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专访英国新媒体艺术家John Goto

我的作品处在社会政治事件碰撞的中心

文/王梆（发自伦敦） 标签：专访英国新媒体艺术家John Goto

John Goto是英国当代最活跃、影响力最深远的新媒体艺术大师之一。他的作品以涉及政治、历史、种族、经济、环境等诸多当代性敏感问题而著称，因此被公众媒体称为"批判艺术家"。目前，他的作品正在重庆展出。本次展览也是"艺述英国"在西南地区最早开始的活动。

John Goto生于1949年，正是英国加入北大西洋公约组织的那一年。在英格兰西北部的小镇Stockport长大的他并没有继承小镇的传统手工业，成为一位制帽工匠，而是像众多背井离乡寻求梦想的青年那样，只身去了伦敦，并在圣马丁艺术学院学习。

那是60年代，他被充满叙事意味的欧洲电影和文学强烈地吸引着，直到今天，在他发表在其官方网站上的“创作笔记”中，仍不时可以看到他作为电影和文学青年的影子。在一篇题为《伤痕》的日记开头，他引用了法国左岸派电影导演克里斯·马克（Chris Marker）的名言：“记忆通常是不被记住的，只有当记忆成为伤痕的时候，它们才被记住。”而Goto这个名字亦来自波兰实验电影大师阿勒列昂·波罗杰克（Walerian Borowczyk）1968年的电影《到爱之岛》（John Goto生于1949年，正是英国加入北大西洋公约组织的那一年。在英格兰西北部的小镇Stockport长大的他并没有继承小镇的传统手工业，成为一位制帽工匠，而是像众多背井离乡寻求梦想的青年那样，只身去了伦敦，并在圣马丁艺术学院学习。

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70年代的Goto在伦敦南部Lewisham街区青年文化中心夜校以讲课谋生，间或亦在欧洲旅行和学习。80年代，他开始将绘画、摄影和电影蒙太奇等元素融合起来，形成其独特的“摄影蒙太奇”风格。在我们的访谈中，他称自己是“一个人的乐队”（one-man-band），通常先将构想绘制成草图，然后动用身边的朋友、学生、亲戚和家人来做模特，演绎草图中的各类形象，他为这些形象亲自设计服装、道具，并为其化妆……拍摄完毕后，他便潜身在自己的工作室里，夜以继日地埋头抠像、剪切、绘制背景。90年代后期电脑特技的出现，让他的创作如鱼得水，他说：“真难以想象，在过去那些没有电脑的岁月里，人们如何完成这种超现实的构想！”

80年代后，他的作品开始愈发关注政治事件，如《Terezin》讲述了包豪斯学派的艺术家被囚禁在纳粹Theresienstadt集中营里的故事，《伤痕》（The Scar）则反映了1989年底苏东巨变带给人们的内心震动；反战亦是他作品的一个重要题材，去年3月爱丁堡的展览上，他展出了一幅叫《马赛克》（Mosaic）的作品，点击进入每一个马赛克下的页面，观众会看到触目惊心的残酷战争画面。艺术评论家Calum Ross写道：“我们非常喜欢Goto先生的作品，在这些抽象的马赛克底下，你看到的是加沙侵略战争的真相。”

B=《外滩画报》

G= John Goto

G：是的，艺术史和电影艺术对我都产生了很大的影响。但是最终极的转变来自电脑数字技术。我从1992年起使用CG，电脑特效给了照片蒙太奇艺术巨大的可能性，就像“美梦成真”那样！最近我和德比大学的博士Matthew Leach，一位虚拟技术专家，一起使用 Augmented Reality（注：增强现实，简称AR）来进行创作。我们用智能手机上的GPS解读功能、互联网在线功能以及相机功能，创作一个虚拟图像页面，来表达我们对日常生活所作的观察。这个图像页面会随着环境地点的变化或主体对象的变化而变化，它能与智能手机上的写字板功能、声音采样功能以及GPS地图功能互动起来。对我来说，这是日常生活蒙太奇化的一种体验。它最尖锐的颠覆性在于，你不需要得到许可，就可以在任何一个现实的空间进入到一个虚拟的空间。我们用AR制作了《镀金城市》（Gilt City，2006）这件作品，将一个叫做“镀金城市”的虚拟空间投射在英国银行的门口，反映经济危机下的贫富分化问题。

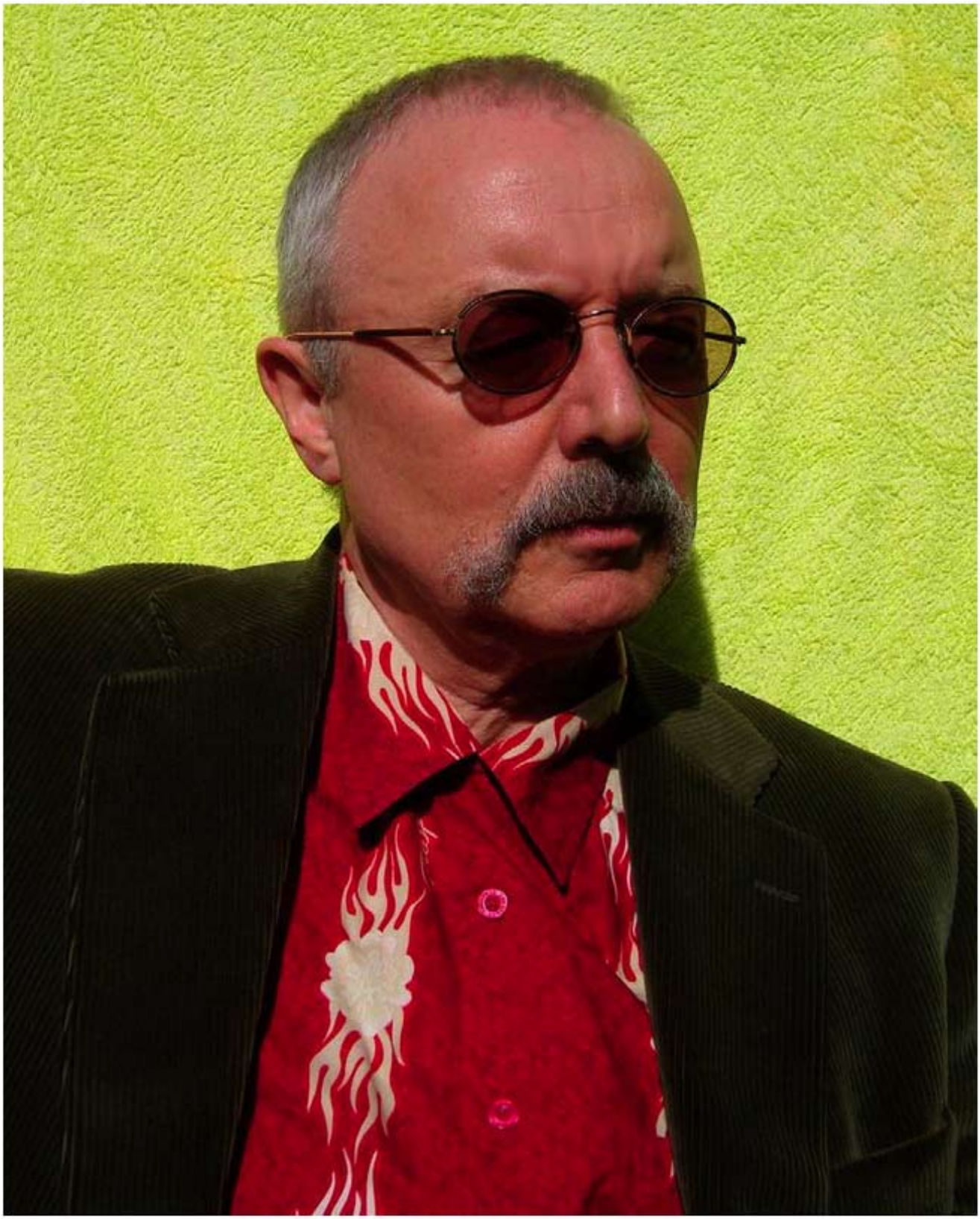
B：这次在重庆展出的《Dance to the Muzikof Time》这一作品中，你亦是编舞吗？你和演员之间的互动关系是怎样的？

G：这是获East Midlands艺术委员会资金赞助的作品，他们希望我能与当地的舞蹈团合作，并能展现出某种地方特色。于是这带给了我一段和舞蹈家们合作的好时光，他们都是极有天赋的艺术家。我的焦点又回到了英国这个多元/多种族文化的社会，我们中的很多人，比如这些舞蹈家们，很可能祖先来自地球的另一端，此刻却生活在同一国家背景下，这曾经或将会带给我们什么样的感受和冲击呢？

在这件作品中我融合了街舞、北印度古典卡萨克舞以及年轻的印度宝莱坞舞。像以往制作任何一件作品一样，我画好了草图并留下了广阔的、让舞蹈家们自由发挥的空间，所以你可以看到，舞蹈家们的精湛表演构成了这个系列的主体。

B：你为何选择这件作品在中国展出？对欧洲历史不太了解的观众，也可以读懂它么？

G：怎样传达作品中的历史事件和背景，一直是一个难题，不论是在中国还是在欧洲。所以我在每一张照片后面都附上了一个简短的说明。但是我更希望观众运用他们自己的想象力去理解作品。我选择它，是因为它看上去很有亲和力，应该能得到年轻的中国观众的喜爱，同时我也想展现无比美丽的乡村风光和它丰饶的历史。



John Goto

TOUT PREVOIR

Tout Prévoir
décembre-janvier 08/09
n°397

NATURE DEAD

John Goto

Green and Pleasant Land

Galerie Dominique Fiat

Né en 1949, l'artiste anglais John Goto demeure pratiquement inconnu en France et il faut rendre grâce à Dominique Fiat de nous présenter le travail de ce grand satiriste visuel aux compositions numériques à la fois féeriques et grinçantes, héritières simultanées de Hogarth et du collage Pop à la Richard Hamilton. Deux séries sont ici présentées. La première, datant de 2001, *High Summer*, montre des décors arcadiens, empruntés à la grande tradition picturale du paysage classique (Poussin, Le Lorrain...), aux perspectives champêtres construites comme des architectures antiques et parsemées de ruines d'agrément, dans lesquels sont placés des petits personnages triviaux issus du monde d'aujourd'hui : militants écologistes partis à l'assaut de plants d'OGM, équipe de tournage d'un film de reconstitution historique, sportifs aux survêtements fluorescents, etc. La deuxième série, *Dance to the Musik of Time*, plus récente, nous invite à reconsidérer des moments-clefs de l'histoire anglaise sous forme de tableaux vivants chorégraphiques, certains assez acrobatiques, réalisés par des troupes bigarrées issues de l'immigration ou des classes sociales défavorisées (danseurs indiens Kathak, break dancers, etc.), dans des décors de théâtre à l'effet carton-pâte appuyé. Ces étonnantes compositions, combinant plusieurs niveaux de mise en scène du réel et de maquillage d'image (et d'histoire), recèlent au-delà de leur séduction immédiate une force dialectique indéniable qui fait de l'image un amalgame contradictoire où passé et présent échangent et transforment leurs significations.

Galerie Dominique Fiat, 16, rue des Coutures Saint-Gervais – Paris IIIe ; du 6 novembre au 20 décembre 2008.

FLUX
Life · Fashion · Mischief

FLUX
Hiver 2008/2009
n°67

Flux Space Special

Dance to the Muzik of Time

By John Goto

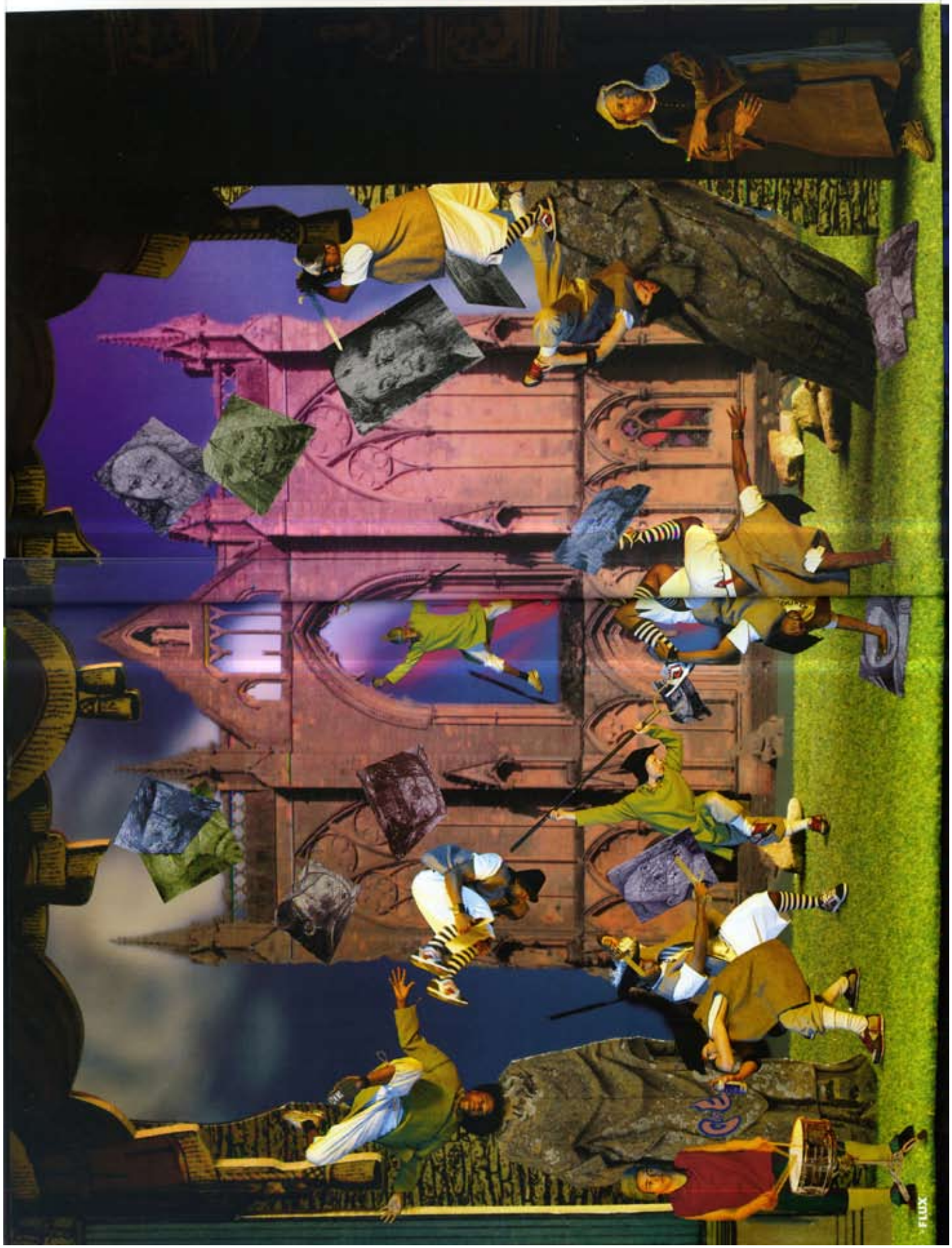
John Goto studied painting at St Martins School of Art and then worked for an advertising photographer to get a sound technical training. He started using computers in his work in the early nineties, "*when most art photographers were fast asleep to digital developments, as indeed they still are!*" says Goto.

'DANCE TO THE MUZIK OF TIME' was commissioned by Arts Council England, East Midlands, who asked Goto to create images of '*professional dancers and iconic locations in the region.*' He had the idea of following a timeline, taking in key historical events from the Black Death and the violence of the Reformation through to the Bradlaugh Riot in Northampton, the opening of the M1 motorway and the death of Princess Diana. John staged his pictures using an old toy theatre and making backdrops from the locations. He then shot the dancers (breakdancing troupe Groundhogs and classical Kathak dancers Manushi, both from Nottingham, and the Bollywood dancers, Desi Masti, from Leicester) and dropped them into the sets.

"*It was tremendous fun - working with great dancers and visiting marvellous locations - and I hope this comes across. The series also deals with weighty subjects; time, history and shifting ideas of culture. I feel no contradiction in this - serious is the new fun!*"

Four plates from the series 'DANCE TO THE MUZIK OF TIME'. Dance to the Muzik of Time will be exhibited at Dominique Fiat Gallery, Paris, 7 November to 23 December. For more of John Goto's work see www.johngoto.org.uk.

• Pilgrims at St. Hugh's Shrine, Lincoln Cathedral, 1280



Iconoclasts at Newstead Abbey, 1539

dOMINIQUE fiAT, GALERIE

FLUX
Hiver 2008/2009
n°67

The Bradlaugh Rise, Northampton Town Square, 1874

Opening of the M1 Motorway, Northamptonshire, 1959

dOMINIQUE fiAT, GALERIE

madame FIGARO

Le Figaro Madame
6 décembre 2008
n°411

MERCREDI 10, GOTO FAIT ILLUSIONS

Entre Lewis Carroll et Bollywood, le photographe anglais John Goto s'amuse a faire entrer en collision une imagerie typiquement anglaise et ses fixations kitsch. Très très joyeux.

Galerie Dominique Fiat, 16, rue des Coutures-Saint-Gervais, 75003 Paris. www.galeriefiat.com. Jusqu'au 20 décembre.

Au premier regard, ces paysages de campagne anglaise semblent idéaux : nature verdoyante, temples antiques, animaux paisibles (moutons, cygnes, etc.). Pourtant, les (petits) hommes ici et là gâchent ce sentiment de sérénité. Et que font-ils ces parasites ? Ils traversent un champ (d'OGM, donc ?) en combinaison anti bactériologique traqués par un hélico, ils chassent, abandonnent leur carcasse de bagnole, tournent un film pour la télé, font du sport, ou squattent en tenue chic : dans une totale indifférence à la nature.
John Goto, qui a photographié et construit digitalement ces 15 photos tableaux en 2001, intitule cette série High Summer. Inspirées des tableaux de Claude Lorrain, elle constitue en fait le deuxième volet d'un ensemble satirique de 3 séries sur la politique anglaise sous le New Labour, rassemblées sous le titre Ukadia.
Pensée au moment de l'épidémie de la vache folle, cette série reste très actuelle aujourd'hui.
Comme le prince charmant, la nature comme on la rêve semble bien loin des réalités !!

Un grand merci à John Goto pour son interview qui suit :

When did you make this series? Is it a consequence of an event ?

High Summer was part of a larger project to document life under the New Labour government of Tony Blair, so it began in 1997 with Capital Arcade, which is set in a fictional shopping mall. My approach was essentially satirical, and draws on the C18 tradition of Hogarth, Gillray and Rowlandson.
I am an urban dweller and therefore very conscious of our uneasy relationship with the countryside. At the time I began this series in 2000 a group called The Countryside Alliance was trying to fight off the government's anti-hunting legislation, and when I finished it a year or so later, a newly arrived 'foot and mouth' epidemic led to mass culls of cattle across the country. So it was a particularly eventful time.

What is for you the main theme of this work? What are exactly the rules of this series ?

I set the series in the English Landscape Gardens of Stowe, Stourhead and Rousham. These were designed in the C18 by Charles Bridgeman and William Kent, who were in turn influenced by the classical landscape paintings of Claude Lorrain and Nicolas Poussin. My idealized landscapes act as a foil to the antics of the modern tourists who we see wandering through the grounds. The 'rules' were set by Claude really, as one so often finds when depicting landscape!

How did you negotiate these rules ?

Well it took some time to realize that his viewpoint is somewhere above tree level, which gives this odd floating feeling. Then of course there are the compositional 'rules' of using proscenium-framing devices, and in creating linear and aerial perspective. But if you take a good look at his work it's by no means formulaic. One composition I took from him, for example, has a large tree placed centrally in the foreground, thereby breaking all the supposed rules.

How did you work on this series ?

Well this was back in 2000 and before medium format digital cameras were widely available. So I shot the large elements (temples and oak trees) on a 5x4 camera and scanned the transparencies, and similarly used a Rollie or Leica for the smaller ones. I built up an archive of elements; skies, crops, lakes etc and also drew preparatory studies using the computer. As always it involved a combination of intension and chance. The methods are close to those of traditional narrative painters ; firstly making studies from observation and later working the final images up, often using many sources, in the studio/Mac.

How did you work with people ? Who are they ?

In this series I photographed people using a documentary method, though normally I shoot figures in the studio. I had to retrain myself when using a camera – no longer was I trying to produce a perfectly composed image within the frame, but rather to grab elements, with a mind towards the bigger composition they might eventually become part of.
The people are participants in such 'traditional' events as country fairs, race meetings, hunts, Morris dancing and sports activities, all of which have their own distinctive kit.

Which software do you use to work ? And why ?

Well it will come as no surprise now to hear that I mostly use Photoshop, but at that time it was still relatively new, having been launched in 1990. I had been using montage in my work during the 'eighties and when I first looked over a publisher's shoulder in the early 'nineties and saw what was happening on screen, I realized the potential – it was like a dream come true !
I'm pleased to see that on your website there is no prejudice against digital media, but most of the photo art world continue to act like nothing much has changed. When they are forced to use the now not so new media, they have little conception of it's possibilities and the ways it can deal with the world as we find it today, and not back in 1950. But unfortunately 'la photographie de papa' still rules !

Propos recueillis par L.T

John Goto
06 nov. - 20 déc. 2008
Paris. Galerie Dominique Fiat

Par Sarah Ihler-Meyer

Si le paradis est toujours ce qui est en amont, la première série de photos recomposées conçue par John Goto est vraisemblablement dédiée à cet imaginaire. Tous les éléments de l'Eden sont ici rassemblés.
En pleine campagne ou au bord de la mer, non loin de monuments antiques, déambule l'ensemble des animaux possibles et imaginables, du mouton à la biche, en passant par le rhinocéros. Plus loin, des enfants et des adultes jouent et se prélassent au bord de l'eau, quand d'autres sont réunis peut-être pour un brunch. Ils emmènent paître les brebis, ou dorment profondément à l'ombre d'un arbre.

Au premier regard, ces œuvres pourraient être confondues avec l'un des nombreux tableaux ruinistes de Claude Lorrain, ou encore de Poussin, dont l'objet est précisément la représentation d'un temps dit «meilleur». Mais, l'intrusion d'éléments de perturbation au sein de ces décors en obscurcit le caractère idyllique.

En apparence idéaux, ces paysages sont en réalité minés par la mort. L'infection du paradis opère à partir de détails: un tronc d'arbre lugubre, un vautour qui plane, une centrale nucléaire voilée par sa propre fumée, ou encore, un homme en combinaison anti_bactériologique. Le danger guette les hommes, contraints à fuir un ciel orageux, aussi bien que les animaux, menacés d'exécution sur les rives d'un torrent boueux.

Plus qu'exposés, trois protagonistes de ces saynètes sont littéralement en péril. L'un d'entre eux est passé à tabac alors que les deux autres, plus jeunes, viennent d'être abandonnés par leurs parents dont il ne reste plus que les images. Ailleurs, la mort a définitivement frappé: une carcasse de voiture flotte à la surface d'une eau sombre, une tête de mort est posée au sol.
En d'autres termes, ce qui est communément défini comme sans tache est ici dérangé, quand il n'est pas envahi par la mort.
Prétendu hors du temps, l'Eden est désormais soumis aux lois du devenir. Ainsi, John Goto met en crise la représentation du paradis, définitivement reléguée au domaine des leurres.

Une deuxième catégorie de photos, au ton plus optimiste, fait face à cette première série. A l'arrière de rideaux de théâtre et sur fond de monuments anciens, appartenant tous à l'histoire de l'Angleterre, des indiens ou des rappeurs esquissent des pas de danse. En tenue traditionnelle, de hip_hop, mais aussi d'époque, les acteurs forment avec leur décor un tout aux couleurs éclatantes.

Des indiens en costumes flashy — tout juste sortis de Bollywood — bougent frénétiquement sur la façade d'une usine en cours de réaménagement. A côté, des rappeurs juchés sur des piédestaux prennent la pose devant un bâtiment historique, narguent des reproductions de peinture médiévale à l'avant d'une cathédrale gothique.

Les cultures et les époques se confrontent ici d'une manière joyeuse et dynamique. Et, bien qu'il soit possible de repérer des éléments apparemment mortifères, tels qu'un chat noir, des croix, mais aussi des squelettes, nulle véritable contradiction. Car, si la rencontre des ethnies et des époques célèbre la perpétuelle métamorphose du monde, la mort a ici toute sa place.

Au rêve d'un paradis hors du temps, où la mort est une injure, John Goto préfère et substitue l'image du Devenir, dans lequel la mort et la vie dialoguent sans fin.

LE FIGARO

Le Figaro
10 novembre 2008

Paris fourmille d'expositions et d'initiativ

PHOTOGRAPHIE
Près d'une centaine d'événements sont prévus pour la 15e édition de ce grand rendez-vous artistique, de plus en plus étoffé et populaire après vingt-huit ans d'existence.

CRISE ou pas crise, la photographie a ses aficionados que rien ne rebute, pas même la pluie froide d'un samedi de novembre. Il y avait donc foule à l'heure des vernissages, samedi dernier, dans les ruelles du Marais pour la Suède caustique de Lars Tunbjörk (galerie Vu) ou l'Angleterre ironique de John Goto (*Green and Pleasant Land*, galerie Dominique Fiat), autour des Halles pour les Européens réunis à la Galerie du jour et les glaciers menacés dans leur superbe, série de Jürgen Nefzger (galerie Françoise Paviot). Foule jusqu'au fin fond du XIIIe, grâce à l'héritage du Gallois Philip Jones Griffiths qui inspira Francis F. Coppola pour certains plans d'*Apocalypse Now* (exposition très attendue à Paris après le succès de Londres).

Un public tranquille, amateur, passionné, qui choisit à sa mesure, dans l'énorme proposition culturelle, ce qu'il faut absolument voir. Le temps manquera, forcément, pour tout découvrir de ces innombrables expositions et initiatives diverses, générées par ce 15e Mois de la photo qui a pris l'Europe comme sujet fédérateur : du salon Paris Photo 2008 (Carrousel du Louvre) aux enchères caritatives, le 13 novembre pour le Cabinet Deyrolle (Musée de la chasse) ; des grandes expositions monographiques et muséales aux expositions plus ciblées dans les instituts culturels étrangers et les galeries d'art, très actives.

L'Europe, donc (*lire ci-dessous*). Elle a de nombreux visages, selon qu'elle expose dans le XVIe à l'Institut Slovaque (17 auteurs réunis sous le titre *Allons enfants*, jusqu'au 30 novembre), rue de Lille à l'Institut néerlandais, adresse bien connue des amateurs de dessins anciens (*Identités pluri-Elles*, Ilse Frech, jusqu'au 21 décembre) ou sur les Champs-Élysées à la Maison du Danemark, toujours fort dynamique (*Marinus & Marianne, photomontages*

LE FIGARO scope

FIGAROSCOPE
5 novembre 2008

JOHN GOTO, la technologie numérique au service du *nonsense* britannique.
« Green and Pleasant Land » galerie Dominique Fiat, ***Monnaie de Paris,*** *11 quai de Conti (VIe), Tél. : 01 40 46 55 10, du 7 nov. au 29 déc. tlj, de 11 heures à 18 heures, entrée libre.*

Ecowarrior © **John Goto à la galerie Dominique Fiat**

dOMINIQUE fiAT, GALERIE

EXPORAMA

EXPORAMA,
septembre/octobre 2008

John Goto. Cet Anglais réalise des photomontages dans lesquels il fait évoluer des personnages contemporains dans des décors du passé et liés à l'histoire de la peinture. Dans la série *High Summer*, par exemple, il mélange des vues de jardins du XVIIIe siècle à la manière du peintre classique Claude Lorrain (1600-1682) et y ajoute des plagistes, des chasseurs et des membres de la haute société anglaise actuelle. Un regard ironique sur l'Histoire et l'actualité.

GALERIE DOMINIQUE FIAT. John Goto. Green and pleasant land. *6 nov./20 déc.08. 16 rue des Coutures-Saint-Gervais, Paris IIIe. 0140299880. Ouvert 11h-19h, fermé dim et lun.* «Hunters», 2000-2001, série «High Summer», ©John Goto, courtesy Galerie Dominique Fiat.

**dOMINIQUE fiAT,
GALERIE**

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Reflections on the Future of History: John Goto's A Dance to the Muzik of Time

Nancy Roth

This series makes no secret of its own construction. It uses–probably tests–the possibilities of digital software, and makes no apology for its jumps and contradictions as it maps past into present, painting into Photoshop, history into dialogue, the durability of traditional «Englishness» on to an athletic, energetic diversity of races, costumes and, inevitably, relationships to the past, all in constant motion. The title is borrowed from that of a painting by Nicolas Poussin in the Wallace Collection in London , showing four allegorical figures–perhaps the seasons–dancing to a tune played by an aged figure suggestive of Time. The same title was used by Anthony Powell for a series of 12 novels published between 1951 and 1975. Said to be the longest novel in the English language, it traces the bonds among a group of friends and lovers who become close, lose touch and later meet again, all the while witnessing and responding to events, personalities, and issues in Britain in the mid-twentieth century. With the title, then, Goto both establishes both a relationship to history painting–to the goal of constructing a serious, nuanced statement about the world in a single image, and alludes to a particular, subjective construction English history. But the changed spelling of Muzik also signals a dissonance, a radical departure–from history painting, from the form of the novel, arguably even from history as such.

A Dance to the Muzik of Time is a commission to picture «iconic locations in the East Midlands, featuring professional dancers.» The commissioning institutions–The Arts Council of England, East Midlands, with support from the University of Derby, didn't explicitly mention history. But since an «iconic location» can only get to be iconic by being meaningful over time, and since dancers are lively, contemporary beings, the brief does specify some form of dialogue between past and present. Among the best reasons Goto qualified for this commission, I suspect, is that for him such dialogue is precisely what contemporary history ought to be.

Each work refers to a specific past time and place, usually by means of a notable architectural monument coupled with the title text. The times range between 1280 and 2008, the places are all in the East Midlands. The three dance companies who collaborated in producing the work, too, are all based in the area: Groundhogs–breakdancers–and the Kathak classical group called Manushi both come from Nottingham, and the Bollywood dancers, Desi Masti, from Leicester.

Depite the explicit dates, Goto calls the whole series not a history, but a peregrination through the East Midlands–that is, a move through space rather than through time. For these images are in the present, about the present. This is clear immediately from the clean, evenly-lit, constructed «look,»–the evidently layered composition, unabashedly eclectic combining of sources, high-end production values, a conscious sense of «performance» insured by the disciplined bodies of the dancers and the constant framing device of a toy theatre, even the heightened, consciously-manipulated colour. No one of the images reads visually as any «older,» depicting any «earlier» event than another. To go back in time is, rather, to go back into any one picture, to what would be the ground of a painting–the first layer in Photoshop, to the plane in which one finds the iconic building that sets the site and date–1280 for Lincolnshire Cathedral, 1486 for Southwell Minster. In front of these, in what reads as the broad, shallow present, the dancers pose and gesture, in costumes that assert a cultural eclecticism. It looks very exciting–if spatially, logistically impossible. They come from everywhere, seem to represent every age, any point in modern history. They strike extravagant poses, gesture with joyous abandon, wear rich splendid, rich, exotic clothing–or not. Sometimes when they move they leave elegant painterly marks that hardly seem photographic. Usually they are shown on the same scale, as though they could meet–although not in Lincoln 1280 , where each pilgrim seems to define a unique space. They move and look across the space of the present, although they don't seem to really meet each other. Nor do they look «back»–literally to the back plane of the picture, or reflect,

rest. A few look at us, especially the masked dancers in Chatsworth 1696 , where they are usurping the plinths formerly occupied by classical statues. But overall they seem tremendously busy with something now, in the present, something that has scant bearing on what is behind them–or on us. In short, A Dance pictures a nation–or part of a nation–performing itself to a great many musics.

There is a strong implication, though, that Goto could engage the same framing, temporal mapping, and compositional devices in another part of Britain or another part of the world. This is to say that the work treats the East Midlands's relationship to its own past as in some respects absolutely unique, and in others as an intersection between Photoshop and earlier photography. The high resolution, sophisticated layering and trained performers mark these images as of extremely recent vintage. But more importantly, they read as insights into Photoshop's inherently theatrical function, for example the way the software expedites the construction of layers in a single image. Some will hastily associate such theatricality with products of the consciousness industry, images that instruct us about how to buy or vote, what to worry about and when. But the complexities of A Dance .. will not resolve into a simple, banal message, however superficially one may look. They demand the second, longer look and then flow into a wealth of detail with the breadth of a reference work. Clearly that this time the technology is doing something very different.

Goto was by no means alone in embracing digital photographic technology from the first moment it became available in the mid-1980s. He must have been among very few, however, who immediately saw the technology as more than a means of doing familiar things like cutting and pasting images more efficiently. Rather he identified in it a way of reflecting and constructing the world in an absolutely unprecedented way, a way suited to an unprecedented contemporary world. He was among the first, that is, to recognize the potential of Photoshop and allied digital software to sustain a life's intellectual engagement, with a potential as rich as that of painting or writing.

As a result, Goto and his work currently figure in a polemic whose depth and scope he could hardly have anticipated, and which he himself still finds puzzling. In an essay from 2005 entitled Digital Photography and its Detractors he speculated about the reasons art and educational establishments continue to give digital technology such a cool and often superficial welcome, why even photographic artists who use digital technology tend to mask the fact behind images that obey the inherited rules of a photographically-ordered visual field. There are institutional reasons for such resistance, Goto assumed–limited funding among them. But he supposed that the more important reason was the absence of an adequate–or even a conventional–way of theorizing and teaching the new possibilities. I want to go a little further and suggest that it is the very possibility of an adequate theory or pedagogy that is under threat, the very concepts of «pedagogy» and «curriculum» themselves. For the speed and fluidity of digital communication threatens the most basic models we make of ourselves, our past, our institutions, which are largely grounded in an assumption about the role of linear text, of writing and print. In challenging linear text, digital technology simultaneously challenges conceptions of history, knowledge, and theory that have long provided the foundations of the academy.

Goto's work has always been concerned with history, that is, with an understanding of the past encoded in written texts–narratives, guidebooks, biographies. However lightly he wears his erudition, he is clearly steeped in historical sources–visual, textual, and acoustic. He writes with grace and fluency–though now more often as clarification, elaboration, or occasionally defense of the work, rather than as part of it. In fact one way to understand the development of his work might be as a challenge to a received concept of history–specifically the challenge presented by photography. In its themes, Goto's work has tended to move forward in time–from the early twentieth century to the present. Perhaps more crucially, it has moved away from a reliance on words to «frame» or locate the pictures, and towards self-sufficient pictures. He has himself remarked that as he approaches present-day England–his own time and place, he has felt «at a loss for words».

Such a changing sense of balance between images and texts recalls the sweeping cultural shift from text to image that Vilém Flusser described, most fully in his 1985 text Into the Universe of Technical Pictures (1). For Flusser, history begins and ends with writing; images do many things, but they do not support a form of consciousness that constructs chains of events, patterns that «explain» the present. That is the province of writing alone. In Flusser's account, automated image-making technologies, beginning with photography, compete with and eventually supercede writing as the most familiar, fastest, most usual way of generating, storing and distributing information. And as we collectively begin to rely more and more on images in favor of linear texts, to we no longer want or need «history» in the sense of a linear, temporal progression. In the «universe of technical pictures» we seek exchange rather than explanation, dialogue rather than truth

Flusser had both hopes and fears for this emerging universe. He feared its tendency to become automatic and to absorb all of us into a fixed, deadly pattern. He hoped that the new technologies would, on the contrary, bring the first opportunity for people to be completely creative, completely human–to stop working and play. The difference between the two, as he saw it, lay in the possibility of inventive engagement with the new technologies themselves, of inducing them to produce surprises, opening new fields of creative play.

Any of Goto's work could be grasped as an address to–or from–the past, «written»–as a series of photographs. Each series relies on a purpose-built relationship of images to language, presenting a specific challenge to our «reading» of the past. In this sense, any of it may be seen to confirm, complicate, or undermine such a sweeping formulation as Flusser's of pictures replacing text. But A Dance to the Muzik of Time does this more effectively than any of Goto's previous work, not least because the images function so independently. They do not constitute a history–at least not in Flusser's sense, for they are not «written,» not linear text, not causally ordered. They don't explain why England is the way it is. Rather they re-present selected historical content–dates and ideas, personalities and projects, successes and failures, as images –all resolutely in the present. If anything they quite systematically undermine linear history, or perhaps better, ransack the ruins for parts.

Goto is fully aware of the implications;

«One of the great things about the present day East Midlands is its diversity of cultures. What sense do national (or maybe its nationalistic) histories make in a migratory world and for citizens of differing ethnic and historical origins? Rather than see history as fixed, might it not be better to think of it as a site of negotiation, a platform for debate, where the relationship between the past and the ever-changing present is constantly reviewed?» (2)

And yet such a history is arguably not history–or not as we know it–but potential play, exchange, invention. And A Dance to the Muzik of Time is neither a text nor a predictable set of technical pictures. Here, Photoshop breaks free of its usual masters, and becomes a means of playing with potential relationships between past and present, recovering a little of the ambitions of history painters, doing things software designers could hardly have anticipated, suggesting, however obliquely, a startling and completely new kind of freedom.

(1) Vilém Flusser (1985) Ins Universum der technischen Bilder , Göttingen: European Photography. The work has not been translated into English.

(2) John Goto (2008) Backstage: Some notes on the Production of Dance to the Muzik of Time.

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guardian

The Guardian
11 août 2001

Go wild in the country

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Floodscapes at Gallery On, Seoul, Korea

John Goto interviewed by Bo-Reung Kim for Monthly Photography, Korea
September 2007

BK - What is the main reason for your conversion from painting to photography? And what do you think about the role of photography in the field of art?

JG - When I was young, art meant for me painting, it was my first love. It was also what we studied at school. But when I went to art school, which was during the 'sixties, I started to get interested in other cultural forms. I started to read the classics of European literature and see the movies coming from the New Wave filmmakers. And I began to understand the importance of narrative as a common thread. So it wasn't such a big step into photography, which is a storytelling medium.

Photography also had the advantage for a young hard-up artist, of being relatively cheap and accessible. Technique can be improved with experience, but getting started in photography is not so complicated, and you get results from day one. For many years I worked in black and white, using improvised or borrowed darkrooms. I had old but essentially good equipment; Rolleiflexs and a heavy tripod, carried over my shoulder all day when out shooting, for weeks on end. Like an old sports injury, I now feel twinges across my back occasionally from those days!

BK - You are very active as a member of the social movement in photography. In relation to social questions, what do you think the role and scope of art can be? How can it further its realm in this field? And what is the most important outcome from your activity?

JG - This is really a very fundamental question, which I can maybe best answer by asking another question; 'what is the responsibility of the artist?' And for me the answer is 'to tell as fully as they can, how it was to be, in their times'. Reflecting on this is of course a tremendously complex matter, but lets just say that the social and the political offer useful, partial ways of understanding experience. I sometimes think of my work being located at an intersection where the socio-political world meets the subjective, internal world.

But to return to this idea of responsibility, of 'telling it how it is'. It is not that I expect to change the world, as a traditionally motivated political artist might, but simply to bear witness to it, through the agency of my individual, subjective experience.

BK - What is your main message to viewers, in your recent Floodscape series?

JG - With Floodscapes the message is simple enough, it is that if we carry on acting as we are, we will bring ecological disaster on ourselves, and our descendants. But in the series, I then go on to suggest some of the ways in which we might avoid future catastrophe.

BK - What is the difference between Floodscapes and your former works?

JG - I do something new in this work - I depict the future. Analogue photography was always seen as contingent on the present, and therefore the future was a forbidden land. But digital photography works differently, and can provide us with a vehicle for a kind of time travel. It is an idea I want to explore further.

BK - Could you tell me the characteristics of 'FloodScape Project' team, which is known as an environmentally activity organization? Why did you make your recent work with them, and what purpose did you share with them?

JG - The original project was developed by the Environment Agency, which is funded by the British government, and also the European Union. The project's task was to develop new ways of managing flood risk. Rather than building ever higher walls and dams, which as we saw in New Orleans, can't always cope with the new conditions brought about by climate change, they looked into other solutions This aspect involved engineers, town planners, landscape architects and ecologists.

But another important role was to involve the public in planning their future environment. And this is where I came in. The project manager, Egon Walesch reasoned «it was clear that, although a central aspect of FloodScape was to stimulate and involve communities in deciding how we manage flood risk in the future, we were using predominately verbal, rational mechanisms to engage them. It struck me that the visual arts could provide a complementary perspective, another mechanism to encourage participation.»

Egon already knew my previous work, especially the 'High Summer' series, which has ecological concerns, so he got in touch and asked if I would like to collaborate.

BK - Are there signs of environmental change in your area of northwest Europe, especially England? What is the main motive that made you start this work, Floodscapes?

JG - It seemed to me an excellent project to be involved with. Of course, like any citizen, I am increasingly alarmed by the effect of carbon emissions on our ecosystem. And if we need reminding of the resulting risks, my hometown of Oxford was recently flooded, and more seriously your neighbors to the north.

Maybe I should tell you a little about my thinking when planning the series. A river offers a marvelous narrative form, which can be developed in one of two directions; up or down stream. I determined to use both. Arguments around flood risk management are often couched in terms of choices. I had the idea of traveling down the river using one set of assumptions and outcomes, and then reversing the journey and showing alternative ways of relating to the same environment. At one level I felt we as a society are facing ethical choices, and the grand master in depicting such issues was of course the C18 English painter William Hogarth.

Hogarth's use of satire and sequence led me to the idea of having a group of young people crewing a punt, on an increasingly perilous journey towards the estuary of the Thames, passing enroute the FloodScape test sites. By using photo-digital technology I was able to produce inundation where there presently is none. And so I have the Thames Barrier overtopped and the North Kent Marshes and Ham House flooded. The youngsters' party mood sobers as they realize the jeopardy they are in. It is only when they reach the mysterious 'Island of Children', where they receive knowledge from their yet unborn grandchildren, that they are empowered to make the necessary changes.

BK - Do you think that your work could affect the environmental movement? If so, how?

JG - One of the ways in which art can contribute to knowledge is through the imaginative transformation of information, which in turn can creatively engage the public. But this alchemical process is delicate, and the imagination does not flourish if overly managed. It needs space, and the great thing about working with the Floodscape team was that they gave me complete creative freedom. I also benefited from their specialist knowledge and access to people and locations.

The series took me nearly a year to make and I was fortunate in being released from my teaching commitments by the University of Derby, in order to give the project my full attention. The work was premiered at Churchill College, University of Cambridge during an international conference entitled 'The Challenges of Living with Flood Risk: Resistance, Resilience or Retreat?' in the summer of 2006. It has since been shown at a number of venues in the UK, where it has stimulating a lot of debate around the issues. I very much look forward to exhibiting the series at the marvelous Gallery On, which is fast becoming a second home for me!

BK - You are continuing to work with digital process of photography. What is the main process of this work, and the reason?

JG - A discussion of the implications of digital media is another big topic. Is it essentially the same as analogue, or is it something quite different, of a new order? Unfortunately a lot of photographers continue as if nothing has changed; they make the same kind of pictures they always did, but now use digital cameras. And when it comes to outputting, they try to make their prints look like silverprints.

I think we are in a new era where analogue photography is only a very distant cousin, or maybe great aunt, to digital photography. Siblings are to be found in games design, electronic muzik and web art. The pre-history of photography

was concerned with fixing the elusive image, but digital processes have unfixed it once more, making it fluid and fugitive, and liable to states of hybridity. Montage is no longer a foreign import, awkwardly imposed on photography, but rather an expression of the inherent fluidity and the instability of the image.

BK - Yes, your work reminds two specific images; Simcity which is an American popular simulation game, and the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch. It seems to be the main characteristic of your work that you show concretely the crucial reality of the human society in the virtual fictional situation. Why do you work in this way, and do you plan to continue it?

This brings us full circle, back to narrative painting via digital photography. I am constantly surprised and delighted at the common methods used by both. When I made the Floodscapes, for example, I made studies and digital drawings to work out the figure compositions. I will be showing some of these, from which you can see the constant process of readjustment in the making of a picture.

You mention virtual space, and this is a modern term for something that painters from the Renaissance on constructed through the use of perspective. Photography was naively attached to a very simplistic idea of truth and reality, but I find a great deal more of each in Bosch than most photos. It is the artist's view of the world we believe or otherwise, and not something inherent in the media.

BK - Your fields of interest are vast and enormous, such as criticizing consuming society in the capitalism era, or satirizing environmental and historical problems. What is the true intention and suggestion that you hope to convey in your works?

JG - I return again to the responsibility of the artist to witness the world and account for it, as best they can. As an artist I have always worked hard, and in time an accumulation of images does occur. Aware of this, I have consciously made interrelated exhibitions, which when considered together take on something of an epic quality.

But there is also the reward of being in conversation with your own picture - they often talk back to you, telling you new and mysterious things.

BK - Is Floodscapes planned to be continue? Could you tell me your about your plans?

JG - In recent years I spend more time in the theatre than cinema, and I'm working presently on a series set in a toy theatre. It is about how we relate to history in an era of global migration. In the past history has tended to be written from national perspectives. This is beginning to unravel in our ethnically diverse and multi-cultural world.

Then I have some plans to return to the future! I don't know much about it yet, but the adventure of making pictures is in finding out!

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John Goto

Né en 1949 à Stockport, Royaume-Uni
Vit et traville à Oxford, Royaume-Uni

expositions personnelles

2009 High Summer, The British Academy Reading Room, Londres, Royaume-Uni
(septembre) Gallery On, Seoul, Corée du Sud
2008 Green and Pleasant Land, Galerie Dominique Fiat, Paris, France
John Goto's New World Circus, soundscape by Michael Young, Backlight - 8th Triennial of photo graphy, Voipaala Arts Centre, Tampere, Finlande
2007 Floodscapes, Galley On, Seoul, Korea; Hampton Court Palace, Londres, Royaume-Uni
John Goto's New World circus, Rugby Art Gallery & Museum; Stephen Lawrence Gallery, University of Greenwich, Londres; University Of Brighton Gallery, Brighton, Royaume-Uni
2006 Floodscapes, Churchill College, University of Cambridge, Royaume-Uni
John Goto: paintings and photographs, Derby Museum and Art Gallery; Andrew Mum mery Gallery, Londres, Royaume-uni
John Goto's New World Circus, Gallery On, Seoul, Corée; Focal Point Gallery, Southend-On-Sea
2005 High summer, Reading Room, The British Academy, Londres; Galerie F5.6, Munich, Allemagne
Carro electrico 104, Clube Literario Do Porto, Oporto, Portugal
2004 Gilt city, Andrew Mummery Gallery, Londres, Royaume-Uni
2003 High Summer, Gainsborough's House, Sudbury, Royaume-Uni
Ukadia, Djanogly Art Gallery, University of Nottingham, Royaume-uni
2002 Loss of face, Tate Britain, Londres, Royaume-Uni
High Summer, Holburne Museum, Bath
Loss Of Face, Norwich Gallery, Norwich; Wolsey Gallery, Christchurch Mansions, Ipswich
2001 High Summer, Andrew Mummery Gallery, London; Wolverhampton Art Gallery; Gallery De Pijp, Groningen
2000 Capital Arcade, Howard Gardens Gallery, Cardiff; Andrew Mummery Gallery, Londres
1999 Npg 2000, Photoworks, National Portrait Gallery, Londres
Capital arcade, Seonam Arts Centre, Séoul, Corée
1998 The Commissar of space, Museum Of Modern Art, Oxford
Early works, Andrew Mummery Gallery, Londres
1997 The framers collection, PorTfolio Gallery, Edimbourg
1995 Recent works, Angel Row Gallery, Nottingham
1994 John Goto 94, exposition itinérante à Perm, Kazan, Osa et Chelyabinsk
Recent histories, John Hansard Gallery, University of Southampton
1993 The Scar, Benjamin Rhodes Gallery, London; Manchester City Art Museum and Gallery
1991 The Atomic yard, Raab Gallery At Millbank, Londres
1990 The Atomic yard, Kettle's Yard, University of Cambridge
1989 Terezin, Raab Gallery, Berlin; John Hansard Gallery, University of Southampton; Cornerhouse Gallery, Manchester
1988 Sites of passage, Goto/Eachus, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford
1986 Goto, Photographs 1975-83, National Library of Singapore, Singapour

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Goto, Goto/Eachus, Portfolio Gallery, Anvers
Sites of passage, Goto/Eachus, Fischer Fine Art, Londres

1983 Goto, Photographs 1975-83, Pps Galerie Gundlac, Hamburg; Uluv Gallery, Prague, Moravian Gallery Bruno Prima Vera, Barcelona (Exposition itinérante du British Council en Espagne)
1981 Goto, Photographs 1971-81, The Photographers' Gallery, Londres

expositins collectives

2009 (mai) Backlight - 8th Triennial of photography, Lodz Art Centre, Lodz, Pologne
(juillet-novembre) Contemporary Landscapes, Haus der Fotografie Dr. Robert-Gerlich-Museum, Burghausen, Allemagne
2007 4 Jahre F5.6, Galerie F5,6, Munich, Allemagne
2005 Identity_factories, Mlr Gallery, Bucarest, Roumanie
Experimentieren, Fotografien Aus der Sammlung des Ivam, Instituto Cervantes, Berlin, Valenciano de Arte moderno
2004 Gilt city/Gone astrey, John Goto & Clare Strand, Fotografins Hus, Stockholm, Suède
Collage, Bloomberg Space, Londres
2003 Picturesque, Tullie House Museum And Art Gallery, Carlisle
Sight seeing, 4th Austrian Triennial of Photography, Graz
Primary colours, The City Gallery, Leicester
2002 Trade, Netherlands Fotoinstituut, Rotterdam, Pays-Bas
Lives lived, Nottingham Castle Museum and Art Gallery
2001 Trade, Fotomuseum, Winterthur
2000 Capital arcade, In 'Modern Times 3' The Hasselblad Center, Goteborg, Suède
1999 Resolve, Platform Gallery, Londres
1998 The discerning eye (artiste invité) Mall Gallery, Londres
1995 After Auschwitz, Royal Festival Hall, London; Manchester City Art Gallery, Northern Centre for Contemporary Art, Sunderland, Edinburgh city Art Centre
Pretext: hetronyms, Rear window, Londres
1993 John Moores exhibition 18, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool (Premier Prix)
1989 Blasphemies, ecstasies, cries, Serpentine Gallery, Londres
Photographic art in Britain 1945-1989, The Barbican Gallery, Londres
1988 Romantic visions, Camden Arts Centre, Londres
1986 Painting/Photography, Richard De Marco Gallery, Edimbourg
1982 The Third Meaning, Museum of Modern Art, Oxford
1977 Summer show 4, Serpentine Gallery, Londres

publications

2008 Dance to the Muzik of Time publié par Arts Council Royaume-Uni
2005 Carro Electrico 104, publié par Stcp Museum, Porto, Portugal
2003 Ukadia, publié par Djanogly Art Gallery, (Isbn 1 900809 16 8)

catalogues

2009 Photographic Migrants: John Goto's West End Blues, par Dr Nancy Roth, Vilém Flusser Studies
2006 John Goto's New World Circus, publié par Focal Point Gallery, Isbn: 0-9547777-3-5 Textes de Celia Goto, John Goto et Michael Young
Floodscapes, publié par The Environment Agency's Floodscape Project, Textes de Egon Walesch et John Goto
1998 The Commissar of Space, Textes de Professor Brandon Taylor et John Goto
1997 The Framer's Collection, Limited Edition H/B Artists Book
1993 The Scar, inclus trois fictions de Durda Otrzan, publié par Benjamin Rhodes Gallery, London
1990 The Atomic Yard, publié par Kettle's Yard Gallery et Raab Gallery
1988 Terezin, Published By `Remembering For The Future' avec des articles du Dr D Muhlberger et Craigie Horsfield
1984 Shotover, publié par Oxford Polytechnic Press

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séléction d'articles de John Goto

2006 A work in progress, in 'Iconic Worlds' Ed. Christa Maar and Hubert Burda, Pub Dumont, Cologne;
2005 Digital photography and its detractors, Nextlevel 8
Landscape gardens, Narrative painting and High summer, In Surface, Ed Liz Wells, University of Plymouth Press
Bursaries, Commissions, Residencies, Awards
2007 Arts council of England Major commission;
Synectics survey of contemporary living genius voted John Goto into 58th place
2006 Floodscape, Environment Agency And Eu Commission
2005 Shortlisted Artist for Bmw Prize at Paris Photo
2002 Nominee for 'No Limits' Award aux Rencontres D'arles
2001 Portrait commission of the Vice-Presidents of The British Academy
1999-2000 Artist in residence, National Portrait Gallery, Londres
1988-89 Artist fellow at Girton College/Kettle's Yard, University of Cambridge

enseignement

2003 - Professor of Fine Art, University of Derby
1979- Visiting Lecturer; St Martin's School of Art, University of The Arts, Londres; Slade School of Fine Art, University College, Londres; Faculty of Architecture, Cambridge University; Ruskin School of Drawing, University of Oxford; Royal College of Art, Londres; University of Indus trial Arts, Helsinki; Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design, Hebrew University, Jerusalem; Lud wig-Maximilians University, Munich

collections publiques

Arts Council of Great Britain
Australian National Gallery
Southern Arts Collection
Victoria and Albert Museum
Museum of Modern Art, Valencia
Manchester City Museum
Perm State Museum, Perm, Russia
University of Warwick Collection
British Government Art Collection
National Portrait Gallery, London
Deutsche Bank, London
The British Academy, London
Norwich Gallery Collection
University of Sussex Collection
Eurohypo Bank, London
British Art Center, Yale University
Marjorie Mynard Barley Collection, St Anne's College, University of Oxford

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Landscape gardens, narrative painting and 'High Summer'
By John Goto, Oxford 2001

'The Lascivious Squire' C1800 by Thomas Rowlandson, pencil, ink and colour washes.
Collection of Celia and John Goto

The last thing to be made after a series of pictures is completed is the lecture accounting for it. The danger in such hindsight is the tendency to correct false turns, erase blunders and give to the development a steadfast and inevitable direction never discerned at the time of making. Such presentations tend, for example, to foreground ideas and to present these as if conceived fully formed and separated from unconscious wanderings and the graft of making images.

I must say that increasingly I think that my pictures 'speak for themselves'. My earlier work, that concerning twentieth century history, required some unpacking as the public could not be expected to have an intimate knowledge of the subject matter; whether it be early Soviet history or the fate of the Jews of Bohemia during the Second World War. Recounting these historical narratives offered a productive way of speaking about my pictures. But since I have turned my attention to contemporary Britain... I have felt lost for words.

I intend, therefore, to write here about some of the paintings and gardens that I was looking at whilst making High Summer, in the hope that the connections linking these disparate images and places will best be revealed in the work itself.

For some years now I have been studying the marvellous body of work left to us by William Hogarth. I would like briefly to discuss his An Election Entertainment which was the first in a series of four paintings Hogarth made concerning the 1754 election campaign in Oxfordshire. It is presently housed in John Soane's labyrinthine museum in London. I learnt something from this picture which I have employed in my recent work, and it concerns the use of ironic contrast.

The scene is set in a functions room in the fictional constituency of 'Guzzledown'. Outside the window the Tories are parading under the same banners as the Whigs, who now occupy the hall they have just vacated. With no real difference between the two parties the election has degenerated into a slanging match over trivial issues and the bawdy electorate are seen making the most of the bribe of a free lunch. At one end of the arrangement of trestle tables the ambitious and foppish politician Sir Commodity Taxem seems over whelmed by his drunken supporters. In the foreground of the picture a Whig attorney collapses as he is struck on the head by a brick thrown through the window, and to his right the mayor is bled by an apothecary to help him recover after a surfeit of oysters.

The picture alludes through its form and subject to Leonardo Da Vinci's The Last Supper. Hogarth creates an ironic contrast between that painting's sense of obligation and sacrifice and the corruption and fatuousness of the present scene. In 'High Summer' I too attempt an ironic contrast, between the idealised Arcadian setting and antics of the contemporary tourists wandering though it.

The seed of the 'High Summer' series was planted twenty years ago when I first visited Rousham Park near my hometown of Oxford. Rousham is a small landscaped garden offering vistas framed by trees, winding paths, streams, classical statues and garden buildings which include temples, a Palladian gateway and a variety of follies. Its importance is as a prototype where the ideas associated with the English landscape garden were first worked out by designers Charles Bridgeman and William Kent. They in turn were influenced by the classical landscape paintings of Claude Lorrain and Nicolas Poussin (of whom more later). The dominant style of garden design when Kent began working at Rousham in 1738 was still the formal geometrical garden with its straight vistas and clipped trees. Bridgeman's most important innovation had been the ha-ha; a ditch surrounding the garden in place of a fence or wall, which gave the impression of including the surrounding landscape within the garden's design. Kent treated the construction of the garden as if making a series of painted views, connecting one to the next by serpentine walkways.

I also used two other gardens from this period, at Stowe in Buckinghamshire and Stourhead in Hampshire, which are larger and more elaborate than Rousham. Stowe offers a particularly interesting example of how a political statement could be encoded into a seemingly innocuous garden design. Its owner, Viscount Cobham, along with other radical Whigs took Republican Rome as their model. The Palladian houses they built in fact became badges of this ideology. Cobham began his garden in 1715 when he was dismissed from the army for his Whig beliefs and retired to his estate. He had John Vanburgh rebuild the house and design temples for the garden whilst Charles Bridgeman laid out the grounds. The Viscount resumed his army career but again resigned in 1733 over Walpole's Excise Bill. A new coalition of disaffected Whigs and old Tories formed against Walpole who had by this time been in power for twenty years. This group gathered around Fredrick, Prince of Wales, and the new style of gardening was associated with this disgruntled coalition.

At this point William Kent arrived at Stowe and laid out his 'Elysian Fields' and 'River Styx'. With James Gibbs, who replaced Vanburgh on his death, he designed 'The Temple of Ancient Virtue' containing statues of amongst others Socrates and Homer. Near by, and in implied contrast, stood 'The Temple of Modern Virtue,' which was a ruin containing a headless figure generally taken to be that of Walpole. Further political inscriptions were made in the 'Temple of British Worthies' with its busts of Whig heroes and the 'Temple of Friendship' containing a statue of the Prince of Wales and other opposition figures.

As has already been mentioned, one of the major sources of inspiration for these gardens were the landscapes paintings of Claude and Poussin, brought back from Rome in quantities by English aristocrats and their agents. For the wealthy the Grand Tour formed an obligatory part of their education. These were the original tourists, travelling for pleasure and self-improvement rather than for war or religion. Like modern tourists some encounter mishaps, were robbed or fell ill, and once away from home others indulged in promiscuous sex, gambling and gluttony. Never the less, many also cultivated a great knowledge of, and love for, Italian painting and their legacy is to be found in our national collections. First hand experience of European art was also considered essential in the training of an artist and William Kent, for example, had travelled in Italy for ten years before commencing his career as a landscape designer.

One can still see in some of these English country houses the effect of a Claude painting hanging beside a window which opens up onto an echoing classical landscape by William Kent. Part of the designer's artistry was in adapting the grand scale of the Roman Campagna to that of the English country estate with its meadows and rolling hills. An interesting reversal of this scaling down can be seen in the fine watercolour by JMW Turner The Rise of the River Stour at Stourhead c1824.

The artist brought an epic sense of scale to the scene by trebling the height of the hill bordering the lake and diminishing the size of the Pantheon across the water, thereby increasing the size of the tarn. It is a most Claudian of views. Turner's admiration for his predecessor is also exampled by his donation of two important paintings by himself to the nation on the condition that they should hang alongside Claude's landscapes, which they do to this day in the National Gallery.

So now let us turn our attention to the ideal landscapes of Claude Lorrain and Nicolas Poussin. Landscape had developed as a genre firstly in Holland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, where a new source of patronage was to be found amongst the rising merchant classes who purchased small paintings for their homes. Rather as if zooming in on the landscape background to a religious painting, the genre now placed nature centre stage. Nature was a source of pleasure and individual contemplation, and in this sense it was seen as politically democratic. It could also be shown as potentially uncontrollable and awe-inspiring.

An important component of these early landscapes were signs of civilisation, without which they were considered to have no real subject matter. The industry of peasants observed working on country estates typically provided such reassuring subjects. The genre of landscape embraced high and low - it encompassed both sublime imitation and every day reality. Through the skill of the artist in rendering detail, nature was given a visible and tangible reality, but it was also assumed that behind that reality lay the workings of God.

There was a troubling erotic element to nature's reproductive fecundity, which was often expressed through the actions of satyrs and shepherds. These transgressive subjects might cause unease and moral turbulence in the viewer but they could be legitimised by idealisation, and the myth of Arcadia accomplished this.

The main sources of Arcadian myth are Theocritus's 'Idylls" and Virgil's 'Eclogues', which situate it either in the little known Peloponnies or distant Sicily. The depictions of temples and other buildings in the paintings of Poussin and Claude do not strictly accord with these accounts of Arcadia. They are in fact based on observations made in the Roman Compagna of Ancient Roman ruins and again testify to the important model classical civilisation continued to offer in the 17C.

Ideal landscapes provided a setting for the drama of human emotions and actions whilst also showing a Utopian world evoking the dream of some longed for perfect life. Precedence was given to the laws of pictorial composition over the strict observation of nature. On a metaphysical level they invited speculation on the role of God in the formation of the natural world.

There is one further landscape painting I would briefly like to look at, as it too has echoes in High Summer. The Forest Fire by Piero Di Cosimo hangs in my local museum, the Ashmolean in Oxford. Painted around 1505, its size and shape suggest it was a spalliera panel, whose function in a domestic context was as a backboard to a chest or bench.

The collection of animals depicted strikes us as rather odd and improbable. For although many are native to the countryside around Florence - the oxen, red deer, domestic pig and even the brown bear which at that time still roamed the forests - others are decidedly alien, particularly the lion and lioness. There is shown a great variety of birds, some of which look drawn from dead specimens in the market. They include starlings, partridges, a pigeon, a woodcock, peregrine hawks, goldfinch and a common crane. The picture begins to look like a catalogue of species, motivated possible by an interest in the emerging natural sciences.

But this does not explain the fire and the two strange hybrid figures. Theories abound; that the fire is a metaphor for love; that taming of fire was seen as the first step towards civilisation and language; or that it was simply a test of the painter's virtuosity. But what of the addition of satyrs heads to the pig and deer? It remains a troubling and enigmatic picture with its odd mixture of natural and unnatural elements. Pasturelands was the picture most directly influenced by it in my 'High Summer' series.

I would like to turn now to someone I felt to be a fellow traveller whilst making this series - Dr Syntax. The creation of Thomas Rowlandson, the good Doctor was a cultural tourist and eccentric who first appeared in Dr Syntax in Search of the Picturesque in 1812. The tale is told through a series of pictures with verses by William Combe attached. On his journey all manner of ills befall Syntax, he is robbed, lost, made drunk and near drowned, all in the search for an illusive picturesque landscape. Rowlandson satirises here the Rev. William Gilpin's ideas, developed in the 1760's, of picturesque beauty which celebrated texture, roughness and ruggedness over the smooth lines of the parklands of Capability Brown. In Dr Syntax pursued by a Bull we see Syntax sketching outside Oxford and Combe's accompanying text reads-

'But as he ran to save his bacon,
by hat and wig he was forsaken.'

Political satire has seemed to me an increasingly relevant means by which an artist can deal with the post Cold War world. And so, along side Hogarth and Rowlandson, I have been looking at James Gillray's work. The marvellous image, Monster Craws at a New Coalition Feast was made in 1787 and I quote from the recent Tate catalogue-

'The subject is a familiar one; the greed and miserliness of the King and Queen, and the perpetual need for funds of Frederick, Prince of Wales. All three are seated in front of the Treasury gate. They sit gorging themselves on a great bowl of guineas, inscribed ' John Bull's Blood'. The print is a satire on a partial reconciliation between the Prince and his parents after Pitt had recommended a settlement of his debts, and the granting of additional income, including the revenue from the Duchy of Cornwall.'

The final historical ingredient I would like briefly to discuss are the scenes of every day life found in Dutch Genre painting. I must say that I think it a great achievement when I see people still laughing in front of humorous paintings made some 300 years ago. (Humour is maybe the most difficult of art forms.) We can still recognise the types portrayed and understand much of the symbolism. And my favourite is the irascible Jan Steen.

As the Old Sing, So Pipe the Young by Steen represents a popular proverb and makes a punning play on children smoking and blowing on pipes in imitation of their elders. It was painted c1663. The well-humoured family group includes the characteristically wayward Steen who appears as the father, mischievously teaching his son to smoke. Its stance is morally equivocal and therefore appealing to modern sensibilities. The expressive animation of the figures and the technical quality of the paintwork I find extraordinary.

A brief word about the term 'genre'. It was used historically either to describe a type, kind or category, as in 'the genre of landscape', or specifically to denote representations of everyday life in the term - 'Genre Painting'. In the latter sense it was often contrasted with the weightier category of History Painting, whose subjects were drawn from religion and classical mythology (as we have seen, for example, in Claude's work). The two offer again a 'high / low' opposition.

In The Merry Threesome c1670, Steen takes a familiar and well-worn theme of a lustful and foolish older man being flattered and fleeced by an attractive young woman whilst an old crone distracts him with wine. Steen gives the story a new twist by the attention the young woman is drawing to her own activity, pointing to the thieving hand, yet the laughing fellow knowingly goes along with the deception. (There is no fool like an old fool). This treatment makes the theme less moralising and more comic and theatrical. Steen's casting of himself as the leering musician enhances the self-deprecating humour of the image.

I hope in this brief account to have shown the value I place on the study of such paintings. Contemporary art education seldom introduces students to art much before their own era, and so if they wish to learn from the narrative tradition in painting, they have to become autodidacts. They are fortunate in having great national collections and galleries in this country, in which the student of landscape can learn as much as by travelling the land, like poor Dr. Syntax, in search of the elusive picturesque.

John Goto

Oxford 2001

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Is There Power in Critical Art?

By John Goto
Presented at The Art Forum, University Museum, University of Oxford; with speakers Marina Warner, Katie Paterson, John Jordan, chaired by John Hoole and organised by Susan Moxley and Tess Blenkinsop, **19 May 2008**

We have been asked to consider 'Is There Power in Critical Art?'

To put the question in perspective one might ask whether there was power in two million people marching through the streets of London in protest against the coming invasion of Iraq? Clearly there was not. Tony Blair took us to war regardless, and behind him, shoulder to shoulder, stood the two main political parties. If within a democracy the voices of so many can be ignored, then what chance has the barely audible utterances of the artist? Very little I would suggest. But maybe artistic 'power' can take on other forms, less direct and more insidious in their critique of the status quo.

I recently saw a film by a younger artist which, from the perspective of our compliant consumer society, lamented the passing of the 'revolutionary' spirit of 1968. The present rash of commemorative celebrations tend to gloss over the comfortable lifestyles that many of the old radicals of '68 now enjoy in the media, business and academia - the tough price they have paid for failure!

For sure something changed, not so much in '68 in my experience, as in '89. Because it was then that we lost an alternative; a counter ideology; a place of hopefulness; we lost Socialism. Since then we have been living in a political monoculture, characterised by a lack of meaningful alternatives, and the growing suspicion that national politicians have little power to control our economic or ecological environments. But I guess I have been invited to contribute to this discussion not for my skills as a political analyst, but as a picture maker. So against this backdrop, I want to pick up the story of my own work from '89, and to show a few examples of the changes it has taken in critical response to events.

After '89 there was for me a period of mourning, rather as for the young filmmaker I mentioned. I made a series in the wake of events entitled 'The Scar', which analogously related the break up of a love affair, to the political rifts occurring within the Eastern bloc. Then followed a series concerning the demise of the old revolutionary and avant-gardist Kasimir Malevich, entitled 'The Commissar of Space'.

But the real change came in the mid '90's when I turned away from historical subjects to deal directly with the present. And when I looked at the world around me I found that, to paraphrase Juvenal, 'It was difficult not to make satire'.

My first shot at producing a satirical image took as its subject the ever recurring absurdities, and small-time corruptions of the art world. At the centre of 'Private View' stands the confident young Gallery Owner, with the figure of Old Money behind her. She manipulates the puppet like Successful Young Artist, held in the palm of the Collector's hand. To the right the leather-clad Critic kowtows, behind whom kneels one of two Artist Donors, whose nose is in dangerous proximity to the Critic's Ass.

An all-important Ethical Distance exists between the main group and the figure on the left of the Public Gallery Director, who as we can see has just lifted the purse of the Collector's Beau. Behind him his Assistant is on his mobile to the Gallery Owner, thus completing the circle. And the cumulative effect of all these shenanigans is... that we can't see the pictures!

From Hogarth I learnt something about the use of ironic contrast. In 'An Election Entertainment' , for example, through its arrangement of forms he refers us to Leonardo's 'Last Supper' , and thereby creates an ironic juxtaposition between its sense of sacrifice, and the greedy fatuousness of this Oxfordshire election scene.

With the coming of New Labour I embarked on three related exhibitions entitled 'Ukadia'. The first, 'Capital Arcade', opens in the car park of a shopping mall on Mandleson Way, with the artist tugged between dour socialism and peroxide consumerism - there's not much doubt which direction he will take. This is based on Reynolds's 'Garrick Between Comedy and Tragedy'. Another example shows a young man beckoning his companions into McDonald's, in implied contrast to 'Christ Driving the Traders from the Temple', by El Greco.

My peregrination through Blaire's Britain then took me, in 'High Summer' into our idyllic countryside, where I encountered 'Eco Warriors', sports fanatics, the county set, and the ubiquitous art world - et in Arcadia Ego .

'Gilt City' is set in the City of London and seems to rehearse a Social Realist model by contrasting rich and poor. Until that is, we take a close look at these outsiders. Then we begin to doubt their authenticity. They are dressed just a little too well, in what might be read as chic street style. The viewer's sympathy turns to suspicion, then incredulity. This conflicted positioning of the viewer echoes greater social uncertainties regarding the poor, in which we are all ethically implicated.

The final image in this series was made just before the Iraq war, and has Blair of Baghdad striking a triumphant pose, brandishing a bible and a gun. On the ground before the 'Living Statue', lies a wounded New Labour Supporter clutching his copy of Peter Mandelson and Roger Liddle's 1996 manifesto 'The Blair Revolution'.

I would like to pause now in this gallop through my work, to think for a moment about 'why make satire?' It is hardly a fashionable form in fine art these days. During the past fifty years or so there have been pockets of activity and notable individuals. A few Eastern European film makers in the 'sixties come to mind, this from Jerzy Skolimowski's 'Hands Up' ; also Ad Reinhardt's 'Art Comics and Satires' ; Joerg Immendorff's 'Café Deutschland' ; Dick Bengtsson's work throughout the '70s; Pyotr Belov's soviet satires; Komar and Melamid's 'History Paintings' and arguably the late works of Peter De Francia and Philip Guston. All good artists but it must be said, none were particularly influential on the mainstream.

If not for career opportunities, then temperament must play its part in creating satirists. Irascibility and a taste for the surreal, the absurd, the grotesque and the carnivalesque seem to be prerequisites. Satirists don't wither in despair but feel compelled to express their dissent. Satire is the language of the underdog. Whilst the propagandist of yesterday offered his or her own brand of ideological fix, the satirist feels no compulsion to offer solutions. In their criticism the satirist self-satirises, believing it better to play the fool than the high priest, of which the art world already has a surfeit.

The invasion and occupation of Iraq is as shameful as it is disastrous. In retrospect there are few who would argue against this, but when I began to make 'The New World Circus' it was a different story. I developed a disparaging analogy between the New World Order and circus, into an allegory of the war. Some of the pictures parody documentary photos from the conflict - Statue Entrée, The Illusionist and Crowd Scene. Others take the form of traditional circus acts - Mazeppa, The Strongman and Mirror Entrée. It begins with a Grand Parade and ends with a Grand Finale.

Did it stop the war? No, of course not. But it did tour the country for 18 months, and in as much as the art press neglected it, it proved popular with audiences. I like to think that the sentiments of all those ignored protesters found voice again, within the gallery walls.

In an attempt to reduce the time lag between events, and the responding images reaching an audience, I recently made a work solely for the internet. Using Google Earth I shifted the topographical furniture around a little. As you move the cursor over the 'i' the location is revealed. These pictures were made quickly in response to news events, in a manner akin to a newspaper cartoonist. What they gained in topicality, however, I felt they lost in complexity, but I still like their pithiness. A less direct, more poetic form of speech, and images layered over a period, places the fine art satirist in a different time relationship to events to the daily cartoonist.

Time and history return as subjects in the most recent series I have made. Here I rework moments from English history with dancers drawn from some of the diverse ethnic and cultural traditions found in present-day Britain. One of its threads is a critique of the homogenised society aimed at by the abandonment of multiculturalism. Saluting the flag, oaths of allegiance and museums of Britishness are hopeless sticking plasters with which to bind the wounds of Iraq.

To return now to the question of 'whether critical art has power'? The artist's job in my view is to tell as fully as they can about the world as they find it. To bear witness, to observe and to reflect. Art does not have the power to directly effect events, and is mercifully incapable of creating revolutions, but it does accrue ethical power over time. By way of an example, George IV is less remembered now through his official portraits (this one by Sir Thomas Lawrence) than by Gillray's savage 'A Voluptuary under the horrors of Digestion' .

Thinking minds and dissenting voices might not register widely in their day, but their ethical power grows over time, as the official line diminishes.

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Reflections on the Future of History: John Goto's A Dance to the Muzik of Time

Nancy Roth

This series makes no secret of its own construction. It uses—probably tests–the possibilities of digital software, and makes no apology for its jumps and contradictions as it maps past into present, painting into Photoshop, history into dialogue, the durability of traditional "Englishness" on to an athletic, energetic diversity of races, costumes and, inevitably, relationships to the past, all in constant motion. The title is borrowed from that of a painting by Nicolas Poussin in the Wallace Collection in London, showing four allegorical figures—perhaps the seasons—dancing to a tune played by an aged figure suggestive of Time. The same title was used by Anthony Powell for a series of 12 novels published between 1951 and 1975. Said to be the longest novel in the English language, it traces the bonds among a group of friends and lovers who become close, lose touch and later meet again, all the while witnessing and responding to events, personalities, and issues in Britain in the mid-twentieth century. With the title, then, Goto both establishes both a relationship to history painting–to the goal of constructing a serious, nuanced statement about the world in a single image, and alludes to a particular, subjective construction English history. But the changed spelling of Muzik also signals a dissonance, a radical departure–from history painting, from the form of the novel, arguably even from history as such.

A Dance to the Muzik of Time is a commission to picture "iconic locations in the East Midlands, featuring professional dancers." The commissioning institutions—The Arts Council of England, East Midlands, with support from the University of Derby, didn't explicitly mention history. But since an "iconic location" can only get to be iconic by being meaningful over time, and since dancers are lively, contemporary beings, the brief does specify some form of dialogue between past and present. Among the best reasons Goto qualified for this commission, I suspect, is that for him such dialogue is precisely what contemporary history ought to be.

Each work refers to a specific past time and place, usually by means of a notable architectural monument coupled with the title text. The times range between 1280 and 2008, the places are all in the East Midlands. The three dance companies who collaborated in producing the work, too, are all based in the area: The Groundhogs–breakdancers–and the Kathak classical group called Manushi both come from Nottingham, and the Bollywood dancers, Desi Mast, from Leicester.

Depite the explicit dates, Goto calls the whole series not a history, but a peregrination through the East Midlands—that is, a move through space rather than through time. For these images are in the present, about the present. This is clear immediately from the clean, evenly-lit, constructed "look,"—the evidently layered composition, unabashedly eclectic combining of sources, high-end production values, a conscious sense of "performance" insured by the disciplined bodies of the dancers and the constant framing device of a toy theatre, even the heightened, consciously-manipulated colour. No one of the images reads visually as any "older," depicting any "earlier" event than another. To go back in time is, rather, to go back into any one picture, to what would be the ground of a painting—the first layer in Photoshop, to the plane in which one finds the iconic building that sets the site and date—1280 for Lincolnshire Cathedral, 1486 for Southwell Minster. In front of these, in what reads as the broad, shallow present, the dancers pose and gesture, in costumes that assert a cultural eclecticism. It looks very exciting—if spatially, logistically impossible. They come from everywhere, seem to represent every age, any point in modern history. They strike extravagant poses, gesture with joyous abandon, wear rich splendid, rich, exotic clothing—or not. Sometimes when they move they leave elegant painterly marks that hardly seem photographic. Usually they are shown on the same scale, as though they could meet—although not in Lincoln 1280, where each pilgrim seems to define a unique space. They move and look across the space of the present, although they don't seem to really meet each other. Nor do they look "back"—literally to the back plane of the picture, or reflect, rest. A few look at us, especially the masked dancers in Chatsworth 1696, where they are usurping the plinths formerly occupied by classical statues. But overall they seem tremendously busy with something now, in the present, something that has scant bearing on what is behind them—or on us. In short, A Dance pictures a nation—or part of a nation–performing itself to a great many musics,

There is a strong implication, though, that Goto could engage the same framing, temporal mapping, and compositional devices in another part of Britain or another part of the world. This is to say that the work treats the East Midlands's relationship to its own past as in some respects absolutely unique, and in others as an intersection between Photoshop and earlier photography. The high resolution, sophisticated layering and trained performers mark these

images as of extremely recent vintage. But more importantly, they read as insights into Photoshop's inherently theatrical function, for example the way the software expedites the construction of layers in a single image. Some will hastily associate such theatricality with products of the consciousness industry, images that instruct us about how to buy or vote, what to worry about and when. But the complexities of A Dance.. will not resolve into a simple, banal message, however superficially one may look. They demand the second, longer look and then flow into a wealth of detail with the breadth of a reference work. Clearly that this time the technology is doing something very different.

Goto was by no means alone in embracing digital photographic technology from the first moment it became available in the mid-1980s. He must have been among very few, however, who immediately saw the technology as more than a means of doing familiar things like cutting and pasting images more efficiently. Rather he identified in it a way of reflecting and constructing the world in an absolutely unprecedented way, a way suited to an unprecedented contemporary world. He was among the first, that is, to recognize the potential of Photoshop and allied digital software to sustain a life's intellectual engagement, with a potential as rich as that of painting or writing.

As a result, Goto and his work currently figure in a polemic whose depth and scope he could hardly have anticipated, and which he himself still finds puzzling. In an essay from 2005 entitled "Digital Photography and its Detractors" he speculated about the reasons art and educational establishments continue to give digital technology such a cool and often superficial welcome, why even photographic artists who use digital technology tend to mask the fact behind images that obey the inherited rules of a photographically-ordered visual field. There are institutional reasons for such resistance, Goto assumed—limited funding among them. But he supposed that the more important reason was the absence of an adequate—or even a conventional—way of theorizing and teaching the new possibilities. I want to go a little further and suggest that it is the very possibility of an adequate theory or pedagogy that is under threat, the very concepts of "pedagogy" and "curriculum" themselves. For the speed and fluidity of digital communication threatens the most basic models we make of ourselves, our past, our institutions, which are largely grounded in an assumption about the role of linear text, of writing and print. In challenging linear text, digital technology simultaneously challenges conceptions of history, knowledge, and theory that have long provided the foundations of the academy.

Goto's work has always been concerned with history, that is, with an understanding of the past encoded in written texts—narratives, guidebooks, biographies. However lightly he wears his erudition, he is clearly steeped in historical sources—visual, textual, and acoustic. He writes with grace and fluency—though now more often as clarification, elaboration, or occasionally defense of the work, rather than as part of it. In fact one way to understand the development of his work might be as a challenge to a received concept of history—specifically the challenge presented by photography. In its themes, Goto's work has tended to move forward in time—from the early twentieth century to the present. Perhaps more crucially, it has moved away from a reliance on words to "frame" or locate the pictures, and towards self-sufficient pictures. He has himself remarked that as he approaches present-day England–his own time and place, he has felt "at a loss for words".
Such a changing sense of balance between images and texts recalls the sweeping cultural shift from text to image that Vilém Flusser described, most fully in his 1985 text Into the Universe of Technical Pictures. For Flusser, history begins and ends with writing; images do many things, but they do not support a form of consciousness that constructs chains of events, patterns that "explain" the present. That is the province of writing alone. In Flusser's account, automated image-making technologies, beginning with photography, compete with and eventually supercede writing as the most familiar, fastest, most usual way of generating, storing and distributing information. And as we collectively begin to rely more and more on images in favor of linear texts, to we no longer want or need "history" in the sense of a linear, temporal progression. In the "universe of technical pictures" we seek exchange rather than explanation, dialogue rather than truth.

Flusser had both hopes and fears for this emerging universe. He feared its tendency to become automatic and to absorb all of us into a fixed, deadly pattern. He hoped that the new technologies would, on the contrary, bring the first opportunity for people to be completely creative, completely human—to stop working and play. The difference between the two, as he saw it, lay in the possibility of inventive engagement with the new technologies themselves, of inducing them to produce surprises, opening new fields of creative play.

Any of Goto's work could be grasped as an address to—or from—the past, "written"—as a series of photographs. Each series relies on a purpose-built relationship of images to language, presenting a specific challenge to our "reading" of the past.

In this sense, any of it may be seen to confirm, complicate, or undermine such a sweeping formulation as Flusser's of pictures replacing text. But A Dance to the Muzik of Time does this more effectively than any of Goto's previous work, not least because the images function so independently. They do not constitute a history—at least not in Flusser's sense, for they are not "written," not linear text, not causally ordered. They don't explain why England is the way it is. Rather they re-present selected historical content—dates and ideas, personalities and projects, successes and failures, as images—all resolutely in the present. If anything they quite systematically undermine linear history, or perhaps better, ransack the ruins for parts. Goto is fully aware of the implications.

> «One of the great things about the present day East Midlands is its diversity of cultures. What sense do national (or maybe its nationalistic) histories make in a migratory world and for citizens of differing ethnic and historical origins? Rather than see history as fixed, might it not be better to think of it as a site of negotiation, a platform for debate, where the relationship between the past and the ever-changing present is constantly reviewed?»

And yet such a history is arguably not history—or not as we know it—but potential play, exchange, invention. And A Dance to the Muzik of Time is neither a text nor a predictable set of technical pictures. Here, Photoshop breaks free of its usual masters, and becomes a means of playing with potential relationships between past and present, recovering a little of the ambitions of history painters, doing things software designers could hardly have anticipated, suggesting, however obliquely, a startling and completely new kind of freedom.