

The Royal Academy and the Academic Tradition



Zoffany, *The Portraits of the Academicians of the Royal Academy*

There were thirty four founding artists at the formation of the Royal Academy, including painters and sculptors of Arts. Two more were later appointed by the King. The instrument of foundation allowed for a total membership of forty. The founding membership included two women: Angelica Kauffman and Mary Moser. It wasn't until 1936 when Laura Knight became only the third woman, and the first to be elected a full member.

In Zoffany's group portrait the artist is seen bottom left. The two women are 'present' only by inclusion of their portraits on the wall; maybe this was because it was thought unseemly to include them in the life room in the presence of two male nude models.

The Royal Academy of Arts was founded through a personal act of King George III on 10 December 1768 with a mission to promote the arts of design in Britain through education and exhibition. The motive in founding the Academy was twofold: to raise the professional status of the artist by establishing a sound system of training and expert judgement in the arts, and to arrange the exhibition of contemporary works of art attaining an appropriate standard of excellence. Supporters wanted to foster a national school of art and to encourage appreciation and interest among the public based on recognised canons of good taste.



Zoffany, *Self-portrait as David with the head of Goliath* 1756

Johan Joseph Zoffany, RA 1733 –1810 was a German neoclassical painter, active mainly in England. Born in Frankfurt of noble Hungarian and Bohemian origin he undertook an initial period of study in a sculptor's workshop with the artist Martin Speer. In 1750, he travelled to Rome, and in autumn 1760 arrived in England, initially finding work painting vignettes for clocks.

By 1764 he was enjoying the patronage of the royal family, King George III and Queen Charlotte, for his charmingly informal scenes such as *Queen Charlotte and Her Two Eldest Children* (1765), in which the queen is shown at her toilette, with her eldest children, inside Buckingham House, and another, outdoors, with her children and her brothers.

Zoffany, *David Garrick in Vanbrugh's "Provoked Wife"*, Theatre Royal, Drury Lane 1763



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".

Reynolds, *Self-portrait, aged about 24*



Sir Joshua Reynolds RA FRS FRSA (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, a position he was to hold until his death. In 1769, he was knighted by George III, only the second artist to be so honoured. 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'

Reynolds, *Jane, Countess of Harrington, 1778*



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." Lay figures were used to model the clothes.

Reynolds often adapted the poses of his subjects from the works of earlier artists, a practice mocked by Nathaniel Hone in a painting called *The Conjuror* submitted to the Royal Academy exhibition of 1775, and now in the collection of the National Gallery of Ireland. It shows a figure representing, though not resembling, Reynolds, seated in front of a cascade of prints from which Reynolds had borrowed with varying degrees of subtlety



Reynolds, *Portrait of Nelly O'Brien 1763*

Gainsborough, *The Blue Boy c1770*



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.

Perhaps his 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 had already drawn something on the canvas before beginning *The Blue Boy*, which he painted over.

The painting is about life-size, measuring 48 inches (1,200 mm) wide by 70 inches (1,800 mm) tall. 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.

Gainsborough, *Girl with Pigs*, 1781–82



Gainsborough's *Girl with Pigs* was said by Sir Joshua Reynolds, who bought it, to be "the best picture he ever painted"



Gainsborough, *Mr. and Mrs. Robert Andrews* c1748–1750

The picture remained in the family of the sitters until 1960 and was very little known. Today it is one of his most famous works.

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.

Wilson, *St Peters and the Vatican from the Janiculum, Rome* 1757



Richard Wilson RA (1714 – 1782) was an influential Welsh landscape painter, who worked in Britain and Italy. With George Lambert 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". Wilson was one of the founder-members of the Royal Academy.



Wilson, *Lake Avernus* 1 c1765



Wilson, *Lyn-y-Cau, Cader Idris* 1774

Wright, *An Iron Forge*, 1772



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.

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



An Experiment on a Bird in the Air Pump is a 1768 oil-on-canvas painting by Joseph Wright of Derby, 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. While his paintings were recognised as exceptional 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.

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.



Wright, *The Widow of an Indian Chief Watching the Arms of her Deceased Husband* 1785



Wright, *Landscape with a Rainbow* 1794



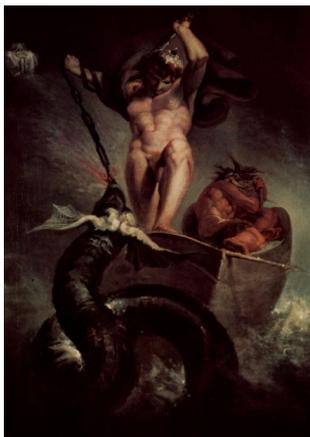
Sandby, *Music by Moonlight* c1782-88



Sandby, *Windsor Castle View of the Round and Devils Towers from the Black Rock*

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.

Fuseli, *Thor Battering the Midgard Serpent*



Fuseli's diploma work for the Royal Academy, accepted 1790. On election to the academy an artist will give a work to the collection, this is known as the diploma work.

Henry Fuseli RA (1741 – 1825) was a Swiss painter, draughtsman and writer on art who spent much of his life in Britain. Many of his works, such as *The Nightmare*, deal with supernatural subject-matter. He painted works for John Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery, and created his own "Milton Gallery". He held the posts of Professor of Painting and Keeper at the Royal Academy. His style had a considerable influence on many younger British artists, including William Blake.

Thor Battering the Midgard Serpent depicts one of the most popular myths in Germanic mythology, Thor's fishing trip. The nude and muscular Thor stands in Hymir's boat with the Jörmungandr on his fish hook.

Fuseli's figures are inspired by his admiration for the nude male figures of Michelangelo; typically by the 'ignudi' (athletes) of the Sistine ceiling.

Fuseli, *Lady Macbeth Seizing the Daggers* 1810–12



Fuseli, *The Nightmare* 1781

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 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.

Thomas Burke's 1783 engraving of *The Nightmare*



It remained well-known decades later, and Fuseli painted at least three other versions on the same theme. He sold the original for twenty guineas, and an inexpensive engraving by Thomas Burke circulated widely beginning in January 1783, earning publisher John Raphael Smith more than 500 pounds. The engraving was underscored by a short poem by Erasmus Darwin, "Night-Mare":

So on his Nightmare through the evening fog
Flits the squab Fiend o'er fen, and lake, and bog;
Seeks some love-wilder'd maid with sleep oppress'd,
Alights, and grinning sits upon her breast.

Kauffman *Self Portrait* 1770-75



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. 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.



Kauffman, Venus convinces Helen to go with Paris 1790



Kauffman, Anna Maria Jenkins and Thomas Jenkins

26 Moser, Vase of Flowers



Mary Moser RA (1744 – 1819) was an English painter and one of the most celebrated women artists of 18th-century Britain. One of only two female founding members of the Royal Academy in 1768, Moser painted portraits but is particularly noted for her depictions of flowers.

Sir Thomas Lawrence PRA FRS (1769 – 1830) was a leading English portrait painter and the fourth president of the Royal Academy.
Lawrence, Queen Charlotte 1789

Lawrence was a child prodigy. He was born in Bristol and began drawing in Devizes, where his father was an innkeeper. At the age of ten, having moved to Bath, he was supporting his family with his pastel portraits. At eighteen he went to London and soon established his reputation as a portrait painter in oils, receiving his first royal commission, a portrait of Queen Charlotte, in 1790. He stayed at the top of his profession until his death, aged 60, in 1830.

Self-taught, he was a brilliant draughtsman and known for his gift of capturing a likeness, as well as his virtuoso handling of paint.



Lawrence, Maria Conyngham 1824

Haydon, Curtius c1843



Benjamin Robert Haydon (1786 –1846) was an English painter who specialised in grand historical pictures, although he also painted a few contemporary subjects and portraits.

His commercial success was damaged by his often tactless dealings with patrons, and by the enormous scale on which he preferred to work. He was troubled by financial problems throughout his life, which led to several periods of imprisonment for debt. He committed suicide in 1846, leaving a wife and two children.

He gave lectures on art, and kept extensive diaries that were published by his wife after his death.



Haydon, *Blessing the Little Children* 1837

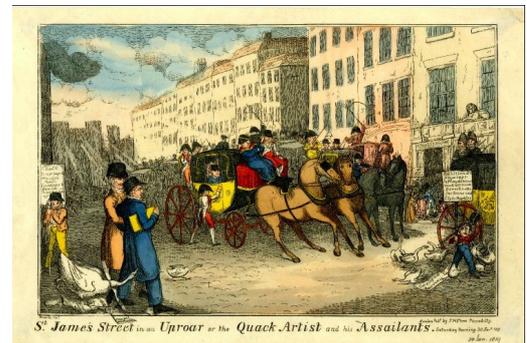


Haydon, *The Anti-Slavery Society Convention, 1840 1841*



Haydon, *Portrait of William Wordsworth* 1842

Satirical print aimed at Benjamin Robert Haydon and William Paulet Carey, *St James' Street in an Uproar or the Quack Artist and his Assailants: Saturday morning 30 Jan 1819*. Haydon is at the left in blue, Carey is represented by the goose behind him. Carey had criticised Haydon's charging for admission to an exhibition of eight chalk drawings.



Martin, *Sadak in Search of the Waters of Oblivion* 1812



John Martin (1789 – 1854) was an English Romantic painter, engraver and illustrator. He was celebrated for his typically vast and melodramatic paintings of religious subjects and fantastic compositions, populated with minute figures placed in imposing imaginary, fantastic landscapes.



Martin, *Belshazzar's Feast* c.1821

Half size sketch. Height: 902 mm (35.51 in); Width: 1,302 mm (51.25 in)

Belshazzar's Feast was first exhibited at the British Institution in February 1821 and won a prize of £200 for the best picture. Five thousand people paid to see it. It was so popular that it needed to be protected from the crowds by a railing, and established Martin's fame.

It was a triumph of which he boasted beforehand "it shall make more noise than any picture ever did before... only don't tell anyone I said so." It was later nearly ruined when the carriage in which it was being transported was struck by a train at a level crossing near Oswestry.

Martin's paintings, and the engravings made from them, enjoyed great success with the general public—in 1821 Lawrence referred to him as "the most popular painter of his day"—but were lambasted by Ruskin and other critics.

His brother, Jonathan Martin, known as 'Mad Martin' is notable only for setting fire to Yorkminster!



Martin, *The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah* 1852



Martin, *The Great Day of His Wrath* c1853



John Everett Millais, *Portrait of John Ruskin standing at Glenfinlas, Scotland* 1853–54

John Ruskin (1819 – 1900) was the leading English art critic of the Victorian era, as well as an art patron, draughtsman, watercolourist, a prominent social thinker and philanthropist. He wrote on subjects as varied as geology, architecture, myth, ornithology, literature, education, botany and political economy. From the 1850s, he championed the Pre-Raphaelites who were influenced by his ideas.

Ruskin, *View of Amalfi* 1844

Ruskin first came to widespread attention with the first volume of *Modern Painters* (1843), an extended essay in defence of the work of J.M.W. Turner in which he argued that the principal role of the artist is "truth to nature".

