The watercolour drawings created by John White depicting American Indian peoples he encountered during the English colonizing ventures to the New World from 1584 to 1590 have a primary importance in the history of European visualizations of American Indians. Their special status as images derives partly from the circumstances of their creation in a number of ‘firsts’ – i.e., this venture being the first organized English attempt to permanently settle with Native North Americans in their own locale; White being the first English artist taken abroad specifically for the role of making a visual record; these ventures being some of the first of Elizabeth’s reign to make land claims in the so-called ‘New World’ of America; and these images being among some of the earliest ever devised by an English artist of the natives of North America. The primacy of White’s images, their foundational importance for so much of the ‘Indian’ iconography that followed and was derived from them, can be explained by their originating position. But, by the same token, precisely because White’s images are the first extensive visualization of Native Americans, with no tradition to draw on, the natural presumption has been to treat them as objective records immune from any process of mediation.

A starting point for any analysis of the balance between ‘truth’ and invention in White’s work is the interpretation first iterated by David Beers Quinn that the drawings’ ‘pictures and actions’ are more revealing than the words provided by Ralph Lane and Thomas Harriot in their respective narratives of the actions’ are more revealing than the words provided by Ralph Lane and Thomas Harriot in their respective narratives of the early English venture in what would become North Carolina. Specifically, Quinn finds White’s ‘drawings speak loudly of his goodwill toward the native peoples whom he pictured, and of his immense care to record them faithfully, without either exaggeration or reduction’. This is a perceptive comment in that it highlights an attitude that White most certainly would have adopted with respect to his subject matter, one characterized by modern scholars as dispassionate and akin to proto-scientific scrutiny. English colonizing ventures such as Sir Walter Raleigh’s in the 1580s instituted a focus on the ‘accurate’ visual recording of details of cultural difference; even if those are not the precise terms they would have used to describe it. One of the earliest scholars of White’s visual material, Paul Hulton, has also written about the artist’s ‘convincing’ and factual approach, [attaining an] almost ethnographic status. This factual content is validated even further by the documentation contained at the end of the British Museum’s A New World exhibition held in 2007. In the last room of the exhibition current Virginian and North Carolinian Indian representatives were quoted from their reactions to first seeing White’s drawings on a visit to the British Museum in 2006. This was one of the first occasions when Algonquian tribal members have been able to view these works firsthand. They recognized themselves in the drawings as they could see images of ‘our brothers and sisters’ and saw their traditional practices well represented.

The idea that White’s drawings offer direct testimony is widespread. In an American educational website (accessed November 2006) designed for use by high-school teachers, White’s methods are described thus: ‘He probably sat off to the side quietly observing the American Indians with his sensitive and understanding eye, then swiftly conveying his impression to paper.’ He showed ‘a delicate naturalism in portraying his subjects’ and did not ‘pose them in unnatural situations’ or ‘europeanize’ them as would most 16th-century artists. It is easy enough to criticize a non-academic website such as this, but it serves to point up the consensus about the ethnographic importance of White’s drawings in contemporary scholarship. White himself spoke of what he had achieved in a more complex manner, stating in the title page to the portfolio of White’s observational accuracy is validated when comparing his watercolours with Thomas Harriot’s text. Harriot describes Granganimeo, the brother of Wingina, the Roanoke Indian leader, and Granganimeo’s acquisition of a piece of tin from the English which he then fashioned as a piece of adornment to wear around his neck. White’s watercolour of the ‘Chiefe Herowan’ (Fig. 1a) shows a man similarly adorned. His folded arms echo Harriot’s observation that some elders of the community known for their wisdom characteristically

Figure 1a A Cheife Herowan, John White (BM 1906,0509.1.21)  
Figure 1b One of the wyves of Wynyno, John White (BM 1906,0509.1.17)
adopted such a pose.10

John White’s ‘truth’, however, is not now easily mapped onto our current expectations of naturalism in art and the mechanical recording of space, volume, shape, colour, field and depth as we understand these elements today. His concepts of truth and artifice pertained to his practice as a gentleman-limner in the tradition instituted by Nicholas Hilliard.11

The limning tradition was codified in several art treatises in English published towards the end of the 16th and beginning of the 17th centuries, just following the period when White was most active as an ethnographer/artist. Richard Haydocke’s translation of Lomazzo’s Trattato (first published in Italian in 1583) appeared in 1598 and continued the incorporation of Italian Renaissance and Mannerist art theories into the broader academic professionalization of artists in England. Nicholas Hilliard’s The Arte of Limning (1600), written at the request of Haydocke, helped to distinguish limning from other kinds of painting. Its discussion of the painting of faces is instructive for my account as one finds a close approximation to what John White might have considered one of the kinds of ‘truth’ being counterfeited in his art.

But of all things, the perfection is to imitate the face of mankind (or the hardest part of it, and which indeed one should not attempt until he were meetly good in story work) so near and so well after the life as that not only the party in all likeness for favour and complexion is, or may be, very well resembled, but even his best graces and countenance notably expressed; for there is no person but hath variety of looks and countenance, as well ill-becoming as pleasing or delighting.12

Hilliard’s tract, and indeed White’s practice, promotes the rendering of faces as a key part of the imaging process, but rather than record the precise features seen before the artist, a countenance is best expressed through the perfect resembling of the ‘best graces’ selecting from a variety of moods or countenances that the person adopts.

Turning to John White’s single or paired figures of Algonquian peoples (10 watercolours in total) we find that the attention to truth in his work is most assuredly found in the painting of the faces of his figures, who many have noted are distinctly American Indian in countenance and ‘individualized’ to a large extent. The faces of his Indian figures reveal a certain amount of variety, as he turns from painting the old to the very young, a mother and her daughter, ‘age of 8 or 10 yeares’, both of the village of Pomeiooc (Fig. 2). Further examination of the faces also reveals the artifice involved in making the ‘best graces and countenance’ for the kind of portrait being assembled. White’s painting of the mother of the young daughter of Pomeiooc and his image of the ‘wyfe’ of Wingina are facially, and in the arrangement of their hair, very much the same individual physiognomically (Fig. 3, details). However, in their depicted poses, costumes and body decoration, each are distinctive. Are we meant to see them as the same individual or do their poses, tattooed limbs and differing titles mean that they are separate and distinct?

White’s male figures are all facially very similar, with the upturned and rather square chin, full lips, somewhat close-set eyes and a certain amount of hairstyle repetition (Fig. 4, details). These figures, apart from their written titles and differing poses and costumes, are mainly distinguished by their age, the older figures having much more lined features, heavily inscribed with dark parallel marks across the forehead and cheeks. Significantly, White’s images of Florida peoples, a man and a woman, are facially different from the ‘Virginians’ as they were copies after those made by Jacques Le Moyne. Here, again, we might have recourse to Renaissance theories of decorum as instituted in several Italian treatises and reproduced for an English audience via Haydocke’s translation of Lomazzo. Younger individuals would show more decoro or decorum in active poses and older figures would maintain more reticent and senatorial stances as befitted their stations in society. Similarly, their faces must show decorum in expression.

When we turn to the poses, stances, articulation of the hands and fingers of the Algonquians being represented, we reach now a place of absolute artifice in John White’s images, several scholars noting the clear dependence of White and his
One well-known instance of this formulation is the deployment of what is termed the ‘Renaissance elbow’ in John White’s figure of the werowance or chief ‘Lorde’, showing the ‘manner of their attire and painting themselves when they go to their generall huntings or at theire soleme feasts’. He isn’t shown as a particularly elderly individual and his pose certainly signifies someone fit and active in European iconographical terms, a military standard-bearer or young courtier. This pose amounts to an idealization and Europeanization of the original sitter and begins a process of hybridrical representations of American Indian leaders that lasted far into the 18th century (Fig. 5a,5b – compare with Standard bearer by H. Goltzius).

Other forms of artifice that enter into John White’s imaging processes are taken again from Mannerist visual culture, in the form of engravings, both of whole figures and of smaller details, such as the depiction of hands and toes. Some of White’s figures seem to speak through their hands, especially in the image of the mother and daughter of Pomeiooc, who Joyce Chaplin and others, have read accurately as literally drawing in the English viewer to imagine their impact on American Indian society whose needs are to be fulfilled by the colonizing effort (see Fig. 2). The mother’s right arm and pointing finger in this watercolour-drawing look very similar to the right arm in the image of a woman holding a plantain leaf illustrated in volume 3 of Giambattista Ramusio’s collection of Navigationi e Viaggi published in Venice in 1550–59. In the circle around Sir Walter Raleigh, Thomas Harriot, the Hakluyts or the aristocratic patron himself would have been aware of this important set of published voyages and amongst his retinue of gentlemen and ‘scientists’ before finally returning home permanently to the Carolina Outer Banks, in 1587. A traveller’s diary of 1584–85, notes that the two American Indian men in Raleigh’s company ‘are clad in a brown taffeta’, that ‘their faces as well as their whole bodies were very similar to those of the white Moors at home’; however, ‘they wear no shirts, only a piece of fur to cover their pudenda and the skins of wild animals to cover their shoulders. Nobody could understand their language, and they had a very childish and wild appearance.’ There is no evidence that either man sat for White. Did he view these two captives and cultural interlopers as non-Anglo but also non-native? Had Manteo’s excellence as an intermediary meant that his success in acculturation is now our ethnographic loss?

What I hope I have suggested in this discussion is that while White’s images are original and accurate in parts, they contain a certain amount of invention and artifice relevant to the era in which they were created. As I now turn to the images that Theodor de Bry and his workshop created after the John White watercolours, I hope to show that these also partake in the visual culture of their creators. Therefore, if White’s images were only partial truths, de Bry’s copies are removed even further from the truth. De Bry would have worked faithfully towards the perfection of his art and would not have questioned White’s authority as artist on a voyage of colonization.

His manipulation of John White’s watercolours, their transformation into graphic imagery, with additions and inventions of de Bry’s own making, should be understood as accepted practices of the processes of reproduction. De Bry enhanced images that he might have considered proto-designs, prepared for printing but not to be widely disseminated without further elaboration. The distinction traditionally held between the two forms of representation is that in John White’s watercolours we find authentic American Indian content, whereas in de Bry’s images we find subjects that are derivative, manipulated and manipulative, ideologically suspect and Europeanized. What I hope will now be apparent is that most of these distinctions are misleading, and work to valorize one form of representation over another. In White’s own words, he ‘counterfeited’ his images ‘according to the truth’ and thus

![Figure 5a](BM 1906,0509.1.12) Their manner of their attire and painting themselves, John White.

![Figure 5b](BM 1853,1008.87) A Standard bearer, Hendrick Goltzius, 1587, engraving.

I would like to make a brief observation at this point about the source White does not appear to have used, despite having every possibility of doing so. Manteo and Wanchese were captured during the first Virginia expedition sponsored by Raleigh and taken back to England in 1584. While Wanchese only spent those few months of 1584 and 1585 in the company of the English, Manteo stayed much longer in Raleigh’s household and amongst his retinue of gentlemen and ‘scientists’ before
understood fully the functional, symbolic and representational qualities of the image-making process and its limitations. De Bry merely extended the practice.

This attention to the context of de Bry’s image-making does not, however, excuse his works from historical or critical reinterpretation which has been undertaken by a number of distinguished scholars. Drawing on this discussion it becomes apparent that, in fact, in terms of understanding Raleigh’s, the Hakluyts and the company of gentlemen-speculators’ intentions (those who backed this English venture into the New World), it is de Bry’s publication that most fully functioned to carry the weight of ideological and aspirational drives behind it. Richard Hakluyt convinced de Bry to publish the 1585 Virginia colonizing efforts ahead of the French Huguenot attempts in Florida of 1563–65 that were chronologically first, but ideologically less relevant to the aims of promoting English Protestant forms of colonial control over those of the Spanish.

Recent analyses of the English written accounts pertaining to the Virginia voyages, including de Bry’s published illustrations, cite their ‘rhetorical’ content and approach, perfectly in keeping with Renaissance attitudes to argumentation and the putting forward of an account or ‘history’. If we can take as a guide the approach adopted by Peter Mason in his recent study of the intentions behind another sort of rhetorical venture, the publication of the Franciscan friar André Thevet’s *Les Singularitez de la France Antarctique* (1557), translated into an English version in 1568, as well Thevet’s *Les Vrais Pourtraits et Vies des Hommes Illustres* of 1584, then the permission to view the inhabitants of the New World as part of ‘history’ itself becomes a significant precursor to how and why the Raleigh circle’s expositor, de Bry, proceeded.

Crucially, it seems, for English promotion of the new colony in Virginia and for how its American Indians are permitted into history it is the structuring of the visual information in a published text that explicates where in ‘history’ these inhabitants of lands not previously known or recorded should be placed. The first illustrated plate in de Bry’s published account of the Virginian venture is of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. In plucking the apple Eve introduces into the timeless world of Paradise an event that precipitates the history of humanity. At the end of the volume are White’s images of Ancient Britons and Pictish peoples, who are included in order to show ‘that the Inhabitants of the great Britaine have bin in times past as sauadge as those of Virginia’. In between are placed the Virginia Indians, framed genealogically by Adam and Eve and anthropologically by the ancient Britons. But the Indians’ historical context is not securely placed. The reader of de Bry may have surmised that the Indians’ previous existence took place in a continual present, bereft of significant history in the sense the English colonists could have recognized. There is no ‘in times past’ for these figures beyond the original moment of the first contact in 1584.

De Bry’s venture, once published, took on an iconic authority of its own and can be shown to have dictated the terms for representation of American Indians throughout much of the next 200 years. In the remainder of this account I will give four instances of this phenomenon to demonstrate just how widespread was the taking up of the de Bry stereotypes.

My first example dates from the 1610s. Two nearly contemporaneous images, c. 1615, have emerged in the historical records, one that clearly labels its figures with individual names and another that shows a single standing male Virginian, viewed in ‘St James’s Park, London in the zoological garden, in Westminster’ surrounded by a number of European animals, a sheep, goat and three birds (Fig. 6). With respect to the latter, the unknown artist [perhaps Brent de Bock] claims to ‘have seen’ this figure, but there is a danger here in accepting this statement as a claim for visual congruity between what is depicted and what was actually ‘seen’. In Dutch visual tradition, the phrase ‘copied from the life’ does not propose, as modern viewers might think, that the artist is recording an event in front of their eyes. Instead, it refers to the basis of the drawing stemming from life-study drawings, i.e., studies of hands, feet, expressions, etc. Just as the birds and animals of this drawing are probably copied from other books containing life studies of these animals, so too is the Indian man derived from the Virginia volume published by Theodor de Bry, particularly the plate *Aged man in his winter garment* (Fig. 7). This drawing’s derivation from de Bry does not invalidate the truth of its inscription, that the draftsman saw a Virginian Indian in St. James’ Park, but de Bry showed him how to turn his experience into a visual record.

The identity of the man seen in the park may be elucidated...
by the Virginia Company broadside, published in 1615, where
two individuals are named: Eiakintomino and Matahan.
Clearly, Eiakintomino (on the left) is identical with the St.
James's Park figure – although the pose is reversed by the
nature of the engraving (Fig. 8). It is possible, therefore, that
both images derive from an intermediary drawing – itself
elaborating on the original in de Bry. This process of using
White’s designs, mediated by de Bry, as templates for the
visualization of the American Indian occurs frequently
thereafter.

A good example comes from the images illustrating John
Smith’s Generall Historie of Virginia, published in 1624. I would
like to take just one part of Robert Vaughan’s six-part plate to
reveal how an original John White image, via a de Bry
reproduction of it, is translated from a North Carolinian
context to one relevant to native peoples living near the
Jamestown colony in Virginia and how this further allows the
subsequent use of the altered image to be reused in an entirely
new context. Vaughan reused White’s scene of the circular
dances of the Carolina natives around carved poles ‘which they
use at their hyghe feastes’ to articulate the position John Smith
must have felt on being captured and surrounded by Virginian
natives carrying weapons and dancing in ‘Their triumph about
him’ (Figs 9–10). Vaughan, or more likely Smith, provided a
rationalization of this reconfiguration by stating in the plate’s
legend that

The Countrey wee now call Virginia beginneth at Cape Henry
distant from Roanoack 60 miles. Where was Sr. Walter Raleigh’s
plantation: and because the people differ very little from them of
Powhatan in any thing, I have inserted those figures in this place
because of the conveniency. 29

Vaughan’s re-imagining of Smith’s capture and his
alteration of the meaning of the dancers’ poses to one of
pervasive pleasure at the suffering of others was carried
forward as late as the early 19th century in an illustration to a
captivity narrative. The scene shows the “horrific torture of two
“helpless virgins”’, illustrating an anti-Indian propaganda
collection now considered fictitious, the Affecting History of the
Dreadful Distresses of Frederick Manheim’s Family, (1793–1800)
(Fig. 11). White’s figures are here given back some of their
original accoutrement seen in their first articulation in de Bry
but they also retain the weaponry brandished in the plate
illustrating John Smith’s account.

Further reuses of the de Bry visual iconography of the
Virginian Algonquian Indians show up in a number of other
contexts, usually graphic, of which I will highlight only two to
exemplify further the range and extent of impact that these
original images had on the general European representation of
American Indians. During the 17th century, a number of
mapmakers displayed in the cartouches and other framing
devices of their printed maps American Indian support figures
who owed their origins to some of White and de Bry’s visual

Figure 8 Eiakintomino, by Felix
Kyngston for William Welby, detail of
Virginia Company Lottery, printed
broadside with woodcuts, 1615.
(Society of Antiquaries of London)

Figure 9 Detail, Map and illustrations in John Smith’s Generall Historie of
Virginia, Robert Vaughan, engraving, 1624, (© The British Library Board. All
Rights Reserved, G.7037)

Figure 10 Their dances which they use at their hyghe feastes, Theodor de Bry,
engraving after John White, 1590, in Historia Americae, Pars 1
(© The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved, c.38.i.18)
formulations. It became somewhat of a stereotype for Dutch and Flemish mapmakers (Blaue and others) to include a number of de Bry ‘Indians’ within the cartouche or decorative borders of their American maps, proliferating what was already a set of semiotically structured elements and fixing to a certain extent the already existing visual iconography of the North American Indians as first expressed by de Bry and his followers (Fig. 12, opposite). As I have argued elsewhere, the uncertain knowledge of the landforms of America can be compared with the seeming security of these iconic figures. The Indian stereotype in the fixity of its visual authority provides a secure frame of reference for the continent. This authority was effective precisely because no new visual representations had emerged to supplant it.

Finally, I wish to underscore the pervasiveness of that use of the Renaissance elbow (mentioned above) in certain images of North American Indians produced up to the 18th century. Two places where this pose is most distinctively seen and which show obvious indebtedness to John White’s original images of coastal Algonquians are those illustrations found in the Historia Canadensis of 1664 of single figures of Huron and other northeastern Indians and the related set of figures shown in the Codex Canadiensis of around 1700 (Figs 13–14). The Codex’s illustrator was probably the Jesuit father Louis Nicholas, who produced a number of tracts based on his experiences during several years of travels in New France. In the Codex, Nicholas created almost entirely hybridical figures of native peoples from the Great Lakes regions that he reconfigured using typical bodies and formats he found in the illustrations to Francois Du Creux’s Historia Canadensis, whose illustrator in turn produced figures drawing on the precedent of White and de Bry. We can trace this especially through the use and reuse of the Renaissance elbow format for some of the figures. In White, this pose is found in a Coastal Algonquian man, in Du Creux’s Historia, he has become Huron, and finally in Louis Nicholas’ Codex, the man is either Ottawa or one of their enemies, the ‘Sioux’, or Nadowessieux ‘King’.

In all of these instances what is laid bare is a process of visual imagining, rather than an eyewitness record. Once White’s designs had been disseminated by de Bry they took on an iconic authority that dictated the terms for representing American Indians for over a century. Even when the draftsman had actual figures to work from, the iconography he deployed frequently relied on de Bry’s formulations. It was as though de Bry had constructed a set of two-dimensional lay figures, which other artists would clothe with whatever variations their own experience offered them.
Notes


2 It was a number of years before the name of the English colony was fixed as ‘Virginia’, this title only emerging from a number of alternates after the late 1580s (alternative names were ‘Wingandacoia’, ‘Ossomocomuck’ or ‘Norumbega’) as discussed in H.C. Porter, The Inconstant Savage: England and the North American Indian, 1500–1660, London, 1979, 225, 230.


4 The attention to visual information is shown in the precise instructions given to the artist Thomas Bavin, who was drafted to sail with an abortive English-backed transatlantic voyage of 1582–83. The instructions to Bavin are reprinted and discussed in P. Hulton, America, 1585: The Complete Drawings of John White, Chapel Hill and London, 1984, 9.


6 As stated on the cover of the recently produced video to mark the historic visit of contemporary Virginian and North Carolinian native peoples, On the traces of Pocahontas, ‘the legacy of John White’—“the 17th-century watercolours is discussed by the descendents of the peoples he encountered’, DVD, filmed and produced by Simona Piantieri and Max Carocci, ©The Trustees of the British Museum, 2007.

7 A current National Park Service website for Fort Raleigh, North Carolina, illustrates John White in the act of sitting and making a sketch on a small board, an anachronism of some proportion; see also the comments about White’s practice by Michael Strock at http://www.nps.gov/fora/teacher.htm.

8 Quoted from the handwritten title page to the collection of John White’s drawings held in the British Museum, Prints and Drawings department, pen and brown ink, 80 x 164mm, accession no. 1906.0509.1.1. See catalogue entry in K. Sloan, et al., A New World: England’s first view of America, London, 2007, 93.


10 This incident of the bartering with the English for their tin dish and Granganimeo’s acquisition of it for the pricey sum of £7 worth of animal furs is described in Porter, 1979, 226; and quoted from Harriot in ibid., 101–2.

11 For an explication of John White’s status as a nobleman–limner, see Sloan, ‘Knowing John White: The courtier’s “curious and gentle art of limning”’, supra n. 8, 22–37, and Katherine Coombs’ paper in this collection.


14 This is quoted from the written notation on White’s drawing, also frequently titled an ‘Indian in body paint’, from de Bry’s reproduction of the same. It is assumed that either Harriot or White himself would have made the notations.


16 J. Chaplin, ‘Roanoke “Counterfeited according to the truth”’ in Sloan, supra n. 8, 63.


18 Most recently cited by Neil McGregor in his keynote address at the conference.


21 ‘Manteo and Wanchese also served an important promotional function for Ralegh and his circle. When parliament in December confirmed Ralegh’s patent to his American holdings, it did so at least in part because, “some of the people borne in those partes brought home into this our Realme of England” visited the Chamber so that the “singular great comodities of that Lande are revealed & made known unto us.” Ralegh may as well have sent Manteo or Wanchese to visit and board with potential investors and supporters. The evidence here is at best sketchy, but it is at least possible that “the Blackamore” who resided for a time with Henry Percy, the Duke of Northumberland, was either Manteo or Wanchese.’ in M.L. Oberg, ‘Between “Savage Man” and “Most Faithful Englishman”: Manteo and the Early Anglo-Indian Exchange, 1584–1590’, Itinerario, Leiden, 24, 2, 2000, 151–2.


26 Quoted from the original third title page in Harriot’s Briefe and true report, 1590, as reproduced in Hulton (1984), supra n. 4, 130.

27 W.C. Sturtevant was one of the first to emphasize the importance of de Bry’s engravings after White for their impact on later visual representations of American Indians, in ‘First Visual Images of Native America’, in First Images of America: The Impact of the New World on the Old, Fredi Chiapelli, ed., Berkeley, 1976, I, 419.

28 The term ‘haer net leven’ or ‘taken from the life’ as used in 17th-century Dutch art theory is clearly explained in C. Swan, Art, Science and Witchcraft in Early Modern Holland: Jacques de Gheyn II, 1565–1629, Cambridge, 2005, 36–40. Swan’s analysis goes some way towards counteracting the tendency in some forms of modern scholarship to align these terms with later theories and practices of naturalism arising in the 18th century and after.

29 Quoted from Robert Vaughan’s illustrations to John Smith’s Generall Historie of Virginia, London, 1624, British Library collections, manuscript no. g7037