

*Friday 30<sup>th</sup> March 2012, Gresham College*

**THE 'DESUBLIMATION' OF  
MODERN ART – A  
THEOLOGICAL TASK?**

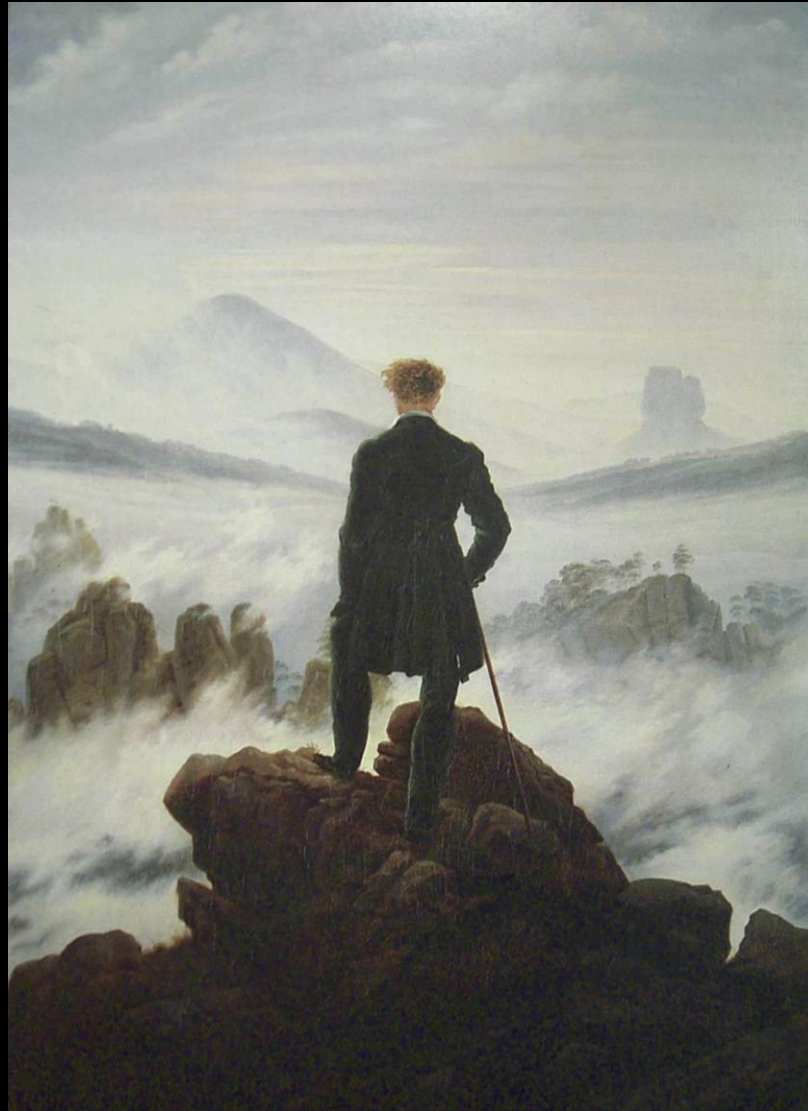
*Ben Quash  
King's College London*

Place is space which has historical meanings, where some things have happened which are now remembered and which provide continuity and identity across generations. Place is space in which important words have been spoken which have established identity, defined vocation and envisioned destiny. Place is space in which vows have been exchanged, promises have been made, and demands have been issued.

Walter Brueggeman



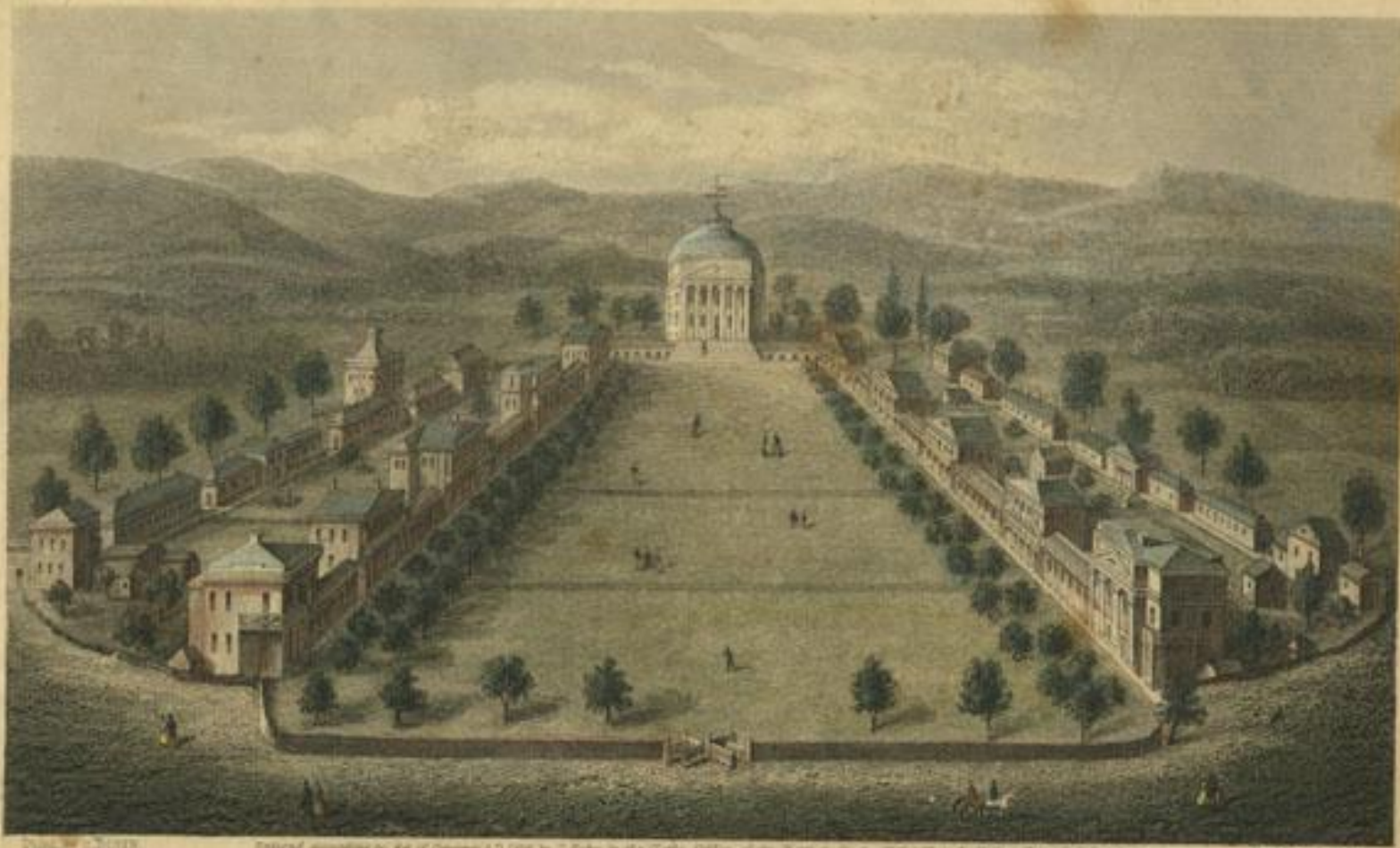
G.F. Watts (1817-1904), *After the Deluge (The 41<sup>st</sup> Day)* (1885-86)  
Oil on canvas, 104 x 178cm  
Compton (Watts Gallery)



Caspar David Friedrich, *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (1817)

Kunsthalle Hamburg





Printed by C. DODD.

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UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA.

W. H. & C. DODD.



J.M.W. Turner, *Snow Storm: Hannibal and his Army Crossing the Alps* exhibited 1812



Raqib Shaw, *The mild-eyed melancholy of the lotus eaters III* 2009-10

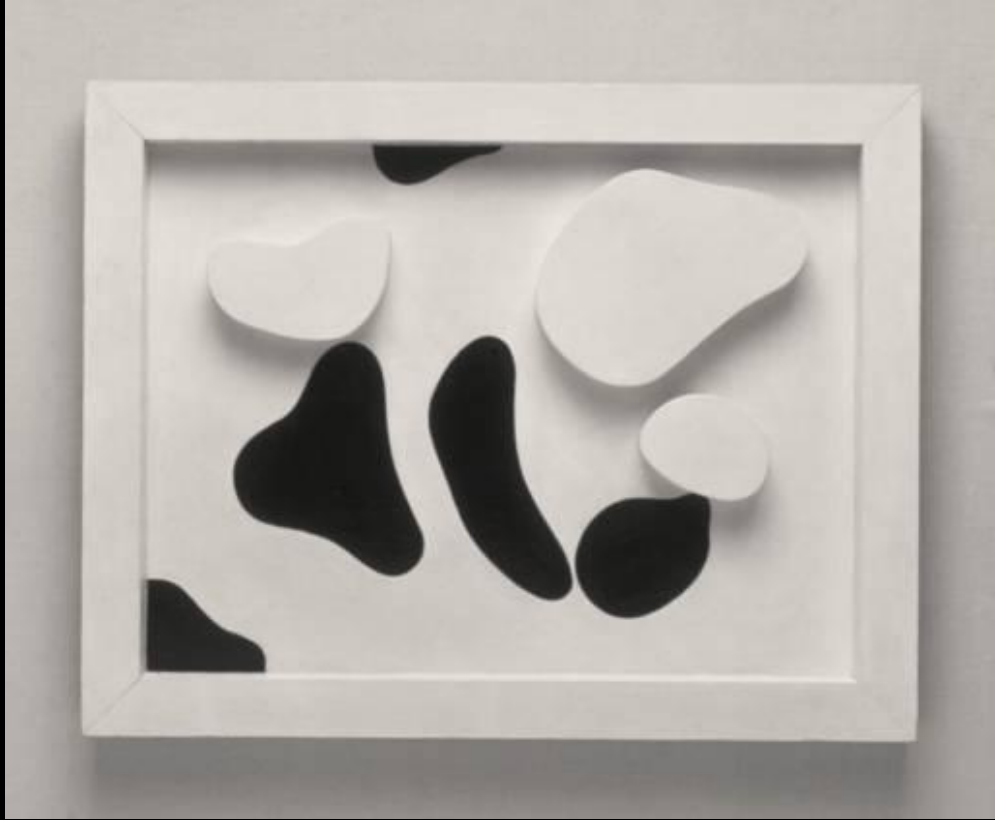




Raqib Shaw *The Moonbeam Gatherer* [detail] 2009-11 Oil, acrylic, glitter, enamel and rhinestones on birch wood 60 x 191 15/16 in. (152.4 x 487.6 cm)

Mark Rothko,  
*Light Red Over  
Black* (1957)











[The] thinking of surfaces subsists upon an aesthetics of the abyss, energy, boundless force, indeterminate instabilities that – through the violence of their ceaseless divergence and convergence within an untold depth of the indistinguishable – give rise to the evanescent shimmering of events and forms; the beautiful – conceived as a staid aesthetics of form, limit, boundary, hierarchy, harmony and accord – becomes simply another manifestation of the essentializing discourse of image and likeness and of the solace of metaphysics, while the sublime – conceived as the turbid immensity of the unrepresentable, a chaotic excess of indeterminacy, strife, incompatible difference, and inchoate energies – is raised up for affirmation. As a divine game of chance and fate, a game whose only rule is the necessity of the casting of the dice (and whose stakes are always the whole). From this sublimity beauty can be extracted, irrelevantly, only as a contraction and a concealment. Metaphysics, in its drive toward totality, classically conceives of the infinite as chaos or negation (or at best a ‘total’ synthesis), and certainly cannot conceive of an infinity that is offered peacefully – without alienation, negation, or deceit – as form. (Hart 2003: 66-67)



Andrea Mantegna (1431-1506), *The Lamentation over the Dead Christ* (c. 1490)  
Tempera on canvas, 68 x 81 cm; Milan (Pinacoteca di Brera)



[B]ehold God become human, the unfathomable mystery of the love of God for the world. God loves human beings. God loves the world. Not an ideal human being but human beings as they are, not an ideal world, but the real world. What we find repulsive in their opposition to God, what we shrink back from with pain and hostility, namely, real human beings, the real world, this is for God the *ground* of unfathomable love. ... [It is] not enough to say that God embraces human beings ... [for] this affirmation rests on an infinitely deeper one ... [namely] that God, in the conception and birth of Jesus Christ, has taken on humanity *bodily*... (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)



Andrea Mantegna (1431-1506), *The Lamentation over the Dead Christ* (c. 1490)  
Tempera on canvas, 68 x 81 cm; Milan (Pinacoteca di Brera)



Theophanes the  
Greek,  
*Transfiguration* (late  
14<sup>th</sup> century)  
Icon 184 x 134 cm  
Moscow (Tretyakov  
Gallery)













Anna M.R. Freeman  
*Abide*

