

# Obituaries

## Erika Langmuir (1931–2015)

ERIKA LANGMUIR, who died aged eighty-four on 8th December 2015, was fascinated by how we look at paintings, how we puzzle over them, make stories out of them and find delight in them. And she devoted her professional life to enabling and encouraging the widest possible public to study and enjoy them, especially those of the National Gallery in London.

Erika's deep belief in European culture as a shared humane inheritance was in large measure the result of her own experiences. She was born in Warsaw on 15th May 1931 to a rich Jewish family, the Blumenfelds. The Jewish child, however, was frequently and covertly taken to church by her Catholic nanny, the source of a lifelong fascination with Christian imagery. When the Nazis invaded in 1939, she and her parents were among the few members of her family to escape – through Romania and via Alexandria to southern France. School there was abandoned when Pétain's Vichy in turn began its persecution of the Jews. The family fled to Morocco, and from there in June 1942 to New York. At Stanford University, where she gained an MA in art history, she was inspired to pursue her career in that discipline by another European refugee, Lorenz Eitner; and on being offered a Kress fellowship to study for her doctorate, she moved to London in 1968, where she quickly became, and remained, a devoted child of the Warburg Institute, deeply influenced by E.H. Gombrich's teaching, from whom she learned to communicate complex ideas in simple language, and by the Institute's intellectual generosity, epitomised for her in Jennifer Montagu.

Erika lectured at the University of Sussex from 1971 to 1981; there she collaborated with her colleague Norbert Lynton on the *Pan Art Dictionary* (subsequently developed into *The Yale Dictionary of Art and Artists*, 2000), contributing the entries covering 1300 to 1800. Each miniature biography was seriously considered, and the choice of themes remains as intriguing as the entries on the artists.

From 1981 to 1988 Erika held the Chair of Art History in the Open University. She played a pivotal role in developing both the teaching and research strategies of the University. She chaired the highly successful course *Art in Fifteenth-century Italy*, launched in 1985 with over one thousand students in its first year. She gave the conceptual lead in boldly structuring the whole course around a debate as to the extent of Florentine dominance in this period, and took on the daunting task of writing the introductory material herself, as well as making memorable television programmes on her beloved Florence. Perhaps even more importantly for the future of art history at the Open University, Erika's wise and generous rule was also marked by the way she encouraged and enabled younger colleagues to start building successful research careers.

From 1988 to 1995 Erika headed – and transformed – the Education Department at the National Gallery. She brought to it a quite new level of academic distinction and rigour. It was rare at the time for so senior an academic to work in museum education (and even rarer for curators to find a respected peer in such a



42. Erika Langmuir at the Piano Grande, near Castelluccio. c.2000.

role), but her years at the Open University had convinced her that there was a large appetite for the serious study of art history. She arrived in Trafalgar Square with the confident experience that intelligent looking could attract and engage a huge non-academic public, and with the support of a gifted curatorial team she set out to do exactly that.

In her book *Imagining Childhood* (2006), she wrote that her aim was 'not to deduce attitudes to childhood from images, but to study what they tell us about the use of images'. In this context, the images of children were especially instructive, because they were produced by artists at all levels of skill, and used by a very diverse public, not least by women. These were images that not only touched or pleased the viewer: they mattered. Indeed, they could change lives.

It was this belief in the power of pictures in daily life that drew Erika from academe to the National Gallery, with its long history of wide public access, a tradition she embraced and greatly enriched. For the opening of the Sainsbury Wing in 1991 she oversaw the production of the technologically pioneering MicroGallery, where every picture could be digitally summoned and explored. The result was a room that attracted above all the young to browse through the collection, but it was also a rich academic resource. It was an achievement of which she was justifiably intensely proud.

In her lectures and books about the collection, Erika hoped to allow everyone 'to visit painted landscapes as confidently and enjoyably as real ones'. And not just landscapes: she also wrote on narrative and allegory (noting archly that 'Few Vices have entered the National Gallery'), still life and saints. These books are strolls through the collection, written with elegant erudition and punctuated with the sharpest observation (such as, how the water in Piero's *Baptism* moves from transparency to reflection). Her *Companion Guide* is, I believe, one of the finest books written on a single collection: through intense engagements with

single pictures, she effectively constructs a narrative of European culture over seven hundred years (see p.229 for a review of the latest edition). The books were accompanied by a wide-ranging programme of lectures and studies, in effect turning the National Gallery into an Open University, where all could learn.

Since 1970 Erika has contributed frequently to this Magazine, writing penetrating articles and reviews on sixteenth-century painting, particularly on Nicolo dell'Abate (1970, pp.106–08; and 1975, pp.728–29), the subject of her thesis, and most recently on Stanley Spencer and Acts of Mercy (2014, pp.590–94). Her final reviews, of a book and exhibition devoted to Carlo Dolci, appeared only two months before her death (2015, pp.712–13 and 729–30).

In retirement Erika moved with her husband Charles McKeown to Giove, not far north of Rome, where this Polish/French/American was affectionately known, to her great amusement, as 'la donna inglese'. She continued writing and reviewing to the end, still finding intense pleasure in pictures. As she wrote at the end of her book on still life, 'A genre that has the potential to make you grateful to be alive can never be a mere reminder of futility, whatever judgment awaits'.

NEIL MACGREGOR

## Giles Waterfield (1949–2016)

GILES ADRIAN WATERFIELD was a museum director, curator, teacher, art consultant and novelist who became an admired authority on museum history and on the history of artists' studios. His life was cut short by a heart attack on 5th November 2016 at the age of sixty-seven.

He was born at Bramley in Surrey on 24th July 1949. His father, Anthony Waterfield (on whom the character Nicholas in Ann Bridges's 1935 best seller *Illyrian Spring* was based), was a metallurgist who worked for Union Carbide in Geneva and who advised the British Government on matters scientific. Giles, his brother, William, and sister, Cordelia, grew up in French Switzerland, Paris and Dorset. He was educated at Eton, followed by Magdalen College, Oxford, where he read English. In 1971 he taught for a year at the Merz-Schule, a private school in Stuttgart, laying the foundations for his deep love of the German language, culture and thought. In 1972 he joined the pioneering Study Centre course for the History of the Fine and Decorative Arts, run by Erica O'Donnell and known as the 'V. & A. course', before moving on to the Courtauld Institute, completing his MA thesis on the architect Thomas Hardwick (1752–1829) in 1975. From 1976 to 1979 he was Education Officer at Brighton Museum and Art Gallery at the Royal Pavilion.

In 1979 Waterfield was appointed the first Director of Dulwich Picture Gallery, aged thirty, thanks to the initiative of the dynamic Basil Greenhill, then chairman of the Dulwich Picture Gallery Committee. The Gallery's important collections had languished in the care of a charitable educational foundation, Alleyn's College of God's Gift, despite opening in 1817 as Britain's first public national gallery in a building designed by John Soane. As a schoolboy at Dulwich College in the 1960s the architectural historian Gavin Stamp recalled how there was no electricity (installed only in 1974) and that 'the interior, painted a drab light grey, felt cold and bleak', while Soane's mausoleum

for the Gallery's principal donors, Noel Desenfans and Sir Francis Bourgeois, was inaccessible (*Country Life*, 2nd March 2011). When Waterfield arrived, there were no special exhibitions and no conservation programme, just a typewriter and a rusty kettle. With the confidence of youth, Waterfield turned the Gallery around, putting the building and its contents back on the international map, beginning by restoring Soane's original red for the gallery walls, introducing a denser Regency hang of the pictures, installing new lighting, embarking on a conservation programme, drawing in more Friends, and devising a sequence of exhibitions that honoured both the collection and the building in which it was housed – including *Collection for a King* (1985), *Soane and After* (1987), *Rich Summer of Art: A Regency Collection seen through Victorian Eyes* (1988), *Palaces of Art: Art Galleries in Britain 1790–1990* (1991) and *Soane and Death* (1996). He handled the theft and recovery of Rembrandt's *Jacob de Gheyn* from Dulwich twice, and both times with aplomb.

The past and present were always combined in Waterfield's mind, and just as he sought the views of an international cohort of contemporary architects on the Gallery for the show *Soane and After* he also invited working artists to exhibit and intervene at Dulwich, from Tom Phillips to Lucian Freud. He introduced novel fundraising methods such as 'Adopt an Old Master' and with the artist Gillian Wolfe, who arrived in 1984 as education officer, he worked as a team, offering innovative art education to schools and setting out to attract groups unlikely to visit the gallery, from the unemployed to teenage offenders. Their work became a model for other museums. And by 1996 Dulwich Picture Gallery was financially secure with independent charitable status and a board of trustees chaired by Lord Sainsbury of Preston Candover.

On leaving Dulwich in 1996 teaching and writing became central activities. Waterfield had a long, important involvement with the Attingham Trust for the Study of Historic Houses and Collections, attending its Summer School in 1978 and serving as joint Director with Annabel Westman from 1995 to 2003. In 1996 he founded and directed the Trust's Royal Collection Studies, organised by the Attingham Trust on behalf of Royal Collection Trust. For the Attingham Trust he produced a crucial report on the educational potential of country houses and historic sites: *Opening Doors: Learning in the Historic Environment* (2004). He was an inspirational and erudite presence on the Attingham courses, and because of Attingham hundreds of curators and art historians from all over the world had contact with his scholarship, teasing wit and charisma. His influence was global. In the Czech Republic, learning of his death, thirty former Attingham students came to Prague from all parts of the country to sign a specially designed card for Giles; this level of shock, sorrow and regard was replicated by former students, colleagues and institutions around the globe.

At the London base of Notre Dame University Waterfield was a faculty member from 1999, creating the course *London as Art Capital* in which he took students into the heart of the British art world. From 2002 he was an associate lecturer and scholar at the Courtauld Institute, where he initially taught the MA course *The History and Theory of the Art Museum* and from 2007 worked together with Martin Caiger-Smith on the MA *Curating the Art Museum*, for which he offered a historical module 'The History and Theory of Museums'. In all these teaching roles Waterfield displayed outstanding commitment, both formally and informally. At his house in south London a research student might meet