

Twombly and Poussin

ARCADIAN PAINTERS

LARGE PRINT GUIDE

Please note that there is no additional information in this guide, everything published herein is displayed on the gallery walls.

Please return the guide before leaving the Exhibition. Thank you.



Introduction

In 1624 and 1957, two artists, aged around thirty, moved to Rome. Nicolas Poussin and Cy Twombly subsequently spent the majority of their lives in the Eternal City, and went on to become the pre-eminent painters of their day. This exhibition examines the unexpected but numerous parallels and affinities between the two artists to reveal how Twombly and Poussin, although separated by three centuries, engaged with the same interests and concerns. Both were artists of prodigious talent who found in the classical heritage of Rome a life-long subject. Not only has Twombly expressed his desire 'to have been Poussin, if I'd had a choice, in another time' but the two artists were the same age when they came to Rome and were aged sixty-four when they painted their versions of the Four Seasons. Between these two markers of early and late career, which bracket the exhibition, lay two lifetimes of work devoted to studying, revivifying and making newly relevant for their own eras, subjects such as antiquity, ancient history, classical mythology, Renaissance painting, poetry and the imaginary, idealised realm of Arcadia.

If the striking parallels between Twombly and Poussin are numerous, neither, however, are they straightforward. Stylistically, the two artists are polar opposites. Poussin's strict and carefully structured compositions, which border on the austere, are seemingly diametrically opposed to the spontaneity and wilder excesses of Twombly. Despite this Twombly and Poussin both dedicated their lives to the same preoccupations: a love of nature, poetry, myth and history, and a real commitment to mastering a vast body of literature that might inform their painting and an unceasing effort to perfect the technical, manual act of painting itself.

Arcadia and the Pastoral

The first paintings Twombly executed after his move to Italy, such as *Arcadia* of 1958, show the immediate influence of Mediterranean light and culture upon his work. Twombly's painting refers to the fabled pastoral paradise of classical mythology also featured in Poussin's *The Arcadian Shepherds* of c. 1628–29.

Both paintings act as an allegory of death's omnipresence in life, even in such an idyllic realm. In Twombly's treatment of the theme, this is intimated solely through the word 'Arcadia' scrawled into the surface of the paint, whereas for Poussin it is enacted through the shepherds stumbling across a sarcophagus and deciphering the inscription etched onto it: 'Et in Arcadia Ego' ('I [Death] am even in Arcadia'). The effect of these elegiac intrusions is to disrupt the calm that otherwise prevails in both paintings, created by the delicate palette of creams with flourishes of silver and gold. The Arcadian theme is continued, but also widened out to a consideration of the pastoral, by Twombly's work on paper from 1973, *Aristaeus Mourning the Loss of his Bees*, here paired with Poussin's painting *The Nurture of Jupiter* from c. 1636–37.

Twombly's work concerns the eponymous shepherd and ruler of Arcadia, Aristaeus, who was punished by nymphs with the loss of his beloved bees. Poussin's painting depicts the raising of the infant god Jupiter in the shadow of Cretan Mount Ida, being fed by nymphs on wild honey and goat's milk. Arcadia also initiated a broader examination of the importance of landscape for both Twombly and Poussin. Twombly's two paintings *Untitled (Bassano in Teverina)* from 1985 are a bold attempt to revive the moribund genre of landscape painting, so beloved of Poussin, by striving to capture the fugitive effects of light dissolving into shadow over the woodland forests outside his studio. Like Twombly, Poussin's love of the landscape of the Roman *campagna* is demonstrated in *A Roman Road* from 1648. The stone architectural forms that line the path of Poussin's painting and the tomb the shepherds happen upon in *The Arcadian Shepherds* find their echo in the sepulchral appearance of Twombly's sculpture *Pasargade* of 1994.

Cy Twombly

Pasargade

1994

Wood, stone, white paint, 34 × 80 × 31.5 cm

Private collection

Pasargade is characteristic of many of Twombly's sculptural works that use found objects such as wood and stone veiled in white paint to adopt a sepulchral form. 'White paint is my marble', Twombly has said of his sculpture, an analogy which links his work to the ruins and classical monuments of Italy. The funerary monument form of this work draws its structure from what is believed to be the mausoleum of Cyrus the Great (559–530 BC) in Pasargadae, the former capital of the Achaemenid Empire in Persia (in present-day Iran). The memorial comprises a series of six broad stone steps surmounted by the tomb of Cyrus II.

Cy Twombly

Untitled (Bassano in Teverina)

1985

Oil, acrylic, spray paint on wooden panel, 181.7 ×

181.7 cm

Private collection

Cy Twombly

Untitled (Bassano in Teverina)

1985

Oil, acrylic, spray paint on wooden panel, 181.7 ×
181.7 cm

Private collection

Both versions of Twombly's *Untitled (Bassano in Teverina)* from 1985 form part of a series of *Untitled* 'green paintings' on identically-sized and elaborately-shaped wooden panels. All of the works in the series demonstrate a preoccupation with capturing the transient effect of light. Most of them were painted *en plein air* overlooking the woodland forests and shadows of the hills outside Twombly's house in Bassano and in the bay of Gaeta, where he captured the subtle and ever changing interplay of light, mist and clouds reflected on the sea.

Nicolas Poussin

Landscape with Travellers Resting, known as *A Roman Road*

1648

Oil on canvas, 79.3 × 100 cm

Dulwich Picture Gallery, London

DPG 203

This painting was recorded in 1685 by André Félibien as part of the collection of Philippe de Lorraine in Paris. Félibien described the picture as ‘a landscape where there is a broad road’. This ‘broad road’ divides the scene in half, and a series of figures – both male and female – travel along it. Even though the structure to the right is clearly based on a medieval ecclesiastical building, the figures’ costumes and the column at the end of the road suggest that the scene is most likely an idealised representation of a landscape from Roman antiquity.

Nicholas Poussin

The Arcadian Shepherds

c. 1628–29

Oil on canvas, 101 × 82 cm

The Trustees of the Chatsworth Settlement

The theme of Arcadia was developed in Latin poetry, and above all by Virgil. The savage and mountainous area of Greece was transformed by the poet into a fabled land, where shepherds lived in a blissful state. Within this landscape, however, Virgil placed death in the form of a tomb.

Carved on to this sepulchre, as a warning to the shepherds, is the inscription: ET IN ARCADIA EGO - 'I [Death] am even in Arcadia'. The painting therefore can be understood as a *memento mori*, demonstrating that even in an idyllic land like Arcadia, death is ultimately always present.

Cy Twombly

Arcadia

1958

Oil-based house paint, wax crayon, coloured pencil, lead pencil on canvas, 182.9 × 200 cm

Daros Collection, Switzerland

In the autumn of 1957, Twombly rented an apartment in Rome overlooking the Colosseum. At this time, he began working with a paint called *cementito*, which was used to create this work. The surface of his paintings became less striated and largely unsullied by black pencil marks compared to his previous works. Titles and words were increasingly prominent, and names and dates attest to where they were 'written'. They seem to act as journal entries of the new sights Twombly was encountering as he became enraptured by Italian life.

Nicolas Poussin

The Nurture of Jupiter

c. 1636–37

Oil on canvas, 96.2 × 119.6 cm

Dulwich Picture Gallery, London

DPG 234

The events around the birth and nurture of the infant Jupiter are described by four ancient Greek and Latin poets: Hesiod, Callimachus, Ovid and Virgil. A prophecy had warned the god Saturn that one of his children would defeat him and rule the universe in his place; one after the other he swallowed all five of the children he had fathered with Rhea, to avoid the prediction. Poussin sets his scene on top of Mount Ida, where Rhea took the new-born Jupiter to save him from death.

A shepherd restrains the goat Amaltheia by its horns, while a nymph lifts the goat to allow Jupiter to drink its milk. Jupiter later vanquished his father and forced Saturn to disgorge his brothers and sisters, sharing the rule of the world with his brothers Neptune and Pluto.

Cy Twombly

Aristaeus Mourning the Loss of his Bees

September, 1973

Paint, pencil on paper, 70 × 100.5 cm

Private collection

This work is one of three produced in 1973 which refer to Aristaeus, the mythical shepherd and ruler of Arcadia. The legend goes that nymphs had taught Aristaeus how to breed bees. He later caused the death of Eurydice by pursuing her on the day of her wedding to Orpheus, and the nymphs killed the bees in revenge. After learning the reason for the death of his bees from Proteus, his mother Cyrene advised Aristaeus to make a sacrifice, which caused new bees to be generated from the carcasses of the old.

Twombly transforms this scene into a wispy, nebulous fog of cream and green paint over a knotted tangle of pencil, which is then annotated by the title of the work and 'bucolic' scrawled above.

Anxiety and Theatricality

For the works gathered together in this room, the focus shifts from Twombly's and Poussin's subjects to consider instead the manner of their depiction.

Moving away from thematics to concentrate instead on style and technique, it is perhaps appropriate to begin with both artists' use of drawing. The anxiety of Twombly's line is overtly calligraphic and yet remains wordless, the jittery tangles of pencil seemingly caught between an utterance and a stutter. Equally, in Nicolas Poussin's pen and bistre drawing *Joshua's Victory over the Amorites* of 1625 an unusually crowded and chaotic composition unfolds conjuring the tension inherent in a battle scene.

The theatricality of Poussin's and Twombly's canvases is also important to consider. Both Twombly's *Herodiade* from 1960 and Poussin's *The Triumph of David* of c. 1631–33 deal with biblical stories of beheading. Twombly's version is derived from Stéphane Mallarmé's dramatic Symbolist recasting of the story of the banquet of Herod and dance of Salome (Mark, 6: 21–28).

The snippets of the play that feature in the composition are augmented by the sanguine paint besmirching the cream-coloured canvas beneath and smeared by Twombly's own hands, which embody the agitated subject matter the artist seeks to transcribe. Like Twombly's painting, the dramatic composition of Poussin's *The Triumph of David* is as artificial as it is visceral, and the seemingly chaotic scene is actually carefully arranged. Any gore is deftly orchestrated by both artists, such as the blood-red paint smeared across the canvas in the case of Twombly, or the lifeless, bloodied head of Goliath impaled on a pole and carried through a procession by David in the canvas by Poussin. Both compositions also take place within a space that resembles a stage set. This includes the schematic and theatrical 'stairs' to the upper left side of Twombly's canvas, as well as the strange, prop-like fragment of entablature in the left foreground and the colonnaded portico that form the backdrop to Poussin's painting. From these areas spectators and *dramatis personae* peer out to watch the events unfolding before them.

Cy Twombly

Untitled

1956

Lead pencil on paper, 55.9 × 76.2 cm

Private collection

During the autumn of 1953, Twombly was drafted into the United States Army and trained as a cryptographer, studying and deciphering code. At night he made drawings in the dark, retracing the Surrealist technique of automatic writing. Twombly's graffiti-like sketches, scribbles and frenetic lines recall the art of automatic writing, as the pencil skips over the paper to trace wordless, pre-linguistic forms of writing. A palpable frustration courses through their stammering, tongue-tied lines, stuttering to articulate something.

Nicholas Poussin

Joshua's Victory over the Amorites

1625

Pen and bistre with grey wash on paper,

24.6 × 39.1 cm

Lent by the Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum,
Cambridge

inv. 2606

This drawing is a highly finished preparatory study for the *Joshua's Victory over the Amorites*, (now in the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow) taken from a passage in the Book of Joshua (10:7-14). Joshua, on horseback, towers at the centre of the composition, while the sun and the moon stand in the sky and witness the bloody combat. The tense rhythm of the composition is based on relief battle-scenes found on ancient Roman sarcophagi and triumphal arches. The drawing was wrongly attributed to 'Julio Romano' by a nineteenth-century hand at the bottom left – a mistake that is understandable given Poussin's known admiration for Giulio's battle scenes.

Cy Twombly

Untitled

1956

Lead pencil on paper, 55.9 × 76.2 cm

Private collection

Cy Twombly

Herodiade

1960

Oil, lead pencil, wax crayon, oil based house paint on canvas,

200 × 282 cm

Private collection

Around the time Twombly moved to Italy in 1957, he began to read the works of Stéphane Mallarmé, whose ‘symbolic whiteness’ became a major inspiration for his work over the next couple of years. Direct quotations from Mallarmé’s poem, *Heriodade*, first began to surface in Twombly’s work in 1959, and the following year he used several other extracts to produce this one. Gone, however, are the preoccupations with Mallarméan whiteness and restrained understatement exhibited in his works from the late 1950s. These are instead replaced by a new theatricality announced by direct quotations transcribed on to the canvas in a cartouche, the increased scale, and the inclusion of stage directions (‘Ouverture + scene’) and acts (‘Incantation’).

Nicolas Poussin

The Triumph of David

c. 1631–33

Oil on canvas, 118.4 × 148.3 cm

Dulwich Picture Gallery, London

DPG 236

In *The Triumph of David*, Poussin takes as his starting point two texts from the Book of Samuel.

An ancient temple provides the architectural backdrop against which the action is staged. Above the podium of the temple, interspersed between the fluted columns, men and women rejoice at David's triumphal entry. A crowd of spectators occupies the foreground to witness the procession; a woman indicates David to her son, a man points to his forehead showing the exact location of the wound on Goliath's head. Two men, playing trumpets, precede the hero David holding the impaled head of the Philistine giant.

Venus and Eros

Eroticism is a key concern for Twombly and Poussin, and both painters have tackled the occasionally doomed aspect of love, at moments poised precariously between pleasure and despair.

Twombly, who has characterised his art as that of a 'Romantic symbolist', has made use of a phrase from one of Sappho's fragments for some of his paintings: 'Eros, weaver of myth, Eros, bitter and sweet, Eros, bringer of Pain'.

This refrain from Sappho might be said to be emblematic of Poussin's and Twombly's vexed relationship with the dialectics of Eros and to echo throughout much of their combined oeuvres. For example, Twombly's painting *Hero and Leandro (To Christopher Marlowe)* of 1985, his drawing *Venus + Adonis* of 1978, and Poussin's *Rinaldo and Armida* from c. 1628 all depict scenes where sensual love is shadowed by a contrasting emotion, such as grief or hatred. These works, perhaps more than any others by Twombly and Poussin, reveal the profound temperamental differences between the two figures, even when both are painting under the sign of Eros. Twombly's highly personal and transgressive paintings fashion a potent hybrid between the gestural painting of Abstract Expressionism and the erotic

abandon of Surrealism. Their stains and swathes of corporal colours are applied and smeared by messy fingers, whose undulating gestures and traces are left on the canvas, beside dribbling paint which not only summons the water central to the story, but also implies spurts, stains and ejaculations. On first impression, Poussin's rigorously constructed paintings, so cool and calculated as to seem almost bloodless, could not be more different. But both artists are fascinated by the struggle between opposing forces, such as the battle for supremacy between Eros and Thanatos.

If Poussin's *Rinaldo and Armida* represents a battle between prudence and lust captured at the moment that Armida's hand is stayed from executing her enemy as he metamorphoses into her beloved, Poussin's *Venus and Mercury* of c. 1626–27 is an allegory of the pull between sexual love, as embodied by Eros, and spiritual, platonic love, represented by Anteros.

Cy Twombly

Hero and Leandro (To Christopher Marlowe)

1985

Oil, oil-based house paint on canvas, 202 × 254 cm

Private collection

This work takes the classical legend of the doomed lovers as its subject. Leander, a youth from Abydos (in present-day Turkey), would swim across the waters at night to meet his lover Hero in Sestos on the other shore. She would guide him safely across by holding a torch to light his way. One night, during a storm, Leander drowned and Hero, in despair, threw herself into the sea. Twombly's painting was executed after reading Christopher Marlowe's poem on the legend. It evokes the mythological story of drowning through its waves of evanescent brushstrokes and dribbles of paint, which ripple and cascade across the canvas.

Nicholas Poussin

Rinaldo and Armida

c. 1628–30

Oil on canvas, 82.2 × 109.2 cm

Dulwich Picture Gallery, London

DPG 238

Torquato Tasso's epic poem *La Gerusalemme Liberata*, completed in 1575, provided the inspiration for this work. This scene, taken from Canto XIV, is dedicated to the story of the crusader Rinaldo and the Saracen sorceress Armida. Rinaldo has finally succumbed to Armida's spell and is asleep in a golden suit of armour. Armida approaches, a dagger in her right hand ready to slay him. Her arm is restrained by a winged Cupid and the sorceress instantly falls in love with the crusader. Poussin represents here the exact moment in which Armida's hatred is turned into undying passion. Overwhelmed by love, Armida transports the sleeping Rinaldo in her flying chariot to the island of Fortuna in the middle of the ocean, where they live together.

Nicolas Poussin

Venus and Mercury

c. 1626–27

Oil on canvas, 80.2 × 87.5 cm

Dulwich Picture Gallery, London

DPG 481

This canvas is the larger of two fragments of an early painting by Poussin. A smaller picture with music-making putti would have formerly been to the left of this fragment (now in the Louvre). The painting was

probably cut down around 1764 in France, because of damage to the top part of the canvas or because of its erotic content. In this painting, Venus and Mercury rest in the shade beneath a group of trees, next to the goddess's chariot. In the original work, four putti would have been to the left playing music and singing, while a fifth stands holding two laurel wreaths. He is intending to crown the victor of the fight that takes place centre stage, between a winged Cupid and a small satyr.

Cy Twombly

Venus + Adonis

5 February 1978

Oil, crayon, pencil on paper, 44 × 46 cm

Karsten Greve

The fleshy, sensuous forms which are splayed across this work are employed here to conjure the myth of Venus and Adonis. The story, which was recounted in Book X of *Ovid's Metamorphoses*, tells that Venus fell in love with the beautiful Adonis after she was grazed by one of Cupid's arrows. One day, as he was hunting, Adonis was killed by a wild boar. Hearing his dying groans, Venus came to his assistance, but was too late. Where the earth was stained by Adonis's blood,

anemones grew – inspiration for the forms which feature across the centre of the composition. They also resemble heart shapes, associated with Venus, that are so engorged they become ruddy backsides. Adjacent to this is a cartoon-like phallus annotated with the name ‘Adonis’.

Mausoleum

Cy Twombly

That Which I Should Have Done. I Did not Do

1998

Velvet, wood, stone, bronze, brass, metal screws,
36 × 37 × 27.5 cm

Private Collection

‘Witty and funereal’: this was how American art critic Frank O’Hara described Twombly’s sculptures in 1955.

Made over forty years after this pithy description, O’Hara’s pronouncement still seems to hold true. At the front of the sculpture is fastened a bronze plaque which Twombly had made in his hometown of Lexington, Virginia, whose inscription seemingly acts as both epitaph and title. The inscription comes from a painting by Ivan Albright (1897–1983) from 1931–41. These reflective words on lost time, both self-

deprecating as they are memorialising, resonated with Twombly and would appear to be the exact opposite of Poussin's expression that has come to act almost as his epitaph: 'I have neglected nothing'.

Apollo, Parnassus and Poetry

The presiding theme for all the works by Twombly and Poussin included in this room is poetry. Twombly has sought inspiration from and paid homage to a list of poets that is both sustained and legion:

Archilochus, Catullus, Cavafy, Dickinson, Eliot, Homer, Keats, Olson, Ovid, Pessoa, Pope, Pound, Rilke, Sappho, Seferis, Shelley, Spenser, Valéry and Virgil are only a few of those who have appeared (many more than once) in Twombly's work.

The Second Part of the Return from Parnassus of 1961 alludes both to the Parnassian school – French poets of the nineteenth century, of whom Stéphane Mallarmé was an associate – and to English theatrical satires of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The work also refers to the mythological mountain range located in Phocis, Greece, which supposedly provided a refuge for Apollo and the nine Muses, which is also the subject of Nicolas Poussin in *Apollo and the Muses on Parnassus*, c. 1630–32.

Twombly's sculpture *Cygnus* not only recalls the mythological character described in Ovid's

Metamorphoses, but also, through its unfurling whitepainted form, cast in bronze from the undulating planes of a palm frond, conjures the ruffled wings of Mallarmé's 'Swan'. The palm tree and the swan are two of the key attributes of the god of poetry, Apollo, that Twombly picks out in his eponymous drawing. *Apollo* (1975) features the god's name inscribed in dark blue oil stick. Below this is an incantation of names and epithets of the god.

Poussin's *Apollo and the Muses on Parnassus*, brings together the prominent themes in Twombly's work included in this grouping – the mythical Mount Parnassus above the city of Delphi in Greece, and the god of poetry, Apollo. Not only do Twombly and Poussin both opt for a similar palette of cool blues, silvery greys and whites to evoke these subjects, but it also underscores the fundamental importance of poetry for both painters. While Twombly simply transcribes Apollo's attributes, Poussin assembles an array of characteristics associated with the god, such as the laurel trees and branches proffered by the putti fluttering above and the nine Muses and various poets who either wait in attendance or kneel in supplication.

Cy Twombly

Cycnus

1979

Bronze, painted with white oil-based paint,

40 × 24 × 6 cm

Private collection

Greek mythology contains legends relating to no fewer than four people known as Cycnus, most of whom were ultimately transformed into swans.

Twombly's sculpture *Cycnus* references the story retold in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

This version casts him as the son of Poseidon fighting on the side of the Trojans during the Trojan War.

He was invulnerable to attack by either spear or sword, so Achilles abandoned conventional weaponry in favour of crushing and suffocating Cycnus. On his death, he was transformed into a swan. Through this simple palm frond, symbolic of both life and death, Twombly is able to invoke the flutter of a swan's wing unfurling.

Nicolas Poussin

Apollo and the Muses on Parnassus

c. 1630–32

Oil on canvas, 145 × 197 cm

Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid

Poussin's composition is set at the top of Mount Parnassus, above the city of Delphi in Greece. In a grove of laurel trees Apollo, the god of poetry, presides over the nine Muses. The female personification of the Castalian Spring, believed to be the font of poetic inspiration, reclines nude at the centre of the painting. The main focus of the picture is the poet in the centre, kneeling in front of Apollo. He holds two books, one of which he presents to the god. The identity of all nine poets in Poussin's canvas remains problematic.

It is likely that they are all figures from Greek and Latin antiquity, and the poet kneeling before Apollo is Homer offering Apollo *the Iliad and the Odyssey*.

Cy Twombly

Apollo

1975

Oil stick, pencil on paper, 150 × 134 cm

Private collection

In 1975, Twombly produced a pair of pendants, *Venus* and *Apollo*, that explored the diametric opposites of gender as embodied by the classical gods. In this work, 'the painting functions like a pictograph, where figurative and graphic elements are combined' (Barthes, 1975, p.13). The text is written in dark

blue oil stick, and the heavily worked and aggressively angular shape of the letter 'A' takes on a phallic form. Two columns on the left side list the god's various guises and on the right side, above which Twombly has written the phrase 'sacred to', his attributes.

Cy Twombly

The Second Part of the Return from Parnassus

1961

Wax crayon, lead pencil, oil, coloured pencil on canvas, 200 × 260.5 cm

The Art Institute of Chicago, through prior partial gift of the Stenn Family in memory of Marcia Stenn

2007.64

Pan and the Bacchanalia

In 1961, Twombly produced *The First and Second Part of the Return from Parnassus*. They draw in part from late sixteenth-century and early seventeenth-century anonymous English satires such as *The Pilgrimage to Parnassus*, *The Return from Parnassus* and *The Second Part of the Return from Parnassus*. Both canvases are formed of patches of furious activity and heavy working set against large, bare areas of cream paint and canvas. Rather than the strict and carefully organised symmetry of Poussin's treatments of this subject, Twombly's is instead emphatically lopsided, with lolling and drooping doodles that are outright erotic.

Bacchus, Pan and Priapus are gods that often appear in both Twombly's and Poussin's works. The signs, characteristics and attributes of Pan and the bacchanal that are chaotically scattered across Poussin's *The Triumph of Pan* of 1636 also proliferate in Twombly's works around this subject. Ruddy stains adorn both Twombly's collage *Pan* from 1975 and the face of the herm at the centre of Poussin's composition, and the pan pipe which lies temporarily abandoned in the lower left foreground of Poussin's painting, is evoked

in a similarly haphazard fashion by a cast assemblage of wooden scraps, dishevelled strips of cloth and cardboard to form a notional pan pipe, in Twombly's *Untitled* of 1985. Pan, the god of shepherds and woods who dwelt in Arcadia, summons Twombly's and Poussin's love of the mythology of nature most directly.

Completed in rural Bassano in Teverina, Twombly's collage *Pan* from 1975 utilises a vegetal form apparently taken from *Revue Horticole* of a 'Poiree-Carde du Chili'. The inscription 'Pan/panic' beneath this invokes both the name of the god and the condition that derives its name from him, and also reappears as an inscription in a later work, *Autunno* in the *Quattro Stagioni*.

Twombly's *Bacchanalia: Fall (5 days in November)* from 1977 is unique among his oeuvre for its inclusion of a reproduction of a drawing by Poussin (a study related to the *The Triumph of Pan* from 1636), which is collaged into the picture plane, and adorned and overlaid with scribbled marks. Twombly creates a distance between himself and Poussin in a variety of ways. Not only through the screening and mediation created by the reproduction torn from a book and then partially obscured by the sheet of graph paper, but also by the casual nature of his handwriting which

accompanies his direct homage – for example, ‘November’ is abbreviated to ‘Nov.’ and whirling forms are rendered in scumbling colours such as brown, umber and cloudy white.

Cy Twombly

Pan

1975

Wax crayon, collage, 148 × 100 cm

Private collection

Nicolas Poussin

The Triumph of Pan

1636

Oil on canvas, 135.9 × 146 cm

The National Gallery, London.

Bought with contributions from the National Heritage Memorial Fund and the Art Fund, 1982

It is unclear if *The Triumph of Pan* does indeed represent Pan, the god of shepherds and pastoral countryside, or instead Priapus, the divinity associated with fertility. In Poussin’s scene, men and women – fauns, satyrs and maenads – abandon themselves to a ‘panic’ dance. Some play instruments; others dance and cavort in drunken stupor. A maenad carries a fawn, ready to be sacrificed, while another

female follower rides a goat in the cortege. The floor is scattered with ancient artefacts. Decorated vases and a metal bowl, half-filled with red wine, have been abandoned by the drunken revellers. It represents the summing up of the painter's knowledge and devotion to antiquity and Venetian sixteenth-century painting.

Cy Twombly

Bacchanalia: Fall (5 days in November)

1977

Collage, oil, chalk, pencil, graph paper, transparent tape, gouache on Fabriano paper

101 × 150 cm

Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen München

Udo and Anette Brandhorst Collection

Poussin's drawing *The Triumph of Pan* (1636) appears at the top of this Twombly work, sheathed beneath a sheet of graph paper.

Though directly referencing Poussin's work, Twombly creates a distance between himself and the painter, not only through the screening of the work behind graph paper, but by using a torn reproduction overlaid by scribbled marks.

Nicolas Poussin

The Triumph of Pan

1636

Pen and ink with wash over stylus and black chalk,
22.8 × 33.8 cm

Lent by Her Majesty the Queen

Cardinal Camillo Massimo was one of Poussin's most important patrons. He collected many of the painter's works, in particular his drawings, towards the end of the artist's life. This drawing is from the Massimo Album at Windsor. It is one of at least ten drawings that relate to the painting of the same subject (seen in this room) which Poussin produced for Cardinal Richelieu in 1636. The composition, with frenzied figures paying homage to a herm of Pan, is almost identical to the National Gallery canvas. The drawing's format, however, is different and Poussin compressed the scene into a relief-like arrangement, closer to an ancient sarcophagus.

It is unclear, in fact, if this is a final preparatory drawing for the painting, or if it was drawn afterwards as an independent exercise.

Cy Twombly

Untitled

1985

Painted synthetic resin, 67 × 34 × 26.5 cm

Private collection

The Four Seasons

How should one depict the difference between summer's haze and autumn's mist? This is the question that both Twombly and Poussin grapple with in their interpretations of the Four Seasons.

Twombly's *Quattro Stagioni*, can be regarded as his most sustained self-comparison with the Old Master's triumphant late cycle of the *Four Seasons*. Twombly has often made works that refer directly or obliquely to the individual seasons and the calendar, from *Summer Madness* (1990) through *Ferragosto* (1961) to *Winter's Passage: Luxor* (1985). When Twombly was in his mid sixties (1993–95) he decided to tackle the classic theme of the Four Seasons by painting two versions of the *Quattro Stagioni* in their entirety. He was exactly the same age as Nicolas Poussin when he painted his late cycle of four paintings, *The Seasons*, in the last years of his life from 1660 to 1664.

Keats's poem 'The Human Seasons' established a correspondence between the seasons of the year and the ages of human existence, which had its roots in the classical concept of the Ages of Man. These may be divided into not less than three and not more than

twelve ages, with a number between four, five or six also common, and three or seven being the most usual. The underlying theme is that of *vanitas*: earthly things are transient; youth and beauty ineluctably fade, and death comes to us all in the end. The span of human life may be linked with the progress of the year, thus four ages with the four seasons, or twelve – each age lasting six years – corresponding to the twelve months of the calendar. Twombly's paintings loosely follow the traditional character of each season and age, which have a discrete quality: spring is lusty, summer sensual, autumn content to be idle, winter sees death approaching. A prevalent theme from late antiquity to the eighteenth century, in early personifications such as those depicted in Pompeiian and Roman frescoes and mosaics, is spring as a young woman holding flowers, summer has a sickle and ears or sheaves of corn, autumn grapes and vine leaves, while winter is thickly clad against the cold. The Renaissance revived this tradition, pairing the seasons with pagan divinities: Flora or Venus for spring, Ceres for summer, Bacchus for autumn, Boreas or Vulcan for winter.

Some of the motifs of Poussin's *Seasons* also occur in Twombly's, such as the grapes in autumn and boats in winter. With these two fascinating and unique treatments of this subject, we return to the

preoccupations of the first group of works in the exhibition, which also deal with the fleeting nature of time and the cyclical and perpetual repetitions and rejuvenations of nature itself.

Cy Twombly

Quattro Stagioni (A Painting in Four Parts):

Part I: Primavera

Part II: Estate

Part III: Autunno

Part IV: Inverno

1993–95

Acrylic, oil, crayon, pencil on canvas

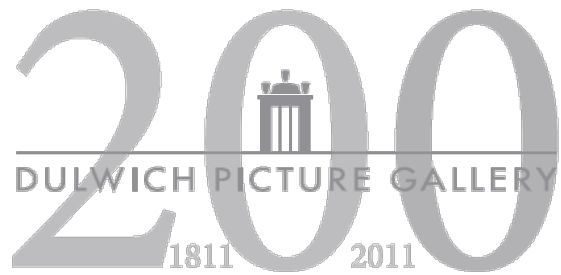
313.2 × 189.5 cm; 314.1 × 215.2 cm;

313.6 × 215 cm; 313.5 × 221 cm

Tate

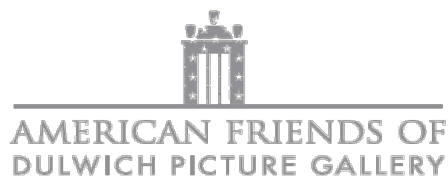
Twombly and Poussin

ARCADIAN PAINTERS



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J. and M. Donnelly



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This exhibition is accompanied by an illustrated catalogue, *Twombly and Poussin: Arcadian Painters*, which is available in the gallery shop.

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Thank you.



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