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# Identifying the patient in George W Lambert's *Chesham Street*

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper takes as its focus one of the Edwardian period's most dramatic and little-understood paintings of a medical examination: George Washington Lambert's *Chesham Street* (1910). The painting shows an upper-class male patient lifting his shirt to reveal a muscular torso for examination by the doctor in the scene and the viewers outside it. The subject of a medical examination, I argue, legitimised the scrutiny of exposed male flesh and offered an opportunity for sensual pleasure between men.

By way of a comparison with other portraits of the artist from around the same period, I interpret *Chesham Street* as a patient self-portrait, which reveals the artist's dual personalities of bohemian artist and Australian boxer: two personae that did not combine seamlessly, as revealed by the composite nature of the patient in *Chesham Street*. From a discussion of the artist as patient, I move to an analysis of other self-portraits by Lambert in which the artist is shown flexing his muscles, especially in the context of his passion for boxing. I consider how these portraits serve as complex inscriptions of illness and health and how this relates to the experience of living and working as an Australian expatriate artist in London in the early twentieth century.

**INTRODUCTION**

If there was anything interesting to hear students applied their stethoscope: you would see a man with two or three to the chest, and two perhaps to his back, while others waited impatiently to listen. The patient stood among them a little embarrassed, but not altogether displeased to find himself the centre of attention (Maugham, p 441)<sup>1</sup>

In 1910, George Washington Lambert (1873–1930), an Australian artist living in London, exhibited at the New English Art Club an intimately sized painting of a medical examination entitled *Chesham Street* (figure 1). This painting has received almost no critical scholarly attention to date.<sup>1</sup> *Chesham Street* is a unique example from the Edwardian period of a depiction of a medical examination of an upper-class male patient. In this way, it contrasts with earlier artistic examples of working-class patients (eg, in Henri Toulouse Lautrec's *Rue des Moulins: The Medical Inspection*, c.1894, National Gallery of Art, Washington), female patients (eg, in Pierre André Brouillet's *Clinical Lesson at the Salpêtrière*, 1887, Musée d'Histoire de la Médecine,

Paris) and infant patients (eg, in Luke Fildes' *The Doctor*, 1891, Tate, London).

In the first section of this paper, I argue that the subject of a medical examination offered Lambert homoerotic possibilities by bringing into close, intimate contact two men of similar class standing. I posit that the painting illustrates the deployment of the visual and aural senses in early twentieth-century medical diagnostics, but also explores the sensual pleasures involved in being a patient. In the paper's second section, I locate in the figure of the patient signifiers of the complex and sometimes conflicted identity of Lambert as an Australian expatriate artist living and working in London in the early twentieth century. In the patient's dinner suit, manicured moustache and pompous expression I identify Lambert the gentleman-bohemian artist; in the deliberate placement of his hands I locate Lambert the skilled craftsman; and in the muscular torso I find Lambert the working-class Australian sportsman.

There is nothing in the painting's title to suggest that it is a self-portrait. In fact, the painting has regularly been misnamed *Harley Street*, which would have placed the scene in the heart of medical London. Nonetheless, Lambert was a prolific portrait painter, repeatedly producing puzzling pictures of himself, his family and his friends in unexpected places and in different guises (eg, *Self-portrait with gladioli*, 1922, National Portrait Gallery, Canberra). He shared in the contemporary vogue for fancy dress, being photographed as 'Lord Thomas Seymour' at the Chelsea Pageant (postcard held in the Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW) and appearing in 'Mr Leon Gellert as the Lambert self-portrait, together with its original, Mr George Lambert, as a Persian Prince' published in *The Home* in 1923.<sup>3</sup> It is in this category of images that *Chesham Street* belongs.

## SECTION I: THE MEDICAL ENCOUNTER Listen and look

At the time of its first exhibition, critics identified *Chesham Street* as an auscultation scene, a subject they found to have passed beyond 'the bounds of permissible ugliness'.<sup>4</sup> The writer for *The Times* stated that, 'When Rembrandt twice painted a dissecting-room he had a real subject; but an auscultation such as Mr Lambert has painted is nothing but an ugly incident'.<sup>4</sup>

*Chesham Street* recalls pictures of women undergoing auscultations, such as Jules-Abel Faivre's *The Examination* (c.1898; figure 2) and Albert Guillaume's *The Doctor* (1903; Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris). All these works explore the

<sup>1</sup>One exception is Jongwoo Kim's description of the work in his conclusion to Kim.<sup>2</sup>



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**Figure 1** George W Lambert, *Chesham Street*, 1910, oil on canvas, 62×51.5 cm, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. Purchased 1993.

potentially erotic nature of medical examinations. In Faivre's treatment, the elderly doctor places his head against the young girl's chest, conveniently and comically close to her exposed breasts. But in *Chesham Street* the male patient stands upright with a condescending expression, in contrast to Faivre's female patient who lies recumbent in bed with a coy expression. A comparison between the works demonstrates the distinctness of *Chesham Street* as a picture of an arrogant upper-class male patient, displaying his body in such a way as to suggest that the examination is taking place on his own terms.



**Figure 2** Jules-Abel Faivre, *The Examination*, c.1898. Wellcome Library, London. © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2012.

No stethoscope is visible in Faivre's, Guillaume's or Lambert's pictures. Despite the invention of the stethoscope by René Laennec in the early nineteenth century, 'immediate auscultation'—that is, when a doctor would put an ear directly onto the patient's chest—persisted into the twentieth century. According to Samuel J Gee in his manual on auscultation and percussion of 1908, 'Since [Laennec's] day the stethoscope has been discarded by many persons, who, preferring immediate to mediate auscultation, apply the ear to the chest. And doubtless the sounds are heard loudest in this way; they are weakened by conduction through a stethoscope' (Gee, p 82).<sup>5</sup>

In *Chesham Street*, the doctor turns his head to the side in a way that suggests that he is listening to the patient's chest. The artist emphasises the doctor's aural sense by highlighting his ear in red paint. William Bynum has shown how the nature of medical examination was transformed during the nineteenth century from a patient-history based model in the eighteenth century, in which doctors and patients would engage in a conversation, to one in which doctors deployed their senses of sight, touch, sound, and smell to arrive at a diagnosis.<sup>6</sup> Hence, on first estimation, *Chesham Street* might be considered illustrative of the nature of medical examinations during the Edwardian period.

On closer inspection, however, while the patient and doctor together inhabit a shallow pictorial space, the doctor does not actually touch the patient; neither does he look at him. Rather, in turning his head, the doctor looks down towards the urine flask in the painting's left foreground, his profile set against the lighter tone of the patient's body. He cups his chin with his hand in a gesture that connotes contemplation, the suggestion being that he is examining the urine for its colouration, quality or transparency. Aesthetic categories associated with the evaluation of art are here being applied to the diagnosis of urine. According to this interpretation, the painting prioritises the act of looking (we look at the body of the patient, the patient looks at us, and the doctor looks at the urine) in both medical diagnostics and artistic evaluation.<sup>ii</sup>

### Touch and taste

Lambert never explicitly referred to the subject of the painting as an auscultation, describing it more generally as 'the picture of the half clothed man being examined by the doctor'.<sup>8</sup> It is my argument that *Chesham Street* is a study in the pleasures of self-exposure involved in being medically examined. In other words, the painting explores the sensual enjoyment of being a patient. As the patient lifts up his shirt, he gently presses the top of his chest with the three bottom fingers of his right hand, precariously close to his nipple, thereby registering a touch of autoeroticism. The flash of bright red paint on the patient's bottom lip intimates the sense of taste, appearing like a smear of blood, which connotes passion or even violence. That the patient is enjoying the examination recalls the previously quoted description of a medical examination in WS Maugham's *Of Human Bondage* (1915): 'The patient stood among them a little embarrassed, but not altogether displeased to find himself the centre of attention.'<sup>1</sup>

The critic for the *Athenaeum* wrote that, 'Mr Lambert's *Chesham Street* must be praised for the mordant humour with which a pompous gentleman is depicted keeping up his dignity in difficult circumstances' (p 680).<sup>9</sup> In Lambert's treatment, the medical examination represents an intimate and potentially

<sup>ii</sup>I elaborate on this point in Hammerschlag.<sup>7</sup>

erotic encounter between two upper-class men. Despite the patient's elevated position in the composition, the artist juxtaposes the fully-dressed doctor with the partially-unclad patient. Moreover, the patient's unbuttoned trousers suggest the act of undressing and reveal a patch of grey shading below his navel, which is suggestive of pubic hair. The doctor's placement in the composition avoids obstructing our view of the patient's chest, but it also places him closer to the patient's genitalia.

A top hat is positioned directly in front of the patient's genitalia as a comical replacement of the traditional fig leaf, while the urine in the flask offers another reference to the functions of the patient's penis.<sup>iii</sup> In *Chesham Street*, it is unclear to whom the top hat belongs, the doctor or the patient, indicating their shared gentlemanly standing and offering a point of conflation between the two figures.

In his erect stance and confident, even pompous expression, and in the way he lifts his own shirt to reveal his muscularity, the patient asserts his authority and therefore his masculinity. But, at the same time, in having exposed his body for medical examination by the male doctor in the scene, and for aesthetic appraisal by the viewers outside of it, we are made aware of the fact that this male body is vulnerable to illness and objectification. Tamar Garb's description of Gustave Caillebotte's *Man at his Bath* (1882) in her text *Bodies of Modernity: Figure and Flesh in Fin-de-Siècle France* (1998) can be effectively applied here: it is a 'quintessential image of modern man: muscular, masculine and yet curiously defenceless' (Garb, p 50).<sup>11</sup>

Garb argues that the figure in Caillebotte's *Man at his Bath* undertakes the mundane activity of towelling himself after a bath, which places the action firmly in the present day and denudes him of the trappings of the academic male nude. She also offers an interpretation of the figure which implicates the artist's subjectivity, writing that: 'When the male artist confronts the male body in the assertively contemporary setting that naturalism demands, his own subjectivity—that is his own psychic and social position—is as visibly on display as that of the model' (Garb, p 29).<sup>11</sup> Like Caillebotte's male nude, Lambert's *Chesham Street* displays the male body in a modern and prosaic environment, this time in the context of a medical examination. Lambert, however, turns his male figure around so that we see his face—a face that, I will argue, resembles that of the artist. In this way, Lambert's work, even more so than Caillebotte's, calls for an analysis of how the figure negotiates issues of the artist's male subjectivity, especially as relates to issues of gender, class and nationality.

### Surgical hands

The points of visual focus in *Chesham Street* are the patient's white torso set against the dark surroundings, and his large hands, which delicately lift up his shirt. There is refinement in the positioning of the patient's fingers: those of his left hand hold back his shirt, while those of his right touch the top of his chest. The torso is framed by the grey, creased shirt and the grey inner-lining of the trousers. In contrast, his head is perched on top of a stiff white collar and his hands emerge out of the neat cuffs of his jacket. One might recognise in the hands of Lambert's patient the floating surgical hands that prod and penetrate sick or dead bodies in nineteenth-century wax anatomies and anatomical atlases. Like the hands of Lambert's

<sup>iii</sup>David Posner offers an account of men's hats as erotic symbols in Posner.<sup>10</sup>



**Figure 3** François Sallé, *The Anatomy Class at the Ecole des Beaux Arts*, 1888, oil on canvas, 218×299 cm, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney. Purchased 1888.

patient, these surgical hands materialise out of shirt and jacket cuffs in a way that affirm their professionalism.<sup>12</sup>

The crumpled shirt, which frames the torso of the patient in *Chesham Street*, connotes the white cloth that was regularly used to frame the part of the body that was being operated on or dissected in nineteenth-century anatomical illustrations and models of operations and dissections.<sup>iv</sup> It also resembles the underside of flayed skin, which has been lifted, like Andreas Vesalius' anatomical illustrations in *De humani corporis fabrica* (1543), to reveal the anatomy beneath. The forefinger of the patient's right hand merges into the fabric, giving the impression that it is penetrating his flesh in the way of Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio's painting *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas* (1601–02). According to this reading, the hands of the patient function like the hands of a surgeon, blurring the distinction between doctor and patient.

It is possible that François Sallé's *The Anatomy Class at the Ecole des Beaux Arts* (1888; figure 3) provided Lambert with a precedent for his representation of the medicalised handling of an exposed male body. Lambert could have seen Sallé's painting at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney after it entered its collection in 1888. (Lambert lived in Sydney for 4 years from 1887, and again from 1894 to 1900.)

Sallé depicted Mathias Duval, Professor of Anatomy at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, demonstrating the anatomy of the wrist and forearm on a working-class male model with the assistance of an écorché, bones, preserved specimens in jars and anatomical diagrams on the wall. The haughtiness of the model's expression and his compositional elevation above Duval recalls the arrogant expression and raised placement of the patient in relation to the doctor in Lambert's *Chesham Street*. At the same time, in both works this confidence is undermined by the figures' state of partial undress, highlighted by the shared feature of unzipped trousers. Anthea Callen writes of Sallé's painting that:

On the model... it is the torso which is stressed, the light and shade emphasizing his muscular form. Body verses mind are posited in Sallé's two contrasting protagonists. Duval's physicality is subsumed in his role as professional, the light falling on his

<sup>iv</sup>For example see Bourgerly.<sup>13</sup>



**Figure 4** George W Lambert, *Self portrait (unfinished)*, c.1907, oil on canvas, 92.1×71.3 cm, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane. Gift of Dr Robert Graham Brown 1942. Photograph: Natasha Harth, QAGOMA.

body absorbed by the black costume and emphasizing only that exposed flesh which connoted the luminary: Duval's skills reside in head and hands. (Callen, p 42)<sup>14</sup>

What distinguishes *Chesham Street* is that, in the figure of the patient, Lambert combined the gentleman's head and hands with the exposed muscular body—conflating doctor and patient, artist and model.

## SECTION II: IDENTIFYING THE PATIENT

### Head and hands

Through the contrast set up between the light tone of the patient's chest and the darker tone of the rest of his body in *Chesham Street*, there is a sense in which the torso of the patient does not belong to the head and hands.<sup>2 3</sup> Lambert's own writings about the work refer to the period of its production as being of 'dual personality' and 'the unfortunate complex of life', and that 'as an example of this complexity I must mention 'Chesham Street''.<sup>8</sup>

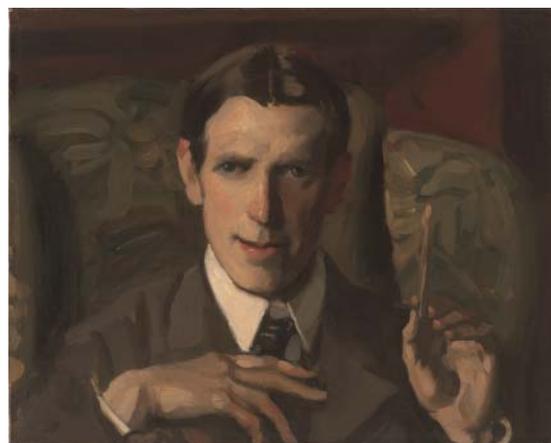
In the remaining section of this article, I propose that the head and hands of the patient in *Chesham Street* are those of Lambert the upper-class bohemian artist and that the body is representative of Lambert the Australian sportsman; the head is upper class and the body is working class; the head modern and the body classical. By offering his self-portrait in the context of a medical examination, Lambert was able to legitimately display his muscular body. He also invited the audience to evaluate his state of health, much like a doctor, and this is precisely what I will be undertaking.

My assertion that the patient in *Chesham Street* is a representation of the artist is based on comparisons between this figure and self-portraits by Lambert from around the same date. The facial hair, hands and white collar with black necktie of the

patient in *Chesham Street* closely resemble those of Lambert's self-portraits, which he produced when he was living in Europe between 1901 and 1916 (see figure 4). When we consider *Chesham Street* along with other portraits and self-portraits of Lambert and his circle from this period, we also find that the figures' heads, hands and collars serve to construct them as turn-of-the-century bohemians.

While living in London, and Paris before that, Lambert was part of a social network of Australian expatriate artists, which included Hugh Ramsay (1877–1906). Lambert and Ramsay met in 1901 on the boat from Australia to Europe and soon became close friends. In Ramsay, Lambert saw an artist whose 'superiority could not be denied'.<sup>8</sup> In fact, the rendering of the patient's right hand in *Chesham Street* might have been inspired by the position of Ramsay's right hand in his *Self-portrait: bust showing hands* (1901–02; figure 5). Lambert produced several portraits of Ramsay, including an ink drawing in which Ramsay rests languidly with his legs propped up on a chair and a cigarette dangling nonchalantly from the corner of his mouth (1901; figure 6). Here Lambert depicted Ramsay in a tailored dinner suit, top hat askew, exuding a lackadaisical demeanour. But what distinguishes Ramsay as a bohemian is, above all, the inclusion of a cigarette.<sup>15</sup>

In their self-portraits and portraits of each other from this period, Lambert and Ramsay regularly cropped their bodies with the bottom edge of the canvas, reducing themselves to heads, hands and the hint of a tailored suit. In so doing they associated their artistic projects with intellect in the head and manual dexterity in the hands. At the same time, these paintings constitute representations of the artists as disembodied. Lambert produced a frieze-like group portrait (c.1901; private collection) with all the figures in bust length, including portraits of himself and Ramsay, but now Lambert is shown with a cigarette. A few years later he again painted a bust-length self-portrait (c.1906; figure 7) with the striking visual features of a manicured moustache with upturned corners and a cigarette in his mouth. In fact, it was the inclusion of the cigarette which most vexed his contemporary critics; the writer for *The Times* commenting that the work 'would be excellent if he would only paint out the cigarette'.<sup>16</sup> In another work, *The Convex Mirror* (c.1916; private collection), Lambert appears in the painting's foreground as a face, hand and white collar. This painting references Francesco Parmigiano's *Self Portrait in a Convex Mirror* (c.1524), in



**Figure 5** Hugh Ramsay, *Self-portrait: bust showing hands*, c.1901, oil on canvas, 36×46 cm, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. Bequest of William Steward McDougall, accepted 2000.



**Figure 6** George W Lambert, *Huge Ramsay in London*, c.1901, brush and black ink, grey wash, with opaque white highlights, 25.9×32.6 cm, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

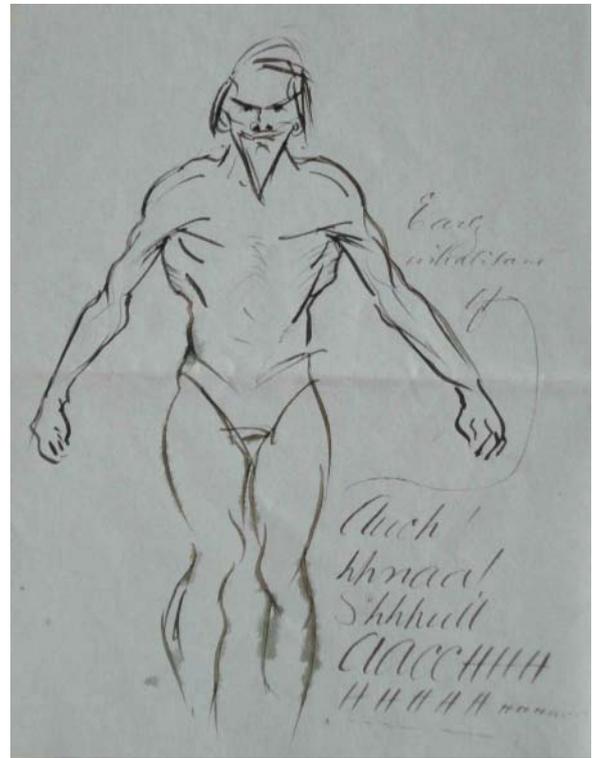
which the deployment of the convex mirror serves both to give the figure thickness by following the curved contours of his body and distorts it so as to emphasise the artist's hand and face.<sup>17</sup>

### Torso

What makes *Chesham Street* so provocative and unique is that Lambert conjoined the head and hands of the bohemian artist with the muscular torso of a sportsman. By situating his self-



**Figure 7** George W Lambert, *Self-portrait*, 1906, oil on canvas, 46.3×38.2 cm, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. The Joseph Brown Collection. Presented through the NGV Foundation by Dr Joseph Brown AO OBE, Honorary Life Benefactor, 2004.

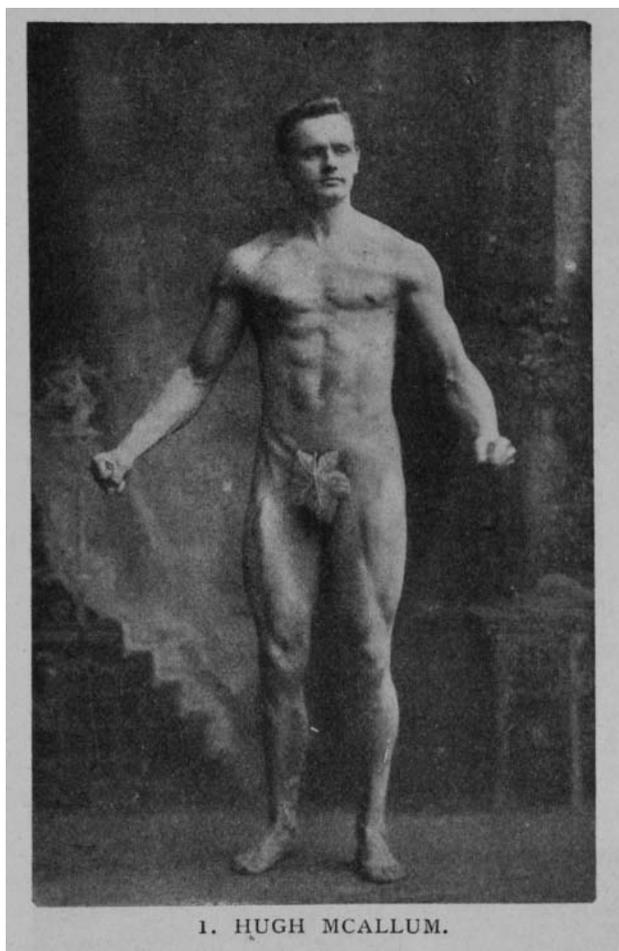


**Figure 8** *Ltr*, 1911. Lambert to Amelia Beatrice in Letters received, 1911–1930, from George Washington Lambert/part of George Lambert and Lambert family, papers, Mitchell Library, MLMSS 97/10/A/41.

portrait in the context of a medical examination, Lambert was able to expose what lay below the head and hands of his bust self-portraits. He also assumed the role traditionally associated with that of the artist's model. Interestingly, some writers have identified Williams, Lambert's model, as the source for the patient in *Chesham Street*.<sup>18</sup> In *The Shop* (1909; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney), Lambert painted both himself and his model Williams, who is dressed as King Henry VII, and the two figures exhibit markedly similar features. The similarity between Lambert and Williams in *The Shop* further problematises our ability to identify the patient in *Chesham Street*: is he the working-class Williams, the upper-class Lambert or a combination?

The critic for the *Observer* wrote that, 'Mr G Lambert's 'Chesham Street' represents an auscultation scene, which is made the excessively unpleasant excuse for the truly masterful painting of a male torso'.<sup>19</sup> Lambert's patient exhibits a lean physique, the shadowing around his chest and abdomen suggesting undulating musculature. A tonal contrast is produced between the light colour of the patient's chest and the darker tonality of his face and hands. It is possible that his body is lighter because it was rarely exposed to the sun. However, it is my contention that this holds further significance: in its cold, white tonality, the patient's torso appears like a classical statue, such as the Belvedere Torso. According to this interpretation, the upper middle-class patient lifts his shirt to reveal his classical, chiselled, marble-like torso.

Lambert would have been familiar with classical statuary from having drawn from the antique at the Julian Ashton Art School where he was a student from 1896 to 1900. But the production of *Chesham Street* was contemporaneous with the circulation of images of muscular male bodies through the Physical Culture movement of Eugene Sandow in London and Edmond



**Figure 9** Hugh Mcallum, muscleman from New Zealand, assuming a Herculean pose, familiar from photographs of Eugene Sandow, *Sandow's Magazine of Physical Culture*, vol. 6, no. 35, May 1901, Wellcome Library, London.

Desbonnet in Paris, and these bodies were repeatedly appraised in relation to their sculpted, classical predecessors. Sandow, as the epitome of male beauty, was placed in communion with the ideal of ancient Greek statuary by having his body whitened with powder and by assuming the poses recognisable from Greek sculpture. In the words of Michael Hatt, 'Sandow offers us a body hardened into stone' (Hatt, p 101).<sup>20</sup> Moreover, Sandow promoted *Physical Culture* throughout the British Empire, including in Australia where he toured in 1902.<sup>21</sup> <sup>22</sup> (Lambert was, by this point, already living in London.)

In its whiteness, the torso of the patient in *Chesham Street*, like the images of idealised bodies being propagated through *Physical Culture*, references the classical sculptures of Greco-Roman antiquity. If taken to be a patient self-portrait, in the context of the racial discourse of the period (it was believed that Sandow resided on the top rung of the human evolutionary ladder), the exposed torso in *Chesham Street* reinforces Lambert's underlying racial 'whiteness'.<sup>v</sup> That Lambert displays his beautiful white body in a medical context invites

<sup>v</sup>For an account of the medicalised and racialised notion of 'whiteness' in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Australia, see Anderson.<sup>23</sup>

consideration of the ways in which notions of health and hygiene were deployed in the racial discourse of whiteness in early twentieth-century Australia.<sup>vi</sup> Yet, as an artist who straddled multiple national identities, the act of self-exposure for the sake of medical examination references Western medicine's role in policing racial and national boundaries, and places Lambert on the border.

### Boxing with my shadow

*Chesham Street* was not the only time that Lambert pictured himself with a muscular body. In 1911, the year after the exhibition of *Chesham Street*, he illustrated a letter to Amelia Beatrice (also known as Mick) with a drawing of himself as a veritable muscleman (figure 8), his arms tensed and to his sides—shoulder, arm and back muscles bulging—in much the same way as Sandow in one of his standard poses (figure 9). In the letter Lambert recounted his recovery from illness: 'If you could see me now—you'd say 'My Gigi can recover from anything. I am pretty fit... painting quite well again''. He continued: 'After boxing with my shadow... I climbed one of the hills for about a mile, jumped down and did a sprint along the level for 1/4 mile'.<sup>25</sup> He deployed a boxing metaphor to describe his having been laid low since arriving in London: 'We've both had a bad knock since we've been in England but I think those who have gone would back us in the idea of hang [sic] on to the ropes before taking the count'.<sup>25</sup>

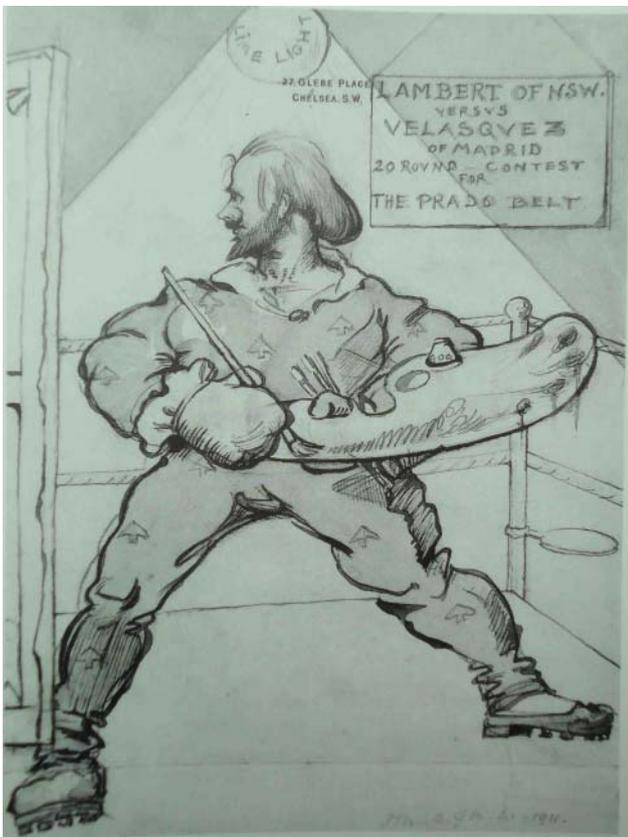
Lambert's own body had become lean and muscular during the 2 years (1892–93) he spent 'mustered and sheering sheep, building fences and breaking in horses' as a station hand on his great-uncle's sheep station 200 miles north-west of Sydney (Gray, p 7–8).<sup>3</sup> In his youth, he also distinguished himself as a good boxer, having been taught the sport at a young age by his grandfather. Hardy Wilson, the Australian architect and friend of Lambert's in London, wrote of Lambert that, 'Being a powerful man with a splendid physique, Lambert, in those days, revelled in boxing and deeds of muscular prowess' (Wilson, p 88).<sup>18</sup> Lambert remained a keen boxer during his time in Europe (explaining the reference to shadow boxing in his letter to Beatrice), practicing it with his friends in Paris in order to keep fit. In *The Art and Life of George W. Lambert* (1920), James Macdonald described him as 'wonderfully buoyant', and noted that: 'At times we would box, and Lambert always let the rest of us off lightly' (Macdonald, p 24).<sup>26</sup> AF Hungerford, quoted by Macdonald, described the artist as 'full of vigor, and a source of interest as one destined to do great things [W]e males liked his manliness'. 'He was also interested in boxing, and in our room he demonstrated the way of sundry attacks and feints, of recent recovery'.<sup>26</sup> <sup>vii</sup>

Lambert made various studies of boxers during his early years in Paris and London, producing a major painted work on the theme of pugilism in 1910, *The Wrestlers*. *The Wrestlers* features two male bodies locked in an intimate hold; wrestling, like medical examinations, offered legitimised opportunities for physical contact between men.<sup>viii</sup> Of course Lambert was not the only artist to depict boxers during this period: Thomas Eakins produced several monumental paintings of boxers,

<sup>vi</sup>Alison Bashford examines the 'historical relatedness of public health and governance, hygiene and rule over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries', focusing on the case of colonial Australia.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>vii</sup>Letter from Mr AF Hungerford to Macdonald, published in Macdonald, p.19.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>viii</sup>See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theorisation of 'homosocial desire' in Sedgwick.<sup>27</sup>



**Figure 10** Derwent Wood, *Lambert of N.S.W. versus Velasquez of Madrid*, 1911, pencil, pen and ink and grey wash, 27.2×20.2 cm, Mitchell Library, SV\*/Sp Coll/Lambert/5.

namely *Salutat* (1889), *Taking the Count* (1898) and *Between Rounds* (1899)<sup>ix</sup>; and Eadweard Muybridge, who worked closely with Eakins at the University of Pennsylvania, included photographic studies of nude boxers in his *Animal Locomotion* (1887). Furthermore, pre-empting *Chesham Street*, Eakins and Muybridge also produced pictures of themselves without their clothes—Eakins in *The Swimming Hole* (1884–85) and Muybridge in *Animal Locomotion*.<sup>29</sup>

In the same year that Lambert depicted himself as a musclemán in his letter to Beatrice, the British sculptor Derwent Wood caricatured him as in the boxing ring with the Spanish seventeenth-century painter, Diego Velazquez (figure 10). Lambert was a great admirer of Velazquez, repeatedly producing paintings like *Chesham Street* with well-defined forms standing out against dark or light backgrounds in the way of Velazquez.<sup>3</sup> In the caricature, Lambert assumes a wide stance and is armed with boxing gloves and palette. He is depicted wearing a prisoner's jumpsuit, which, along with the inscription 'Lambert of NSW', references New South Wales' history as a British penal colony. (During this period Lambert signed his illustrations 'G. W. L. of N. S. W'.)<sup>18</sup>

Australian boxing had entered into a boom period in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The sport was taught in the nation's private schools, and world famous boxing matches took place there, including a world heavyweight title fight at Rushcutters' Bay in 1908.<sup>30</sup> In Britain, boxing was heavily imbued with class ideology: on the one hand, it was considered a suitable sport for middle-class men to build up bodily strength



**Figure 11** Alf Vincent, *George Lambert in London*, c.1912, pen and ink, brush and ink on paper, National Portrait Gallery, Canberra. Purchased 2010.

and mental fortitude; on the other, it was championed as offering an opportunity for social reform, intended to channel working-class violence into healthy sport. Nonetheless, despite efforts at increased regulation during the Victorian period (eg, weight categories and gloves), boxing still retained its lowly associations with dangerous illegal prize fighting and gambling.<sup>31</sup> As Garb has observed, 'A bourgeois gentleman participating in this sport had to be exercising a certain amount of class irony' (Garb, p 180).<sup>32</sup>

The Australian cartoonist, Alfred Vincent, juxtaposed 'Lambert the upper-class gentleman' with 'Lambert the boxer' in his drawing of *George Lambert in London* (c.1912; figure 11). Here Lambert appears almost foppish, with his wrists resting on his hips in a nonchalant stance, pointed beard and distinctively-manicured moustache, familiar cravat and arrogant expression. Lambert's pose, legs astride and hips thrust forward, is mirrored in the miniaturised figure of the boxer, who appears to be stepping onto his shoulder and punching his head. This picture illustrates the bifurcation of Lambert's identity in London, contrasting the well-dressed, debonair, dandified artist with the more robust, exposed yet shrunken body of the boxer. As an Australian artist in London, Lambert's identity thus emerges as complex, multifaceted and contradictory, encompassing the personae of a bohemian artist and Australian boxer, depressed expatriate and paragon of health and fitness.<sup>x</sup>

<sup>x</sup>In an unpublished letter, Lambert wrote that the London weather had been really 'depressing' and that, 'I am a bit less melancholy today.' He also referred to: 'these terrible depressions.' 26 August 1911, MLMSS 97/10.

<sup>ix</sup>For a fuller discussion of Eakins' boxers see Hatt.<sup>28</sup>



**Figure 12** George W Lambert, *Important people*, 1914–1921, oil on canvas, 134.7×171 cm, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney. Purchased 1930.

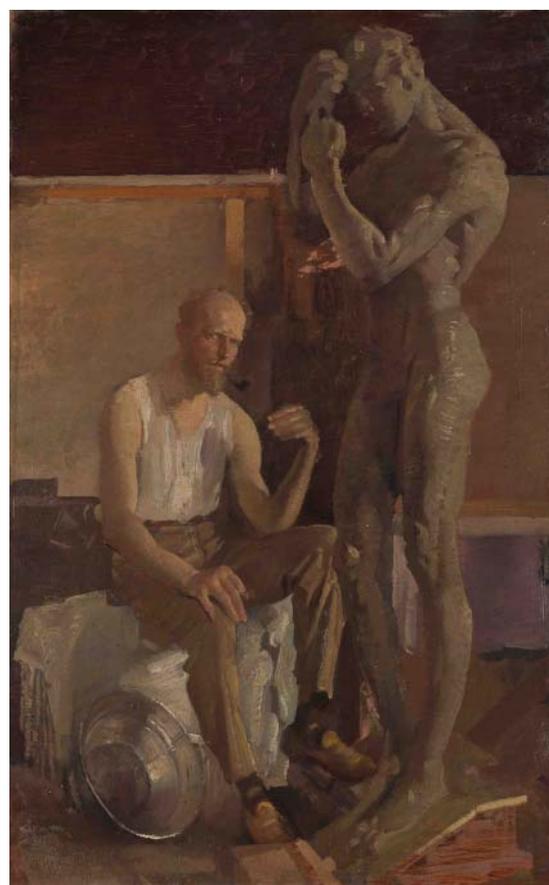
### G W Lambert Chelsea and Sydney

There is another important boxer in Lambert's oeuvre: the young boxer in *Important People* (c.1914, 1915, 1921; figure 12). Like *Chesham Street*, *Important People* is one of Lambert's 'puzzle pictures'. The strange ensemble of apparently random figures leaves the viewer perplexed as to who these 'important people' are and why they appear in the painting together. As a group portrait it challenges the genre itself, since the figures are peculiarly unidentifiable, apparently representing different qualities ('motherhood', 'merchant or administrative type' and 'the fighting type') rather than important individuals.<sup>8</sup>

The boxer appears next to an older suited gentleman who could be his manager. The exposed musculature of the working-class boxer's shoulders and arms is juxtaposed with the top hat, suit and tie of his upper-class manager. Lambert's wife, Amy, identified the model for the boxer as Albert Broadrib (p 55).<sup>33</sup> But as we have already seen in relation to *Chesham Street*, the identity of the figures in Lambert's puzzle paintings is ambiguous. In turn, I will be offering an interpretation of the boxer and the gentleman in *Important People* as referencing the different personae of Lambert himself.

*Important People* contains significant inscriptions of the identity of the artist, especially the embedded signature 'G. W. Lambert Chelsea and Sydney', which appears as a company seal on the side of the wagon. It is possible to recognise in the suited gentleman a representation of G. W. Lambert Chelsea, and in the young working-class boxer a picture of G. W. Lambert Sydney. Moreover, the whiteness of the boxer's vest in *Important People* picks up the whiteness of the patient's torso in *Chesham Street*, and reappears in Lambert's depiction of himself in *The Artist and the Geelong Memorial Figure (Self portrait)* (c.1924; figure 13).

*The Artist and the Geelong Memorial Figure* was produced on Lambert's return to Australia after his time as a World War One artist in the Middle East from 1917 to 1918. It includes a depiction of the memorial sculpture he made to commemorate the 'old boys' from the Geelong Grammar School in Victoria who lost their lives in the Great War. Geelong Grammar, an elite school for boys, which was developed during the second half of the nineteenth century according to the model of the English



**Figure 13** Lambert, *The Artist and the Geelong Memorial Figure (Self portrait)*, c.1924, oil on plywood, 46.3×29.1 cm, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.

public school, championed sport as a way to instil character into its students.<sup>34</sup> In *The Artist and the Geelong Memorial Figure*, Lambert is seated beside his memorial statue; as in *Chesham Street*, the body of the artist can be appraised in relation to the sculpted form. Lambert's gesture mirrors that of the statue and looks like he is flexing his bicep. Yet, the artist is dwarfed by the sculpture's monumental size. The once vigorous boxer is now older and hunched over. A diminished reflection of his early muscular self-portraits, Lambert's picture of himself here contrasts with the strength and heroism of youth, which his statue memorialises.

### CONCLUSIONS

In the same year as Lambert exhibited *Chesham Street* at the New English, EM Forster published *Howards End*. In his novel, Forster describes an attempt by the doctor, Mr Mansbridge, to institutionalise Helen Schlegel, writing of science that:

After long centuries among the bones and muscles it might be advancing to knowledge of the nerves, but this would never give understanding. One could open the heart to Mr Mansbridge and his sort without discovering its secrets to them, for they wanted everything down in black in white, and black and white was exactly what they were left with (Forster, p 282).<sup>35</sup>

This statement encapsulates the lack of understanding provoked by Lambert's painted patient. Rather than clarifying meaning or pinning down identity, Lambert's *Chesham Street* dramatically problematises the relationship between the doctor

and patient, and even among the patient's own head, hands and torso.

Through the compositional elevation of the patient above the doctor, the patient's pompous expression and the self-assured way in which he lifts his own shirt, he seems to be in command of the examination. In fact, through such inclusions as the top hat, which could belong to either man, along with the surgeon-like-hands of the patient, the distinction between doctor and patient is provocatively blurred. Moreover, the patient offers—consciously or not—a complex representation of the artist himself. According to this interpretation, Lambert lifts his shirt to display his white muscular chest: a torso befitting comparison with that of classical statuary and its turn-of-the-century incarnation in the form of modern body builders. At the same time, he reveals his 'dual personalities' of cosmopolitan bohemian artist and working-class Australian boxer, personae that were not easily reconciled as evidenced by the composite nature of Lambert's patient self-portrait.

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