

Hints for the Tourist:

The Opinions of James Garrett Faulkner

It's been several years since I received a first edition copy of Augustus J. C. Hare's (1834-1903) *Walks in London* from Jim Faulkner. We both appreciate old guidebooks for their depth and variety of information apparently no longer of interest to most travelers. In contrast to contemporary guide books, early *Baedekers* or *Guides Bleu* answer basic but important questions about art and architecture like "who made it and when?" and offer many other useful facts. Hare went even further in his travel books, embellishing facts with anecdotes, gossip, and unambiguous opinion. Compare, for example, two texts describing Sir Christopher Wren's St. Paul's Cathedral:

The interior is imposing from the beauty and vastness of its proportions, but strikes one as somewhat bare But with the exception of Thornhill's grisailles, practically nothing was done in this direction until about 1860

Karl Baedeker

The interior of St. Paul's is not without a grandeur of its own, but in detail it is bare, cold, and uninteresting ... here, there is no color except from the poor glass of the eastern windows, or where a tattered banner waves above a hero's monument. In the blue depths of the misty dome, the London fog loves to linger, and hides the remains of some feeble frescoes by Thornhill, Hogarth's father-in-law.

Augustus J. C. Hare

Hare's "walks" are like spending the day in London or Rome with a well-traveled man of

letters who confides secrets of the past and privileges the reader with more elaborate histories of places and things than any didactic inscription in situ could ever provide. For anyone who has had the pleasure of Jim Faulkner's company while walking the streets of London, Rome, or Paris they will recognize a fondness for Hare by the countless histories and anecdotes that Faulkner is able to relate while on the fly about, say, the history of the drum and dome in Byzantine architecture or the toppling of the Vendôme column during the Paris Commune of 1871. Even Hare's six volume autobiography [HYPERLINK "http://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian/issues95/oct95/book_1095.html"](http://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian/issues95/oct95/book_1095.html) \ "people#people" *Peculiar People: The Story of My Life* resonates uncannily with Faulkner's penchant for the eccentric and his own weird and wonderful biography, which he partially discloses in this catalog.

Faulkner is well known in Chicago for sometimes outrageous but always entertaining remarks and anecdotes. Many of them are about his travels, which are often supplemented by a show-and-tell of ephemera and novelties that he has collected over the years from around the world. Similarly, his life-story and travel experiences have been enlarged upon and embellished in thirty years of his collage. Thus his work takes on the aspect of numerous visual travelogues in the tradition of intrepid tourists like Hare, revealing an insatiable curiosity and limitless capacity to connect the present with the past through erudite and often humorous observations. Who else do you know who would describe the advent of pre-paid postage as *The Miracle of the Postage Stamp* (1990), or would pause to consider the formal relationship between gothic architecture and sadomasochistic sex toys in *The Cathedral of Erotic Misery* (1987) while alluding to issues of control and domination that this pairing conjures in the history of the Catholic church and lives of the Saints? Even amid the moments of humor and irreverence in his work, there are often quieter moments of daydreams and musings that are more poetic in nature such as in the elegiac collage *The Sweet Waters of Asia* (1988), which refers to

a region where the elite in Istanbul once picnicked on the Bosphorus shore where two streams known as “the sweet waters of Asia” used to empty into the Bosphorus.

Collage is well-suited to convey the experience of travel since the sights, smells, sounds, and tastes of a place provide a sensory montage of reminiscences. Thus travel and collage are related activities to Faulkner. In fact, his luggage while traveling consists mainly of art supplies, his hotel room becomes an ersatz studio, and cities become hunting grounds for material. On more than one occasion he has been known to lead a cadre of neophyte collagists armed with graphite and tracing paper through the legendary Paris cemetery Père-Lachaise in search of Max Ernst's tomb. Every candy wrapper, matchbook, sardine tin, and paper menu are loaded with potential for Faulkner, and back at home he sorts these bits and scraps of paper that have not already made their way into a finished work among the pages of his scrapbooks. These function both as sketchbooks and diaries and are a prelude to Faulkner's collages, juxtaposing fact with fiction, and the observed with the imaginary.

In Faulkner's work, those who take themselves too seriously are at serious risk. The vaunted is fair game for mockery, and eccentrics, fools, villains, and heroes are all fodder for Monty Pythonesque narratives rife with delightful non sequiturs that attempt to make evident the irreconcilable disparities between history and our evolving impressions of the past. In *L'Ultimo Paladino* (1991), objects are assembled in a shadow box for an imaginary portrait of the Italian fascist Benito Mussolini. The ridiculousness of the medieval term “paladin” (here referring to a group of holy knights from the 11th-century epic poem *The Song of Roland*) as applied to Mussolini is underscored by his silly helmet-cum-badminton racquet and crossed eyes, while his monomaniacal desire for dictatorial power is signified by an absurdly misplaced and foreshortened erection. It is a work straight out of the Marcel Duchamp playbook, recalling his “rectified readymade”

L.H.O.O.Q. (1919), a mustachioed travesty of Leonardo Da Vinci's portrait of Mona Lisa on a postcard version of the painting that is also one of Faulkner's favorite targets.

Among the multitude of artworks cluttering the tourist's field of vision, the Mona Lisa (*La Gioconda*, c. 1503-06) is among the most commercially ubiquitous and for that reason perhaps most maligned in the tradition of Duchamp. There must be at least a dozen works by Faulkner based on the Mona Lisa, mocking her exalted place in art history, or rather our unconditional willingness to confer that upon her. His most recent foray on the subject, a diptych titled *Mona I* and *Mona II* (both 2004), partially conceal the reproduction of the painting behind veils of white and black, respectively. Veiling Mona's celebrated beauty, Faulkner evokes customs in women's dress that alternately denote virginity and widowhood, suggesting the vast range of women's experiences in between these conditions that are largely absent in the history of art. Other artworks that Faulkner has subjected to scathing parody include Gustave Caillebotte's *Paris Street and Rainy Day* (1877), Caravaggio's *Bacchus* (c. 1597), and a lesser-known painting titled *Gordale Scar* (c. 1814-15) by the minor British painter James Ward (1769-1859). Faulkner's surrealist-inspired object *Gordale Scar* (1991) is a sculptural fragment of a man's arm holding a reproduction of Ward's painting. The object is "scarred" by a wound-like set of eyelets and shoelaces attached to it. Using visual and verbal puns, Faulkner relates the famous limestone gorge in Yorkshire named Gordale Scar to the sexually charged shape of the wound.

Travel for Faulkner is as invariably linked to the history of art as it is to the process of art making. In his pantheon of art heroes, Kurt Schwitters and Max Ernst are the preeminent masters of collage in the early twentieth-century, so he returns to them repeatedly. *Rubbing Max* (1995) is an homage to Ernst that includes a rubbing of his tombstone from Père Lachaise. The rubbing is an ironic tip of the hat to Ernst who

conceived the technique he called frottage as a surrealist process for “automatic” art-making. In *After Kurt Schwitters* (1991), Faulkner alludes to Raphael’s *Sistine Madonna* by way of Schwitters’s collage titled *A Knave Child* (1921). In the Schwitters collage, the head of a fashion model from a magazine advertisement is substituted for the Madonna’s overtop a drawn reproduction of the Raphael. Instead of refashioning the Madonna as did Schwitters, Faulkner replaced the Christ child in her arms with a “leather daddy” by the homoerotic illustrator Tom of Finland. The collage proposes an alternative standard of ideal beauty while inverting conventional power relationships between the sexes in art. In addition to this work, others suggest an aspect of traveling – cruising for sex – that was not an insignificant part of Faulkner’s peripatetic youth and which inspired an ongoing series of homoerotic works including *Monument to Wolfgang von Goethe* (1991), a work based on the adult party game “spin the bottle.” The phallic shaped “monument” is made up of wooden balls, a tin can, bird egg and a spindle. When spun, the balls eventually come to rest over images of sites visited by Goethe during his Grand Tour of Italy, which supposedly ended his celibacy and was the subject of his classic travel book titled *Italian Journey*

Among Faulkner’s most affectionate works is a series of collages about “the avian egg,” or bird egg. As a subject of miracles and an object of fetish in *The Miracle of the Avian Egg-Gulf of Taranto* (1998) and *The Avian Egg as Object of Contemplation* (1998), the egg is given the role of pilgrim and talisman, respectively. In this sense, Faulkner both satirizes and pays obeisance to the great American artist Joseph Cornell who repeatedly returned to bird imagery in his constructions and collages. Similarly, Faulkner’s continuing series of postcard collages is distinguished by a particularly high degree of earnestness. Like lyrical palimpsests exploring lost places, resuming ancient love notes, and conferring forgotten salutations, they transform quotidian travel mementos into vehicles for the poetic investigation of a place, its history, customs, and mythologies.

Using vintage postcards or reproductions of architectural sites, Faulkner interrupts our familiarity with the subject by subtly changing its features or introducing unexpected imagery. In works such as *La Douce Pensee*, *Islamic Art by Mail* (1984), *Two Views of Capri at Night* (1989), and *Georgia on My Mind* (1999) postcards are subtly modified by Faulkner with additional imagery, text, and transparent overlays, and are juxtaposed to suggest a commemoration, legend, or allegory of a place. In the “Pompeii series” (1990), postcards of Vesuvius are overlaid with transparencies that depict violent eruptions bringing the postcards’ volcanic imagery to life. While these refer to the 18th-century romantic’s exaltation of emotion over reason and of the senses over intellect, the works also suggest a ridiculously grandiose metaphor for sexual ecstasy.

As in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1962) by Muriel Spark, whom Faulkner acknowledges in his autobiographical chronology, the stories of Faulkner’s protagonists – the gods, goddesses, artists, writers, heroes, villains, as well as the hotels, bridges, cathedrals, and palaces of fabulous cities - are told concurrently from the past and in the present and address joys, regrets, comedy, and tragedy. His collage narratives offer up truths and observations about the past, both mundane and provocative, for interpretation or poetic reverie. The stories illuminate the present like contemporary maxims that can be as sober and earnest as his images are entertaining. Faulkner’s work, marked by its formal sophistication, thematic obscurity, and razor sharp wit, become the conveyance for journeys to the darkened recesses of our collective imagination with occasional detours down unseen camel trails and Roman highways. Thankfully Faulkner is fond of reminding us that travel is nothing if not an endless series of embarrassments that teach us about ourselves, others, and the places we’ve been.

I would like to thank François Robert for initiating this long overdue exhibition with a suggestion over lunch which struck many, including myself, as so obviously a good idea that it was hard to believe that it had not already been done. The exhibition was realized swiftly thanks to the skillful direction of Hyde Park Art Center Director of Exhibitions, Allison Peters and the enthusiastic participation of each lender. John Jones and Michelle Fire have my fondest devotion for spearheading the effort to publish this catalogue, and at the risk of repeating acknowledgements printed elsewhere I would like to personally thank Jack Andrews and Peter Shull, Henry and Gilda Buchbinder, Ruth Horwich, Ken Lieber and Peter Hawrylewicz, Paula and Herb Molner, and Edmund Paszyk, who have been constant supporters of Jim's work over the years and without whom these pages would be wanting.

Michael Rooks

Karl Baedeker, *London and its Environs* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902)

Augustus J. C. Hare, *Walks in London* (New York: George Routledge and Sons, 1884)

_____, HYPERLINK "http://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian/issues95/oct95/book_1095.html" \ "people#people" *Peculiar People: The Story of My Life*, Anita Miller and James Papp, ed. (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 1995)

Having studied at Chicago's Institute of Design (now IIT) in the 1950s with Harry Callahan and Aaron Siskind, Faulkner later educated himself in collage techniques which he continues to refine in his studio library where he scrutinizes the work of artists such as Kurt Schwitters and Max Ernst, and later artists from Cornell and Jess to Joe Brainard and John Evans.

See "The Sweet Waters of Asia: Representing Difference/Differencing Representation in Nineteenth-Century Istanbul" by Frederick N. Bohrer in *Edges of Empire: Orientalism and Visual Culture* (Malden, MA; Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

Predating the rise of collage in the early twentieth-century as a serious medium for art making, scrapbooking became a widespread hobby in the nineteenth century as a result of sophisticated printing techniques and the ever-increasing quality of paper ephemera including postage stamps, greeting cards, ticket stubs, postcards, and *cartes de visite*. With advancements in mechanical reproduction and modern travel, scrapbooks became a popular way for people to record daily experiences that occurred in greater varieties and at a greater pace than during preceding generations, to such an extent that articles on scrapbook cutting were not uncommon in nineteenth-century newspapers. Scrapbooks, soon surpassed in popularity by photo albums, provided a non-linear, image-based format for the recording of time and personal history, as well as a space for the expression of memories and innermost reflections using text alongside imagery pictorially rather than literally.

See Arturo Schwartz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1969).

Surrealist automatism involves spontaneity and the physical practice of mark-making or writing without conscious thought or esthetic deliberation.

See J. W. Goethe, *Italian Journey, 1786-1788* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1962).

Faulkner's longtime friendship with Hyde Park residents Lindy and Edwin A. Bergman allowed him to examine many of Cornell's best works repeatedly, helping foster a great knowledge of and appreciation for Cornell's constructions and collages.