

## Afterword: Victorian Sculpture for the Twenty-First Century

David J. Getsy

This issue of *19* is significant for being among the few books or collections devoted to Victorian sculpture. Despite waves of resurgence in the past fifteen years, such gatherings of voices are still relatively rare. With its focus on reading and curating, this issue stages how Victorian sculpture studies might relate to other fields and modes of presentation, and its texts offer new ways to think about such major issues as technology, religion, and colonialism in art history. This is a great value for a subfield that has sometimes had a hesitant relationship to other approaches and methods in Victorian studies, to nineteenth-century studies, and to the discipline of art history more broadly. This collection helps to advance the ways in which Victorian sculpture studies seeks to redefine itself in the twenty-first century.

The early 2000s saw a resurgence of interest in Victorian sculpture (especially of the last quarter of the nineteenth century), and it was at this time that the first books devoted to the topic were published since the foundational histories of the 1980s. These twenty-first century reassessments argued that the peculiarity of Victorian sculpture afforded an opportunity to critique larger accounts of sculptural aesthetics, of the long nineteenth century across Europe, of the origins of modernism, and of the relationship of Victorian figuration to issues of the body, gender, sexuality, and class. Such work built upon the energy of Victorian literature studies and sought a similarly capacious potential for sculpture's participation in the discipline of art history and nineteenth-century studies. As well, the Public Monuments and Sculpture Association's books on the sculpture of Britain have made available a wealth of material that allows scholars a view of the range of Victorian sculpture like never before.

In the burst of activity and scholarship a decade ago, there was one thing that was missed — or, rather, inadequately addressed — and that was the complex relationship that Victorian sculpture had with empire, colonialism, and race. It is in this arena that Victorian sculpture studies has grown the most, and one could characterize this issue of *19* and the exhibition 'Sculpture Victorious' as reflective of a struggle with those issues of privilege and power. The most important advance in Victorian sculpture studies in the past decade has been this greater and more nuanced

critique of sculpture's role in empire and the power dynamics of its global reach. These are current questions for both art history and Victorian studies, and the study of sculpture is exemplary in this because of its embedded relationship to systems of power, patronage, propaganda, and national self-fashioning.

There is clearly much more to be done in the subfield, which is just beginning to grapple with the epistemological shift demanded by decolonization, but nevertheless the archive and the questions have been extended to characterize Victorian sculpture as a global topic — with global problems. While this is a contribution of 'Sculpture Victorious' (and remains an incomplete undertaking), I wonder what other ways of discussing Victorian sculpture still remain to be pursued from the early years of its twenty-first century reassessment. The subfield continues to need the kind of wide-ranging analyses that use Victorian sculpture as a basis from which to pose big questions to the field, to other historical moments, and to debates both aesthetic and theoretical. It is this to which this issue of *19* points.

In these articles, the questions applied to Victorian sculpture about empire — evident throughout but especially in the essays of Jason Edwards, Mark Stocker, and Nicola Capon — are joined with other new contexts such as issues of intermediality (Greenaway, Di Bello, Pulham, Sheehan) and limitations of historiography (Jones, Edwards). New figures are upheld as demanding importance (Jones on Hitch, Stocker on Williamson) and familiar ones are given greater complexity (Greenaway, Thomas). Most novel among these other contexts is the interrogation of issues of technology and imaging. These are taken on directly in the innovative and original article by Rebecca Sheehan on cinema but also contribute to Edwards's strategic, ekphrastic analysis of the *Outram Shield*. In these ways, this issue offers us a more diverse range of possibilities for how Victorian sculpture might be studied.

As a museum exhibition catalogue, *Sculpture Victorious* was never intended to offer such a plurality of methods or voices, and it is useful to see the responses to the exhibition and its catalogue presented in these articles. Already, the exhibition's narrative is being augmented, and we should be enthused about the catalytic effect it is having in part because of its circumscribed focus on certain issues and kinds of objects. The parsimony in the catalogue's registration of existing literature, in this sense, offers an opportunity to spur further debate and to address its omissions and occlusions. More robust relationships with existing literature, with different methodologies, and with topics outside of the Victorian are necessary both to bring new readers to this material as well as to retain the diversity of issues and narratives in Victorian sculpture studies.

In this regard, it is encouraging to see this issue of *19* push against a singular view or methodology for the subfield, and the internal divergences are productive. New narratives are brought to the table and are promising

in their identification of the need for significant rethinking. There is potential for such expansion and wider debate with significant issues in the field in each article. Edwards's text, for instance, is a challenge in its form to methodologies of art-historical narration and argues for the role of animal studies, and this (and other of his) work has deep implications for the sub-field and for its dialogues across the humanities. Sheehan's article tells us a great deal about the complex relationship between sculpture and imaging technologies (both two- and three-dimensional) in the nineteenth century that, in turn, inform debates about modelling and prototyping in the digital age. Claire Jones's recovery of religious sculpture, as well, demands a reconsideration of the exclusions of the history of modern art (and, like it or not, this work is both related to and necessary for a history of the modern). She rightly argues for an alternate view of the history of sculpture, with different players and institutions, and I for one look forward to the book-length treatment of these issues that struggles with the anxiety about religious faith in nineteenth-century studies, the importance of religion in English modernist sculpture's building upon its Victorian precedents, and the relationship of religion to empire and self-fashioning. This is just one example (of the many) in this issue where a solid historical case is made and new material is offered as the basis from which expansive claims (and a wider art-historical audience) could be visualized. We could also think about the relationship between sculpture and poetry as put forth in Vicky Greenaway's article for its value to the long-standing interest in literary studies with the imagery of the statue and the sculptural; or the ways in which Stocker's work calls for a global account of the monument relevant beyond narratives of the Victorian.

These are all opportunities to refuse a narrow focus on the Victorian and to engage with broader debates in art history and cultural studies. This issue of *19* looks to the future directions for the subfield beyond its first attempt at a comprehensive exhibition, and it raises again the questions about how Victorian sculpture studies can best be relevant and engaging to a wide readership.