 1920, reveal conflicting viewpoints which embrace both an entrenched negative attitude towards Africa and a more enlightened acknowledgment of the continent's art as surpassing western art in its formal content (Fig. 24).⁴²⁰ The critic, Amelia Defries, similarly viewed the West African artefacts shown at Wembley in a positive light. She regarded these 'natural arts of mankind' as 'most valuable' if British designers were 'to revise our aesthetic theory and base it on sound principles'.⁴²¹

⁴¹⁷ August, 1993: 42, 43. Margarita Díaz-Andreu has argued that under imperialism archaeology did not objectively analyse the past, but rather 'interpreted data from a hegemonic position', privileging some material, whilst excluding other. This resulted in the Greek, Roman and Egyptian classical civilisations being adopted as 'a complementary primary origin of each successful nation', whilst the 'uncivilised' pasts of Africa, Australia and America were considered 'so far removed from the classical canon [that] their adoption as Europe's past was not considered germane'. See Díaz-Andreu, 1994: 238 – 39.

⁴¹⁸ 'The Arts at Wembley' by Sir Lawrence Weaver, *Times*, 30 September 1924.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁰ An example of Fry's dualism is found in the essay 'Negro Sculpture', initially published in *Athenaeum* in April 1920. The subject-matter of the essay was a relatively small exhibition of thirty Yoruba sculptures from West Africa held at the Chelsea Book Club in 1920. See 'Negro Sculpture', *Athenaeum*, 16 April 1920: 516, reprinted Fry, 1981: 70 – 73. Marianna Torgovnick effectively sums up Fry's position on primitive art: 'Reading Fry with regard to the primitive is like witnessing a tug of war: on one side, and almost winning, is the innovative Fry, free of contemporary prejudices; on the other side, and finally dragging his opponent through the mud, is a Fry who thinks and speaks in the rhetoric of colonialism'. Torgovnick, 1990: 89, and see the chapter 'The Politics of Roger Fry's *Vision and Design*' in the same volume.

⁴²¹ See Defries A. 'Craftsmen of the Empire: A Comparative Study of Decoration and Industrial Arts', *Architectural Review*, (June 1924), 262, quoted in Woodham, 1989: 16.

Fry's and Defries' enlightened view on African art, which recognised its own intrinsic qualities, was, however, not much in evidence in the reporting of the Gold Coast's display at Wembley, and the *West Africa* article in which Osai Abotrim is identified as the creator of significant work was a rarity.⁴²² More typical was the praise that was bestowed upon the British contribution to the display. This is seen in Donald Maxwell's accompanying commentary to his illustrations of the Gold Coast's exhibit, where the only artistry acknowledged is that of the British input into the endeavour. Maxwell credits Lady Guggisberg – 'the reigning monarch of the Gold Coast Section' – as the overseeing hand in the production of 'so telling a result in the way of art'.⁴²³ His stance, similar to the Gold Coast government's own prioritisation of western art to project their vision of the colony, effectively subjugates the displayed Ghanaian artefacts to the lesser status of props as aesthetic prominence is bestowed upon the British-designed conception of Ghana.

Whereas the reporting on the Gold Coast's exhibit largely rendered the Ghanaian contribution anonymous, specific British artists were highlighted in the coverage of the display and granted authorial identity for works that featured in the colony's pavilion. One such artist was Edwin Whitney-Smith R.A. (1880 – 1952), who contributed at least two busts, *My Child* (Fig. 25) and *A Lady from the Gold Coast* (Fig. 26).⁴²⁴ F.D. Lugard, in a piece on the Wembley exhibition written for *West Africa*, singled out Whitney-Smith and his 'beautiful sculptures' in contrast to his generic use of the terms 'weaver', 'potter' and 'smith' to describe the Ghanaian artists and craftsmen who could be seen practicing their crafts in the Exhibition's 'Native village'.⁴²⁵ A further artist mentioned in the coverage of the Gold Coast's display is Edith

⁴²² Only one other Ghanaian artist, a Mr Bannerman, described as a 'highly-skilled craftsman in gold and precious stones', is named in the coverage of the Gold Coast's display at Wembley. See *West Africa*, 26 April 1924.

⁴²³ Maxwell, 1924: 19, 20.

⁴²⁴ *West Africa* reported in March 1923 that Whitney-Smith had 'been specialising in African subjects for the last eighteen months', and it ran a further piece in May 1923 detailing that two of his busts, *Sybil of the Gold Coast* and *The Daughter of Kings*, originally titled *A Lady from the Gold Coast*, had been accepted into the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition. See 'African Sculpture for the Royal Academy', *West Africa*, 31 March 1923 and 5 May 1923. It was subsequently reported in December 1923 that Lady Guggisberg as chairwoman of the London Gold Coast Committee visited Whitney-Smith's studio to view the busts of African subjects, which, according to the report in *West Africa*, had 'excited much interest at the Royal Academy'. Whitney-Smith, it was reported, offered to lend his work for exhibition in the Gold Coast pavilion at Wembley and, in the view of the paper, they would contribute 'a handsome addition' to the display. See 'The Gold Coast and Sculpture', *West Africa*, 1 December 1923.

⁴²⁵ See 'Tropical Africa at Wembley' by Sir F.D. Lugard, *West Africa*, 24 May 1924. 'Native villages', in which indigenous members of colonial populations demonstrated local craft production within an 'authentic' environment, featured in imperial exhibitions from the late nineteenth-century onwards. Annie Coombes points out that almost all imperial exhibitions of the period featured the participation of colonised races and argues that 'their inclusion provided the points of differentiation around which to reinforce, whether consciously or through more subtle means, the certainty of European imperial superiority'. Coombes, 1994: 64. For a description of the West African 'native village' seen at Wembley, see Stephen, 2009: 119 – 20.

Cheesman. Indeed, it is her name that occurs most frequently in contemporary reports. Maxwell referred to Cheesman's paintings as the first objects he encountered on his tour of the Gold Coast pavilion.⁴²⁶ A report on the colony's exhibit in *West Africa* in April 1924 confirms the location of the paintings as adorning two walls near to the entrance of the pavilion.⁴²⁷ It would be fair to assume from its positioning that the organising committee attached significant importance to Cheesman's work. As amongst the first cultural objects seen by those entering the pavilion, her paintings were accorded a privileged propaganda role in delivering the Gold Coast government's desired narrative of the economic and social progress that was unfolding in the colony under its direction.⁴²⁸ It was a role denied to Abotrim's work, located amongst the chaotic display of Ashanti material culture in the Ashanti Court. Despite Rattray's aggrandisement of Abotrim's distinctive and individual carvings, the Gold Coast government emulated imperial policies implemented in India in the nineteenth century and prioritised the commercial possibilities for Ghanaian art over a specific cultural role that it could serve.⁴²⁹ This marginalisation of Ghanaian art mirrored the Wembley Exhibition's wider sidelining of African material culture, deemed not to merit a place amongst the upper echelons of the empire's fine art.⁴³⁰ Cheesman's grouped paintings, on the other hand, like the work on display in the Palace of Arts, constituted a cohesive exhibition, just as they had done when shown in Accra earlier in 1924. Consequently, at Wembley they were similarly invested with the authority bestowed upon structured displays of western high cultural production. This would have permitted the paintings to be viewed as not only conveying the imperial project underway in Ghana, but, moreover, stamping that project with the seal of cultural approval.

⁴²⁶ Maxwell, 1924: 20.

⁴²⁷ The reporter was more effusive in praising Cheesman's paintings than Maxwell, who considered them merely 'interesting', describing a series depicting the operations of the Colony's cocoa industry as 'worthy of a prominent place on the walls of one of the great West African commercial concerns in this country'. *West Africa*, 26 April 1924.

⁴²⁸ See Thompson, 2006: 97. Cheesman played her own part in conveying that narrative. *West Africa* reported her in conversation with Mrs Thomas, the wife of the Colonial Secretary J.H. Thomas, at the Wembley exhibition, and drawing her attention to the painting of Government House which, the report stated, Mrs Thomas 'admired'. See 'West Africa and the Exhibition', *West Africa*, 12 July 1924.

⁴²⁹ For a discussion of how Britain sought to develop the commercial possibilities of Indian craft production, see Ata-Ullah, 1998: 69 – 72. In his lecture on Ashanti arts and crafts, Rattray bestowed pride of place upon weaving 'because its commercial possibilities are perhaps the greatest'. See Rattray, 1923 - 24: 266.

⁴³⁰ A.G. Fraser, discussing West African arts and crafts at the end of the 1920s, stated that he had 'seen no art schools nor heard of one in West Africa' and believed that their introduction at the time was 'outside the range of immediate practical politics'. See Guggisberg and Fraser, 1929: 141.

In the early 1920s reports in *West Africa* tracked the progress of a Nigerian artist, Aina Onabolu (1882 – 1963), as he underwent an art education in Europe.⁴³¹ His name is first encountered in December 1921 when an article titled 'A Talented West African Artist' reported upon Onabolu's contribution to an exhibition of student's work at the St. John's Wood Art Schools, whose principal considered him 'a gifted student ... [who] will go far in the profession'.⁴³² Amongst the work described was an unfinished oil portrait of a likely fellow West African, titled *Mr Delo-Dosumo*, whilst further descriptions reveal evidence of Onabolu's engagement with indigenous British life and landscape – a watercolour, *Brentford Bridge* and two black-and-white studies, *A Cavalier* and *Mrs 'Enery 'Awkins*. Also included in the exhibition was a selection of Onabolu's life drawings, three of which, the article informed, were 'quick poses' which had to be completed in half-an-hour.⁴³³ This exposure to the practice of short-posed life study reveals the relatively progressive nature of Onabolu's art education at the St. John's Wood Schools – similar life-study classes were held at the Slade, considered one of the more advanced art institutions in Britain, at this time.⁴³⁴ A month later, in January 1922, a photograph in *West Africa* shows Onabolu at work in the studio of the similarly progressive Académie Julian in Paris.⁴³⁵

Onabolu's western art education realised a material benefit. *West Africa* reported in June 1923 that his design was selected as the winning poster in a competition organised by the Nigerian government to advertise their presence at the British Empire Exhibition.⁴³⁶ Titled *The Nigerian Weaver* (Fig. 27), the poster was initially displayed in the Nigerian pavilion, but was subsequently adopted as an advertisement for the entire Exhibition.⁴³⁷ The poster shows a female weaver seated in front of a loom on which is stretched vertically-striped cloth. She wears a similarly striped dress that visually links her to the cloth on which she is working, whilst the striped motif is further echoed in the lines formed by her braided hair. The woman's outstretched hands are depicted operating the loom's beater that compresses the cloth's thread, but they also serve an alternative pictorial purpose in effectively 'presenting' to the viewer this example of Nigerian material culture which, as the weaver's dress demonstrates,

⁴³¹ For a biographical account of Onabolu, see Oloidi, 1997.

⁴³² 'A Talented West African Artist', *West Africa*, 24 December 1921.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁴ The technique of recording detail quickly was an integral element of the life drawing practice at the Slade. Models would hold a series of short poses of between five and ten minutes in the last hour of study in the life studio. See Chambers, 2002: 8.

⁴³⁵ See *West Africa*, 7 January 1922. The Académie Julian was established in 1868 by Rodolphe Julian and emerged as an alternative place of study to the official École des Beaux Arts, becoming popular with foreign art students. See <http://www.tate.org.uk/collections>. Accessed on 10/03/10.

⁴³⁶ See *West Africa*, 23 June 1923.

⁴³⁷ Oloidi, 1997: unpaginated.

has commercial potential. The Nigerian government, like their counterpart in the Gold Coast, similarly prioritised the commercial dimension of the country's crafts in their projection of the colony.⁴³⁸

Olu Oguibe has argued that the prioritisation of indigenous crafts over indigenous art, although 'projected as an act of philanthropy' by the colonial governments, was in reality an exercise in imperial hegemony, because it sought to deny West Africans a role as artists.⁴³⁹ The Nigerian government's choice of a Nigerian artist, Onobolu, in contrast to the Gold Coast government's employment of a British artist, Cheesman, to convey an image of the colony appears to breach contemporarily-held negative perceptions of indigenous West Africans' ability as graphic artists. Yet, it could be argued, that racial difference is here overridden by Onobolu's and Cheesman's shared western art practice - we see in Onobolu's painting evidence of the life study to which he had been exposed in Europe in his academic realisation of the female figure - that equally positioned them within a cultural framework granted privileged status by the two governments in validating the imperial mission. Significantly, though, realism was equally part of Onobolu's own artistic heritage and, indeed, the naturalistic modelling of the woman's head arguably reveals West African cultural influences as much as European.⁴⁴⁰ Accordingly, it can be argued that Onobolu's depiction of the female weaver exposes a degree of slippage from a singularly western academic norm. The figure conveyed is, in reality, the product of diverse cultural influences, and, as is true with all forms of colonial hybridity, serves in undermining an entrenched perception: in this instance, the contemporarily held notion that cultural production was marked by superior, exclusively western practice.

⁴³⁸ A report in *West Africa* in February 1923 outlined Nigeria's proposed plans for their display at Wembley. These included what is described as an 'actual tableaux' which would feature 'Natives at work on the principal industries and occupations of the Colony' with the finished articles being sold to visitors to the Exhibition. See 'West African Chambers of Commerce', *West Africa*, 10 February 1923. The commercial success of this policy was indicated in an article in *West Africa* in May 1924 that reported on the Exhibition: 'The sale of Native products has been so good and constant that calculations in most cases have been entirely wrong. The demand has outpaced the supply and in many cases fresh supplies from West Africa are awaited eagerly'. See 'West Africa and the Empire Exhibition', *West Africa*, 17 May 1924.

⁴³⁹ Oguibe, 2002: 36. Writing in the *Blackwood Advertiser* in January 1918, Sir Hugh Clifford, then serving as the Gold Coast's governor, argued that 'the West African Negro ... has never sculptured a statue, painted a picture, produced a literature, or even invented a mechanical contrivance worthy of the name'. Quoted in Oguibe, 2002: 36.

⁴⁴⁰ See Oguibe, 2002: 38. The medieval city-state of Ife in present-day South-Western Nigeria had a centuries old tradition of producing sophisticated sculptures and 'by 1100 C.E., Ife's artists had already developed a refined and highly naturalistic sculptural tradition in terra-cotta and stone that was soon followed by works in copper alloys'. Drewal, 2010: 70.

3.8 The dissemination of Edith Cheesman's Gold Coast pictures

According to a report in *West Africa*, Edith Cheesman painted sixty pictures of the Gold Coast during the six months that she spent in the colony between October 1923 and March 1924.⁴⁴¹ Today, none of these visual records of Ghana's colonial past have been retained by the country's National Museum in Accra. A similar situation prevails in Britain, with no major public collection holding any of Cheesman's Gold Coast work. Paintings that occupied a privileged space within the Gold Coast's display at the 1924 British Empire Exhibition have to a large degree been erased from the historical record. The whereabouts of Cheesman's paintings remains, to my knowledge, unknown, though a possibility is that the collection was broken-up and sold.⁴⁴² A report in *West Africa* in June 1924 hoped this situation would not prevail, and that Cheesman's 'beautiful' pictures would 'find purchasers as a whole' so as to retain the effect of 'these instructive sets'.⁴⁴³ That this did not ensue suggests that beyond the duration of the Wembley Exhibition the pictures were not deemed by the cultural institutions of the day as having enduring aesthetic or historical worth. Perhaps for such institutions they fell within Virginia Woolf's negative assessment of the Wembley Exhibition:

They say, indeed, that there is a restaurant where each diner is forced to spend a guinea upon his dinner. What vistas of cold ham that statement calls forth! What pyramids of rolls! What gallons of tea and coffee! For it is unthinkable that there should be champagne, plovers' eggs, or peaches at Wembley. And for six and eightpence two people can buy as much ham and bread as they need. Six and eightpence is not a large sum; but neither is it a small sum. It is a moderate sum, a mediocre sum. It is the prevailing sum at Wembley.⁴⁴⁴

Certainly, the overriding lack of critical interest displayed by British art critics and writers to Cheesman's paintings would not have encouraged a public collection in Britain to acquire them. What does appear surprising, particularly in the light of Guggisberg's obvious pride in commissioning the work, is that there is no record of the Gold Coast government retaining the pictures as part of a formative national art collection in the colony.

Paradoxically, in view of the cultural and monetary value that is frequently attached to works in oil and watercolour, the visual medium through which Cheesman's Gold Coast pictures have survived is in the mass-produced, low value format of the postcard, part of the

⁴⁴¹ See *West Africa*, 26 April 1924: 378.

⁴⁴² Even this possibility has to be treated with caution, however, because the Artprice website that records work passing through the auction houses does not list any of Edith Cheesman's Gold Coast paintings. See <http://web.artprice.com>. Accessed on 8/3/2010.

⁴⁴³ *West Africa*, 7 June 1924: 566.

⁴⁴⁴ Woolf, 1988: 411.

plethora of ephemeral material published to record the Wembley Exhibition.⁴⁴⁵ The Royal Commonwealth Society Library holds a near-complete collection of the thirty-six postcard reproductions of Cheesman's Gold Coast paintings that were produced by the leading British postcard publisher Raphael Tuck and Sons for the Wembley Exhibition.⁴⁴⁶ Although, as Saloni Muthur argues, the postcard is a 'notoriously low cultural form', the postcard publishers and specialist postcard magazines that proliferated in the postcard's golden age from the 1890s to the end of the First World War, sought to elevate its cultural standing.⁴⁴⁷ Raphael Tuck held a postcard competition in 1900 with the objective of 'fostering the love of art and encouraging the collection of artistic postcards'.⁴⁴⁸ In an attempt to realise this aim the company introduced in 1903 its 'Wide-World Oilette Series' which featured photographic views of India and the colonies, coloured and worked-up so as to imitate original oil paintings: an illusion that was completed by the addition of fake wood or gilt borders.⁴⁴⁹ Tuck and Sons continued to use their 'Oilette' process long after its introduction, and, as the Cheesman postcards reveal, were still employing it in 1924. The merits of the 'Oilette' card are prominently stated on the brown paper folders that each contained six postcard reproductions of Cheesman's paintings. The postcards are said to 'show the raised brushmarks [and] the canvas grain with the actual oil effects of the original painting', and are proclaimed in bold capitals as 'really marvellous veritable miniature oil paintings and everyone worthy of a frame'.⁴⁵⁰ The projection of the Gold Coast images as facsimiled versions of high cultural material would have reinforced the objective that Guggisberg sought to achieve through the display of Cheesman's original work. The cultural seal of approval was once more stamped upon the imperial mission, but now it was disseminated, in the form of permanent miniature mementos, to a far greater audience than would have lasting access to the original paintings.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁵ Andrew Thompson lists leaflets, maps, postcards, posters, programmes, postage stamps and miniature newspapers as examples of the type of published ephemera produced for the Wembley exhibition. See Thompson, 2006: 96.

⁴⁴⁶ Cheesman's postcards can be found in two collections held by the Royal Commonwealth Society Library within the Cambridge University Library. Series I, II (lacking one card), IV, V and VI can be found under reference PC Gold Coast/ 1 – 29 and Series III under reference GBR/0115/Y30448L.

⁴⁴⁷ Muthur, 1999: 111, 95.

⁴⁴⁸ Carline, 1959: 4.

⁴⁴⁹ Muthur, 1999: 102, 103. Raphael Tuck did not succeed in convincing everyone as to the artistic merits of the postcard. The artist Joseph Pennell announced in the *Journal of the Society of Arts* (27 April 1906) 'that postcards had no artistic value as they were the work of commercial firms'. Quoted in Carline, 1959: 8.

⁴⁵⁰ See Edith Cheesman Postcard Folder, Royal Commonwealth Society Library, PC Gold Coast/ 1 – 29.

⁴⁵¹ Although falling short of the organiser's expectations, the Wembley Exhibition attracted twenty-six million visitors, whilst a report in *African World* in November 1924 claimed that sixty per cent of the Exhibition's attendance visited the West African Walled City which indicates a potentially large market for the postcard reproductions of Cheesman's work. See Stephen, 2009: 118. John Fraser has argued that the most prolific users of postcards were the lower middle and working class, but that the middle-class was probably the main collectors of postcards. The better quality postcards, amongst which Tuck's 'Oilette' cards could be numbered, were

The postcards also served a more explicit propaganda purpose in imprinting upon the British public's imagination through an inexpensive and easily accessible visual format - perhaps framed as Tuck and Sons suggested, or retained in a collector's catalogue - the Gold Coast government's desired projection of the colony.⁴⁵² Although no record of the number of postcards sold exists, the decision to replicate Cheesman's paintings through this format bears witness to the determination to convey the imperial message as widely as possible. Viewers of the postcards were left in no doubt as to what the images conveyed for each card carried at its base an explanatory title printed over the picture surface. So although the Gold Coast authorities entrusted the delivery of their propaganda message to a visual medium, text retained an important role in suppressing any dangerous ambivalence that the paintings may have engendered. Prosaic titles, such as *Ashanti Weavers, Gold Coast* or *A Manganese Mine in the Gold Coast*, or, indeed, *A Government Officer's Bungalow, Gold Coast* (Fig. 18), seem to have been employed so as to eliminate possible ambiguous interpretations of the images, although, as I have argued in the context of the latter work, these titles would not necessarily have curtailed unwelcome interpretations.

The dominant theme conveyed in the postcard images, and reinforced by the unequivocal language of their imposed titles, is the imperially initiated social and economic transformation of the Gold Coast. Important as the relating of this transformation was for Guggisberg, of no less importance for him was the aesthetic quality and character of Cheesman's work itself, judging by his repeated praise of her paintings in these terms in the speech he delivered at the opening of her exhibition in Accra.⁴⁵³ It served Guggisberg's purposes to highlight the paintings' aesthetic quality, and two pictures recording the provision of vocational education in the Gold Coast serve, here, in demonstrating why this was so.⁴⁵⁴

Cheesman painted two views of one of the four trade schools – referred to by Guggisberg as his 'infants' – that had recently opened in the colony: *The Carpenter's Shop, Kibbi Trade School, Gold Coast* (Fig. 28) and *Boys on Parade, Kibbi Trade School, Gold*

designed 'for a more discerning audience'. See Fraser, 1980: 39. Postcards were, however, also viewed in a negative light by early twentieth-century writers. Virginia Woolf described them as an 'insubstantial phantom' when she employed the postcard as a negative metaphor in contrasting the late performances given by the actress Ellen Terry in the early 1900s to her earlier work on stage: performances she described as 'a picture postcard compared with the great Velasquez in the gallery'. Woolf, 1967: 67.

⁴⁵² See Wollaeger, 2001: 44.

⁴⁵³ See *Gold Coast News*, 31 January 1924.

⁴⁵⁴ For a discussion of Guggisberg's educational policy in the Gold Coast, see Goodhall, 1998: 119 – 126, and Coe, 2002: 27 – 32. The prioritisation of technical over literary education in colonial West Africa was widely expressed in the 1920s. Discussing the issue in *The Economic Revolution in British West Africa* (London, 1926), the book's author, Allan McPhee, argued that the 'bookish' education supplied by the region's Mission Schools 'turn[ed] out clerks and potential politicians rather than efficient tradesmen': a situation that he viewed as 'lop-sided and dangerous'. See McPhee, 1926: 267.

Coast (Fig. 29).⁴⁵⁵ Guggisberg had argued for the importance of vocational training in the Gold Coast in a pamphlet, *The Keystone*. Here, he stated that the long-term objective of providing higher education 'must be accompanied by a better system of training in handicrafts, agriculture, and all those trades that go to provide for the necessities of a community; for although higher education may be the brain of a country, its productive capacity is its heart'.⁴⁵⁶ *The Carpenter's Shop* conveys in unremarkable, almost diagrammatic, fashion Ghanaian boys acquiring the skills of one of Guggisberg's necessary trades. Cheesman leaves the viewer in no doubt that the painting's subject is the 'progress' being made by the Ghanaian population under British tutelage, exemplified by the two boys sawing a plank who are prominently placed at the centre of the composition. Her other view of the Kibbi Trade School, *Boys on Parade* delivers its message of imperial transformation in a slightly more subtle manner, and is the more interesting picture as a result. Guggisberg admitted that he felt sorry for Cheesman 'having to tackle a subject so lacking in artistic possibilities as a tidy, well-swept school-ground', but it is the school-ground, populated with serried ranks of uniformed boys, that dominates the bottom half of the painting.⁴⁵⁷ The imperial presence within the colony, symbolised by the thin sliver of colour that represents the Union flag hanging limply on the flagpole to the left of the frame, carries a disproportionate visual impact. The flag's exclamatory red, white and, just perceptible, blue colouring stands out against a dark background and the picture's generally more muted tones. Its symbolic impact is further magnified by the ranks of boys, shown standing to attention in front of it, honouring this manifestation of British authority. Cheesman's image would have served Guggisberg's objective of relating the benefit of imperial intervention to a domestic British audience, for an intended purpose behind the trade schools, in addition to the teaching of technical skills, was the inculcation of what he termed 'character training'. This entailed the grafting onto the students of qualities such as order, cleanliness, punctuality, self-control, obedience, reliability and respect for parents and institutions, all of which could arguably be ascribed to the boys seen in the picture.⁴⁵⁸

The painting clearly fulfils its explicit propaganda purpose, but the picture's other inherent characteristics serve additional, less transparent, propaganda needs. The open expanse of the school-ground is shown surrounded by neat and tidy whitewashed school

⁴⁵⁵ *Gold Coast News*, 31 January 1924: 1.

⁴⁵⁶ Goodhall, 1998: 133.

⁴⁵⁷ *Gold Coast News*, 31 January 1924: 1.

⁴⁵⁸ See Goodhall, 1998: 140. For a more detailed outline of Guggisberg's aims for the trade schools, see Guggisberg and Fraser, 1929: 83 – 92.

buildings that form a barrier between the manmade and prosaic landscape - an outcome of modernity - and the looming native forest – symbolising the untransformed, and, hence, still exotic Africa - now consigned in silhouetted form to the background. Although marginalised, Cheesman's expression of Africa's picturesqueness was important for Guggisberg as her 'skilful introduction of the harmattan mists in the great forest in the background' elevated what he feared was dull subject-matter into the status of art.⁴⁵⁹

Throughout his speech Guggisberg heaped praise upon Cheesman's picturesque evocation of the Gold Coast citing 'the faithful manner in which [she] has given the real atmosphere and characteristics of the Gold Coast and yet maintained throughout the true art of colour'.⁴⁶⁰ Discussing a series of paintings depicting the cocoa harvest, he singled out her colouring of cocoa pods 'red-gold orange by the slanting rays of the sun through the leafy canopy overhead' and praised her depiction of a 'group of picturesque sitting figures husking the golden pods'.⁴⁶¹ Another painting showing the interior of a Gold mine – 'a veritable *tour-de-force* ... that will cause a sensation in England' – is described as an almost sublime vision: 'The yellow lights of the lamps, the red glow on the ebony bodies of the miners [and] the sense of weight overhead'.⁴⁶² In extolling the picturesque virtues of Cheesman's pictures, Guggisberg positioned her work, despite its projection of an often more prosaic, modern Ghana, within a widely accepted and continuing conception of West Africa that emphasised the region's timeless aesthetic character.⁴⁶³ This, I argue, was essential for him, because Cheesman's paintings could not be seen as departing too far from an established and accepted mode of expression if they were to effectively serve in culturally validating his imperial project.

Notwithstanding Guggisberg linking Cheesman's work to the realm of the picturesque, it nevertheless occupies its own space. It is, however, an uncertain space, one forced to acknowledge the intrusion of western modernity in West Africa, whilst still accommodating an established picturesque conception of the region. Jon Heggllund has argued that:

⁴⁵⁹ *Gold Coast News*, 31 January 1924: 1, 2. The 'harmattan' is a dry, dusty easterly or north-easterly wind on the West African coast that occurs from December to February. See *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford, 2006), 651.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*: 1.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*: 1.

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*: 2. Cheesman's painting of the gold mine was singled out for praise in a report in *West Africa*. Here, though the correspondent was - as was typical in much of the coverage of women artist-travellers of this period - more concerned with the physical hardships Cheesman had to endure in order to record her underground view. See 'Ancient Splendour of Ashanti', *West Africa*, 26 April 1924.

⁴⁶³ A report in *West Africa* describing how Cheesman's work evoked an impression of the Gold Coast, sandwiched the term 'progress' between those of 'mystery' and 'charm'. See *West Africa*, 7 June 1924.

In the twentieth-century, Africa is written through two apparently contradictory narratives in the West: one holds the continent in a realm of timeless myth, the other makes it part of the historical process of globalisation ... Africa appears over and over again as an image of a timeless continent, outside of history, stubbornly resisting modernisation and autonomy.⁴⁶⁴

There is undoubted truth in Heggglund's analysis, and his final sentence neatly encapsulates much of the visual imagining of West Africa produced in the early 1920s. What we encounter, however, in Cheesman's paintings of the region (as also in Beatrice Bright's portrait, *Miss Dove-Edwin of Sierra Leone* (Fig. 20) is the coalescing of these two opposed narratives within the same frame as timeless 'African' picturesqueness provides a backdrop to, or, more significantly, intersects with distinctly non-picturesque images of imported western modernity. An example of the latter situation occurs in the painting *Koforidua Station, Gold Coast* (Fig. 30). Here, Cheesman depicts, massed in the foreground and snaking through the picture, Ghanaians laden with sacks of cocoa converging upon the station. They are shown clothed in indigenous dress; a woman is depicted with a child strapped to her back; the background is blotted out by the looming presence of the untamed forest; in fact much of the scene appears to confirm Heggglund's definition of 'a timeless continent outside of history'. But to the right of the station buildings can be seen standing isolated on some clear ground, though still immersed within Cheesman's pictorial conception of the Gold Coast, two motorised trucks that clearly signify the incursion of twentieth-century modernity into the scene. Although depicted as small and unobtrusive, in relation to the mass of figures that dominate the picture, the vehicles, heavily-laden with cocoa sacks, read as a harbinger of change: within the same frame the concept of 'timeless' Africa is challenged by this manifestation of global modernity.⁴⁶⁵

In concluding my analysis of Cheesman's paintings I offer one further example of the Gold Coast government's projection of the colony. *A Palaver of Chiefs, Accra, Gold Coast* (Fig. 31) portrays some of the traditional societal chiefs who were permitted to retain their localised power by the British authorities as part of the system of Indirect Rule utilised in colonial West Africa so as to facilitate cost-effective administration in the colony.⁴⁶⁶ We see

⁴⁶⁴ Heggglund, 2005: 44.

⁴⁶⁵ Allan McPhee, writing about the economic changes unfolding in West Africa in the 1920s, considered that: 'The provision of adequate, cheap and speedy means of transportation meant that a region which had hitherto been practically self-supporting and an individual unit, became linked with the outside world'. He considered this a modern story, begun less than forty years previously and still proceeding. See McPhee, 1926: 1.

⁴⁶⁶ Penelope Hetherington succinctly defines Indirect Rule as 'a system which aimed at the growth of a responsible African elite, out of the old tribal elite, which would gradually be taught the duties and responsibilities of rulers of a modern state'. Hetherington, 1978: 137. James Epstein has argued that in the West African chieftaincies the British authorities found a 'hierarchically ordered society' that mirrored their own. Britain's

the formally posed chiefs sitting surrounded by their entourages and symbols of power – the highly-coloured umbrellas and the wooden stool, prominently placed at the centre of the composition. In the manner of royal portraiture – a genre understood by a western audience for the cultural authority it bestows – Cheesman's 'official' portrayal similarly validates the status of the chiefs in the Gold Coast of the early 1920s. Her picture conveys the colonial government's selective projection of a Ghanaian elite. As such, it merits comparison with a photograph published in *West Africa* on 31 March 1923 which shows a Mr. and Mrs. E.K. Adisi standing on the steps of their home accompanied by their children (Fig. 32). The accompanying caption described Mr. Adisi as 'well known in the cocoa and general produce export trade', and detailed that the luxury car parked in front of the family's impressive house belonged to Mrs. Adisi.⁴⁶⁷ A week after the photograph's publication, the paper published a letter addressed to the Editor from a regular reader, Harold Wilkerson. Wilkerson begins his letter by complementing *West Africa* for being 'the only newspaper which gives, both in its reading matter and more particularly in its pictures, a reliable account of what is happening in West Africa'. He later remarks that despite not having set foot in Africa for ten years the photograph shows, for him, a continent where Africans now 'carry on great enterprises, have fine houses, and use some of the most expensive makes of British motor-cars and other articles'. 'There are people', he continues, 'who will look at [this picture] with a certain amount of disapproval, but their disapproval avails not a jot, for, whether they like it or not, the African, who represents a race which does not die out before but becomes stronger with British civilisation, is bound to go on along the path of progress'.⁴⁶⁸

Over a year after the publication of Wilkerson's letter, C.F. Hayfron-Benjamin, a Ghanaian student at King's College, London and President of the University of Students of African Descent, and a likely example of Wilkerson's 'progressive' African, contributed an article to *West Africa* in which he set down his observations on the West Africa display at the Wembley Exhibition. Hayfron-Benjamin's view was not entirely complementary. Although, he argued, the exhibition was quick to 'show what Africa contributes to the Empire ... it scarcely presents with the same conspicuousness what Africa has gained under the aegis of the Empire'. The education exhibit, he observed, rich as it was, did not do justice to the fact that the region's missionary schools provided a secondary education that enabled West African

retention of the chiefs, he continues, can be ascribed to class ideology, that identified 'a ruling elite in the first instance with landed wealth'. See Epstein, 2006: 252.

⁴⁶⁷ See *West Africa*, 31 March 1923.

⁴⁶⁸ 'West Africa: Pictures and their lesson', *West Africa*, 7 April 1923. Allan McPhee referred to the rise of a West African mercantile class, particularly in the Gold Coast, describing them as 'the first capitalists of West Africa in the sphere of industry'. McPhee, 1926: 104.

students to pursue higher education at a British university. He believed that visitors to the West African Section are 'introduced to only one side of African life', and 'would hardly gather that the African is quite accustomed to the use of such amenities as the motor-car, telephone and electric light'.⁴⁶⁹

Hayfron-Benjamin's observation that the Wembley exhibition revealed 'only one side of African life' is telling. It suggests that educated individuals, such as him, were not widely projected by the exhibition organisers as evidence of the region's progress towards a western notion of civilisation. Hayfron-Benjamin pinned his hopes on the modern technology of the cinema remedying this omission, and, indeed, there is evidence that it may partially have done so.⁴⁷⁰ During the exhibition 'interesting and instructive' films of West African life were shown daily in an on-site cinema.⁴⁷¹ One of these was the Greville brothers' film, *The Gold Coast Today* which was shot in the colony in 1923. *West Africa* reported in May 1923 on some of the scenes that had been filmed. One showed an African barrister at work in Accra interviewing clients and leaving for Court in a car.⁴⁷² Guggisberg was reported as taking a supervisory role in the making of the film, suggesting that he was not averse to the filming of the barrister.⁴⁷³ If so, this projection of a member of the country's educated elite, as evidence of the increasingly 'civilised' colony, contrasts with the absence of such figures in the scenes depicting modernising and 'civilising' processes that Guggisberg directed Cheesman to convey.

Wilkerson lauded the photograph of the westernised Adisi family as evidence of the beneficial influence that British civilisation could bring to bear upon the indigenous West African population. In the 1920s, however, westernised Africans continued to be viewed in a more negative light.⁴⁷⁴ A contemporary commentator, Hugh Wyndham, vindictively traduced them at this time:

He may end up as a highly trained mechanic, dancing in evening clothes, and in the intervals whispering pan-African politics of which the first plank is to turn all Europeans out of Africa neck and crop. But his mental and spiritual being is all the time in its primitive state. He becomes an individual drifting about without any real anchorage in the society he sees so rapidly developing around him, and

⁴⁶⁹ 'The Land of Sunshine greets her Sister States', *West Africa*, 24 May 1924.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁷¹ 'West Africa and the Empire Exhibition', *West Africa*, 22 March 1924.

⁴⁷² 'Gold Coast at Empire Exhibition', *West Africa*, 5 May 1923. The report lists an extensive number of scenes shot by the film-makers that conveyed the industrial and social life of the colony. Having been unable to view the film, I can not state with certainty if the footage of the African barrister was included in the final print.

⁴⁷³ 'West Africa and the Empire Exhibition', *West Africa*, 22 March 1924.

⁴⁷⁴ For an account of changing British attitudes to West Africans, see Bickford-Smith, 2004: 194 – 227.

therefore, at the same time, a menace to the maintenance of the standard of the imported civilisation which has cut him adrift from his natural environment.⁴⁷⁵

Wyndham cast westernised Africans as shams, as rootless, but most of all as subversive. The circulation of such opinions in the mid 1920s offers a reason as to why they were not viewed as suitable material for 'official' art projecting a desired British construction of Ghana at this time. Although permitted representation in the relatively new, but culturally less esteemed, media of film, elite westernised Ghanaians were denied, evidenced by their omission in Cheesman's work, cultural validation through the more culturally elevated mediums of oil and watercolour paint.

3.9 Conclusion

In this chapter I have focused upon work produced in the early to mid 1920s that conveys just one region of the empire – West Africa. As was largely so with the work discussed in chapter one, the paintings I reference may likewise be defined in formal terms as Academic or naturalistic. They neither pay heed to, nor acknowledge, more modernist formal practices in circulation by the early 1920s. A cursory glance at some of these pictures also suggests that in imagining West Africa artists continued to produce images of empire that in time honoured fashion expressed it as a fixed site of the exotic, the picturesque or the 'primitive'. Rose Chicotot Stinus reproduces large upon the canvas an image of the 'primitive' African. Or does she? For a critic of the time, the figures Stinus depicted in *Back from Fishing* represented 'a sympathetic appreciation of dignity and mystery proceeding from race' – descriptive terms that sideline more commonly-held notions of primitiveness. As I have argued, however, Stinus' male figures can be read as an equally stereotypical expression of the exotic and erotic male black body, desired both as image and in the flesh in certain western social circles at this time. Thus although entrenched conceptions of empire may have lingered, the imagining of empire did not entirely remain fixed, and images were susceptible to alternative, more topical, though invariably still generalising, interpretation.

The erosion of a 'fixed' imagined empire is evident also in Beatrice Bright's portrait, *Miss Dove-Edwin of Sierra Leone*. Whereas colonial exoticism in the early twentieth-century was primarily viewed as stemming solely from indigenous characteristics, here, Bright

⁴⁷⁵ Hugh Wyndham 'The Colour Problem in Africa', *International Affairs*, Vol. IV, No. 4 (1925), 176, cited in Hetherington, 1978: 70. Wyndham's view was far from isolated in the mid 1920s. Western-educated Africans were also described at this time as 'loose-charactered, deraciné, non-producing, inefficient and often unemployable'. G. Howard Jones 'Educational Needs in West Africa'. *Journal of the African Society*, XXXVI (1926 – 27), 344, cited in Hetherington, 1978: 118.

combines signifiers of her subject's experience of both England and Sierra Leone to produce a more 'modern' hybrid exoticism. Bright's reformulation of empire, transmitted through her expression of colonial hybridity, nevertheless, remains somewhat tentative. This, perhaps, is not unsurprising, as her painting was directed towards a market that had established clear parameters regarding the visual imagining of empire. Conversely, Edith Cheesman – commissioned by the Gold Coast government to convey an 'official' view of empire for the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924 – did not have to heed the strictures of the marketplace and produced a more assertive expression of colonial hybridity in her depiction of Ghanaian nurses dressed in western uniforms.

Picturesqueness - a quality that continued to define and consolidate much artist-travellers' work - for the most part performs an aesthetically subsidiary role in Cheesman's generally prosaic realisations of modern, but often mundane, subject-matter. As I have argued, however, even a limited picturesque quality engendered the paintings, certainly for the Gold Coast's governor Sir Gordon Guggisberg, with a contemporary cultural validity. The significance of this should not be lost sight of, for despite being largely ignored by critics, and indirectly derided by a modernist writer such as Virginia Woolf, Cheesman's paintings held considerable importance for the imperial authorities at Wembley. They were, for them, an invaluable means of conveying to as wide an audience as possible – hence their reproduction in postcard format - a new visual conception of empire that was more attuned to its contemporary political projection, and this conception was given added cultural validation through its expression in art.

As propaganda art, it could be assumed that Cheesman's work would not be subject to alternative or subversive interpretation. Indeed, there is evidence that the colonial authorities, in stamping unambiguous titles on the postcard reproductions of her paintings, did their best to prevent this. However, as I have outlined in my discussion of *A Government Officer's Bungalow, Gold Coast*, images can evade the constraints imposed upon them by text and are vulnerable to undesired interpretation.

Art also has the capacity to undermine limitations that may be artificially imposed upon it. Despite levels of control at Wembley that prioritised the display and cultural merit of western art over indigenous colonial material culture, Aina Onabolu's poster *The Nigerian Weaver* – a work equally influenced by indigenous as by western art practice – was prominently circulated in advertising for the Exhibition. The widespread dissemination of Onabolu's work reveals, in the case of the visual arts, just how fragile and insecure the conceptualisation of empire could be.

What emerges in the art that imagines West Africa in the early to mid 1920s is evidence of slightly altering responses to empire. Well established modes of expression remain – Africa continues to be exoticised, and it continues to be imagined as a picturesque entity outside of time – but these traditional formulations are now disrupted by the intrusion of western or contemporary factors within visual representations of the continent. Although in formal terms the paintings of West Africa upon which I have focused may appear uniform, in conceptual terms they reveal evidence of artists' nuanced and differentiated response to empire. They reveal that too often dismissed Academic or naturalistic work can be insightful, and can possess the capacity to challenge established ideas.

4. Imagining empire in the late twenties: Gerald Spencer Pryse in West Africa

4.1 Introduction

In this final chapter I turn to a period in the 1920s that saw the most concentrated and visible florescence of empire imagery: a time when the Empire Marketing Board (EMB), effectively a government quango established in 1926 with the objective of promoting trade within the empire, was operating. Concentrated, because until its abolition in 1933, the Board spent £426,879 on up to 836 different poster designs, and visible, because the posters were prominently displayed throughout the country on custom designed billboards away from other advertising.⁴⁷⁶ Speaking at the annual Royal Academy banquet in May 1924, the Academy's president, Aston Webb, recalled how the guest of honour, the Prince of Wales, had the previous year praised the high standard of design frequently seen in the posters that adorned the nation's advertising hoardings, to the extent that they were deemed by the prince as constituting 'the people's picture gallery'.⁴⁷⁷ A few years later, the EMB's posters, designed by prominent artists of the day, such as Edward McKnight Kauffer, Paul Nash, Clive Gardiner and Gerald Spencer Pryse, assumed their place within this very public domain.

Stephen Constantine has provided a detailed analysis of the political machinations that ultimately determined the establishment of the EMB, whilst his pictorial survey *Buy and Build: The Advertising Posters of the Empire Marketing Board* includes invaluable colour reproductions of posters commissioned by the Board as part of their advertising/propaganda strategy.⁴⁷⁸ Because of Constantine's scholarship I do not intend to emulate his survey of a large number of EMB posters, rather my narrative centres on the work that one artist, Gerald Spencer Pryse, produced for the Board. Spencer Pryse's images of West Africa typify the contrasting, even conflicting, response to empire that, I have argued, characterised its representation in the 1920s. As a commissioned artist he had a brief to work to – one that emphasised empire's modern economic dimension - which was met in the posters published by the EMB. However, as I will argue, Spencer Pryse equally produced images that ran

⁴⁷⁶ 1800 EMB billboards were erected in 450 towns by 1933. The boards, measuring twenty feet in length and four feet in height, displayed five sequential images. See Constantine, 1986a: 211.

⁴⁷⁷ 'British Art: Prince of Wales on a Truly Imperial Show', *Observer*, 4 May 1924.

⁴⁷⁸ Constantine has argued, that in addition to the Board's pragmatic objective of boosting trade, a propaganda mission was also explicitly evident in the organisation's ideological 'attempt to consolidate imperialist ideals and an imperial world view as part of British popular culture'. See Constantine, 1986a: 192 – 231. Constantine's *Buy and Build* also includes a detailed account of the bureaucratic processes that ultimately determined much of the eventual content of the posters' imagery. See Constantine, 1986b and Meredith, 1987: 30 – 36, for a similar type of account.

counter to this objective; images which drew more upon the well-rehearsed notion of the exotic empire, though, significantly, less as an end in itself, and more as a means of criticising those aspects of modern western life which, ironically, the EMB wished to promote as present and functioning within the realm of the peripheral empire.

Constantine included in his pictorial survey four of Spencer Pryse's posters, and I refer to some of these images in my discussion, but I am also concerned with the preparatory watercolours that he made during his tour of West Africa in late 1927. This sizeable and, contemporarily, much exhibited body of work – in the late twenties and thirties it was shown partially or in its entirety in London, Liverpool, Manchester, Copenhagen and Toronto – offers, not only in its own right, rich scope for discussion – it conveys both the economic and exotic empire – but enables, due to the treatment of similar subject-matter, a comparative analysis to be made with earlier representations of empire that Spencer Pryse produced for the Wembley Empire Exhibition in 1924. Furthermore, it permits an exploration of Spencer Pryse's motivations at specific historical moments: motivations that, I argue, perhaps determined the manner in which he imagined empire at different times in the 1920s.

Recent scholarship pertaining to the EMB's posters has moved away from Constantine's original distanced view, to a more focused concentration on the smaller narratives that constitute the larger story of the organisation's imagery. Studies of posters depicting East Africa and Ireland are two cases in point, and a focused study of Spencer Pryse's images of West Africa, used by the Board and other cultural institutions in the late 1920s, will contribute to this branch of scholarship.⁴⁷⁹

A particular component of Spencer Pryse's imagery – the representation of the cocoa industry – was a subject treated by a further artist commissioned by the EMB, Edward McKnight Kauffer. A discussion of Kauffer's image enables the broadening of this chapter's analysis, because, unlike the naturalistic work produced by Spencer Pryse and the vast majority of artists featured in this study, Kauffer designed an image that sits within a more modernist idiom. As such, it permits an examination of how a practitioner associated with progressive art practice imagined the peripheral empire in the 1920s; something that was a relatively rare event in this decade. Equally rare was the attention paid to the graphic work of West Africans at this time, but evidence suggests that the EMB produced a poster which

⁴⁷⁹ For a specific discussion of the EMB's representation of the tobacco industry in East Africa and the construction of white male imperial archetypes, see Ramamurthy, 2003. And Cronin, 2004: 132 – 43, for an account that exposes gaps between the EMB's imagery and the message they aimed to convey, specifically in work produced for the Board by the Irish artists Seán Keating and Margaret Clark, whose imagery, Cronin argues, 'decisively subverts stereotypical depictions of the imperial "native"' (139).

featured sketches made by Ghanaian art students. I consider this work in much the same way that I discussed Aina Onabolu's poster exhibited at the Wembley Empire Exhibition; as an example of the colonised speaking back.

Although through its widely displayed posters the EMB made a concerted attempt to influence public perception of empire, they were, of course, not the only participants clamouring to be heard. Their output can be placed in context when reflecting that in the Board's peak year of 1928 in which it spent £278,414 on public activities some fifty-seven million pounds was spent overall on national advertising in Britain.⁴⁸⁰ As Constantine has commented, it was unlikely that the EMB's posters would have 'regularly outpaced the great bulk of ordinary commercial advertising'.⁴⁸¹ Bearing his remarks in mind, I conclude this chapter by considering one example of that vast mass of commercial advertising circulating at the time of the EMB's operations; an advertisement produced by the confectionary manufacturer Rowntree in 1933 which drew upon African imagery. The Rowntree advert provides an opportunity to see, as far as the visual imagining of empire was concerned, if the EMB's poster campaign had any great effect in comprehensively altering the way in which empire was viewed in Britain in the late twenties and early thirties.

4.2 Culturally validating the imperial mission

On 2 March 1928, less than a year after ending his eight year tenure as governor of the Gold Coast, Sir Gordon Guggisberg repeated a duty that he had performed in the colony's capital, Accra, some four years previously. Having officiated at the opening there in January 1924 of an exhibition featuring paintings of Ghana by the British artist Edith Cheesman, he now opened a further show of a British artist's depictions of colonial West Africa.⁴⁸² The events were differentiated in two obvious ways: the 1928 exhibition was staged in England rather than Ghana - at the Imperial Institute in London; and it featured the work of a male rather than female artist - Gerald Spencer Pryse (1882 – 1956).⁴⁸³ In other respects these separate occasions were marked by similarities, notably the comments Guggisberg expressed in his two opening speeches. In 1924 he had praised Cheesman for faithfully capturing in her paintings, 'the real atmosphere and characteristics of the Gold Coast'.⁴⁸⁴ Four years later, as *West Africa* reported, Guggisberg highlighted these same qualities as permeating Spencer

⁴⁸⁰ See Constantine, 1986a: 221.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

⁴⁸² See 'Mr Spencer Pryse's West African Pictures', *West Africa*, 10 March 1928.

⁴⁸³ The exhibition of Spencer Pryse's watercolours and gouaches of West Africa was staged in the Imperial Institute's newly opened Imperial Art Gallery from 2 to 20 March 1928.

⁴⁸⁴ *Gold Coast News*, 31 January 1924: 1.

Pryse's work. He praised the artist for successfully conveying, for him, the region's atmosphere and colour, and, in the report's words, 'the very life of the people'.⁴⁸⁵ The expression of such markedly similar observations, divided as they are by a four year time-span, suggests that despite the 1924 British Empire Exhibition – in which art had played its part in conveying a truly imperial empire - receding into memory, circumstances in 1928 remained much the same, and Britain's colonial authorities retained a desire for art to convey an image of empire that served their purposes. Ideally, this was an image which incorporated a degree of the exoticism that continued to play powerfully in the public's imagination of empire, but also conveyed the imperially initiated modernising processes that were transforming a number of Britain's colonial possessions in the post-war decade.

In 1924, Lord Stevenson, Chairman of the Wembley Exhibition Board, had prioritised the Exhibition's 'educational' element by declaring it as 'of great national importance' in that it would convey 'a quickened sense of Imperial achievement'.⁴⁸⁶ Art, such as the work produced by Cheesman that was displayed in the Exhibition's Gold Coast pavilion, contributed to this 'educational' process, and was part of what Andrew Thompson has described as Wembley's 'intensive and imaginative propaganda effort' to counter 'public ignorance of the empire' and 'persuade the British people of its value'.⁴⁸⁷ As Thompson argues, however, the impact the Exhibition achieved, certainly with regard to changing the public perception of what the modern empire was, and could be, 'is far from certain'. He considers that the Exhibition's carnival element – it was as much an amusement park as an educational experience – may well have 'stood in the way of its "serious" purpose', and concludes that the 'evidence of Wembley does not point us in a clear direction' regarding its effectiveness as an exercise in transforming public opinion.⁴⁸⁸ Events would suggest this was so, certainly judging by the evidence of a colonial governor still being called upon in 1928 to open an exhibition of work depicting empire, and in effect supply an 'official' seal of approval to an artist's imaginings. Such a situation suggests that the policy of re-educating the public as to the modern reality of empire remained an ongoing project: one in which art was still seen as playing a contributory role. As will become clear in this chapter this, indeed, was the case, for the paintings of West

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁶ Quoted in J. Richards *Imperialism and Music: Britain, 1876 – 1953* (Manchester, 2001), 177 and cited in Thompson, 2006: 96.

⁴⁸⁷ Thompson, 2006: 97.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid: 30. The Wembley Exhibition's dual function as part entertainment, part educational vehicle was later commented on in popular cultural production. A character in Noel Coward's film *This Happy Breed* (1943) when visiting Wembley remarks, 'I've brought you here to see the wonders of the empire, and all you want to do is go to the Dodgems'. Quoted in Jeffrey, 2002: 30.

Africa that Gerald Spencer Pryse exhibited at the Imperial Institute in 1928 were the result of a commission from the Empire Marketing Board.⁴⁸⁹

Before turning to the role performed by the EMB in the imagining of empire in the late 1920s, and specifically some of the art that it commissioned to promote its objectives, I want to return to the paintings produced by Cheesman and Spencer Pryse in West Africa so as to bring to light another factor that links these two temporally separated bodies of work. It is a connection which reveals evidence of the continuing importance that the colonial authorities attached to British art projecting empire in this decade: art seen as important not just for its propaganda function, but also its wider cultural value. Not only was it beneficial for supporters of colonialism to have, for short-term political requirements, art that conveyed their idea of empire, it was also important, for long-term needs of historical endorsement – what Kenneth Coutts-Smith has called ‘the freezing of concepts’ – that this art was validated and elevated through critical evaluation and established practices of display so as to endow it with a degree of cultural permanence.⁴⁹⁰

A call for this type of historical endorsement is found in a *West Africa* article in June 1924 which hoped that Cheesman’s Gold Coast paintings would remain as an unbroken collection so as to retain their maximum effect, although, as I have earlier outlined, there is no evidence to indicate that this ever occurred.⁴⁹¹ By 1928, the muted plea expressed in 1924 for the preservation of a body of work conveying colonial West Africa had grown to a clamour, and the ill-defined suggestion of that earlier date had evolved into a far more detailed plan. *West Africa* devoted a front page editorial in September 1928 to demanding the procurement of Spencer Pryse’s paintings ‘as a whole for the good of the Empire and of British West Africa’, and suggested a number of possible venues in which his work could be displayed.⁴⁹² In support of its argument the paper cited instances in which the pictures, aside from their use

⁴⁸⁹ Minutes from an EMB sub-committee meeting report that that the Board did not object to the exhibition of Spencer Pryse’s West Africa sketches, only insisting that those ear-marked for their use were so indicated. First Sub-Committee - Poster Section Minutes, 19 January 1928, CO 760/26.

⁴⁹⁰ Coutts-Smith, 1991: 15.

⁴⁹¹ *West Africa*, 7 June 1924: 566.

⁴⁹² The editorial argued that in the future, British West Africa may, like the Dominions, have a headquarters building in London, and considered that Spencer Pryse’s pictures would be a fine attraction in such an establishment. Undaunted by the current unavailability of such a location it even suggested the room at the Colonial Office in which the West Africa Committee met, or the offices of a shipping, mercantile or banking organisation with links to West Africa as a temporary suitable home for the pictures. See ‘Wanted – Twelve Hundred Guineas. The Spenser Pryse Pictures’, *West Africa*, 1 September 1928. A.M. and A.G.R. Mackenzie’s *Australia House* (1913 -18), constructed on a site at the Aldwych, was the first of the big purpose-built Dominion headquarter buildings in the capital, whilst Robert Smirke’s *Union Club* (1824 – 27) in Trafalgar Square was renamed *Canada House*, after being refaced and enlarged by Septimus Warwick in 1924-25, and served as the London headquarters of the Dominion. See Bradley and Pevsner, 2003: 77, 78, 333.

by the EMB, had served the empire in both propaganda and cultural roles.⁴⁹³ One such instance revealed in the editorial was as visual material projecting West Africa at the Canadian National Exhibition held in Toronto in September 1928.⁴⁹⁴

The West African exhibit in Toronto was divided into three sections, one of which was devoted to 'the arts and crafts of West Africa'.⁴⁹⁵ A photograph of this section (Fig. 33) reproduced in *West Africa* shows eight of Spencer Pryse's watercolours mounted upon a variety of patterned cloths, of probable West African design, attached to a temporary stand. In front of this stand, positioned upon the floor, are further examples of West African material culture, notably a centrally-placed ceremonial stool, whilst an unconvincing attempt to further exoticise the display is made by the inclusion, at its boundaries, of two frail tropical palms planted in distinctly 'un-African' clay pots. What is telling in the photograph is evidence of the exhibition's elision of indigenous West African and western material culture to convey the artistic life of the region. This differs from the situation at Wembley four years earlier when material culture from West Africa and Britain selected, respectively, as representative of, and, as representing, the region was - certainly in the Gold Coast pavilion - allocated separate spheres. What remains the same, however, is that as at Wembley, where Cheesman's paintings were accorded pride of place within the Gold Coast exhibit, so in Toronto, it was Spencer Pryse's paintings that were granted a privileged position within the display. The photograph shows them overlaying examples of West African material culture that effectively serve as a backdrop to this manifestation of western high cultural production.

The incorporation in Toronto of Spencer Pryse's paintings within a display demonstrating 'the arts and crafts of West Africa' serves, however, to blur their purpose. Was a Canadian audience in 1928 expected to view the pictures as conveyors of imperial

⁴⁹³ An unpublished letter, dated 7 November 1928, from a colonial official Lt.-Col. J.H. Levey to the Lord Mayor of London, reveals Levey asking for use of the Guildhall Art Gallery as a venue in which to display Spencer Pryse's West Africa paintings. Levey describes the paintings as 'depicting conditions of social life, trade and commerce of the two West African colonies', and argues that as 'a very large number of city merchants are directly interested in the trade and commerce of British West Africa the exhibition of this magnificent collection in the city of London and the heart of the empire would be of great value to the West African Colonies'. Lt-Col J.H. Levey to Lord Mayor of London, 7 November 1928, in possession of Tessa Spencer Pryse. Sir Lawrence Weaver, author of the 'Foreword' in the exhibition catalogue that accompanied the showing of Spencer Pryse's West African paintings at the Free Public Museums, Liverpool from 18 January to 12 February 1930, later referred to the 'keen interest these pictures have aroused in Canada, in Copenhagen, at the Imperial Institute, and at the Alpine Gallery' which 'has led to a movement for purchasing them, so that they may become the nucleus of Fine Art Collections in the two Colonies depicted'. Spencer Pryse, 1930: 7.

⁴⁹⁴ West Africa's participation in the Exhibition was an attempt to establish closer trading relations with Canada of mutual benefit to both parties. Nigeria, Sierra Leone and the Gold Coast combined to produce a joint display of primarily economic produce, but also used film and cultural artefacts to convey to Canadians life in the region. See 'West Africa at Toronto Exhibition. The Coast Colonies' Joint Display', *West Africa*, 5 May 1928.

⁴⁹⁵ 'West Africa and Canada. The West African Exhibit at the Canadian National Exhibition, Toronto', *West Africa*, 29 September 1928.

propaganda, as advertisements for trade within the empire – the pretext for the exhibition - or was it being asked to recognise them more as aesthetic artefacts, as examples of the art associated with this part of the colonial empire? Or, indeed, were propaganda and cultural functions so successfully elided in Spencer Pryse's paintings that neither can be viewed as holding sway in Toronto? When reviewing the contemporary critical reaction to the Spencer Pryse paintings displayed in Canada, the answer is far from clear.

The photograph of the West Africa exhibit in Toronto shows, hanging in the top right-hand corner of the stand, Spencer Pryse's painting *Squaring the Log* (Fig. 34) - one of a series of seven watercolours that he produced on the reserve of the British Nigerian Timber Company at Ebw - which can certainly be interpreted as having a propaganda function. The series was described in *Commercial Art* in March 1928 as telling 'the story of the mahogany tree – its finding, felling, squaring ... hauling and float[ing] downstream'.⁴⁹⁶ Later, Spencer Pryse, too, contributed comments that reinforced the propaganda message underpinning the series. In an exhibition catalogue accompanying the showing of his West Africa paintings in Liverpool in January and February 1930, he outlined the ongoing destruction of the mahogany forests, and conceded that replacing felled timber was 'a slow process', but implied there was no need for British consumers of tropical hardwoods to despair, as 'happily' Nigeria was the source of 'other fine timbers such as Eke or Opepe, not yet known in Europe, and for that reason still plentiful'.⁴⁹⁷ Here, Spencer Pryse textually affirms the visual message the paintings conveyed; that the British Empire was an abundant source of economically valuable raw material – one of the fundamental propaganda messages that the EMB sought to deliver. For Major A.A. Longden, writing of Spencer Pryse's West African venture in *Commercial Art*, it was the propaganda function of his pictures that was prioritised over any intrinsic aesthetic quality they may have possessed - comment upon which is conspicuously absent in the article.⁴⁹⁸ A review in the *Times* of the Imperial Institute exhibition likewise initially focused upon the advertising role of the paintings. It considered the pictures that illustrated the West

⁴⁹⁶ Longden, 1928: 112.

⁴⁹⁷ Spencer Pryse, 1930: 19.

⁴⁹⁸ This was perhaps a not unsurprising response on the author's part. *Commercial Art*, as its title suggests, was a publication concerned with the application of art to commercial needs, and, consequently, it was the effectiveness of Spencer Pryse's work as an advertising, or propaganda, vehicle that presumably was of prime interest to the publication. Longden considered the paintings of Nigeria as bringing to light a 'country [that] seems too little known', and praised Spencer Pryse's 'pictorial presentment' which 'should do much to interest our people in the endless possibilities of this enormous tract of land with its twenty million inhabitants'. Longden, 1928: 108. In a similar vein, when the West Africa paintings were shown in Manchester in May 1930 the *Manchester Guardian* urged 'anyone interested in West Africa, whether as an armchair traveller or as a merchant', to visit the exhibition. It considered, however, that the function of this 'noteworthy feat of pictorial journalism' was 'primarily informative rather than aesthetic'. 'Paintings of West Africa. Exhibition at the Platt Hall Branch of the City Art Gallery, Manchester', *Manchester Guardian*, 21 May 1930.

African industries of manganese mining, palm oil production and timber felling 'the most interesting' in the show, and thought that a work such as *The Saw Mills of the British Nigerian Timber Company at Ebw*, in which 'the subject has organised itself', one of the 'most effective' paintings.⁴⁹⁹ However, as part of a more general criticism of the EMB's visual campaign, believed by the *Times* to have suffered from 'ineffective pictorial machinery', it was thought that Spencer Pryse's pictures could be more effective 'from an advertising point of view'.⁵⁰⁰ This attack on the paintings' propaganda value runs alongside criticism directed more towards their intrinsic pictorial merit. Although considered 'excellent as illustrations', the reviewer believed they needed some 'bracing as pictures', and that their appeal would be improved if they were more 'definitely designed'.⁵⁰¹

Meanwhile, Frank Rutter, reviewing the Imperial Institute exhibition in the *Studio* in May 1928, largely confined his comments to an evaluation of the paintings' aesthetic quality. An acknowledgement of their propaganda or advertising function is noticeably absent in Rutter's article, and, for him, the pictures' only purpose, beyond the aesthetic domain, is as 'human documents of historical and ethnographical value'.⁵⁰² In achieving this objective, Spencer Pryse, as far as Rutter is concerned, never resorts, however, to being 'merely topographical or prosaically literal'.⁵⁰³ Rather, Rutter defines Spencer Pryse's 'invariably picturesque' renderings of West African life that achieve 'a happy compromise between illustration and decoration' as paying 'homage to art' through 'expressive drawing, harmony of colour and dignity of design'.⁵⁰⁴ And Rutter further endorses this body of work as 'art' by placing it within a specific art historical context, linking it generally to both classical and impressionist antecedents, and especially to the watercolours of Arthur Melville.⁵⁰⁵

Returning specifically to the mahogany series, *Squaring the Log* and *Log Sawyers at the Stump* (Fig. 35) reveal the influence upon Spencer Pryse of another major early twentieth-

⁴⁹⁹ 'Art Exhibitions. Mr. Spencer Pryse's Pictures. British West Africa', *Times*, 3 March 1928. The painting shown in the photograph second from the top on the left of the stand may well be *The Saw Mills*.

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.* The *Times*' reviewer qualified this criticism by taking into account the 'snapshot' conditions under which many of the paintings had to be produced. Interestingly, Spencer Pryse, perhaps piqued by the *Times* review, included a 'Special Notice' in the exhibition catalogue that accompanied a later showing of the West Africa pictures at the Alpine Gallery, London in March 1929, in which he stressed that the pictures were sketches, and that they had not 'been added to, in any way [as] to do so, would have diminished their sense of actuality'; a characteristic viewed at this time as an important element in artist-travellers' work. As a final retort to the critic, Spencer Pryse stated that, therefore, the pictures could not 'be compared with easel compositions'. Spencer Pryse, 1929: unpaginated.

⁵⁰² Rutter, 1928: 326.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*: 328.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*: 326.

century British artist, Frank Brangwyn.⁵⁰⁶ This is evident in Spencer Pryse's deployment of dramatic tonal contrasts, similar to those that characterised Brangwyn's lithographs and etchings, such as, *Old Houses, Ghent* (1906) (Fig. 36). Charles Marriot, reviewing Spencer Pryse's first major solo exhibition of paintings and lithographs at the Leicester Galleries in June 1913, picked up on this feature of the artist's work, and considered that he had 'an uncanny gift of making you feel things [through] light and shade, apart from the meaning of the facts represented'.⁵⁰⁷ The lithograph *Workless* (1913) (Fig. 37), part of a triptych of images used by the Labour Party in a political poster, serves as an example in revealing Spencer Pryse's dramatic, though less than subtle, deployment of light, to not only animate a scene, but equally evoke a response from the viewer; in this instance, presumably sympathetic feelings for the two unemployed individuals who are bathed in its rather sickly glow. The West Africa watercolours also show him using light in a similar manner; here, to illuminate felled mahogany trunks so that they stand out against the jungle's enveloping darkness. Once more light is unsubtly deployed to leave the viewer in little doubt as to the paintings' primary subject-matter, though, in the context of the EMB's objective to highlight the empire's economic potential, the spotlight Spencer Pryse shone upon this example of Nigeria's raw material wealth was arguably done so as much to suit the demands of his employer as for intrinsically aesthetic reasons.

The critical reception accorded to the mahogany series and Spencer Pryse's other West Africa pictures is informative. Not only do reviews of the time attest to the contemporary effectiveness of these images as imperial propaganda, they also reveal attempts to situate the work within a specifically high cultural context. An article such as Rutter's, and the linking of formal characteristics evident in Spencer Pryse's work to those seen in esteemed contemporaries such as Melville and Brangwyn,⁵⁰⁸ would have been grist to the mill for the EMB, as this type of critical response helped to culturally validate pictures that served explicitly imperialist purposes. In this regard, Spencer Pryse's widely exhibited images of West Africa – acknowledged for their achievement as both propaganda and as intrinsically aesthetic artefacts – can be viewed as superseding the effectiveness of Edith Cheesman's work four years previously which largely failed to elicit an equivalently textured critical response.

⁵⁰⁶ Both were early members of the Senefelder Club, founded in 1908 to raise the status of lithography as a fine art medium, and in 1912 were amongst the nineteen Club members who exhibited prints in a special exhibition at the Venice Biennale. See Miller, 2006: 106.

⁵⁰⁷ 'Notes on Art Exhibitions by Charles Marriot', *Evening Standard*: 25 June 1913.

⁵⁰⁸ Reviews of the time noted that 'Mr Brangwyn's influence may be seen in the well-known lithographs by Mr Spencer Pryse'. *Athenaeum*: 21 March 1914.

4.3 Two commissions in the twenties

From articles on, and interviews given by, Gerald Spencer Pryse in the 1920s, as well as his own output – both visual and textual - it is possible to acquire an insight into the man that helps explain his response to empire, and inform a study of the West African images he produced in 1927. It is worthwhile examining this material because the picture of Spencer Pryse that emerges reveals a complex individual – he was described by a contemporary as ‘quite an unusual type of man’ - though one whose behaviour perhaps also embodies the contradictory manner – certainly from the distance of the twenty first-century - in which many Britons during the 1920s viewed the overseas empire in relation to home.⁵⁰⁹

Prior to the First World War and continuing into the twenties Spencer Pryse produced a number of lithographs that were used by the Labour Party as political posters.⁵¹⁰ As to whether he was a Party member remains to my knowledge unknown, but he would seem, judging by comments made by the Labour Party General Secretary Jim Middleton, who referred to him in 1942 as ‘an old and valued friend of the Party’, to certainly have been allied to its causes and objectives.⁵¹¹ Middleton’s description opens up the possibility that Spencer Pryse, who, like Cheesman, operated as a freelance artist either executing commissions or speculatively offering work for sale through exhibitions in commercial galleries,⁵¹² may well have been motivated as much by his own political sympathies as financial remuneration when producing images for the Labour Party.⁵¹³ Certainly, as is evidenced by *Workless*, Spencer Pryse created for the Labour Party deliberately provocative images designed to stir emotions.⁵¹⁴ Some contemporary critics, however, considered that he overplayed his hand.

⁵⁰⁹ Jim Middleton, Labour Party General Secretary to Professor A.W. Ashby, 13 March 1942, People’s History Museum, LP/GS/ 40-44.

⁵¹⁰ In addition to the aforementioned lithograph *Workless*, exhibited at The Royal Society of British Artists in March 1914 as one element of a triptych that also included works entitled *The Awakening* and *Homeless* – images that were later used by the Labour Party as a political poster - Spencer Pryse produced a further trio of colour lithographs, *Yesterday – The Trenches*, *Tomorrow when Labour Rules*, *Today – Unemployed* after the war for the Party.

⁵¹¹ Middleton to Professor A.W. Ashby, 13 March 1942, People’s History Museum, LP/GS/ 40-44.

⁵¹² In 1918 the *Studio* reproduced an image of a Spencer Pryse commission - a poster he designed to support the British Women’s Hospital and raise funds for nursing scholarships. The journal considered the lithograph, copies of which were available for five guineas, ‘admirable in its artistic qualities’ and a ‘welcome addition’ to his body of lithographic work which is ‘eagerly taken up by collectors’. *The Studio*, Vol. LXXIII. No. 299 (March 1918), 68 – 69. Additionally, Spencer Pryse’s work frequently featured in joint and solo exhibitions in the 1910s and 1920s.

⁵¹³ A 1914 review of the *Workless* triptych considered, however, that Spencer Pryse’s work for the Labour Party was ‘a new utilisation of the artist whose patrons have usually been the rich rather than the poor’. ‘A Spring Art Show. Interesting new work by Mr Frank Brangwyn’, *Daily Graphic*, March 1914. Martin Hardie appears to contradict this statement for he commented later upon the ‘brilliant’ posters Spencer Pryse produced for ‘the poor man’s picture gallery’ - the London Underground. Hardie, 1925: 203.

⁵¹⁴ Reproductions of *Workless* and a further Spencer Pryse poster, *Mothers – Vote Labour*, were included in an article on election posters published in *Commercial Art* in July 1929, and they can be linked by association to the

The *Evening Standard* felt *Workless* lapsed into melodrama and that the image was too sentimental and the figures 'too romantic'.⁵¹⁵ Such criticism did not prevent Spencer Pryse repeating his sentimentalising approach, and three lithographs used by Labour in the 1923 General Election campaign convey deep-rooted human behavioural traits and emotions of duty, despair and hope in an overtly melodramatic and sentimental fashion (Fig. 38).

The sombre days of the war are pictorially emphasised in *Yesterday - The Trenches* (Fig. 39) through a deployment of dark tones that dominate a large section of the composition. From the trench's subterranean darkness – a darkness that is only partially alleviated by an artificial light source shown glowing within the bowels of the earth – rises the figure of a soldier gazing out into a desolate, ill-defined no-man's-land. This, as is evidenced by the depiction of distant flashes of explosions on the horizon, and blackened, shattered tree stumps leading out in a line towards them, is a hostile space – one Spencer Pryse would have intimately known through his wartime service.⁵¹⁶ It is, however, a more brightly lit space onto which the soldier gazes, one that contrasts starkly to the dark environment that he occupies, and, as such, is suggestive, paradoxically perhaps, of a brighter future that awaits victory.

Balancing this image in the triptych is another portrait format work, *To-Day - Unemployed* (Fig. 40), showing a man – possibly the soldier seen in *Yesterday - The Trenches* – accompanied by his wife, who shelters their child under her shawl, trudging, grim-faced, and head-bowed, through a landscape as bleak and ill-defined as the wartime no-man's-land. Save for these figures the landscape is devoid of any semblance of active industry, its only signifier is a pit-head winding tower, standing silent on the horizon – a symbol of Britain's declining heavy industry.⁵¹⁷ The image's uniformly coloured grey and blue background emphasises the sombreness of the scene, whilst the figures have turned their backs on the light source that starkly illuminates the woman's neck. The possibly 'hopeful' light, into which the soldier gazed in *Yesterday - The Trenches*, has turned out to be chimeric.

author, Norman Jameson's view, that in contrast to Conservative and Liberal propaganda of the period, Labour's election posters were the only ones that 'profess[ed] idealism or [made] an appeal to enthusiasm'. Jameson, 1929: 2.

⁵¹⁵ *Evening Standard*: 18 March 1914.

⁵¹⁶ Spencer Pryse was commissioned as a Captain in the Queen Victoria's Rifles and during the course of his wartime service was twice wounded in action which resulted in him losing the sight in one eye. He was widely decorated, being awarded the Military Cross, the Croix de Guerre and the Order of the Crown of Belgium. See Cheese, 1993.

⁵¹⁷ Martin Pugh details one of the many unemployment marches that took place in Britain during the 1920s. He relates how in November 1922 unemployed workers from many of Britain's traditional centres of heavy industry – Glasgow, Newcastle, Barrow-in-Furness, Rotherham and Sheffield – set out for London where they intended to protest about the lack of employment. See Pugh, 2008: 76.

Sandwiched between these two images is the landscape format of *To-Morrow – When Labour Rules* (Fig. 41). Here, Spencer Pryse portrays, massed in the darker tones that constitute the left half of the composition, the ‘victims’ of Britain’s post-war climate - the elderly, the young and the unemployed. He counterbalances this darker section by flooding the right half of the picture with light which picks out the features of some of the figures, and causes other individuals to break from the crowd and run towards it, throwing open their arms to welcome the brighter prospects that await them after the coming to power of a Labour government.

It is, perhaps, possible to discern in the naturalistic drawings, infused with sentiment and melodrama, which Spencer Pryse made for the Labour Party, his empathy with the downtrodden and dispossessed. His visual projection of society’s marginalised members led a critic at the time to venture that his work possessed ‘the tragic realism of the French school’.⁵¹⁸ This empathy is given pictorial force through the individually characterised figures that populate the lithographs. Spencer Pryse elevates the figures above the level of the generic ‘unemployed’ in an attempt to invest them with a degree of believable authenticity that would, hopefully for his employer, the Labour Party, evoke a sympathetic response in the viewer to their plight.

Spencer Pryse’s work for the Labour Party in 1923 is only one example of his employment as a commissioned artist in the 1920s. As I will subsequently argue, the sentimental and sometimes dramatic nature of the Labour Party posters later finds an echo in his West African imagery. It is, however, another commission that he received around this time to which I now turn, for it is more directly connected to the work he produced later in the decade for the EMB. In 1924 he was asked to design a series of twenty four posters depicting aspects of life – primarily economic, but also cultural - in the colonies and Dominions for the British Empire Exhibition: Spencer Pryse, like Cheesman and other artists of the time, also participated in Wembley’s visual projection of empire.⁵¹⁹ As it transpired the posters were not utilised by the Wembley authorities. They were too large and could not be displayed as intended on railway station billboards to advertise the Exhibition⁵²⁰ - a situation that led

⁵¹⁸ *Scotsman*, 14 March 1914. The critic was presumably referring to work produced by the likes of Jules Bastien-Lepage (1848 – 84), who from the late 1870s produced a series of naturalistic studies of impoverished peasant subjects.

⁵¹⁹ For a full list of the countries and subject-matter depicted by Spencer Pryse in the twenty four posters, see Hardie, 1925: 205.

⁵²⁰ The lithographs measure 44 x 38in and sets are held by the British Museum, Victoria and Albert Museum and the National Gallery of Canada. Spencer Pryse did, however, contribute to the official published material that surrounded the Wembley Exhibition. Eleven of his drawings depicting life in the colonies and Dominions were included, alongside work by Frank Brangwyn and Macdonald Gill, in a souvenir volume published to

Spencer Pryse to successfully sue in the High Court where he was granted damages and costs and handed over the lithographic stones from which the posters were printed.⁵²¹ An article by Martin Hardie, titled 'The British Empire Lithographs', which appeared in the October 1925 edition of *Apollo*, briefly sketched out the story surrounding the posters, before assessing their cultural merit. Hardie considered that Spencer Pryse's work which, he reported, had recently been shown at the Twenty One Gallery in London,⁵²² 'should have permanent value for the forwarding of Empire ideals', as there could be 'no better encouragement to think and buy imperially than that given by a series of posters such as these'. He thought that through their 'gravity and simplicity of treatment' and their 'popular and pictorial appeal', the lithographs 'impressively' illustrated 'the present greatness and vast possibilities of our Dominions and Colonies'.⁵²³

commemorate the Pageant of Empire performed in Wembley Stadium in summer 1924. Writing in the Preface, the Colonial Secretary, J.H. Thomas, stated that an intention behind the book was 'to compile a memorable record of noble episodes in our history and to depict events in the daily life and work of our sister nations overseas'. See Lucas, 1924.

⁵²¹ The case was heard uncontested in the King's Bench Division of the High Court on 27 April 1925. Transcript notes of the hearing detail that in addition to displaying the posters, the Exhibition authorities also intended to sell reproductions of the images from which 'it was anticipated that a considerable amount of profit would be made'. This intention had been widely advertised in the press and when the posters were not used it was, Spencer Pryse's counsel argued, suggested in some quarters that this was due to their subject-matter being deemed unsuitable. Counsel conceded that though this inference did not emanate from the Exhibition authorities, nevertheless his client's reputation as an artist had suffered accordingly, and it was on these grounds that he was seeking compensation. Counsel for the Exhibition authorities conceded that Spencer Pryse had 'a legitimate grievance' under the terms of his contract, going as far to say that as a poster artist he wished to pay 'tribute to the merits of his work' which was not used purely for commercial reasons. *Spencer Pryse v British Empire Exhibition*, Royal Courts of Justice. Monday, 27 April 1925. Transcript from the Shorthand Notes of Shedlock & Stammers, 87 Chancery Lane, London, W.C.2 - in the possession of Tessa Spencer Pryse.

⁵²² The lithographs were exhibited at the Twenty One Gallery between 16 and 30 July 1925. They were tantalisingly described in publicity produced by the gallery, presumably to maximise commercial interest, as 'the suppressed pictures'. The use of this term was based upon criticism that, the gallery argued, had been put forward by the British Empire Authorities who considered 'inadequate' the clothing in which Spencer Pryse depicted the 'native races', and that 'public decency would be outraged by the publication of these pictures', particularly in the colonies. The Twenty One Gallery's publicity detailed that Spencer Pryse's response to this criticism was that 'each subject was carefully selected by the management of the British Empire Exhibition in consultation with the Colonial Authorities concerned', and, it concluded, that 'it has not been suggested that the pictures are untrue to life but merely that they are improper'. *Captain Spencer Pryse's British Empire Exhibition Posters* (London, 1925). According to advertisements of the time, sets of the twenty four lithographs, which were limited to an edition of 220, were available at a price of twenty guineas. See *Apollo*, Vol.1, No. 1 (January 1925), x and *Apollo*, Vol.2, No. 7 (July 1925), x. Hardie reported 'a large proportion of the exhibition is being reserved at a price which does not exceed the original cost of printing in the hope that one or more public benefactors interested in empire propaganda may acquire them for presentation to schools and other public institutions'. Hardie, 1925: 204. It transpired that one such benefactor was Queen Mary who gave a set of the posters to a school close to the royal estate at Sandringham in Norfolk. 'Nudes that Shocked the Prudes – but not Queen Mary', *Daily Mail*, 7 March 1962.

⁵²³ Hardie, 1925: 204, 208. Margaret Breuning, writing about the lithographs in the *New York Evening Post Literary Review*, was less complementary. Although she praised Spencer Pryse's 'superb craftsmanship' and 'impeccable drawing', she felt that 'the highly romantic settings' depicted in the lithographs gave them 'a rather arranged air', whilst their colour left 'much to be desired'. Although she accepted their propaganda function, Breuning argued that the lithographs left nothing 'for the imagination of the observer' and produced an 'effect of

A lithograph dating from 1924, *Nigeria – Timber Haulers* (Fig. 42), merits closer attention because it compares in subject-matter to a watercolour *Pullers hauling the Log to Waterside* (Fig. 43) - one of the images of the mahogany trade that Spencer Pryse produced in Nigeria in 1927 - and, as such, provides an opportunity to contrast these two temporally distanced depictions of colonial Nigeria. An obvious divergence is evident in the compositional treatment of the labouring figures that populate the two images, something that may be explained by the specific factors that determined their production. The 1924 picture, unlike its later counterpart, did not result from Spencer Pryse's first-hand observation of the timber harvesting process in Nigeria. It was, instead, a more contrived composition - though this is not to dismiss the pronounced compositional element that structures the 1927 image - that was informed in all likelihood by drawings made of native West Africans sent to Spencer Pryse's home by the Wembley Exhibition authorities, and by the technical guidance he received from colonial officials.⁵²⁴ However, the manner in which the figures dominate the foreground of the picture plane in *Nigeria – Timber Haulers*, to the extent that the *Illustrated London News*, describing the picture in 1923, felt it possible to almost reach out and touch the 'hot shining flesh' of the Nigerian labourers, arguably owes as much to other near contemporary representations of physical labour produced by British artists - Frank Brangwyn's *The Tow-Rope* (1906) (Fig. 44) equally portrays manual labour in this type of aggrandising, heroic manner - and to Spencer Pryse's own magnification of working-class society, seen, for example, in the near contemporary *To-Day - Unemployed*.⁵²⁵

Tim Barringer, in his analysis of mid-nineteenth-century visual depictions of labour, has argued that 'the representation of the male labouring body provide[s] the most powerful and significant formulation of work as the nexus of ethical and aesthetic value'.⁵²⁶ In his detailed analysis of Ford Madox Brown's *Work* (1852 - 65), Barringer isolates the multifarious types of labour that are shown, and discusses the ethical weight that can be attributed to them. Although Spencer Pryse's drawing dates from a later time, Barringer's approach serves a useful purpose in an analysis of this image. The aestheticised, masculine physical labour that constitutes the principal subject-matter of Spencer Pryse's design can, I believe, similarly be discussed in terms of the ethical dimension it would have conveyed to a 1920s audience. A

painstaking reliability but not much inspiration'. 'Institute Arranges Collection of Work by Spencer Pryse' by Margaret Breuning. *New York Evening Post Literary Review*, 4 September 1926.

⁵²⁴ See Hardie, 1925: 205.

⁵²⁵ 'The Art of Spencer Pryse', *Illustrated London News*, (14 July 1923), 68. Rodney Brangwyn argues that Brangwyn 'regarded the sight of a man toiling as rhythmic, poetic and an emotionally satisfying experience' and that he 'was at pains to express' the 'dignity' he saw in physical labour. Brangwyn, 1978: 110.

⁵²⁶ Barringer, 2005: 1. 1.

depiction of purposeful work being carried out by colonial 'natives' would have thrown into sharp relief the uselessness experienced by many British men at this time.⁵²⁷ Their work, or, more accurately, lack of it - as Spencer Pryse had melodramatically conveyed in his Labour Party posters - had been obliterated by post-war economic conditions that caused wide-scale unemployment in Britain's traditional heavy industries. These industries, despite the greater use of mechanised processes, still relied upon the type of co-operative physical labour that Spencer Pryse explicitly foregrounds in *Nigeria – Timber Haulers*.⁵²⁸ Here, by way of emphasising a spirit of co-operation, Spencer Pryse depicts the bodies of the labourers as overlapping; arms are concealed by other arms, legs by other legs, as the six straining figures pulling a just visible log meld into a greater, more powerful, 'human machine'; a coalescence that is given added visual force by the parallel diagonal lines, created by the angle of the men's bodies, that fan out across the picture plane.

The drawing can be read as a celebration of pre-modern communal labour, but it is more than just a romanticised evocation of a 'primitive' way of life that endured in the peripheral empire - though this undoubtedly is what it conveys. A depiction of men working in physical unison to achieve an honest objective can be viewed, in the light of economic conditions prevailing in Britain in the early 1920s, as equally an image of protestation. In projecting, in such dramatic pictorial fashion, a notion of 'primitive' labour, Spencer Pryse correspondingly highlighted the deficiencies of sophisticated western capitalist practices which when they failed, as they did to some extent in the early 1920s, produced for Labour supporters, such as him, too many human casualties. For many British working class men it was not just employment that had evaporated, but the status and well-being derived from the type of shared experience depicted in *Nigeria – Timber Haulers*. In losing that they also lost what Thomas Carlyle had referred to in describing 'even ... the meanest sorts of labour' as the 'real harmony' that makes 'man ... a man'.⁵²⁹

In contrast to *Nigeria – Timber Haulers*, the view of manual labour conveyed by Spencer Pryse three years later in *Pullers hauling the Log to Waterside* is more distant, the figures are more fully integrated within the environment, and the specific conceptual projection of work now seems of lesser importance. Additionally, the mechanics of the depicted labour appears less organic; the body shapes of the figures shown hauling the log are less

⁵²⁷ In school textbooks of the period, Africans were frequently depicted simplistically as overgrown children, idle and undisciplined, so Spencer Pryse's image of Africans engaged in disciplined and intense labour runs counter to this type of negative projection. See Pugh, 2008: 400.

⁵²⁸ Keith Laybourn describes 'unemployment [as] the dominating issue of British society during the inter-war years ... determining the social policies of governments, and shaping the politics of the age'. Laybourn, 1990: 1.

⁵²⁹ Thomas Carlyle *Past and Present* (London, 1912), 189, quoted in Barringer, 2005: 28.

haphazard, more symmetrical, their actions more controlled. An overseer dressed in noticeably western clothes – symbolising perhaps the unseen guiding British presence in the country - directs operations, and the effort depicted, though still undoubtedly strenuous, lacks the visceral quality evident in Spencer Pryse's earlier picture. Evidenced by the track of wooden rollers, over which the huge squared-off mahogany log is hauled, that splits the landscape, separating the cut-down palm leaves and foliage littering the foreground of the picture from the shadowy background depths of the jungle, it is altogether a more sophisticated operation that is conveyed. In contrast to the earlier work, Spencer Pryse now pays more attention to the specificity of the landscape. He links more explicitly the felled mahogany log to its natural environment, for in the darker background of the picture it is possible to discern the trunks of yet to be felled trees. In doing so he betrays one of the specific objectives of his employer the EMB – to convey to the British public the natural fecundity of the empire and the resources it was capable of producing.⁵³⁰

4.4 The Empire Marketing Board commission

Spencer Pryse's commission from the EMB to produce images of colonial West Africa was the result of protracted negotiations between the artist and the members of the Poster Section, a sub-committee of the EMB's Publicity Committee.⁵³¹ I will consider these negotiations in greater detail shortly, but first want to turn to an earlier instance of his dealings with the EMB because it is an episode that illustrates the level of control the Board exerted over the poster designs it commissioned, not just from Spencer Pryse, but equally other artists it employed; a control that reveals the EMB's determination to convey through their posters a specific ideological projection of empire that brooked no unwelcome, inauthentic or distracting imagery.⁵³²

⁵³⁰ It is noticeable that in *Nigeria – Timber Haulers* Spencer Pryse pays little attention to reproducing a specific geographical environment. The log is shown being hauled through grass, whilst a vague representation of foliage fills the background. An article describing Spencer Pryse's desired working method appeared in *Illustrated London News* in July 1923 and it may help explain the setting in which the timber haulers are depicted. The article revealed that he liked being in 'direct contact with nature', and that he had erected 'all sorts of contrivances more or less to represent the decor of projected pictures' in a part of his garden that he had allowed to run wild. See 'The Art of Spencer Pryse', *Illustrated London News*, (14 July 1923), 68 – 72.

⁵³¹ The Poster Section sub-committee was under the chairmanship of Frank Pick who had been responsible for the London Underground's use of innovative poster designs in the 1910s and 1920s. Also serving on the sub-committee was Frank McDougall, the Australian High Commissioner and Stephen Tallents, Secretary of the EMB. The sub-committee minutes are contained in file CO 760/26 of the EMB archives held at the National Archives, Kew.

⁵³² Stephen Constantine has disclosed a wealth of material culled from the EMB archives which reveals evidence of the organisation's control over the design of the visual material it displayed and, indeed, he refers to images produced by Spencer Pryse. He, however, does not engage in a detailed pictorial analysis that draws on examples of rejected and approved designs. See Constantine, 1986b.

Spencer Pryse's name is first encountered in the minutes of a Poster Section meeting prior to his West African expedition. On 4 November 1926, his poster *Working in the Rice Field* (Fig. 45), which shows a group of women planting rice shoots in a flooded paddy field, was discussed by the sub-committee. The postures of the women echo those of figures that appeared in an interpretation of this subject, *Rice Planting in India* (Fig. 46), produced by Spencer Pryse for the British Empire Exhibition two years previously. A standing figure, shown gazing into the distance in the earlier picture, is echoed by a woman third from the right in the EMB image, whilst there are also similarities between the stooping female figures seen in both works, notably the woman depicted to the left in the EMB image whose body shape mirrors that of the stooping woman seen at the right in the British Empire Exhibition poster. There, however, similarities between the two posters ends and differences assume control. The environments in which the planters toil are dramatically contrasting – the flat, almost featureless, landscape of the earlier picture is replaced in the latter image by a more verdant countryside replete with trees and bounded by purple-tinted, gently rising hills. Equally, the settlements conveyed in the two works are notably different. A disparate group of architecturally ill-defined buildings litter the horizon line of the earlier image, but in the EMB design it is a more detailed built environment, comprising a conically thatched structure, a low flat-roofed building, and a further building which may almost be read as a church, that is depicted in front of a copse of densely foliated trees. Save for a solitary palm that sprouts in front of the church-like building, this small scene conjures up an English rural idyll transposed in India. Spencer Pryse's visual referencing of his earlier image, and his rendering of an Indian village that does not quite ring true, suggests, on his part, a degree of creative license in the imagining of the scene. His drawing was not well received and an Indian colonial official, a Mr Lindsay, 'commented unfavourably' upon its design, though the sub-committee minutes do not specify why. As a result, presumably because of Lindsay's disquiet, the sub-committee agreed the poster should be cancelled and that Spencer Pryse would consult Lindsay before revising the design.⁵³³

The revised poster (Fig. 47) conveys an alternative version of the subject. Figures are again shown stooping as they bend to plant rice shoots, and the upright figure seen staring into the distance – a mainstay of all three interpretations – remains. Significantly, however, the figures are now male, replacing the semi-naked female workers that populated the Wembley

⁵³³ At the same meeting it was agreed that a few copies of the cancelled print should be pulled as a record, and that depending upon the approval of the revised design, Spencer Pryse's poster of Indian rice growing would form part of the fourth set of images to appear on the EMB's purpose-designed hoardings. See First Sub-Committee – Poster Section Minutes, 4 November 1926, CO 760/26.

drawing, and the more chastely, though vividly, dressed group of women seen in the rejected design. Such a transformation suggests that the planters' gender may have been an element of the original design to which Lindsay objected.⁵³⁴ He may, though, equally have found fault in Spencer Pryse's evocation of the Indian landscape. The detailed rendering of a village replete with an 'English' copse is missing in the approved design where it is replaced by a vague suggestion of simple low-lying dwellings spread out under distant palm trees, whilst the colouring of the landscape is more muted and the high-tones that characterised the rejected drawing are noticeably absent.

The protracted realisation of this one design – it had to meet first with Lindsay's approval before being passed by the sub-committee – exemplifies the control exerted by the EMB over the images it commissioned; images the Board insisted on being technically accurate (Lindsay provided Spencer Pryse with photographs of rice planting as reference material), but equally ideologically sound, for a principal function of the posters was to convey specific messages that the Board hoped to instil in the minds of the British public as it sought to project its own particular conception of empire.⁵³⁵ Accordingly, the standing figure that features in the approved design can be read in terms of the ideological message it would have delivered on behalf of the EMB to a British audience. As his fellow workers stoop to plant their rice shoots, the upright figure stands in quiet contemplation staring towards home and rest. In doing so he suggests that labour in the colonies is not enforced, that the indigenous population work at their own pace and of their own volition.⁵³⁶ Did, however, Spencer Pryse's inclusion of three standing figures, visibly 'not working' in the rejected design, convey an unwelcome perception, as far as the EMB was concerned, of inefficient labour? Was his

⁵³⁴ The *Daily Mail* in March 1962 carried a story that the posters Spencer Pryse produced for Wembley had been banned by the British Empire Exhibition organisers on the grounds that they found the depicted nudity 'shocking'. Spencer Pryse's widow, Anstace, interviewed by the paper, stated that three pictures showing nude and partly nude African figures were objected to in particular. This version of events recorded nearly forty years later does not correspond with the evidence that emerged in the contemporary court case when it was stated that the only reason for the non-use of the posters was due to their excessive size. Perhaps, though, the explicit depiction of partially naked female figures engaged in everyday work in the peripheral empire did not sit well with colonial officials in the 1920s keen to project Britain's 'civilising' role in the empire. See 'Nudes that Shocked the Prudes – but not Queen Mary', *Daily Mail* (7 March 1962).

⁵³⁵ See First Sub-Committee – Poster Section Minutes, 11 November and 1 December 1926, CO 760/26. It was recorded in the minutes of the latter meeting that payment of a fee of 150 guineas was to be made to Spencer Pryse which included his supervision of the printing from the lithographic stones.

⁵³⁶ If we take as an example the changes enforced upon Adrian Allinson in the design of his EMB poster *East African Transport – New Style*, there was perhaps still a perception in Britain in the 1920s that indigenous colonial populations were ruthlessly exploited for their labour, though some on the Left would have argued this was a justified perception; see the Labour Research Department's *British Imperialism in East Africa* (London, 1926), 3. This, however, was certainly not a perception that the EMB wished to convey. At the request of the East African Trade Commissioner, Allinson had to remove a whip from the hand of a white man depicted in the foreground of his design and replace it with an ideologically neutral pipe. See First Sub-Committee – Poster Section Minutes, 8 & 29 May 1930, CO 760/26 cited in Constantine, 1986b: 8.

image, in this instance, out of kilter with their desire to project an idea of an empire built upon a notion of common work?⁵³⁷ In the approved design the balance between rest and labour was perhaps more to their liking. As the greater number of stooping figures signify, the indigenous populations of the colonial empire did work. These are not the 'lazy natives' of popular myth, but individuals toiling late into the day (Spencer Pryse shows a distant sun slipping below the horizon) for the benefit of a 'people's empire' that the EMB sought to project as 'a multi-racial, harmonious partnership'.⁵³⁸

Spencer Pryse's name is next encountered in the EMB's archives some seven months after the episode of the Indian rice planters' poster. The minutes of a Poster Section meeting of 23 June 1927 report that the artist had discussed with sub-committee member Frank McDougall the possibility of receiving a commission from the Board 'to visit Africa with the object of making a series of original sketches for posters'.⁵³⁹ On 4 August the sub-committee agreed to commission Spencer Pryse to design two sets of five lithographs depicting scenes in both colonial East and West Africa for an inclusive fee that was not to exceed 1,000 guineas.⁵⁴⁰ After being interviewed by the sub-committee on 18 August, the minutes of the 31 August meeting reported Spencer Pryse had accepted a revised fee of 1,100 guineas for two sets of lithographs depicting scenes in West Africa. At this time it was also agreed that he should be given a list of ten subjects to sketch: a decision that echoes, in its determination to control the image of empire conveyed to the British public, the attention paid earlier to the depiction of rice planters.⁵⁴¹

As with the revisions Spencer Pryse was forced to make to his *An Indian Rice Field* poster, he similarly had to respond to the sub-committee's criticism of his West Africa

⁵³⁷ Constantine has argued that the EMB sought to change the connotation of the word 'empire' by substituting 'the old flags of exploitation' for 'the new flags of common labour'. Constantine, 1986a: 217.

⁵³⁸ Constantine, 1986b: 13. The EMB was keen to project an idea that empire was not perceived as Britain selfishly exploiting her colonial states. Consequently, slogans such as 'The Empire is One Large Family', 'Keep Trade in the Family' and 'Remember the Empire, Filled with your Cousins' were used in an attempt to promote the concept of an egalitarian empire. Ibid: 12. Two figures detailing advertising expenditure demonstrate the enormity of the task the EMB set itself in attempting to dramatically alter the British public's perception of empire. In its peak year of 1928 the EMB spent £278,414 on public activities (including poster production) which is set against a national £57million spend on advertising. The EMB's voice was thus only one, and a small one at that, of a multitude of voices projecting wildly contrasting messages – some of which included differing conceptions of empire – to the public. See Constantine, 1986a: 221.

⁵³⁹ First Sub-Committee - Poster Section Minutes, 23 June 1927, CO 760/26. At this same meeting it was suggested that consideration might be given to paying Spencer Pryse a fee to cover his travelling costs and the production of rough sketches, plus a further fee for every poster that was commissioned from him on his return.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid: 4 August 1927.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid: 18 and 31 August 1927. Taking into account the greater distance of Spencer Pryse's venture, his high fee of 1,100 guineas bears testimony to the reputation he had earned as a poster artist by this time. By comparison, Keith Henderson was offered a fee of only 300 guineas, inclusive of travelling expenses, to produce a set of five designs of the Irish Free State. Ibid: 18 August 1927.

drawings. An image of cocoa harvesting, designed as one of a set of Gold Coast posters earmarked for display in March and April 1928, was said to 'require some strengthening' which the sub-committee believed could be achieved by bringing a stooping figure further forward into the picture: it was clearly not only thematic issues, but also compositional concerns that were addressed.⁵⁴² More humiliatingly for Spencer Pryse was the criticism levelled at the drawings for a set of Nigeria posters he submitted to the sub-committee in May. These were deemed to fall below the standard of draughtsmanship expected and had to be redrawn before finally being approved.⁵⁴³

What also emerges from the Poster Section minutes detailing Spencer Pryse's dealings with the EMB is his attempt to maximise the financial gain he could extract from his West Africa material. One particular incident dragged on for six months in 1928. The minutes of a meeting on 21 June 1928 record Spencer Pryse submitting to the sub-committee sketches of Nigerian transport. They report him enquiring that if there was a likelihood of this further set being commissioned he would wish to make cartoons as soon as possible, while the scenes were still fresh in his mind. Despite stating they had no immediate need of a third West Africa poster set, the sub-committee did not object to Spencer Pryse making these cartoons and submitting them at a later date.⁵⁴⁴ On 5 July it was agreed that a firm agreement should be entered into with Spencer Pryse, and that he should be informed that consideration would be given to the commissioning of a third set of posters at a fee of 300 guineas.⁵⁴⁵ On 4 October, however, the sub-committee agreed that Spencer Pryse should be informed 'that in view of existing commitments on posters the Board were unable to commission a further set from him'.⁵⁴⁶ A letter from the artist asking the sub-committee to reverse their decision was considered at a meeting on 15 November, as was his claim for payment for work already carried out on the designs of the third poster set. The sub-committee concluded 'that Spencer Pryse was not entitled to consideration for any work that he might have undertaken at his own risk', and they reaffirmed their decision not to commission a third set of posters from him.⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴² Ibid: 3 February 1928.

⁵⁴³ Ibid: 10, 24 May 1928. The images that the sub-committee provisionally selected for the Nigerian set depicted the transport and felling of timber, the gathering of palm nuts, and a transport scene on the Niger. Ibid: 19 January 1928. Two of the published Nigeria posters, *A Niger Fisherman* and *Nigeria's Exports – Gathering Palm Fruit* are contained in Manchester Art Gallery's collection of EMB posters.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid: 21 June 1928.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid: 5 July 1928.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid: 4 October 1928.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid: 15 November 1928.

The sequence of events related in the Poster Section minutes shines a light upon the business practice of a freelance artist in the late 1920s.⁵⁴⁸ They reveal, understandably, an artist seeking to maximise his earning potential, but they leave us unclear as to Spencer Pryse's own attitude to empire. Empire was certainly a source of income for him – his work for both the Wembley Empire Exhibition and the EMB bears testimony to this – but was he motivated when executing these commissions, as Cheesman's memoirs suggest she was, and as he himself was in his work for the Labour Party, by deeper feelings of personal engagement that ran alongside a purely professional motivation? Was empire simply a cash cow to be milked, effectively just another job that came the way of a freelance artist, or did its representation have utility for Spencer Pryse beyond immediate financial remuneration? In search of answers, I return to the West Africa watercolours.

Interviewed in *West Africa* in March 1928, Spencer Pryse was asked if the watercolours, then being exhibited at the Imperial Institute, were for sale. He acknowledged that he had received offers for individual pictures, but was delaying his response to these requests as he was waiting to see if the call in the press, and by prominent individuals such as the Imperial Institute Director, Sir William Furse, to preserve the collection as a whole, materialised. If it did, Spencer Pryse continued, he was prepared to accept a smaller sum for the entire set, and he apologised for being unable to 'freely present the pictures for a purpose which has my deepest sympathy'.⁵⁴⁹ 'Deepest sympathy' certainly suggests Spencer Pryse's support of empire, as do other comments that appear in the same interview, notably when he praises the administration he encountered in West Africa as 'a model for tropical colonies'.⁵⁵⁰ Equally, however, the acquisition of a sizeable number of his pictures by a renowned public or private institution would have benefitted him professionally. It would have raised his profile as a professional artist, and it would have validated his work, in much the same way as colonial administrators, such as Guggisberg, had turned to art to validate their imperial achievements.

⁵⁴⁸ In his life as a professional artist Spencer Pryse would seem to have been relatively active at this time. Whilst gathering visual material in West Africa between September and December 1927 for his EMB commission – he sailed for Sekondi on board the s.s. Appam on 7 September 1927 (See *West Africa*, 10 September 1927) – an exhibition of his watercolours, featuring figure studies and English and North African landscapes, was staged at the Twenty One Gallery in London between 12 October and 5 November 1927. See *Exhibition by G. Spencer Pryse*, exh. cat. (London, 1927).

⁵⁴⁹ See 'The Artist and his Experiences in West Africa', *West Africa*, 10 March 1928. In a front page editorial, *West Africa* detailed that Spencer Pryse had placed 'the modest valuation' of 1,200 guineas on the West Africa watercolours which he set 'on the condition that they are acquired as a whole for public purposes'. 'Wanted – Twelve Hundred Guineas. The Spencer Pryse Pictures', *West Africa*, 1 September 1928.

⁵⁵⁰ 'The Artist and his Experiences in West Africa', *West Africa*, 10 March 1928.

Having agreed to commission Spencer Pryse, the Poster Section subsequently proceeded to leave the representation of colonial West Africa primarily to him. A sketch submitted by a Mr. Campbell of a Gold Coast subject was not 'entertained' at a Poster Section meeting on 29 March 1928 principally because 'of the posters already in hand from Spencer Pryse'.⁵⁵¹ More intriguingly, as early as 1 December 1926 the Poster Section had 'considered a specimen of work submitted by Miss Cheesman' who, it was said, 'specialised in pictures of West Africa'. Her name was 'noted for possible use in the event of a picture of this area being required', but though getting her pitch in early this was a commission that Cheesman, in spite of her first-hand experience of the region, did not receive.⁵⁵² It must remain a matter of speculation as to why this was. Her gender can in all likelihood be ruled out as a disqualifying reason – the EMB employed the Irish painter Margaret Clarke to paint scenes of the coal and butter industries and Clare Leighton to produce pictures of British farming⁵⁵³ – so maybe the Poster Section members, satisfied with Spencer Pryse's earlier posters for the Board, were confident in his ability to successfully fulfil the West Africa commission or, perhaps, they simply deemed him a more capable artist than Cheesman.⁵⁵⁴

There were though other artists from whom the Board accepted images of West Africa: a small group of West African art students. The minutes of a Poster Section meeting on 20 December 1928 record consideration being given by the sub-committee to sketches by West African native students which G.A. Stephens, a former art instructor at the Prince of Wales College, Achimota in the Gold Coast, had left with the Board.⁵⁵⁵ The sketches were considered 'of interest', and a decision was taken that six of them should be incorporated within a composite poster. As payment, in stark contrast to the often generous fees the Board paid to western artists, the Poster Section suggested that each of the West African students should be sent a set of watercolours valued at a guinea.⁵⁵⁶ Stephen Constantine has argued

⁵⁵¹ First Sub-Committee - Poster Section Minutes, 29 March 1928, CO 760/26.

⁵⁵² Ibid: 1 December 1926.

⁵⁵³ For a discussion of Margaret Clarke's work for the EMB, see Cronin, 2004: 137 – 43. Clare Leighton's poster, *Sheep*, is reproduced as Plate 39 in Constantine, 1986b.

⁵⁵⁴ Frank Pick, the powerful chairman of the Poster Section, had previously, in his role as head of London Underground's Traffic, Development and Advertising Department, commissioned at least five posters from Spencer Pryse for the railway company - *Worker's Way* and *Underground for Sport* (1913); *The Only Road for an Englishman* (1914); *Madonna* (1915) and *The High Places* (1921) – which perhaps offers evidence of the respect he held for his work. See Saler, 1999: 41 and www.ltmuseum.co.uk – Accessed on 11/01/11.

⁵⁵⁵ The Poster Section had earlier invited students in British art schools to submit designs to the EMB. First Sub-Committee - Poster Section Minutes: 12 May, 16 June, 4 August, 15 December 1927; 12 January, 8 March, 12 April, 24 May, 4 October 1928, CO 760/26 cited in Constantine, 1986b: 7.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid: 20 December 1928. At a time when £250 a year was considered a high wage for a skilled manual labourer, Clive Gardiner received 280 guineas for his set of posters, whilst the Burmese artist Ba Nyan received 60 guineas for each of the two posters he produced for the Board. Ibid: 6 January, 2 June, 15 December 1927, CO 760/26 cited in Constantine, 1986b: 9.

that the students were 'fobbed off' with the watercolour sets, but other evidence suggests that their work was incorporated within the EMB's publicity output, though no visual record of it is contained in the EMB archives.⁵⁵⁷

The catalogue for an exhibition of 'Drawings by Modern Gold Coast Artists' staged at the Imperial Institute between 16 February and 2 March 1929 lists, under a heading 'Chosen by the Empire Marketing Board for Posters', six drawings. The anonymous 'West African art students' referred to in the Poster Section minutes are here named: G.A.S. Okraku contributed a drawing titled *Keley Village*; Seth Boapea, *A Doorway Scene*; H. Ampomah, *Cutting Timber*, R.A. Otchere, *A Mango Tree*; Thos. Kyei Yeboa, *Native Life* and Heymann, similarly a work entitled *Native Life*.⁵⁵⁸ Denied the visual evidence of the drawings themselves, it remains a matter of speculation as to their content. *Cutting Timber* and *A Mango Tree* would appear self-explanatory, and their selection by the Poster Section was presumably because this projection of the peripheral empire's raw material wealth tied in with a fundamental message that the EMB sought to convey. As to the scenes depicted in the four other drawings, we can only guess at to what these were, but works entitled *Native Life* and *Keley Village* suggest an image of Ghana that would equally have fitted snugly within a perpetuating, romanticised British view of an unchanged and unchanging Africa. Such timeless images would have reinforced a further EMB message that the West African colonies were not being exploited solely for Britain's economic benefit, and that the indigenous people's traditional life was neither interrupted nor despoiled by the western intervention in the region. If this was the highly selective view of West Africa that the EMB wished to convey, it was not one that the Ghanaian art students universally produced. Other drawings exhibited at the Imperial Institute, judging by their titles, reveal evidence of the impact, and at times the disruptive impact, of western modernity upon the colony.

G.A. Stevens, who contributed the 'Introduction' to the exhibition catalogue, outlined in his essay the teaching practice he had pursued whilst serving as art instructor at Achimota; a practice that he defined as 'a three year experiment in art teaching'.⁵⁵⁹ In solemn terms he detailed that it had been his duty 'to teach the subject in such a way that it should be a real training of the aesthetic side of the African's nature, that it should become a means of liberating the artistic spirit of the negro in a new form'.⁵⁶⁰ Stevens' comments, although seemingly generous in their acknowledgment that an 'artistic spirit' resided in the Ghanaian

⁵⁵⁷ Constantine, 1986b: 7.

⁵⁵⁸ See *Drawings by Modern Gold Coast Artists* exh. cat. (London, 1929), 16.

⁵⁵⁹ Stevens, 1929: 1.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid: 2.

students, betray a typical colonialist desire of the time to change or 'civilise' the way of life of the colonial subject by having him or her forsake traditional native cultural practice for what is termed by Stevens as 'real training' in 'new' forms: forms that, unsurprisingly, were intrinsic elements of western cultural practice.⁵⁶¹ His task, as he admitted, was not easy, but after selecting for the Achimota College art exhibition the 'least unpleasant specimens of a most depressing collection of coloured drawings of ink bottles, boot brushes and candles' he experienced an epiphany when discovering sketches made by his students outside the confines of the classroom: 'Here was the germ of the African art of the future'.⁵⁶² These sketches, principally satirical cartoons that depicted the daily life of the college, were included by Stevens in the College exhibition, and, as he detailed in the 'Introduction', he formalised his students more spontaneous and freer artistic endeavour by incorporating this mode of expression into his teaching practice under the title 'imaginative composition'.⁵⁶³

The Imperial Institute exhibition, in addition to including studies of 'Trees' and a section devoted to 'Drawing from Objects', primarily consisted of pictures grouped under the heading 'Imaginative Composition'. The titles of the pictures constituting this body of work bring to light the subject-matter to which Ghanaian art students in the mid 1920s were drawn, and they provide a fascinating insight into how they perceived their environment. Many titles do seem to suggest scenes that convey the pre-colonial way of life that attracted the attention of the Poster Section sub-committee members: *Funeral custom in a village house* by Bekpo and *Woman and Drums* by Samuel Yensu, being cases in point. Others, however, appear to reveal the western intervention in Ghana: Sam B. Atiase's *A Football Match* and Allasani's *Kumasi Railway Station (looking towards Sekondi)*, being obvious examples. Perhaps more intriguing is the image that I.A. Kotey's *A Road Scene (motorcar overtaking sheep)* conjures up in its juxtaposition of western modernity alongside a perhaps more traditional evocation of Ghanaian life. None of the above titles hint at any negative consequences of the intermingling of western and African culture, but those given to other works – W.I. Kofi's *A Motor Accident*, Sam B. Atiase's *A Shooting Accident* and J.E. Aikins' *Collision with Mr Brown's car at Cape Coast, Jackson Street* – do so.

It is pertinent at this point to recall the two heavily-laden trucks that are seen parked-up quietly, almost apologetically, in the background of Edith Cheesman's *Koforidua Station, Gold*

⁵⁶¹ The art teaching provided to the Ghanaian students, as part of their training as elementary school teachers, included study in drawing, painting, modelling and handwork, as well as a weekly lecture on the appreciation and criticism of art. Ibid: 1, 2. Evidence of the 'civilising' mission is manifest in a section of drawings included in the Imperial Institute exhibition under the title 'Imaginative Composition: Biblical Subjects'.

⁵⁶² Ibid: 2, 3.

⁵⁶³ Ibid: 3.

Coast (Fig. 30). The inclusion of the trucks in the scene suggests Cheesman did not attempt to deny the impact that motorised vehicles would likely have had upon Ghanaian life. She, however, diminishes that impact by visually prioritising a mass of black male and female figures carrying loads upon their heads. As they snake through the picture, these figures powerfully convey a romanticised depiction of a way of life likely soon to be erased by encroaching western modernity.⁵⁶⁴

As Kofi's and Aikins' drawings suggest, however, the cars and trucks that patently signified the western intervention in the country would surely have attracted attention. And if involved in accidents their spectacular appeal can only have increased. The depiction of car accidents by the two students may well have been due to the dramatic visual quality that such incidents can engender, but, conversely – certainly in a country enduring colonial rule – their drawings can also be read as images that expose a flaw in the imperial project. With sudden and dramatic abruptness a car crash strips the imperial intervention of its much mooted efficiency. A Ghanaian artist's production of a picture of this sort in the 1920s carries, therefore, a potentially powerful critical punch because the image can be read as questioning or mocking the validity of the dominant colonialist narrative.⁵⁶⁵ Such images exemplify a 'speaking back' on the part of the colonial subject through a format that 'allow[s] his or her consciousness to find an expression which will then inflect and produce [a] form of political liberation'.⁵⁶⁶

Gayatri Spivak has argued, in her writing on the subaltern's facility to speak back, for the necessity of the 'space for a change', adding that this had to be there 'in the prior function of the sign-system'.⁵⁶⁷ Drawing, as a mode of artistic expression, undoubtedly provides that liberating space as, indeed, equally does wood carving – an art form more typically associated with West African cultural output at this time – which, as previous research has shown, also reveals evidence that nineteenth-century West African carvers lampooned European colonists in the artefacts they produced.⁵⁶⁸ There is, therefore, nothing novel in demonstrating that West African art of the 1920s at times also mocked the imperial presence and project. Of

⁵⁶⁴ Sir Hugh Clifford, who preceded Guggisberg as Gold Coast governor, recalled that one of his earliest impressions of the colony in 1912 had been 'the endless stream of men, women and children carrying cocoa on their heads to the coast or the railway line'. Wraith, 1967: 79.

⁵⁶⁵ Julia Blackburn has argued that images produced by colonised people most often and primarily 'question the assumptions of power on which white administration and political authority is based'. Blackburn, 1979: 143.

⁵⁶⁶ MacCabe, 2008: xxii.

⁵⁶⁷ Spivak, 2008: 271.

⁵⁶⁸ In his essay 'Unofficial versions', part of Susan Hiller's anthology *The Myth of Primitivism: Perspectives on Art* (London, 1991), Guy Brett includes two illustrations of nineteenth-century wood carvings produced by West African wood carvers that both show European colonists in an unflattering light. See Brett, 1991: 117, 118.

more relevance is that a graphic art form, deemed by a British educator of the time as 'new' to the experience of his Ghanaian students, was readily appropriated for the production of, what can be deemed, subversive imagery. Stevens' desire that the impartation of drawing skills to West Africans would liberate their 'artistic spirit ... in a new form' resulted, in some instances, in the production of images that he perhaps may not have expected or, indeed, welcomed.

4.5 Spencer Pryse's attitude to empire

In the previous section we encountered Spencer Pryse's 'deepest sympathy' with empire, but when reading his account of his trip to West Africa, published in the industrial conglomerate Lever Brothers' in-house magazine, *Progress*, in October 1928, we find an expression of his concern for the West Africans living under British colonial rule. Early in the piece Spencer Pryse describes a mental picture of the region he held prior to his arrival; an image of 'tin sheds, with strings of sooty individuals at work, or carrying headloads; a dismal picture, not without a hint of forced labour'.⁵⁶⁹ The pernicious effect of this impression is, however, somewhat negated by Spencer Pryse limiting its overall veracity. He designates it a 'local' idea, one more associated with an attempt by 'the great trading companies' to convey 'the extent of their activities', rather than a universal image generally believed as characteristic of colonial West Africa.⁵⁷⁰ And on arrival this negative mental image is quickly dispelled. West Africans do, indeed, carry loads on their heads, but 'under an intense sunlight they are richly coloured', and although sheds are found 'from end to end of the country', visually, they barely impinge upon the landscape despite their importance as trading posts.⁵⁷¹ It is, Spencer Pryse details, to these 'tin sheds' that the indigenous population bring quantities of ground-nuts each season, but now in his account the negative implications that, for him, previously surrounded the manner of their doing so is subjugated to the visual impression they create. He describes 'as something epic ... this simple gathering-in of the groundnut', and considers that it provides rich 'subject matter for a frieze that might adorn a public building in London as the Venetians once adorned their palaces'.⁵⁷² Thus within the space of consecutive paragraphs Spencer Pryse's initial expression of concern over the fate of some of Britain's imperial subjects is submerged within an increasingly aestheticised projection of the region's population and landscape. And his aestheticising of West Africa continues apace:

⁵⁶⁹ Spencer Pryse, 1928: 112.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid.

⁵⁷² Ibid.

I have watched long lines of camels from Sokoto and Zinder, their Tuareg proprietors perched high on piled-up bags, shrouded in indigo draperies, each with a great cross-handled sword slung at his side. I have seen them again in the white African moonlight mysteriously set against the sky. I have watched groups of women in twilight interiors, waiting for their loads of groundnuts to be weighed out, sumptuous and sombre groups that might inspire new essays in art. I have seen men with the proportions of Greek athletes racing all day up and down the beach when a steamer has been loading ... Such images as these have replaced what I took with me to Africa. In those pre-conceived monotonous lines of carriers it is hard to recognise the diversity and amplitude of the reality.⁵⁷³

It is, perhaps, a not unsurprising response from an artist primarily recalling the visual impression that newly visited countries made upon him. Effectively, he provides in his retrospective account a summation of the picturesque material that awaited his paintbrush - those 'new essays in art' - although by the late 1920s such picturesque evocations could not be deemed novel, as far as the imagining of West Africa was concerned.

Heeding Spencer Pryse's account of his West Africa venture, the temptation is to bracket him amongst the many early twentieth-century artists who continued to imagine empire in primarily picturesque or exotic terms. But his initially expressed concern over what he would find there lingers in the memory. The mental image lodged in his mind as he travelled out on the s.s. Appam in September 1927 does not concur with the increasingly 'civilised' West Africa that Cheesman's pictures of the Gold Coast had sought to relay to a Wembley audience in 1924, nor does it convey the exoticism that Stinus had expressed in her paintings of Sierra Leone, exhibited that same year, instead it evokes something altogether darker: an image of empire infected by negative concepts such as exploitation.

Further evidence of Spencer Pryse's concern over imperial intervention in Africa is found in his article 'Through the Lines to Abd-el-Krīm's Stronghold in the Riff', published in the November 1925 edition of *Blackwood's Magazine*, which records his experiences in the Riff region of Morocco at a time when the indigenous population were fighting imperial Spanish forces.⁵⁷⁴ The *Progress* article, in referring to his earlier contribution to *Blackwood's*, included a photograph of him in Arab dress (Fig. 48), in which, an accompanying caption said, he

⁵⁷³ Ibid: 113.

⁵⁷⁴ David Finkelstein, in his history of *Blackwood's Magazine*, provides an illuminating statistical breakdown of the type of article that it typically published: 'Of the just over 2,000 pieces published in *Blackwood's* between 1880 and 1899, over 300 were exclusively set in or about the various British imperial possessions and colonies, India, Africa, Australia, Canada and Asia. Political articles attacking Liberal policies on Foreign Affairs accounted for approximately another 5% of the content. Thus 20% of the magazine was devoted to the Empire, its problems, its colonisers, and its indigenous people, as well as to the standard smoking room anecdote of strange and amazing occurrences while out in the colonial jungle'. Finkelstein, 2003: 100.

disguised himself whilst travelling through the Riff.⁵⁷⁵ Spencer Pryse boasts in the *Blackwood's* article of his and his travelling companion, Captain Gordon Canning's, easy assimilation into Riff life: 'Among the group it happens there are two Englishmen; but it would be hard to distinguish these two from the rest, were it not for their slovenly appearance and ill-fitting rozzars'.⁵⁷⁶ His comments are revealing. They imply the ease with which, on an individual level, the West could appropriate an alien culture; a metaphor perhaps for the success of the West's wider colonial acquisition. But they are not defining in regard to Spencer Pryse's attitude to empire; rather they are just a further example of the ambiguity that characterises his procrastinations on matters imperial.

The *Blackwood's* article is an amalgam of descriptive writing that produces a highly picturesque and not untypical evocation of a 'mysterious' region – 'the talk is obscure, like the atmosphere ... [it] winds on like an endless river, without definite aim, yet full of force ... pass[ing] through ... confusion ... to vanish finally in all-encompassing obscurity' - and geo-political analysis – 'as liberators alone the Riffi have overstepped the boundaries of their tribal lands [but] the submissions of neighbouring chiefs have been given willingly to [Abd-el-Krim] who has showed them how the invader may be thrown back'.⁵⁷⁷ It is evident in the article that Spencer Pryse's sympathies lie with the region's indigenous people. 'Throughout the Riff', he writes in an anti-imperialist vein, 'a most exalted spirit of patriotism prevails ... In proof of the singleness of their intentions, [the Riffi] have sought membership of the League of Nations, only to learn that as rebels they have no international status', although, he adds indignantly, '[they] were never consulted in the cession of their country'.⁵⁷⁸ However, in a more pro-imperialist manner – and here we see evidence of his ambiguous attitude to empire - he details that 'the Riff is rich in minerals', and the 'Mediterranean countries, and particularly Italy, would be substantial gainers by the free opening up of these resources' which could be achieved through the 'employment of western skill and capital', a situation Spencer Pryse

⁵⁷⁵ Spencer Pryse, 1928a: 112.

⁵⁷⁶ Spencer Pryse, 1925: 633. Diana Fuss, in her discussion of Kaja Silverman's analysis of T.E. Lawrence's adoption of Arab dress and custom, argues that Lawrence's cultural impersonation 'masked a will-to-power, a desire to outdo the Arabs in their Arabness, an ambition to become more truly other than the Other'. Fuss, 1994: 25. See also Silverman, 1989: 17 – 20.

⁵⁷⁷ Spencer Pryse, 1925: 627, 631, 646. Spencer Pryse gave enormous credit to Mohammed ibn Abd-el-Krīm, 'a chieftain of the Beni Ouariel, styled Sultan by the free choice of the tribes'. His respect was perhaps due to Abd-el-Krim's familiarity with the West – 'he has travelled in Europe, and at least on one occasion has been in London' – and his desire to adapt an ancient civilisation 'to modern requirements'. Ibid: 641.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid: 639.

regarded as 'specially welcome'.⁵⁷⁹ Thus although he appears to decry colonisation – arguably a minority opinion held by westerners at this time - echoing a more widely-held view, he expresses no qualms in positioning the less developed regions of the world as of economic benefit to the West, so long, significantly, that those rewards are freely given.

His aversion to the exploitation of colonised indigenous populations that emerges in the *Blackwood's* article, and which constituted his mental picture of West Africa, may well have been informed by accounts in circulation at this time. As a Labour supporter he may have been familiar with the publications then being produced by the Labour Research Department as part of a 'Colonial Series' that dealt with British imperialism in Africa. In *Imperialism in East Africa*, published in 1926, the Labour Research Department painted a gloomy picture of life for the indigenous population under imperial rule:

The capitalist system of production is a very new and a completely foreign development [which] has been violently forced on East Africa in a single generation. There is perhaps no country in the world where the working of the capitalist machine is more nakedly revealed than in East Africa. The whole organisation and administration of Government is directed ... towards compelling the African inhabitants to work for European masters, and is based on the absolute subjection of the native population.⁵⁸⁰

Even in West Africa, where British imperial rule was generally considered more enlightened than that applied in the east of the continent, Elinor Burns, who authored *Imperialism in West Africa*, published by the Labour Research Department in 1927, detailed that 'West African railways and public works have been and still are constructed mainly by forced labour'.⁵⁸¹ She cited in evidence the report of Hon. W.G.A. Ormsby-Gore M.P. who as head of a parliamentary mission had visited West Africa in 1926:

The supply of voluntary labour for road and rail construction has always proved inadequate in Nigeria, and recourse is had to compulsory or 'enlisted' – sometimes called 'political' – labour for these essential public works and

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid: 643. Finkelstein points out, in his analysis of articles published in *Blackwood's*, that even in those articles primarily concerned with nature and travel 'there was an underlying presumption about the commercial potential and benefits' that could accrue from imperial intervention. See Finkelstein, 2003: 101.

⁵⁸⁰ Labour Research Department, 1927: 3.

⁵⁸¹ Burns, 1927: 46. Anne Phillips has argued that Britain's rule in her West African colonies could be presented as 'a model of enlightened colonial policy, where pre-colonial institutions were cherished ... and where colonial administrators worked to protect Africans from the destructive influences' of capitalism and modern individualism. This outcome, as she points out, resulted primarily from the 'fragility' of imperial control in West Africa which made the colonial authorities dependent on pre-capitalist relations, such as the rule of local chiefs, retained as part of the region's administrative structure. The failure to transform colonial West Africa into a facsimile of a modern western economic state was, Phillips argues, 'romanticise[d] ... into a success' by the British authorities, and the administration's policies were held up 'as a model of colonial responsibility'. Phillips, 1989: 78.

services. All the railways and most of the roads in Nigeria have involved the use of this compulsory labour.⁵⁸²

Burns also referred to the transportation of goods by headload – an image that had formed part of Spencer Pryse's mental 'dismal picture' of the region – and without passing comment, though still conveying the bleakness of this existence, she set down the work conditions and pay of this type of labour: 'The average load carried is forty to fifty pounds; wages are one shilling to one shilling and three pence a day for a distance of twelve to eighteen miles'.⁵⁸³

Reading further on into Spencer Pryse's account of his West African venture the question arises as to whether his concern over exploitation is solely motivated by the West African forced labourers that he recalled in his mental image of the region. Increasingly, it appears that the aspect of twentieth-century life he criticises is that which he sees prevailing at home, in Europe. He argues that Europeans – a geographical grouping he refers to as 'we moderns' – 'are inclined to worship' the industrialism that underpins modern western society as though that marked in itself 'some sort of culmination'. It took, he believed, 'that sinister screen picture *Metropolis*', which only 'the other day ... sent a shudder through Western Europe', to affirm that 'though industry must lie at the foundation of all achievement, it may never be the apex'.⁵⁸⁴

As an artist, Spencer Pryse was around this time not alone in railing against the destructive and negative impact of western industrialism which produced the sort of 'victims' that he had depicted in his Labour Party posters. He had a temporally-near ally - perhaps surprisingly in view of the esteem in which he had earlier held industrial processes - in Wyndham Lewis, whose travel book *Filibusters in Barbary*, an account of his journey through Morocco in the spring and summer of 1931, was published in 1932.⁵⁸⁵ Lewis' text, which drew on academic studies and tourist guidebooks as well as incorporating fictional passages, registers 'the increasingly complex cultural relations' that existed between Europe and this part of North Africa at the time.⁵⁸⁶ In detailing these relations, Lewis exposes what he regards as the negative impact of western modernity upon Morocco - 'Our Machine Age civilisation has pushed its obscene way into the heart of their country' - though when he encounters

⁵⁸² Burns, 1927: 46.

⁵⁸³ Ibid: 44.

⁵⁸⁴ Spencer Pryse, 1928: 113.

⁵⁸⁵ As a signatory of the 'Manifesto' that appeared in the first issue of *Blast* (1914), Lewis presumably shared in the praise of industry and the machine that it expressed. Two statements in their praise of British industrialisation stand out: 'But our industries, and the Will that determined, face to face with its needs, the direction of the modern world, has reared up steel trees where the green ones were lacking; has exploded in useful growths, and found wilder intricacies than those of Nature (36) and 'Machinery is the greatest Earth-medium' (39).

⁵⁸⁶ Neilson, 2006: 313.

factories on his travels he is relieved that they have 'none of the oppressive hustle and slickness of 'the Works' [where] it is the Machine that is paramount', and he delights to find places 'where industrialism has not put its squalid foot'.⁵⁸⁷

Spencer Pryse, too, delights in the type of society he encounters in West Africa, regarding it as a timely corrective of which the West should take notice.⁵⁸⁸ Europeans have, for him, something to learn from 'the African, to whom living remains an art', and in whom 'aesthetic perceptions predominate to an astonishing degree'.⁵⁸⁹ Some three years later Lewis is expressing remarkably similar sentiments when he favourably contrasts the random, though heightened, aestheticism that he encounters in Morocco with the regimented patterns that he cites the Machine Age as producing in the West:

Projecting his tortuous, not yet oppressive, geometry out upon the chaotic superstructures – being methodic where he can, in the teeth of natural disorder – man is seen at his best. He then produces something of intellectual as well as emotional value, which the unadulterated stark geometry of the Machine-Age precludes. Without arguing pro or contra – whether some day the Machine will be put in its place – it is sufficient here to affirm that the labyrinths of these ancient Souks are far more imaginatively pleasant places to be in than is, say, Hoboken, across the ferry from Manhattan.⁵⁹⁰

For Spencer Pryse, the heightened aesthetic sensibility that he detects in West Africa is seen in the native sculpture that has permeated the cultural institutions of the major European cities which, he believes, 'originated in a directness and purity of mind' no longer evident in the West.⁵⁹¹ So although he is prepared to restate a widely-held pejorative and factually inaccurate view of the African that s/he was 'innocent of any economic impulse', he acknowledges in his account that he returned to England 'with a suspicion that our racial

⁵⁸⁷ Lewis, 1983: 41, 56.

⁵⁸⁸ Spencer Pryse's positive view of West Africa was shared by others at the time. Allan McPhee, author of *The Economic Revolution in British West Africa* (London, 1926), trusted that 'the spirit of individualism' that had triumphed in England would not become dominant in West Africa. He admired the strength of the natives' communal spirit and hoped it would be strong enough to counteract 'the Anglicised and individualistic tendencies' that was already evident, he believed, in the West Africans inhabiting the coastal towns, who historically had had greater exposure to western practices. McPhee, 1926: 311. Such views can also be positioned within a longer historical timeline. Edward Carpenter's *Civilisation, Its Cause and Cure* (1889) expresses dissatisfaction with European civilisation. Instead, Carpenter lauds the harmonious society that, he believed, characterised the life of native Africans. See Porter, 1968: 32. For a more recent overview of modernism's relationship to imperialism see Booth and Rigby, 2000. In their 'Introduction' to the volume's collection of essays Howard Booth and Nigel Rigby pose the question: 'Was the colonial 'other' to be resisted or did he offer an exhausted West a way out?' They argue that modernism answered both questions in the affirmative, but the question addressed determined 'the type of symbolism and language that was employed'. Booth and Rigby, 2000: 7.

⁵⁸⁹ Spencer Pryse, 1928: 112.

⁵⁹⁰ Lewis, 1983: 57.

⁵⁹¹ Examples of the display of African art in Europe by the time Spencer Pryse was writing in 1928 are numerous. One such occasion occurred at the Goupil Galleries, London in February 1921 when an exhibition entitled 'Negro Art', featuring carvings from Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Sudan, Congo and Guinea, was staged.

ascendancy on the intellectual and moral side is not always matched on the aesthetic', that, indeed, 'there may be something to learn from the untutored savage'.⁵⁹² To emphasise his point he returns again to the 'lines of tin sheds' that infested his original mental image of West Africa, but only to once more quash their negative impact. He acknowledges that in experiencing the region he now realises that the numerous dreary and prosaic sheds – an all too evident physical manifestation of imperialism – do not intrude so much upon what he views as the aesthetically more exotic life of the indigenous West African whose 'existence is actually passed in an incomparable setting of forest and lagoon and river and inland sunburned space'.⁵⁹³ But he cannot dispense with them too readily – to do so would have disclosed an injudicious lack of faith in the message that the EMB had commissioned him to convey through his work – rather these sheds symbolise, instead, "the romance of trade".⁵⁹⁴ Their significance is thus reclaimed, and the British presence in the region is again assigned historical importance. West Africa stands, for Spencer Pryse, like the ancient trading communities of Tyre, Baghdad, and Venice, as 'beacons in the history of the world'.

What emerges in Spencer Pryse's commentary is evidence of the contrasting, even competing, narratives that informed the imagining of empire by artists working in the 1920s. So as to more fully develop an analysis of the narrative that underpins his work I turn now to the visual evidence itself: the watercolours, and some of the EMB posters that were derived from them, that Gerald Spencer Pryse made during his 'hundred days' in West Africa in late 1927 when 'he travelled great distance through primeval forests, setting down with brilliant brush, in conditions often of extreme difficulty, records of native life of strange and vivid interest and beauty'.⁵⁹⁵

4.6 Spencer Pryse's images of West Africa

Reviewing an exhibition of Spencer Pryse's West Africa watercolours in Manchester in May 1930, the *Manchester Guardian* felt that included amongst the exhibits were 'some rather grim pictures of western industrialism impinging on the primitive'.⁵⁹⁶ Commenting on the same

⁵⁹² Spencer Pryse, 1928: 115.

⁵⁹³ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁵ Weaver, 1930: 7. The catalogue that accompanied the exhibition of one hundred of Spencer Pryse's West Africa watercolours at the Alpine Gallery, London in March 1929 included a 'Special Notice'. It stated that all the watercolours were made in fifty three working days, with the bulk of the rest of the expedition being spent travelling. See *Exhibition of Pictures painted in the Colonies of Nigeria and the Gold Coast (British West Africa) by G. Spencer Pryse*, exh. cat. (London, 1929).

⁵⁹⁶ 'Paintings of West Africa. Exhibition at the Platt Hall Branch of the City Art Gallery, Manchester', *Manchester Guardian*, 21 May 1930.

show, the reviewer for the *Manchester Evening News*, however, liked the way in which the artist had 'caught the spirit of beauty' in pictures of railroad building and dredging, subject-matter, that s/he acknowledged did not generally 'bring forth canvases of loveliness', but in this instance resulted in 'great art'.⁵⁹⁷ Continuing, the reviewer deemed, that taken as a whole, the pictures constituted 'a vivid and pictorial record of people and a place that are both touched and untouched by modern civilisation', and s/he expressed the view that though 'this rich variety of native life may be passing before the march of progress', Spencer Pryse had 'caught the spirit of it before it finally dies away'. The exhibition, the review concluded, revealed 'an amazing life being lived under strange conditions and in circumstances of unusual beauty'.⁵⁹⁸ That final sentence succinctly encapsulates the situation that prevailed in colonial West Africa in the late 1920s. The term 'unusual beauty' conjures up notions of the picturesqueness and the exoticism that in many western minds continued to characterise the region, but 'strange conditions' - surely an allusion to the impact that modernity was wreaking upon West Africa - disrupts that entrenched perception.

Spencer Pryse stated, in an interview given to a *West Africa* correspondent in March 1928, that his 'original purpose' in visiting West Africa was for 'the making of studies' for possible EMB posters.⁵⁹⁹ The EMB commission demanded representations of colonial West Africa that showed it to be a fully functioning member of a modern trading empire. Although Spencer Pryse complied with this requirement, it was not solely in this manner that he conveyed the region. He is quoted in the same *West Africa* article: 'The production of a series of West African pictures, beyond the immediate needs of the Marketing Board, was my own impulse'.⁶⁰⁰ But what drove that impulse, and what did these additional images convey? Spencer Pryse provided an answer of sorts: 'I tried in each [picture] to bring out some salient point which took my fancy as being the essence of the place, glimpses, if I might say, of the soul of a people'.⁶⁰¹ Asked by the interviewer as to which he considered his best watercolours, he was initially hesitant, stating he had 'no particular preference', before picking out two paintings, one of a woman carrying a child on her back and the other, a market scene, but it was, he believed, only when the collection was viewed as a whole that 'the general driving

⁵⁹⁷ *Manchester Evening News*, 21 May 1930.

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁹ 'The Artist and his Experiences in West Africa', *West Africa*, 10 March 1928.

⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰¹ *Ibid.*

idea comes out'.⁶⁰² So what constituted West Africa's 'essence' for Spencer Pryse? Let's turn to those paintings singled out by him in search of an answer.

West Africa included in its 10 March 1928 issue a black and white reproduction – and an apology for the consequential loss of the picture's beautiful colouring – of one of the two selected paintings. *The Madonna of Sheba* (Fig. 49),⁶⁰³ considered in a review in the *Times* as 'the most easily remembered picture in the whole exhibition' when the *West Africa* watercolours were shown at the Imperial Institute in March 1928, was praised by the reviewer for recalling Gauguin and, indeed, the distinct outline of the woman's back and semi-profiled face, which helps lift her clear of a background replete with oversized leaves (or are they poppy-like blooms?) on spindly stems, does echo a formal technique utilised by the French painter in his drawing of the figures that populate his Tahitian canvases.⁶⁰⁴ A more obvious reason for the Gauguin reference lies in the painting's subject-matter – an image of a young, partially naked, dark-skinned female all too readily recalls the paintings Gauguin produced in the 1890s which depict Tahitian women in an exoticised manner. Stephen Eisenman has argued, in his discussion of these works, that the women were associated in Gauguin's mind, 'as in the collective colonialist imagination, with natural fecundity and beneficence'.⁶⁰⁵ Spencer Pryse's image, too, expresses a notion of natural fruitfulness, not only in its portrayal of a young woman who we assume is already a mother because of the baby shown slung at her back, but also through its depiction of the over-sized plants that sprout behind her. It further conveys, metaphorically, a harmonious relationship between woman and environment that allows both to flourish.

Did a notion of abundant natural life or growth – surely the themes celebrated in the picture – encapsulate, for Spencer Pryse, the 'essence' of West Africa? If so, it was not a conception that was reliant on the impartation of evidence of the imperial intervention in the region. Here, it is a pre-modern, pre-industrialised West Africa that is projected as fruitful, and those defining characteristics of early twentieth-century western life are conspicuous by their absence. As I have earlier detailed, Spencer Pryse expressed concern over the West's excessive worshipping of industrialism. An image such as *The Madonna of Sheba* addresses this concern by foregrounding the natural abundance to be derived from supposedly less

⁶⁰² Ibid.

⁶⁰³ Spencer Pryse exhibited two other watercolours that make reference to Sheba which is located in Yola, Adamwara in eastern Nigeria; *The Sheba Fishermen* and *Sheba Water Carriers*. See Spencer Pryse, 1929: unpaginated.

⁶⁰⁴ 'Art Exhibitions. Mr. Spencer Pryse's Pictures. British West Africa', *Times*, 3 March 1928. A clear example of Gauguin's pronounced outlining of the figure is seen in *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* 1897, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Oil, 139 x 374.5cm.

⁶⁰⁵ Eisenman, 1994: 382.

technically advanced regions of the empire. His rejection, in this instance, of any trace of western modernity at play within West Africa – a surprising conceptualisation from an artist specifically commissioned to convey the region's modern character - can be read as part of a critical modernist discourse in circulation at this time. Patrick Williams has argued that 'ideologically modernism disrupts the imperialist ideology', for whilst imperialism 'proclaims western superiority', modernism has the capacity to not only celebrate the achievements of western modernity, but equally mourn the losses that stem from its transformative processes. As Williams succinctly concludes; 'imperialism speaks progress and expansion, modernism highlights dislocation, fragmentation and entropy'.⁶⁰⁶ Paradoxically, though, an image of West Africa that ostensibly seems to depart from the EMB's main objective of showing a modern colony geared towards trade perhaps more subtly served their needs, for the natural bounty that the colonial empire could deliver as part of a global trading entity was equally part of the message that the Board sought to convey.

The ascription of *Madonna* to the painting's female subject was perhaps an attempt on Spencer Pryse's part to cement the picture's place within an established art historical genre. Its composition, however, renders this problematic because his depiction of a West African mother and child is not one that conforms to typical western representations of maternity. Noticeably lacking in the painting are the conspicuous signs of nurture or attentiveness that frequently characterised – and continued to do so in the 1920s - this subject-matter in the western canon. For example, in John Copley's 1920 lithograph *Madonna Nutrice* (Fig. 50) it is a feeding child that is not only the principal focus of the viewer's gaze, but equally the subject of the depicted mother's attentive look.⁶⁰⁷ By contrast, in Spencer Pryse's picture, compositionally, the child is marginalised, a discrete appendage cloaked in shadow with barely delineated facial features who is crushed between the mother's back to which s/he is slung and the left hand edge of the frame. It is, instead, the self-absorbed woman who is the focus of our attention, and, unlike the mother depicted in the Copley drawing, her gaze is not devoted to her child, but to an undefined distant point beyond the frame of the picture.

Carrying a child slung across the back was widely practiced by West African women, as Edith Cheesman had shown in her more distant view of women in *Koforidua Station, Gold Coast* (Fig. 30). The women Cheesman depicted were working, their attention,

⁶⁰⁶ Williams, 2000: 23.

⁶⁰⁷ Copley, the first Secretary of the Senefelder Club, exhibited independently and as part of the Club's regular joint exhibitions during the early decades of the twentieth-century. In 1919 and 1920 he produced a number of lithographs based upon the theme of the *Madonna*, including *Madonna col figlio* (1919), *Madonna seduta* (1919) and *Madonna Lavoratrice* (1919), all of which feature a child as the focus of the mother's gaze.

understandably, not solely devoted to their offspring, but for the subject of Spencer Pryse's painting, shown seated in leisurely and thoughtful repose, her child is not the obvious focus of her attention. Such an image of motherhood may have been disturbing for a British audience, more used to maternal images that centred on the child. So although *The Madonna of Sheba* could have been read as a celebration of indigenous West Africa, it may equally have been perceived by a contemporary audience as an image critical of the region's way of life, and, as such, may have contributed to the entrenched perception of West Africa as a 'backward' part of empire that remained in need of British supervision.

The market scene selected by Spencer Pryse as his other favoured picture was a watercolour entitled – *Lokoja Market*. A depiction of a market scene in this Nigerian town would, on the one hand, have participated in the EMB's projection of the colony as a trading member of the empire, and, for Spencer Pryse, the picture, indeed, expressed a situation he encountered in Nigeria where he saw 'interwoven everywhere ... the threads of commerce' and 'the products of the tropics [being] bartered for the manufactures of England'.⁶⁰⁸ It also arguably served another purpose: Spencer Pryse's own compulsion to project the richly aestheticised life that, for him, characterised the region. This unlocated work was described by Guggisberg as 'full of vivid colour and clever sketches of women', but another view of Lokoja, *Lokoja Beach* (Fig. 51), in terms of subject-matter and formal characteristics, seems in a similar vein, and this picture serves in my further exploration of Spencer Pryse's imagining of West Africa that went beyond the obvious needs of the EMB.⁶⁰⁹

Guggisberg, when commenting on the figures that populated *Lokoja Market*, considered Spencer Pryse had 'caught the live warm tints of the skin of the African, which is far from being the dusky grey-black familiar to Londoners'.⁶¹⁰ Colours encompassing red and ochre tones, used by Spencer Pryse in the realisation of the flesh tones of the figures seen in *Lokoja Beach*, similarly produce Guggisberg's 'warm tints', but vivid mauve, purple and yellow hues, deployed in the colouring of head scarves and dresses, equally invest the image with a pictorial heat that contributes to a pronounced aestheticised view. Paraded across the foreground of the picture we see a number of naked and semi-naked women, their sensuousness amplified by Spencer Pryse's use of fluid outline in his drawing. The women

⁶⁰⁸ Spencer Pryse, 1928: 115.

⁶⁰⁹ 'Mr Spencer Pryse's West African Pictures. Formal Opening by Sir Gordon Guggisberg.' *West Africa*, 10 March 1928. Present day Lokoja sits on the west bank of the river Niger at its confluence with the river Benue. A trading post was established at this location by British merchants in the 1850s, and from 1886 to 1900 the town served as the military headquarters of Sir George Goldie's Royal Niger Company. See <http://brittanica.com> - Accessed on 05/02/11.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid.

are massed at the edge of the river, presumably on the 'beach' of the title, and some are shown bathing or entering the water. This situation may explain, in some instances, their state of undress, but in other cases, specifically that of a naked young woman carrying a pot on her head seen towards the left of the picture, nakedness is more incongruous. Posed as a classical statue, as a less than subtle signifier of unshrouded aesthetic appearance, this West African Venus resembles a fantasised figure cast adrift within the scene's possibly more plausible reality.⁶¹¹ Metaphorically, she is, however, superfluous, because through a more credible depiction of landscape Spencer Pryse equally conveys the aesthetic nature of the life he perceived was lived by indigenous West Africans. The scene, particularly through the depiction of a number of huts lining the river bank which are backed by a swathe of forest and distant purple-tinged hills, establishes an 'existence ... passed' within an 'incomparable setting of forest ... and river'.

If we take as evidence the two works selected by Spencer Pryse in his interview with *West Africa*, and the general thrust of his commentary in the *Progress* article, West Africa's 'essence of ... place' would seem, for him, not to have engendered the efficiency and modernity that the EMB so wished to convey, but rather it evoked qualities of naturalness, of sensuousness, of heightened aestheticism, that spoke against these defining, often deadening, characteristics of western life. However, in meeting the demands of his commission Spencer Pryse produced paintings that did convey an image of the modern West Africa, yet even these 'grim pictures of western industrialism', so reviled by the *Manchester Guardian* reviewer, but which served the purposes of the EMB, are clouded in ambiguity.

A photograph showing Spencer Pryse's Gold Coast designs adorning an EMB hoarding sited on the Brighton Road (Fig. 52) offers an indication of how his posters would have been seen by the British public. Although undated the photograph in all likelihood dates from March

⁶¹¹ John Mack, in conversation, has questioned the likelihood of the excessive female nudity depicted by Spencer Pryse in the scene, and I am grateful for his comments. An even more implausible rendering of female nudity is apparent in a watercolour *Ladies of the Household of the Emir, Katsina*, reproduced in black and white in Spencer Pryse's article, 'Talking Drums and Stools of Sovereignty: An Artist in British West Africa' published in the 10 March 1928 issue of the *Illustrated London News*. The Emirate of Katsina, an Islamic region in northern Nigeria, was, when Spencer Pryse visited it, ruled by an Emir whom the artist considered to be 'of outstanding culture and enlightenment'. The Emir's son, Nagogo, himself the subject of one of the West Africa watercolours, was familiar with the West – 'he speaks English, drives a car, and plays a wonderfully good game of polo' – and facilitated, according to Spencer Pryse, the opportunity to paint the women of the Emir's household. The watercolour depicts a standing woman leaning against a wall, and seated on the floor at her side, five other female figures, all of whom gaze out unselfconsciously at the viewer. In keeping with Islamic tradition, the women's heads are covered in turban-like creations, yet, improbably, all are depicted naked from the waist up. Despite the enlightened regime that Spencer Pryse projects in his article, whether he witnessed such a scene is surely open to doubt. Arguably the painting is a further example of him aestheticising and exoticising West Africa. See Spencer Pryse, 1928: 391.

or April 1928 when the posters were scheduled for display.⁶¹² Under the banner headline, 'What Gold Coast Prosperity Means', ran a sequence of five images titled from left to right *Gathering Cocoa Pods*, *The Talking Drums*, *Takoradi Harbour*, *Native Chiefs in Palaver* and *Sorting Manganese Ore*. The large centre poster, *Takoradi Harbour*, and that at the right of the hoarding, *Sorting Manganese Ore*, took as their subject-matter scenes of modern mechanised industry.⁶¹³ The former was developed from a watercolour titled *Takoradi, From the Gardens of the Resident-Engineer* (Fig. 53) on which Spencer Pryse provided his own commentary in an exhibition catalogue that accompanied the showing of the painting in Liverpool in 1930. He set down the cost of the harbour – some three and a half million pounds – and detailed that its construction enabled ocean-going ships to dock alongside a wharf for the first time; a factor, he added, that greatly reduced the transportation costs of Gold Coast produce.⁶¹⁴

Spencer Pryse's written observations express, in tune with the EMB's wishes, the notion of a modern empire built on mutual trade, and they hint at his support for their objective. Arguably, however, the scene depicted in the watercolour conveys a less effusive response on his part to modernity's incursion upon West African shores. In the picture we look down from behind a fragile barricade of plants – a vestige of African picturesqueness that, paradoxically, lies within the garden of the individual overseeing the devastating transformation of the coastline – onto a site of unrelenting, primarily mechanised, industry. It is, perhaps, not surprising – at least in terms of fulfilling his EMB remit – that Spencer Pryse painted such a scene, for it is invariably at the coast that cultures initially interact, and where the potential for transformative change is at its most potent. Exiting the scene stage left we see a line of indigenous labourers, some of whom carry beams or poles upon their shoulders. It was figures such as these that Spencer Pryse originally perceived in his mental image of the

⁶¹² The EMB's poster programme for 1928 lists under March/April the 'Takoradi Harbour Set' by G. Spencer Pryse. See First Sub-Committee - Poster Section Minutes, 5 January 1928, CO 760/26. Reviewing his achievements whilst governor of the Gold Coast, Sir Gordon Guggisberg placed the modernisation of the colony's transport facilities, which included the construction of the deep water harbour at Takoradi, 'at the head of my programme'. G. Guggisberg *The Gold Coast: A Review of Events of 1920 – 1926* (Accra, 1927), 95, cited in Wraith, 1967: 102. Addressing the Gold Coast Legislative Council, Guggisberg argued that the construction of the harbour 'will assure the safety of the Gold Coast trade. And with the safety of our trade assured comes assurance of our revenue – the sinews of war for our campaign of education and progress'. *The Gold Coast Legislative Council Debates*, (1925 – 26), 25 cited in Wraith, 1967: 119. The harbour was opened on 3 April 1928 by J.H. Thomas, M.P., who served as Colonial Secretary in the first Labour government in 1924 - 'I've been sent here to see that there's no mucking about with the British Empire' (Blaxland, 1964: 170) - but Guggisberg was not invited to the opening ceremony, and neither was he mentioned by Thomas in his opening speech. See Wraith, 1967: 157.

⁶¹³ The Poster Section minutes record that both the Manganese Ore and Takoradi Harbour designs were deemed satisfactory by the sub-committee subject to a minor amendment of the latter work. See First Sub-Committee - Poster Section Minutes, 3 February 1928, CO 760/26.

⁶¹⁴ Spencer Pryse, 1930: 19.

region as signifiers of forced labour, though on his arrival in West Africa he began to view the labourers more as picturesque embellishments. Now, however, these individuals, replete with exotic potential, seem to have no place in the industrialised West Africa he conveys. Instead, it is imported technology, in the form of the cranes depicted scattered along the length of Takoradi's wharf and the rail tracks shown incised into it, that holds sway. Anchored off the end of the wharf, which stretches out to the horizon, is seen a small flotilla of the ocean-going ships that the quayside mechanisation serves. But at what cost to West Africa? Spencer Pryse's image indicates there is a price to be paid.

The watercolour shows an horizon that is partially obscured at the right by a shrub that reaches skywards; its lofty presence, an all too visible signifier of West Africa's exotic flora. But as the eye travels along the horizon to the left hand edge of the picture, it is interrupted by a column of smoke and steam shown rising from a train depicted in the lower left foreground. These two vertical pictorial elements balance the composition and internally frame an industrial scene which shows, amongst a hive of activity, further smoke belching from ships' funnels. They also function as symbolic opposites that represent, to the right, the picturesque and exotic indigenous West Africa of popular British imagination and, to the left, imported western modernity and its attendant industrial pollution. The thin front line of vegetation depicted in gentle sketchy curves diminishes as we pan from the right across the picture's foreground until ultimately it is terminated by the hard-edged and menacing silhouette of a steam engine hauling a line of trucks, represented as a dark linear stain upon the surface of the paper. It is an unsightly mark, perhaps symbolising Spencer Pryse's view of the ugly modernity that was blemishing the region, and contributing to the erasure of West Africa's picturesqueness.

A painting of the Ghanaian coastline produced by Edith Cheesman in 1923 offers an indication of the picturesqueness that was threatened by the activity Spencer Pryse conveyed in his scene. Cheesman's *Loading Cocoa into Surf Boats, Accra, Gold Coast* (Fig. 54) was one of a number of paintings depicting various scenes from the cocoa industry that she produced for the Gold Coast government. Guggisberg waxed lyrical about the painting, describing it as conveying a 'wonderful scene on Accra beach' that, for him, not only showed by dint of the bags of cocoa 'the wealth of the country', but equally, through Cheesman's depiction of 'gleaming silvery sands', the colony's intrinsic natural beauty.⁶¹⁵ What Cheesman's painting also conveys is the type of physical and communal labour that Spencer

⁶¹⁵ *Gold Coast News*, 31 January 1924: 1.

Pryse depicted as departing his scene. Although she also shows, perhaps ominously, at the end of the wharf two cranes, harbingers of the mechanisation that Spencer Pryse depicted more fully in his view of Takoradi, in Cheesman's scene an old form of picturesque transportation - one readily familiar to Europeans arriving off the West Africa coast - still holds sway.

In another view of Takoradi harbour, *Takoradi: The Government Slipway under Construction* (Fig. 55), Spencer Pryse strikes a more equitable balance between human endeavour and mechanised force. Figures are spread out across the scene, their role in the construction of the slipway being read as supplementing that played by a stationary steam engine depicted in more modulated, less threatening, tones than that used to convey the train visible in his elevated view of the harbour. However, behind this more harmonious mingling of imported modernity and indigenouness, Spencer Pryse depicts in the background of the picture a stretch of the West African coastline as a barren environment, denuded of life or vegetation. Can this possibly be read as a portent of modernity's devastating impact upon the region? As if to force home the scene's melancholic air, he shows hanging over the coastline a crane's lifting gear, starkly outlined against the sky, the isolated cable, resembling, ominously, a hangman's rope suspended from a gibbet. This metaphor of death, of irreversible destruction, carries a powerful negative charge.

A further view of a waterside scene reveals Spencer Pryse once more tackling the interface of indigenouness and modernity in West Africa. He gave a detailed description of the location depicted in *Loading Ground Nuts on the Wharf at Burutu* (Fig. 56) in the Liverpool exhibition catalogue:

Burutu, built on piles at the mouth of the Niger, by the Niger Company (now absorbed into the United Africa Co. Ltd.) is the re-filling point where cargoes are discharged from river steamers into ocean-going vessels. Surrounded by mangrove swamps, Burutu with its electric light standards and travelling cranes presents an astonishing spectacle to an eye grown accustomed to unending forest-fringed waterways. The harbour equipment is of the most modern sort. A bulk oil plant, second to none in the world, is installed on the quay where by thousands of tons of purified oil are annually pumped into tank steamers, for shipment to Europe and America.⁶¹⁶

The text reads as a paean for modernity. Electric lights, travelling cranes, 'a bulk oil plant, second to none in the world' are amongst the signifiers of modernity that are singled out for praise, whilst their existence in a location deemed almost primordial - 'surrounded by

⁶¹⁶ Spencer Pryse, 1930: 18.

mangrove swamps' - is considered 'astonishing'. In the watercolour, however, it is a more antiquated mode of labour – physical human effort – that Spencer Pryse prioritises, and the evidence of Burutu's modernity is consigned to a shadowy presence of a travelling crane (possibly?) viewed in the distance, and the partially obscured cabin of a river steamer at the right of the picture.

Spencer Pryse had considered the 'gathering in' of the ground nuts 'epic' and 'rich subject-matter', but the visual evidence of the watercolour suggests that, for him, the drama of this enterprise resided more in the contribution made by physical human exertion than in the role played by technology. Two male figures shown pushing a trolley laden with sacks of nuts dominate the composition – an echo of the manner in which manual labour was prioritised in the Wembley poster's depiction of Nigerian timber haulers. Even allowing for the rapid sketch-like character of the drawing, Spencer Pryse has lavished attention upon the labourers' physiques, emphasising the broad musculature of their backs through the employment of highlighting tones, and investing in their postures a pleasingly harmonious symmetry that reinforces the communal nature of their work. Despite having to rely on a black and white reproduction, we can surmise that the right-hand figure's striped trousers have a pronounced visual impact that further heightens his aestheticised presence. By contrast, Spencer Pryse renders the distant and isolated mechanised technology situated towards the edges of the frame in a low key manner. These manifestations of imported western modernity are cast as prosaic and peripheral, whilst indigenous Africa retains an exotic allure and a dominant central presence. Through a depiction of a simple act of physical labour Spencer Pryse conveys the notion, which he later expressed in his *Progress* interview, that living for the African 'remains an art'. Even in an image that purportedly expresses an idea of a modern West Africa benefitting from the technological advancements of the West, it is this condition, the intrinsic aestheticism and the communal nature of the indigenous life, which Spencer Pryse feels compelled to express.⁶¹⁷

Even when indigenous West African labour is conveyed pictorially on a much smaller scale, as is the case in the watercolour *Unloading Salt at Burutu* (Fig. 57), Spencer Pryse, in keeping with the general tone of many of the West Africa paintings, invests it with a heightened aesthetic resonance. Potentially mundane subject-matter - figures carrying sacks of salt - is transformed into a communal ballet of syncopated and vibrant movement. Simple

⁶¹⁷ David Cannadine has argued that the colonies and Dominions were frequently envisioned 'as a more wholesome version of society than could be found in the metropolis', and 'as a layered, rural, traditional and organic society'. Cannadine, 2001: 12 – 13.

paint marks convey the distant stick-like figures that traverse the wharf. Though denied recognisable physiognomies, the vast majority of them, through subtle differentiations in pose, are, nevertheless, individualised, each being invested with an aestheticised rhythmic presence. Behind this frenetic 'dance' looms the massive bulk of an ocean-going ship, a sober presence, constituted through a mass of largely featureless flat planes and geometric lines that contrast discernibly with Spencer Pryse's pictorially looser, but joyous, projection of West African exuberance. The vessel's staid pictorial realisation embodies notions of imperial order and restraint that seem all the more telling when juxtaposed on such a large scale against the more chaotic but diminutive realisation of native West African life. And the notion of restraint is expressed even more forcefully and literally through the depiction of the vessel's taut mooring ropes that slice the surface of the picture: an arguably all too visible manifestation of intrusive imperial control being brought to bear.

Through a close study of Spencer Pryse's images of the increasingly modernised West Africa of the 1920s it is possible to detect a degree of his anxiety over the effects of the colonial project. His watercolours are permeated by an ambiguity less evident in his written commentary on the scenes he recorded which tend to reveal his enthusiastic support for the imperial intervention in the region. Undeniably, these images can be read – his posters certainly were by his employer, the EMB – as revealing the greater efficiency that the processes of imported modernity were bestowing upon Nigeria and Ghana, yet in the watercolours so-called improvement or advancement is invariably balanced with a sense of loss.⁶¹⁸ When indigenous West African practices and western modernity occupy the same picture space as they do in these watercolours, Spencer Pryse has a tendency to distance the two. He expresses this, for example, as a physical distance in *Loading Ground Nuts on the Wharf at Burutu*, and as a pictorial estrangement in *Unloading Salt at Burutu*. We can perhaps see this space as reluctance on Spencer Pryse's part in showing indigenous West Africa wholeheartedly embracing western modernity. If she was shown as doing so – and as I have detailed in my discussion of the photograph of Mr and Mrs Adisi, some West Africans did fully embrace, and on their own terms, western modernity – it would jeopardise the very quality – the heightened aestheticism – that, for him, positively differentiated West Africa from his characterisation of the more prosaic West.

⁶¹⁸ David Peters Corbett's summation of modernism's anxiety over the effects of modernity serves well. He has argued that 'the intensification of the pace of change and the transformative capacities of modernity gave rise to a growing realisation of modernity's dual potential, which placed the Enlightenment inheritance of positive belief in progress in conjunction with another, and darker, acknowledgement of the negative consequences of that trajectory'. Corbett, 1997: 13.

When Clive Gardiner's *Making Electrical Machinery* (Fig. 58), one of a set of three posters displayed by the EMB in 1928 that depicted industrial scenes in Britain, is contrasted with Spencer Pryse's *Sorting Manganese Ore* (Fig. 59), an image of modern industry that featured in the Gold Coast poster set, the lack of visual integration between signifiers of indigenouness and modernity that occurs in the latter's West Africa images is particularly noticeable.⁶¹⁹ In Gardiner's poster the depicted factory workers, through pictorial modes of colour and design, are subsumed into the enveloping industrialised environment, causing them to be seen as an integral element of the mechanical process that features in the scene. The result is a visualisation of modern industrial life in which workers' individuality is stripped away to be replaced by a deadening uniformity that renders them anonymous and less visible, perceived as much a replaceable component of the industrial environment as the parts that comprise the omnipotent machinery.⁶²⁰

⁶¹⁹ The evolution of the posters Clive Gardiner (1891 – 1960) produced for the EMB can be traced through the minutes of the Poster Section sub-committee. On 17 February 1927 they record that Gardiner was to be invited to the Board's headquarters to 'discuss the question of his undertaking the design of a poster'. On 29 September rough sketches submitted by Gardiner were rejected as unsuitable but he was invited to submit a further design. A suggestion by Frank Pick that Gardiner's blast furnace design should be accompanied by two further industrial pictures depicting a motor work shop and an electrical machinery workshop was approved at a meeting on 27 October, and on 15 December a fee of 280 guineas for the whole set was fixed. The poster section meeting of 5 January 1928 pencilled in May and June of that year for the display of Gardiner's posters. His finished designs were considered on 3 February and deemed satisfactory subject to slight modification, and it was agreed that the drawing of the electrical machinery workshop should be submitted to the General Electric Company for any comments they might wish to make. Finally, on 16 March the three designs were approved, and it was agreed that the wording under them should be *A Blast Furnace, Motor Manufacturing and Making Electrical Machinery* respectively. First Sub-Committee - Poster Section Minutes: 17 February, 29 September, 27 October, 15 December 1927, 5 January, 3 February, 16 March 1928, CO 760/26.

⁶²⁰ Stuart Hall's definition of modernity, as a condition in which 'everything is destined to be speeded up, dissolved, displaced, transformed, reshaped', serves in positioning *Making Electrical Machinery* within a framework of modernity. Hall, 1992: 15. Within a modernist discourse, Gardiner's reductive portrayal of factory workers could be read as an image critical of modern industrial life. Yet this was clearly not a message that the EMB wished to convey. Sir Philip Cunliffe-Lister, who served as President of the Board of Trade in Conservative governments in the 1920s, was categorical in his assertion that 'the solution of unemployment depends on finding and developing new markets for our industry'. There was, therefore, no motivation on the EMB's part to portray industrial life in a negative manner, and the caption surmounting Gardiner's posters, 'Empire Buying Makes Busy Factories', reinforces a positive conception of the industrial workplace as active and dynamic; qualities that Gardiner conveyed in his design. Gardiner's image fits within an imperialist ideology asserting progress and expansion: modern concepts ideally suited to his modern representation. The objective in linking this modern visualisation of industrial Britain to empire was that it emphasised changing circumstances, a re-envisioning of empire, deemed essential by the EMB if Britain was to believe 'in her ability to serve the world under the new order as she had served it under the old'. Constantine, 1986a: 196, cites Lloyd-Greame's *The Imperial Economic Conference*, Unionist Workers' Handbook, National Unionist Association (Westminster, 1924) p. 6, as the source of Cunliffe-Lister's quote. Taylor, 1981: 104, quotes Stephen Tallents in *The Projection of England* (London, 1932) 37.

A different narrative unfolds in Spencer Pryse's *Sorting Manganese Ore*.⁶²¹ Looming, saturnine, in the background of the picture we see the machinery involved in the mineral extraction process, whilst advancing towards the foreground are observed two lines of men standing either side of a conveyor belt carrying the crushed ore.⁶²² Through their subtly differentiated dress the figures retain a degree of individuality, but their clothing's pastel tones also helps separate them *en masse* from the predominantly steel-grey coloured environment in which they are shown working. Although, in comparison to the spectacular coloured attire worn by the women seen in *Lakoja Beach* the mine workers' clothing is more muted in colour, Spencer Pryse again uses the dress of native West Africans, specifically in this instance the striped shirt worn by the figure in the foreground, to aestheticise indigenosity. His projection of West Africa's heightened aestheticism is once more given pictorial prominence, and is elevated above the drabness of imported western modernity that dwells in the background of the picture. So, despite the near uniformity of the mine workers' body shape which, conceptually, emulates the repeated posture of Gardiner's more robotic figures, thereby perhaps impelling us to perceive the miners as similarly absorbed into the industrial process in which they partake, Spencer Pryse's figures can, through the pictorial mode of colour, be read as retaining a metaphorical distance from their labour and their environment. Unlike Gardiner's imagining of factory workers, the miners, though equally physically dominated by their oppressive surroundings, are not subsumed into them, and although undeniably part of an industrial environment they remain, in contrast to Gardiner's sacrificed individuals, beyond modernity's grasp.

We can perhaps view the mine workers as symbolising the 'essence' of West Africa, as embodying 'the soul of a people' for which Spencer Pryse searched, and believed he found, in pictures such as *The Madonna of Sheba* and *Lakoja Beach* which went beyond the immediate needs of the EMB. Paradoxically, an image selected by the Board can equally be read in essentialist terms as foregrounding, albeit on a lesser scale than in other of the more

⁶²¹ Spencer Pryse exhibited two watercolours related to the mining of manganese in the Gold Coast. In his commentary on *The African Manganese Company's Mining Camp at Nsuta*, he detailed how at the beginning of the First World War 'a mountain composed of almost pure manganese ore' was discovered at Nsuta. This discovery, he continued, 'was of immense importance to the Empire, manganese being essential to the steel industry, and the then known sources of supply being in enemy hands'. Spencer Pryse, 1930: 15. Edith Cheesman, too, had produced a painting of the manganese mining industry during her time in Ghana in 1923 and 1924. Guggisberg, in his description of the picture, highlighted its visual qualities – 'the rich red colouring of the face of the manganese ore', 'the deep browns and greys of the piles of ore on the right' – which he believed lent 'an artistic touch to the busy scene'. *Gold Coast News*, 31 January 1924: 2.

⁶²² The scene conveyed in the watercolour, *The Loading Floor at Nsuta*, was described by Spencer Pryse as showing 'Impurities [being] picked out as the Manganese, on a moving belt, passes under the scrutiny of a long line of boys'. Spencer Pryse, 1930: 15. This image would seem to have directly informed the EMB poster.

obviously picturesque watercolours, the richly aesthetic West Africa that Spencer Pryse felt compelled to convey.

4.7 Imagining Cocoa Production

I conclude this chapter with a further comparative study of two images produced for the EMB. Both convey scenes of Ghana's cocoa industry, one the work of Gerald Spencer Pryse, the other that of Edward McKnight Kauffer (1890 – 1954). It is a comparison that permits an exploration of how artists with vastly differing visual practices - Spencer Pryse's work is rooted within a naturalistic tradition; Kauffer's firmly belongs in a modernist camp - imagined a specific feature of colonial life in the late 1920s; the harvesting of cocoa, one of the empire's numerous raw products.

Naturalistic work of the type produced by Spencer Pryse in his imagining of empire is more than capable of expressing themes and ideas that sit readily within a discourse of modernism which, in some instances, valorised the othered life of colonised indigenous populations in its criticism of aspects of western modernity. Formal modernism is, of course, equally capable of doing this, or it may also be perceived, in the same way that more naturalistic work can, as celebrating the positive impact of modernity, as Clive Gardiner's images were presumably thought to do when approved by the EMB's Poster Section sub-committee. Gardiner's visualisation of industrial life which draws upon compositional devices previously utilised by Futurist and Vorticist artists, such as C.R.W. Nevinson and Wyndham Lewis, who a generation earlier had constituted, alongside others, British art's avant-garde, is formally amongst the most modern imagery commissioned by the Board.⁶²³ Gardiner was never part of that avant-garde, Kauffer, however, was, and because of his close links to progressive artists and practice, it is the modernist image of the cocoa industry that he produced for the EMB which I am taking as exemplary, and on which I am drawing in this comparative analysis.⁶²⁴

⁶²³ The slant of the figures and the diagonal cubist faceting that pulses across the picture plane of *Making Electrical Machinery* evokes compositional elements utilised by Nevinson in *Returning to the Trenches*, (1914 – 15, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Oil), and the exaggerated angular construction and simplified, faceted realisation of Gardiner's factory workers echoes Wyndham Lewis's portrayal of soldiers in *A Battery Shelled* (1918 – 19, Imperial War Museum, London, Oil). Gardiner's reiteration, over a decade later, of a type of formal modernism that had once constituted avant-garde practice, places it within the realm of work criticised by the writer R. H. Wilenski in 1927. He contrasted the avant-garde modernism produced at the time of the First World War with what he labelled the 'popular cubism' of the post-war period, being especially critical of those artists in the 1920s who adapted cubist forms for commercial usage. See Wilenski, 1927: 147.

⁶²⁴ Kauffer, American by birth, briefly studied in Paris at the Académie Moderne in 1913 before moving to England on the outbreak of the First World War where he exhibited with, and became a member of, the progressive London Group in 1916, also later joining the Cumberland Market Group which included Robert

Frank Pick, chairman of the Poster Section sub-committee that commissioned Kauffer, has been described by Michael Saler as 'the most significant member of the avant-garde network of medieval modernists', a group, he argues, who more so than Bloomsbury 'ought to be considered as England's foremost avant-garde in the interwar period'.⁶²⁵ This, he continues, was because of their belief 'that modern art was compatible with modern commerce', and due to their attempt to integrate two often diametrically perceived pursuits.⁶²⁶ Through his position as head of London Underground's Traffic, Development and Advertising Department, Pick was already familiar with Kauffer's work - he had commissioned posters for the Underground from him as early as 1915 - and was an admirer of his modernist designs; designs that fitted readily within Pick's broader objective to 'restore a social function to [modern] art' by linking it directly to modern life.⁶²⁷ Praising, in 1923, the abstract imagery of his posters, Pick defined Kauffer's practice in the following terms: 'He asks himself what is the idea to be conveyed rather than what is the object to be illustrated ... [and] with how little, boldly and bravely executed, will the public be satisfied and convinced'.⁶²⁸ Kauffer's reductive designs were contemporarily praised in a number of quarters. *Arts and Decoration* in November 1921 considered his 'non-representative and geometrical pattern designs' struck 'a hammer blow' in the effects they achieved, and that his posters rather than possessing an 'imitative slavery' had 'an intense realism ... more real than a photograph because of [their] power of suggestion'.⁶²⁹

Thus by 1926, when Kauffer was approached by the EMB, it would have been abundantly clear to those inclined to commission him as to the type of work that could be

Bevan amongst its members. He was one of the original members of Wyndham Lewis' Group X and exhibited work in their only exhibition at the Mansard Gallery in March 1920. The modernity of his practice was commented on by Roger Fry in a letter dated 5 April 1918. Fry noted 'the influence of Cubism' upon Kauffer's work which had amounted to 'an increasing definition and delimitation of planes, and a slightly more abstract planning of the design' though, he acknowledged, Kauffer had 'not allowed' this 'to interfere with his direct sensibility to the forms and colours of natural objects'. See Webb and Skipworth, 2007: 7, 15, 18; Haworth-Booth, 2005: 21; Sutton, 1972: 426 - 27.

⁶²⁵ Saler, 1999: ix. viii.

⁶²⁶ Ibid. Saler defines medieval modernism as 'a specific discourse in which ideas about aesthetics, society, science and religion were interfused, a conceptual framework about art and its relations to life espoused by an informal network of individuals at a discrete historical moment'. Ibid: viii. Contemporary commentators also recognised Pick's pivotal role in introducing modernist design to the general public through a medium aimed at promoting everyday commercial activity. Anthony Blunt, writing in the *Spectator* on 5 April 1935, praised Pick for commissioning posters from designers who deployed 'the methods of the more advanced schools' which have 'familiarised a very wide public with the conventions of modern painting and has greatly increased the chances which modern painters, who are not involved in publicity, have of being appreciated and widely enjoyed'. Cited in Haworth-Booth, 2005: 61.

⁶²⁷ Kauffer continued to design posters for London Underground throughout the 1920s. See Saler, 1999: 9, 43 and Webb and Skipworth, 2007: 18.

⁶²⁸ Frank Pick on Kauffer's 'DIA Lecture', 29 November 1923. London Transport Group Archive 100 853/1 cited in Saler, 1999: 99.

⁶²⁹ Cited in Haworth-Booth, 2005: 30.

expected, yet, as with many of the artists employed by the Board, he had to submit his designs to the intense scrutiny of the Poster Section sub-committee before they were deemed acceptable. We can trace the path he had to negotiate by recourse to the minutes of the Poster Section meetings. On 11 November 1926 Kauffer is recorded as being interviewed regarding two designs that showed the harvesting of bananas and cocoa. The minutes detail that he agreed to modify the 'Bananas' design in accordance with suggestions made by the sub-committee, and that a decision was taken that his design for cocoa harvesting should not be used, instead a design depicting the growing of grapefruit in the West Indies was suggested as subject-matter for the other poster.⁶³⁰ However, at a meeting on 1 December the sub-committee agreed to take Colonel Levey, the Gold Coast Trade Commissioner, to see Kauffer's sketch for cocoa in West Africa, suggesting that they retained an interest in his design.⁶³¹ It was, finally, at a meeting on 2 June 1927 that Kauffer's completed set of posters was accepted. They included a design depicting the harvesting of bananas, another, based upon a suggestion from Pick, that showed beneath a slogan 'Jungles Today are Gold Mines Tomorrow' two black figures posed either side of a table revealing trade statistics, and a further image - one that now presumably met with the approval of Levey - *Cocoa* (Fig. 60).⁶³²

Cocoa depicts a jungle environment that is realised in a formally modernist manner as a mass of flat overlapping leaf-like shapes that pattern the picture surface. It is a design in which a sense of illusionistic three-dimensional space is largely denied: the viewer relying largely on the juxtaposition of stronger and weaker tones to evoke a sensation of depth within the image.⁶³³ It was, in parts, however, a design that Kauffer had used previously to convey an utterly different geographical context. In 1925 London Underground published as a triptych three posters on the theme of 'Whitsuntide' and 'Summertime'.⁶³⁴ *Whitsuntide in the Country* (Fig. 61) features at each side of its design a small clump of trees. These sprout a similarly flat pictorial depiction of dense foliage that is shown rising to the top of the frame to form a central arch which reveals a distant view of a stylised, but idyllic, English village scene replete with red-roofed buildings, an arched bridge that crosses a river and a bordering lake and small copse of trees. The foliage in both its colouration, primarily a range of four green tones, and in

⁶³⁰ First Sub-Committee - Poster Section Minutes: 11 November 1926, CO 760/26.

⁶³¹ *Ibid*, 1 December 1926.

⁶³² *Ibid*, 17 February, 2 June 1927. Kauffer was paid £300 for his poster set which were displayed on EMB hoardings in September and October 1927. *Ibid*, 6 January, 29 September 1927.

⁶³³ Kauffer's contraction of space was attuned to formal modernist painting practice which increasingly emphasised the flatness of the picture plane. An extensive literature exists detailing progressive painting practice of the early twentieth century, but Roger Fry's 'An Essay in Aesthetics' (1909), reprinted in Fry, 1981, provides an account by a contemporary critic of how progressive painting recognised the inherent flatness of the medium.

⁶³⁴ See Haworth-Booth, 2005: 39.

elements of its design, notably the corrugated effect Kauffer uses in his suggestion of leaves, finds an echo in his later rendering of foliage in the West African jungle scene. We see in these two images evidence of the quality in Kauffer's work that was praised by Pick, namely, his prioritisation of the idea to be conveyed rather than the object to be illustrated. So, following Pick's logic, in *Whitsuntide in the Country* it is not a naturalistic rendering of English woodland that is deemed important, just as in *Cocoa* it is not a precise realisation of a West African jungle, but rather it is the idea or the essence of both that is considered more vital. In *Cocoa* Kauffer conveys, with the EMB's and the Gold Coast Trade Commissioner's approval, the idea rather than the reality of a tropical African jungle. This type of representation fits well within a discourse of pictorial modernism, but seems to go against the grain of one of the EMB's overriding objectives, namely, the technically accurate representation of all aspects of empire.

Bearing this objective in mind, Kauffer's poster becomes even more problematic when we consider his representation of the Ghanaian cocoa harvesters. Centrally positioned within a mass of dense enveloping foliage, we see three figures engaged in processing the cocoa pods shown piled-up around them. In the left foreground of the poster, in comparison to the generally more abstracted rendering of the jungle foliage, is shown a more naturalistically drawn tree bearing cocoa pods, suggesting that the representation of this crop – effectively the image's *raison d'être*, at least as far as the EMB was concerned - was of such importance that its realisation could not be subjugated within *Cocoa*'s more abstract design. The same cannot be said for the manner in which the three figures are realised. Kauffer's depiction of the Ghanaian harvesters, if not entirely abstracted – they are primarily rendered in a naturalistic manner – is, to say the least, reductive. Dress, for example, is reduced to a simple pink skirt-like garment worn by all three of the figures, yet only the standing figure can be unequivocally read as female; the gender of the two seated individuals is less clear. However, through the signifier of dress the figures are defined, regardless of gender, as one and the same. Additionally, their status is diminished by the location that is evoked. Though shown harvesting a crop, thereby characterising them as part of the modern global economic system, placed within an environment that pictorially is primarily rendered as chaotic and unordered, the Ghanaian cocoa harvesters themselves are closely associated with a primitive condition. And, most significantly, physiognomy suffers the same reductive process. The face of the seated figure seen in half-profile, is primarily defined by Kauffer's realisation of pink fleshy

lips; a hackneyed and stereotypical example of an 'essential characteristic' seen 'as fixed by nature'.⁶³⁵

When contrasted with a near contemporary photograph of workers on a cocoa plantation, published as part of an article reviewing the EMB's report on cocoa production in July 1930, it seems surprising that Kauffer's design was deemed technically accurate by the Poster Section sub-committee members and the colonial expert on whom they called (Fig. 62).⁶³⁶ Although the vegetation is characterised by the same lack of order in the photograph and in *Cocoa*, there is a dramatic divergence between the two representations of the harvesters. The clothed, and therefore 'civilised', figures seen in the photograph are entirely at odds with Kauffer's primitivist depiction of semi-naked individuals, though, paradoxically, as far as early twentieth-century formal modernism is concerned, Kauffer's primitivist imagery would perhaps not have seemed at all out of place and may only have reinforced the poster's modernist credentials.⁶³⁷ Surprise at the acceptability of his image is also perhaps lessened when we reconsider the caption that overrode the design; 'Jungles Today are Gold Mines Tomorrow' - a slogan that expresses a narrative of development and modernisation expected to accrue considerable economic benefits. The force of this narrative may further explain the suitability of Kauffer's design for the EMB, if only in helping Pick realise one of the aims he sought to achieve - the marriage of modern art to the expression of modern commercial life.⁶³⁸ The EMB's objective to reposition empire as a progressive and modern trading entity, here, draws directly upon an advanced visual practice to convey this idea: modern art is deployed to express the concept of a modern empire. The undeserving casualties of a 'before and after' notion of empire, projected as being transformed by imperial intervention, are though the cocoa harvesters, cast, anachronistically, - in terms of the reality of their existence - as primitive in Kauffer's modernist design; a design which in truth fails to adequately represent the modernity of indigenous West African life in the 1920s.

⁶³⁵ Ramamurthy, 2003: 6. Edward Said has argued that Orientalism is 'a library or archive of information' on which Europeans draw when constructing the Oriental. It provides a vocabulary that emphasises the distinction between western superiority and Oriental inferiority resulting in the construction of palimpsests that maintain this position. Kauffer's image conforms to Said's analysis, in its stereotypical portrayal of figures reduced to a limited number of characteristics that confirms their 'otherness'. Said, 2003: 41, 42.

⁶³⁶ This photograph was reproduced as part of an article entitled 'The Story of the Cocoa Bean' published in *The C.W.M.: The Journal of Rowntree's Cocoa Works York* in July 1930.

⁶³⁷ We need only think of Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger*, 1907, Museum of Modern Art, New York, Oil, 90 x 92 in.

⁶³⁸ It would seem that for other contemporary commentators this unification was not so evident. In December 1926 *Advertiser's Weekly* described *Cocoa* as an 'outstanding design' that drew on 'an art deco style to represent exotic lands'. Although, by dint of its reference to a contemporary visual style, the journal recognised the formal modernity of the image, empire remained, for it, fixed as traditionally exotic, rather than equally being envisaged as an entity undergoing modernisation. *Advertiser's Weekly*, 10 December 1926, cited in Haworth-Booth, 2005: 49.

In contrast to Kauffer's modernist, though far from modern, representation of cocoa harvesting, Spencer Pryse's *Gathering Cocoa Pods* (Fig. 63) provides a more naturalistic visualisation of the same subject. Like Kauffer's image, the latter design also reveals evidence of imagery drawn from other sources. *Women at the Well* (Fig. 64) was one of the one hundred watercolours exhibited by Spencer Pryse on his return from West Africa, and was listed as one of seventy seven pictures of Nigeria in the exhibition catalogue that accompanied the showing of the paintings at the Alpine Gallery in London in March 1929.⁶³⁹ Two elements within the picture, the depiction of a desert landscape and the headdresses worn by the women, indicate the painting represents a scene in geographically arid, and religiously Islamic, northern Nigeria, a part of the country little visited by westerners.⁶⁴⁰ Few members of the audience seeing Spencer Pryse's picture in London in 1929 would, therefore, have been familiar with the scene portrayed in *Women at the Well*, and few would have been in a position to question its veracity. However, his depiction of semi-naked women, especially in an Islamic region of the country, fails, just as it does in *Lakoja Beach*, to ring entirely true. Rather than an eye-witness account of a particular incident, *Women at the Well* should perhaps be viewed more as a construction, one that, in keeping with many of Spencer Pryse's watercolours, projects West Africa as a location of richly aesthetic and exotic imagery.

Bearing in mind Spencer Pryse's inclination to construct and project West Africa on his terms, it is worth paying close attention to the composition of *Gathering Cocoa Pods*. Two of the women seen in the poster – the young woman holding a basket of cocoa pods positioned at the left of the frame, and a woman carrying a basket on her head seen walking away from the viewer towards the right of the picture – appear to have been 'lifted' from *Women at the Well*. This impels us to view the EMB poster equally as a constructed and arguably artificial image. His appropriation of these figures is, in itself, not unsurprising; Spencer Pryse, in fairness to him, visited West Africa to specifically make preparatory sketches for the posters

⁶³⁹ See *Exhibition of Pictures painted in the Colonies of Nigeria and the Gold Coast (British West Africa)* by G. Spencer Pryse, exh. cat. (London, 1929).

⁶⁴⁰ Spencer Pryse produced a number of paintings that would have depicted, at least to western eyes, the exotic life of northern Nigeria. He detailed in his commentary on the watercolour *Donkeys on the Sokoto Road* that goods were transported between the northern Nigerian towns of Kano, Sokoto, Katsina, mainly by pack mules and donkeys with camels being used for more extensive journeys. An even more exoticising commentary accompanied the watercolour *A Touareg Camel Man*: 'The lower part of the face is always veiled, food being slipped under the veil. With their Caravans these Touaregs cross vast desert spaces. Soldiers, by choice, they leave menial work to slaves. Fearless and armed with great cross-hilted swords, they are the terror of less virile races'. Spencer Pryse, 1930: 17, 21. Spencer Pryse appears to have taken pride in territorially breaking new ground during his tour of the region, gently boasting in an interview he gave to *West Africa* in March 1928, that in Kano, one of the locations he painted whilst in northern Nigeria, 'the average of visitors ran out to something under three a year'. 'The Artist and his Experiences in West Africa', *West Africa*, 10 March 1928. Wyndham Lewis, in *Filibusters in Barbary*, similarly outlined a desire to venture down less-travelled routes so as to evade 'the stupefying squalor of Anglo-American tourism ... casting its Baedekered light'. Lewis, 1983: 24.

and was, therefore, likely to draw upon this visual material in his production of the finished works. What is more the issue is the extent of that appropriation. Take the young semi-naked woman seen in the foreground of *Women at the Well*, who, slightly remodelled – her head is more declined in the poster – reappears in *Gathering Cocoa Pods*. An individual supposedly representative of an Islamic woman from the arid north of Nigeria is now cast as a plantation worker in non-Islamic, tropical, southern Ghana. It is not that Spencer Pryse re-states in the poster the body shape of the northern Nigerian woman that is the issue here – the use of models in the development of compositions, whether drawn from life or derived from graphic sources, is a much-practiced element of western art - but more that she is depicted in near identical dress, save, perhaps for the concession to British public decency, that in the poster she appears fully-clothed. Her dress, a vividly striped creation is, like the dress worn by the cocoa harvesters depicted in Kauffer's design, entirely at odds, both in terms of style and pattern, with the clothes of the figures seen in the photograph of the cocoa plantation (Fig. 62). Dress, as in Kauffer's design, where it played its part in a primitivist construction of West Africa awaiting the benefit of imperial intervention, is again used as a signifier. Now, though, in an imagining of a highly aestheticised and exotic region shown, contradictorily - though equally beneficially as far as Britain's view of itself as an enlightened colonial power was concerned - as continuing undisturbed despite that intervention. Through differing formal means both Kauffer and Spencer Pryse convey an artificial image of the Ghanaian cocoa industry; images deemed by the EMB as suitable in their projection of colonial West Africa as an intrinsic element of the modern trading empire, yet images which, nevertheless, also reaffirm widely-held and long-standing perceptions of the region as primitive and exotic.

In addition to the images of empire disseminated by the EMB in the late twenties and early thirties, British business at this time similarly employed in their advertising material imagery that drew upon the same subject-matter. Consequently, in their daily lives the public were confronted with a range of empire images that were employed for differing purposes; be they the posters of the EMB, used, ambitiously, to rebrand empire as a peaceable entity more associated with trade than conquest, or the designs produced on behalf of individual manufacturers, who less portentously utilised an image of empire to simply sell a particular brand of tea or cocoa.

As a large importer of cocoa from both West Africa and the West Indies, the chocolate manufacturer Rowntree had close trading ties to empire; a link which it projected in its advertising material. Pictured on the cover of the March 1922 issue of the company's in-house

magazine, *The C.W.M.: The Journal of Rowntree's Cocoa Works York*, was an image that Rowntree had used to advertise its cocoa (Fig 65). The advertisement features a young black boy, shown carrying on his shoulder a pole which has attached to one end a cocoa pod and to the other, causing the pole to bend, a large tin of cocoa that would have been familiar to British consumers. The boy occupies a clear patch of ground and behind him to the left rises dense foliage, suggestive of a cocoa plantation, whilst to the right what appears to be a stretch of beach washed by gently breaking waves – an image that evokes the tropical idyll from which the cocoa originates. The youngster's smiling face and lack of shoes additionally helps to evoke the paradisiacal environment. Perhaps, more significantly, it deflects the viewer's attention from the fact that it is a child who is shown engaged in what seems to be quite heavy labour. As Anandi Ramamurthy has argued, many late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century product labels depicted scenes of black labour, and the representation of a 'black child working was not seen as a symbol of exploitation, since it appeared to be their "natural" place'.⁶⁴¹ The Rowntree advertisement can thus be seen as part of a general mode of representation.

Alongside their cocoa and chocolate products Rowntree produced other types of confectionery. Their advertising for one such item, 'Beechnut' chewing gum, is illustrative both of the influence the EMB exerted over the advertising of empire produce, but equally its impotence in altering the type of stereotyped representation of peripheral empire populations that characterised the above advertisement. As I have argued, though, in respect of the Kauffer and Spencer Pryse images of cocoa harvesting, the EMB was equally culpable in this regard. Between 1929 and July 1932 'Beechnut' was promoted through a series of press adverts as synonymous with an active outdoor life, using the recurring slogan 'Nice to chew and healthy to!' (Fig. 66).⁶⁴² Then from August to October 1932 this advertising was replaced by a campaign emphasising 'Beechnut's' country of origin through the slogan 'And it's British!' (Fig. 67).⁶⁴³ Rowntree's highlighting of the 'Britishness' of their product may be seen as an indication of the company responding to earlier EMB advertising slogans, such as 'Buy Empire Goods from Home and Overseas' and 'The Home Countries First', that the Board had used to promote the idea that British products were as much a part of empire trade as those

⁶⁴¹ Ramamurthy, 2003: 19.

⁶⁴² The campaign was run by the advertising company H.K. McCann. See Rowntree Archive. Guard Book R1, 278.

⁶⁴³ The new campaign was run by the firm of J. Walter Thompson. See Rowntree Archive. Guard Book R2, 279.

originating from the overseas colonies and dominions.⁶⁴⁴ However, the July to December 1933 'Beechnut' campaign, devised by the advertising firm J. Walter Thompson, showed Rowntree marketing the product through a conception of empire that ran contrary to the EMB's attempt to present it as something modern and relevant to the times.⁶⁴⁵ In a series of strip cartoons Rowntree related the African adventures of the eponymous 'Captain Beech and his pal Nutts' (Fig. 68). In a similar vein to Kauffer's representation, the cartoon conceptualised Africa as an untamed jungle, but whilst Kauffer's jungle revealed, through its depiction of cocoa harvesting, the potential for economic and attendant social development, for the art designer at J. Walter Thompson the jungle remained more an adventure playground in which an imperial hero triumphed over a primitive terrain and population.

Such a representation was though far from untypical. Films in the 1930s, such as *Rhodes of Africa* (1936) and *King Solomon's Mines* (1937), endorsed the myth of empire as a site of adventure and excitement,⁶⁴⁶ whilst children's fictional heroes, such as the 'The Black Sapper', who appeared in the D.C. Thomson publication *Rover* in 1929, had numerous adventures fighting 'savages' in Africa.⁶⁴⁷ The perpetuation of aggressive and xenophobic representations in the many visual formats in circulation at this time raises doubts as to the effectiveness of the EMB's imagery in altering the public perception of empire. Well intentioned though their efforts may have been in shifting an outdated perception of empire - though of course they were primarily motivated in promoting the economic interests of Great Britain plc - the EMB's voice was but one clamouring to be heard. The continuing commercial success of adventure films and stories set within the colonial empire meant that for many members of the British public empire remained, as Gerald Spencer Pryse felt compelled to convey it, romantic and exotic, and, despite the best efforts of the EMB to link it to domestic British life, something fundamentally different to anything that existed at home.⁶⁴⁸

⁶⁴⁴ 'Buy Empire Goods from Home and Overseas' and 'The Home Countries First' was used by the EMB in 1929 and 1932, respectively. See Constantine 1986b – Plates 43 and 57. Constantine offers further evidence of the response of commercial producers to the EMB's 'British' campaign, citing the advertising slogan 'No Foreign Wheat in Allinson Flour and Bread'. Constantine, 1986a: 206.

⁶⁴⁵ J. Walter Thompson Advertising. *Beechnut* campaign, July – December 1933. Rowntree Archive. Guard Book R3, 280.

⁶⁴⁶ Jeffrey Richards argues that these films conformed in some respects to the EMB's portrayal of empire by replacing a jingoistic representation with one of imperial development, but not surprisingly it was the romance and adventure of that development that was highlighted. See Richards, 1986: 146.

⁶⁴⁷ Paris, 2000: 164.

⁶⁴⁸ Rosemary George has argued with regard to the overseas empire that 'ultimately...distance in itself becomes difference'. George, 2002: 3.

5. Conclusion

This thesis adds to the recent art-historical literature that has confronted the 'silence' which has surrounded British art's engagement with empire. More specifically, it details that engagement at the precise historical moment of the 1920s. This is not to say that, up to now, a comprehensive silence has reigned over the role performed by British art in the projection of empire during this decade, but, generally, it has been neglected by art historians working in this field. This is somewhat surprising because the twenties constitute important years in the history of British art and empire. A significant change in how artists imagined empire – albeit, only a few of them – is apparent when work from the 1920s is compared with that from preceding decades. My intention in this thesis has been to note that changed response, the variety of forms it took, and offer an explanation as to why it occurred, but also to explain why only a few works reveal evidence of artists responding to the wider socio/economic conception of empire then in circulation.

Stephen Constantine's groundbreaking study of one episode in British art's engagement with empire in the twenties - the posters produced by a number of artists for the EMB – is a rare example of relevant scholarship. Constantine, a scholar in modern British history, rather than an art historian, delivered a detached, though still detailed, survey of this work in 1986. More recent scholarship on the EMB's posters (particularly that of Anandi Ramamurthy and Mike Cronin) has, through its concentration on specific images, added greater nuance to our understanding of how artists envisaged empire at this time. I have, likewise, in my study of Gerald Spencer Pryse's work for the EMB, adopted an equally postmodern focus to produce a smaller, though intensive, narrative that elucidates the complex response of this particular British artist to empire in the late 1920s.

Kwame Anthony Appiah felicitously describes the postmodern as a 'semantic island', around which 'narratives, unlike metanarratives, are allowed to proliferate' in the surrounding seas.⁶⁴⁹ This thesis introduces three more of these, smaller, less assertive, 'narratives' to Appiah's analogical ocean. Their purpose, however, is not to undermine the validity of a particularly relevant metanarrative, namely Edward Said's formulation of Orientalism - neatly defined as 'the variety of textual forms in which the West produced and codified knowledge about non-metropolitan areas and cultures, especially those under colonial control' - with which I maintain faith.⁶⁵⁰ Rather, they serve - utilising Patrick Williams' and Laura Chrisman's

⁶⁴⁹ Appiah, 1997: 423.

⁶⁵⁰ Williams and Chrisman, 1993: 5.

definition of an aspect of post-colonial theory - as 'critiques of the process of production of knowledge about the Other'.⁶⁵¹

Aside from my study of Spencer Pryse's work, two further narratives are included in this thesis. In each I have focused upon a small number of artists who exhibited in Britain at distinct moments during the twenties. I have evaluated the type of knowledge they produced about the colonial empire, examined the motivation for its creation and reviewed the circumstances that led to its production. By eschewing a surveying view for a limited number of focused studies, I have, following Clifford Geertz's dictum, 'attended ... with some exactness' to the behaviour that realised what, I have argued, were, historically, key evocations of empire. Examination of this behaviour has extended beyond that of the individual artist to incorporate analysis of the influential role performed at different times by the art market and by patrons which, I maintain, equally determined how empire was visualised at certain moments in the twenties.

I have further argued, with regard to the art market and the patron, that due importance should be attached to the significance of prosaic, but fundamental, economic motives when considering the manner in which British artists visualised empire in the twenties. In my discussion, in chapter two, of the speculative work offered for sale in commercial galleries, I maintain that the economic power of a well-established market, which demanded a relatively narrow picturesque or exotic evocation of a static, othered empire, may have caused many independent artist-travellers to tailor their production to comply with the taste of that market. Moving beyond its confines would, potentially, have carried an economic risk, and could have jeopardised the livelihood of the jobbing artists who comprise this study, hence, I argue, there was, perhaps, little motivation for them to do so. A base economic motive, as much as the images themselves, was, therefore, arguably, part of the process that ultimately resulted in the production of knowledge of the colonial other in the 1920s.

Despite the market's narrow parameters, empire was, nevertheless, re-imagined, in the early twenties, in some speculative work. Its exotic and static otherness was disrupted by the occasional representation, directly or obliquely, of the imperial presence - with all its attendant modernity - in the colonial empire. I have argued, however, that this initial registering of a modern colonial empire was tentative, as was the response to such work by critics and commentators. The conception of an exotic othered empire, as far as visual art was concerned, was so powerful – it had been cemented into the art that imagined empire over the

⁶⁵¹ Ibid: 8.

course of the three preceding decades – that producers of an alternative, more modern, evocation, and those who commented upon it, had to carefully negotiate its acceptance. Accordingly, as I have demonstrated, the initial introduction of images of a modern empire was partial, and they were assimilated into exhibitions alongside more typical representations of the picturesque empire. Commentators responding to this new visualisation of empire remained within safe theoretical territory when evaluating it. For example, in the view of P.G. Konody, Alfonso Toft's registering of colonial modernity, in his oil paintings of Newfoundland paper mills, did not detract from the more established conception of the colonial empire as the location of the sublime.

In government commissioned work, notably the pictures Edith Cheesman produced for the Gold Coast authorities, empire's modernity was registered more explicitly, and the reception accorded it was less ambiguous. The modernity Cheesman depicted in the Gold Coast was seen by imperialists as testifying to the effectiveness of Britain's governance of the colony and her work was praised, by them, for conveying this. I also maintain that, once more, an economic factor contributed to the production of a particular view of empire. It was, I contend, the economic might of government patronage that to a large degree determined the re-imagining of a modernising empire. A female artist was commissioned to convey empire as a unified, progressive trading commonwealth: a conception that served her paymasters' political and economic requirements. Thus the projection of the Gold Coast's modernity at the 1924 Wembley Exhibition was part of a strategy to encourage investment in and trade with the colony. Again, an economic motivation played a role in the production of knowledge of the othered sites and people of the colonial empire at a specific historical moment, though now it was empire as the site of modernity, rather than exoticism, which was being prioritised.

However, as I argue throughout this thesis, the dichotomy between the exotic/modern empire was far from stable. Certain pictures dating from the twenties cannot be neatly bracketed within either of these alternative conceptions. Indeed, one factor that makes these works so interesting is that in them the dividing lines between the two are often breached. The exotic, static empire is shown inhabiting the same picture space as its modern projection - particularly evident in Spencer Pryse's work - whilst deliberate expressions of the more prosaic modern empire retain on occasions an exotic lustre – Cheesman's depiction of the trade school at Kibbi, a case in point. Thus although parameters were well established, as far as market taste was concerned, and well defined, in the case of commissioned work, they were not impermeable. It was seldom a simple case, of either/or. Many of the pictures discussed in this thesis are more sophisticated and ambiguous than that.

The elision of exoticism and modernity within individual works that imagined empire has provided a rich source of discursive material. These pictures reveal the reluctance of artists, even when specifically commissioned to convey empire's prosaic modernity, to forsake an established art historical tradition which had determined that empire was the site of the picturesque or the exotic. It was, I have argued, a, perhaps, understandable response from practitioners whose training impels them to prioritise the aesthetic over the mundane. Certainly, for Gerald Spencer Pryse, it was West Africa's heightened indigenous aesthetic, rather than its imported western modernity, that captivated him. If the lure of the picturesque or exotic, for artists, was understandable, it is more noteworthy that government patrons, demanding a projection of the modern empire, welcomed (Guggisberg, especially) the retention of empire's traditional picturesqueness in the paintings they commissioned. It helped, I have argued, situate these novel conceptions of empire within an established art-historical framework that served to validate their expression, and, through the process of recording, consequently validate the imperial policies being implemented in the colonial empire.

Although the retention of empire's exoticism, in images primarily expressing its modernity, could serve imperialist objectives, I have argued that it equally had the capacity to diminish the intended purpose of these pictures. An intrinsic element of the West's production of the otherness that defined the colonial empire, and negatively differentiated it from the metropole, could be utilised to critique the West. Spencer Pryse's frequent prioritisation of picturesqueness or exoticism, in images ostensibly conveying West Africa's modernity, performed, I argue, a critical function in highlighting, for the artist, not only the negative impact of western modernity upon the region, but also the detrimental loss of aesthetic characteristics in the increasingly uniform and mundane industrialised West.

To fully appreciate the significance of the changed manner in which empire was imagined by those artists who, in the twenties, produced government commissioned work, I have argued that we must venture beyond the images, themselves, and equally consider the reception accorded them. The audience for work that depicted empire undoubtedly evolved as the twenties progressed. The relatively small number of art buyers who attended the commercial London galleries in which artist-traveller's work was principally exhibited in the early twenties - an audience with a narrow and, arguably, outdated notion of how empire should be envisaged - was supplemented as the decade progressed by a larger, perhaps less dogmatic, audience who visited the imperial exhibitions and institutions partly established, to convey knowledge of the modernising trading empire, and in which the work of the artist-

traveller was now also shown. In these environments, the objectives attached to that art were undoubtedly different to those operating when it was shown in commercial galleries. Now art was being employed to promote specific contemporary imperial ideals and achievements, rather than to satisfy art historically rooted and primarily aesthetic, desires. This change in its purpose was contemporarily recognised and specialist journals, such as *Commercial Art*, concentrated upon art's effectiveness as publicity for a specific notion of empire over a more traditional evaluation of its aesthetic merit.

Although primarily devoted to a discussion of British art and empire in the twenties, I have, where germane to the argument, incorporated in this thesis, particularly in the context of West Africa, recognition of the art produced by the indigenous population under colonial rule. Visual evidence of graphic images, with the exception of Aina Onabolu's Empire Exhibition poster, has, for now, remained frustratingly out of reach, forcing me to rely solely upon textual information, garnered from a 1929 exhibition catalogue of West African students' work, to acquire an idea of its content. How western graphic art practice was appropriated by West African students, and which subjects they addressed, awaits more detailed research and analysis – the 1929 exhibition catalogue text offers only tantalising hints - especially as this was a time when art education was becoming part of the curriculum provided by the British colonial authorities. What can be deduced from the catalogue, however, is an inkling of how the students perceived their imperial rulers. A few of the picture titles refer to motor vehicle crashes, and, I have argued, that these images showing the failings of western technology can, perhaps, be read as mocking the West's supposed superiority. As much as British art was complicit in the construction of the colonial empire's otherness, so, equally, West African art students were capable of representing the West in terms of its otherness: an otherness which, like that produced in the West, could be as much informed by negative as positive characteristics.

The construction of the colonial subject in art that envisaged empire in the twenties constitutes the essence of this study. I have demonstrated that at specific times during the decade the colonial subject in art represented different conceptions of empire. But whether the subject personified the exoticism of the empire, or its burgeoning modernity, I argue that it must be approached as an artificial construction, and, in the case of the government commissioned work, equally as a rigorously controlled construction. So, as I have maintained, although many of the figures who populate Cheesman's images of the Gold Coast convey the modernity of the colonial subject, indeed, to a greater extent than is seen in any other British art that imagined empire in the twenties – her image of a Ghanaian nurse in western nursing

uniform, stands out in this respect - they more specifically represent an imperially defined version of modernity. Significant as the image of the nurse is, as important are the signifiers of modernity absent from Cheesman's pictures – individuals such as the independently wealthy Ghanaian traders Mr and Mrs E.K. Adisi, whose photograph appeared in *West Africa* in March 1923, who convey a notion of modernity in excess of, and beyond the control of, that sanctioned by the Gold Coast government in their commissioned images.

The Adisi's photograph, and, at the other extreme, the crudely racist black figures seen in the Rowntree advert from 1933, reveal the varied constructions of colonial otherness in circulation in the twenties and early thirties. In the light of this evidence, it appears, from today's perspective, an act of futility that a colonial government and a British government institution sought to produce a tightly controlled construction of the colonial subject at this time. The version of colonial modernity they produced in commissioned works of art was always likely to be vulnerable to other representations of colonial otherness, be they images that conveyed another side of contemporary colonial modernity or, conversely, crude, outdated, but still accepted, racist stereotypes.

The individuals who commissioned art to convey a particular notion of empire in the 1920s are, from today's historical distance, as much othered individuals as the indigenous colonial populations were, then, othered figures for the majority of the British public. Utilising historical evidence, as well as recent post-colonial theory, allows us, however, to formulate an understanding of their motivation for producing a particular, narrowly defined, construction of colonial modernity. Drawing upon the work of Olu Oguibe, I have argued that the 'official' representation of indigenous West Africans as having appropriated only a partial modernity in the 1920s - despite the different contemporary reality - meant that the necessity for continued imperial intervention in the region was not placed under immediate threat – the 'civilising mission' remained part of an ongoing process invulnerable to time constraints. From today's perspective this appears a cynical, self-serving operation on the part of the imperial authorities, but, as Appiah has argued, as 'authentic postmodernists, [we] now know that the first and last mistake is to judge the other on one's own terms'.⁶⁵² Imperialist administrators in the 1920s, such as Guggisberg, undoubtedly believed the policies they were implementing were progressive and that they were helping to transform, in a controlled manner, the lives of the indigenous population over whom they ruled.

⁶⁵² Appiah, 1997: 422.

Unlike many art buyers who continued to demand an exotic and static view of empire, an imperialist's view of empire in the twenties – based upon the evidence of Cheesman's pictures and the response they provoked – though still drawn to its exoticism replaced a notion of stasis with one of dynamism. The level of dynamic activity shown by Cheesman was, as I have argued, determined by the Gold Coast government. That was surely to be expected from administrators steeped in the belief that the rationalisation of the world from the time of the enlightenment had been determined by the West - it was the West who brought modernity and it was the West that determined the rate of its progress. To show in government commissioned paintings, West Africans who had acquired the trappings of modernity through their own initiative – as coastal traders such as the Adisi's had – would have compromised the message that the Gold Coast authorities wished to convey.

The photograph of the Adisi family is an important historical image. Appiah has argued 'that to understand our – our human – modernity we must first understand why the rationalisation of the world can no longer be seen as the tendency either of the West or of history'.⁶⁵³ An image such as this, when juxtaposed with Cheesman's contemporary paintings of the modern Gold Coast, subverts the narrative that her work was designed to relate. It helps critique some of the art that produced knowledge of the colonial other in the 1920s. Williams and Chrisman argue that part of postcolonial study's validity is its capacity to produce a 'better knowledge'; a knowledge they hope, can better respond to Said's central question: 'How can we know and respect the Other?'⁶⁵⁴ The photograph of the Adisi family provides us with an opportunity.

The art discussed in this thesis was produced by previously little-studied figures that do not typically feature in a roll call of British artists of the twenties. Without wishing to challenge existing histories of 1920s British academic or naturalistic art which have argued that to a large degree there was a pictorial disengagement with modernity at this time, I have, nevertheless, attempted through the process of historical recovery to broaden and supplement this argument by arguing that some British artists working in a naturalistic idiom, engaged with and, indeed, celebrated modernity in their imagining of empire in the 1920s. In analysing careers and pictures that imagined empire at different times during the decade, in bringing to light two important artists and in examining the contextual background behind the production of their work, I have added nuance to our picture of 1920s British art, and, in doing

⁶⁵³ Ibid: 428.

⁶⁵⁴ Williams and Chrisman, 1993: 8.

so, allowed previously unacknowledged artists to speak about the history of which they are so fundamental a part.

Appendix 1

Artist-Traveller Exhibitions staged at the Modern Gallery between 1900 and 1915

Year	Artist	Exhibition Title	Countries Depicted
1900	Mr. and Mrs. Albert Stevens	Souvenirs of the sunny south	Italy – Lakes Como and Maggiore France – Cannes Switzerland – Geneva, Chamonix, South Africa
1901 - February	Frank A. Stewart	Original drawings of the 'Natal campaign'	
1901 - June	Mr. and Mrs. Albert Stevens	Gardens at home and abroad': 'sunshine and shadow in foreign lands	Unknown
1902 - November	Miss Sophia Woods	Glimpses of many lands	Unknown
1903 – March	Percy French	Sunshine and shadow	France – Brittany Ireland England Egypt
1903 – June	Frederick F. Ogilvie	The submersion of Philae	
1904 – March to April	H. Forbes Witherby	Landscapes at home and abroad	Unknown

1904 - May	Miss Frances Rodd, Miss Gertrude R. Prideaux and Mr. John W.G. Bond	England, Italy and Sicily	Italy England
1904 – June to July	Lawrence G. Linnell and Elizabeth M. Chettle	Mountain snows and Spring	Switzerland - Davos, St Moritz, England
1904 - November	Miss Bertha Garnett	From Rye to the Riviera	France – Riviera England – Rye
1904 - November	Joseph W. Carey, Miss Jessie O. Douglas, Percy French, C. MacIver Grierson, Alexander Williams and G. Wakeman	Irish pictures and sketches	Ireland
1905 - February to March	Andrew Colley	Holland, Italy &c. in figure and landscape	Holland Italy
1905 – November	Percy French	Irish and other water-colour drawings	Ireland
1905	Miss Kathleen McCracken and Miss Nellie Hadden	Perugia, &c., Studies at the Zoo and Miniatures	Italy - Perugia
1905 - December	George C. Haite	Venice: colour and sunlight	Italy – Venice
1906 – April	The Late L.J. Wood	Three Generations	France Belgium
1906 - May	Alexander Williams	The green isle of Erin	Ireland

1906 - May	Miss E. Perceval-Clark	Natal: Exhibition of oil sketches of Ladysmith, Colenso, Spion Kop, etc	South Africa - Natal
1906 - June	Major E.L. Engleheart	The garden of Allah: Exhibition of water-colour sketches of Arab life in Biskra, its neighbouring oases, and the surrounding desert	Algeria - Biskra
1906 - June	Frederick F. Ogilvie	Egyptian temples: including the new discoveries at the Temple of Mentuhetep III, at Der el Bahri	Egypt
1906	Miss Victoria Cholmondley and Sir William Baille-Hamilton	Water-colour sketches of Rome, Bruges, Scotland, Hertfordshire, etc	Italy – Rome Belgium – Bruges England Scotland
1906 – December	Miss H. Donald-Smith	River, Lake, and Garden	Italy
1907– February	A.H. Hudson	Landscapes	Italy France America
1907	Sophie Beale Aug. O. Lamplugh Alex. Williams	Venice and Dorset Egypt and Nubia Irish scenes	Italy – Venice England – Dorset Egypt Sudan – Nubia
1907 - April	Arthur Briscoe	Round the North Sea and Zuyder Zee	Ireland Holland
1907 - June to July	Augustine Fitzgerald	Scenes in the Orient: and Old French gardens	Middle East France

1907 - June to July	Ernest Thesiger	Madeira and Morocco	Madeira Morocco
1908	A.O. Lamplugh	Egypt and Nubia	Egypt Sudan - Nubia
1908	F.W. Sturge	Desert and Sea	Egypt England – Cornwall
1908 - December	Mrs. Henry Campbell	Portraits in pastel and water-colours	Italy Holland Belgium England
1908 - December	Miss Victoria Cholmondley and Sir William Baillie Hamilton	Water-colour sketches of Venice, Florence, Belgium, England and Scotland	Italy – Venice, Florence Belgium England Scotland
1909	Charles N. Worsley	New Zealand	New Zealand
1909	A.O. Lamplugh	Egypt	Egypt
1909 – March to April	Alexander Williams	Ould Donegal	Ireland – Donegal
1910	Miss Joan M. West and Miss Rachel Wheatcroft	Water-colour drawings of Holland, Italy, Norway, Normandy, S. Wales, Dorsetshire, Cornwall, Sussex and Kent	Holland Italy Norway France – Normandy Britain

1911 - June to July	F.F. Ogilvie	Egypt: water-colour drawings and sketches of Egypt, including paintings of the statues found by Dr. Reisner at the Giza pyramids	Egypt
1911	Atherton Furlong	American landscapes and animal studies	United States of America
1911 - December	Percy French	In the Donegal Highlands, the West Indies and elsewhere	Ireland – Donegal West Indies
1912 - May	Mary Helen Carlisle	Wild flower landscapes and sunny gardens in California; also street scenes in Mexico	USA – California Mexico
1912 - November to December	M.L. Harding	Water-colour drawings of England and France	England France
1913 - May	Gertrude Hadenfeldt	India: from the cities of its plains to the snows of the Kashmir	India
1913 - May to June	Miss F. Anna Lee	Egypt, Dalmatia and Montreux	Egypt Bosnia – Dalmatia Switzerland – Montreux
1913 - June	Emily Strutt	South Africa, Scotland and elsewhere	South Africa Scotland
1913 - July	Frank Crisp	Mr Frank Crisp's Exhibition	Italy Egypt Morocco Spain

1913	Frederick F. Ogilvie	Philae in 1913: A summer's work after the lowering of the water; and other drawings of Egypt	Egypt
1913 - November to December	Miss Ella Du Cane	Water-colours of the banks of the Nile	Egypt
1915 - Spring	A.O. Lamplugh	Egypt and the Nile	Egypt
	F.F. Ogilvie	Philae and its temples	
1915 - June to July	Miss Aswen Montgomerie	'Our prisoners in Germany': Water-colours of views of the Riviera, etc. in aid of the Church Army's fund for our prisoners in Germany.	France - Riviera
1915	G.A. Anderson	Pictures of India	India

Appendix 2

Artist-Traveller Exhibitions staged at Walker's Galleries between 1920 and 1922

Year	Artist	Medium	Exhibition Title	Countries Depicted
1920 – February	Sir Bartle C. Frere	Watercolour	Sketches of everyday life and street scenes taken in intervals of work at Furnes and Alexandria, and when on short leave to Luxor and Palestine during the war	Egypt Palestine
1920 - May	Bridget Keir	Watercolour	Exhibition of water-colour drawings of London and the lagoons of Venice	England Italy – Venice
1920 - May	The Late E. Phillips Fox	Oil	Exhibition of oil paintings of France, Australia, Algeria and Venice	France Australia Algeria Italy – Venice
1920 – June	E.W. Powell	Watercolour	Paintings of France and Egypt from the air	France Egypt

1920 - June	F.F. Ogilvie	Watercolour	Exhibition of water-colour drawings of Egypt	Egypt
1920 - June to July	Dorothea M. Vyvyan	Watercolour	Exhibition of water-colour drawings of Natal and Zululand	South Africa
1920 - October	A.J. Davies (Miss Dorothy Prickett)	Unknown	Exhibition of sketches of the Firth of Forth, Australia, Suffolk, Dorset etc.	Scotland Australia England
1920 - October to November	Alfonso Toft	Oil, Watercolour	Exhibition of oil paintings and water-colour drawings of Newfoundland and some English pictures	Newfoundland England
1920 – November	Gregory Robinson	Watercolour	Out and Home	Britain Sierra Leone
1920 - November to December	Ranee of Sarawak (Sylvia Brett).	Pastel	Scenes in Sarawak and native types	Malaysia - Sarawak
1921- January	Guy Lipscombe	Unknown	Portraits and Italian scenes	Italy
1921 - February to March	Cicely Roscoe and Vera Down	Watercolour	Water colours of Taormina and Jersey and other places	Sicily – Taormina Jersey
1921 - March	Harry Godwin	Watercolour	Wild flowers at home and abroad, Swiss mountain scenes and some suggestions of decorative borders	Britain Switzerland

1921 - March to April	Gabriel Thompson	Oil	Exhibition of pictures and sketches in oils: including many examples of French landscape	France
1921 - April	Alice E. Prangley	Watercolour	Exhibition of water-colour drawings (Swiss and other scenes)	Switzerland
1921 - April to May	Frank Fowler	Unknown	Paintings of India, Italy, Germany and England	India Italy Germany England
1921 - April to May	Col. H.R.B. Donne	Unknown	Paintings of Switzerland	Switzerland
1921 - May to June	Evelyn L. Engleheart	Watercolour	Eastern and other sketches in water-colours	Unknown
1921 - June	Hon. Mrs Robert Boyle and Sir A. Martin	Watercolour	Egypt, India, Switzerland and elsewhere	Egypt India Switzerland
1921 - October	Florence M. Asher and Rosalie Emslie	Oil, Watercolour, Etching	Exhibition of Oil Paintings, Water-colours, Etchings, etc.	France
1921- October	Vivian Guy	Watercolour, Pastel	Exhibition of water-colours and pastels of the Riviera and Algiers	France – Riviera Algeria
1921 - November	Romilly Fedden	Watercolour	Exhibition of water colours of Morocco	Morocco

1921 - November	Martin Hardie	Watercolour, Etching	Exhibition of Water-colours and Etchings	France
1921 - December	Hanslip Fletcher and Kenneth Hobson	Watercolour, Pencil	Exhibition of drawings and water colours of Spain	Spain
1922 - February	Evelyn and Marjorie Watherston	Oil, Watercolour, Pastel	Exhibition of Oil Paintings, Water-colours and Pastel Drawings	Italy - Bellagio
1922 - March	E. Mary Shelley	Etching	Exhibition of Etchings	Italy – Sienna, Florence
1922 - April to May	C.N. Worsley	Watercolour	Exhibition of water colours of New Zealand	New Zealand
1922 - May	Bridget Keir	Watercolour	Exhibition of water-colour drawings of London and 'The sands and waters of Egypt'	England Egypt
1922 - May	Sylvia Concanen Dakin	Watercolour	Water-colour sketches of Constantinople, Smyrna, Cyprus, some Syrian ports and Alexandria	Turkey Cyprus Syria Egypt
1922 - May	Joan Bloxham	Pencil	Pencil drawings of France, Belgium etc.	France Belgium
1922 - May to June	Mrs Lucy Pelling Sultan Ahmad	Watercolour	Exhibition of water-colour drawings of India (chiefly Kashmir and Central India)	India
1922 - June	G.P. Jacomb-Hood	Unknown	Sketches: at home and abroad	Unknown

1922 - June	Ben Browne	Watercolour	Exhibition of water-colour drawings of scenes in Burma and Kashmir	Burma India
1922 - July	Mrs Basil Johnson (Bessie Percival)	Unknown	Exhibitions of paintings (Madeira gardens and Switzerland in winter)	Madeira Switzerland
1922 - July to August	Mrs Price King	Watercolour	Exhibition of water-colour paintings of the nitrate regions of Chile	Chile
1922 - October 1922).	Harry E. James	Watercolour	Exhibition of water-colours	France – Brittany Belgium
1922 - October to November	Mrs Russell Walker and Mrs Style	Unknown	An exhibition of paintings of sunshine and flowers at home and abroad	Unknown
1922 - November	Edith Cheesman	Oil, Watercolour	Five months in Iraq	Iraq
1922 - December	Lawrence B. Phillips	Unknown	Memorial Exhibition	Italy – Venice Egypt Germany

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