“All Surface and No Soul”

John Singer Sargent’s Portraits of Modern Mannequins

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Appello, non ad Caesarem, sed ad Caesaris uxorem
"Appeal not to Caesar, but to Caesar's wife"
Oscar Wilde, *The Philosophy of Dress,* 1885

Introduction

When John Singer Sargent (1856-1925) entered the Paris atelier of Carolus-Duran at the age of just eighteen, he began a society portrait career that spanned three countries and nearly three decades. From his first to his last portrait, Sargent captivated 19th and 20th century audiences with his characteristic painterly brushwork and keen ability to capture likenesses. In the popular discussion of Sargent's works, particularly his portraits of women, fashionable costume was a prominent focal point of contemporary critics either loving, or loathing, the artist's approach to capturing modernity. And yet, only a few scholars have undergone analysis of Sargent's particular interest in contemporary fashions. One of which is Anna Reynolds' 2019 essay in the Metropolitan Museum Journal, which interprets Sargent's dedication to the wardrobe of his female sitters as an attempt at capturing the 'eternal' quality of historical grand manner portraiture while still exhibiting modern fashions.[1] That this essay features among only a few dedicated analyses of the artist's involvement in women's dress is surprising given the characteristics of his portraits. To look at a Sargent portrait is to be immersed in a visually tactile experience, with fabrics of every texture, vibrant patterns, and lavish settings. While Sargent no doubt painted

[1] Anna Reynolds, "John Singer Sargent Painting Fashion." *Metropolitan Museum Journal* January 2019.

likenesses that impressed his sitters, and those who knew them, some of his sitters are represented with a rigidity that resists this tactility, leaving the dress to dominate the viewer's attention.

Sargent studied the portraitists of the past as diligently as he had his teacher Duran's work. Sketching after master portraitists like Velazquez, Van Dyck and Reynolds, Sargent often combined the posing, coloring and compositional plans from masterworks with his characteristic loose painting style.[2] Sargent's painting after contemporary fashion was a signifier of the artist's modernity and a departure from the traditional academic portraiture he studied. In Joshua Reynolds' seventh *Discourse* in 1776, he believes that the proper portraitist should, "...not paint her [the sitter] in the modern dress, the familiarity of which alone is sufficient to destroy all dignity," but instead he should dress the, "... figure in something with the general air of the antique for the sake of dignity, and preserves something of the modern for the sake of likeness".[3] This belief, that portraits required historicized drapery to stand the test of time, had become rather old fashioned by the end of the century as the influence of Romanticism, as well as the emerging realist and impressionist movements challenged academic tradition. Sargent's own divergence from the historicized portrait is likely to have started as early as his apprenticeship with Duran, as the master was often scolded by critics for his explicitly modern sitters. The popular French art critic, Jules-Antoine Castagnary wrote that Duran's *Lady with a Glove* was, "...an entirely exterior portrait, a surface likeness of a woman's attire or rather an elegant pose".[4]

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[2] See Bruce Redford, *John Singer Sargent and the Art of Allusion*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016.

[3]Joshua Reynolds, *Sir Joshua Reynolds' Discourses* (London: W. Scott, 1887), 138.

[4] Jules-Antoine Castagnary, *Salons (1857-1870) Vol. 1,* (Paris: Bibliotheque-Charpentier et E. Fasquelle, editeurs, 1892),364. This translation was found in Marc Simpson, *Uncanny Spectacle*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press) 15.

The harsh reviewer sees a superficiality in her contemporary representation. Ironically, Castagnary is among the earliest supporters of the Impressionists, who were also dedicated to capturing contemporary fashions.[5] The Impressionists likely furthered Sargent's interest in contemporary fashion during his Paris years. In the *Painter of Modern Life,* an ode to the author's love of the growing art movement, Baudelaire saw in fashion of his day a uniquely urban beauty. He encourages the artist to, "distill the eternal from the transitory ".[6] So to capture the transitioning fashions of the day was to discover the eternal within the modern, the foundation of which Reynold's builds her argument. Sargent's interest in modern fashion was repeated throughout letters to sitters and friends revealing his interesting and often tedious studio habits. He is known to have often personally selected the dresses of his female patrons and to have collected large assortments of fabrics, tapestries and dresses. A visitor of the artist even noted that Sargent had, "a chest in his studio where he had silks and stuffs" for use during sittings.[7] While discussion of his interest in women's fashion has certainly not been exhausted, Reynolds' essay provided essential information on this topic that served as a starting point for my analysis of the representation and role of the dressed bodies themselves.

This paper analyzes some of the artist's most interesting portraits of women, which establish Sargent as a participant within a uniquely turn-of-the-century visual vocabulary and how that participation created a successful portrait career within a growing culture of consumption. His sitters maintain a nervous rigidity throughout his

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[5] See Gloria Groom, Heidi Brevik-Zender, *Impressionism, Fashion, & Modernity,* (New York: Art Institute of Chicago, 2012)
[6] Charles Baudelaire, *Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays,* (Phaidon Press,1995), 402.
[7] Qtd in Richard Ormond, Elaine Kilmurray, *John Singer Sargent: The Later Portraits*, *vol. 2* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003),171.

oeuvre, a quality noted by Sargent's contemporaries and modern scholars alike. I aim to contextualize this curious aspect of Sargent's portraits with the anomalous turn-of-the-century interest in mannequins. From the mid-century emergence of modern department stores to the boom in both ready-made and couture fashion, the mannequin in its many variants, became a common motif in goods displays throughout Paris, London and New York. But fashion was not the only industry experiencing what Jane Munro refers to as an 'outing' of the mannequin during the nineteenth-century.[8] Artist's (Sargent included) were also revealing their long time manipulatable assistants in portraits and studio scenes.Through analyzing Sargent's studio practices, writings of critics, sitters and friends, as well as contemporary interest in mannequins, I will demonstrate the visual and commercial similarities between his portraits of women and modern mannequins.

To begin, the simplest point of comparison between Sargent's very real sitters and their dummy counterparts is that of the artist's tedious studio practice. Sargent found that women's portraits often required more sittings than men's, asking for at least ten sittings to get the likeness right.[9] During these sittings, Sargent was known to assert almost total control over the wardrobe of his sitters, requesting that they bring as many dresses as possible so that he could analyze them under the studio's lighting conditions. Lady Leonora Speyer, whose portrait required over twenty-five sittings, brought crates of her costliest gowns to Sargent and spent the day changing in and out of them, only for the artist to be displeased with them all and her attendant sent home to fetch more. The final choice was not a gown at all but a white gold brocaded

[8] Jane Munro, *Silent Partners: Artist and Mannequin from Function to Fetish*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), IX.
[9] Lance Mayer, *American Painters on Technique*, (J.Paul Getty Museum, 2013), 180.

slip that he admired for its elegance and simplicity.[10] A similar story is recorded by Peter Widener, the son of Mrs. Joseph Widener who commissioned a portrait from the artist in 1903. Widener remembers Sargent's 'moodiness' as he sorted through his mother's finest gowns only to land on a torn dress of blue velvet which had only been kept to be recycled into cushions. Sargent further ripped the lace embellishments and pinned loose ends together, "...as if he were a Paris couturier about to dress a mannikin [sic] for an opening".[11] I. N. Phelps Stokes also remembered his wife's treatment "like a manniken" during sittings for their double portrait by Sargent.[12] This request to model dresses for portraits had an early start in the artist's career as one of his most famous sitters remembered a similar practice for her portrait: *Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth* (Figure 1).

Completed in 1889, the full-length portrait shows the British actress in the role of Lady Macbeth, as she stands alone before a soft navy background. At a slight diagonal to the viewer with her arms raised, she is seen only moments from placing the crown of the dead Duncan atop her head. Her pale blue eyes stare out in a combination of joy and shock while her jaw remains stiff, capturing beautifully the expression of a woman who has just aided and abetted a murder for the sake of power. With only the arms and face exposed, the other two-thirds of the canvas is reserved to capturing Terry's costume. Rich with interesting textures, the dress dazzles with greens, blues and golds, a true playground for Sargent's Impressionist style/technique. The dress was designed by the aesthete Alice Comyns Carr who

[10] Charles Merril Mount, *John Singer Sargent: A Biography,* (New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1969), 265.
[11] Peter A.B. Widener, *Without Drums,* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1940), 67-68.
[12] Isaac Newton Phelps Stokes, *Random Recollections of a Happy Life*, Revised Ed. (New York:1941), 116.

used blue tinsel layered atop green silk and hand embroidered with the iridescent wings of hundreds of beetles. The wings refract light in a way that mimics chain armor and serpent skin, an ambiguity likely intentional for the character.[13] The shimmering of the dress gave it a magical quality, shocking audiences with its innovative material and aesthetic design. The dress has been fully reconstructed as of 2011 and is considered to be one of the most famous costumes in the history of the stage.[14]

It was the movement of the dress which best demonstrated its unique shimmer and caught Sargent's attention when he attended the debut of Irving's *Macbeth* at the Lyceum theatre the evening of December 27, 1888. Writing to his friend, Isabella Stewart Gardner, Sargent remembered the evening fondly,

> Miss Terry has just come out in Lady Macbeth and looks magnificent in it...but she still has not made up her mind to let me paint her in one of the dresses until she is quite convinced that she is a success. From a pictorial point of view there can be no doubt about it- magenta hair![15]

It is of note here to point out that the artist did not comment on Terry's physical attractiveness. He does not claim that Ellen Terry simply looks magnificent but that she looks magnificent *in it*. Sargent's comments here on the quality of Lady Macbeth's surface attributes like her wig and her dress rather than Terry's character, demonstrate an interest in not just women's fashion but the quality of surfaces overall.

After some time of consistent requests from Sargent for Terry to sit for him, she agreed. The initial oil sketches from Terry's early sittings suggest that Sargent is attempting to recreate the moment that caught his attention on stage– the arrival of

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[13] Ormond and Kilmurray, *Early Portraits,* 305
[14] Sandra Richards, *The Rise of the English Actress*. (New York: St.Martin's Press, 1993), 132
[15] John Singer Sargent to Isabella Stewart Gardner, 1 January 1889, *Isabella Stewart Gardner Archives*

Lady Macbeth (Figure 2)– and in doing so provide a small visual record of his studio practices.Terry reminisces on this initial state of the portrait in her biography writing,

> Mr. Sargent first of all thought that he would paint me at the moment when Lady Macbeth comes out of the castle to welcome Duncan. He liked the swirl of the dress...He used to make me walk up and down his studio until I nearly dropped in my heavy dress, saying suddenly as I got the swirl:—"That's it, that's it!" and rushing off to his canvas to throw on some paint in his wonderful inimitable fashion![16]

This act of walking back and forth to demonstrate the movement of clothing, which multiple of Sargent's sitters claim made them feel 'like a mannequin', might recall fashion modelling to a 21st-century audience rather than mannequins. To a 19th-century audience, though, the act of modeling in an artist's studio was still commonly associated with the human, and often nude, body.[17] What Terry was doing for Sargent in his studio on Tithe Street was not modeling her body; instead, she was modeling her dress. Modelling clothing as a commercial practice began early in the nineteenth-century and was popularized by the father of haute couture himself: Charles Frederick Worth (1825-1895). Worth was a British national who, after working at department stores and textiles shops around London, moved to Paris where he founded the House of Worth with his wife Marie Vernet. The couple became internationally famous for their innovative marketing style. Marie, in the early stages of the couple's business, began live demonstrations of Worth's designs. She would wear the dresses to the homes of wealthy clients, allowing the patron to see how they moved and laid on different curves of the body. She was considered a 'living mannequin', simply a walking clothes hanger. While this form of display was certainly

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[16] Ellen Terry, *The Story of My Life*, (New York:Doubleday, Page & Co, 1908), 371-372.
[17] Jane Munro, "Flesh and Bloodlessness" in *Silent Partners: Artist and Mannequin from Function to Fetish*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 131.

the origins of the modern runway model, the audiences of the 19th and early 20th-century had not yet experienced the modern distinctions between the mannequin and the model. This difference in definition is made clearer when Yvett Guilbert (1865-1944), the popular French cabaret performer, stated in response to a question concerning her former career as a department store mannequin, that,

> I became a mannequin, not a 'model' in your sense of the word. We look upon mannequin and models as different things. The first means to try on dresses before customers, but a model in France is a girl who shows her figure before everybody, especially sculptors and painters.[18]

Even with this clarification, the definitions around the terms became more complicated in their use by dressmakers. To the 19th-century designer, a model or *modelle*, is the physical dress, but the mannequin is the woman who wears this dress. So, that which is now considered animate, the model, was once the very thing that was not and that which is considered inanimate, the mannequin, was once alive.[19] *Manette Salomon, a* novel by Edmond and Jules De Goncourt of 1867, provides a humorous staging of the artist's encounter with these complicated labels. It contains a notable scene where the character of Coriolis, a training painter, talks to his friend Bazoche about a recent rejection the artist received from a model. The woman was offended at his request to pose in drapery, he exclaims,

> "It was as if I had insulted a queen….'who do you take me for? A mannequin?'....she looked for all the world as if she were saying 'your five francs buys you only my nudity'....I was for her a man who would use the Venus de Milo as a clothes hanger!"[20]

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[18] "Yvette Guilbert Comes", *Chicago Daily*, 8 December 1895.
[19] Caroline Evans, 15.
[20] Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Manette Salomon,* 1867), 269-270.

Though the readers are to find humor in the seemingly absurd reaction of the model, it highlights fantastically the complicated uses of these terms and how the 21st-century has confused their meaning.

Worth was inspired by the *demoiselles de magasin*, or shop girls, of his former employer Gagelin, who demonstrated the movement of shawls and cloaks to their customers. While employed there, Worth was often the announcing salesman and Marie Vernet was his first mannequin.[21] While shop girls could be found at many milliners, it was really the scale and sophistication of mannequins at Worth's that has associated him with this 19th-century display tactic.[22] Described as a "traveling exhibition of her husband's style", Marie differed from other mannequins in that she was not only allowed to wear the dresses outside of Maison Worth but every moment outside of the shop was carefully choreographed. She knew how to wear a dress and was so influential on women that the success of a dress did not depend on the design but rather on how the lady wore it.[23] The 'living mannequin' display was theatrical in inspiration and practice; hence, it is not surprising that dressmakers like Worth worked closely with actresses throughout their careers.

Worth remained an icon in fashionable society throughout Sargent's career, with many of his sitters proudly painted in Worth designs. Another milliner closer to the artist in geography, age and aesthetic philosophy is Lady Duff Gordon(1863-1935) who went professionally by the name Lucile. This London milliner was also deeply involved in designing for the stage and continued Worth's legacy of the 'living mannequin' spectacle. It can be said that Lucile truly twisted the role of the 'living

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[21] Diana de Marly, *Worth: Father of Haute Couture*, (London: Camelot Press Ltd., 1980),23.
[22] Diana de Marly, *Worth: Father of Haute Couture*,103
[23] Ibid, 104.

mannequin' into a more theatrical one than Worth had. Staging 'by appointment' Mannequin parades of women's clothing designs in her "Rose Room" (Figure 3), she encouraged an eroticized stage-like environment, making more and more revealing gowns with suggestive names, revealing her mannequins with a sweep of a curtain and inviting gentlemen to participate in her studio spectacle.[24] Lucile's designs were innovative, taking inspiration from the aesthetic movement that informed Terry's Macbeth costume. The long sweeping drapery, the total dismissal of corsetry and the dresses that hung from the shoulders as opposed to the waist, that we see in Terry's dress, are the defining features of many of Lucile's designs (Figure 4). With her numerous stage connections, it comes as no surprise that the two women knew each other. Terry was in the audience of Lucile's first 'Mannequin Parade' at her new studio in Hanover Square in London (Figure 5).[25] Remembering the day fondly, Lucile records in her memoirs,

> I shall never forget the long-drawn breath of admiration that rippled round the room as the curtains parted slowly and the first of my glorious girls stepped out on to the stage, pausing to show herself a moment before floating gracefully down the room to a burst of applause.[26]

The scene at Lucile's, set to the accompaniment of music, was a highly theatrical performance but instead of reciting lines from the Bard, Lucile's mannequins portrayed the attitudes of clothes. The bodies beneath served only as stages for the dress. This concept of the body as a secondary spectacle to costume can be detected in Sargent's letter regarding Terry's performance when he records that Terry looks 'magnificent *in* it' and gives Gardner no impression of Terry's acting performance that

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[24] Sheila Stowell, "Lucile and the Theatricalization of Fashion." *Staging Fashion 1880-1920*, ed. Michele Majer (New York: Bard Graduate Center, 2012.), 64.
[25] Hugh Brewster, *Gilded Lives, Fatal Voyage: The Titanic's First Class Passengers and Their World*, (New York: Crown Publishers, 2012)
[26] Lady Lucy Duff Gordon, *Discretions and Indiscretions,* (London: Jarrold's Publishers, 1932.), 71.

night. Terry herself focuses on the prominence of the dress over her character when she later reflects in her memoirs that,

> One of Mrs. Nettle's greatest triumphs was my Lady Macbeth dress, which she carried out from Mrs. Comyns Carr's design. I am glad to think it is immortalized in Sargent's pictures.[27]

In her writings on the painting, Terry does not suggest that it immortalizes herself, the role or her acting. Instead she suggests that Sargent immortalized the costume and this immortalization soon competed with the public memory of Terry's performance. She notes that, "Sargent's picture is talked of everywhere and quarrelled about as much as my way of playing the part".[28] Sargent's focus on capturing the dress in all its 'triumph' led him to ask Terry to create in his studio the latest mode of dress display through movement. As she walked back and forth in the artist's studio, Terry became a 'living mannequin' like those of her friend Lucile. Sargent's final composition shows this emphasis on costume over actress as less than a third of the over 7ft tall canvas reveals the body of Terry. Only her pale arms and face appear out of the drapes of blue and green. Even the magenta braids that Sargent refers to in his letter, are not part of Terry's person but rather a large wig designed to compliment the dress. It has been noted as well that the pose Lady Macbeth assumes with arms raised above her head gripping the crown, was imagined by Sargent, having never taken place during Irving's rendition. This leaves Terry and her performance, like the anonymous girls of Maison Lucile, buried beneath the celebrity of a dress. It is this type of mannequin, the living one, that Sargent's patrons record feeling akin to as they pull on dress after

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[27] Ellen Terry, *The Story of My Life*, (New York:Doubleday, Page & Co, 1908), 305.
[28] *Ibid.*

dress. But while Sargent's studio process during Terry's sittings left behind a sketch hopeful of capturing the dress's movement, Sargent's final portraits of women are notably stationary demonstrating that while they may have played the role of a 'living mannequin' within the studio space, their images show the traces of visual influence from a different 'type' of mannequin that blossomed during the nineteenth-century.

In looking at adjectives used to describe many of Sargent's portraits from his lifetime until today, there is a focus on describing the strange quality of his sitters. One of the artist's earliest portraits and his first salon admission, *Fanny Watts* (fig. 6), was described by French art critic Henry Houssaye as, "pleasantly unsettling".[29] Her pose gave the impression of an internal tension that Marc Simpson describes as, "like a coiled spring".[30] In 1884, the same year of the *Madame X* debacle, Sargent's portrait of *Mrs. Henry White* (fig. 7) was described by a writer for the *Athenaeum* as "hard" and, "almost metallic."[31]The critique of rigidness returns in the public reception of one of Sargent's most artificial renderings, *Mrs. Cecil Wade* (fig. 8). The incredibly serious looking 23-year old was one of Sargent's first commissions after moving to London following his loss of French patrons with the unpopular exhibition of Madame Gautreau's portrait. But the new city did not spare Sargent criticism of superficiality, as one critic wrote, "Mr. Sargent's "Portrait of a Lady" [*Mrs. Cecil Wade*] in white satin suggests that her arms and face were made of cardboard".[32] The young woman's pasty complexion, seemingly jointless arms and stiff profile certainly visually do not

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[29] Henry Houssaye, "Le Salon de 1877," *Revue des deux mondes* 21, no.4 (15 June 1877); Marc Simpson, *Uncanny Spectacle: The Public Career of the Young John Singer Sargent,* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), 39.
[30] Simpson, *Uncanny Spectacle,* 39.
[31] Qtd. in William Howe Downes, *John S. Sargent: His Life and Work,* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1925), 135.
[32] "Art Exhibitions," *Illustrated London News* 90, no. 2503 (9 April 1887): 406.

deny the author's pointed jab. Still this does not rank as the harshest reviews of Sargent's women, an honor that belongs to the *New York Times'* comment of 1888 that inspired the title of this essay. The critic claims,

> It is all surface and no soul with most of Mr. Sargent's portraits, and the fault must lie with him, not with his sitters, for it can hardly be that all of them are as flinty and impudent of character as they appear.[33]

This scathing review, as well as the slightly more polite ones provided before it, suggests that there was an acknowledgement by some contemporary critics of a superficial, rigidity and strangeness to Sargent's portrait style.

This quality was not lost on Sargent's closest friends, either. During his sittings for the Vickers family (fig.9), Sargent's childhood friend Vernon Lee wrote to her mother in a tone of concern, admitting, "I fear John is getting rather into the way of painting people too *tense*. They look as if they were in a state of *crispation de nerfs*".[34] It is a statement that scholars like Elizabeth Prettejohn have used as evidence to suggest that Sargent's tense poses were influenced by the belief that hysteria, the nineteenth-century fictive female mental illness, most often affected the upper classes. [35] While certainly a convincing argument, hysteria alone does not explain the adjectives used to describe Sargent's portraits. Wooden, hard, and cardboard in their inanimacy defy the random movement of the stereotypical hysteric. There is indeed a link between Prettejohn's hysteric reading and the superficiality discussed by Sargent's contemporaries.

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[33] Qtd. in Richard Ormond, Elaine Kilmurray, *John Singer Sargent: The Later Portraits*, *vol. 2* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 210.
[34] Vernon Lee to her mother, 25 June 1885, *Vernon Lee's Letters*, 171.
[35] Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Interpreting Sargent,* (New York: Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 1999), 46.

The counterpart to the 'living mannequin', the inanimate dummy, is something the 21st-century audience is much more familiar with. Taking on many forms, the mannequin was an artist's lay-figure, puppet, automaton, doll or wax display figure. Munro, in her extensive history of the mannequin, demonstrates the similarities between the use of hysteric women within science to that of the mannequin. Jean-Martin Charcot, the leading name in hysteria research, performed demonstrations with afflicted patients in the amphitheatre in which he contorted the women's bodies as if he was the master puppeteer and as Munro writes his eyes seemed to "penetrate the patient's flesh ...just as an anatomical wax Venus laid itself bare for demonstrations of dissection."[36] Charcot, as he posed his strangely manipulatable women's bodies for his *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière*, acted as an artist, making the hysteric his mannequin, a comparison that during the latter half of the century became 'commonplace'.[37]

Sargent's sitters describe a 'living mannequin' role in the studio and critical reviews suggest an inanimate mannequinesque quality. To refer back to Terry's portrait, what the viewer sees in the final rendition is truly the opposite of the sketch- the actress standing alone, in a rigid and imagined pose. Instead of highlighting her famous performance, as the early oil sketch had, *Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth* is focused on a famous dress. The sketch had Terry playing the role of the 'living mannequin' but just as the portrait is the opposite of the sketch, it shows Terry as an actual mannequin and the display mannequin type in particular.

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[36] Jane Munro, " 'Hysteriques! Hysteriques! Tous Hysteriques!': Woman Mannequinized" in *Silent Partners: Artist and Mannequin from Function to Fetish*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 116.
[37] Munro, *Silent Partners,* 124.

Much like the terms 'living mannequin' and model, the term mannequin was multifaceted. Dolls, puppets, marionettes, maquettes and anatomical models were popular during the nineteenth century but three types of life-size dummies were in frequent commercial use: the artist's lay figure, the dressmaker's form, and the display mannequin. All of these forms function as stand-ins for the human figure but vary in naturalism and visibility. The most abstract of the three primary types is the dress form, which beginning in the mid-nineteenth century were often plaster-cast from live models or commissioned by women to meet their personal measurements.[38] These forms lacked heads and limbs and were intended for use by dressmakers to mitigate the number of refittings (fig. 10). Alexis Lavigne was a couturier to the Empress Eugenie like Worth, and is credited with using this technique first after showcasing a finished from-life '*buste*' at the Exposition Nationale des Produits de l'Industrie Agricole et Manufacturière in 1849.[39] Lavigne was quick to capitalize on the growing industry surrounding 'ready-made' fashion and produced both personal *bustes* and generalized ones out of Maison Lavigne. The general forms were made from models who 'fit' the ideal of their time and from the mid-nineteenth century on, that ideal seemed to change rapidly.[40] A dress form moulded to the woman's size became a necessary element of a bourgeois Parisian household as it made the process of couture dressmaking easier. The next dummy on the ascending scale of naturalism is the artist's lay figure. These figures tended to vary in scale from miniature to life-size. Unlike their dress-form cousins, they have all parts intact but often lack characteristic

[38] Jane Munro, "Vivified Commodities: Paris and the Development of the Fashion Mannequin" in *Silent Partners: Artist and Mannequin from Function to Fetish*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 168.
[39] Munro, *Silent Partners*, 168.
[40] Ibid.

features like defined faces, hair or personalized dimensions.The lay figure has a rich history in the artist's studio appearing possibly as early as the middle ages, and entering into frequent use during the Renaissance.[41] Its function was to help artists achieve a greater amount of naturalism in their painting or sculpture and they were most frequently used for the sketching of drapery (Figure 11). Sargent was known to purchase his lay-figures from Charles Roberson & Co in London.[42]

The display mannequin's function was, and still largely is, as a hanger for the store's wares.[43] The first choice was the dressmaker's form, whose headless and armless forms were functional but lacked the appendages that could display the store's increasing number of accessories, like hats, gloves, and jewelry.[44] The wax figure, used for anatomical models since the seventeenth century, became the preferred style of mannequin for store displays from the middle of the nineteenth century into the twentieth. Wax created a surprising illusion of human skin, with a soft tactile quality and allowed for mannequins to be articulated into changing poses. Even with the increase in Parisian mannequin production mid-century, these mannequins were considered luxury items, as they were labor intensive to produce, often with real veneers and each human hair sewn in by hand. Sargent's sitters appear visually similar to the 'wax display mannequin type' in their 'intact' body, naturalism, and purpose as object for display.

The comparison of the modern woman and the mannequin is not exclusive to the discussion of Sargent's portraits. The nineteenth-century experienced an intense

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[41] Munro, "Some Artful Instrument: The Mannequin as Tool," in *Silent Partners: Artist and Mannequin from Function to Fetish*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 13.
[42] Munro, 62.
[43] Gayle Strege, "The Store Mannequin: An Evolving Ideal of Beauty," in *Visual Merchandising: The Image of Selling,* ed. Louisa Iarocci (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2013), 95.
[44] Strege, *Visual Merchandising,* 97.

fascination with the human-look alike. Automatons, doppelgangers, doll production and the manufacture of mannequins increased significantly throughout the century. Artist's began incorporating what used to be a 'silent' studio tool into their compositions. Trubner, Ferguson Weir, Boldini and Degas (fig. 12) all have works that stage their 'silent partners' among their living companions.[45] The mannequins with their gender ambiguity, are slumped against walls, draped over female models, and interacting with their artists/manipulators as Weirs' does (fig. 13). Sargent also participated in the exposure of the artist's lay figure in his oil sketch *Mannikin in the Snow* (fig. 14) from around 1891. The odd picture is accompanied by a well-known narrative. Sargent started the sketch while staying with fellow artist and friend, Edwin Austin Abbey. The men set the mannequin outside of their studio window and painted together. In similar circumstances both men painted very different images. Sargent's composition is loose and cold in its use of neutral tones, his figure is simply the lay figure he staged with Abbey, the footprints of the men still visible in the snow beside the wooden form. Abbey's image stages a jolly violinist in rhapsodic performance before the walls of a fictive castle.[46] The aforementioned popular narrative insists that the sketches showcase the men's differences; Sargent is the realist, empirically studying his scene, while Abbey is the visionary full of imagination.[47] It is certainly true that the two demonstrate different styles of the painters, but far to suggest that Sargent was dedicated to exact representation, a misunderstanding that Reynolds does well to clarify. Instead, Sargent demonstrates an interest in surface. He focuses on the drapery of the figure, the interesting shifting of its color, as well as the effect of

[45] Munro, 136.
[46] See for illustration Ormond and Kilmurrary, *Sargent Abroad: Figures and Landscapes*, 113.
[47] *Ibid.*

snow and worn brick. Sargent painted portraits throughout his life, a genre he grew tired of in his later years. For Sargent, the sketch was not intended to be a portrait, it was a study of a landscape and the objects within it.

The fascination with the mannequin was not limited to painters, as literature photography, and caricature all reveal a keen interest in these inanimate figures. Anatole France's book, *Le Mannequin d'osier* (1897), follows the life of a literature professor who, during the course of the book, projects the disdain for his wife onto her wickerwork mannequin which he ultimately smashes in a fit of rage.[48] Emile Zola's novel of 1883, *The Ladies Paradise*, is set in the first department store in Paris and the mannequins are an eroticized army of headless women, who, like their living counterparts within the shop, are commodities on display for the male spectator.[49] This imagining of the human-dummy relationship has continued into the present day as popular tv shows like *Westworld* continue to explore the anxieties surrounding human look-alikes. This sustained interest in the mannequin is largely in part to its uncanny qualities.

The discussion of the human facsimile also entered into scientific dialogue in the German psychiatrist, Ernst Jentschs' 1906 *On the Psychology of the Uncanny*. Jentsch suggests that the sensation or impression of the uncanny is the result of intellectual disorientation. Jentsch believes this feeling occurs when the 'traditional', which the viewer is comfortable with and understands, is collided with the 'new', which is perceived as threatening. Jentsch writes that the uncanny stems from,

> Doubt as to whether an apparently living being really is animate and, conversely doubt as to whether a lifeless object may not in fact be

[48] Anatole France, *Le Mannequin d'osier*, (Paris: Calman-Levy, 1890).
[49] Emile Zola, *The Ladies' Paradise*. Translation by Briann Nelson. Oxford World's Classics. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

> animate...and more precisely, when this doubt only makes itself felt obscurely in one's consciousness.[50]

Jentsch provides plenty of examples in his essay of experiences that provoke the uncanny response like the human look-alike and the hysteric .[51] The descriptions of Sargent's critics of the strange qualities of his female sitters likely produced a sense of the uncanny, which was difficult to describe in its 'obscurity'. The artist's life long friend and fellow American expatriate, Henry James used that precise word to describe Sargent's paintings, referring to them as a, "slightly 'uncanny' spectacle'.[52] When James says this, it is in reference to the 'effortless' appearance of Sargent's portraits, and yet as a friend, James understood the incredible effort Sargent expelled on each painting, often fussing over them for months at a time.That would make the traditional element of the uncanny the effort of the artist but the 'new' would be the effect of Sargent's impressionistic painterly style. Is his style the only way to discuss the uncanny sensation in Sargent's works? With Jentsch's triggers in mind, perhaps Lee experienced the uncanny in the nervous tension of the Vickers and possibly, Sargent's critics who accused the women of being cardboard, metallic, and hard, too questioned the animacy of Sargent's patrons.

Sargent's sitters acted as living mannequins, were represented with stiff qualities in their final portraits that recall display mannequins, and function in a similar manner to the store mannequin. The female portrait and mannequin both fill important roles in their respective sales environment. To be successful, mannequins and patrons needed to be fashionable ideals of their day. The sheer expense of a wax mannequin meant that the shops that could afford them often displayed the

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[50] Ernst Jentsch, "On the Psychology of the Uncanny", (1906), 8.
[51] Jentsch, 11.
[52] Henry Jones, "John S. Sargent," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 75, no. 449 (October 1887): 684.

mannequins in the most important sales location: the window.[53] Display mannequins were primarily female, meant to appeal and entice the growing population of *femme-flaneurs* that frequented department stores. In *The Handbook of Window Displays*, the author argues for the importance of these figures in a successful display, writing, "...the customer is influenced to look upon the model [mannequin] as a replica of herself".[54] The customer is not simply meant to identify with the mannequin version of themselves in a window, they are meant to look up to them. They are the smooth and forever perfectly shaped beauties, who spend their lives dressed in the next best thing. And so in this goal for 'greater enticements' window displays became a work of art, full of mannequins that represented a feminine ideal of their age.

In *Designing the Department Store* (2020), Emily Orr draws numerous connections between the world of commercial interior design and commercial art. Window displays entered the level of artistry at the turn of the century and had become, as Orr described it, "Permanent yet ever changing exposition[s], a show-place for visitors".[55] The artistic quality of these commercial displays may not fall within a traditional category of art but writers at the turn of the twentieth century certainly saw the similarities. Thomas Bird wrote in his manual to window dressing,

> Some of the opening displays that have been designed by decorators for the big department stores are works of art as perfect as any to be found in art galleries; yet they are built to last but two or three weeks, and are then torn out to make room for something else. That is one of the unsatisfactory features of the window dresser's work- his achievements leave behind no lasting record.[56]

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[53] *Ibid.*
[54] William N. Taft, *The Handbook of Window Displays,* (New York: Mcgraw-Hill co., 1926), 220.
[55] Orr, *Designing the Department Store,*6.
[56] Thomas A. Bird, "Window Trimming and Commercial Display," in *Library of Advertising:Show Window Display and Specialty advertising,* vol. 4. A. P. Johnson (Chicago, IL: W B Conkey, 1892), 22.

If the store display of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is comparable to a work of art, as Bird proposes, then the display mannequin can be characterized as the window-dresser's muse.

Just as window displays were meant to entice customers, successful portraits, when exhibited at exhibitions and galleries,were meant to impress potential patrons. Sargent was a clever exhibitor, requesting to borrow his best finished portraits for exhibitions and choosing carefully which paintings to exhibit where. Similar to the mannequin, posed elegantly in the display window, the wealthy socialite in her best dress was on display in the gallery to entice future commissions for the impressive painter. She too epitomized the modern feminine ideal. Artists' success at salons and exhibitions were pertinent to their financial success, making the exhibition, for portrait painters especially, a space to advertise. When Henry James was considering which of Sargent's portraits of women should be exhibited to the public, he took the commercial interest into account, stating, "Mrs. M will do him great good with the public - *they will want to be painted like that*".[57] Given that Sargent was in high demand throughout his life, it seems that they certainly did want 'to be painted like that'.

The aim of this essay is not to suggest that Sargent either could not paint his sitter's at ease or that by suggesting their visual and commercial similarities to mannequins, that he dehumanized these women. Both suggestions are far removed from the truth as his lifelong friendships with many of his sitters is certainly evidential. Instead, I have sought to analyze the qualities of Sargent's portraits that set them apart from traditional grand manner style portrait and conversely, how those qualities

[57] Henry James to Henrietta Reubell, 24 May 1888; Qtd in Marc Simpson, *Uncanny Spectacle,*65.

situate the artist within a modern visual vocabulary. The stiffness and inanimacy that is noted of Sargent's portraits by his contemporaries, along with the artist's own studio practices, show a fascination with mannequins that is typical of the nineteenth-century culture. Sargent was a virtuoso painter with a deep passion for his craft, but his patience for the genre he came to dominate began to wane as a mature artist. Vernon Lee once noted that , "John is extremely serious, a great maker of theories; he goes in for art for art's own sake, says that the subject of a picture is something not always in the way".[58] While in his later years, Sargent had become exhausted by portraiture, he continued to see the genre as an opportunity to explore style on the surface of the canvas, experimenting with composition, atmosphere and texture, often in subtle but highly marketable ways. Some truth can be found in the harsh criticism of Sargent. It really is all surface, but the soul is in the paint not the painted.

[58] Vernon Lee to her mother, 21 June 1881, *Vernon Lee's Letters,* (London:Privately Printed, 1937), 63.

Figure 1. John Singer Sargent, *Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth,* 1889. Tate Britain

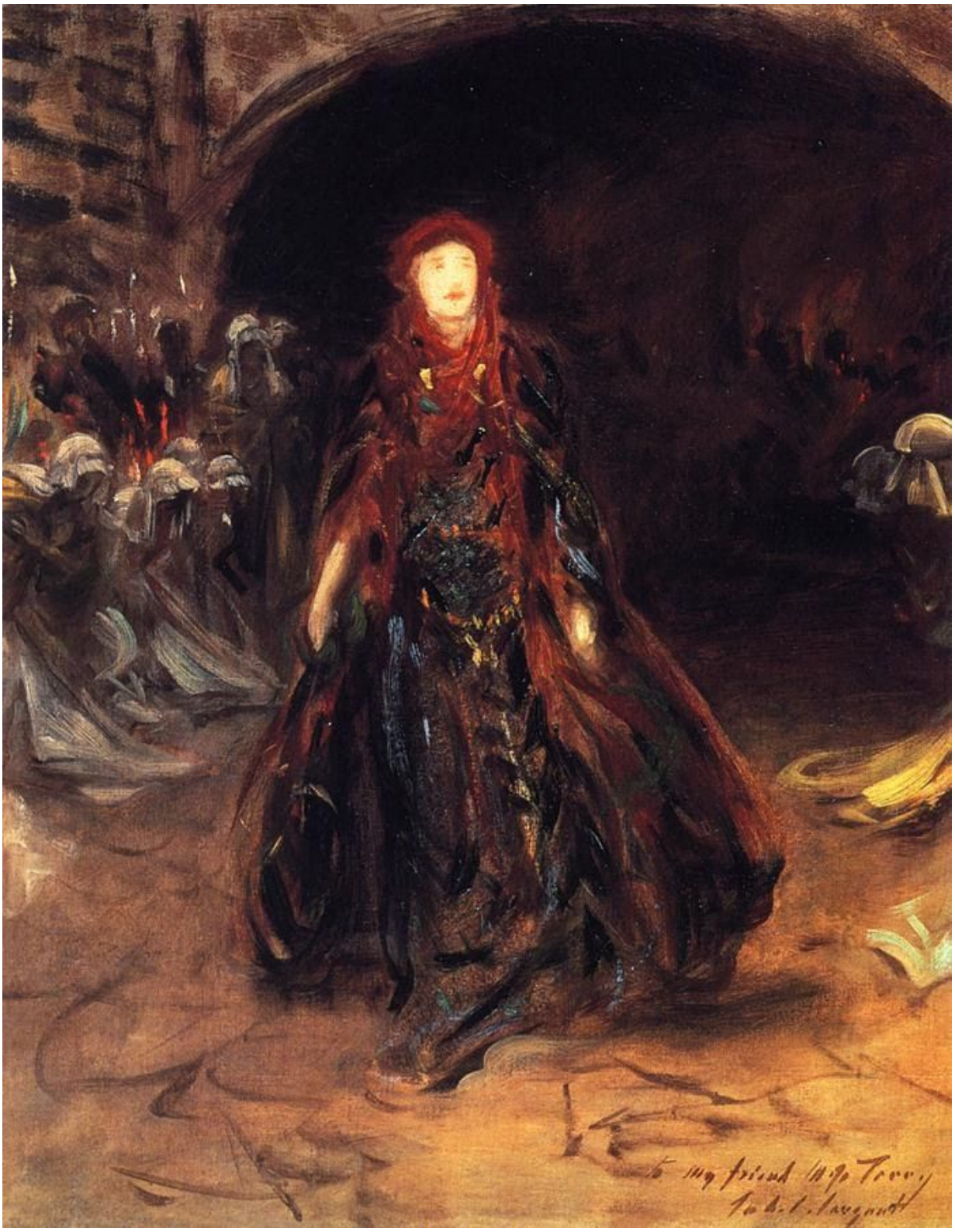

Figure 2. John Singer Sargent, *Oil sketch of Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth*, 1889.

Figure 3. “Rose Room” at Lucile Ltd., 1921

Figure 4. Lucile Ltd. ‘Dancing Dress’ display, 1939, Metropolitan Museum of Art

A "MANNEQUIN" PARADE IN 1913
in the garden at Lucile's, 23, Hanover Square

Figure 5. An example of a Lucile Mannequin Parade, Hanover Square, 1913.

Figure 6. John Singer Sargent, *Fanny Watts,* 1877, Philadelphia Museum of Art

Figure 7. John Singer Sargent, *Mrs. Henry White,* 1883, National Gallery of Art

Figure 8. John Singer Sargent, *Mrs. Cecil Wade*, 1887, The Nelson-Atkins Museum

Figure 9. John Singer Sargent, *Mrs. Albert Vickers*, 1884,

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

Figure 10. Advertisement for Maison Lavigne ‘Bustes Perfectionnés’ Mannequins, 1880 ESMOD International, Paris, France

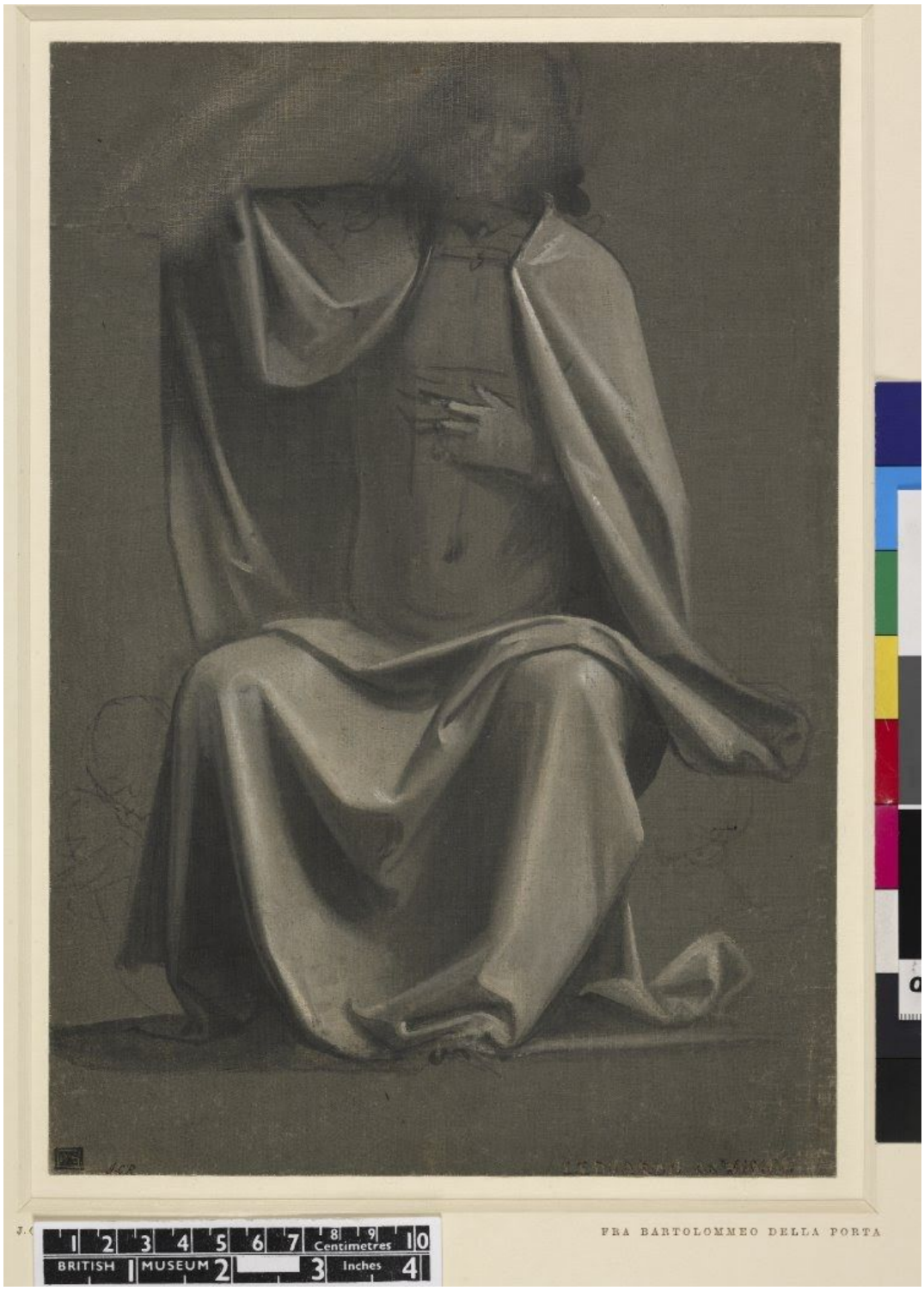

Figure 11. Fra Bartolomeo, *Study for the Figure of Christ,* ca.1430,

British Museum Drawing Archives

Figure 12. Edgar Degas, *Portrait of Henri Michel-Levy,* 1878, Museu Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon

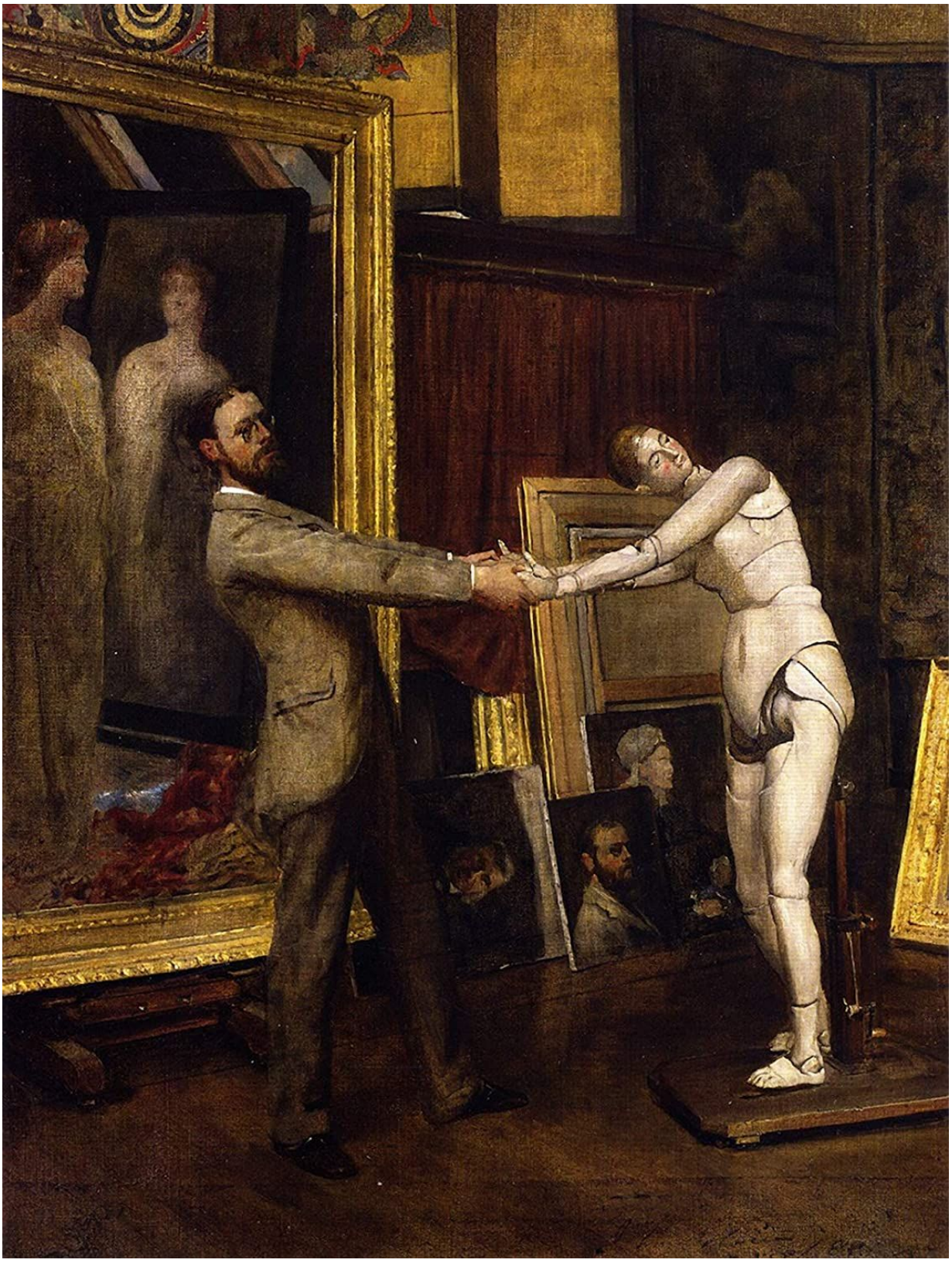

Figure 13. John Ferguson Weir, *His Favorite Model,* 1886?, Yale University Art Gallery

Figure 14. John Singer Sargent, *Manniken in the Snow,* ca. 1891-93, The MET

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