



Written by Teresa Stoppani
Nov 05, 2007 at 01:17 PM

Architecture Open Lecture Series 2007 / 08

- University of Greenwich School of Architecture & Construction
- Norbert Singer Lecture Theatre (M055)
- Mansion Site, Avery Hill Campus
- Bexley Road, Eltham, London SE9 2PQ
- Commencing 17.30

Tuesday 20 November 2007

**John Macarthur University of Queensland
Brisbane**

**The picturesque: Architecture, painting and
Titian's Madonna di ca' Pesaro**

The term picturesque once meant a radical blurring of art and life – a reordering of hierarchies of taste and of relations between the arts of architecture, painting and gardening. William Gilpin developed his theory of the picturesque from Roger de Piles' late 17th century theory of the pictorial surface. It is usual to understand the picturesque as the result of architects and gardeners taking and reapplying concepts and techniques from painting. The picturesque arises from the concept of the picture, in the sense that modern concepts of composition, both pictorial and architectural, are immanent in it.



Titian. Madonna of Ca'Pesaro. Frari Church, Venice (photo T.Stoppani)

These complex issues of intellectual and technical history can be grasped in a particular example. Sir Uvedale Price, in one of his many attempts to explain and defend the picturesque, considers Titian's Madonna of Ca' Pesaro, 1519-26. Although Price does not say so, his remarks are a circuitous disagreement with Sir Joshua Reynolds' earlier comments on the same painting. The Titian also plays a crucial role in Thomas Puttfarcken's *The Discovery of Pictorial Composition* (2000), which is a strong argument for composition being an issue of the history of the painting support. The arguments of Puttfarcken, Reynolds and Price all rest on whether or not the painting implies a specific viewpoint. Comparing their analyses of the painting and the arguments that are entailed can lead to a better understanding of what the 'picture' is doing in the 'picturesque'.

John Macarthur is Reader in Architecture at the University of Queensland and Visiting Professor at RMIT University. He teaches architectural design and the history and theory of architecture, and conducts research at both universities. With Antony Moulis, John directs the UQ based research group ATCH (architecture/ theory/ history/ criticism) His research in history and theory of architecture focuses on the conceptual framework and the history of picturesque aesthetics. John has edited four books and published over 80 articles and book chapters His book *The Picturesque: architecture, disgust and other irregularities* has been published recently by Routledge (2007).

Last Updated (Nov 06, 2007 at 11:06 AM)

Close Window