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An extract from **Marisa Futernick's new artist book, 13 Presidents**, published by Slimvolume

In advance of **Premiums 2017**, RA Schools Patrons talk about their favourite artworks purchased from the RA Schools

**Text by Lyton Talbot** to accompany 2015 graduate Matt Ager's exhibition at Studio\_Leigh



Paulsmith.co.uk

## Aimee Parrott

Cover image: Artists' Book  
Exhibition at Horatio Jr

Above: The Kennington  
Residency. Installation  
shot, work by Sean  
Steadman and Kira Freije



Aimée Parrott graduated from the Schools in 2014 has since exhibited on a regular basis in London, Manchester and Cornwall. She met Jonathan Stubbs at her most recent solo presentation in Breese Little, Bethnel Green.

AP: The run up to this show was unusual. It was planned for the spring, giving me about six months to make the work – a good amount of time for a solo show of this scale. But, the space wasn't ready and I broke my left elbow (I'm left handed). As a result I had almost a year to make the show. Because of this the work had a lot of time to evolve, there was space to experiment and allow things to fail. I think the consequence of this is that the focus of my practice has shifted slightly and I've become a bit braver.

JS: How did the period when you weren't able to make work because of your elbow affect you? Obviously your thought process doesn't stop, but previously your work has been quite driven by process and making.

AP: Yes, up until recently my practice was process led. I would start by experimenting with different materials and then evaluate and make decisions based on what I'd learnt. But after the break I couldn't lift anything – and so couldn't make large scale work. As a result of this I did a lot of drawing and started making books out of a series of



Parkwood Coffee  
Cone and Mug from  
DOHM

monotypes. The fluidity of the process means that one drawing leads into the next – it is quite a quick way of generating ideas and imagery. I found this period altered the way I work. Drawing has become a way of thinking through ideas and, as a result, my recent works are more concerned with form and consequently figurative elements have crept in. On reflection the accident was a good excuse to rethink the way I approached things.

JS: Did the figuration come through creating accidental forms, or through deliberate decisions?

AP: It was deliberate. I found through drawing I was able to develop a new visual language to shift a pre-existing conversation, to complicate my practice with recognisable forms whilst retaining an interest in materiality and gesture.

It allowed me to more directly reference the body. As a female artist referencing the nude, I find myself in complicated territory – just as in life as I woman I find I am holding myself and being held to conflicting standards. In one moment being judged on an intellectual level, and as an object the next. The female forms look at different types of scrutiny, some are introspective, examining self-portraiture (for example Faint), or coming from an internal viewpoint (e.g. Percussion, Nerves), others are seen as though from external perspective like classic nudes, a voyeuristic gaze.

JS: Previously the work talked about the body in terms of action as well.

AP: Yes – in terms of gesture and scale. I was quite particular about the scale I worked in. I focused on portrait size, where I was engaging the hand and the wrist, or a much larger scale which meant employing the whole body to make marks. For me the most interesting thing about making painting is in creating an object that has a bodily presence or trace as well as a visually engaging image. It is the duality of painting; its material presence at odds with the illusion of space that gives it such a density. By reintroducing figurative elements whilst combining them with a complex handling of the surface I hope to highlight this dualism.

JS: But the materiality can still reference the body as well as the form?

AP: Yes, there is possibility for metaphor – thinking about the surface as a permeable barrier – a membrane or skin. Reference to this metaphor comes up over and over again in the show; pigment sits under the surface of the fabric, colouring it like blood colours skin. The thread in pieces like Communion interrupting the composition like stitches, the batik marks are surrounded by a dark waxy residue which look like a secretion or greasy mark. So there is a slightly abject undercurrent referencing bodiliness that runs alongside the more obvious depictions of forms.

JS: How has using form affected your way of creating space within the picture plane? The previous work relied on mark, light and atmosphere to talk about the relationship between the surface and the space. But now you are using form, it creates space in a totally different way.

AP: That is something that I have struggled with. One way I have tried to get around it is by interrupting the figure so there is room to doubt it. To keep it shifting in and out of focus. When you are using a figure, the form will always be the most prominent thing, but you can still be caught on the surface.

I think that is why I still like making more ambiguous works. I don't want to shift completely to figuration; I want to keep the play between the two. I really like the openness of abstraction, the associations keep rolling. Once you make something that looks like something or is nameable it can become slightly more direct or closed. So this new territory is problematic, but interesting.

JS: There is a boldness in tackling the subject. You said before that you find it hard to talk about the female body. But, by making this work, you are saying "I am talking about it".

AP: I think I want to bring the subject to the table, to let gender be one of the discussions around my work. With the large latex work, Banner, I wanted



Andrew Munks at  
Watch It Gallery

to make something that was contradictory rather than didactic. Although on the one hand it is a graphically bold piece depicting a huge, towering female figure, I also see her as an incredibly vulnerable form, exposed, blushing and bald with her eyes averted drooping under the weight of the viewers gaze.

JS: With a lot of these processes you are never quite sure what you are going to get.

AP: Yes, for me there needs to be an element of discovery in the work to keep things energetic. For example, pigments have different weights so when staining the surface with a mixture I can never be quite sure how the colours with separate and change as they dry. I find that it is this sense of embracing chance and grappling or reaching out to the limits of my knowledge that keeps the practice mobile. As soon as I know exactly how a material or technique is going to behave I need to find another irritant.

JS: Also with the work there is one hit – most of the time you can't rework these.

AP: I think that's because my earliest work was using watercolour, I inherited this transparent way of applying colour and using the surface of the fabric as a source of light. It means that every mark is seen in relation to the one before – nothing is totally hidden only partially obscured. A result of this method is that many of the works fail if ones confidence falters or the surface is overloaded. Recently pragmatic moves such as working on the underside of overworked fabric or appliquéing patches on have meant that my success rate is slightly higher!

The drive to experiment with materials is a facet of my practice that I developed at the RA Schools. When I started there I wanted to question habits that I'd built up. I let my practice fall apart which was very uncomfortable – but I did that in the knowledge that I had the time and the space to take chances, to let things fail and have time to rebuild. In the current climate it is one of the few places where post graduate art students are really supported. The three years granted as well as lack of fees and the availability of small bursaries means that the pressure is relieved enough for each artist to properly examine their practice.

Aimée Parrott  
BRESE LITTLE  
Until 26 November 2016  
[www.breeselittle.com](http://www.breeselittle.com)

# Extract from Grits

by Marisa J. Futernick



It was a mild early spring day, but I felt a chill on my skin. I put on a cardigan that was hanging on the back of the kitchen door—the same one I wore for that televised “fireside chat” I did in ’77. Gerald Ford used to make fun of me for giving speeches in cardigans. “The man looks more like Mister Rogers than President of the United States,” he told the press. At the time, I thought he was bitter about losing to me, but I like Jerry now. He’s a good man who was given a rotten job. One he hadn’t even asked for. Like Truman and Johnson before him.

Jerry and I write to each other often these days. He called me up the morning after I lost the election to ask if I’d like to golf sometime. “Make it softball,” I said, “and I’ll be there.” In the end, we went swimming. We lay back on lounge chairs, side by side in our bare chests and trunks, and had orange Popsicles. They were as close as you could get to the Frosted Orange at The Varsity without having to go to Atlanta. When I was governor, if I was working late, I might pick up some fried peach pie from the drive-in, and maybe a Frosted Orange, too. I mostly just liked hearing the kids working there shout the slogan: “What’ll ya have? What’ll ya have?”

“Do you honestly wish you had another four years, Jimmy?” Jerry asked. I thought about it for some time, and as my Popsicle melted and I stared into the clear swimming pool, I noticed how much more relaxed Jerry seemed nowadays. “I just wish it had been someone else, that’s all.”

Extract from “Grits”, one of the stories in Marisa J. Futernick’s *13 Presidents* (Slimvolume, 2016).

Installation views of  
*All About My Mother*



In 2014, artist Marisa J. Futernick drove nearly 10,000 miles across America in search of the Presidents, visiting all 13 of the nation’s Presidential libraries along the way. *13 Presidents* is the result: an artist’s book that combines photographs from the journey with a suite of short stories. Mixing fact and fiction, each President from Herbert Hoover to George W. Bush is a protagonist in this collection of unexpected portraits.

The photographs, shot on analogue film, depict the everyday details of the towns that these men are from, including the homes where they were born, and their final resting places. *13 Presidents* weaves together personal narrative with wider cultural observation, forming a vision of America that is both invented and true.

Marisa J. Futernick graduated from the RA Schools in 2014. She was born in Detroit, Michigan in 1980 and raised in Hartford, Connecticut. She attended Yale University and Goldsmiths College, and was recently a recipient of the Deutsche Bank Award in Art. She has published several artists’ books, including *How I Taught Umberto Eco to Love the Bomb* (RA Editions & California Fever Press, 2015) and *The Watergate Complex* (Rice + Toye, 2015). She has exhibited widely, at venues including the Whitechapel Gallery, London; Royal Academy of Arts, London; Jerwood Space, London; Arnolfini, Bristol, England; and Yale University. She has lived and worked in London since 2002.

# Patron as Collector

With Premiums: Interim Projects 2017 opening in January, we asked several of our Patrons for their thoughts on collecting works from the RA Schools over the years.

## Sam and Rosie Berwick

We have bought three works of art over the years, at either the Final Year or Premiums show. In addition, Mizuho International, who generously sponsored the RA Schools, very kindly gave me one of their RA student paintings as my parting gift when I left the bank in 2010. It hangs proudly now in our drawing room and regularly gets great praise from our guests.

Our tastes are constantly changing, as we get older and less wise. Whenever we come to a show, we never have any idea of what we will like, or more importantly, whether we will agree on what we like!

Our philosophy is only to buy what we love instinctively. We hope that each of our children will fall in love with one of our paintings so that they can hang them wherever they end up. We like the idea of a painting being part of our lives, but outliving us and passing on to the next generation and then the one after that.

## Marcelle Joseph

As a collector, I have bought the works of many Schools students either at their Premiums or Degree Shows, at the RA Schools Dinner and Auction or in other exhibitions in London. I have also bought the work of RA Schools tutors and the Keeper. In addition to collecting for myself, I am also one-half of the collecting partnership GIRLPOWER Collection which only collects the work of female artists.

The last work I bought from a Schools student was a large steel sculpture by Kira Freije entitled *The Argument*. I was attracted firstly to the strength of Kira's entire Degree Show display - the individual works as well as their curation, the artist's process and the concepts underlying the works. I also loved the humour in the piece depicting a woman (suggested by a blonde wig on a steel pedestal) eating spaghetti at a dinner table opposite her angry partner (suggested by two hands bearing down on the table), all made of steel except for the wig.

The works are for the most part hanging on the walls of my home in Ascot. I do a comprehensive rehang at my home once or twice a year so that I am able to enjoy the most recent additions to my collection. My two children have been surrounded by artworks for most of their lives so the artworks in my entrance hall (including large sculptures by Rebecca Ackroyd and Kira Freije and wall-based works by Pio Abad and Rhys Coren) are surrounded by my son and his friends playing indoor football. Yikes!!

## Paul and Susie Kempe

Paul and I became Patrons of the Royal Academy Schools about six years ago and have enjoyed meeting the students enormously. Some of the benefits of having access to the RA Schools is that you can see how the students progress and develop over the three years, have conversations about what is currently influencing them and see their work changing as a reaction to that.

We have bought a number of works from the students over the years and two of our most recent acquisitions are an oil painting from Sean Steadman and an installation by Kira Freije.

With Sean's *The Dive* we were attracted by the use of colour, texture and the enigmatic story we felt it was telling. Sean kindly came up to our studios to help position the painting and it is hung in our Tileyard Music Office where it is seen by a huge number visitors.

Kira's installation called *We Strike A Match At The Very Same Time To Signal Our Own Unique Unity* which combines steel, silkscreen on stainless steel to produce a remarkable effect. We loved the shape, the use of steel and felt it had a sense of irony as well as drama. This piece will be displayed on our new Reception area, currently under construction, also at Tileyard Studios.

Installation views of  
*All About My Mother*



## Lizzie Alston

I have been a Patron of the RA Schools for several years and have collected various works over that time. I love watching the various student progress and to see their work diversify whilst they are students at the RA.

I have two lovely grandsons and I have decided each of them shall have a piece of artwork each year so when they eventually have a home of their own they will have something to hang on the walls. I have kept a record of the artists and in which student show I purchased the work. It's great fun for me because I get to buy art, and my daughters love it too because their houses have walls to fill. It's a win win and I get to see the art that I love. I also try to keep up with the students when they leave the RA and to get to as many of their exhibitions as I can.

I am a little naughty as I also have several purchases from the Summer Exhibition and works by some of the tutors at the RA. I feel the role of an RA Schools Patron is to be interested in the students, their progress and their work and the general workings of the RA Schools. It's definitely not a chore but a complete pleasure.

## Ray Treen

Encouraged by the then Keeper, Maurice Cockrill, I became a Schools Patron in 2005. I bought my first student painting in 2006, a work by David Small. Subsequently I've bought works by sixteen students, either when they were at the School or fairly shortly thereafter. In total I have over thirty works, mostly paintings - but including three ceramic pieces.

I have been collecting paintings and sculpture for many years, with a focus on modern and contemporary British work. Buying student work seemed to me to be an excellent way to both support students at a difficult financial stage of their career while enabling me to enlarge and vary my collection with work I really liked.

Most of the pieces I've bought have been abstract or semi-abstract but there are a few figurative works. I like to have more than one work from each student I select but this has not always been possible for various reasons, including on one occasion liking a year two work, but being less positive a year later!

I've kept in touch with most of the students even if only by email. I've visited some at their studios, usually in the East End of London and will attend showings at a gallery. Some of the students are overseas, one is in Berlin and another in Milan. I find it rewarding to hear from them of their progress and efforts to forge an artistic career.

Over the past couple of years, I've bought less at the Schools' own shows, mainly because the works I liked were too large to add to an already overfull collection. However, I will follow these students and hope to buy something later. At the same time, in the last twelve months I've bought works from students who were at the School in 2006/8 and also from students who have only just left. So the thrill of collecting continues unabated.

## Will Ramsay

Premiums: Interim Projects 2017  
27 January - 5 February  
Weston Rooms, Norman Shaw Staircase and  
Architecture Space  
[roy.ac/exhibition/premiums-interim-projects-2017](http://roy.ac/exhibition/premiums-interim-projects-2017)

# Matt Ager *Gusto*

Matt Ager graduated in 2015, and continues to live and work in London. In November, he opened a solo show at Studio\_Leigh. The following essay was written by Lyton Talbot to accompany the exhibition.

There is no Polo Maldini website. There is no Wikipedia entry. But I've seen the brown Polo Maldini loafer in Matt Ager's studio and I've tried to find out more. I've never encountered a shop that sells them but I've held the surprisingly light, chisel-toed shoe in my hand. It's extravagantly stitched, the leather is shiny and hard, there's a sunburst gradient of tonal browns, a rubber tread moulded from a snakeskin pattern for extra grip. Polo Maldini is emblazoned across the insole. Its large typeface tells you everything you need to know.

It's a vertically stretched serif font, with a mid-20th century gravitas that exudes unquestionable quality. A cut price approximation of the Ralph Lauren font, surely. Vidaloka or ITC Fenice, perhaps? In white, against a black background it strikes a classy tone. Polo Maldini sounds good and it looks good too. Evocative and unashamedly capable of seduction. Luxurious yet familiar. Timeless. Italian. What exquisitely good taste. Very Prima Gusto.

There's a trickle of activity on style forums. People asking questions and looking to the internet to assuage any doubt that this really is the exclusive brand they believed it to be. Anxieties about the authenticity of the company are aired. In reply it is suggested that maybe they're unknown outside of the town where they are made (also unknown), affirming exclusivity and allaying any deep-seated fears or regrets about purchases made. Questions about the quality of the shoes emerge with a quiet desperation. 'I'm sure this leather will soften'... 'Rubber tread is definitely a pragmatic decision, these are stylish and practical'... 'They're Polo Maldini for god's sake'. 'Guys? Polo Maldini?' DKZZZZ (banned) offers a diplomatic if not philosophical close to the thread by suggesting:

"Quality is in the eyes of the beholder".[1]

I first saw Matt Ager's work at the Royal Academy Schools in 2015. Marble, glass and natural objects were configured as a coldly corporate aesthetic for his postgraduate show. Slick and coolly inert, the installation offered an acute attention to display methods. Sculptures that seemed to employ the vernacular of the business conference or the trade show belied an interest in material relationships. Cheap material masqueraded as luxury good, the marble surfaces were, in fact, vinyl wraps. Artichokes used to support clear surfaces were cast in plaster, hand-painted with meticulous attention to detail. Singular, hand-crafted components were made to appear ubiquitous and highlighted the deceptiveness of the entire proposition. Placed on low platforms, positioning themselves as an event or a stage, the works pulled you into a misleading and duplicitous game, led by disingenuous trompe l'oeil that surprised and infuriated. This was the artist calling out your own prejudices about taste and holding your value judgments to account before revealing you had been duped.

In *Gusto*, at Studio Leigh, this strategy endures but the objects have been located in a wider context. The Polo Maldinis become the physically supporting element of each sculpture and the sculptures not only refer to their own materiality and proximity to each other as a way to read the work, but also to a specific environment. The environment is made clear by the material; the material examines the cultural cache of place, informed by our own preconception of what that signifies. The exhibition exudes an earthy tone, a flavour of a place, a Mediterranean palette. Plastered surfaces awaiting a fresco, glass and marble objects suggest the outline of people's faces in profile. The work becomes bodily with feet and heads, human and confrontational. The sculpture locates itself this way but it locates you too. You are somewhere else. Susan Stewart's extended essay, *On Longing*, analyses the ways in which everyday objects can be mediated in order to animate a certain version of the world. Examining how a notion of the 'souvenir' or a personal collection of objects can infer an abstracted experience of time and space. She writes:

"In most souvenirs of the exotic, however, the metaphor in operation is against one of taming; the souvenir retains its signifying capacity only in a generalised sense, losing its specific referent and eventually pointing to an abstracted otherness that describes the possessor".[2]

This is how we might view Matt Ager's works. A coalescence of form, figuration, experience and feeling. An abstracted account of the world viewed through the language of its objects and how they can be heightened through a sensitivity of handling and a provocative interrogation of their cultural value and personal signification. The Oxford English Dictionary reminds us that *Gusto* is not simply an etymological descendent of the word 'taste' or an enthusiasm for enacting something, but also the style in which a work of art is realised.

A folder of Matt Ager's related research accompanied the invitation to write this piece. As well as brochure images of swimming pool designs displaying the architectural plans of 'The Venetian', 'The Texas', 'The Bahama' and 'The Copenhagen', there were thirty or so snap shots from around Tuscany and Northern Italy, Pisa and the island of Elba specifically. Not so much a travel journal but a material diary. Tightly cropped images of the chalky, yellow grain of hard cheese, colliding with the marble counters that they sat on. Close-ups of exuberantly rendered, architectural surfaces showing deliberate apertures left in the walls to reveal the perfunctory brickwork behind. The collusion of different surfaces. Tiles and artificial marbling, shiny car bonnets and the salty deposits of the sea air on glass. Terrazzo flooring, polished to impressive finishes. Geometrically shaped plinths, stuccoed to look organic and rock-like in a shoe shop window. In this I saw a closely observed account of material hierarchies and how differing cultures value the expression they offer. A visible economy of minute decisions being made by craftsmen, DIY enthusiasts, amateurs, experts and charlatans alike. The inclusion of impoverished approximations of quality favoured over the exclusion of the real. Signifiers to a set of values being good enough. An openly inauthentic currency.

Installation views of  
*All About My Mother*



We know the differing swimming pools offer nothing other than a slightly altered step configuration, we know deep down that Polo Maldini can't deliver us the shoes we dream of and we know the marble in our kitchen isn't marble at all. But we also know the value and the magic that these things do hold. Matt Ager exposes the trick but in his interrogation of our relationship to objects and their signification he speaks more pointedly to our desire to know the world. As Susan Stewart reminds us:

"The magic of a souvenir is a kind of failed magic. Instrumentality replaces essence here as it does in the case of all magical objects, but this instrumentality always works an only partial transformation. The place of origin must remain unavailable in order for desire to be generated".[3]

[1] DKZZZZ, Maldini shoes?, [www.styleforum.net/t/20397/maldini-shoes](http://www.styleforum.net/t/20397/maldini-shoes) (10th April, 2006)

[2] Susan Stewart, *On Longing. Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Duke University Press, 1993) p. 148

[3] Ibidp. 151

Matt Ager *Gusto*  
Studio\_Leigh  
11 November 2016 – 14 January 2017  
[www.studioleigh.com](http://www.studioleigh.com)

# RA Schools Patrons

## Editor

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## RA Schools Patrons

Regarded throughout the world as a centre of excellence, the Royal Academy Schools are at the centre of the arts in Britain. Founded in 1768 it is the country's oldest art school, with a strong sense of identity, tradition and community.

The Schools is an independently funded charity, which relies on its Patrons to continue providing free postgraduate study for 17 artists, selected from 600 applicants each year. In return for their support Patrons receive many benefits, including invitations to Royal Academy Exhibition Opening Receptions, private curator led tours and bespoke Patron events.

Starting at £1,750 a year, Schools Patrons have unparalleled access to the RA Schools. No other programme will give you the same level of access to working artists and the Royal Academicians that support them.

Contact the Patron Office on 020 7300 5885 or patrons@royalacademy.org.uk to set up a tour of the Schools and find out more.

## Schools Patron events, spring 2017

### RA Schools Annual Lecture & Dinner Olafur Eliasson in Conversation with Tim Marlow

Wednesday 4 May  
Lecture 6.30–7.30pm, Dinner 8–10pm  
Royal Institution and RA Schools

This year we welcome renowned Danish-Icelandic artist, Olafur Eliasson, who will be in conversation with Tim Marlow. Patrons are invited to join the artist and RA Schools students and staff for dinner after the lecture in the RA Schools.

*RA Schools Public Programme is supported by the David Lean Foundation*

### Inside the RA Schools Show

Thursday 19 May  
6.30–8pm  
Life Room, RA Schools

Patrons will have the opportunity to hear directly from four graduating students as they prepare to stage their final year exhibition. Introduced by Brian Griffiths, Senior Tutor.

### Royal Academy Schools Show 2016

23 June – 3 July 2016  
Royal Academy Schools

The RA Schools Show is your chance to be the first to see contemporary art created by the next generation of artists. They represent some of the most talented emerging artists working today and this exhibition is the culmination of their time here.

*Patrons Preview*  
Wednesday 22 June  
5.30 – 6.30pm

*Opening Reception*  
Wednesday 22 June  
6.30 – 8.30pm

To find out more about any of these events, please email patrons@royalacademy.org.uk or call 020 7300 5885

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*And others who wish to remain anonymous*