ARTWORK

Peter Campbell

London Review
OF BOOKS

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Introduction
Jeremy Harding

Peter campbell's illustrations appeared on more than four hundred covers of the *London Review of Books*. Most of these works are watercolours, with only a handful of pieces in other media, including collage, photography, pastel, oil and gouache. A few were computer-generated. Peter was involved with the *LRB* at the outset: his was the original design for the paper in 1979, and he steered it through a further two make-overs. In the early years, it was Peter who looked after the covers. Sometimes he commissioned photographs or went out and took them himself, but mostly he selected work from picture libraries and agency stock. Then in 1993 the designer became the cover artist.

This book, with its selection of finished covers, gives a good sense of Peter's skills as a colourist and draughtsman, his feeling for landscape and still life, his affection for what was in front of him or in his mind's eye.* It confirms the kinds of attention he paid to the world outside the window, the room he'd just entered, or the things he liked and went on to arrange on a table. Papers, fruit, typewriters, flowers in a porcelain jug. And of course it shows the energetic play of his intelligence once he brought it to bear on a pattern or framing motif, for example, or a brisk, formal study in which one shape has assented to the presence of another, or a graceful, low-key lesson in the properties of colour.

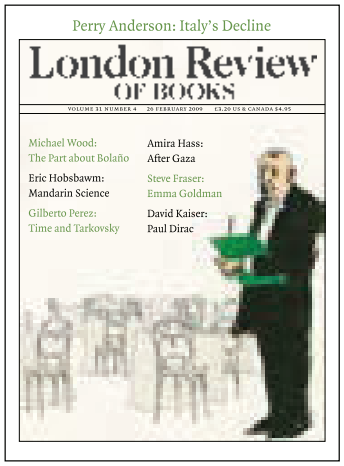
Then there are his people. People about in the great outdoors, often a bit retro, in cars, on bikes – Peter liked bicycles – or waiting on railway platforms: destination is a favourite theme. Leisure is another: idlers, sunbathers, deckchair habitués. Coming indoors, he liked to drape a man over an armchair or sit a young woman on a bed with her back to us. Inside and out, he enjoyed figures in well-defined roles: jockeys, trainers and lads; butlers, waiters and maître d's; dancers and players, tenors and tumblers, tailors' dummies.

Peter also had a sub-style which, without being abstract in the strict sense, catches the drift of abstract painting and places it at the service of a magazine cover. Sometimes he would take a device that might have been repeated successfully as a decorative surround and let it loose in its own right, like a Miró asterisk, looking on with avuncular interest to see how it coped with its new independence. Covers in this mode contained curious forms – chevrons, calligraphic twirls, characters from an imaginary font – acclimatising nicely to the pale colour washes where he set them down. Then there were emptier, altogether larger 'abstracts' suggestive of desert and steppe, where bands of colour were laid down rapidly on wet paper, one after the other, the edge of one band bleeding here and there into its predecessor. At times the darkest, thinnest band would hint deliberately at a horizon; at others it abandoned its pretensions and settled back as matter on the picture plane.

The unselfconsciousness and ease with which Peter moved between these idioms also took him fluently from one painterly reference to the next: his head was populated with the works of masters, classical and modern, and had been since his years as a teenager in New Zealand, where he was born in 1937. Often he alludes to the painters he happened to be thinking about at the time he was doing a cover. Many of his male subjects might have come to the *LRB* down a corridor hung with sketches by Daumier and Ardizzone. One of his afternoon-tea-scapes, with a picnic waiting under a parasol, pays obvious tribute to Eric Ravilious. A fiddle and bow rehearse an air from Dufy. A wild stretch of highland (dabs of ochre and weals of black) restages the panache of Ivon Hitchens; the upper part of the landscape is raised on a sheer flank of pink and pale blue: pure Peter Campbell.

A cover from 1996 depicts a multicoloured chequerboard, nine cells by nine, with a dozen or more reserved areas, and reminds us obliquely of Paul Klee's grids. A few years later, in 2002, Peter designed the exhibition catalogue for *Paul Klee: The Nature of Creation* at the Hayward. Walking readers around the show in a piece for the *LRB*, he singled out the watercolour backgrounds of Klee's oil-transfer drawings for special attention. 'There is no twentieth-century artist of equal importance,' he wrote, 'who depended so much on paper and transparency.'

In Peter's own grid for the *LRB* there are twenty-five square cells: the rest are narrow rectangles, separating the squares like buffers. Two thin lines intersecting at ninety degrees divide the entire design into four parts. Each of the parts contains four, six or nine of the master cells. This arrangement caused Peter a good deal of private enjoyment and though he spoke about it at the time, no one remembers precisely why. Perhaps there's a clue in the fact that 2:3, the golden ratio, was the proportion favoured in the design of medieval manuscripts, a theory



advanced by Jan Tschichold, the designer and typographer who brought the first illustrations to Penguin covers in the 1940s. Before and during his time with the *LRB*, Peter was a book designer. He would have enjoyed the challenge of transposing the 2:3 ratio, *sotto voce*, to a colourful patchwork of cells.

Finally, the exercise reminds us of another in *The Elements of Drawing*. Ruskin's advice to students in Letter I, Exercise VII was to draw a grid on Bristol board and paint alternate squares, repeating the process until they could 'strike the colour up to the limit with perfect accuracy'. By practising on grid after grid, like a series of chessboards, the novice would learn to stop the pigment ponding at the bottom of each square. He called it 'leading a colour down'. Peter was no good at chessboards – a reader once wrote in to complain that he'd put a black square in the right-hand corner on a cover – but he knew how to lead a colour down, creating a uniform field, and he also became a great exponent of the graded wash, progressively adding water so that the pigment appeared to ebb as the brush went on its way. Like the wealth of reference he brought to his pictures, the suggestion of technical skill was underplayed in his finished pieces.

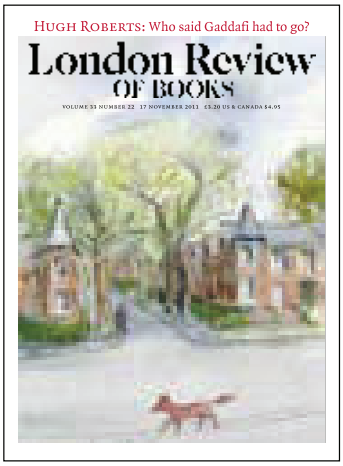
It's odd, given his versatility and his many acts of homage, oblique or obvious, that there's such a thing as a Peter Campbell. But there is and it's hard to mistake. Some of the best signature work is without decoration or abstraction and has no human figures: the convivial still lifes, the beguiling landscapes and subdued yet stagey interiors (an empty palm court, an unadorned corridor, a room with the tousled contents of a suitcase on the bed).

But signature was seldom the primary consideration: the purpose of a cover was to extend some form of welcome to the world. Neither vain nor especially modest, Peter understood that the good host doesn't make too much of himself. Hospitality, as far as a paper is concerned, is not just about readers: there are the contributors to think of as well. The charm of Peter's work appeals to the reader, and the world, but there is also a structural courtesy reserved for contributors. In many of his compositions he left plenty of neutral space where the names of writers and their stated business could be advertised: 'Hilary Mantel on Doris Lessing'; 'Frank Kermode: How Jesus got his face', 'James Wood: From a Novel in Progress', 'John Ashbery: "In the Village of Sleep"', and so on. Working around the contributors and their stories was something Peter got used to. It must have been like turning down a bed in a hotel room before the celebrity arrived.

That's where his manservants and restaurant staff, also a bit retro, come in. 'Peter's flunkies', as we used to think of them, were there to announce that everything in an issue was as it should be. They were cheerful personifications of his own duties as designer and cover artist. Peter could create a mood of anticipation just as well with the lights on a Christmas tree or the head waiter standing in an empty dining room. But if he suspected this wasn't enough to entice readers into the paper's austere interiors, with the plain four-column format he'd designed, he might decide to take things up a notch and evoke the thrill of the show. Just as you'd got used to his decorative fancies or his quick, confident landscapes, you were confronted by an acrobat halfway across a wire, or a gnome-like actor bowing stage right.

Performance could also solve the problem of presenting words on a cover. The void he'd left for writers and their subjects would be dressed in a range of ingenious ways, as a bare stage drop, a movie screen, a lecture platform, a canvas on an artist's easel, a still photographer's studio, or any number of exotic entrances to tents, seraglios, marquees. The same ceremonial vacuum could also become an open book with no text, an unfurled scroll, or an oblong box with pretty packaging folded back on four sides. The basic themes – giving and taking, touting for business and catching the act, showing off and being at the show – allowed him to create a sense of occasion from a routine technical constraint.

But Peter the facilitator could sometimes put his foot down. Plenty of his drafts offered stiff resistance to the words. In a piece about him after his death, Mary-Kay Wilmers, the editor of the *LRB*, wrote that 'there was an unstated war between covers that couldn't accommodate words and covers that were all words – as sometimes they had to be.' Peter would bring in work that defied the editorial staff to put anything on it at all, and quite often this was how it appeared, pristine, with no more information than the masthead and a single story on the strapline. The sweeping interior of a terraced house, viewed through the sash window at the front, was published in 1998 under the strapline 'Seven Essays for a Rainy Summer'. (A slim



young woman is carrying a tray of tea things left to right.) The following summer, not so wet, a London garden in full leaf, viewed from the house, appeared beneath the rubric 'Big June Issue!' So much for words. The last picture he did for a cover before his death in October 2011 – a Wimbledon townscape with a fox moving smartly down the road – had allowed space for a couple of lines of text above or around its jaunty protagonist, but it appeared intact, slightly eerie, under a strapline about Libya.

Pictures weren't commissioned according to the likely contents of a coming issue: the *LRB* is not so seamlessly run and the world, across the space of a fortnight, not that easy to predict. Covers were chosen on the Thursday of each press week from a stock of paintings in the office which Peter would replenish with one or two new works every month. In her valedictory piece Wilmers wrote about the process of deciding on a picture:

> The considerations were simple: season (no beaches in winter, no bare trees in summer); general appropriateness (no ice-cream sundaes in wartime); and how many pieces had to be signalled on the cover. Sometimes a cover would hang around for a year and suddenly find favour ... The only literal connection I remember between a cover and the content was in an issue with a piece by Jenny Diski that eventually became her book *Skating to Antarctica*: Peter did a wonderful painting of the moon in its successive movements, rising and falling over a polar landscape. That may have been a pure coincidence (nobody can remember) and in any case the piece advertised on the rubric – it was the first issue of 1997 – was Alan Bennett's 'What I did in 1996.' One thing Bennett didn't do was skate to Antarctica.

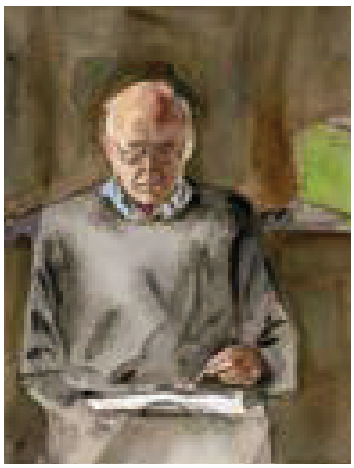
Watercolour suited Peter, and his sense of how his time was best spent. His brief was to look things up and down and then record what he had seen and how it came to appear the way it did. His extraordinary pieces for the *LRB* about the round of exhibitions, the great collections, and the changing face of London, are all about looking and divulging. Much of his working life was spent prowling the galleries and glossing the metropolis for his readers in these discursive biweekly bulletins.

Toward the end of Peter's life his friend Robin Kinross published a selection in *At... writing from the 'London Review of Books'*. He had filed nearly three hundred pieces by then: the editors kept him busy. In the course of Peter's day there was often a lot to see but not much time to record. Sometimes his decisions, which can seem beautifully judged in retrospect, were taken at quite a lick. This is true of the covers as well as the writing.

As far as the covers are concerned, watercolour got him where he wanted to go at just the right tempo, ensuring that the portfolio in the office was regularly resupplied. Among his books, he kept a copy of C. J. Holmes's lectures on the 'science of picture-making', first published in 1909. It's in a passage from Holmes – an artist as well as an art historian – that we come closest to the merits of watercolour as they must have seemed to Peter: 'It is simple and rapid in manipulation, it renders delicate tones with ease ... no other process is so rich in felicitous accident, so crisp and fresh in character.' (Or in its low-tech way, more admirably suited to the requirements of journalism. Watercolour, Holmes added with a raised eyebrow, was also 'pre-eminently the medium of tricks and dodges'.) Peter might complete a cover in a day or so, give or take the final touches, sometimes less. Summer seemed to bring on more labour-intensive studies – lavish picnic baskets and layered greenery done with a succession of glazes – but more often he liked to move along at a rate, painting wet on wet, pacing his performance against the speed at which his paper dried, charging areas of the picture with colour, lifting pigment off others, leaving little embankments of bleeding to stand.

Peter worked in the front room of the family home in Southfields, and a bare-bones studio in a flat in King's Cross. He kept a stock of good loose leaf paper and watercolour block, the leaves gummed down on three sides to prevent curling and puckering. He liked 100 per cent cotton blocks, fine grained, to take his drybrush detail, cold-pressed for maximum absorbency. His most delicate washes were put down with a superabundance of water and barely a trace of pigment. On solid, cold-pressed paper, 300 grams per square metre, Peter could afford to lay on water like a fireman. He used sable and 'finest sable' brushes, occasionally ox and sable, or hog. He bought most of his paint in Cornelissen & Son, the old artists' colourmen in Great Russell Street, a short walk from the *LRB*. He had an impressive range of drawing inks – vermilion, yellow, orange and bright green.

Among a large body of work that was never intended for the



LRB, built up over the years with no end in view but painting, there is a self-portrait, which hangs in the Campbells' kitchen. The likeness is unmistakable, yet the sitter is uncharacteristically stern. Peter would often fix his gaze on you as he seems to here, peering over his half-moon spectacles. In life the effect was nearly always quizzical, as though there were still something about an English person, or even a generic Brit, that appeared to him despite his years as a Londoner both engagingly novel and vaguely specious. That disarming expression had none of the severity we find in the eyes and the forehead of the self-portrait, or even the mouth.

Of a self-portrait by the American artist Alice Neel from the 1970s, Peter said that 'the face is rather tight around the mouth, as a painter's face can be when reaching a decision about just how a detail seen in the mirror can be put down with the next stroke.' There's a similar tension in Peter's face under his own scrutiny: this is not the gregarious, inquisitive Peter with his eyes and wits so very much about him. It is the focused twin, the decision-maker, full of 'contained, serious concentration' – Peter again, on a self-portrait by the Scottish painter David Wilkie.

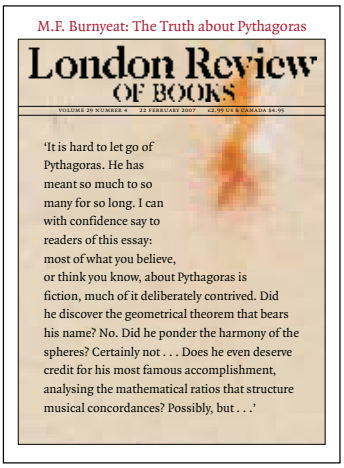
The left hand, which gestured affably in company and now looks like a right hand – this is also a painting of a reflection – is hidden from view, an irrelevant detail. The right hand has been active on the shaded half of the head and face (the viewer's right), where there is plentiful use of wet on wet, the colour dropped onto the moistened paper; the lit half (the viewer's left) is patiently glazed, one layer on an earlier layer that's been left to dry, and so on, with a precision that explains why the person in the picture is more intense and less convivial than the one who could walk into a room and engage almost anybody in conversation. Plenty of artists tackle the self-portrait sooner or later as a technical challenge or a conceit with a couple of passport photos. Peter played it straight.

Peter's father, Arnold, was an educationalist, close to the New Zealand Labour Party, who went on to become head of the New Zealand Council for Educational Research in 1939 and eventually, in 1960, director of the Department of Education. Peter's mother, Nancy Combs, was a founding member of the New Zealand Family Planning Association. Both parents had come through the 1930s convinced of the need to extend education in all areas of life to all areas of society. Peter made less of university than his father had. After a desultory two years studying philosophy, geology and a handful of peripheral subjects, he began serving an apprenticeship with the printer and poet Denis Glover. On completing his final year as a part-time student he picked up work with the New Zealand Schools Publications department, where both parents had connections. He and his wife, Win Doogue, left for Britain in 1960. His earnings in New Zealand from books for young readers paid the rent in London and eventually helped the couple buy their house in Southfields.

Geology had suited Peter better than philosophy, but either way he hadn't much liked being taught. From an early age, he'd been an independent rummager. In the front room at Southfields he kept an edition of Rembrandt's paintings and drawings inscribed in his own neat hand 'Peter Campbell 1949'. He'd asked for the book for his twelfth birthday. The plates and prints are all monochrome. Looking at a drawing catalogued as *Negro Band* from 1637, Peter had to colour in, imagining the 'red and yellow chalk' advertised by the caption. Or the 'watercolour' announced under a picture of *Two Negro Drummers Mounted on Mules*.

Years later, asked why he'd moved to Britain, he said it was a voyage of discovery: he wanted to experience the colours of paintings he'd only seen in black and white. The limitations of books were as clear to him as their advantages. Peter was a keen reader with wide interests. His mother, Nancy, had a passion for Henry James, which he acquired and passed on to his daughter, Jane, who returned the favour by keeping him up to date with contemporary fiction. His son, Ben, put a steady stream of younger writers his way. Ever since his time with Glover at the Wingfield Press in Wellington, books had shaped the contours of Peter's working life and his leisure. He was alert to the way they settled in the hand and met the requirements of a reader's eye.

In the late 1960s he was still turning out children's books, with Jane and Ben in mind. Methuen published three titles written and illustrated by their father. By now he was also designing books for the BBC, always quick to spot an asset, and by 1969 he had become the corporation's main man for 'the book of the film', or rather the series. He was assigned to



the blockbusters of public broadcasting in its golden age and told to reconfigure them in print with the help of the presenters: Kenneth Clark on *Civilisation* (1969), Jacob Bronowksi on *The Ascent of Man* (1973) and later, David Attenborough's *Life on Earth* (1979).

Between assignments, Peter found time to design a superb edition of Reynolds Stone's engravings from John Murray. The grabby, mannered styles of the 1970s did mainstream publishing few favours and the BBC jackets, unlike the Reynolds Stone, have not aged gracefully. All the same, Peter knew how to organise blocks of information, lay out a page and set up an illustration as master or servant of the exposition in hand. His writers were indebted to him. Clark inscribed his copy of *Civilisation* 'to Peter Campbell, the perfect editor, from a grateful author'.

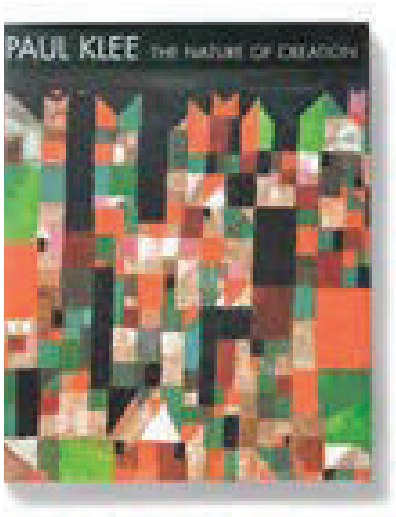
It helped that Peter was a fonts-and-faces enthusiast of a high order. He was willing to concede, Diana Souhami wrote in an obituary for the *Guardian*, 'that a book set in the 1790s should have an eighteenth-century typeface'; at the same time he could spot the best of the new type designers emerging in the age of desktop publishing. No proper book design without a knowledge of typography, and Peter's went back a good way. In his teens in Wellington he would have seen the new Penguin covers introduced by Tschichold during his brief heyday at the firm as titles were added to the family library. By the time he reached London, the German engraver Berthold Wolpe was the figure in the ascendant. Wolpe had devised a serif typeface known as Albertus, which Peter greatly admired. During the war, having been deported to Australia and then returned, Wolpe was taken on at Faber & Faber and remained there for thirty years or more, with 1,500 jacket covers to his credit.

Peter took a keen interest in the development of book design. Asked to contribute to a volume of the *Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, he wrote about the first edition of *Leviathan*, pointing up the use of different fonts to signal themes and sub-themes, and guide the reader through the text from its list of contents to its conclusion. It was, he wrote, like being led through a magnificent house: 'The effect is architectural. The reader is never lost, never unaware of how each wing and the rooms it contains relate to the whole building.'

In Karl Miller's day, the masthead of the *LRB* was set in a version of Caslon and the columns in Times. In 1997 Peter had a chance to review these arrangements. He shrunk the size of the paper slightly, let the masthead stand and set the pages in Quadraat, a crisp typeface devised by the Dutch designer Fred Smeijers. Quadraat, as Robin Kinross remarked, was 'a tool in a larger strategy': Peter had transformed the look of the *LRB* and in doing so made it a showcase for Smeijers's elegant design. 'I have said this many times in lectures,' Smeijers wrote to Kinross in 2011, 'the most faithful user of Quadraat is the *LRB*, or Peter … Then I show the public some slides of the *LRB*, [including] a slide of a page with four columns of just Quadraat, no illustrations whatsoever, stating … that this is one of the most beautiful pages of [pure] text you can get these days, and it comes every two weeks!' Unlike the editors or the publisher, Smeijers was exhilarated if he came across an issue where advertisements were thin on the ground: 'By the way,' he wrote to Kinross, 'in the last *LRB* there is a spread of two pages, with no illustrations, so eight columns of just Quadraat. If possible do not throw this issue away.'

In the 1990s, Peter was involved in design and typography for the *Musical Times* and *Early Music*, a journal published by Oxford, and for Profile Books. The Fourth Estate logo, also his, was by now a familiar sight in bookshops. He had been collaborating on Quentin Blake's books since the 1980s and later wrote the introduction to *The Life of Birds* (2005). Every autumn his posters went up in museums, galleries and universities, advertising the Pannizi Lectures at the British Library.

In 2000 an issue of *New Left Review* appeared with an introductory essay by Perry Anderson calling for 'uncompromising realism' among the remains of the left. The journal looked and felt quite different. Anderson, who took over the helm for the next few years, had nominated Peter for the redesign. The brief had gone out, the current editor Susan Watkins explained in a piece after Peter's death, at 'a conjuncture transformed by the West's Cold War victory', though had it been put to Peter in quite those terms, he might have been excused for thinking they'd picked the wrong man. In fact, the result was another kind of victory. The calming effect of the Campbell aesthetic lightened what had become a daunting journal. Peter opened up the margins and set about a massive decongestion. Scala, the clean, disinterested typeface he chose, was the invention of another Dutch typographer, Martin Majoor: Peter used it to



bring measure and equanimity to the page. At Anderson's suggestion, he reproduced the letters 'n', 'l', 'r' in brush and watercolour – lower case – and digitised the result for the covers. Before long he was invited to design books for the journal's imprint, Verso.

Peter's most rewarding designs, in his own eyes, were probably his exhibition catalogues. Besides the Klee in 2002, there were two memorable catalogues for the Hayward: *Francis Bacon: The Human Body*, a show curated in 1998 by David Sylvester, a longstanding contributor to the *LRB* with whom he'd already collaborated, and *Goya: Drawings from His Private Albums* in 2001. Work at the National Gallery now came his way via the publishing director Kate Bell, who'd moved on from the Hayward. Together they produced a short book on Vermeer to coincide with a major show. A run of commissions followed, with exhibitions of Kitaj, Titian, El Greco, Rubens and Cézanne.

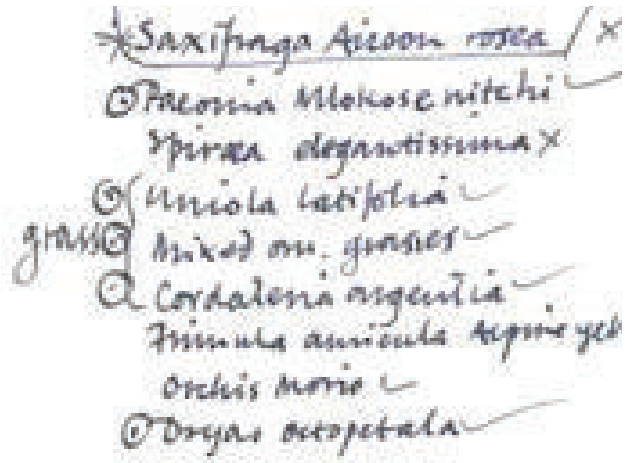
The Rubens catalogue was one of Peter's favourites and saw him take charge of the curator's text as well as the design. The challenge of *Rubens: A Master in the Making* was to show how far the young Rubens had relied on classical and Renaissance sculpture (and cannibalised his own pictures) as he beat a path to maturity: with references well beyond the work that was on display, the catalogue had to do more than the usual share of work. Peter's answer was to design it as a viewer's toolkit, or as Bell put it, 'a visual extension of the exhibition'.

Working on the earlier Titian catalogue had allowed him to return at his leisure to the transfiguring brushwork of the master – 'a new way of recording likeness', he wrote in the *LRB*, 'that would define the technical ambitions of European portrait painting until photography put an end to them'. The text of the Titian catalogue was set in a serif typeface and when promotional pressures required a chunky sans serif for the cover, the jarring contrast became a source of anxiety. It was Peter, Bell remembers, who came up with 'the radical idea of having no title on the cover at all'. The book went on to become one of the gallery's bestselling publications.

Not all Peter's plans went smoothly or came to fruition. One that ran into trouble was *Master Pieces*, a witty, how-to book dreamed up in the early 1980s in collaboration with a British writer, Richard Ball. The idea, in Ball's words, was 'to give readers and makers a new way of approaching paintings' by explaining how to build a piece of furniture depicted in a famous work. The book consists of twenty 'master pieces', lists of materials, instructions for assembly and reproductions of the pictures in which they're to be found: Van Gogh's chair in *Chair and Pipe*, a sideboard from a Picasso still life, a trestle table from *Christ in the House of Simon* by the fifteenth-century Dutch artist Dirk Bouts, the deacon's bed in *The Dream of the Deacon Justinian* by Fra Angelico and so on. Prototypes of all the pieces were built under Peter's supervision and exhibitions were lined up at Hille's showroom in London and the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford.

After Hearst published *Master Pieces* in 1983 a firm of English solicitors representing SPADEM, the royalties and copyright agency in Paris, leapt into action, demanding that the book be withdrawn and all the furniture inspired by twentieth-century pieces destroyed. The exhibitions in the UK went ahead without the modernist items (there was a third show in New York at the Workbench gallery). So did the first print run of the book. However, it was agreed that there should be no further runs, even in the US, where the Picasso was the only contested item. Most of the pre-twentieth-century prototypes survive. Someone somewhere owns a facsimile of Mme Récamier's chaise longue, which set her off to such startling effect – the gloved hand, as it were, without the proffered string of pearls – and someone owns the Virgin's elaborate lectern from Ghirlandaio's *Annunciation* in the Baptistery loggia at San Gimignano. The condemned pieces were never destroyed: they found their way discreetly into people's homes, where they remain – including a handsome version of the table from *The Difficult Crossing* (the 1926 version) by Magritte. SPADEM fell into disrepute and folded in the mid-1990s.

Peter's private works for friends and family carried fewer liabilities: over many years he turned out decorated notebooks, address books and hand-painted postcards. He also wrote a very brief guide to composition, in the form of an illustrated letter to Anna Fender, the daughter of friends, consisting of notes on a selection of photos he'd taken in Italy. Though he excelled at 'looking and noticing', he suggested to Anna that they were not 'the only reasons for making pictures'. She should also understand that 'all makers of images borrow from each other.' He



juxtaposed a shot of a basket of fruit on a tiled floor and another of flowering mustard beside some olive trees:

> These are now two of the commonest kinds of picture – landscape and still life. There was a time when people would have expected them to be about something (particularly the landscape) . . . The pictures are very simple, much simpler than the world. I took the fruit basket off the table so the picture would be just of it and the wall and the tiles, and I avoided getting any houses or the road or people into the landscape.

From the reading of genres to the workaday detail, Peter's thoughts move freely but the passage ends with an emphatic tribute to two of his favourite painters: 'Lots of paintings work by making less stand for more. But getting hold of the complexity of the world, getting in everything as Bonnard, say, or Rubens sometimes seems to, is the best and most difficult game.'

Peter used his own notebooks to work up sketches for covers and jot down thoughts about the shows he noticed for the *LRB*. There's also more personal material. In a book from the end of the 1960s he kept lists of seeds and shrubs to be ordered from nurseries along with their prices ('Mahonia japonica, 1/6d' etc), interspersed with pen-and-ink sketches, including a plan of the back garden in Southfields, with newly ordered plants imagined in their places.

The loveliest of his books is a red Moleskine volume, which he began to fill about forty years later. By now he'd become impatient with manicured natural forms and the tampering human hand. Gardens were no longer so interesting. 'In my seventy-first year,' he writes in 2008, 'I find I want to know about plants,' and goes on to say that he'd like to live among them 'as anthropologists live among the natives of isolated tribes, to learn but not to interfere'. Walking near the Cheshire-Flintshire border, he sees nothing 'that has the self-sorted natural balance of unmanaged landscape'. He tells himself: '*Read* Rackham on managed/wild woodland.'

Oliver Rackham's books on woodland ecologies were among several delights he'd already savoured and now meant to return to. Others included a long treatise on the graminae (Peter loved to paint grass and walk in it up to his shins), a study by E. J. H. Corner of *The Life of Plants* and *The British Islands and Their Vegetation* by A. G. Tansley, all three of which he owned. In the meantime he'd obtained a translation of Ray's *Catalogus Plantarum circa Cantabrigiam Nascentium* (1600), and transcribed a line from the preface, addressed to 'men of University standing': from time to time, it advised, they should renounce the library and wander outdoors to 'gain wisdom by their own experience rather than from somebody else's brain'. Peter added: 'If you are to write about vegetation, that must be your guide.' His wish to know was inseparable from the wish to set it down.

Peter's intention, to judge from the notes, was a book based on his findings as an inexhaustible walker, observer and recorder, out on the common, about in the wilder fringes of the back garden, wandering away from the towpath at Putney, or moving gingerly on the limestone pavement of the White Peak, examining mosses. The book would consist of careful, luminous description. The business of setting out to see and describe would also be brought into focus, as a short passage in his notes implies: 'Coleridge and Will. & Dot. Wordsworth in the Quantocks, sitting on camp stools with portfolios, noting down the look of things.'

But poets were not the guiding lights for this piece of work and neither were artists. Peter had become interested instead in the figure of the amateur naturalist, who could account for the 'look of things' in the process of capturing it. 'Amateur'? Peter, a competent professional – designer, critic and draughtsman – now meant to write about plant life as if from an open-access tradition. 'Any science I describe,' he notes, 'must be at a distant second-hand but observation of specifics is, to a degree, my practice.' But who or what was a professional in this eclectic area of study? The answer: 'Natural history – the amateur pursuit – is a constant avocation like reading.'

By now, he had begun to think of the world as a vast lending library where members who took out plenty of titles and worked through them would find satisfaction and instruction, and pass these on in their own distinctive ways. Borrowing had become the mark of intelligence and engagement. In his jottings on a show at the British Museum, he writes of artists working with 'the borrowed science of perspective' and by the time he's reached the realm of natural history, he seems to see a baggy discipline, with a sharp eye and sensible shoes, destined even so to spend much of its time indoors, roaming the stacks and scavenging from other disciplines – evolutionary science, geology, the arts – in order to ground the enchantments of fieldwork.

'To have been asked to write, draw and design for the paper over the years,' Peter wrote in his preface to *At...*, 'has been my great, my absurd, good fortune.' But it was more than good fortune. Among contributors, the trials of writing for the *LRB* were legendary in Karl's Miller's day and got no easier as time went on. Anxieties were heightened for staffers – Peter was one – who hadn't been hired to write in the first place but sooner or later found themselves with assignments: what were they doing in print, in the company of writers whose reputations sold the paper? Peter was unruffled. He could knock out strong, democratic pieces that took you through a gallery or walked you round a building with a quiet authority and the merest hint that you might have something to learn. In due course his writing became a valuable deposit in the fine arts layer of *LRB* geology, alongside work by critics like William Feaver and Tom Lubbock, and essays by scholars and artists whose names he'd presented many times on the cover: David Sylvester, Nicholas Penny, T. J. Clark, Julian Bell, Bridget Riley, Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Richard Wollheim. By and large he chose his own subjects and set his own pace. Going over his copy, you heard no fast food rumblings: he never had to bolt down a piece of information at the last minute. He had lived with the material he described for most of his life. Every two weeks he disappeared with an assignment and then he reappeared; he met his deadlines; he was a model journalist.

In her farewell to Peter in *NLR*, Susan Watkins spotted one of his great articles, from 2010, about a show of Renaissance drawings at the British Museum. In his opening paragraph, Peter went at once to the process of production: the exorbitant cost of materials, the need for constant experiment, how artists squirrelled away successful sketches, like money in the bank, to be recycled in later projects, until the arrival of printing, whereupon old bits of paper and vellum where studies jostled for valuable space ceased to be such a crucial workshop resource. He asked his readers to imagine the economy of drawing and painting in a Renaissance atelier. And then to consider how many options had to be tested before a work could get fully under way. In preliminary sketches for the San Benedetto altarpiece by Lorenzo Monaco in the National Gallery, he noticed, the figures had been 'moved about like chessmen'.

Here he is on another kind of economy – the economy of lifestyles – and the old bachelor habits which artists on both sides of the Channel were able to cultivate with the help of wealthy patrons:

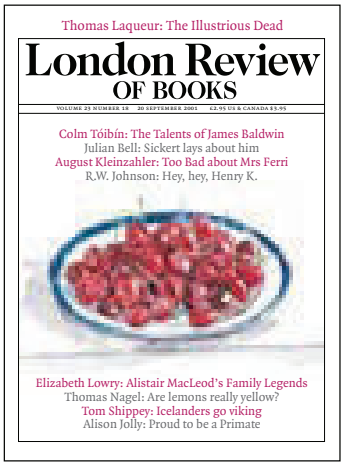
> Delacroix should be an open book to the British. He respected them. He was a dandy with a taste for English clothes. The English taught him to paint in watercolour ... While others crossed the Alps to see Rome, Delacroix crossed the Channel to England and rather liked it ... There are no longer, I would guess, enough energetic hostesses – amusing people with time on their hands, cooks, parlour maids and untaxed income – for any substantial part of society to indulge in the abundant entertaining which underpinned bachelor life of the old kind ... Henry James, Proust and Degas were all, like Delacroix, supported by it. When they went home it was to a housekeeper and the muse – who, Delacroix wrote, 'is a jealous mistress. She abandons you at the slightest infidelity.'

Peter liked to explain how ambitious works of art came about, as he does in a piece on Bonnard's paintings, locating their origins partly in the dream of colour, partly in the rapid sketches he made in his pocket diaries:

> These drawings from life were the seeds from which the paintings grew. But they were painted from the imagination. 'I have all my subjects to hand,' [Bonnard] is recorded as saying: 'I go and look at them. I take notes. Then I go home. Before I start painting, I reflect, I dream.' Colour ... was deployed to produce an image that gives a sense of the taste of ordinary life, but almost every line has been adjusted, experimented with, recharged ... Bonnard himself said he could not paint from nature because he ... had no defence before the facts of the thing in front of him. It had first to be reflected on, 'dreamed'.

The 'distinctiveness' of artists was an idea he approached with caution, but when he'd seen it, as he did in Joan Eardley, he had no difficulty accounting for it:

> In her land and seascapes Eardley knifes, drips and brushes paint with broad gestures which ... resemble those of Tachiste contemporaries. Hans Hartung and Pierre Soulages were both painters whose work she could have seen exhibited in Scotland. More to the point are the abstracted landscapes of Nicolas de Staël and Soutine's crumpled, wavy transformations of Céret ... 'Provincial' is a condescending word ... but I can't think of a better one to describe a particular kind of distance from the traffic of styles and reputations that Eardley exemplifies. It is not that she was unknown outside



> Scotland or ignorant of what was going on in the world. She made regular trips to London to see exhibitions ... But the self-confidence that carried her forward, undistracted by the strong international currents that broke the flow of other careers, seems to have been sustained by attachment to her native place.

In another piece he retraces the route that led Samuel Palmer into a 'hermetic world, essentially an illustrator's world', whose scale and ambitions made him a more approachable artist, to Peter's mind, than William Blake:

> In the compelling self-portrait drawing of around 1824–25, as memorable as any by an English artist, he seems both vulnerable and determined. He was then just out of his teens; a couple of years earlier he had been sought out by an older artist, John Linnell, who had seen and admired his work. Palmer wrote that God had sent Linnell 'to pluck me from the pit of modernity'. Through Linnell ... Palmer met William Blake. It was the light of Blake and the old prints Linnell pointed him towards – in particular those of Dürer, Lucas van Leyden and Bonasone – that showed Palmer the path out of the pit of modernity.

And then there are the walks, which he staged as guided tours for himself and his readers. Here he returns to New Zealand to consider the way a built environment looks when its inhabitants think nothing of moving around, and sometimes take their houses with them:

> I am in Wellington, where I spent my first twenty years. I have walked, as I used to then, down the hill from Wadestown ... Houses speckle the steep green hills around the harbour more thickly than they did in the past, because pieces of land so close to vertical that you would not trust yourself to scramble down them are now built on, as are plots perched on the fault scarp itself. Houses are tucked in or cantilevered out, the carports and backs ... are supported on stilts, and verandahs and decks project over long drops, down to roofs or bush below. Zigzag paths and steep steps cut up and down the hillsides ... Timber-frame houses are light: you can move them about – people quite often do. In a lot to the north of the city you can see dozens of bungalows – even a few two-storey houses – lined up like second-hand cars ... If you grow up among houses which are lightly tied to the ground moving them seems almost as natural as shuffling furniture around inside.

But under Peter's inquisitive eye it was the destiny of all built environments to appear mobile, or at least conspire with movement, and he disliked the proliferation of electric lighting in London because it brought the city to an ugly standstill. At Christmas, he wrote, 'the kinds of thing that are done with light are very like those which, if done with a spray-can, would have boys up in front of the magistrates.' Buildings should be seen 'by the shifting light of day (sometimes bright, sometimes flattened by cloud, low in the morning and evening, high at noon, varying from season to season and hour to hour, but always coming from above or from the side)'. Switched on in the early evening and turned off after dawn, lighting made it harder to explore the physiognomy of a façade. Floodlit from below, it became a grimace. 'Think how you would feel,' he wrote, 'about the performances of an actor who had to do half of them with a torch held under his chin.'

Fortunately there were all kinds of modulations to be observed in the thoroughfares and pavements of the city, as he explained in this piece about streets:

> Roadmaking, not the most glamorous civil engineering project, deserves respect. To the engineer a puddle is a reprimand. It is his or her job to see that water is guided towards drains. That requires slopes at very small angles: the shallow curve of the tarmac carriageway, the gentle slope of the pavement, the modest incline of the gutter towards the drain. When you see pavement slabs being laid it looks as though they are being tapped down onto a foundation of sand. In fact it is weak cement: delicate enough to be broken up easily when a new pipe is laid, coherent enough to keep out the water that could wash it away and leave the slab rocking.

And then, looking up for a moment: 'Pedestrians, like birds in circling flocks, are remarkably good at avoiding one another.' Navigating around Peter during his inspections of the ground beneath his feet would have called for special skills on the part of fellow pedestrians.

The pleasure he took in these urban field trips resonates in his findings. As it does in less risky assignments, like his study of the 1651 *Leviathan* – so carefully organised, he decided, that the edition was both 'an illustration and a diagram of its contents'. This close coincidence of form and function, with its hint of tautology – the thing being the guide to itself – was part of what intrigued him about natural history, amateur or not. For all its impressive bustle – looking, reading, drafting, naming – he was more convinced by the 'self-sorted balance' of the plant species, which seemed to him to illustrate themselves and divulge their own order. And yet, to Peter's great delight, the

naturalists had never given up their 'gathering and describing', as he wrote in a piece about the early stirrings of natural history: 'sustained by habits of curiosity and close observation' they scribbled away in the margins of the book of nature. Peter, too, was never without a pencil or paper and shared that consuming interest in the natural world, for all his love of man-made things. He could bring close observation to bear on a wooded valley in the Auvergne, a Dutch masterpiece or a manhole cover. As for curiosity, he had no end of it.

* *Some of the pictures towards the end of this book are from Peter's own portfolio. They include several landscapes, a vase of anemones in pastels, a still life in oils, and an occasional piece with a dog in a pram, dedicated to his wife, Win, for their wedding anniversary or her birthday – Peter had confused the two.*

At… writing from the 'London Review of Books' was published by Hyphen in 2009. The first illustrated edition of C.J. Holmes, *Notes on the Science of Picture-Making*, was published by Chatto & Windus in 1927. The title of the essay in the *Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, Vol IV, 1557–1695* (Bernard & McKenzie 2002) is 'The Typography of Hobbes's *Leviathan*'. Susan Watkins's article appeared in the November/December 2011 issue of *New Left Review*. Some of Peter Campbell's pieces in the LRB, excerpted here, are freely available on the paper's website; all can be revisited by subscribers.