

ART IN FOCUS

John Goto's High Summer





Art in Focus: John Goto's High Summer

In his series *High Summer* (2000–2001), a portfolio of fifteen digital prints, the photographer John Goto (born 1949) creates composite scenes in which contemporary figures disrupt the landscape gardens of eighteenth-century British country estates. These intrusive arrangements of people complicate the carefully contrived gardens with their seemingly natural plantings and emblematic classical buildings. Goto's integration of contemporary characters into historic landscape gardens encourages the viewer to think critically about nature and culture both past and present, and the politics of these gardens then and now.

This student-curated exhibition explores the historical sites that Goto references in his photographs. Drawing on eighteenth-century views of the gardens at Stowe in Buckinghamshire and Stourhead in Wiltshire from the Center's collection, Goto's work is contextualized to highlight the ways in which these picturesque landscapes have been created, adapted, and represented over time to serve particular and sometimes competing ideologies.

Art in Focus is an annual initiative for members of the Center's Student Guide Program, providing Yale undergraduates with curatorial experience and an introduction to all aspects of exhibition practice. The student guide curators for this exhibition have been Kelly Fu, DC '19; Matthew Klineman, BK '19; Jordan Schmolka, SM '20; and Jackson Willis, BK '19. In researching and presenting the exhibition, the students have been led by Linda Friedlaender, Senior Curator of Education and Jennifer Reynolds-Kaye, Curator of Education and Academic Outreach; with curatorial oversight from Courtney Skipton Long, Postdoctoral Research Associate in Art Collections.

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The English Landscape Garden

The structured geometry, precisely trimmed topiary, and symmetrical avenues of formal French gardens influenced seventeenth-century English landscape designs. However, the next century brought a revolution in garden construction at country houses like Stowe and Stourhead, as French rigor, associated with absolute monarchy, was supplanted by a new, informal style of English landscape garden. By taming nature, a series of eighteenth-century landscape architects—notably, Charles Bridgeman (1690–1738), William Kent (ca. 1685–1748), and Lancelot “Capability” Brown (1716–1783)—pioneered this informal style closely aligned with the development of a parliamentary democracy in Britain. Inspired by ideals of liberty and limited government espoused by the political philosopher John Locke (1632–1704), architects and landowners cultivated a garden aesthetic emphasizing freedom in the landscape.

Serpentine walkways swept along manicured lakesides, and light and shadow were manipulated through the careful arrangement of hills and wooded areas—creating an illusion of naturalness. Hidden border walls formed like trenches, called “ha-ha’s,” were designed to protect the grounds without obstructing its vistas, offering a sense of freedom while obscuring methods of containment. These gardens were also strongly influenced by ideas of classical antiquity gathered on the popular Grand Tour of Italy and the Continent. The ancient literature of Virgil and the works of the seventeenth-century French landscape painters Nicolas Poussin (1594–1665) and Claude Lorrain (1604/5–1682), depicting the Roman countryside, each shaped the development of gardens with allegorical temples like those found at Stowe and Stourhead, which became emblems of British liberty and power.

Jacques Rigaud, *Stowe Gardens in Buckinghamshire, Belonging to the Right Honourable the Lord Viscount Cobham: Laid out by Mr. Bridgman, principal gardener to their majesties King George I and II / delineated in a large plan and fifteen perspective views: drawn on the spot by Mons. Rigaud, and engraved by him and Mons. Bernard Baron* London: Printed for Tho. Bowles in St. Paul’s Church-Yard, W. H. Toms, in Union-Court, Hlbourn, and J. Bowles, in Cornhill, 1746 [Plate 6, “View of the House from the Equestrian Statue” (detail), Rigaud & Baron after Rigaud], Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection



Stowe and Stourhead

The gardens of Stowe and Stourhead were monuments to the political and aesthetic ambitions of great landowners—the Whig Richard Temple (1675–1749), first Viscount Cobham at Stowe, and the Tory Henry Hoare II (1705–1785) at Stourhead—who used their properties to critique the perceived corruption of the age, especially the systematic venality introduced into public life by Robert Walpole, Britain’s first Prime Minister. Shaping both productive and fallow land into carefully constructed, picturesque landscape gardens, created ideal environments where all members of society—from landowner to laborer—could perceive their place in an apparently harmonious, divinely ordered world. Improved road and carriage technology meant that a growing number of Britain’s elite could navigate these landscapes, walk their serpentine pathways, and experience the curated Arcadian vistas with their erudite Classical monuments and rare seasonal plantings.

Gardens such as these drew increased attention as country house visiting became fashionable among the growing middle classes in Georgian Britain. Audiences flocked to visit country houses, transforming the gardens into centers for polite tourism. In 1743, the Stowe estate, for instance, became one of the first country houses to offer a guidebook to its visitors. Subtly advertising the estate’s wealth and power with Latin terms and English transcriptions, information about the expansive gardens and their monuments referencing those of classical Rome could be gleaned from these publications for a small fee. Later, guidebooks, such as the 1823 guide to the “picturesque views of noblemen’s & gentlemen’s seats” (on display), demonstrated the continued allure of the English landscape garden in the Regency period. Fantasies such as these provided John Goto with the visual language to explore, and complicate, notions of the landscape, its social structures, and its histories.

top right: Robert Streatfeild, *Stowe House, Buckingham*, 1797, watercolor on paper, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection

lower right: After Francis Nicholson, 1753–1844, *Stourhead, Wiltshire*, undated, watercolor over graphite on paper, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection



Movie and Farmer

In *Movie and Farmer*, Goto reminds us that the English landscape has always been more than an aesthetic object and a vessel for picturesque ideals. Instead, Goto modifies the quintessential British garden to reveal the artificiality of the environment, as well as the class hierarchies that haunt the rural landscape. In *Movie*, Goto exposes the modern trend of staging films in these picturesque country gardens, thereby emphasizing the continued financial benefit of such landscapes for estate owners. The small thatched cottage feels even more like a temporary stageset when compared with the grand neoclassical building set atop of the hill. The staging of the actors in their period costumes within a starkly hierarchical landscape resonates with theatrical scenes like those by the eighteenth-century satirist William Hogarth (1697–1764), in *The Beggar's Opera*, depicted in a print by William Blake (1757–1827) mounted nearby. Goto was strongly inspired by Hogarth, and similarities can be found between his subject matter and ambiguous settings and those of the eighteenth-century satirist.

The modern film crew's conception of a charmed rural life emerges from a long British tradition of romanticizing farmers in art. For example, *Haymakers in a Field*, by George Robert Lewis (1782–1871), features tillers whose raised arms seem to transform backbreaking farm labor into a lyrical dance. In *Farmer*, Goto offers a brutally honest view of the modern laborer's plight. Juxtaposed with the green pastures in *Movie*, Goto's *Farmer* features a dull, infertile landscape. The barrenness of the land echoes the farmer's lifeless body hanging from the tree and implies that a failed harvest is the cause of his death. In *Farmer*, the smashed classical column ominously signals the demise of an ancient agrarian British ideal.



John Goto, *Movie* (top) and *Farmer* (lower) (*High Summer* portfolio), 2000–2001, giclée print on Somerset archival paper, Yale Center for British Art, Friends of British Art Fund, Courtesy of the artist and Dominique Fiat, Paris, © John Goto, photo by Richard Caspale

Society and Brigands

The violent muggers in *Brigands* are not as far removed from the representation of the upper class in *Society* as one might initially suspect. Goto invites the viewer to contemplate the delicate balance between notions of the “high” and the “low,” not just within the constructed landscape of his photographs but in the very structure of British society as well. In his series *High Summer*, Goto plays with what he calls “ironic contrasts,” where he juxtaposes ideas of “high” and “low” in unexpected ways. The fumbling of folding chairs in the foreground of Goto’s *Society* is a moment of humorous spontaneity that ruptures the sense of familial duty and civic virtue that seems to emanate from the classical architecture in the background. Isaac Cruikshank (1756–1810) depicts a similar parade of decadence in his etching *A Flight Across the Herring Pool* (1800)—where well-heeled men who clamor for titles and recognition are instead humiliated in the “imperial Pouch.” Both scenes depict an upper class focused more on parading vanity than on serving the nation. Scenes like these also seem to respond ironically to images like those in *The Queen or Domestic Education at Windsor*, by James Barry (1741–1806), where well-dressed figures diligently discuss Enlightenment ideas and pore over schematics for securing their nation’s cultural and commercial prosperity. Where Barry’s nobility is engaged in public service through the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts (founded 1754), Goto’s upper class seems preoccupied by expensive hats.

Goto’s contrasts between “high” and “low” ultimately seem more ominous than Cruikshank’s, however, as he sets a menacing sky and circling birds as the backdrop for *Brigands*. This image does not convey the light-hearted ironic contrast between virtue and vanity that is present in *Society*. Instead, *Brigands* represents the violent explosion of a delicate balance coming undone. Just as nature, when left unchecked, will quickly return to an untamed state and overrun man-made structures—as the undergrowth has forcefully overtaken the grotto in Goto’s *Brigands*—so too will base human impulses, when left unchecked, quickly engulf civic ideals.



John Goto, *Society* (top) and *Brigand* (*High Summer* portfolio), 2000–2001, giclée print on Somerset archival paper, Yale Center for British Art, Friends of British Art Fund, Courtesy of the artist and Dominique Fiat, Paris, © John Goto, photo by Richard Caspole

High Ground and Plinth

In *High Ground and Plinth*, Goto complicates the historic use of classical temples, statuary, and other monuments to ornament British garden landscapes. *High Ground* depicts a group of British soldiers and displaced civilians taking refuge on a mossy plain before Stowe's "Temple of Friendship." In the distance, plumes of smoke rise from detonated bombs dropped by aircraft flying overhead. The photograph recalls Goto's own memory of observing distant scenes from the Kosovo War on television and learning about the contested history of conflict on the familiar British landscape while at school. Goto's digitally manipulated "Temple of Friendship" magnifies the tensions of war as its inscription "AMICITIAE S" (sacred to friendship) has been wiped from its facade, suggesting that the memory of friendship does not last once the bonds of trust have been broken.

Goto's *Plinth* captures the reverberations of imperial conquest and the glories of British power embedded in English landscape designs. At Stowe, monuments celebrating British heroes can be found dotting the serpentine walkways and ornamenting remote corners of the garden. Goto's draped statue stands waiting to be exposed atop a sturdy base bearing the inscription "Et in Arcadia Ego" (meaning 'Even in Utopia there is Death'). Alluding to an notions of harmonious and pastoral landscapes, Goto's inscription on the statue's base refers to his interest in ironic contrasts between Classical and contemporary themes, and between the shroud-like cover of the lifeless statue and the lively interaction of figures coming to celebrate the monument's unveiling. Goto's *High Ground and Plinth*, like the garden temples and statuary found at Stowe, serve as testaments to human greatness but also as symbols of human insignificance, as all monuments decay and return to nature.



John Goto, *High Ground* (top) and *Plinth* (*High Summer* portfolio), 2000–2001, giclée print on Somerset archival paper, Yale Center for British Art, Friends of British Art Fund, Courtesy of the artist and Dominique Fiat, Paris, © John Goto, photo by Richard Caspale

Eco-Warriors and Pasturelands

In *Eco-Warriors*, Goto interrogates the bucolic rural landscape of Stourhead by disrupting the classical idyll with a swarm of environmental protesters populating the landscape like aliens as a helicopter hovers overhead. These “eco-warrior” activists sabotage a test site for genetically modified crops. Suggesting a modern-day battle for control over nature, their presence renders the idealized nature of their historical setting absurd. Beneath looming gray clouds and suffused with eerie yellow light, Goto’s supposed representation of a serene landscape quickly becomes apocalyptic.

In *Pasturelands*, Goto takes aim at a different form of present-day landscape engineering—the twentieth-century proliferation of wildlife parks in the English countryside. Below cascading waterfalls and rose-colored skies, a menagerie of animals roam in another idealized garden setting. Goto assembles creatures representing both “high class” and “low class”: an exotic peacock struts among the ranks of ordinary goats, a rabbit, and some deer. Referencing paintings of exotic bird and game species, like Marmaduke Cradock’s (1660–1716), *Peacocks, Doves, Turkeys, Chickens and Ducks by a Classical Ruin* (ca. 1700), Goto creates a scene similar to those found in eighteenth-century country houses that served as reminders of Britain’s imperial power. Estate owners, like those at Stowe and Stourhead, existed within a human ecosystem ranging from the laboring poor to the landed aristocrats. Goto creates a parody of this hierarchy by degrading their estate to the realm of the animal world, mocking the beastly ferocity with which humans have tamed the countryside to procure power. In creating absurd juxtapositions of high and low, past and present, and wild and tame, Goto challenges what is considered natural in the English landscape.



John Goto, *Eco-Warriors* (top) and *Pasturelands* (*High Summer* portfolio), 2000–2001, giclée print on Somerset archival paper, Yale Center for British Art, Friends of British Art Fund, Courtesy of the artist and Dominique Fiat, Paris, © John Goto, photo by Richard Caspole

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

John Goto, born 1949

Works from *High Summer* portfolio
2000–2001, giclée print on Somerset
archival paper

Eco Warriors

Friends of British Art Fund, B2002.17.1

Hunters

Friends of British Art Fund, B2002.17.2

Dancer

Friends of British Art Fund, B2002.17.3

Movie

Friends of British Art Fund, B2002.17.4

Society

Friends of British Art Fund, B2002.17.6

Beach

Friends of British Art Fund, B2002.17.7

Deluge

Friends of British Art Fund, B2002.17.8

Plinth

Friends of British Art Fund, B2002.17.9

Brigands

Friends of British Art Fund, B2002.17.11

Pasturelands

Friends of British Art Fund, B2002.17.12

High Ground

Friends of British Art Fund, B2002.17.13

Farmer

Friends of British Art Fund, B2002.17.14

Coplestone Warre Bampfylde, 1719–1791

In the Gardens at Stourhead, after 1772,
black and white chalk, and graphite,
on paper
Paul Mellon Collection, B1975.4.1000

James Barry, 1741–1806

The Queen or Domestic Education at Windsor
(*Designs for the Walls of the Great Room of*
the Society for the Encouragement of the
Arts), after 1783, engraving
Paul Mellon Collection, B1977.14.11049

George Bickham the Younger, ca. 1704–1771

Beauties of Stow, or, A Description of the Most
Noble House, Gardens & Magnificent Buildings
therein, of the Right Honorable Earl Temple,
Viscount & Baron Cobham . . .
London: Sold by G. Bickham, 1753. [page 31,
“Grotto”], Paul Mellon Collection

George Bickham the Younger, ca. 1704–1771, after Jean B. C. Chatelain, 1710–1771

A View from Cap’t Grenvilles Monument to
the Grecian Temple in the Gardens of Earl
Temple at Stow, in Buckinghamshire, undated,
hand-colored engraving on paper
Paul Mellon Collection, B1995.13.160

A View in the Elysian Fields, from the Spring of
Helicon in the Gardens of Earl Temple at Stow,
in Buckinghamshire, undated, hand-colored
engraving on wove paper
Paul Mellon Collection, B1995.13.161

A View of the Grotto & Two Shell Temples
in the Gardens of Earl Temple at Stow, in
Buckinghamshire, undated, hand-colored
engraving on paper
Paul Mellon Collection, B1995.13.171

A View to the Grotto of the Serpentine River in
the Alder Grove in the Gardens of Earl Temple
at Stow, in Buckinghamshire, undated, hand-
colored engraving on wove paper
Paul Mellon Collection, B1995.13.172

A View of the House from the Equestrian
Statue in the Park of the Earl Temple at Stow,
in Buckinghamshire, undated, hand-colored
engraving on wove paper
Paul Mellon Collection, B1995.13.174

William Blake, 1757–1827,

after William Hogarth, 1697–1764
Beggar’s Opera, Act III, ca. 1790, engraving
Paul Mellon Collection, B1978.43.911

Jean B. C. Chatelain, 1710–1771

A View of the Rotunda in the Garden at
Stowe, Buckinghamshire, 1753, watercolor and
graphite on paper
Paul Mellon Collection, B1975.4.1058

The Grotto and the Temple of Contemplation,

Stowe, 1752, watercolor, graphite, brown and
gray wash, and pen and brown ink on paper
Paul Mellon Collection, B1975.4.1059

Marmaduke Cradock, 1660–1716

Peacocks, Doves, Turkeys, Chickens and Ducks
by a Classical Ruin, ca. 1700, oil on canvas
Paul Mellon Collection, B1981.25.169

George Cruikshank, 1792–1878, published by Thomas McLean, 1788–1875

Monstrosities of 1822—Pt. 5, 1835, hand-
colored etching on paper
Paul Mellon Collection, B1977.14.9707

Isaac Cruikshank, 1756–1810

A Flight Across the Herring Pool, 1800, hand-
colored etching
Paul Mellon Collection, B1981.25.1131

Rev. William Gilpin, 1724–1804

Landscape with Classical Building at Left,
between 1745 and 1748, brown and gray
wash over graphite on paper, prepared
with orange wash
Paul Mellon Collection, B1981.25.2039

John Harris the Elder, 1767–1832, after John Abbot, 1751–ca. 1840

Phalaena Quernaria. Quercus Rubra (American
Oak Beauty, Northern Red Oak), Plate 103 from
James Edward Smith, the “Natural History of
the Rarer Lepidopterous Insects of Georgia,”
London, 1797, 1797, engraving with original
hand color on paper
Gift of John D. Viener, Yale AB 1961, B2011.20.5

Robert Havell, 1769–1832

A Series of Picturesque Views of Noblemen’s
& Gentlemen’s Seats, with Historical &
Descriptive Accounts of Each Subject
London: Published by R. Havell, Chapel Strt.
Tottenham Court Road, 1823 [“View of the
Pantheon, & Stourhead Gardens: Wiltshire,”
aquatint by Robert Havell & Son after F.
Nicholson], Paul Mellon Collection

John Frederick Herring, 1795–1865

The Harvest
ca. 1857, oil on canvas
Gift of David, Alex, and Philip Dearborn in
memory of their mother, Pauline Moore
Nickerson, B2008.1

Robert Hills, 1769–1844

An Oak in Englefield Park, undated,
watercolor and graphite on paper
Paul Mellon Collection, B1977.14.5911

Farm Laborers and Other Studies, undated,

watercolor and graphite on paper
Paul Mellon Collection, B1986.29.419

George Robert Lewis, 1782–1871

Haymakers in a Field, undated, watercolor
and graphite with scratching out on paper
Paul Mellon Collection, B1986.29.436

James Malton, 1761–1803

A Military Encampment in Hyde Park
1785, watercolor, pen and black ink, and
graphite on paper
Paul Mellon Collection, B2001.2.999

George Morland, 1763–1804

Peasants in a Grotto, undated, brown and gray
wash with pen and brown ink on paper
Paul Mellon Collection, B1977.14.5083

After Francis Nicholson, 1753–1844

Stourhead, Wiltshire, undated, watercolor
over graphite on paper
Paul Mellon Collection, B1977.14.6229

Willey Reveley, 1760–1799

Views in the Levant: Faceless Bust of Statue
Supporting a Broken Capital on Her Head,
ca. 1785, watercolor with pen in gray ink, over
graphite on paper
Paul Mellon Collection, B1977.14.19433

Jacques Rigaud, 1681–1754

A General Plan of the Woods, Park and Gardens of Stowe, the Seat of the Right Honourable the Lord Viscount Cobham, with several Perspective Views in the Gardens
London: Sarah Bridgeman, 1739, etching
Paul Mellon Collection

Stowe Gardens in Buckinghamshire, Belonging to the Right Honourable the Lord Viscount Cobham: Laid out by Mr. Bridgman, principal gardener to their majesties King George I and II / delineated in a large plan and fifteen perspective views: drawn on the spot by Mons. Rigaud, and engraved by him and Mons. Bernard Baron London: Printed for Tho. Bowles in St. Paul's Church-Yard, W. H. Toms, in Union-Court, Hlbourn, and J. Bowles, in Cornhill, 1746 [Plate 6, "View of the House from the Equestrian Statue," Rigaud & Baron after Rigaud
Paul Mellon Collection

Thomas Sandby, 1721–1798

An Encampment in Flanders, ca. 1747, watercolor, black ink, and graphite on paper
Paul Mellon Collection, B1975.4.718

Encampment at Maestricht, 1747, pen and black ink, graphite, and gray wash on paper
Paul Mellon Collection, B2001.2.1177

William Simpson, 1823–1899

The Shah Nujeef, 1861, watercolor with gouache and graphite on paper
Paul Mellon Collection, B1975.3.262

Robert Streatfeild, 1786–1852

Stowe House, Buckingham, 1797, watercolor on paper
Paul Mellon Collection, B1975.2.23

James Ward, 1769–1859

Landscape with Deer under "The Beggar's Oak," Dagot's Park...
between 1820 and 1830, oil on panel
Paul Mellon Collection, B2014.5.7

John Wootton, 1682–1764

Preparing for the Hunt
ca. 1745, oil on canvas
Paul Mellon Collection, B1981.25.704

Stowe: A Description of the Magnificent House and Gardens of the Right Honourable Richard Grenville Temple, Earl Temple: Viscount and Baron Cobham: One of His Majesty's Most Honourable Privy Council, and Knight of the Most Noble Order of the Garter...
London: Printed for John Rivington, in St. Paul's Church-yard; B. Seeley in Buckingham; and T. Hodgkinson at the New Inn at Stowe, 1766
["A description of the gardens with neoclassical arch print" on facing page]
Gift of Paul F. Walter

Stowe: A Description of the House and Gardens of the Most Noble and Puissant Prince, George Grenville Nugent Temple, Marquis of Buckingham, Earl Temple, Viscount and Baron Cobham. Buckingham: Printed and Sold by B. Seeley, 1788 [page 23, Plate VI, G. L. Smith after B. Seeley]
Gift of Paul F. Walter

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cover:
John Goto, *Dancer* (detail) (*High Summer* portfolio), 2000–2001, giclée print on Somerset archival paper, Yale Center for British Art, Friends of British Art Fund, Courtesy of the artist and Dominique Fiat, Paris, © John Goto, photo by Richard Caspole

right, and inside front cover:
George Bickham the Younger, ca. 1704–1771, after Jean B. C. Chatelain, 1710–1771, *A View of the Grotto & Two Shell Temples in the Gardens of Earl Temple at Stow, in Buckinghamshire* (detail), undated, hand-colored engraving on paper, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection



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