

IN THE GARDEN.

The sculpture that we have before us is by Gregor Erhart, a German sculptor, active at the end of the fifteenth century. It's a representation of the Mary Magdalene as a naked and very beautiful young woman. One of the many things that is striking about this sculpture is the hair. The young woman's hair hangs down abundantly, partially covering her with its tresses, but also showing her off. Her hair both reveals and conceals. It's not particularly disordered nor is it particularly ordered – it's looked after but unstyled, you could say it was natural. This a Spanish panel showing scenes from the life of Mary Magdalene. One of those scenes features in the Gospel According to St. Luke where there is the wonderfully redemptive and erotic image of Mary drying Christ's feet with her hair, prior to anointing them with salve, after having first washed His feet with her tears. Meister Erhart represents this hair as a pattern of semi-regular undulations. This is not like the hairstyle you'd find on a portrait of a Roman matron – perhaps it's closer to the way Bernini represents the hair in this portrait of Francesco I d'Este, with the wig framing the face – but as we will see later, this kind of framing has a different signification. Whatever it is, the sculpted hair represents something, and the gloriously full head of a young woman's hair is not the only thing.

The parts of the world that are in flux – fire, water, smoke, clouds for example, pose particular problems for the artist. These are forms without form, disorganised but recognisable, shifting and uncertain. In representing these things it tends to be pattern that the artist turns to, in various ways, as I hope I am going to be able to show. Wind is the force that moves waves and stirs the draperies in these two angels by Verrocchio, both giving them body but also, by suggesting their aerial environment, taking away their weight. The pattern of folds of the drapery is used as a way of embodying and

disembodying, of allowing life to breathe into inanimate things. This is a page from the 'Lectures on Sculpture' by John Flaxman, an English artist of the eighteenth century, showing the ways in which the waves, the clouds or a flapping drapery can be codified, the graphic signatures which, in repetition, create the impression of the depicted object. The artist turns to a set of patterns, of known elements, in order to represent those things that are in flux or movement. Pattern both respects the possibility of change and is, by systematisation, the beginning of ordering. Repeated pattern is also the thing that we find as a surrounding border, an edge around other things. Within this border different things emerge, as we can see in this decorated lintel, different things emerge, both in the margin itself and in the thing that's enclosed within the margin.

These are the subjects of this talk tonight. The garden that we are in is perhaps the tragic garden of Gethsemane but also the garden of representation, that place where nature and culture mix and mingle and are encouraged to grow together and to produce fruit and flowers.

A repeated undulating line, together with a pattern of 'X's, is one of the earliest signs. You find it in the dragged finger marks that appear in Cro-Magnon caves, you find it as an incised mark at the entrance to Neolithic burial mounds. It's one of the earliest hieroglyphs of pre-dynastic Egypt. You find it in the rock paintings of the !San people in Southern Africa. Sometimes it's a symbol for water, sometimes it's a symbol for an aura, something that surrounds. The sign is also an indication of presence, the way the hand drags across the rock face leaving a mark behind can be a way of just saying, "I am here" – and with that kind of marking – "I am here" – you can say that representation begins.

My talk tonight begins with the recognition of a correspondence between the sculpted hair of the Mary Magdalene in the Erhart sculpture and aspects of the forms that I've been making in the studio. That correspondence is initially formal, but in exploring the kinds of form that it is, as those initial remarks indicated, subjects of rather more interest emerge.

This is Leonardo da Vinci's famous self-portrait in Milan. Leonardo presents himself staring out, his face surrounded by what seems to be the hair and beard of a sage, an old man. But if you look (as we will do) at the ways in which Leonardo depicts hair or water in his drawings, you understand that the reading of this image as the naturalistic representation of the hair and beard of an elderly man isn't necessarily the case. You can say that the flowing hair and beard also represents Leonardo saying, "I am here, this is me." If you look at the drawings of water – as in this page from one of his sketchbooks – you can see that the ways in which water is drawn (and there are many pages of such studies of pattern in flowing water in Leonardo's notebooks) is remarkably like the ways in which hair is drawn. The notebooks themselves often transfer from one page to the next between studies of water and studies of hair. The search is to do with finding a graphic way of notating something that is hard to grasp and that seems to be unrepresentable. Leonardo strives to find a solution to that in these repetitive pattern forms.

To go back to earlier times. This is an Egyptian cartouche (a name badge), the sign on the top left is the hieroglyph for water. The cartouche is a name, the hieroglyph both signifies water (as a component of the name) and is also an inflected sign – it changes the tonal value or the sense of the signs around it. So it both signifies water and changes value, transforms the signifying environment.

This is a page from an Armenian gospel, showing the baptism of Christ. Jesus is standing in the water, His feet being nibbled by fish, and the water is shown as a series of undulating lines, but the moment being represented is one of significant spiritual transformation, with the dove of the Holy Spirit plunging down onto His head, directed by the hand of God which projects into the top of the image. The transparency of the water is conveyed by our being able to see between the lines in the bottom half of the image and Christ's partial immersion, by the fact that the upper part of his body obscures the lines. The next image is a detail of the fifteenth-century Spanish panel of the life of Mary Magdalene I showed earlier. In this section she is under the table, anointing Christ's feet, having first washed and dried them. Looking at the table you see that the covering cloth has the same wavy-line motif. So the act of washing is conveyed by our knowledge of the story but is also represented in the image by the presence on the tablecloth of this wavy line, marvellously echoing the wavy lines of her hair and condensing the story.

This next image is another page from an Armenian gospel, again showing the baptism of Christ. There are many interesting features to this image, including a very acrobatic angel and the hand of God emerging from a cloud, represented by a similar wavy pattern to that of the water in which John the Baptist and Christ are standing. John is on the left and he is conventionally represented as being savage, uncouth or wild; there are the beginnings here of a form of representation that transfers the flux of water onto the flux of hairiness.

This is a fifteenth-century Westphalian carving of John the Baptist. The surface of the sculpture shows a figure dressed in rough clothes – animal skin – but also someone of

unkempt appearance, wild or savage. The motif that we have seen as signifying water now is used in the representation of someone slightly out of control, untamed, prophetic, a seer, a wild man of the desert. This is not an exclusively Christian iconography. This is a Roman bronze of Hercules, bearded and clad in a lion skin (though with this figure, sporting the small club, you could also speculate on the hairiness of Samson). He's a wild and powerful man, his wildness and strength conveyed by his raised club, by his hair and beard and by the matted hair on his arms and legs.

Back to Leonardo. Here the elaborate coiffure of this young woman beautifully frames her face, just wisps and traces of hair escaping the hair-do and giving emotion and character to the figure. Contrast her with the next figure, where the hair on this forceful male head is uncontrolled and stormy, on the verge of chaos. This is clear if you compare this drawing with the next, which is one of Leonardo's Deluge drawings. The way the hair on the man's head is drawn is extraordinarily like the way the tumultuous flood is drawn. To be clear about the cataclysm that Leonardo is representing – in the bottom right of the page you can see fragments of shattered buildings and landscape. What started in this discussion as something relatively ordered, a wavy line, a simple sign of presence, has become something disorderly, a representation of chaos, where everything is in flux and nothing is fixed or stable.

This is Arthur Rackham's illustration for Edgar Allan Poe's short story, 'A Descent into the Maelstrom': you can see ships, houses and goods being sucked into the maw of the churning whirlpool. The Maelstrom is a real whirlpool – it exists off the Norwegian coast, becoming active as the tide surges in and out. Poe's story is about an imagined descent into the Maelstrom. In the middle of this swirling mass you have a black space, an entry, a portal into somewhere else. Passing through this chaotic gate you enter

another world.

This is the portal stone at the entrance to the fourth-fifth century BCE Neolithic chambered tomb at New Grange in Ireland. The stone is across the entrance. In order to get in you have to cross this zone of turbulence, an area where things are in flux and, having crossed this zone you enter a different place, even a different world.

These are drawings derived from patients' reports of entopic illusions. They are representations of the peripheral phenomena that are experienced in extreme states of consciousness. Migraine sufferers very often describe such flickering and tunnelling at the edges of their visual field; psychedelic experiences and epileptic episodes are also often associated with flickering and edge disturbance to the field. These drawings are thus representations of areas of consciousness impinging on perception and are ways of describing the awareness of a border or an edge. Clearly I'm trying to make a connection between these graphic ways of representing that edge and the entry into another place or zone. This is a rock painting by members of the !San people in Southern Africa. The boat-like shape from which spirit elands are emerging corresponds to the curved shapes in the previous representations of entopic phenomena. Elands are the totem animal of the !San and their shaman adopt the persona of an eland as guides in ritual. The 'boat' is marked by zig-zag shapes and a masked shaman is in the foreground. This is a depiction of a negotiated or invoked passage between two different zones of existence. The next image is from North America and is also concerned with a passage ritual, in this case a rock painting associated with a puberty ritual for young girls. Again you have a horseshoe/boat shape and emanating from it, or associated with it, a set of zig-zag or wavy lines. A puberty ritual is obviously a rite of passage, associated with the transition from childhood to adulthood, in this case from girl to

woman, marking the beginning of sexual and reproductive maturity. From these examples I infer a connection between the representations of experienced phenomena of extreme states of consciousness and the ways in which, within tribal practices, the representation or manifestation of important rites of passage in our lives is depicted or graphically indicated.

This is an Armenian grave marker – a kacka. And what is a grave but a portal, an entry point? Here, in a very formalised way you see, around the central cross, a set of interlaces, of overlapping patterns. Or equally in this, a gravestone from Constantinople, a figure of a military saint who seems to be going backwards into the tomb, his body facing us, but his head turned back. The two counter-spiralling columns suggest a vortex and the decoration on the arch has some relationship to the graphic representation of entopic phenomena – the edge of uncertainty. Self-evidently death is clearly an entry into a different and unknown zone. The means of framing that entry, that passage, have extraordinary similarities in different cultures and times.

To bring us out of the museum, temple, church or cave into a rather different public arena. This is a drawing, from 1806, by the British, eighteenth-century caricaturist Thomas Gillray. The figure of Bonaparte on the right is no doubt identifiable. Britain and France were at war and Lord Castlereagh (the Secretary of State for War at the time), seen here as the figure in the middle of the bed, is having an invasion nightmare. The bed is a chaotic mass of sheets and blankets, from out of which monsters emerge or which themselves become monstrous – the roiling clouds put up by Napoleon's advancing armies. What Gillray does is to use this highly wrought representation of drapery to put the bed at the centre of a churning vortex and to represent a disembodied and fearful nightmare state. But equally, as in this fourteenth-century relief

by Agostino di Duccio, turbulence can protect a heavenly state, a zone of sanctity and grace. Paradoxically, a central space surrounded by similar convoluted and curved lines, conjures apparent opposites.

If we now go back to the Magdalene's hair, we can try on another pair of spectacles. In the New York *Herald Tribune* of 5 April 2008 there was an article on three-dimensional scanners and how a new generation of these scanners were becoming desk-top sized.

Previously these were both big and expensive machines. The price, with the size, is coming down and the prospect has arisen of them entering domestic rather than specialist budgets and of them becoming something that we might individually own. A three-dimensional scanner creates a digital file after laser scanning an object; this file can then be sent to a prototyping machine to print out a three-dimensional copy.

Although I can think of loads of uses for such a set-up I am perhaps not typical. In looking for the 'killer app' – the application that would make such machines a global success – what the developers came up with, is that we'd all like to have one because we'd all like to do portraits. How many times you would want to subject your loved ones to being scanned is perhaps open to question. The following quote is from someone called Brad Porter, the President of Great Eastern Technologies, the company leading the research in this field. He says that they have produced a number of busts, but then goes on to say, "The biggest issue is hair – hair does not scan well," and suggests that people start with scanning faces but then resort to three-dimensional graphic software (i.e. pattern-makers) to generate or construct a representation of hair. Not so far from Meister Erhart.

This is an eighteenth-century woodblock print of John Barleycorn. John Barleycorn was a kind of mythical Englishman, less pugnacious than John Bull, a gentleman farmer at

ease and at liberty. The point of including this is to show how the hair on his head and the smoke from his pipe and coming out of his mouth are all conveyed by a similar simple double curved line, and that he himself is tranquilly at ease within this controlled turbulence. To some extent, context controls what we see – it must be smoke coming out of his pipe and we assume that it's the same coming out of his mouth (and that he is not throwing up) and we assume that it's hair (or a wig) on his head, not someone trying to douse his pipe. Equally we know that because this figure is standing on the clouds, then he is weightless. This is a risen Christ – you can see the stigmata of the Crucifixion on the foot – so it is Christ transfigured but retaining His link, through evidenced suffering, to humanity. In this next figure, St. Anne with the child Mary on her lap, the hair on the child's head is without style, falling naturally. This is a human Mary. To go back to John Barleycorn, the very simplicity of the representation tells us things about the straightforwardness of the man, a representation that frames an individual of plain and simple tastes. Here is someone who likes a drink and a smoke, who you feel you could sit down and talk to, man to man. Whereas Francesco d'Este in this Bernini portrait is not a man you could sit down and talk to, the framing of the face is a representation of power and influence, a triumph of will over disorder, the flowing and dangling locks signifying connections to powerful undercurrents that he has at his command. Similarly the dangling curls of these python priestesses from Minoan Crete signify their connection to and association with the oracular power of the snakes, with the slithering formlessness of the snakes of course also being pertinent.

These are not necessarily things that are confined to the distant or archaeological past. It is equally true that, within the various cults that are closer to our own lives, we use these motifs to represent zones of inclusion and exclusion, to represent wildness or to invoke power. When you enter the flame-painted, customized Cadillac you enter a

different zone of experience, and any of these associations can be applied to this.

To go back to our original young woman: her hair frames and hides, it provokes and disturbs us and it empowers her. And the way in which the representation is constructed allows these aspects to emerge. It's both a chaste and a provocative image.

This is a second representation of New Grange in Ireland, this time a drawing. You can see that for the artist, in drawing rather than photographing the site, the portal stone has become even more emphasized as a zone of turbulence that you have to cross in order to enter. And within this lintel, where the hunting scene emerges from the scrollwork foliage, something is created from within the decorative motif, both the hunter and the prey that the hunter seeks. This emergence from pattern is something that Leonardo, to return to him, was evidently fully aware of. This is a monogram for Leonardo's proposed Academy in Venice, an endless interlace from within which his name emerges.

This is the very famous engraving, *The Analysis of Beauty*, by the eighteenth-century British painter, William Hogarth, where he sets out to try reduce the idea of beauty, by derivation from various sources, to a single, double-curved line. Joined to a text, it's an exemplary attempt by an artist to become self-conscious about the ways of representing an ineffable concept, such as beauty, and about the relation between observation and graphic motif. It's a refutation of simple naturalism.

The beginning of this talk conjectured a relation between this sculpture of mine and the sculpture that provoked it: the very beautiful sculpture of the Mary Magdalene by Gregor Erhart. As I began researching the connections and as I began looking at more

and more images, I started to wonder if an image like this, which is an image of RNA (Ribonucleic acid), whether this representation of a structure that has powerful and complex meanings for us because of what it is, is not also powerful because, as a representation, it echoes or invokes a formulation like a spell or an incantation that enables us to harness flux, to tame sex and to signify that we are here. The common forms of the representation of genetic structure have a lot in common with the ways in which the hair on the Magdalene's head is represented, or with the ways in which Leonardo, for example, represents water coming out of a pipe – as in the second drawing down on this sheet. The question that is raised is the extent to which a structure like the structure of RNA or DNA, because of the way we represent or picture it, comes to capture not just our knowledge but also our imaginations. Thank you.