



ELSEWHERE
SUSAN BUTLER

AT A DISTANCE

Made for eyes, all pictures are in some sense about looking. But Monet's 'San Giorgio Maggiore by Twilight' is more so than most. In 1908 at the time of Monet's painting the picture, Palladio's famous church had been a familiar image for over three hundred years - a site that was already a sight, virtually from the time it was built, meant to be seen across the water from the Piazzetta di San Marco.

More than a building or a landmark, San Giorgio Maggiore is an apparition, a beacon for imagination, symbol of itself and of Venice. Monet's painting with its intense, extravagant colour seems the most flamboyant of *vedute*, anticipating those glorious tourist postcards showing famous landmarks and blazing sunsets - images that understand so well distance as a condition of desire.

As such, and given its importance in the collection of the National Museum and Gallery of Wales, in Monet's work, and in the international exhibition *Turner Whistler Monet* (Toronto, Paris, London, May 2004 - May 2005) this painting was the fitting choice to frame the duration of *Elsewhere*. In substituting a miniature closed frame, as if compressed by the disappearance of the picture, for the picture out on loan, a marker of time is laid down, a sign

equally of absence and anticipated return. This curious object disrupts the practice of overhanging by which the departure of a painting is masked by putting another one in its place. The closed frame keeps open this space, marking the temporality of a journey, an elsewhere - another gallery, another country or culture perhaps, a new setting where other eyes may possess the image and be possessed by it. Until, like Persephone, the object of desire returns to its accustomed home.

The 'preciousness' of the frame as a decorative object, which closed resembles a treasure chest, serves as a reminder that paintings are not only a kind of ultimate treasure of the imagination, but also the currency of curatorial exchanges - exchanges which extend the influence of a painting well beyond the physical confines of a given Museum. So that we must transform our concept of the Museum into something less fixed and more open than a particular building and a particular collection. But the errant painting, too, is transformed by its sojourn in every new curatorial context where it is viewed by fresh eyes and catalyses different tangents of desire.

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