

Adrian.

Where I have made amendments I have highlighted the relevant text. I have also added comments and highlighted them. I recommend using italics for the titles of art works as it stops them looking like quotes. You've used Calibri which doesn't have any bold/ italic options. Have a think about choosing a font that does.

Over all this is better. The writing is tighter and you touch on some serious points. There are still issues though. You ask 'in what ways does he aspire' and then conclude by saying that 'in the course of time popular opinion will assert whether his work merits recognition for Old Master status; but, despite the humorous and flippant elements in his work, he is a serious contender.' that resolutely not an answer to the question you've asked. I think you do explore how / in what ways he aspires but then simply conclude that he might. Ditch that conclusion (which is vague you hedge your position somewhat), and list how he aspires. That will also give you a chance to explain how he is different from them. You might also want to define 'old master', too.

Bryan

"In what ways does Currin's opus - an opus is a single work but I think you mean to refer to his practice as a whole - aspire to Old Master status?"

Introduction

According to Tony Godfrey, "Currin's recent paintings seem to aspire to Old Master Status." (Godfrey, 2010,p.180)

For example, "The Pink Tree" has the appearance of a Renaissance painting. The blackened background throws the figures into relief accentuating the solidity of their forms and eliminates distraction from the subject. The chiaroscuro backdrop is evident in the work of Botticelli. There is a fine finish to the rendering of the skin that appears unnaturally blemish free. The figures display distortions with elongated necks, one with a distended pot belly and stylised legs with knobby knees. The faces bare a resemblance to Currin's own features.(Fig 1). It is clear these characters are imaginary. "The people I paint don't exist." (Godfrey Op.cit) The ambivalent relationship between the female subjects adds a surreal edginess and contemporary twist. The pink tree itself is obscured by the women. Consequently, one can speculate if the pink tree is the naked human form itself.



Figure 1: Currin, The Pink Tree,1999

Laura Hoptman provides art historical references that proves helpful in contextualising Currin's work with Old Masters. " ...from the modern illustrator's coloured pencils, to a Leonardo-esque sepia and wash, coloured chalks recalling Watteau and Fragonard, and pastels in icy colours like Boucher..." (Hoptman, 2002, p.151) When a quotation is included within a larger sentence, do not use ellipsis points at the beginning or end of the quoted material, even if the beginning or end of the original sentence has been omitted. If the quote is at the end of sentence (as here) then you can use them, but put a full stop too. If you edit the quote in the middle, then put [...] where the edit happened.

In order to ascertain whether - the title change implies that Currin's work does aspire to Old Master status but here your doubting that. Clarify whether you're exploring HOW it aspires or WHETHER it aspires - recent work aspires to Old Master status I will begin by surveying a selection drawings and paintings and expound the gamut - not sure exactly what 'expound the gamut' means - of his representations from caricature through cartoons to straight portraiture. Then I will search for evidence for Old Master status by directly comparing Currin with giants in the canon of art history referenced by Hoptman.

A brief survey John Currin and his work

Currin's early works lampoon male heterosexual desire (Dexter, 2005, p.070) or comment critically upon a particular social type or class through caricature. ~~propose that~~ His work becomes increasingly sophisticated and more serious as he juxtaposes high art with low life using photographic references culled from popular cultural sources.

Straight portraits



Figure 2 Currin, Untitled, 1995

This “straight” portrait is one of a series of “vacant looking high school girls” derived from class year book photographs. (Cite Vit P) The dead pan expressionless face is humorous. Why? I agree, but it’s worth expanding this a little. The paint handling is refined, even at the early stage and the skin tones convincing. The blouse subtly merges into a blended background and we admire the controlled transition from dark to light as our eye travels from the top down the canvass. The author (is this you? You’ve used ‘I’ elsewhere so this is confusing. I recommend finding a more neutral way of stating this. Also, best to include evidence). recognises a homage to Richter’s “Eight student nurses”.

Cartoons



Figure 3 Currin, Jaunty and Mame, 1997

http://www.saatchigallery.com/aip/john_currin.htm

The image above shows two women with abnormally large breasts negotiating a transaction involving the sale of an inadequately sized bra. Currin often distorts proportions for comedic effect. For instance in “Big Hands” a voluptuous female is portrayed with large hands. This is a visual pun on the epithet that describes a large breasts and we are reminded of Currin’s enjoyment of word play.

Since we recognise Currin's ability to handle paint; it is curious to note the lack of effort in the faces. (You can't comment on the effort that goes into the work. Unless you have evidence do not make such a claim). The brush marks there are thick impasto gouache and otherwise hastily rendered compared with the fabric and skin. It is as if the faces are of no importance in the context of the exaggerated and signature distortions of forms; and we can ruminate upon Currin's ambiguous motives and message in doing so. Again, there is little background to distract the viewer.

The humour appears to be at the expense of women and many consider Currin sexist or misogynistic and he has drawn volatile critical attention from feminist commentators. (Cite) Get a quote that summarises this neatly.

Conversely, Currin may be poking fun at the male "gaze". According to Dominic Molon; "Such exaggerated imagery serves as a lampoon of male heterosexual desire at its most fetishistic while also pushing figurative representation into a strange new direction." (Dexter, 2005, p.070)

Caricature



Figure 4 Currin, Mrs Omni, 1993

Here Currin is lampooning vanity so harshly that his critics denounced him as ageist and sexist. Particularly so with his nude portrait of Bea Arthur. This is odd. I spent ages trying to work out which picture this was, but you haven't included it. You need to make this clear for delete the clause about the image. It might be better to find a quote that backs up your point.

In this next section it sounds like you're talking about the Be a Arthur picture and not the Mrs Omni one. confusing.

The stance is that of a model, "someone trying to strike a nonchalant pose, to appear much younger and far more elegant than she is." (Godfrey, 2009, p.180) The skin tones are dulled, and she is

presented, (knowingly) on a grey background, the grey hair and a grey stripe on her jumper drawing attention to her hollowed breasts. The figure is emaciated and this allows Currin to distort the figure with elongation particularly in the neck and stick thin arm. Backgrounds and context clues are noticeably absent as if not to distract from the subject. The brush strokes in the fabric are fluent and confident.



Figure 5 Currin Mrs So and so, 1992

Currin is certainly difficult to quantify. However, it is clear that, despite the acerbic humour, Currin is serious about his work and his opus (I think you might mean 'corpus') is self-consciously littered with art history allusions (either 'art-historical allusions' or 'allusions to art history'). As Currin remarked in 2000, 'it's always me remembering an old master and combining it with contemporary ad images. Those are the two things that compel me' (Rosenblum, 2000, p.78).

While what you say above is relevant to understanding Currin's work, but little of it has anything to do with his relationship to Old Masters and their work. His concerns are very contemporary, combining irony, humour, and offence in pretty much equal measure. You have dealt, more or less, with the conceptual content of the work rather than any aspiration he might have to be an Old Master. Though I can see why you've put the quote about 'remembering old master's at the end of the section - it feeds the next section - it might be better to place it at the head of the section as you could then find specific references to art history.

2: Aspects of Currin's art historical references

Appropriation is central to Currin's working practices as he ingeniously reworks traditional, Old Master pictorial representations and techniques.

Leonardo- sepia and wash



Viewed in https://www.bridgemaneducation.com/en/asset/857407/summary?context=%7B%22route%22%3A%22assets_search%22%2C%22routeParameters%22%3A%7B%22_format%22%3A%22html%22%2C%22_locale%22%3A%22en%22%2C%22filter_text%22%3A%22Leonardo+sepia%22%2C%22filter_group%22%3A%22all%22%7D%7D accessed 12/10/15

In this sepia and wash by Leonardo we see a grotesque image of an old man with distorted and exaggerated features. Leonardo records facial variation to scrutinise features and medical abnormality forensically. The same activity Currin engages in but for exploring stereotypes or making social commentary.



25a Hag, 2006
Charcoal on paper
22 1/2 x 17 1/2 in. (57.8 x 44.3 cm)
Private Collection



Rachel's "The Hag", 2006
Charcoal and white chalk on
preparatory paper
22 x 16 in. (55.9 x 40.6 cm)
Private Collection

Viewed in http://media.aphelis.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/CURRIN_2006_Thanksgiving_related_material_B.jpg accessed 15/10/15

The studies for "Thanksgiving" are equal technically (is this important?) to that of Leonardo. He explores facial distortion to create a hag from the features of his wife, Rachel Feinstein.



<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/currin-thanksgiving-l02546> accessed 19/12/15

The figures form a triangle. There is a sight line from the seated hag that connects to the turkey encouraging the viewer to scan in a circular figure. There are references to Van Eyck in the chandelier and the mirror; and dutch floral masters. The withered and fresh flowers comment on the youth and beauty compared with the hag. The spoon offered to the open mouth is empty perhaps alluding to the hollow observation in the American Thanksgiving. This is good. You're beginning to assess his work in the same way as you might assess a Van Eyck.

The technical excellence of the painting rendering flesh and surfaces shows Currin a match to the Masters he appropriates. This is important. I don't think his technique is as good as you do, but what matters here is that he ASPIRES to that model. Watteau is a lot more subtle and refined, and Currin doesn't come close to Rembrandt or Caravaggio (in my opinion). Don't make subjective comments as if they are facts.

Watteau and Fragonard



Viewed in https://www.bridgemaneducation.com/en/search?filter_text=watteau+nude&filter_group=all accessed 15/10/15

Fragonard (1732-1806)

The Chemise Removed



Viewed in <https://www.bridgemaneducation.com/en/asset/89788/> accessed 15/10/15

Watteau is more modest than Fragonard. His is the elegantly society of Fêtes villageoise, Fêtes gallantes. For Watteau the passive female is only viewed even when the narrative intention is a prelude to intercourse. It is clear that voyeurism of a woman at her toilet is a fitting subject for art as long as it is dressed in classical literature or the romanticism of arcadia.

Fragonard brings us into the boudoir and furnishes the intimacy with swathes of fabric folds, sheets, curtains and chemises. The figure is being interacted with. For Fragonard there is no requirement to legitimise the nudity as in *Young Girl with puppies*. The questionably young female is inexplicably bare-breasted. Themes of abduction, manslaughter and rape are acceptable subject for art so long as it is mediated by soft focus, pastel colours and vapid and luxurious brush strokes.

The use of multiple figures makes for compositional interest and the floating form of gods and goddesses of classical mythology allows forms to intertwine without straining belief within the parameters of their supernatural powers.

The Maenads, 2015



Viewed in <https://www.gagosian.com/artists/john-currin/selected-works> accessed 15/10/15

The title, *Maenads*, refers to the wild followers of the cult of Bacchus. The apples hint at ripeness and fecundity, the roundness of the breasts and belly of the main subject; but I am pushed to infer alcohol. It is easier to make a connection with the uppermost figure, apparently floating on a sea of silken sheets with the image of a classical cupid. The sheets and flowery curtains segue between Fragonard's boudoirs and Watteau's arcadia. The diaphanous chemise and fabric fold protect modesty, but appear self-conscious allusions and appropriations from late 18th early 19th Century models. What makes this more contemporary is the acknowledgement of the voyeur in the returned gaze.

Boucher

Leda and the swan



Viewed in <http://pagineazzurre.forumcommunity.net/?t=50775944> accessed

Boucher is being explicit in this recumbent nude. The figure is presented with a clear view of the genitals. Additionally, the swan's neck is used as a compositional device to direct the viewer's gaze. To our post-modern minds, the phallic symbolism is apparent. I think the intention was always for this to be a phallus. It doesn't take postmodernism to see it. Freud was a modern and he'd have certainly seen it. Even today this has the power to shock. The image has all the finesse and refinement we expect but we learn that implied intercourse with animals is an acceptable subject for art. I disagree. What's acceptable is the representation of mythic stories, some of which have this as subject matter.

Limoges, 2008



Viewed in <http://www.sadiecoles.com/artists/currin#jc-john-currin-2008> accessed 15/10/15

So it is equally surprising that Currin is castigated for presenting images culled from Danish porn reworked as fine art with all the technical aplomb of the Renaissance. This should not be so shocking when rape, voyeurism, manslaughter, and bestiality sit so comfortably within the canon of art history. But they are rooted in mythology not the exploitative sex industry. There is a difference and people can read that. Perhaps it is Currin's conscious appropriation from the high Renaissance that makes us reassess how we review that heritage and challenge assumptions from our post-modern vantage point. This is better. Currin is exploiting a tension that exists between style and subject matter. He's asking the questions that you are (why are we offended? isn't this the same as a Boucher?, etc.).

Conclusion



Viewed in <http://lustloveart.tumblr.com/post/22943055275/john-currin-the-women-of-franklin-street> accessed 19/12/15

The Woman of Franklin Street, 2003 is a complex composition with multiple intertwining figures arranged as a central pyramid. Fabric folds, skin tones, marble, ceramics and tiling are all beautifully rendered displaying the artist's technical skill and paint handling. Genre, figurative and still life are represented in the image. The bubble hints at a vanitas. Earthly pleasures will not last. This is not conclusion material. It's more evidence and ought to be included in the previous section.

Certainly, Currin's art has developed from single portraits on a blank or modulated background, to complex arrangements of figures in believable space furnished with all manner of surfaces rendered realistically. By appropriating themes, Currin has made it evident that he thinks he deserves his place alongside the Old Masters. Is this arrogance to make this assertion? Don't ask rhetorical questions, especially in a conclusion. Tell us your conclusion.

Perhaps in the course of time popular opinion will assert whether his work merits recognition for Old Master status; but, despite the humorous and flippant elements in his work, he is a serious contender.

Cover girls with Botticelli



Viewed in https://www.bridgemaneducation.com/en/asset/1109605/summary?context=%7B%22route%22%3A%22assets_search%22%2C%22routeParameters%22%3A%7B%22_format%22%3A%22html%22%2C%22_locale%22%3A%22en%22%2C%22filter_text%22%3A%22Botticelli+nude%22%2C%22filter_group%22%3A%22all%22%7D%7D accessed 12/10/15

List of Images

1. Currin, J. (1999) 'The Pink Tree'. [oil on canvass] Painting Today. s.l.: Phaidon Press.p.179
2. Currin, J. (1999) "The Pink Tree"
3. Currin
4. Currin
5. Currin
6. Currin
7. Currin
8. Currin
9. Currin
10. Currin
11. Currin
12. Currin
13. Currin
14. Currin
15. Currin

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Footnotes

- 1.According to Laura Hoptman Currin has claimed that all of his works are self portraits. She cites Seward, K. (1995) "John Currin: The Weirdest of the Weird". *Flash Art* No.185, Nov-Dec