



Art, Insurance and the Climate of Risk

Nicolas Barbon

exploring Barbon's building schemes

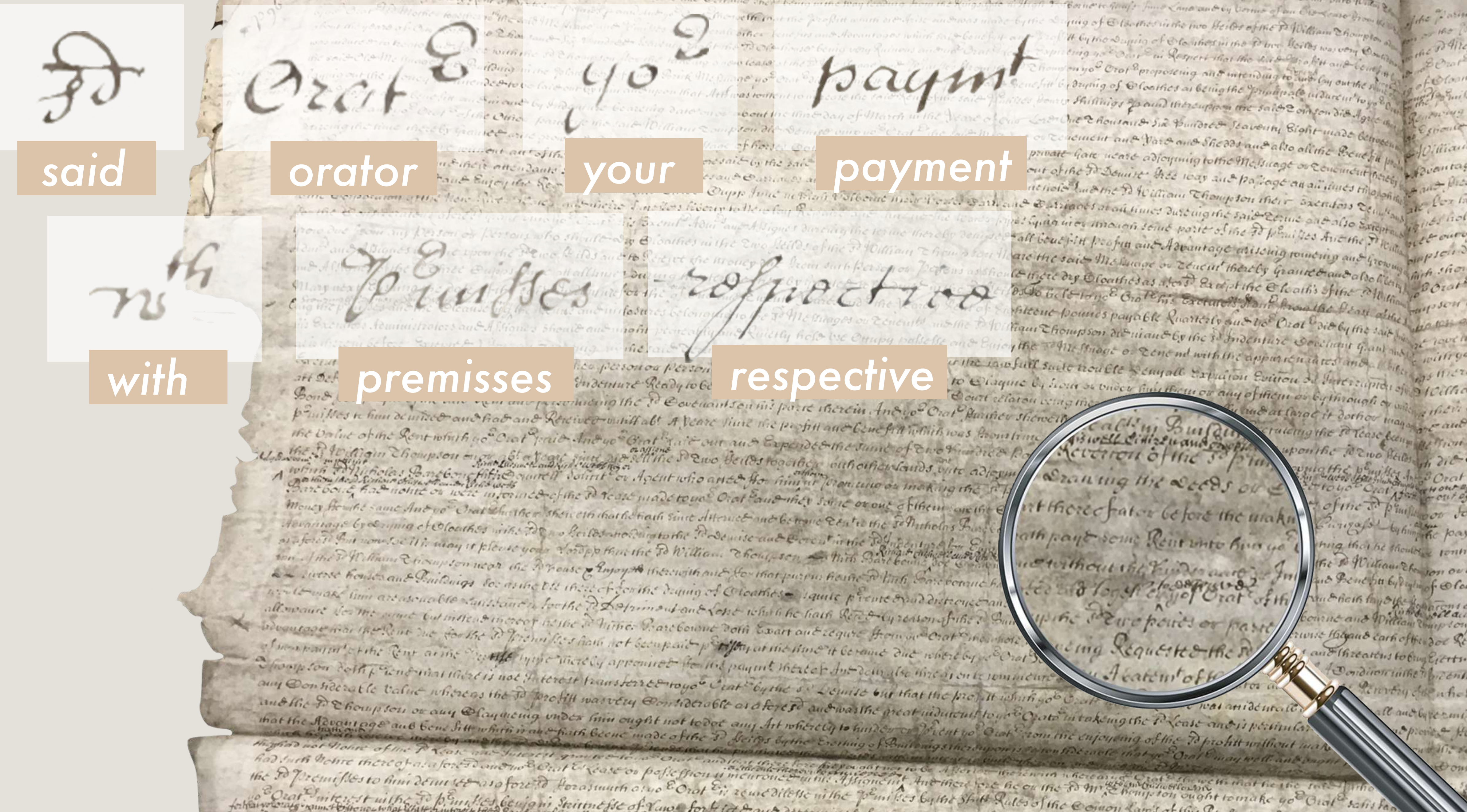
RACHEL SUTHERLAND | DEPARTMENT OF ART HISTORY | MCGILL UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT: From the inception of fire insurance in early modern London to evaluating priceless works of art, insurance offers a lens through which we are able to consider the nuance of art's movement and display. In the early stages of development for the syllabus of an undergraduate seminar course and a later conference, *Art, Insurance and the Climate of Risk* examines whether the role of photographic media in the genesis of the combustion engine carries some responsibility for the conditions of climatic risk now governed by insurance. With all stories needing a beginning, my task in *Art, Insurance and the Climate of Risk* was to research Nicholas Barbon—a 17th-century economist, builder, and fire insurer operating in London—in order to lay the narrative foundation for the beginnings of insurance.

METHODOLOGY: Beginning with a brief biographical account of Nicholas Barbon, my research involved using online resources to locate specific archive entries across London that could pertain to Barbon's fire insurance office. Upon drafting a list of promising documents, they were photographed by Professor Hunter and the long process of transcribing each page began. With each new document's bearing it's own hand-writing and stylistic nuances, it became a matter of patience and eventual familiarity.

FINDINGS: While the broader project is still in its nascent phase of development, the transcriptions drafted throughout this research internship will provide Professor Hunter with material with which he can construct a narrative base—weaving together the history of art insurance from post-fire London to the United States' civil war era. The documents provide an insight into legal cases between Barbon and a number of tenants, workers, and land owners—appearing as defendant and plaintiff. As dealings concerning properties (such as Essex House and the Red Lion Inn) are brought before court, Barbon's deliberate attempts to thwart the repayment of loans and debts colour a picture of the schemes contrived by the builder and economist.

PALAEOGRAPHIC SAMPLES: Certain writing conventions no longer in use (and subject to a scribe's personal style) were used in legal documents to save space and time. Although patterns can be found that make for quick transcriptions, the shorthand more often than not adds a layer of complexity to comprehending the words written over three-hundred years ago.



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