

18th Century: Portrait and Landscape in British Art

Richard Wilson RA (1714 – 1782) was an influential Welsh landscape painter, who worked in Britain and Italy. He is recognised as a pioneer in British art of landscape for its own sake and was described in the Welsh Academy Encyclopedia of Wales as the "most distinguished painter Wales has ever produced and the first to appreciate the aesthetic possibilities of his country".



1 Summer Evening, (Caernarvon Castle) 1764-5

2 The Destruction of Niobe's Children 1760

Painting in Italy and afterwards in Britain, he was the first major British painter to concentrate on landscape. He composed well, but saw and rendered only the general effects of nature, thereby creating a personal, ideal style influenced by Claude Lorrain and the Dutch landscape tradition. John Ruskin wrote that Wilson "paints in a manly way, and occasionally reaches exquisite tones of colour". He concentrated on painting idealised Italianate landscapes and landscapes based upon classical literature, but when his painting, *The Destruction of the Children of Niobe* (c.1759–60), won acclaim, he gained many commissions from landowners seeking classical portrayals of their estates. His landscapes were acknowledged as an influence by Constable, John Crome and Turner.



3 St Peters and the Vatican from the Janculum, Rome c1765-7

4 Lake Avernus c1765

5 Llyn Cau, Cader Idris

Alexander Cozens (1717–1786) was a British landscape painter in watercolours, born in Russia. He taught drawing and wrote treatises on the subject, evolving a method in which imaginative drawings of landscapes could be worked up from abstract blots on paper.



6 A Vale Near Matlock

7 Blot drawings

In 1785 he published a pamphlet on his manner of drawing landscapes from blots, called *A New Method of Assisting the Invention in Drawing Original Compositions of Landscape*.

Henry Angelo, his pupil at Eton, described Cozens' unusual method of teaching in his *Reminiscences*:

“ Cozens dashed out upon several pieces of paper a series of accidental smudges and blots in black, brown, and grey, which being floated on, he impressed again upon other paper, and by the exercise of his fertile imagination, and a certain degree of ingenious coaxing, converted into romantic rocks, woods, towers, steeples, cottages, rivers, fields, and waterfalls. Blue and grey blots formed the mountains, clouds, and skies’. An improvement on this plan was to splash the bottoms of earthenware plates with these blots, and to stamp impressions therefrom on sheets of damped paper.”



8 Wooded Landscape
(cottage in a wood)



9 Setting Sun 1770-3

Allan Ramsay (1713 – 1784) was a prominent Scottish portrait-painter.



10 Lady Mary Coke



David Hume 1752

Among his most satisfactory productions are some of his earlier ones, such as the full-length of the duke of Argyll, and the numerous bust-portraits of Scottish gentlemen and their ladies which he executed before settling in London. They are full of both grace and individuality; the features show excellent draughtsmanship; and the flesh-painting is firm and sound in method, though frequently tending a little to hardness and opacity. His full-length of Lady Mary Coke is remarkable for the skill and delicacy with which the white satin drapery is managed; while the portrait of his brown-eyed second wife Margaret, in the Scottish National Gallery, is described as having a sweetness and tenderness. The portrait of his wife also shows the influence of French art, which Ramsay incorporated into his work.

Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723 – 1792) was an English painter, specialising in portraits. John Russell said he was one of the major European painters of the 18th Century. He promoted the "Grand Style" in painting which depended on idealisation of the

imperfect. He was a founder and first president of the Royal Academy of Arts, and was knighted by George III in 1769.



11 Jane, Countess of Harrington 1778 John Murray, 4th Earl of Dunmore 1765

In 1749, Reynolds met Commodore Augustus Keppel, who invited him to join HMS Centurion, of which he had command, on a voyage to the Mediterranean. While with the ship he visited Lisbon, Cadiz, Algiers, and Minorca. From Minorca he travelled to Livorno in Italy, and then to Rome, where he spent two years, studying the Old Masters and acquiring a taste for the "Grand Style". [citation needed] Lord Edgcumbe, who had known Reynolds as a boy and introduced him to Keppel, suggested he should study with Pompeo Batoni, the leading painter in Rome, but Reynolds replied that he had nothing to learn from him.

On his return to England he spent time in Devon before settling in London. He achieved success rapidly, and was extremely prolific. In the late 1750s, at the height of the social season, he received five or six sitters a day, each for an hour.

The clothing of Reynolds' sitters was usually painted either by one of his pupils, his studio assistant Giuseppe Marchi, or the specialist drapery painter Peter Toms. James Northcote, his pupil, wrote of this arrangement that "the imitation of particular stuffs is not the work of genius, but is to be acquired easily by practice, and this was what his pupils could do by care and time more than he himself chose to bestow; but his own slight and masterly work was still the best."

His Discourses, a series of lectures delivered at the Academy between 1769 and 1790, are remembered for their sensitivity and perception. In one lecture he expressed the opinion that "invention, strictly speaking, is little more than a new combination of those images which have been previously gathered and deposited in the memory." William Jackson in his contemporary essays said of Reynolds 'there is much ingenuity and originality in all his academic discourses, replete with classical knowledge of his art, acute remarks on the works of others, and general taste and discernment'.

Critics included William Blake who published the vitriolic Annotations to Sir Joshua Reynolds' Discourses in 1808



12 Miss Nelly O'Brien c1762-64

Nelly O'Brien (d. 1768) was a well-known beauty and courtesan, who sat for Reynolds on a number of occasions between 1760 and 1767. O'Brien is portrayed in fashionable contemporary dress, holding a Maltese lapdog. By c. 1763, she was the mistress of Frederick St John, 2nd Viscount Bolingbroke (1732-1787). However, there is no evidence to suggest that the portrait was commissioned. Rather, it is thought that Reynolds painted it without a particular buyer in mind, as a means of demonstrating his skills. The portrait is notable for its interplay of light and shadow, particularly in the upper part of the sitter's body, where the wide brim of the bonnet casts a shadow over her face and bosom. Reynolds rendered with great subtlety the different tones, colours and fabrics of eighteenth-century costume, particularly in the skirt area, where a transparent layer of lace is convincingly and effectively portrayed overlying the quilted material underneath.

George Stubbs ARA (1724 – 1806) was an English painter, best known for his paintings of horses.

Largely self taught he had a passion for anatomy from his childhood, and in or around 1744, he moved to York, in the North of England, to pursue his ambition to study the subject under experts.

In 1754 Stubbs visited Italy. Forty years later he told Ozias Humphry that his motive for going to Italy was, "to convince himself that nature was and is always superior to art whether Greek or Roman, and having renewed this conviction he immediately resolved upon returning home". In 1756 he rented a farmhouse in the village of Horkstow, Lincolnshire, and spent 18 months dissecting horses, assisted by his common-law wife, Mary Spencer. He moved to London in about 1759 and in 1766 published *The anatomy of the Horse*. Stubbs's drawings were seen by leading aristocratic patrons, who recognised that his work was more accurate than that of earlier horse painters.



13 Whistlejacket c1762



Mares and Foals in a Landscape 1763-8



14 A Lion Attacking a Horse 1770



15 Painting of a Kangaroo 1772

Thomas Gainsborough FRSA (1727 – 1788) was an English portrait and landscape painter, draughtsman, and printmaker. He surpassed his rival Sir Joshua Reynolds to become the dominant British portraitist of the second half of the 18th century. He painted quickly, and the works of his maturity are characterised by a light palette and easy strokes. He preferred landscapes to portraits, and is credited (with Richard Wilson) as the originator of the 18th-century British landscape school. Gainsborough was a founding member of the Royal Academy.



16 Self Portrait 1754

When he was still a boy he impressed his father with his drawing and painting skills, and he almost certainly had painted heads and small landscapes by the time he was ten years old, including a miniature self-portrait. Gainsborough was allowed to leave home in 1740 to study art in London, where he trained under engraver Hubert Gravelot but became associated with William Hogarth and his school.



17 *Mr and Mrs Robert Andrews* c1748-50

Gainsborough was about twenty-three when he painted *Mr and Mrs Andrews* in 1750. Today it is one of his most famous works, but it remained in the family of the sitters until 1960 and was very little known before it appeared in an exhibition in Ipswich in 1927, after which it was regularly requested for other exhibitions in Britain and abroad, and praised by critics for its charm and freshness. By the post-war years its iconic status was established, and it was one of four paintings chosen to represent British art in an exhibition in Paris celebrating the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953. Soon the painting began to receive hostile scrutiny as a paradigm of the paternalist and capitalist society of 18th-century England, but it remains a firm popular favourite.

The work is an unusual combination of two common types of painting of the period: a double portrait, here of a recently married couple, and a landscape view of the English countryside. Gainsborough's work mainly consisted of these two different genres, but their striking combination side-by-side in this extended horizontal format is unique in Gainsborough's oeuvre, and extremely rare in other painters. Conversation piece was the term for a portrait group that contained other elements and activities, but these normally showed more figures, set engaged in some activity or in an interior, rather than a landscape empty of people.

Gainsborough was later famously given to complaining that well-paid portrait work kept him away from his true love of landscape painting.



18 *Sunset* 1760

Gainsborough's enthusiasm for landscapes is shown in the way he merged figures of the portraits with the scenes behind them. He said, "I'm sick of portraits, and wish very much to take my viol-da-gam and walk off to some sweet village, where I can paint landskips (sic) and enjoy the fag end of life in quietness and ease." His landscapes were often painted at night by candlelight, using a tabletop arrangement of stones, pieces of mirrors, broccoli, and the like as a model. His later work was characterised by a light palette and easy, economical strokes.



19 Road from Market 1767-8

The art historian Michael Rosenthal described Gainsborough as "one of the most technically proficient and, at the same time, most experimental artists of his time". He was noted for the speed with which he applied paint, and he worked more from observations of nature (and of human nature) than from application of formal academic rules. The poetic sensibility of his paintings caused Constable to say, "On looking at them, we find tears in our eyes and know not what brings them."



20 Woman in a Blue Dress c1770 The Blue Boy 1770

Perhaps Gainsborough's most famous work *The Blue Boy* is a historical costume study as well as a portrait: the youth in his seventeenth-century apparel is regarded as Gainsborough's homage to Anthony van Dyck, and in particular is very close to Van Dyck's portrait of Charles II as a boy.

Gainsborough painted the portrait in response to the advice of his rival Sir Joshua Reynolds, who had written:

It ought, in my opinion, to be indispensably observed, that the masses of light in a picture be always of a warm, mellow colour, yellow, red, or a yellowish white, and that the blue, the grey, or the green colours be kept almost entirely out of these masses, and be used only to support or set off these warm colours; and for this purpose, a small proportion of cold colour will be sufficient. Let this conduct be reversed; let the light be cold, and the surrounding colour warm, as we often see in the works of the Roman and Florentine painters, and it will be out of the power of art, even in the hands of Rubens and Titian, to make a picture splendid and harmonious.

Paul Sandby_RA (1731 – 1809) was an English map-maker turned landscape painter in watercolours, who, along with his older brother Thomas, became one of the founding members of the Royal Academy in 1768.



21 Windsor Castle

In 1745 he followed his brother Thomas in obtaining an appointment in the military drawing department at the Tower of London. Following the suppression of the Jacobite rebellion of 1745, Sandby was employed to assist in the military survey of the new road to Fort George, and of the northern and western parts of the Highlands, under the direction of Colonel David Watson. He was later appointed draughtsman to the survey. While undertaking this commission, which included preparing designs for new bridges and fortifications, he began producing watercolour landscapes documenting the changes in Scotland since the rebellion, and making sketches of Scottish events such as the hanging in Edinburgh of soldier-turned-forger John Young in 1751.

Johan Joseph Zoffany, RA (1733 – 1810) was a German neoclassical painter, active mainly in England.



22 Charles Townley and friends in his library 1782

A founding member of the new Royal Academy in 1768, Zoffany enjoyed great popularity for his society and theatrical portraits, painting many prominent actors and actresses, in particular David Garrick, the most famous actor of his day – Garrick as Hamlet and Garrick as King Lear – often in costume. He was a master of what has been called the "theatrical conversation piece", a sub-set of the "conversation piece" genre that arose with the middle classes in the 18th century. (The conversation piece – or conversazione – was a relatively small, though not necessarily inexpensive, informal group portrait, often of a family group or a circle of friends. This genre developed in the Netherlands and France and became popular in Britain from about 1720.) Zoffany has been described by one critic as "the real creator and master of this genre".



**23 Self Portrait as David
with the Head of Goliath
1756**



**Archduchess Maria Christina,,
Duchess of Teschen, called "Mimi"
1776**

George Romney (1734 – 1802) was an English portrait painter. He was the most fashionable artist of his day, painting many leading society figures – including his artistic muse, Emma Hamilton, mistress of Lord Nelson.



**24 Emma Hart,
Lady Hamillon
as Circe 1782**



**Miss Juliana Willoughby
1781-88**

Joseph Wright ARA (1734 – 1797), styled **Joseph Wright of Derby**, was an English landscape and portrait painter. He has been acclaimed as "the first professional painter to express the spirit of the Industrial Revolution".

Wright is notable for his use of chiaroscuro effect, which emphasises the contrast of light and dark, and, for his paintings of candle-lit subjects. His paintings of the birth of science out of alchemy, often based on the meetings of the Lunar Society, a group of scientists and industrialists living in the English Midlands, are a significant record of the struggle of science against religious values in the period known as the Age of Enlightenment.



25 Wright, *An Experiment on a Bird in the Air Pump* 1768

One of a number of candlelit scenes that Wright painted during the 1760s. The painting departed from convention of the time by depicting a scientific subject in the reverential manner formerly reserved for scenes of historical or religious significance. Wright was intimately involved in depicting the Industrial Revolution and the scientific advances of the Enlightenment, but while his paintings were recognised as something out of the ordinary by his contemporaries, his provincial status and choice of subjects meant the style was never widely imitated. The picture has been owned by the National Gallery, London, since 1863 and is still regarded as a masterpiece of British art. In June 2015 it was on loan to Tate Britain.

The painting depicts a natural philosopher, a forerunner of the modern scientist, recreating one of Robert Boyle's air pump experiments, in which a bird is deprived of air, before a varied group of onlookers. The group exhibits a variety of reactions, but for most of the audience scientific curiosity overcomes concern for the bird. The central figure looks out of the picture as if inviting the viewer's participation in the outcome.



26 *Two Girls Dressing a Kitten by Candlelight* c1768-70



27 *Matlock Tor by Moonlight* 1772-80

Francis Towne (1739/40 – 1816) was a British watercolour landscape painter and teacher, who spent his career between his native London and Exeter. Towne travelled to Italy in 1780-81, which was strongly formative for his style, perhaps as much for what he learned from other English watercolourists there as from the sights or Italian art. He also went on "study trips" to Wales and the Lake District. He was reasonably well known in his lifetime, though failing repeatedly to get elected to the Royal Academy, but soon became neglected after his death.



28 *The Tarpeian Rock, Rome* 1780

He remained an obscure figure until the early 20th century, so that the collector Paul Oppé was able to acquire numbers of important works very cheaply. Oppé was greatly impressed, especially with Towne's elegant and somewhat stylised early manner, which chimed with trends in English painting at the time, "the taste of our own century for flat colourful pattern-making", as Andrew Wilton put it in 1993. The writings of Oppé and others created a revival of interest in Towne, and more works began to appear on the market. By the 1950s he was widely recognised as an important figure and his works were owned by many museums.

Maria Anna Angelika Kauffmann RA (1741 – 1807), usually known in English as **Angelica Kauffman**, was a Swiss Neoclassical painter who had a successful career in London and Rome.



29 *Tragedy and Comedy* 1791

Remembered primarily as a history painter, Kauffmann was a skilled portraitist, landscape and decoration painter. She was one of the two female founding members of the Royal Academy in London in 1768. Her firmest friend was Sir Joshua Reynolds. In his pocket-book her name as "Miss Angelica" or "Miss Angel" appears frequently; and in 1766 he painted her, a compliment which she returned by her Portrait of Sir Joshua Reynolds.

Henry Fuseli RA (1741 – 1825) was a Swiss painter, draughtsman and writer on art who spent much of his life in Britain.



30 *Lady Macbeth Seizing the Daggers* 1810-12

As a painter, Fuseli favoured the supernatural. He pitched everything on an ideal scale, believing a certain amount of exaggeration necessary in the higher branches of historical painting. In this theory he was confirmed by the study of Michelangelo's works and the marble statues of the Monte Cavallo, which, when at Rome, he liked to contemplate in the evening, relieved against a murky sky or illuminated by lightning. Describing his style, the 1911 edition of the Encyclopædia Britannica said that: His figures are full of life and earnestness, and seem to have an object in view which they follow with intensity. Like Rubens he excelled in the art of setting his figures in motion. Though the lofty and terrible was his proper sphere, Fuseli had a fine perception of the ludicrous. The grotesque humour of his fairy scenes, especially those taken from *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, is in its way not less remarkable than the poetic power of his more ambitious works.

Though not noted as a colourist, Fuseli was described as a master of light and shadow.



31 *The Nightmare* 1781 1784

The Nightmare shows a woman in deep sleep with her arms thrown below her, and with a demonic and apelike incubus crouched on her chest.

The painting's dreamlike and haunting erotic evocation of infatuation and obsession was a huge popular success. After its first exhibition, at the 1782 Royal Academy of London, critics and patrons reacted with horrified fascination and the work became widely popular, to the extent that it was parodied in political satire and an engraved version was widely distributed. In response, Fuseli produced at least three other versions.

Interpretations vary. The canvas seems to portray simultaneously a dreaming woman and the content of her nightmare. The incubus and horse's head refer to contemporary belief and folklore about nightmares, but have been ascribed more specific meanings



Rowlandson, *The Covent Garden Nightmare*

by some theorists. Contemporary critics were taken aback by the overt sexuality of the painting, since interpreted by some scholars as anticipating Jungian ideas about the unconscious.

The *Nightmare* simultaneously offers both the image of a dream—by indicating the effect of the nightmare on the woman—and a dream image—in symbolically portraying the sleeping vision. It depicts a sleeping woman draped over the end of a bed with her head hanging down, exposing her long neck. She is surmounted by an incubus that peers out at the viewer. The sleeper seems lifeless and, lying on her back, takes a position then believed to encourage nightmares. Her brilliant coloration is set against the darker reds, yellows, and ochres of the background; Fuseli used a chiaroscuro effect to create strong contrasts between light and shade. The interior is contemporary and fashionable and contains a small table on which rests a mirror, phial, and book. The room is hung with red velvet curtains which drape behind the bed. Emerging from a parting in the curtain is the head of a horse with bold, featureless eyes. For contemporary viewers, *The Nightmare* invoked the relationship of the incubus and the horse (mare) to nightmares. The work was likely inspired by the waking dreams experienced by Fuseli and his contemporaries, who found that these experiences related to folkloric beliefs like the Germanic tales about demons and witches that possessed people who slept alone. In these stories, men were visited by horses or hags, giving rise to the terms "hag-riding" and "mare-riding," and women were believed to engage in sex with the devil.

His style had a considerable influence on many younger British artists, including William Blake.



32 *Falstaff in the Laundry Basket* 1792

Sir Henry Raeburn FRSE RA RSA (1756 – 1823) was a Scottish portrait painter and Scotland's first significant portrait painter since the Union to remain based in Scotland. He served as Portrait Painter to King George IV in Scotland.



**33 Alexander Ranaldson
MacDonell of Glengary 1812**



34 The Skating Minister 1790s

It is considered an icon of Scottish culture, painted during one of the most remarkable periods in the country's history, the Scottish Enlightenment.

Robert Walker was minister of the Canongate Kirk as well as being a member of the Edinburgh Skating Club, the first figure skating club formed anywhere in the world. The club met on Duddingston Loch as shown in the painting, or on Lochend loch to its northeast between Edinburgh and Leith, when these lochs were suitably frozen.

According to Andrew Graham-Dixon, "The pinkish grey crags and sky have been painted with great freedom, whereas the figure of Reverend Robert Walker himself is so tightly drawn and painted that he appears almost as a black silhouette against an icy, vaporous wilderness. Perhaps this was the artist's way of suggesting that, for all his apparent probity and self-restraint, the minister was at heart something of a romantic – a man, at any rate, with a penchant for communing with nature."

William Blake (1757 – 1827) was an English poet, painter, and printmaker. Largely unrecognised during his lifetime, Blake is now considered a seminal figure in the history of the poetry and visual arts of the Romantic Age. What he called his prophetic works were said by 20th-century critic Northrop Frye to form "what is in proportion to its merits the least read body of poetry in the English language". His visual artistry led 21st-century critic Jonathan Jones to proclaim him "far and away the greatest artist Britain has ever produced."



35 Blake, Newton 1795

Blake became a student at the Royal Academy. There, he rebelled against what he regarded as the unfinished style of fashionable painters such as Rubens, championed

by Joshua Reynolds. Over time, Blake came to detest Reynolds' attitude towards art, especially his pursuit of "general truth" and "general beauty". Reynolds wrote in his Discourses that the "disposition to abstractions, to generalising and classification, is the great glory of the human mind"; Blake responded, in marginalia to his personal copy, that "To Generalize is to be an Idiot; To Particularize is the Alone Distinction of Merit". Blake also disliked Reynolds' apparent humility, which he held to be a form of hypocrisy. Against Reynolds' fashionable oil painting, Blake preferred the Classical precision of his early influences, Michelangelo and Raphael.

Blake's Newton demonstrates his opposition to the "single-vision" of scientific materialism: Newton fixes his eye on a compass (recalling Proverbs 8:27, an important passage for Milton) to write upon a scroll that seems to project from his own head.



36 *The Ghost of a Flea* 1819-20

Having informed painter-astrologer John Varley of his visions of apparitions, Blake was subsequently persuaded to paint one of them. Varley's anecdote of Blake and his vision of the flea's ghost became well-known.

Fleas are often associated with uncleanness and degradation; in this work, the artist sought to magnify a flea into "a monstrous creature whose bloodthirsty instinct was imprinted on every detail of its appearance, with 'burning eyes which long for moisture', and a 'face worthy of a murderer'."

According to Varley, the imagery of a Flea came to Blake during an 1819 séance. Varley described the scene:

"As I was anxious to make the most correct investigation in my power, of the truth of these visions, on hearing of this spiritual apparition of a Flea, I asked him if he could draw for me the resemblance of what he saw: he instantly said, 'I see him now before me.' I therefore gave him paper and a pencil with which he drew the portrait... I felt convinced by his mode of proceeding, that he had a real image before him, for he left off, and began on another part of the paper, to make a separate drawing of the mouth of the Flea, which the spirit having opened, he was prevented from proceeding with the first sketch, till he had closed it."



37 Lovers in a Whirlwind 1824-27

Illustrates Hell in Canto V of Dante's Inferno