

Milan. There Duke Francesco Melzi d'Eril, vice-president of the Italian republic, ordered two complex *desers* (table centrepieces) in the manner of the goldsmith Luigi Valadier, one, seven metres long, completed in 1803, and the other, for the Palazzo Reale, Milan, and thirteen metres long, in 1804. Both were made in Rome, but in April 1804 Raffaelli moved to Milan on a ten-year contract to create a workshop and school for mosaic in the former convent of S. Vincenzino. In 1806 his bid to create a full-size mosaic copy of Leonardo's *Last Supper* won the patronage of Eugène de Beauharnais, Viceroy of Italy (in 1807–08 Eugène's mother, the Empress Josephine, purchased 113 pieces of jewellery from Raffaelli). Executed after a cartoon by Giuseppe Bossi (Russian Academy of Arts, St Petersburg), this tour de force, completed in 1817, was in 1847 installed in the Minoritenkirche in Vienna, where it remains.

Throughout this book generous use is made of archives: the Fondazione Negro, Rome, has records of the family and firm, notably rich and informative letters from Raffaelli to his eldest son, Vincenzo; in Milan the Archivio di Brera has accounts of technical demonstrations, while the Archivio di Stato includes negotiations for Raffaelli's return to Rome in 1820, followed by 195 cases of materials and stock-in-trade (listed in the Negro archive). Once back, Raffaelli acquired a large property in the via del Babuino, rebuilt by Giuseppe Valadier, architect son of the goldsmith. The business, in which Vincenzo became prominent, thrived. After Raffaelli's death in 1836 over 1,300 works were listed in his premises. Production on this scale and in this variety – Raffaelli's ambit came to embrace *pietre dure* and he dabbled in scagliola – involved many employees, subcontractors and collaborators, whose names Massinelli fleshes out. Tables and chimneypieces were among the grander works: purchasers of the former included Thomas Hope and the 3rd Marquess of Londonderry, and the latter were installed in Château de Malmaison; the Earl of Bristol's house in St James's Square, London; the Musée du Louvre, Paris; Palazzo Tornabuoni, Florence; and the Marmorpalais, Potsdam. Indeed, such elements, and the rest of Raffaelli's works, constitute a quintessentially Roman ingredient in the decorative panorama of Europe around 1800, thanks, in his words, to 'care in design, perfection in execution, and discrimination in material, harmonious by virtue of its polychrome

vivacity'. And thanks to this book, full of colour and detail, his achievement can be appreciated as never before.

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### John Craxton: A Life of Gifts

By Ian Collins. 384 pp. incl. 160 col. + b. & w. ill. (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2021), £25. ISBN 978-0-300-25529-4.

by GILL HEDLEY

In 2022 the centenary of the birth of John Craxton (1922–2009) will be celebrated by an exhibition in Greece, which will then travel to Britain – a trajectory that is the opposite of its subject's life. Ahead of this, Ian Collins's definitive new biography paves the way.

A century before Craxton's birth, Samuel Palmer and the Ancients chose Arcadian Kent as the home for the first English artist colony, inspired by their shared admiration for William Blake. Craxton was introduced to the work of Palmer by his greatest patron, Peter Watson. The literary scholar Nevill Coghill, who, like so many people, was smitten by Craxton, bought him Blake's *Poetry and Prose* as a birthday present. At a schoolfriend's house, Craxton encountered the work of El Greco and in 1937 the two boys were taken to Paris to see Picasso's *Guernica*. Among many other early gifts, the artist used these introductions well.

In the title *A Life of Gifts* Collins uses an elegant device, which he deploys throughout the book, to echo Craxton's own habit of wordplay. Craxton was the recipient of many gifts, not least the Greeks' kindness to strangers, but also his artistic talent, which has not been sufficiently celebrated. His drawings in particular are piercing and romantic, easily challenging those of his close friend Lucian Freud – at least in their youth. Whereas Freud's life has been told in two blockbusting volumes, Collins's biography, in contrast, is a joyful adventure story of an artist's life. Illustrated with many letters and previously unseen paintings, this account of chaos and perseverance reveals Craxton to be a committed artist from his early years. Schooldays in Dorset gave him a love of archaeology and Watson constantly whispered that the Mediterranean was superior to everything – light, food, landscape, sex – in grey post-war Britain.

Craxton's first trip to his beloved Greece was in 1946. After an exhibition in Zurich,

he met a *deus ex machina* who flew him to Athens in a requisitioned bomber. She was Noel Norton, wife of the British ambassador to Greece, an enthusiastic patron of young artists. Later, Craxton visited Crete, seeking El Greco's birthplace, and lived there among gods and heroes. Watson's generosity financed Craxton's odyssey to a new life, where he joined a colony of foreigners, delighting in Greece and its hospitality. Craxton made friends everywhere in Greece but especially within a circle of artists and writers from Nikos Ghika to Leonard Cohen and, naturally, Patrick Leigh Fermor. The latter's book *A Time of Gifts* (1977) took its title from a line in a Louis MacNeice poem of the late 1940s, which captures the moment when childhood gives way to things 'not given, but made'. Craxton was given many things and never stopped making art; *A Life of Gifts* reveals the lifelong links between generosity and talent.

Collins's biography is constantly entertaining and visually rich with filmic moments: a Cretan butcher dances with a chair in Minoan style; a Gauloise cigarette packet provides the exact shade of blue to recreate a Grecian sky in a set for a Frederick Ashton ballet; and the ambassador's wife's bomber skims Venice so that Craxton can get his first glimpse of the city. He visited Venice once more but just for four hours, always in a hurry to get home to Greece.

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### Of Modernism: Essays in Honour of Christopher Green

Edited by Grace Brockington and C.F.B. Miller. 280 pp. incl. 80 col. ill. (Paul Holberton Publishing, London, 2020), £40. ISBN 978-1-911300-13-7.

by MARTIN HAMMER

In the mid 1970s such art-historical colossi as John Shearman, Anita Brookner and John Golding strode the corridors of the Courtauld Institute, London, which was then located in the beautiful eighteenth-century Home House in Portman Square. Christopher Green was the new kid on the block and friendlier than most to the awe-struck students. Fast forward and, now in productive retirement, Green is the worthy recipient of a *Festschrift*, an increasingly rare format for a book, which recognises his extraordinary distinction as a nurturer of talent. The production is handsome and