south-west of Berlin, closed itself down rather than submit to the political and racist demands of the Nazi government. (Ironically, the Nazis wanted Kandinsky fired; but the Russian, who'd experienced the Bolshevik revolution at first hand, had developed Nazi sympathies.) The staff and students of the Bauhaus therefore went elsewhere. Contrary to the mythology, however, by no means all of them fled to the United States. Some chose the Soviet Union. Others emigrated to Palestine, where they turned part of Tel Aviv into a Bauhaus colony. Some stayed in Germany. One of these, the great typographer Herbert Bayer, designed a brochure for an exhibition celebrating life in the Third Reich and the authority of Hitler until he went west in 1937. Another was Wilhelm Wagenfeld, creator of the world-famous table lamp, who won the Goethe medal for design. After the war a few former students worked on the dreadful Stalinallee in East Berlin.

Not a few, including Gropius, Marcel Breuer and Moholy-Nagy, came to London, quickly moving on to America. Moholy-Nagy did an enormous amount of work here. He designed special effects for the film *Things to Come* (1936); he directed documentaries, one of them about the mating habits of lobsters off Littlehampton (1935); he took photographs for the *Architectural Review*; he worked for Imperial Airways and became display consultant for the clothing store Simpsons of Piccadilly, puzzling pedestrians with his abstract compositions of striped shirts and bowler hats. Meanwhile Gropius, no doubt hedging his bets, continued to enter German architectural competitions, never forgetting to include on his drawings a few fluttering Nazi flags. (He also never missed the annual party for the Fuhrer's birthday at the German Embassy, now the British Academy.) More importantly he designed, with Maxwell Fry, Impington Village College outside Cambridge. He also applied (unsuccessfully) to be the Rector of the Royal College of Art and was commissioned to design an extension to Christ's College, Cambridge. This was never begun. Modernism was still an exotic import to Britain and Gropius could be dangerous. Even a designer as masterly as London Transport's Frank Pick could dismiss Moholy-Nagy as "a gentleman with a modernistic tendency who produces pastiches of photographs of a surrealistic type, and I am not at all clear why we should fall for this".

The influence of the Bauhaus was enormous; but it wasn't entirely benign. The location of this exhibition is enough to prove it. Think about it while you're tramping the bleak walkways of the Barbican, trying to find your way to the gallery. And think of it again while you're puzzling about where the exhibition begins and continues.

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A right understanding

DROR WAHRMAN

DEAD STANDING THINGS
Still life painting in Britain, 1660–1740
Tate Britain until September 16

The display *Dead Standing Things: Still life painting in Britain, 1660-1740* at the Tate beautifully and compactly illustrates the Dutch introduction of still lifes into Britain, and also draws attention to the way in which this influence eventually morphed into something new. The two most prominent artists on display, Pieter van Roestraten and Edward Collier, who migrated to London respectively in the 1660s and in 1693, were key to the popularization of the genre.

Each wall in the display is dedicated to a different sub-genre of still life: flower arrangements, silver vessels, *vanitas* still lifes with books, and *trompe l'oeil* paintings with handwritten and printed materials. Viewed sequentially the paintings begin with representations of the luxury market: the expensive tulips and other exotic plants in the flower still-lifes of Simon Verelst (another immigrant artist, arrived in London in 1669) belong here as much as Roestraten's vessels proudly sporting their silver hallmarks. They then move to incorporate the print market, first heavy books and then pamphlets and newspapers: a quick index, if you will, of a shift from seventeenth- to eighteenth-century preoccupations.

Worldly goods repeatedly encroached on the transcendent. This after all is the whole point of the *vanitas* still life compositions, which employed a range of often unsubtle elements, from recognizable moralizing mottos through emptying hour glasses to memento mori skulls, in order to admonish viewers not to spend the course of their short lives pursuing worldly things that have no true value. And yet the *vanitas* painting itself, like every other still life, was a worldly thing with a marketplace value.

This display offers a nice indication of market-driven differentials in two similar Collier *vanitas* still lifes that even include the same ornate golden goblet, as their captions point out. The treatment and execution in one is clearly superior to the other, rendering the latter painting flat and wooden. Seeing them together, one cannot fail to notice the discrepancy between the handling of textural details like cloth folds, paper edges and metallic sheen. Most likely, one painting was produced for a valued patron while the other was churned out quickly for the open market or for an undiscerning client: an ironic lesson about worldly value to be learned from *vanitas* paintings.

One wall stands out as radically different: that of the *trompe l'oeil* "letter racks" by Edward Collier. They still bear some relationship to these earlier compositions. For instance, the black sealing wax stick resting lightly on the letter bearing the painter's signature is noteworthy; since black sealing wax was used only for death and mourning, this is a subtle two-dimensional rendering of a memento mori, harking back to the *vanitas* tradition. And yet with their surprising two-dimensionality and their playful toying with the viewer, the letter rack paintings have a strikingly modern appearance. These compositions were Collier's main innovation following his arrival in England, revealing him as one of the most quirky and original painters of the period. They can be enigmatic, often deliberately so, and their uncanny treatment of printed documents easily overlooked. The display makes readily visible a striking example.

This letter rack painting usually hangs fifteen feet above the silver display cabinets in the Victoria and Albert Museum, visible only with the light of a powerful torch while balancing precariously on top of a rickety ladder, but in the Tate display it is hung at eye level. The top strap of the painted letter rack holds two printed works: an almanac dated 1701 and a pamphlet of a speech to parliament by "Her Majesty" – Queen Anne. But there is something odd about this combination. Queen Anne acceded to the throne in 1702. She became queen on March 8, 1702, the day that King William died, supposedly of complications from a riding accident two weeks earlier. The new Queen gave her first speech to parliament on March 11, and her second on March 30 – which is the speech that Collier painted into this letter rack. But why pair it with an almanac from 1701, when King William was still on the throne? Of course it is not impossible that Collier might have simply cobbled together some recent publications on his shelf. But in his numerous letter rack paintings (I am aware of almost 70 of them) Collier is quite attentive to dates and does not mix different years on a single canvas. Might there be a reason for this exception?

Collier actually placed the answer to this question in plain sight in the painting itself. At issue was the date of Queen Anne's accession to the throne. In this period, as all its students are painfully aware, the English and the European calendars were out of synch. Europe was on the Gregorian calendar that we use today. But England was on the unreformed Julian calendar, according to which the New Year fell not on January 1 but on March 25, the Feast of the Annunciation known as Lady Day. For almost three months England and the continent were thus in different years, a cumbersome situation that continued until the calendrical reforms of the middle of the eighteenth century. So the dating of Anne's accession was ambiguous: it was 1701 if you were counting days in England, 1702 if you were counting "New Style" as on the Continent. Anne's first speech to parliament was thus in fact dated March 11, 1701, and her second, three weeks later, March 30, 1702. It was to this ambiguity and complication that Collier probably wished to draw attention by placing the 1701 almanac next to the Queen's 1702 speech, for his painted almanac in this composition – like elements in dozens of other canvases he painted, which similarly drew attention to slips and ambiguities in contemporary documentary culture – is detailed and legible. It explains that its purpose is to assist people "in the right Understanding of this Years Revolution". And how does it do so? With the aid of "A twofold Kalendar . . . / viz. Julian or . . . / Gregorian".

Edward Collier, "Trompe l'oeil with writing materials", *c*.1702