

Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest, Case 8 (2023-24) <i>Taste in High Life (or Taste à-la-Mode)</i> by William Hogarth	
Statement from Expert Adviser	Statement of the Expert Adviser to the Secretary of State that the painting meets Waverley criterion three See below
Statement from the Applicant	Statement from the applicant referencing the three Waverley criteria. The Reviewing Committee will designate an object as a 'national treasure' if it considers that its departure from the UK would be a misfortune on one or more of the following three grounds: a) Is it closely connected with our history and national life? b) Is it of outstanding aesthetic importance? c) Is it of outstanding significance for the study of some particular branch of art, learning or history? See below
Note of case hearing	See below
Press release	A press release was issued by the Secretary of State on Wednesday 15 November 2023: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/william-hogarths-satirical-painting-taste-in-high-life-at-risk-of-leaving-the-uk
Recommended price	£2,468,000 (plus VAT of £93,600 which can be reclaimed by an eligible institution)
1st Deferral period	14 March 2024
2nd Deferral period	
Note of outcome	

RCEWA – Taste in High Life (or Taste à-la-Mode) by William Hogarth

Statement of the Expert Adviser to the Secretary of State that the painting meets Waverley criterion three.

Please note that images and appendices referenced are not reproduced.

1. Brief Description of object(s)

William Hogarth (1697-1764)

Taste in High Life 1742

Oil on canvas, 63.5 x 76.1 cm

Inscribed 'THE / MODE / 1742' on the pedestal of Venus

A satirical painting lampooning the folly and self-delusion of aristocratic taste, specifically the influence of foreign fashions and imported luxuries. It depicts a lavishly decorated drawing room, in which an older woman and foppish young man – their figures comically distorted by their fashionable clothes – admire a tiny teacup together. To the left, a richly dressed woman in blue cups the chin of an enslaved page boy who sits on a table holding a porcelain chinoiserie figurine. In the foreground, a monkey dressed as a gentleman inspects a food menu through a monocle, parodying human behaviour and ridiculing the figures' pretensions.

Condition

This picture was viewed by the advisor and conservators while it was on loan to Tate Britain's recent *Hogarth and Europe* exhibition (Nov.2021 – March 2022). The work is unglazed and appears to be in fair and sound condition. There are some areas of losses and old retouching around the edges, as well as a fine network of cracking throughout (notably in the woman in blue's dress, the curtains and along the stretcher bar), but this is not visually disturbing.

2. Context

Provenance

Commissioned from the artist by Mary Edwards (1705-1743) for £60; her sale, Cock's, London, 28-29 May 1746, lot 49 (as 'Mr. Hogarth, Taste a-la-Mode'), 5 guineas; bought by Mr. Birch; with John Birch, surgeon of Essex Street, Strand, by 1782 until 1814 or later; the Revd. Robert Gwilt (1811-1889) by 1843; sold by his executors, Christie's, London, 13 July 1889, lot 95, 215 guineas; bought by Davis for C. Fairfax Murray; Charles Fairfax Murray (1849-1919); Louis Huth (1821-1905), 28 Hertford Street, Mayfair and Possingworth Park, East Sussex; his sale ('Catalogue of the Highly Important Collection of Fine Pictures and Drawings of Louis Huth, Esq. Deceased'), Christie's, London, 20 May 1905, lot 104, 1,250 guineas; bought by Agnew, on behalf of Edward Cecil Guinness, 1st Earl of Iveagh; thence by descent; Old Master & 19th Century Paintings Evening Auction, Sotheby's, London, 5 July 2023, lot.34.

Exhibition history

Pictures by the late William Hogarth, Richard Wilson, Thomas Gainsborough, and J. Zoffani, British Institution, London, Summer 1814, no.125, lent by John Birch.

The Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds together with a selection of Pictures by Ancient, and Deceased English Masters, British Institution, London, June 1843, no.149, lent by Robert Gwilt.

An Exhibition on Behalf of the Artist's General Benevolent Institution, Thomas Agnew & Sons, London, November – December 1913.

Exhibition of British Art c.1000-1860, Royal Academy, London, January – March 1934, no.220, lent by the Earl of Iveagh.

William Hogarth 1697-1764, Tate Gallery, London, June – July 1951, no.56, lent by the Earl of Iveagh.

Hogarth's Marriage A-la-Mode, National Gallery, London 1997, no.2.

Hogarth, Tate Britain, London, February – April 2007; La Caixa, Madrid, May – August 2007, no.74.

Hogarth and Europe, Tate Britain, London November 2021 – March 2022.

Literature

John B. Nichols, *Biographical Anecdotes of William Hogarth*, rev. ed., London 1782, pp.216-17.

John B. Nichols, *Biographical Anecdotes of William Hogarth*, rev. ed., London 1785, pp.259-60,

John Nichols and George Steevens, *The Genuine Works of William Hogarth*, 3 vols., vol. II, London 1810, pp.iv and 158, vol.III, London 1817, p.173.

John B. Nichols, *Biographical Anecdotes of William Hogarth*, London 1833, p.358.

Austin Dobson, *William Hogarth*, enlarged ed., London 1907, p.202.

R.B. Beckett, *Hogarth*, London 1949, p.74, no.140.

G. Baldini & G. Mandel, *L'Opera Completa di Hogarth pittore*, Milan 1967, p.106, no.142.

Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth: His Life, Art, and Times*, 2 vols., London 1971, vol.I, pp.466-67, fig.180.

Mary Webster, *Hogarth*, London 1979, pp.97-100, 108, and 185, no.129, reproduced.

David Dabydeen, *Hogarth's Blacks: Images of Blacks in Eighteenth Century English Art*, Kingston-upon-Thames 1985, pp.79-80 and 128, fig.51.

Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth*, 2nd rev. ed., 3 vols., Baltimore and Cambridge 1991-93, vol.II, pp.203-4, fig.85.

Judy Egerton, *Hogarth's Marriage A-la-Mode*, London 1997, pp.8-9, reproduced in colour.

Kimberley Chrisman, 'Mary Edwards's Taste and High Life', *Costume*, no.35, 2001, pp.11-13, reproduced in colour.

Diana Donald, *Followers of Fashion: Graphic Satires from the Georgian Period*, exh. cat., London 2002, p.23.

Jenny Uglow, *Hogarth: A Life and a World*, London 2002, pp.371-2, fig.113.

Catherine Molineux, 'Hogarth's Fashionable Slaves: Moral Corruption in Eighteenth-Century London', *ELH*, vol.72, no.2, Summer 2005, pp.496, 498-500, 502, 507-9, and 513, fig.2 reproduced from the engraving.

Mark Hallett and Christine Riding (eds), *Hogarth*, exh. cat., London 2007, pp.144-5, fig.74.

Robin Simon, *Hogarth, France and British Art: The Rise of the Arts in 18th-Century Britain*, London 2007, pp.41-2 and 48, reproduced from the engraving, plate 37.

Sara D. Schotland, 'Africans as Objects: Hogarth's Complex Portrayal of Exploitation', *Journal of African American Studies*, vol.13, no.2, June 2009, pp.147, 149-150, and 159-60, fig.1 reproduced from the engraving.

David Bindman and Henry Louis Gates jr. (eds.), *The Image of the Black in Western Art. Part 3 The Eighteenth Century*, Cambridge MA and London 2011, pp.163-64, fig.157.

Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell, "'He is not dressed without a muff": Muffs, masculinity and la mode in English Satire', in Elizabeth Mansfield and Kelly Malone (eds), *Seeing satire in the eighteenth century*, Oxford 2013, p.140, fig.6.4 reproduced from the engraving.

Elizabeth Einberg, *William Hogarth: A Complete Catalogue of the Paintings*, New Haven and London 2016, pp.246-8, fig.163.

Jacqueline Riding, *Hogarth: Life in Progress*, London 2021, pp.280-1, 294, 296 and 398.

Alice Insley and Martin Myrone (eds), *Hogarth and Europe*, exh. cat., London 2021, pp.168 and 214, reproduced in colour.

Comparable artworks by William Hogarth in the UK

William Hogarth is today recognised as a seminal figure in eighteenth-century British art and, as such, he is well represented in collections both in the UK and internationally.

His celebrated 'modern moral series' are almost all in public collections: *A Rake's Progress* (1734, Sir John Soane's Museum, London); *The Four Times of Day* (1736-7, split between Upton House, National Trust and a private collection); *Marriage A-la-Mode* (1743-4, National Gallery, London); and *The Humours of an Election* (1754-5, Sir John Soane's Museum, London). These show Hogarth as a social commentator and storyteller at his best, but they are distinct in being conceived as a sequence of images. Among his standalone satirical paintings in UK collections, perhaps the most comparable works in terms of ambition and sharp wit are: *Before and After* (c.1730-1, the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge), a pair showing first an elegant seduction and then its aftermath; *A Midnight Modern Conversation* (c.1731-2), now only known through the print but widely copied, which humorously moralises on excessive drinking; *O the Roast Beef of Old England* (1748, Tate, London) lampooning the French and recalling Hogarth's own visit to Calais; and *Francis Matthew Schutz in his Bed* (c.1755-60, Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery), also deriding drunkenness and womanising. These are, though, varied in subject matter and do not approach the degree of comic exaggeration in *Taste in High Life*.

Very few satirical works by Hogarth remain in private collections and rarely appear on the market. There are only three comparable works: *Sir Francis Dashwood at his Devotions* (c.1733-9), *A Night Encounter* (c.1738-9), and *Charity in the Cellar* (1739). These pictures, however, depict extravagance and unconventionality in elite male culture without the sharp satiric and moralising edge apparent in *Taste in High Life*, and are testament to the aristocratic male patrons for Hogarth's art. Both *Francis Dashwood* and *Charity in the Cellar* have also suffered from abrasion and considerable overpainting. *Taste in High Life* is certainly distinct in its quality, provenance, and subject matter.

3. Waverley criteria

Waverley 3

This painting is of outstanding significance for the study of art history and the history of eighteenth-century British cultural life.

Not only is it exceptional as a standalone painted satire by William Hogarth, a major figure in eighteenth-century British art, it also offers an important insight into the period, notably the ambivalence and tensions that emerged with Britain's growing commercial and consumer culture. Within Hogarth's oeuvre it holds an

important position, coming closer to graphic satire in painted form than any other work. It elevates satire to the status of high art, an endeavour he would go on to pursue in his celebrated series *Marriage A-la-Mode* (1743, National Gallery, London). Lastly, its commission by Mary Edwards, one of Hogarth's most important patrons, and her role in shaping the painting, makes this work a seminal example of female patronage and cultural agency in the eighteenth century.

Significance of the subject matter

Taste in High Life is exceptional as a highly sophisticated satirical representation of society's extravagances and bad taste. While the picture is singular in its degree of comic exaggeration, bordering on caricature, its rich iconography adeptly reveals the tensions within eighteenth century British culture and high society.

As detailed in Appendix A, the whole picture is a vividly rendered display of luxury goods and global commerce. It speaks to Britain's rapid economic growth during this period, underpinned by its expanding commercial and increasingly imperial networks. These international networks saw individuals, ideas, images, and objects circulate more than ever before. Goods and profits flooded into Britain, and luxuries became more accessible, particularly for the growing middle classes. Working in London, then the largest city in Europe and a busy hub of global trade, Hogarth would have seen this first-hand.

The potentially detrimental effect of wealth and luxury was an increasing cause of concern in the eighteenth century. Writers like Alexander Pope and Henry Fielding voiced the perceived dangers of over-reliance on luxury imports and indulging in excess. By ridiculing figures characterised by their extravagance and preoccupation with superficial fripperies and fashions, *Taste in High Life* gives visual form to these anxieties about the corrupting influence of foreign tastes and luxuries, and particularly how they might foster an artificial, overly refined, and morally lax society. This was seen as a danger to the very idea of 'Britishness'. The painting's depiction of stereotypes like the 'effeminate' fop, childless women, and its emphasis upon French tastes resonates with this concern about British social degeneration. The rise in the market for luxury goods also created tension at a time in British cultural life when artists and makers like Hogarth were championing and making their name as distinctly British. The influx of imported goods and the taste for European culture, appeared to undermine this; it is perhaps not a surprise that the central picture in the background alludes to the classical tastes favoured by the connoisseurs Hogarth so vociferously denounced.

The presence of the Black enslaved pageboy in the painting also provides an important insight into eighteenth-century British cultural life and is the subject of growing scholarly and public attention. His inclusion in the scene highlights in a very immediate way Britain's growing role in the transatlantic slave trade during the eighteenth century and implicitly alludes to the source of wealth underpinning much aristocratic culture. More particularly, it signals the wider practice among elite women of keeping enslaved Black boys as pageboys or personal servants that were treated like pets or status symbols. This practice is in part reflected in the traditional but unlikely identification of the child as a young Ignatius Sancho, the famous writer and composer (he would have been in his teens by 1742, but earlier

in life he had been mistreated by three sisters in Greenwich and subsequently ran away). Hogarth's representation of the pageboy in such exoticizing costume, holding a chinoiserie figurine, framed by the red sweep of curtain, and among a whole range of luxury goods, conforms with the eighteenth-century objectification of Black servants as fashionable and highly desirable possessions. Furthermore, the intimacy depicted between the young woman and pageboy alludes to illicit sexual activity, revealing the stereotypes around Black sexuality and female depravity. The pageboy's presence here underscores the contemporary connection drawn between extravagance, vanity, and lax sexual morality. As the subject of the woman's affection, the pageboy draws attention to her desire and subverts ideas about female benevolence and charity in a way that likely resonated with current sociocultural concerns about female virtue.

Yet the pageboy's inclusion also serves an important satiric purpose, as has been widely discussed by scholars including Professors David Bindman and David Dabydeen. Whereas Black servants were conventionally included to denote a sitter's affluence and civility, the pageboy in *Taste in High Life* instead signals the pretension, affectations, and absurdity of high society. His elaborate dress is understood as a means by which Hogarth derides the 'dress up' of the other figures and their wholesale imitation of French culture and fashions. As David Dabydeen has noted, this emphasis upon imitation is reinforced by the visual dialogue between the monkey (the traditional symbol of human folly and mimicry) and the boy in the picture. The pageboy can therefore be interpreted as enacting the established satiric device of an outsider witnessing the supposed civilisation of European society. Furthermore, the pageboy's visible enslavement – indicated by his silver collar – can also be understood as a satire upon his 'owners' who are themselves obliviously enslaved by fashionable consumption. The tensions in the representation of the pageboy – as both affirming dehumanising stereotypes and seemingly accepting the institution of slavery, while also emphasising the harmful effects of luxury goods, and articulating the idea that enslaving others is morally corrupting for the enslaver (anticipating the later arguments of the abolition movement) – expresses a sense of ambivalence. This brings into question Hogarth's own position on the transatlantic slave trade and his role as social satirist. It is also these tensions that makes the painting so significant and pertinent for art historians and cultural organisations today, as they increasingly engage with the complex histories and legacies of eighteenth-century British culture.

Place in William Hogarth's career

William Hogarth was the most celebrated English painter and engraver of his day, achieving international fame in his lifetime. Training first as an engraver, and then moving into the more esteemed field of painting, Hogarth was able to straddle and excel in both 'high' and 'low' art. He worked across different genres but achieved greatest and lasting fame through his startlingly vivid depictions of modern life. The term 'Hogarthian' was coined during his lifetime, describing his distinctive worldview: satirical, independent, and insightful. Hogarth's art engaged with – and communicates to us – the rapidly changing eighteenth-century world and the vibrant artistic culture emerging in London. He championed native-born artists and British art, successfully campaigning for the copyright act in 1735, realising the

potential of the Foundling Hospital as a public exhibition space, and bullishly competing with foreign artists like Giamaco Amiconi and Jean-Baptiste van Loo. Today, Hogarth is frequently heralded as the father of British painting and the grandfather of political satire, reflecting the profound impact he has had on subsequent generations. While different conceptions of the artist have emerged since his death, Hogarth has become a touchstone for the role of the artist as social commentator, and for an art of social utility.

Painted in 1742, *Taste in High Life* demonstrates Hogarth's ability to bridge both high and low art with great invention and wit, and reflects an important moment in his career as he sought to present himself as the leader of the national school of painting. While Hogarth had successfully established himself as a painter during the 1730s, first with conversation pieces and then with his 'modern moral series' (*A Harlot's Progress*, 1733, destroyed by fire, and *A Rake's Progress*, 1734, Sir John Soane's Museum), he continued to produce engravings in dialogue and tandem with his painted work, using it to promote his art and to reach wider audiences. In its dense imagery – relying on a plethora of details to be 'read' by the audience and benefitting from close looking – and its degree of comic exaggeration, *Taste in High Life* closely corresponds with the visual language of eighteenth-century graphic satire. Indeed, *Taste in High Life* comes closer than any other work in Hogarth's oeuvre to graphic satire in painting form. As such, the painting can be regarded as an attempt to elevate satire and the representation of modern life to the status of high art. This is significant, as it coincides with Hogarth's efforts to establish himself at the forefront of a British school of painting. In the same year, Henry Fielding had flatteringly proclaimed Hogarth as a 'Comic History Painter', a title that positioned his art as socially and morally instructive, distinctively British and with wide popular appeal. *Taste in High Life* exemplifies Fielding's praise and shows the importance Hogarth placed upon satire as a defining quality of his art. In its anti-French sentiment too, the painting can be seen in conjunction with Hogarth's wider efforts to champion distinctively British art, notably writing as 'Britophil' in the *St James's Evening Post* a few years earlier attacking the import of 'Old Masters' to the detriment of living British painters.

Furthermore, while the conception and realisation of *Taste in High Life* is undoubtedly indebted to Mary Edwards (as detailed below), its themes aligned with Hogarth's own ideas and stimulated his creativity. As early as 1724, Hogarth had already satirised the 'bad taste of the town' in his print *Masquerades and Operas* (1723-4, Fig.1). In this image he attacks the popularity of foreign entertainments like masquerades and Italian operas, positioning himself against the new classicising taste championed by figures like artist William Kent (who is also subtly lampooned in *Taste in High Life*, as detailed in Appendix A). Hogarth's two highly popular and acclaimed 1730s narrative series, *A Harlot's Progress* and *A Rake's Progress* continued to satirise those who had pretensions above their station – including adopting foreign fashions. That *Taste in High Life* stimulated Hogarth's creativity is apparent in his third modern moral series, *Marriage A-la-Mode* (1743-4, National Gallery, London), painted just the following year. Over six paintings, Hogarth extends and develops his satire upon high society, vividly showing the dangers and hypocrisies of wealth and extravagance. *Taste in High Life's* importance as a forerunner to this is most apparent in *The Toilette* (Fig.2), the fourth picture in the sequence, where he similarly explores and visualises the

moral laxity arising from indulging in foreign fashions and luxury goods, including using the presence of two Black servants to provide a satirical and irreverent perspective on the behaviour of their mistress. The relationship between *Taste in High Life* and *Marriage A-la-Mode* was recognised early on, when George Vertue referred to the painting as 'Taste à la mode' and Hogarth himself inscribed Venus's pedestal 'The Mode' in *Taste in High Life*. By the mid-1740s, Hogarth's treatise on art (*The Analysis of Beauty*, 1753) was also in gestation. *Taste in High Life*, which articulates bad taste and immorality through the sharp, angular lines of the figures, can be seen as an early expression of his central tenet that the serpentine line was the embodiment of natural and artistic beauty. Just as in the painting he uses the Venus de Medici to highlight ideal or artistic beauty against the distortions of current fashions, in *Plate I* for the *Analysis of Beauty* (1753, Fig.3) a statue of Venus is again placed in visual dialogue with constricting corsets.

Mary Edwards's patronage

Taste in High Life was commissioned by Mary Edwards (1705-43), one of Hogarth's most important patrons. Edwards is remarkable for her independence at a time when women were afforded few opportunities, risking social ostracization to protect her interests and using her wealth and position to commission artworks in her own right.

Mary Edwards was the only child and heir of Francis Edwards of Welham, Leicestershire, and Anna Vernatti, his wife of Dutch Huguenot descent, whose families had made their wealth through commerce, landownership, road building and land reclamation. Following the death of her father in 1729, Edwards was the sole inheritor of multiple estates as well as an annual income estimated to be between £50,000-60,000, making her one of the wealthiest women of her day. Her relationship with Lord Anne Hamilton, with whom she had one son, Gerard, in 1733, reflects the extraordinary steps she took to retain financial and personal independence. It is uncertain if she married Hamilton (family tradition is that Edwards destroyed all evidence of the marriage) or simply lived openly with him between 1731-34, but she kept her maiden name and later repudiated the marriage, describing herself as a spinster to retain and protect her estates and fortune, even at the expense of her son's legitimacy. Her portrait by Hogarth (commissioned the same year as *Taste in High Life*, now in the Frick Collection, New York) is one of the artist's most striking and captivating images, subtly conveying her individuality and intellect, her contravention of accepted gender norms, and her political and personal belief in English freedoms. This, with *Taste in High Life*, marks the culmination of almost a decade of Edwards's patronage of Hogarth which included family portraits (*Gerard Anne Edwards in his Cradle*, 1733, Upton House, National Trust, and *The Edwards Hamilton Family*, 1734, Private Collection, Switzerland), as well as the pioneering representation of urban life, *Southwark Fair* (1733, Cincinnati Art Museum).

It is perhaps unsurprising then that Mary Edwards's patronage gave rise to one of Hogarth's most direct and cutting satires. Edwards failed to attain the social acceptance or status she hoped for and subsequently seems to have withdrawn into managing her estates and overseeing her son's education. She apparently commissioned *Taste in High Life* after she was ridiculed for her 'singularities' by

high society. The painting is therefore shaped by her personal disenchantment with fashionable life, particularly expressing her scathing attitude to contemporary tastes and, in her view, the detrimental effects of foreign influences. Indeed, writing in 1782 John Nichols records that Hogarth was unhappy with the picture because he had 'designed after her ideas' and so would not permit a print to be made after it, intriguingly suggesting that Edwards's input inhibited the artist (the etching after the painting, see fig.4, was published without Hogarth's permission in 1746, after Mary Edwards's death). Seen in conjunction with her contemporaneous portrait, her implacability and patriotism comes readily to the fore. *Taste in High Life*, and Edwards's role as a patron and collector more broadly, is testament to the ways in which women were able to assert their own agency and independence during the eighteenth century.

RCEWA – *Taste in High Life (or Taste à-la-Mode)* by William Hogarth

Applicant's statement

Please note that images and appendices referenced are not reproduced.

Is the item closely connected with our history and national life?

Is it of outstanding aesthetic importance?

Hogarth's *Taste in High Life* is a significant work within the oeuvre of one of the most significant British artists of the eighteenth century. It is also an important work of social satire that sheds a light on the material culture and social history of the period. Painted at the high point of the artist's career and preserved in exceptionally good condition, it is also of particularly high quality within the context of Hogarth's surviving paintings. As such, we do not contest that it meets the criteria for both the first and second Waverley criteria.

Is it of outstanding significance for the study of some particular branch of art, learning or history?

We would note, however, that the subject of the painting and the social commentary that it makes is closely aligned with that of Hogarth's great series of satirical paintings such as *Marriage a la Mode* and *A Rake's Progress*. These are housed in the National Gallery and the Sir John Soane's Museum respectively. In addition to this the holdings of Hogarth's work at the Tate, the Foundling Museum, the Ashmolean, Birmingham Museum, the Walker Art Gallery and many other museums across the country already provide ample opportunity to study Hogarth's work in this genre. In all there are 185 works by or attributed to William Hogarth in British public collections (source ArtUK), and as such we contest that *Taste in High Life* is of outstanding significance to the study of Hogarth's art or eighteenth-century British art history in general. We would therefore contend that third Waverley criterion does not apply.