

GRADUATION 2011

Presentation speech for Anthony Green for the honorary degree of Doctor of the University *honoris causa*

Chancellor,

When I am asked to sum up our University, I often say things like, 'Well, we take care, we are realists yet we look at reality from perspectives different to those found at other universities.' Any of my former students present today will tell you that I am no artist – witness my pathetic attempts to draw maps or diagrams on whiteboards – but when I talk about realism and perspectives I am, in fact, using the language of art.

Our honorand today is an artist of distinction. Anthony Green studied and later taught at the Slade School of Art. In 1971 he was elected as an Associate Member of the Royal Academy and, having won the Royal Academy Summer Exhibit of the Year in 1977, was elected a full member. In 1991 he became a Fellow of University College, London, and in 1996 was shortlisted for the Jenwood Painting Prize. He has served as a Trustee of the Royal Academy, was the Featured Artist at the 2003 Summer Exhibition and is currently Chairman of the RA's Exhibition Committee. But Anthony Green is also very much a Buckingham person, a long serving and enthusiastic member of our Council, notable for his courtesy, his perception and quiet work behind the scenes that has crucial to the establishment and success of our degree programmes in Art History and related areas.

But, Chancellor, I believe there is a deeper, more philosophical link between the University and Anthony Green. Perhaps I could pose what may seem to be a rather strange question: 'If the University of Buckingham were a painting, what qualities would be want that picture to embody?' We would certainly want it to show us as exciting, wide ranging, interested in everything. Anthony says of his own art:

My concerns are universal, sometimes tasteless, frequently artless, but never dulling. I wanted to paint adolescence, bicycles, carpets, dog, Eric, failure, Greens, hair, irritation, Joscelyne, kisses, Mary, nasturtiums, optimism ... quiet, roses, sexuality, tenderness, undies, vice, walls, x-shapes, Yvonne, and much, much more ...

We would also want our painting to show our sense of realism – not over committed to abstractions, but in touch with day to day things, with and our mission (to provide good teaching and to produce good research) readily comprehensible to everyone. Anthony Green believes in realistic art – because he wants his work to be understandable both to arts experts and the everyday person. We would want our picture to embody our respect for the past, our appreciation of History and the wisdom of earlier ages. Appropriately, Green derives inspiration from Medieval art, especially from the very realistic paintings of 13th century Flemish artists. We would also want our picture to show that we were painstaking and skilful in all we do: from the minute detail in Green's pictures we can see that his approach is very labour intensive. It takes him one or two months, painting every day, to complete a picture.

Above all we would want our picture to show that we look at things differently. Here the parallels with Green are most telling. The thing that usually strikes us is his technique of showing interior space. It seems as if the viewer is looking through the roof of a room and at the same time seeing all four walls, the floor and the ceiling. The effects of this are even more emphasized by the unusual shapes of his canvasses. Looking at things differently indeed. The 'fish eye' view actually echoes experiments in showing space and distance utilised by Medieval and Early Renaissance painters such as Jan Van Eyck. It is good that Anthony Green draws so heavily on the Middle Ages – after all it was the Middle Ages that invented universities and the earliest universities were 'independent' universities too. I have even noticed that some of Green's later works are 'free standing' – that must be a good sign.

Chancellor, it must now be obvious that the answer to the question I posed a few moments ago is that, if this University were a picture, we would want it to be like one of Anthony Green's. There are many famous collections throughout the world that contain his works and he has had over one hundred one man shows since 1962. It is particularly appropriate, however, that there should be an exhibition of Anthony's paintings in the Chandos Road Building this

weekend. Those previously unfamiliar with his works may like to see if my little theory works.

Chancellor, it gives me great pleasure to call upon you to confer on Anthony Green RA the degree of Doctor of the University *Honoris Causa*

Professor John Clarke, MA, DPhil
26 February 2011