



FRANCIS HASKELL

Francis James Herbert Haskell

1928–2000

FRANCIS HASKELL was born in London on 7 April 1928, the eldest of three children. His father, Arnold, who invented the term *balletomane*, played a leading role in establishing the taste for ballet in Britain, first as a writer and subsequently as director of the Sadlers Wells Ballet School, later the Royal Ballet School. Arnold also took an interest in contemporary art and was the author of a book on Jacob Epstein. In the early years of their marriage he and his wife, Vera Saitsova, the daughter of a Russian émigré industrialist, talked to one another in French, so this was Francis's first language. His early familiarity with France was strengthened by a period at the Lycée in Kensington, between the ages of five and eight. From this experience he retained little beyond a vague memory of Pepin le Bref and Louis Le Fainéant, but later thought that it might account for his passion for French history. His family also spent their holidays in France, including a badly timed trip which left them stranded near Bordeaux in late August 1939, after the signing of the Nazi–Soviet Non-Aggression Pact. In the face of formidable problems, Arnold and Vera, neither of whom could drive, managed to bring their children back to the Channel by taxi. Arnold's observation, as they ate a marvellous roast chicken in the restaurant of the Hotel de la Poste at Rouen, that this would be their last good meal until the end of the war, was one that Francis never forgot. He was to return to France in 1945, when the experience of attending trials of collaborators in Paris gave him a sense of being present at the making of history, while nightly visits to the theatre, to see works by Giraudoux, Jules Romains, and others, provided further stimulation.

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During his wartime schooldays at Eton, which he did not much enjoy, Francis specialised in science, with the intention of becoming a doctor, but changed his mind after a few months of medical training. Following his military service in the Education Corps, when he found himself, to his appalled amusement, lecturing troops on sexual hygiene, he went up to King's College, Cambridge, in 1948. In his first two years he read History, one of his teachers being Eric Hobsbawm, who was to be a lifelong friend, but changed to English in his final year. The ethos of King's in those years, with its strong emphasis on intellectual enquiry, liberal values and sociability, proved immensely stimulating and sympathetic, giving him a much more congenial milieu than he had experienced at school. As an undergraduate he took some interest in the history of art, reading the few general books then available, visiting museums and exhibitions and travelling abroad. He also attended the lectures given by the Slade Professor, Nikolaus Pevsner, which ranged from ancient Egypt to Cubism. Thus it was almost inevitable that when Francis was encouraged in 1951 to write a dissertation for a college Fellowship, doctorates then being scarcely considered seriously at King's, and thought of choosing a subject related to art history, he should have sought Pevsner's advice, even though he had never met him. The topic which Pevsner suggested was to explore the possible influence of the Jesuits on the art of Mannerism and the Baroque; and he also agreed to act as Francis's supervisor.

Francis's approach to his research was inevitably coloured by his previous experience, or rather lack of it. The idea of working on an Italian topic had an obvious appeal, not least because he had been astonished and delighted, on an early trip to Italy, to discover, while he was being given a lift in a lorry, that the driver talked to him about Michelangelo. But his interest in Italian art up to that time had been confined to the Renaissance, so the art that he was now set to study, on which almost nothing of substance had been written in English, and, in modern times, very little in other languages, was entirely new to him. Equally important, he had never had any formal training in art history and so had never acquired the habits of mind which this encouraged. In particular, he did not start from the idea that his main task was to study individual works of art and the craftsmen who had made them, nor was he preoccupied with style, which was then often thought to reflect in some way the 'spirit of the age', although there was a deep ambiguity about whether this applied most directly to the attitudes of the artists themselves, or of their patrons, whose social and intellectual background was usually very different. Both approaches have tended to place a high premium on subject-

ive responses to works of art and have encouraged strongly deferential attitudes towards the views of supposed experts. But by temperament and training Francis was, and always remained, empirical and sceptical.

Pevsner evidently assumed that he would concentrate on style, exploring the possible parallels with the attitudes of Jesuits, as expressed in their teachings and theology. The idea was that he was to establish whether Jesuit ideals fitted better with Mannerism or the Baroque, and which of these styles they had promoted. But unaware of his supervisor's expectations, Francis adopted an entirely different approach. When he first arrived in Rome, and was acquiring a knowledge of Italian and looking for the first time at the art of the Baroque, he lodged with a well-connected Catholic family, who helped him to gain access to the Jesuit archives. Here he discovered the answer to the problem that Pevsner had set him. It turned out that the Jesuits had little or no say about the art that decorated their churches, simply because in their early years they were extremely poor and therefore had to follow the wishes of wealthy benefactors, which often did not coincide with their own preferences. Seen in this light, the Jesuit style turned out to be a myth.

The experience of writing the dissertation was decisive in many ways. It introduced Francis to types of art at which he had never looked closely before and which he found immensely exciting and sympathetic. It gave him a taste for research in libraries and archives which he never lost. It showed him that some art-historical problems could be solved by straightforward historical enquiry of a kind that very few of those professionally involved in the subject were then doing. Most important of all, it introduced him to a new culture, that of Italy, which was profoundly different from what he had known in England. Thus in the family with whom he lodged it was unthinkable for the daughters to leave the house unchaperoned; and when he moved into a flat with two young Italian art historians, Luigi Salerno and Alessandro Marabottini, who was to remain one of his closest friends, he was surprised to discover that as a matter of course they employed a maid who looked after the house and prepared their meals. Francis also soon learned about the power which Italian professors had over their young assistants, and about the ferocious feuds which dominated Italian art history, a topic on which he remained a well-informed and fascinated observer.

He had already been introduced to Marabottini and Salerno in England by Rudolf Wittkower, who was then on the staff of the Warburg Institute. As Francis himself later wrote, the influence of the émigré scholars who worked there, including also Otto Kurz and Ernst Gombrich,

was to be of fundamental importance for his later career. Not only did they have a far greater familiarity with baroque art than virtually any British scholar of that time, they were also generous with their advice and in encouraging him to make use of the unique resources of their library, not least the wonderful collection of early source material in the history of art. Equally important, their own interests and approaches were very different from those then dominant in the British art-historical world, which was centred on the connoisseurship that was so important in museums as well as the art trade. But the Warburg Institute also had another strong attraction. At a time when fuel was short, it was extremely warm, because it shared a heating system with an adjacent building that had to be maintained at a high temperature.

When he was completing his fellowship dissertation in 1953 Francis found a job in the Library of the House of Commons, on the strength of a single interview. This was work that he greatly enjoyed, involving as it did pure research on a huge variety of topics; and late-night sittings also gave him the opportunity of reading Gibbon. At the same time he was occupied with a task that proved far less congenial, a translation of Franco Venturi's *Roots of Revolution*, which finally appeared in 1960. His career in the Commons library was very brief, because in the summer of 1954 he was awarded a Fellowship at King's on the strength of his dissertation and accordingly returned to Cambridge, where he was to remain until 1967. It was expected that he would turn his dissertation into a book, but Francis himself did not believe that the subject would have much appeal to the public, and soon decided, with the agreement of the college authorities, to undertake a more general study of art and patronage in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Italy. This finally appeared in 1963 under the title *Patrons and Painters*, and at once established him as one of the leading art historians of his generation.

The idea of tackling so immense a subject, even restricting the focus largely to seventeenth-century Rome and eighteenth-century Venice, now seems so ambitious as to be entirely foolhardy. Yet Francis's intellectual ambitions were evident to his contemporaries from his earliest years at King's. Admittedly, in the 1950s the study of baroque art was still undeveloped, and most of the scholarly literature was concerned with problems of attribution and chronology. Major discoveries could still be made by reading the primary sources, while the archives, which were less frequented and more accessible than today, were still largely unexplored, especially from the perspective of patronage. But to make some sense of such a vast field still called for exceptional energy and insight. Even today,

the book remains astonishing for the amount of ground that Francis covered and for the sureness of his judgement. It also demonstrates the extent of his first-hand knowledge of and admiration for the art he was discussing, the result of years of assiduous sight-seeing, partly by public transport and partly in the company of friends with cars; for Francis wisely recognised that he was temperamentally unsuited to driving. He explained his priorities in a letter to his friend and driver, Willy Mostyn-Owen, in a letter of 1953, 'You're the only person I really enjoy travelling with, as, like me, you want to see everything. This isn't flattery, as I don't think that it is a virtue: it comes from a form of puritanism, of the same type that makes me loathe skipping the pages of a book, even when they are dull.'

In his dissertation he had shown how a knowledge of patronage helped to resolve a specific historical problem. In extending this approach to the whole Italian art world of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries he was not attempting to advance a particular theory, but to understand what had happened. The general conclusion that he reached could hardly have been more tentative: 'Inevitably I have been forced to think again and again about the relations between art and society, but nothing in my researches has convinced me of the existence of underlying laws which will be valid in all circumstances. At times the connections between economic or political conditions and a certain style have seemed particularly close; at other times I have been unable to detect anything more than the internal logic of artistic development, personal whim or the workings of chance.' For all the modesty of the tone, the implications of Francis's comments could hardly have been larger. Most obviously, he was challenging the then influential Marxist approach of historians such as Friedrich Antal, in his *Florentine Painting and its Social Background* (1948). More generally, he was emphasising that the relationship between art and the society in which it was produced was far more complex than many scholars of all political persuasions were then willing to admit. Given his deep suspicion about all large theories of history or politics, this was a finding that cannot have caused him surprise or dismay. Yet, paradoxically but characteristically, he only added a conclusion at the urging of his friend Benedict Nicolson.

Francis may not have found a single pattern underlying baroque patronage, but he did reveal an immense amount about the circumstances in which the art of the period was produced, as well as about the personalities and motives of those who paid for it. He was later to claim that he saw the purpose of history as bringing the past to life, and in this he

triumphantly succeeded. His descriptions of the leading patrons, as well as of a host of minor figures, are vivid, economical and convincing, not least because he did not claim that the most perceptive patrons were necessarily admirable in other ways. Up to that time most art historians had only been concerned with the motivations of the artists themselves, and such accounts as they had provided of patrons tended to be schematic and one-dimensional. *Patrons and Painters* inspired a vast amount of new research, as other scholars tried to fill in the gaps in Francis's account, increasing our knowledge of specific commissions and of the activities of individual patrons and collectors. But no one has attempted to look again at the subject as a whole, so his book remains the point of departure for all discussions of patronage, as well as the most readable and illuminating introduction to the topic of Italian art and society of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

At the time, and subsequently, Francis was criticised for neglecting eighteenth-century Rome in favour of Venice. But he consistently defended his choice, for two reasons: firstly, that the mechanisms of patronage established in Rome in the seventeenth century remained virtually unchanged in the later period, whereas the social circumstances of Venice were very different, thus providing a basis of comparison; secondly, that in terms of quality painting in eighteenth-century Venice was unmatched anywhere in Italy. The shift in his focus from Rome had one unforeseen consequence which was of far more than professional importance to him. One evening in 1962, while he was working in Venice, Francis's friend Alessandro Bettagno took him to dinner at the Ristorante Malamocco, where he introduced him to Larissa Salmina, curator of Venetian drawings at the Hermitage. She had been sent to Italy as Commissar of the Russian pavilion at the Biennale, and because of some bureaucratic confusion had been obliged to remain in Venice until the exhibition closed. Francis realised after their first meeting that he wanted to marry her, and Larissa was equally smitten, but the problems that they faced were formidable. Pessimistic by nature, seemingly wholly unpractical, as well as being a constantly anxious traveller and at that time unable to face flying, Francis nonetheless succeeded in meeting Larissa in Yugoslavia and Russia and finally in obtaining permission to marry in 1965, in the Soviet Palace of Weddings in Leningrad. Without Arnold Haskell's prestige in the world of ballet and the access this gave him to the Russian authorities, the necessary consent, a matter which supposedly involved even the Central Committee, could never have been obtained. The whole romance had been conducted with extreme discretion, and when Francis arrived in Stockholm a few

days after his marriage, his visa having expired, an old friend he met there, on learning that he had just been in Leningrad immediately said that he bitterly regretted not having given him an introduction to a charming curator in the Hermitage, only to be told by Francis that this was unnecessary, as he had married her less than a week before. A few months later Larissa was granted a visa and was finally able to come and live with him in Cambridge, where he served as an outstandingly effective librarian of the Department of History of Art. In 1967, following his appointment as Professor of the History of Art in Oxford, with a Fellowship at Trinity College, they moved to a house in Walton Street, a few yards from his department and from the Ashmolean. This was to remain their home for the rest of his life, repeatedly converted and modified to accommodate a vast and constantly growing library.

The success of *Patrons and Painters* led to many offers from publishers, all of whom wanted Francis to write essentially the same book, but he decided instead to turn his attention to French painting of the nineteenth century. This was a subject on which he was required to lecture in Oxford; it was also an entirely different and still largely unexplored field, about which he knew relatively little. Initially he hoped that it would provide the kind of surprises, in the form of unjustly neglected artists, that had followed the reassessment of the Italian Baroque, but later conceded that this turned out not to be the case. Characteristically, he was particularly intrigued by the growth of the idea, in the second half of the nineteenth century, that leading artists would, and perhaps should, initially be rejected by the public, a phenomenon, which, as he observed, had no obvious precedent in the history of European art, although it had often been claimed, for example, in the case of Caravaggio. Whereas in his work on Italian Baroque patronage he had had the field virtually to himself, he soon discovered that there were other scholars, particularly in France, equally interested in recovering the forgotten masters of the nineteenth century, as one can see today in the Musée d'Orsay. Francis's own research led immediately to various articles, some of which were later collected in *Past and Present in Art and Taste* (1987). It also led him to transform the department of the History of Art at Oxford into one of the major centres for the study of French eighteenth- and nineteenth-century art anywhere in the world, at first through the typically astute purchase of a remarkable collection of early Salon criticism; and he soon attracted a number of gifted graduate students working on the topic.

Whereas his previous work had been concerned primarily with attitudes of patrons and the wider public to the art of their own time, his next major book, *Rediscoveries in Art: Some Aspects of Taste, Fashion and*

Collecting in England and France, published in 1976, for which he won the Mitchell Prize for Art History, instead focused on changing perceptions of the art of the past, which was henceforth to be his major preoccupation. It was based on the Wrightsman Lectures he had given at the Institute of Fine Arts in New York in 1973. Despite the qualification in the subtitle, the book was an extraordinarily wide-ranging account of changes in the taste for Old Master paintings, particularly in England and France, from the French Revolution until about 1870, a period which saw the most dramatic reversals in artistic values ever recorded. During the eighteenth century many collectors may have preferred, for example, Dutch art to that of the canonical Italian masters, but scarcely anyone had tried to argue that the former was superior to the latter. By 1870 the early Italian and Flemish had almost entirely eclipsed the painters of the seventeenth century, and even within individual schools the old hierarchy had been overturned, with Vermeer supplanting Dou and El Greco replacing Murillo. Such revaluations had usually been seen by historians as a relatively straightforward consequence of an increase in knowledge, or as a reflection of responses to contemporary art. But while conceding that the growth of knowledge was at times an important factor, Francis realised that this was far from being the whole story. The availability of particular types of painting on the market, a desire for novelty on the part of certain collectors, dislike as much as admiration for contemporary art, even changing political and social ideals were all factors that came into play at different times and in different ways. While explicitly rejecting the idea of 'total aesthetic relativism', he demonstrated 'that history itself can—at certain moments—only be understood at the price of a certain abdication of those value judgements which art lovers (rightly) esteem so highly'. Francis himself took far too much pleasure in art to reject those value judgements, and he was well aware that it was virtually impossible to do so; but he was temperamentally sceptical enough to take pleasure in contemplating that they would almost certainly be overturned by changes in fashion and historical circumstances in ways that are entirely unpredictable. Indeed, as he pointed out, this was evident enough in the way in which museum acquisitions were made; and as an active and highly valued member of the committee of the National Art Collections Fund he championed the purchase of works by unfashionable and neglected artists, realising that sooner or later their turn would come. What mattered, in his opinion, was to trust one's own judgement in selecting objects of the highest quality and historical importance, rather than those of merely parochial interest.

Francis's interest in changes in taste, and in the preconceptions on which taste is so often based, led him not long afterwards, while spending a few days with Larissa at Versailles, to escape a heatwave in Paris, and strolling round the park, to the recognition that many of the once famous ancient statues that were visible there in reproductions, as indeed they are in palaces and formal gardens throughout Europe, were now virtually unknown even to specialists, including himself. Soon afterwards, he and his friend Nicholas Penny, who was then working on the impact of classical art on English sculpture, decided to write a short illustrated pamphlet for art historians, with the intention of providing a summary of the discovery and subsequent history of a hundred celebrated ancient statues. They thought that the job could be done in a few weeks. In the event it occupied them for three years, and resulted in *Taste and the Antique* (1981), which retained the approach they had originally envisaged, but which involved far more research than they had anticipated.

The book itself was immediately recognised as fundamental for the understanding of European art from the middle of the sixteenth century until at least the time of the French Revolution. It marked the rediscovery of an important chapter in the history of taste, as well as illustrating one of the most profound and irrevocable changes in artistic fashion that has ever occurred, one that was illustrated by Francis himself in a letter written in 1953, in which he said that having just revisited the Elgin Marbles he would never again take the classical section of the Vatican Museum seriously. Without changing his preferences, he did of course take it very seriously indeed, while recognising that many of the sculptures he studied are never likely to recover their former prestige. The removal of baroque restorations by archaeologically-minded museum directors has ensured that in some cases this is impossible, since their appearance has been irrevocably altered. *Taste and the Antique* itself contributed greatly to bringing that practice into disfavour.

In his next book, *History and its Images: Art and the Interpretation of the Past*, published in 1993, Francis shifted his focus once more, to examine the use and, more often, the misuse that historians had made of art as historical evidence, or, as he put it, to provide 'a study of the impact of the image on the historical imagination'. In a sense this marked a return to a problem that he had been forced to confront in his thesis on the supposed Jesuit style, since his starting point there had been a hypothesis that a particular artistic style was somehow revelatory of the attitudes of a religious order. The equation of the Jesuit style with the Baroque, indeed, had been popularised by Taine. But whereas in his earlier work Francis

had examined how an idea about history had been taken up by art historians, now he turned to the work of historians themselves. He had been struck by the almost ubiquitous modern practice of illustrating history books with reproductions of works of art, and he had also been amused by some of the strange identifications proposed for the Roman statues that he had studied in *Taste and the Antique*. But the immediate catalyst was a paper he was invited to deliver on Gibbon and the visual arts, in which he had been surprised by the fact that although Gibbon had certainly looked at works of art with the diligence expected of a cultivated eighteenth-century tourist, and although the original impetus for *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* had, famously, come to him when he contemplated the ruins of the Forum, in his book the visual arts scarcely figured at all; and when they had been mentioned, Gibbon had subscribed to the view, already present in Vasari, that the decline in the power of the Roman empire had coincided with a change, and a perceived decline, in the visual arts, despite some clear evidence to the contrary. Gibbon, he realised, had been a decisive influence on Seroux d'Agincourt, who provided the first extensive illustrated survey of the visual arts from the Roman empire to the Renaissance. The publication was delayed for many years, which meant that d'Agincourt's original intention of providing a complement to Gibbon's masterpiece was largely overlooked.

Francis's approach to his vast topic was necessarily selective, and, as usual, more descriptive than analytical. Starting with the antiquarians of the Renaissance, he moved on to Paolo Giovio and the fashion for collecting historical portraits, then to the discovery of the images in the Roman catacombs, and, via Voltaire, Caylus and Montfaucon, to Lenoir's establishment of the Musée des Monuments français, an institution which had already figured in *Rediscoveries in Art*. Dealing also with the use of medieval manuscripts and gargoyles for the study of popular culture, and the types of historical reconstructions used to illustrate popular works of history, he discussed the ideas of Burckhardt, Warburg, and Huizinga, as well as the notion, influential in the early years of this century, that art could somehow be prophetic of social or political change.

What emerged most strongly from this survey was the extreme slowness with which most historians came to appreciate the potential value of visual evidence, and the apparent naivety with which they almost always used it. Some of the reasons are easy enough to understand, most notably the lack of reproductions and the absence of secure historical evidence about the objects themselves. But gradually the more perceptive scholars

became more conscious that the purpose for which such objects had been made was seldom merely illustrative, that art had its own conventions, which changed over time. With this realisation came the idea, shared for example by Gibbon and d'Agincourt, that the visual arts were somehow symptomatic of larger social changes; but estimates of how this might work in practice varied very widely. According to Francis, the historian who used the evidence of art in the subtlest and most imaginative way was Huizinga, who based his reinterpretation of Flemish culture in the late Middle Ages on a highly personal response to the art of the fifteenth century, but who later expressed strong reservations about the validity of his approach.

As a study of the intellectual history of Western Europe, *History and its Images* is wide-ranging and immensely impressive, with a huge cast of characters portrayed with authority and an obvious familiarity. It casts a new light on ways in which the past was perceived by historians over a long time-span, as well as on ways in which art itself was understood by a series of highly intelligent and learned scholars. Equally importantly, it underlines the fact that the study of large areas of European art, from late antiquity to the early Renaissance, had largely been initiated by historians, who used visual material as a source of historical information about social customs, or as evidence of cultural change. What emerged most strongly from this survey was just how elusive the evidence provided by art has proved to be. The seductive notion that it is in some sense equivalent to written sources is profoundly misleading, and its interpretation presents us with problems which even the most acute of past historians have consistently failed to solve, and which in most cases do not permit a definitive solution. The book in this sense is a cautionary tale, and, now that visual evidence is used more extensively than ever before, one that historians, and art historians, need to ponder.

One of the topics that Francis discussed in the later part of the book was the growth of exhibitions of Old Master paintings, and in particular the impact of a major exhibition of Flemish 'primitives' on the thought of Johann Huizinga. His final book, *The Ephemeral Museum*, completed just before he died, was a study of the development of this phenomenon. It is entirely typical that here, once more, he should have discovered a theme of central importance for the understanding of the art of the past and its place in cultural life, and one that had never previously attracted the attention of historians, at least in a systematic way. His own views about the phenomenon were predictably ambivalent. On the one hand, he was attracted by the possibility of seeing, under one roof, huge selections

of works of art that had never previously been brought together, and he was personally deeply involved in organising several of these exhibitions, such as *The Genius of Venice*, held at the Royal Academy in 1983, and the Council of Europe's neoclassical show of 1960. Yet he deplored not only the risks that such enterprises involved, in the transport of irreplaceable and fragile objects, but also the ways in which such exhibitions distorted the development of scholarship, leading to a focus on the kinds of object that could be lent and encouraging, through the publication of massive catalogues, a superficial and bland type of analysis; and he recognised that the motives that prompted the organisation of such manifestations often had little to do with the interests of scholarship, but were instead all too frequently involved with cultural propaganda of the most dubious kind, as in Mussolini's promotion of the famous exhibition of Italian art held at the Royal Academy in 1930. He also observed that, in bringing together works of widely different periods by a single artist, they also permitted us to see these works in ways that had never been anticipated by those who had made them.

In addition to his books, Francis also wrote a large number of articles and reviews. Most are focused on the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, and deal with the same kind of issues as he explored in his major books. If there is one single feature that unites all his published work, it is a reluctance to address the most common topics of art history, the study of individual artists and the works that they produced. Francis instead preferred to concentrate initially on the circumstances in which art was made and the motives of those who paid for it, and later on the ways in which the art of the past was understood, appreciated and collected by later generations. That process was so complex and unpredictable that it would not be surprising if he had believed that his own interpretation of what the works had meant to those who created them was bound to be subjective and, in the last analysis, profoundly partial. As I have already indicated, his reluctance to adopt a traditional approach was certainly not because he was insensitive to the power of art. On the contrary, he was always an enthusiastic and discriminating collector, a passionate sight-seer and an assiduous visitor to museums and exhibitions. But, unlike most art historians, he evidently did not believe that his own aesthetic responses constituted historical evidence of a reliable kind, except about himself. Everything that he wrote suggested just the opposite, and in this sense his work was powerfully subversive.

This cannot have been a source of dismay to Francis, who was keenly alert to pomposity and more strongly still disliked all forms of dogmatism.

By temperament he was suspicious of received opinions, ideologically motivated positions or anything that smacked of theory. As he once put it in connection with *Patrons and Painters*, he was trying to write Marxist history without Marxism; and while he believed strongly in ideas, he regarded theory as congealed or dead ideas. He was also convinced that individuals were important, and for this reason he tried to discover as much as he could about those he chose to study. He enjoyed their eccentricities while admiring their insights and sometimes their productive or revealing errors. He believed that the greatest challenge to the historian was to bring the past to life; and that meant getting to know the protagonists of his books in the same way as he knew his own friends and acquaintances. Not that he supposed that the past was like the present, or that all societies worked in the same way. That, after all, was part of the appeal of Italy; and he was fascinated to discover, in his early days there, when invited to tea with a local dignitary, that it was appropriate to address him as 'Your excellency', just as it would have been in the seventeenth century. Throughout tea Francis's companion noticed that he used the expression whenever he could, just to see what it felt like.

As a scholar, Francis was as partial as any to delving into small, well-defined problems, finding out exactly what had happened by following up countless leads in archives, but his most characteristic medium of expression was the book, rather than the article. He was primarily interested in the broad questions of the history of art, and his detailed investigations were always part of a larger enquiry. He had the great gift of knowing how far to carry his research. And it was precisely because he was not deeply preoccupied by the minutiae of the subject that he usually avoided the scholarly controversies that are so characteristic of the subject. This was certainly not because he was ever reluctant to express contentious or unfashionable views, or did so only in a qualified way. In his writing, as in conversation, he was entirely without such inhibitions, seeing his role as that of mapping out new territories by raising new issues, advancing hypotheses that others might enrich or modify on the basis of further research.

Francis defined his own political attitude as one of pessimistic liberalism. Entirely uncensorious, he valued above all else personal and professional honesty, candour, and tolerance, and he was committed to the idea that everyone should have equal access to art and education. It was typical too that when the government of the day refused to provide funds to buy a painting by Poussin that had been owned by the disgraced Anthony Blunt, Francis should have urged the National Art Collections, of which

he was a member of the executive committee from 1976, to contribute to the purchase. His pessimism was profound, in that he felt that the values he believed in were under constant threat, and, in his early years, that he was not equipped to achieve happiness, although this changed when he met Larissa. His marriage brought him security, companionship, and reassurance of a kind that he had never expected or indeed thought possible. Up to that time his friends had always felt that he needed to be looked after. Afterwards, Larissa fulfilled that role, and from the time of their marriage they were almost never apart. Inevitably he remained anxious about the practical problems of life, constantly expecting that carefully planned arrangements would go wrong, or worrying about his health, but this type of anxiety was such a deep aspect of his character that he would have not have been able to function without it. Certainly, it did not prevent him from acting extremely effectively as an administrator and on committees, when he thought it was important to do so, or even, in his later years, from mastering the challenge of computers, to his surprise and satisfaction.

In his youth Francis's appearance of diffidence and impracticality was certainly helpful in gaining him access to archives and libraries; he had the gift of persuading people that they could and should help him. At the same time, this diffidence could easily be mistaken for shyness, to which he was not subject. On the contrary, he was the most sociable of scholars, with a vast network of friends which extended far beyond his circle of professional colleagues. He was an alert and subtle observer of social situations of all kinds, equally at home at smart dinner parties as among old friends. He was also a marvellous and generous host, welcoming to students no less than to his contemporaries, all of whom were treated with the same informality and attention. Young foreign scholars, in particular, were often overwhelmed by his accessibility and kindness. Francis did not believe in hierarchy; he encouraged a critical attitude to the work of all scholars, and his lack of discretion about their follies made many of them seem less intimidating. Most important of all, he believed and managed always to convey the idea that to study the past was the most enjoyable thing that one could do; his vast curiosity and his evident delight in what he did always left his friends and students with the feeling that to be an art historian was a great privilege.

For many of his friends, one of the great pleasures of life was to travel with him and Larissa. Encyclopedic in their knowledge and indefatigable in their enthusiasm, they were eager to see, and see again, every significant building and collection in Europe, although the Middle Ages was

relatively low on their list of priorities. Because Francis persisted in his inability to drive and for some reason of his own did not entertain the idea of Larissa doing so, they needed drivers, but there was no lack of people happy to oblige, since they were such ideal travelling companions, unerring in their ability to discover obscure but wonderful things, encouraging to the chauffeur and also careful to ensure that the rigours of the journey were moderated by good meals and a decent level of comfort. Although he claimed to be a nervous passenger, and invariably insisted on sitting in front, he would soon forget his fears if informed that it might just be possible, by driving flat out, to see just one more museum before closing time. In later years, after Francis had conquered his fear of flying, he and Larissa became more ambitious in their plans, extending their range to Turkey and Egypt, and towards the end of their life were planning a trip to China, where they were to be entertained by a student who had written a thesis on his work.

While Francis was still unable to fly, his travel plans usually involved the most elaborate advance planning, and he often insisted on arriving at the station in time to catch the previous train to the one on which he had booked. On one occasion, when asked to attend a conference in New York, he unwittingly used up the entire travel budget by organising an itinerary that enabled him to go by boat, via the West Indies. Later, America became a fixed stage on his itinerary, particularly the Getty Center in Los Angeles, where he could often be seen, wrapped in scarves and clutching a gin-and-tonic by some swimming pool. The incongruities of southern California had a great appeal to him, such as the sight of the San Francisco Gay Men's Choir singing *God Rest You Merry Gentlemen* on television, but so did the resources of the Getty Center and especially its Provenance Index, an initiative which he championed from the first, as he did another major project of scholarly collaboration, the publication of the *Paper Museum of Cassiano Dal Pozzo*, of which he was an editor.

Francis's huge influence on his contemporaries was exerted not just through his many publications but also through his lectures, which were delivered in French and Italian as well as English, in a slightly histrionic tone, a relic of his experience as a student actor in Cambridge. Equally important for the diffusion of his ideas was his friendship with art historians from every country in Europe, as well as from North America, who were constantly entertained in Walton Street, with Francis dispensing whisky and Larissa providing marvellous and abundant food. He was usually not particularly forthcoming about the details of his latest research, but he always enjoyed discussing general questions about the

history of art, in a provocative, probing way, or exchanging gossip, which he loved, and which in his case was never coloured by moral judgements. Conversation with Francis was always exhilarating, because of his wit, his exceptional intelligence, and his candour.

Francis was elected to a Fellowship of the British Academy in 1971, and in 1985 was awarded the Serena medal for Italian Studies. He was also a Trustee of the Wallace Collection, a Foreign Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, a Corresponding Member of the Accademia Pontiana in Naples and Foreign Member of the Ateneo Veneto. His contribution to scholarship was also acknowledged in 1999 when he became a chevalier of the Légion d'Honneur.

In November 1999 he received the news that he had inoperable liver cancer with exemplary stoicism. At first he thought of spending his last months rereading authors such as Molière and Shakespeare, and watching again his favourite French films, but soon decided instead to devote his efforts to completing the *The Ephemeral Museum*. While he did so, friends came to visit him from all over the world. He died at home on 18 January 2000, spared what he had always feared most, having to face life without Larissa.

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