

A Leap Forward at Toad Hall: David Ferry's Seasonal Veteran and Vintage Cars in Colour

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ABSTRACT

The *Wind in the Willows* (1908) by Kenneth Grahame, is the fictional frame for this discussion on David Ferry's altered book and print series *Seasonal Veteran and Vintage Cars in Colour* (2017-2018). Grahame's character, Toad, is obsessed with the motor car. Toad's disturbance of the rural scene is married with Ferry's practice of inserting photographic additions – mischievous intrusions – from hobbyist 'donor' books in to discarded pictorial guidebooks of the British Isles. Ferry's photomontages and prints from the late 1980s on, which comment on the British heritage industry, are the wider context for this essay.

For *Seasonal Veteran and Vintage Cars in Colour*, Ferry overlaid the 'host' picture book of museum vehicles from the collection of a wealthy aristocrat, with bright, exuberant flora from gardening books, thus obscuring the 'intruders' by greening over their presence. The paper proposes that these photomontages are a response to the inevitable redundancy of technology, and concludes that modern innovations are eventually co-opted by traditional conservative values. This argument is constructed using three protagonists: Futurist, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti as advocate of modernity; John, 2nd Baron Montagu of Beaulieu, as motoring pioneer; and Kenneth Grahame as establishment figure.

INTRODUCTION

In summer, many bright colours are dotted around the British scene, some are the natural delights of flowers in bloom, others are the artificial chroma of the ubiquitous motor car. The natural and the synthetic meld together on suburban driveways and in rural beauty spots; both private and public gardens are spoiled by the metallic intruder. This modern contraption makes its presence felt in the classic children's novel, *The Wind in the Willows*, first published in 1908. The book follows the

adventures of four friends – Mole, Ratty, Badger and Toad – living in the fields, woodlands and riverbanks of the English landscape. At the heart of this story is Toad's obsession with the motor car and his travels through the countryside, which disturb the rustic scene.

The photographic guidebooks altered by David Ferry imagine the artist's adventures through the British Isles. Like Toad, he hurtles through the countryside – but he defiles bucolic scenes with photographic intrusions from modern life. At the



Figure 1



Figure 2

Figure 1. David Ferry, Daimler '35-120' (Great Britain) 1930, from the series *Seasonal Veteran and Vintage Cars in Colour*, 2018
 Figure 2. David Ferry, Ford Model T (USA) 1921, from the series *Seasonal Veteran and Vintage Cars in Colour*, 2018

heart of his print series', and the books of photomontages from which his prints derive, is a critique of Britain's heritage culture.

MODERNISM

Hence, modernism intrudes in an age-old land, much like the disturbance that Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, the lead figure of Italian futurism, caused when he visited London in 1910.[1] Like Toad, Marinetti was fond of fast cars. His own epiphany occurred in 1908 when he crashed his car into a ditch. Perhaps this enthusiasm for the motor car was matched by John Walter Edward Douglas-Scott-Montagu MP, the 2nd Baron Montagu of Beaulieu (1866-1929). A pioneer of motoring, Montagu introduced the future King Edward VII to the invention in the 1890s, and later became the first person to drive a motor car, his Daimler, into the yard of the House of Commons. His promotion of motoring laid the foundations for the National Motor Museum at Beaulieu. In Ferry's print series, *Seasonal Veteran and Vintage Cars in Colour* (2017-2018), machines and flora are combined in the same manner as Toad, Marinetti and Montagu. The artist and his illustrious company converge further in Ferry's commitment to competitive cycling, where speed is of the essence. For this artist-cyclist, modernism is celebrated with garlands.

Perhaps contrary to expectations, the National Motor Museum is not sited in an urban centre but instead resides in the protected environs of the New Forest, where native ponies have right of way. The area became a National Park in 2005, having previously retained its unspoilt state through various Forest laws. Overlooking the small village of Beaulieu in the New Forest, and set on Beaulieu River, is Palace House, the ancestral home of the Montagu family since 1538. Initially the gatehouse to Beaulieu Abbey, Palace House has gone through a continued process of development from the sixteenth century, settling into a medium-sized Victorian country house. It shares its grounds with the remains of the abbey, the gardens, and the museum. Much like the residencies in Ferry's series *The Stately Aquariums of England* (2011-2013), this estate is composed of odd parts.[2] Through his process of photomontage, the artist accentuates the truly disparate character of historical narrative. In 1952, the 3rd Baron Montagu of Beaulieu (1926-2015), son of the motoring enthusiast, added to this particular aristocratic contrivance by opening up Palace House to the public and displaying a collection of five veteran cars.[3] These few seeds quickly spawned an abundant infestation in this rural setting.

SPEED AND MACHINE

Among the parked cars now on display at the museum are vehicles that have held the land speed record, notably Donald Campbell's 'Bluebird CN7'. Campbell, the son of a record breaker, already held the water speed record when he also broke the record on land, making him the only man to hold both titles in the same year, 1964; however, his achievements were quickly overtaken. Famously, Campbell met his end on Coniston Water while attempting another water speed record.



Figure 3



Figure 4

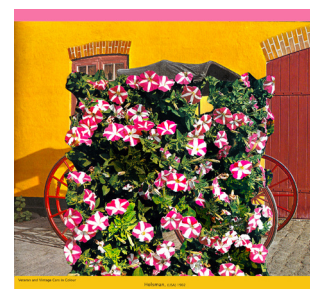


Figure 5

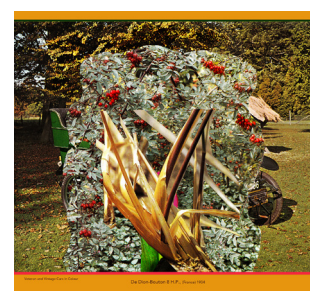


Figure 6

Figure 3. David Ferry, *Delahaye (France) 1909*, from the series *Seasonal Veteran and Vintage Cars in Colour*, 2018

Figure 4. David Ferry, *The Stutz 'BB' (USA) 1928*, from the series *Seasonal Veteran and Vintage Cars in Colour*, 2018

Figure 5. David Ferry, *Holsman (USA) 1902*, from the series *Seasonal Veteran and Vintage Cars in Colour*, 2018

Figure 6. David Ferry, *De Dion-Bouton 8 H.P. (France) 1904*, from the series *Seasonal Veteran and Vintage Cars in Colour*, 2018

Climactic moments punctuate the relationship between man and mechanical creation; sometimes providing stimulus, as with Marinetti and Toad, at other times resulting in abrupt endings, as was the case with Campbell and David Ferry. On a summer's day in 2014, while cycling through the Kent countryside, Ferry was involved in a major accident, being catapulted from his saddle when a sheepdog ran into the front wheel of his bicycle. Ferry underwent extensive surgery and spent months in hospital; the crash changed his life.[4] Ferry's bicycles are now as redundant as Campbell's Bluebirds. This is the fate of technology: the new is instantly out-of-date, to be sold or relegated to a museum. Once a shiny-new, brightly-coloured purchase on the drive, our cars instantly decrease in value. Usually bound for the knacker's yard, a few manage to invert their previous status to become valued as remnants of the past – vintage cars.[5]

Alongside the picture books of Britain that Ferry collects and re-engineers are books aimed at the devoted hobbyist. Found by chance, the 1971 hardback *Veteran and Vintage Cars in Colour* by the Montagu Motor Museum's curator, Michael Sedgwick, is a collection of photographs of cars, unpeopled, displayed in stage-set outdoor locations.[6] Ferry gives the title the prefix 'Seasonal' and festoons the vehicles with flowers. By simply enhancing one property of these pictures – the plants – Ferry obscures the main character. In his altered images the cars are lost within exuberant horticultural design, either fully camouflaged or transformed into a supporting monumental feature. Marinetti (Harrison and Wood 1992, p.147) had declared that 'a roaring car... is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace', the winged Hellenistic sculpture; and here, in Ferry's gardens, both become possible garden statuary.

Metal bodies, rubber tyres, and leather upholstery ride into Britain's national heritage and are pictured in colourful guidebooks. Saturated hues exaggerate their attractiveness; the vehicles blossom as summer blooms. A near neighbour to the car museum at Beaulieu is Exbury Gardens. Belonging to the Rothschild family, famed for their banking prowess, Exbury can be considered a botanical museum. It holds the National Collection of *Nyssa* and *Oxydendrum* trees, deciduous trees that display vivid colour during the autumn. Collections of machinery and flora lie at the crossroads in the forest. It is at this juncture that Ferry's montages parallel real life – the future-that-was, subdued by collectors' classifications, and prettified as a suitable attraction for the tourist trail.

INTENSE COLOUR

Intense colour pervades Ferry's *Seasonal Veteran and Vintage Cars in Colour*. Flowers in full bloom occupy the fore of the frame in all seasons; winter days feature a crisp light that brings into sharpness white and pink petals against the cold snow. Ferry has hidden the cars, indigenous occupants of the photographs, underneath the plants that have migrated from the pages of donor publications. Some of these automobiles have been overridden with plants; others have seemingly



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9

Figure 7. David Ferry, Clement-Bayard 12 H.P. (France) 1912, from the series *Seasonal Veteran and Vintage Cars in Colour*, 2018

Figure 8. David Ferry, Chevrolet 490 (USA) 1914, from the series *Seasonal Veteran and Vintage Cars in Colour*, 2018

Figure 9. David Ferry, Ballot 2LT (France) 1924, from the series *Seasonal Veteran and Vintage Cars in Colour*, 2018

crashed into their situation, embedded in the bedding plants. The French-made, green and yellow Delahaye (1909) is cut in two by a magenta gladiolus sword that rises into the centre of the picture; blue cornflowers explode on top of the cornflower-blue Clement-Bayard (1912); and the fiery burst of a crimson chrysanthemum sets the picture of the 1913 American Cadillac aflame. These early- century vehicles are overwhelmed by the decorous vegetation.

In their Manifesto of 1909, the Italian futurists exalted the racing car as the herald of 'a new beauty' (Harrison and Wood 1992, p.147). This was the aesthetic of speed, accelerating with violence into the future. They expressed a refusal to look back, a stance that was likely borne from the political development of Italy as an independent state that, at the beginning of the twentieth century, needed to modernize. Consequently, the tenth tenet of the Manifesto declared: 'We will destroy the museums'. Labelled as cemeteries, the institutions that stood as records of the past were anathema to these artists. According to this viewpoint, an English lord's motor collection functions as a graveyard for modernism. Far better is the breaker's yard where useless cars are pulled apart and some parts taken out of these old machines can be salvaged to be re-used in other vehicles. The yard is not a cemetery but instead a repository: the once new is renewed. Non-recyclable futurism is out of date and a different road is being travelled. The emphasis is on 'green' alternatives.

One of the exhibits at Beaulieu's Motor Museum is Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, the car from the film of the same name. The fictional story of this car begins with triumph as it wins races in the European Grand Prix of 1907, but in 1909 crashes and bursts into flames as it swerves to avoid hitting a dog and child that run into its path. The car ends up in Coggins' Garage in rural England where it is found by an inventor, Caractacus Potts. Potts rebuilds Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, giving it a fresh role as the vehicle for family adventure. A simple children's story provides a riposte to Marinetti's Manifesto that advocates the new and discards the old. In this, a garage, or junkyard, acts as a museum of old parts that still have use and meaning.

SCISSORS AND SATIRE

Ferry's working method has similarities to that of the fictional Mr Potts. He takes redundant books found in charity shops to recreate pictures of British heritage in the same manner as a mechanic in a garage makes use of odd pieces of junk that have been kept in boxes. Ferry's old-fashioned cut and paste method of the artist- collagist, using scissors and glue, makes use of chance rather than precision. His are images built from found parts on high street shelves rather than digital imagery located by internet search engines. Unlike his contemporaries, the politicized collagists of the 1970s and the appropriation artists of the 1980s who stole their material with clever deliberation, Ferry is not a knowing semiologist. In *Seasonal Veteran* and *Vintage Cars in Colour*, the freedom of surrealist interpretation is apparent and, specifically in regard to the period dates of these vehicles, there are resonances from

early modernism.

Time also frames Lord Montagu, Marinetti, and the author Kenneth Grahame. In 1899, Montagu was the driver of the first car to enter the yard of the House of Commons; he went on to drive his Daimler in the Paris-Ostend road race later that year. Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* was first published in 1908, the same year that Marinetti crashed his car. *Toad of Toad Hall* could be an amalgamation of the Italian artist-poet and the English aristocrat. The novel is a paean to a traditional rural life that was, at that point, still undisturbed by the violence of modernism that was stirring across Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century. Mole represents the modesty of the lower classes, knowing their place and serving their betters; Ratty stands in for the comfortable and educated middle classes; and Badger is the hand of authority, both senior and wise. Toad portrays the errant upper classes, neglecting his inherited responsibilities in favour of modish pursuits, namely the thrill of motoring.

The journey that Toad takes is from an ardent modernist to resigned traditionalist. The message is clear: the mechanical intruder is an unwanted toxin that threatens stability in pastoral England. The central chapter in Grahame's book, titled *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn*, introduces the god, Pan. This is the mystical core of Grahame's narrative – beyond the reach of modern man (or toad), the natural order is in place. Grahame worked at the Bank of England until retiring in 1908. As Secretary of the Bank of England, he would have been a key figure in the British establishment, upholding its values. This sense of decorum and propriety is what he brought to his depiction of the rural landscape, and is what informs the picture books that Ferry uses as his raw material. Much like Mr Toad, Ferry has disrupted this conservative view of Britain by inserting common material from the mundane reality of British life, including images from DIY manuals, cookery books, and knitting patterns.

The ambition of the wealthy aristocrat and suburban gardener is to develop a montage of plants and objects that harmonize. The Montagu family and their neighbours the Rothschilds achieved this on a grand scale, turning their collections into museums of national treasures. The lower classes manage the conflict between the synthetic and the natural using fewer means – simple colour schemes match family saloon, front garden, and domestic interior. Modernism is accommodated in the museum, the home, and in literature, not on its own terms but in the existing status quo. In his photomontages in *Seasonal Veteran* and *Vintage Cars in Colour*, Ferry inverts his previous strategy of rude insertion. The vehicular invaders have already taken root, so the artist becomes a horticulturalist, deliberately greening over his lordship's mistake.

David Ferry uses satire to destabilize the established hierarchy. The cherished English scene, written about by Kenneth Grahame, becomes home to intruders, as tropical fish, iced cakes and DIY constructions find their place implicitly subverting the hegemonic calm. His

interventions and their hosts are surgically conjoined by the monteur's instruments – a process not dissimilar to what became of Ferry's own body following the collision in the Kent countryside that threw the artist-cyclist off his bicycle. The consequence for the artist and his work was that a new hybrid was created. In his print series *Seasonal Veteran and Vintage Cars in Colour*, Ferry's work can be read as cultural and political comment, a reaction to the enthusiasm of the Italian futurists but also a stab at the privileged few. This approach to interpretation has the closed grip of the simple illustration of ideas; however, Ferry draws his inspiration from the wellsprings of British surrealism. An autobiographical commentary could equally be evident. Taking the role of the Master of Toad Hall, Ferry's pictures of machines buried beneath flora may be a lament for a life without cycling.

The series, *Seasonal Veteran and Vintage Cars in Colour* (2017-2018), has been exhibited at the School of Art Gallery, Aberystwyth University, Wales; Grosvenor Museum, Chester; Chelsea Arts Club, London; and in the exhibitions *David Ferry: The Ruins of Picturesque Britain* (2018); *David Ferry: The Invader's Guide to the Museum (and other places)* (2019); and *David Ferry's Exploring Britain by Cake & Car* (2019).

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FOOTNOTES

[1] Marinetti visited London in order to garner support for futurism. See Wood (2015).

[2] The series derives from the altered book English Aquariums in Country Houses in Colour (completed 2010) which is in The National Art Library, V&A, London. Twelve pages plus dust jacket with forty original photomontages. See the essay by Clarke (2013).

[3] Lord Montagu had inherited the Beaulieu Estate in 1951. He was instrumental in the formation of what later became the Historic Houses Association.

[4] Ferry, D. (2019) The Force that Fuses in Scott, J. et al. (2019). This essay looks at Ferry's accident and time in hospital. Its title makes reference to Dylan Thomas' 1934 poem, The Force That Through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower.

[5] Vintage is a term more specifically given to cars dated between January 1919 and December 1930. Veteran refers to cars built before December 1904. See the National Motor Museum Trust website for car classification.

[6] Michael Sedgwick was assistant editor of Veteran and Vintage car magazine (launched in 1956 by Lord Montagu) and curator at the Montagu Motor Museum before it became the National Motor Museum. His Veteran and Vintage Cars in Colour, published by Batsford, includes cars from the (then-)Raben Car Collection, established by Baron J.O. Raben-Levetzau in 1964, at Aalholm Castle, his country estate in Denmark.

AUTHOR

Stephen Clarke (b.1962) is Lecturer in Art & Design: Critical and Contextual Studies at the University of Chester. He studied Fine Art and Photography at Newport Art College, South Wales (1983-86), and followed this with a postgraduate qualification at Goldsmiths' College, London, in art teaching. He has Masters' Degrees in Contemporary Art and Theory (1994-96) and Fine Art Printmaking (2003-04), both from Winchester School of Art. He has photobooks published with Café Royal Books and The Velvet Cell, and he writes for Photomonitor, The Art Newspaper, The Book Arts Newsletter, and The Double Negative. Clarke has collaborated with Professor David Ferry since 2012.

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IMAGE GALLERY



Figure 1. David Ferry, Daimler '35-120' (Great Britain) 1930, from the series Seasonal Veteran and Vintage Cars in Colour, 2018

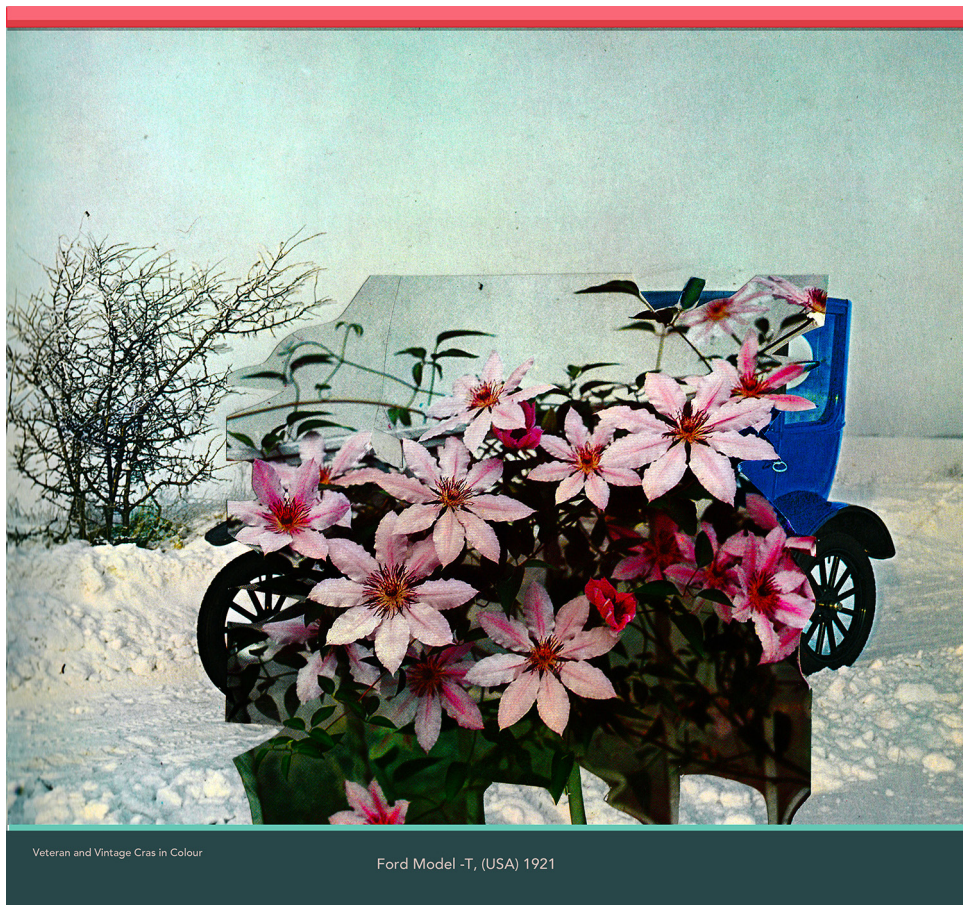


Figure 2. David Ferry, Ford Model T (USA) 1921, from the series Seasonal Veteran and Vintage Cars in Colour, 2018



Figure 3. David Ferry, Delahaye (France) 1909, from the series Seasonal Veteran and Vintage Cars in Colour, 2018



Veteran and Vintage Cars in Colour

The Stutz 'BB', (USA) 1928

Figure 4. David Ferry, The Stutz 'BB' (USA) 1928, from the series Seasonal Veteran and Vintage Cars in Colour, 2018



Figure 5. David Ferry, Holsman (USA) 1902, from the series Seasonal Veteran and Vintage Cars in Colour, 2018



Veteran and Vintage Cars in Colour

De Dion-Bouton 8 H.P., (France) 1904

Figure 6. David Ferry, De Dion-Bouton 8 H.P. (France) 1904, from the series Seasonal Veteran and Vintage Cars in Colour, 2018



Veteran and Vintage Cars in Colour

Clement-Bayard 12 H.P., (France) 1912

Figure 7. David Ferry, Clement-Bayard 12 H.P. (France) 1912, from the series Seasonal Veteran and Vintage Cars in Colour, 2018



Figure 8. David Ferry, Chevrolet 490 (USA) 1914, from the series Seasonal Veteran and Vintage Cars in Colour, 2018



Figure 6. David Ferry, De Dion-Bouton 8 H.P. (France) 1904, from the series Seasonal Veteran and Vintage Cars in Colour, 2018