Such symbolic conventions were part of a contemporary visual language that would have been understood by an audience which was not restricted to the most highly educated upper classes. While the more sophisticated levels of meaning in Reynolds’s portrait, such as the possible allegory of the actor’s choice, might only have been appreciated by a more elite audience, the allegorical conventions themselves and the mythological references would have been understood by a wider social group, albeit one which probably did not extend far beyond the middle classes. Moreover, the rapidly growing market for engraved copies and popular prints suggests that the consumption of ‘art’ (understood in its broadest sense) in the mid-eighteenth century was expanding way beyond elitist aristocratic and upper-class circles. As we shall see, it was precisely this wider middle-class market which Hogarth sought to address in his own series of engravings.

I have suggested that in this satirical print of 1772 the contemporary practices of both art and theatre are under attack. So far I have deliberately chosen to focus on visual representations of theatrical characters and themes in order to help ‘set a scene’, and later in this case study I shall be looking more closely at the complex relationship between the forms of artistic and theatrical representation. We have seen that both portraits of Garrick by Hogarth and Reynolds use literary and/or mythological references and poses to give the sitter a more elevated status. Thus Garrick’s role as an actor and theatre director is presented as a high-ranking, even intellectual profession. During this period the theatre, like painting, was seeking to improve its public status and gain recognition as a profession, and Garrick played an instrumental role in this process. Moreover, both portraits of Garrick helped to establish a relatively new and increasingly popular subgenre within portraiture: the theatrical portrait. Apart from Reynolds, who became well known for his many portraits of actresses (Plate 94), we have seen that Johann Zoffany (who became a Royal Academician in 1768) took up the genre in the 1760s (Plate 96). In my section on portraiture below, I will consider some of the meanings which these works held for an eighteenth-century audience.

The similarities we have discussed between the two portraits of Garrick mask some important differences and contradictions in the artistic practices and approaches adopted by the two artists and within the range of practices developed by each. My argument is that the art and ideas produced by both play an important part within the complicated network of interests and factions which made up the English art world and its academic ambitions in the mid-eighteenth century.

The first British academies: institutionalizing art

One of Hogarth’s earliest prints, and the first which he published as an independent enterprise (rather than as an illustration for another publication), was The Taste of the Town or Masquerades and Operas (Plate 101). It shows a street scene dominated by crowds attending a harlequin’s performance of the play Dr Faustus\(^6\) on the right, and a masquerade (or masked ball) on the left. Facing the square is a portico surmounted with sculpted figures, which marks the entrance to ‘The Academy of Arts’. Each of these institutions and

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\(^6\) The story of Dr Johannes Faustus, who according to legend made a pact with the devil Mephistopheles, was dramatized in England by Christopher Marlowe in 1589. Goethe wrote his play Faust in the late eighteenth century.
events is the object of Hogarth’s critical gaze. Three figures assuming foppish poses look up in admiration at ‘The Academy of Arts’, as one points to the statue of the Italian-influenced architect and landscape gardener William Kent (1685–1748) above the pseudo-classical pediment. Beneath him, the Italian Renaissance artists Michelangelo and Raphael occupy more lowly positions on the corners. The design of the portico and Kent’s dominant position are intended to mock the contemporary taste for Palladian7 and neo-classical architecture at the expense of an English tradition. For Hogarth this ‘Academy of Arts’ symbolizes the decay or corruption of English artistic culture and the infiltration of foreign (Palladian) values. These beliefs echoed those of a group of British artists in the 1720s, among them the history painter Sir James Thornhill (1675/6–1734), who was to play an important role in the Saint Martin’s Lane Academy, one of the first British institutions for the teaching of art.

Plate 101 William Hogarth, The Taste of the Town (also known as Masquerades and Operas), 1724, etching and engraving, 11 x 17 cm, British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings, London. Copyright © British Museum.

7 The Palladian style was fashionable during the first half of the eighteenth century, and was named after Italian architect Andrea Palladio (1508–80). It was based on a rigid theory of proportion.
In his engraving *The Taste of the Town*, Hogarth makes an association between the taste for Palladianism (in "The Academy of Arts") and debased forms of popular entertainment in the foreground. The *Dr Faustus* is being vulgarized and popularized through a harlequinade, while the masquerade on the left is a form of popular entertainment which depends on disguise. The pomposity of the Academy's portico is thus echoed in the debased popular spectacles on either side of the image, in which theatrical metaphors of disguise and deceit are employed to satirical ends. Moreover, the contemporary taste for such spectacles at the expense of more serious drama is attacked in the foreground image in which a figure carries off a wheelbarrow full of the discarded works of respected English writers – including Shakespeare, Congreve, Dryden and Addison – to be disposed of as 'waste paper'.

To understand the many implications of Hogarth's comment on the English art scene, we need a fuller picture of the context in which Palladianism was seen to be infiltrating the culture. David Bindman has described the situation as follows:

> There was no academy as in France to lay down an orthodoxy, there were no places of exhibition, very few places of formal instruction and hardly any books of art theory. It was very difficult to see works of art, for there was no system by which they could be made accessible. There was, however, no shortage of demand for art of most kinds, but understandably patrons preferred to employ well-trained and talented foreigners, who were always available, rather than nurture native artists who, it was believed, would need a lengthy training abroad anyway. At the top end of the profession were the painters of allegorical wall decorations, for they carried with them the prestige of the Grand Manner and they had the ability to create astonishing effects of illusion which, at their most opulent, could create a completely false architectural space and ornamentation out of a plain room.

*(Bindman, *Hogarth*, pp.18)*

As we saw in the preceding case study, circumstances were rather different in France, where the Académie royale, founded in 1648, exerted enormous influence and encouraged classes in drawing and the promotion of history painting. A number of Italian cities also boasted academies which had flourished since the Renaissance, among them the famous Accademia di S. Luca in Rome. Within such institutions the teaching of art tended to follow rather rigid and hierarchical structures, and the absence of equivalent British schools of training helps to explain the relative success of the lesser genre of portraiture in Britain during the first half of the eighteenth century. However, the codification of aesthetic doctrines in Italy and France played an important role in public perceptions of the status of art in those countries. The institutionalization of art, preferably with royal patronage and support, was crucial in helping to create a culture of professionalism for the discipline and, as I have suggested, in the establishment of a canon.

For that culture to thrive and develop, adequate facilities must be provided for both education in, and access to, art. In early eighteenth-century England access to paintings and collections of Old Master works was almost entirely confined to stately homes in which aristocratic owners had built up personal collections or employed Italian or French artists to decorate their apartments. Hogarth was one of many artists to draw attention to the need to provide training, exhibiting space and public access to art in the early eighteenth century, and during the first two decades there were several small-scale attempts to provide such facilities.
In 1711, on Saint Luke's day (the patron saint of artists), the first London academy of painting and drawing from life (that is, using live models) opened in a room in Great Queen Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields. Its governor was Sir Godfrey Kneller, then one of Britain's most successful portrait painters, and the Board of Directors included Sir James Thornhill, renowned for his decorative wall paintings on historical themes. According to surviving reports, the early history of the academy was characterized by internal bickering and power struggles, and Thornhill replaced Kneller as governor in 1716.8 The former's artistic and political ambitions appear to have been closely entangled. He was appointed Sergeant-Painter and knighted in 1720, and elected a Member of Parliament in 1722. Internal struggles continued at the academy, and it moved to rooms in St Martin's Lane in 1720, when William Hogarth's name first appears on the membership list. This institution appears to have thrived until, according to popular myth, embezzlement of funds by the treasurer caused a financial crisis. Meanwhile, Hogarth had married Thornhill's daughter, and after his father-in-law's death in 1734 he reconstituted the academy in St Martin's Lane in 1734–5. This institution, which was run on democratic lines giving all members equal rights, became known as 'The St Martin's Lane Academy', and flourished until the 1760s when plans for the Royal Academy were consolidated. Hogarth was one of several directors, and in 1764, shortly before his death, he described his early involvement thus:

attributing the failure of the preceding Academies to the leading members having assumed a superiority which their fellow students could not brook, I proposed that every member should contribute an equal sum towards the support of the establishment and have an equal right to vote on every question relative to its affairs. By these regulations the Academy has now existed nearly thirty years, and is for every useful purpose equal to that in France or any other.

(Hutchison, History of the Royal Academy, p.10)

This retrospective account would seem to contradict Hogarth's well-known scepticism towards the influence of foreign 'Academies of Art', which he was indirectly satirizing in The Taste of the Town. But Hogarth's scepticism clearly masks some problems and contradictions behind the definition of a desirable 'British' art. In mid-eighteenth-century England it was difficult to find practising artists who were not influenced in one way or another by the work of French and Italian decorators, painters and engravers, for whom the London art world had become a popular destination and source of commission. In fact, among the teachers at the St Martin's Lane Academy were the French engraver Hubert Gravelot and the sculptor Louis François Roubiliac. And, as we shall see, much of Hogarth's own graphic work and his famous 'conversation pieces' such as The Graham Children (Plate 114) were influenced by the work of French Rococo9 engravers and painters.

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8 Details of the various academies which preceded the formation of the Royal Academy of Art, and the political struggles involved, are described in Hutchison, History of the Royal Academy.

9 Rococo, which emerged in France around 1700, was a development from the Baroque style and was generally seen to be characterized by lightness and grace of design.
His somewhat self-congratulatory comparison with the situation in contemporary France was both seeking acknowledgement for the success of the democratic principles of the St Martin’s Lane Academy and a bid for professional recognition for the practice of art in England. During the 1750s and 1760s there had been many discussions and proposals among artists from the school for the establishment of a larger, more prestigious academy which would put Britain on a par with its continental neighbours, and which eventually materialized with the foundation of the Royal Academy in 1768. Hogarth’s comment from the early 1760s was thus seeking recognition for the important role played by the St Martin’s Lane Academy in changing opportunities for the development of art in England, in helping to assert the viability of a professional culture of art.

While the St Martin’s Lane Academy provided tuition, attempts by many of its members (including Reynolds, Thomas Hudson, Gavin Hamilton, Roubiliac, George Moser and others) to advance plans for a more prestigious academy were also provoked by the pressing need to provide public exhibition space for their members. This was to be one of the most important roles of the Royal Academy, and its two main forerunners in this respect were the Foundling Hospital, established by the philanthropist Captain Thomas Coram (Plate 102) in 1739, and the Society of Artists founded in 1761 in a large room in Spring Gardens, Charing Cross. The former was in fact a hospital for orphaned and abandoned children which, under Coram’s patronage, built up an extensive collection of pictures that could be viewed by the public in return for a charitable donation. The Foundling collection became a fashionable institution for an educated art public to visit, and in the process anticipated some of the social and cultural rituals associated with the later Royal Academy shows. As a contemporary observer recorded, the paintings ‘being exhibited to the public, drew a daily crowd of spectators in their splendid equipages; and a visit to the Foundling became the most fashionable morning lounge of the reign of George II’ (Hutchison, History of the Royal Academy, p.16). The Society of Artists was primarily an exhibiting society which included Reynolds, Hogarth and the portrait painter Thomas Gainsborough (1727–88) among its participants and obtained a royal charter in 1765. In the early 1760s this society enjoyed considerable success, with well-attended annual exhibitions, until internal dissensions in 1767 encouraged some members to pursue plans for the establishment of the Royal Academy.

The public conventions for consuming art, usually at a price, were thus already established in mid-eighteenth-century England, although this group of consumers often came from a relatively elite group of middle- and upper-class patrons. For a modern audience used to a thriving ‘gallery culture’ and state-patronized national museums (of which the National Gallery is to feature in a later case study), these eighteenth-century channels for the consumption of art might seem rather limited. But as David Solkin has argued, during the mid-eighteenth century there was a marked expansion in public facilities for viewing art when ‘Britain effectively acquired the components of a modern art world’ (Solkin, Painting for Money, p.2). My (albeit sketchy) mapping of some of the early institutionalizing processes for art should help to give you an idea of the very different social and political perceptions of, and context for, the practice of art during the period. What we now take for granted as a ‘professional’ activity with a widely disseminated influence on our culture was, in a sense, in its infancy in the eighteenth century.
Plate 102. William Hogarth, Captain Thomas Coram, 1740, oil on canvas, 239 x 147 cm, Thomas Coram Foundation for Children, London. Photo: Bridgeman Art Library.
One of the crucial distinguishing features of the Royal Academy – which ensured its political and institutional survival – was that it was conceived of and established under the protection of the Crown and government. While most of its predecessors were founded independently by groups of artists, the Royal Academy sought the support of George III (who came to the throne in 1760) at an early stage in its conception, and in December 1768 he signed a charter setting out the constitution and its original membership. However, we should note that this royal charter, while providing political status, was also intended to enable certain 'freedoms'. The founder members hoped that by establishing themselves as an officially sanctioned independent body, they might actually reduce their dependence on aristocratic patronage. They believed that the stamp of approval from George III would effectively give them more control over the practice and teaching of art, limiting interference by aristocratic clients. By taking control of the theory behind the teaching and production of art, they could thereby control its value systems. Of course, this relative freedom was still exercised within an immensely hierarchical society in which the institution had to be seen to promote interests which were at least compatible with many of its patrons. Through the provision of teaching, lectures, regular public exhibitions (Plate 103) and the distribution of prizes and awards, the Royal Academy became an important and powerful disseminator of such value systems.

As I have suggested, these processes of institutionalization are themselves instrumental in helping to establish a canon of art. For a canon to survive and flourish, it must provide exemplars of values which can be imitated and

refined, or rejected and challenged. As aesthetic values are disseminated and passed on, they evolve and develop. Thus the sense of relative freedom from aristocratic control which I described above enabled the academicians to develop an image of themselves as both drawing on tradition and respected classical values, and also refining and reworking them to produce an art of modern relevance and quality. A canon, then, is not static; while it may assume a dominant (that is, powerful and controlling) role within the art of a particular society, it is always evolving and reshaping itself, responding to ideological, political and aesthetic shifts in the culture which it represents.

Membership and academic values
Of the 36 artists listed in the founding constitution of the Royal Academy, only two were women: Angelica Kauffmann (1741–1807) and Mary Moser (1744–1819) (Plates 104 and 105). Within the contemporary art world, women were more likely to be seen as the objects of art, often in symbolic or allegorical disguise, than as serious professional practitioners. In fact, after Kauffmann and Moser no women were given membership (that is, the full status of academician which entitled them to the initials R.A.) until 1920. In a much cited painting by Johann Zoffany of the first academicians, The Academicians of the Royal Academy (Plate 106), Kauffmann and Moser are famously excluded from the group of male founder members who contemplate plaster casts after antique sculptures and ‘living models’. As women were prohibited from copying from nude models, they are depicted as an absent presence, as mere head-and-shoulder portraits on the wall to the right of the assembled group.


Plate 106 Johann Zoffany, *The Academicians of the Royal Academy*, 1771–2, oil on canvas, 101 x 147 cm, Royal Collection. Copyright Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.
The painting was intended as a kind of group portrait – a historical record of the first members shown in relation to key academic concerns. Drawing from plaster casts and the live model were a major part of the teaching at the Royal Academy Schools, although women were excluded from these classes. In fact, the only female form to be shown as part of the central academic activity is quite literally an object: a plaster cast of an antique sculpture, itself headless and legless and consigned to the side of a bench. The artist Richard Cosway, who was elected to full academician in 1771, is shown in a somewhat mannered pose, pressing his stick dismissively into the damaged female torso. Several other figures, including Joshua Reynolds in the centre, assume similarly mannered poses which remind us that the artist, like his objects of representation, is indebted to classical prototypes and is thus qualified to claim the status of ‘academician’.

An implicit association is made here between the appreciation of classical objects and an exclusively male group. This was a common theme in contemporary art, and is itself the subject of one of Cosway’s own paintings, Charles Towneley with a Group of Connoisseurs (Plate 107). Towneley was a well-known antiquarian and connoisseur, shown here in a group portrait with male friends admiring works from his collection – works which are largely sculpted female bodies. Given the way in which these figures are scrutinizing the sculpture, it’s hard to avoid the possibility that the artist might have intended the work to have another, more voyeuristic, sexual level of meaning. While painting this picture, Cosway corresponded with the collector, often openly referring boastfully to his own promiscuity. One could argue, then, that in this painting Cosway has carefully veiled any intended sexual overtones through the representation of an identifiable high art theme – the learned contemplation of classical objects.

Long before this work was even conceived, Hogarth had already attacked both sets of interests in a satirical engraving featuring Richard Cosway. In 1761 he published a ‘tailpiece’ to the catalogue for the Society of Artists exhibition (Plate 108). In a clear reference to his promiscuity, Cosway is represented as a dandyish monkey (a traditional symbol of sexual promiscuity) who is watering dead trees labelled ‘exoticks’. The label ‘exotick’ was intended as a reference to foreign Old Master paintings, which were much beloved by connoisseurs at the expense of a British school of art. Even in the 1760s, then, Hogarth was still railing against the ‘foreign’ influences which were ultimately to form an important aspect of the culture that nurtured the establishment of the Royal Academy and helped to inspire Zoffany’s famous painting (Plate 106).

Not surprisingly, perhaps, the print medium which Hogarth used so adeptly to make his satirical points was consigned to a lowly status within those academic hierarchies enforced by the Royal Academy Schools. The 1768 constitution decreed that there should be 40 Royal Academicians, ‘Painters, Sculptors or Architects, men of fair moral characters, of high reputation in their several professions’. Absent from this group were engravers, an exclusion which generated some controversy inside and outside the institution for many years. The persistent belief (within some circles) that engraving should qualify as a ‘lesser art’ is one of the themes of the following section.

Painting and the ‘lesser arts’

Hogarth’s controversial views on the dominance of foreign influences within the British school, and the wide range of his aesthetic interests revealed in his painted and graphic work, contributed to his shifting and sometimes problematic relationship with a contemporary canon of art. Despite academic attempts firmly to establish the canonical status of easel painting as ‘high art’, during the mid-eighteenth century many other forms of artistic production were thriving and expanding, and often provided artists with more economically viable forms of employment. Hogarth made extensive use of the print medium, which along with miniature painting, topographical painting and decorative art (that is, for domestic designs and decorative schemes) was a buoyant area of production during the period.

Hogarth’s reputation, and much of his income, came from his prints, in particular his famous series of ‘Progresses’. These appeared in the 1730s and included A Harlot’s Progress (Plate 109), The Rake’s Progress, and Marriage à la Mode. Each of the ‘Progresses’ consisted of a series of engraved images which told a moral tale of contemporary life, a continuing narrative which progresses much like a strip cartoon. For example, in plate i of A Harlot’s Progress an innocent country girl has just alighted from the York stage in the City of London. She is on her way to her cousin, for whom she carries a goose, but is waylaid by a well-dressed older woman who appears to admire her looks. A contemporary chronicler of Hogarth’s works, called Vertue, tells us that the older woman is the ‘bawd’ Mother Needham, notorious for luring young country girls into her employ. The image is packed with details which invite us to interpret the narrative. While Mother Needham is respectably dressed, her pockmarked skin betrays her profession and inner corruption. And many details provide symbolic references to impending disaster and moral decay, such as the horse which kicks over a pile of pans, and the cracking and crumbling plaster on the walls of the inn in the background.

Please look carefully at plate ii of A Harlot’s Progress. Suggest how the narrative or story-line is continued through the imagery of this plate. Can you identify the various symbols which represent a continuing moral degeneration?

Discussion

In this image the young protagonist’s (to whom Hogarth gives the name M. Hackabout) moral decay is well advanced. She is shown about to lose her position as the kept woman of a wealthy Jew, to whom she has just been unfaithful. Her lover is shown hurriedly slipping out with the help of a maid in the background. While Ms Hackabout’s fine dress, comfortable surroundings including (significantly) Old Master paintings on the walls, and the black servant suggest that she now enjoys a life of affluence and

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10 The character of the Jew and possible associations with, or references to, eighteenth-century anti-semitism are discussed by Ronald Paulson in Hogarth.
respectability, that fragile respectability is shown crashing to the floor with the symbolism of the broken crockery. Other details such as the pet monkey - symbol of her promiscuity - and the mask on her dressing table - evidence of her taste for the deceit of the masquerade - bear witness to the degeneration of her morals.

Later plates in the series continue this complex exposition of her degeneration. In plate iii she is shown working as a Covent Garden prostitute in relative squalor; her black servant has now been replaced by a fat, pockmarked female assistant, as the armed watch arrives to take her away. In plate iv she is now in Bridewell, a house of correction in which the inmates are largely prostitutes, while in plate v the narrative becomes progressively more tragic as she sits dying (presumably of venereal disease) in impoverished circumstances with her child next to her by the fire. The final plate shows the scene of mostly unsympathetic mourners around her coffin, after her premature death at the age of 23. Apart from the obvious moral message behind A Harlot’s Progress on the effects of the exploitation of poverty and ignorance in the pursuit of sexual vice, there are several related recurring themes in this series which appear in all the ‘Progresses’. As the cultural historian David Dabydeen has described it, ‘people are always seen in relation to things, a relation that is indicative of the depersonalisation of human life’ (Dabydeen, Hogarth’s Blacks, p.11). Relationships are often represented in terms of financial or commercial transactions, of money or objects changing hands. The result is an on-going preoccupation with exploitation and hypocrisy in contemporary society, a preoccupation which, it has been suggested, stems in part from Hogarth’s own family experiences of childhood poverty as the son of a bookseller who was imprisoned for debt.

Although the print series of the ‘Progresses’ were successful in establishing Hogarth’s reputation, each of these prints was first produced in painted versions, or ‘novels in paint’ as they have been called (Plates 110 and 111). However, he found it much more difficult to sell the original paintings, indicating that the market for the latter was much more restricted – and restricting. Dabydeen has suggested that the subject-matter of the Progresses itself separated this body of work from the category of ‘high art’:

With the Harlot’s Progress paintings of the 1730s Hogarth became the first English artist to represent on canvas the lives of the common people in a serious and sympathetic way. He invests their lives with significance, and the capacity for tragedy, suffering and redemption, and insists that they are subjects ‘worthy’ of painting: this at a time when painting was seen as the province for ‘serious’ ‘elevated’, ‘religious’ or ‘historical’ themes, the lives of the common people fitting none of these categories. This championing of the common people which violated the spirit of the age earned him the rebuke of connoisseurs of art and gentlemen of taste who either dismissed him as a ‘bad’ painter or condemned him for ‘lowering the standards of art’.

(Dabydeen, Hogarth’s Blacks, pp.14-15)
Plate 109 William Hogarth, A Harlot’s Progress, plates i–vi, 1732, engravings, c.31 x 38 cm each, British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings, London. Copyright © British Museum.

i: Ensnared by a Procuress

ii: Quarrels with her Jew Protector

iii: Apprehended by a Magistrate
iv: Scene in Bridewell

v: Expires while the Doctors are Disputing

vi: The Funeral
Dabydeen suggests, then, that as paintings these works were not easily absorbed into recognized—or canonical—categories of artistic value. Like some of the other images I have discussed so far in this study, they seem to sit on the boundaries between established genres and categories of artistic production. They draw on a repertoire of poses, attitudes and expressions, the acquisition of which (as we saw in the preceding study on Le Brun’s models of expression) was part of a traditional artists’ training, and they develop complex narratives and layers of symbolic meaning. Yet, as Dabydeen suggests, the themes which Hogarth explores did not qualify for the ‘elevated’ status sought after (in theory at least) in conventional history painting. As works on moral themes derived from contemporary social issues, they were separated from the more austere classical themes thought desirable for the highest form of art. In some respects this series of Hogarth’s paintings comes closer to the category of painting which was to enjoy so much success in nineteenth-century Britain—known as ‘genre’ painting—which purported to represent everyday life, and which was much influenced by the work of the seventeenth-century Dutch school (Plate 112). In a sense, Hogarth had created his own genre: somewhere between history painting and genre painting, but with the satirical edge of the popular print.
The fact that these painting cycles were so closely related to (that is, were copies of) the graphic versions of the Progresses may itself have contributed to the lack of status attached to the former. The whole process of copying held an ambiguous status for advocates of high art. And Ronald Paulson has suggested that copying itself becomes an important theme in Hogarth's work in that the story-line is 'about the copying of inappropriate behaviour' (Paulson, The Art of Hogarth, p.22). Given the popularity and relative visibility of the prints, the visual language employed (the complex narratives, crowded images, etc.) could be seen as more suitable to the graphic medium. And the success of the engravings may also have served to undermine the 'unique' status of the paintings. While the copying of successful Royal Academy exhibits by established engravers could increase the status of the original painting, Hogarth was himself producing the same image in two different media, thus undermining any sense of a unique and revered original. An important and emerging theme in contemporary critical attempts to raise the cultural profile of painting was the idea of the 'original' which is distinguished from mechanical copying as it 'rises spontaneously from the vital root of Genius; it grows, it is not made' (Young, Conjectures on Original Composition).

The desire to see painting (with sculpture and architecture) as a 'high' or 'liberal' art, practised by 'men of fair moral characters, of high reputation', was a recurring theme in much of the criticism and writing about art which accompanied the establishment of the Royal Academy of Art. In some respects our modern concept of 'art theory' has its origins in the eighteenth century, when attempts to institutionalize and codify art practices were necessarily accompanied and supported by theoretical justifications. This involved a growth in critical writing not just in the broad area of aesthetics (which already
had a strong philosophical tradition, but also about the practical issues of what resources (subjects, genres) to select and how to paint them. Reynolds's series of *Discourses* constitutes one such attempt to provide a theoretical justification for contemporary art practice, its philosophical ambitions, and its relationship with the art of the past. And despite Hogarth's hostility towards some of the ideas about art which were to emerge with the success of the Royal Academy, earlier in the century he had already sought to provide a theoretical framework for his interests with the publication of his *Analysis of Beauty* in 1753.

This early essay on the theory of art reveals an imaginative and inventive thinker who is concerned to open up the subject of beauty to a broader audience than those elite 'men of letters' who had hitherto dominated aesthetic debate. In keeping with his pragmatic approach to the discipline, Hogarth wrote that what was needed was an analysis based on a 'practical knowledge' of the whole art of painting. In this respect, Hogarth could be seen to be targeting a rather different – or at least wider – audience to the high-minded gentlemen who, as we have seen, helped to constitute the public for Reynolds's theoretical ambitions.

**Art and theatre**

In my earlier discussion of Hogarth's *A Harlot's Progress* (Plate 109) I mentioned the strip cartoon effect of the print series in which each image forms part of a continuing narrative. You probably noticed that the sequence of images unfolds rather like a play; each involves a change of scene, but the series as a whole follows a clear plot with a beginning, middle and end. Within each scene there are dramatic incidents, and characters often assume theatrical poses and gestures. Hogarth seems to 'stage' his image as if it were a play, and there is ample evidence that this was part of a conscious strategy. I have already cited his interest in the theatre and his friendship with David Garrick, but his painted and graphic work suggests that he also saw parallels in the conception of, and the techniques adopted in, these two art forms. In his *Autobiographical Notes* he wrote of constructing an image in which he 'let figure[s] be consider[ed] as Actors dressed for the sublime genteel comedy or same in high or low life' (quoted in Bindman, *Hogarth*, p.108).

There are, of course, certain types of art for which this analogy with the stage seems relatively obvious. Conventional forms of history painting, for example, often depend on theatrical devices to convey their effects and meanings. If we look again at Gavin Hamilton's *Hector's Farewell to Andromache* (Plate 89), you will notice that the scene is arranged across the canvas rather like a stage set, with figures across the foreground plane and a classical 'backdrop' behind them. The figures act out dramatic roles, and the artist deliberately juxtaposes impassioned or tragic poses and gestures. Thus the whole scene appears very theatrical in its attempt to convey the appropriate heroic or tragic message. Hogarth used these sorts of devices in his adaptation of other genres: both David Garrick and Mr Hackabout were depicted at dramatic moments of surprise or tragedy, evoked by a melodramatic pose or gesture.

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11 Extracts from *The Analysis of Beauty* are reproduced in Edwards, *Art and its Histories: A Reader.*
Hogarth’s interest in the relationship between art and theatre is evident on several levels. We have seen that he often used themes from the theatre—such as plays, masquerades, masked balls and actors—as part of his repertoire of (often satirical) subjects. The repetition of such themes in his engravings and paintings provides clear evidence of his use of the metaphor of life as a stage, of his preoccupation with the relationship between reality and artifice, hypocrisy and deceit. One fascinating print from the 1730s took up the theme of the theatre with a focus on the role of the actress in eighteenth-century society, *Strolling Actresses Dressing in a Barn* (Plate 113).

Hogarth depicts a crowded group of players, dressing in a barn before going on stage, who appear to be preparing a complicated play with many characters. It’s difficult to read from a reproduction, but the playbill lying on the bed gives us the title of an unknown play, *The Devil to Pay in Heaven*, and lists the characters as Jupiter, Juno, Diana, Flora, the Night, a Siren, Aurora, an Eagle, Cupid, two Devils, a Ghost and Attendants, ‘To which will be added Rope dancing and Tumbling’. The range of characters suggests an absurdly pretentious mythological play, probably intended by Hogarth as a satirical reference to the early eighteenth-century obsession with the classical past,

**Plate 113** William Hogarth, *Strolling Actresses Dressing in a Barn*, 1738, etching and engraving, 43 x 53 cm, British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings, London. Copyright © British Museum.
and perhaps to the bawdy of mythological roles being taken on by coarse, lower-class women. The ‘low-life’ origins of these actors would have been immediately evident to a contemporary audience familiar with the troupes of ‘strolling’ players who travelled around the countryside giving performances. These troupes were the poor relations of the big urban theatres, and their players were easy targets of satire. Moreover, the actresses in these travelling groups were generally seen to be women of ‘ill-repute’ and low morals. Such troupes were thought to nurture dissenting political voices and forces of disorder, and were very much in the public eye at the time: in 1735 the ‘Playhouse Bill’ which limited their activities had been passed in Parliament, and in 1737 (one month after Hogarth started work on the print) an act was passed which made it illegal for a company to perform without a royal patent. This meant that the only legal companies at the time were the Drury Lane and Covent Garden theatres in London. These two royal playhouses, rather like the early academies of art, sought to establish a more professional and respectable context for the production of their art.

What kind of image of eighteenth-century actresses does this engraving (Plate 113) suggest?

Discussion

_Strolling Actresses_ represents a space almost exclusively inhabited by women. It’s not clear if the figure on the left is a man or a woman dressed as a man. And these women are not on stage performing, but are backstage dressing. They are shown in a context which is closer to their real existence, which reveals the process of ‘dressing up’ and deceit involved. Thus their actual roles in life are shown alongside their assumed roles. The women in this crowded image are shown feeding babies, drinking, mending stockings, rehearsing their parts and so on, while the semi-clad actress in the centre plays Diana, goddess of chastity. As she assumes her somewhat ridiculous goddess-like pose, she is watched through a hole in the roof by a young boy (perhaps a reference to her mythological partner, Actaeon). All around the barn are scattered traditional emblems of _vanitas_ or vanity, many of them theatrical props, including a crown, orbs, mitres and a helmet.

This is an image, then, which is concerned with specifically feminine roles and activities. What’s more difficult to sort out is the extent to which Hogarth sought to satirize or criticize those roles. The print appeared at a time when literary forms of anti-feminist satire were flourishing. The poetry of Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift frequently targeted ‘woman’, seeking to unmask some contemporary myths of femininity as merely concealing ‘feminine’ vices such as vanity, deceit, sexual intrigue and frivolity. The theme of feminine masquerade and the idea of ‘woman’ as consummate actress recur in the poems of both writers, including Pope’s famous _Epistle to a Lady_ of 1735.\(^{12}\) Such critical and often misogynistic representations were frequently opposed to a supposedly more desirable, polite ideal of femininity, of woman as a

\(^{12}\) Among the most famous lines from this misogynistic poem is ‘ev’ry woman is at least a Rake’.
His somewhat self-congratulatory comparison with the situation in contemporary France was both seeking acknowledgement for the success of the democratic principles of the St Martin’s Lane Academy and a bid for professional recognition for the practice of art in England. During the 1750s and 1760s there had been many discussions and proposals among artists from the school for the establishment of a larger, more prestigious academy which would put Britain on a par with its continental neighbours, and which eventually materialized with the foundation of the Royal Academy in 1768. Hogarth’s comment from the early 1760s was thus seeking recognition for the important role played by the St Martin’s Lane Academy in changing opportunities for the development of art in England, in helping to assert the viability of a professional culture of art.

While the St Martin’s Lane Academy provided tuition, attempts by many of its members (including Reynolds, Thomas Hudson, Gavin Hamilton, Roubiliac, George Moser and others) to advance plans for a more prestigious academy were also provoked by the pressing need to provide public exhibition space for their members. This was to be one of the most important roles of the Royal Academy, and its two main forerunners in this respect were the Foundling Hospital, established by the philanthropist Captain Thomas Coram (Plate 102) in 1739, and the Society of Artists founded in 1761 in a large room in Spring Gardens, Charing Cross. The former was in fact a hospital for orphaned and abandoned children which, under Coram’s patronage, built up an extensive collection of pictures that could be viewed by the public in return for a charitable donation. The Foundling collection became a fashionable institution for an educated art public to visit, and in the process anticipated some of the social and cultural rituals associated with the later Royal Academy shows. As a contemporary observer recorded, the paintings ‘being exhibited to the public, drew a daily crowd of spectators in their splendid equipages; and a visit to the Foundling became the most fashionable morning lounge of the reign of George II’ (Hutchison, History of the Royal Academy, p.16). The Society of Artists was primarily an exhibiting society which included Reynolds, Hogarth and the portrait painter Thomas Gainsborough (1727–88) among its participants and obtained a royal charter in 1765. In the early 1760s this society enjoyed considerable success, with well-attended annual exhibitions, until internal dissensions in 1767 encouraged some members to pursue plans for the establishment of the Royal Academy.

The public conventions for consuming art, usually at a price, were thus already established in mid-eighteenth-century England, although this group of consumers often came from a relatively elite group of middle- and upper-class patrons. For a modern audience used to a thriving ‘gallery culture’ and state-patronized national museums (of which the National Gallery is to feature in a later case study), these eighteenth-century channels for the consumption of art might seem rather limited. But as David Solkin has argued, during the mid-eighteenth century there was a marked expansion in public facilities for viewing art when ‘Britain effectively acquired the components of a modern art world’ (Solkin, Painting for Money, p.2). My (albeit sketchy) mapping of some of the early institutionalizing processes for art should help to give you an idea of the very different social and political perceptions of, and context for, the practice of art during the period. What we now take for granted as a ‘professional’ activity with a widely disseminated influence on our culture was, in a sense, in its infancy in the eighteenth century.
more passive and virtuous domestic creature. Literary and visual images of ‘woman’ were often adopted as a symbol of the theatre and masquerade, an association which Hogarth exploits to the full in his *Strolling Players*. On one level, the idea of woman as consummate actress seems to be the determining theme of Hogarth’s work, as actresses are shown in different stages of their disguise, both masked and unmasked.

There is little doubt that this image would have been read by contemporary viewers as a satire on the pretensions of strolling players, and perhaps also as a broader metaphor for the deceit and hypocrisy of life ‘as a stage’. However, by the time that Hogarth produced the work, the players he depicts would have been out of a job as a result of the Act of 1737. It has been suggested that this image functions on another level, that it is also a more sympathetic and complex image of the relationship between femininity and theatricality. The art historian Christina Kiaer has argued that, in interpreting the image, we need to be aware of what it would have signified to audiences of different class and gender. She suggests that ‘female viewers, especially lower-class ones, could recognise central and salient aspects of their own experience in *Strolling Actresses*. The carefully articulated manifestations of the everyday life of women, presented in a language of sensuous beauty, call into question the adequacy of the term “satire” to describe the working of this picture’ (Kiaer, ‘Professional femininity’, p.240). For Kiaer the crowded activities of the barn relate closely to the experience of many lower-class women for whom the ‘household’ usually consisted of one room in which all domestic roles were enacted. The print is packed with minor narratives in which women act out the harsh realities and experiences of everyday life, including feeding the baby and dressing, having cooked and washed (indicated by the line of washing and cooking pots behind the group). All this takes place while they are also preparing for the play. Kiaer writes: ‘Hogarth depicts the actresses as completely comfortable in their communal twilight world; topsy-turvy as their domestic life is, their household seems to function quite smoothly according to its own rhythms’ (Kiaer, ‘Professional femininity’, p.240). I would agree that this representation of camaraderie and domestic activity in conditions of extreme poverty takes some of the edge off the satirical message, and might well have appealed to those poorer women who would have been able to view copies of the image displayed in taverns or public places.

Kiaer’s argument about the ‘language of sensuous beauty’ is a reference to the techniques adopted in this print. The organization is rather different to that adopted in the *Progresses*, which are designed to be read in sequence and which involve more clearly organized spaces within each scene. *Strolling Actresses* is not only packed with separate narratives (scenes within scenes), but space seems to be organized around a series of interwoven lines. In his *Analysis of Beauty* of 1733, Hogarth advocated what he called ‘the serpentine line’ (‘being composed of two curves constrained’) as the first principle of beauty which ‘gives play to the imagination and delights the eye’. In Chapter 7 he describes this line as having the ‘power of super-adding grace to beauty’ (Hogarth, *Analysis of Beauty*, p.41). Kiaer argues that the almost exaggerated use of this line gives the print a sensual rhythm which is more in keeping with the techniques of painting than those of the print. In her view this effect is reinforced through the use of subtle distinctions between light and shade and variations in texture (often more difficult to achieve in the print medium).
These techniques do seem to contribute to the general sense of graceful ebb and flow of the whole composition, although my own view is that it is quite difficult to argue conclusively that such techniques actually undermine the satirical impact of the work. Many other aspects of this engraving, such as the ludicrously ambitious cast list and the poses assumed by some of the characters, tell us that it was at least partly designed to make fun of the theatrical pretensions of strolling players. It is possible that, given the close relationship between Hogarth’s painted and graphic work, he may have deliberately sought to create a more painterly effect in this print, perhaps seeing it as more appropriate to the feminine subject-matter. But we could also argue that this graphic technique still retains a linear emphasis and employs exaggeration and distortion in some objects, and is therefore close to the category of ‘caricature’ which we usually associate with satirical prints.

One of the interesting aspects of this print is, I think, precisely its ambiguous status between the categories of painting and print making. This underlines a key theme I have been developing in relation to Hogarth: that his art provides rich material for study because it seems to straddle the boundaries between those categories and genres which many of the evolving institutions of art were seeking (in theory at least) to codify and canonize. We have seen that both the technique and content of his work raise questions about the extent of the artist’s intended satire. In my view the complexity of the image suggests that Hogarth may have intended it to be read as a more wide-ranging and multi-levelled commentary on contemporary femininity, class and the theatrical world.

**Portraiture and the canon**

In 1757 Hogarth announced publicly that he intended to spend the rest of his time mostly in portrait painting, recognizing perhaps that portraiture was an area in which academic compromises were most successfully achieved, particularly with the growing popularity of the ‘Grand Manner’ portrait. This compromise had been successfully achieved with his painting of Garrick (Plate 87), which fell between the genres of history and portrait painting. However, many contemporary artists made their living as ‘face painters’, or what Shaftesbury had called ‘mere face painters’, working in studios in which processes were standardized and assistants employed to work on and reproduce commissioned portraits. As we have seen, Shaftesbury’s derogatory sense of the word ‘mere’ was a reference to the supposedly mechanical and unintellectual processes involved in copying a face – in attaining nothing more than a likeness.

Implicit in Shaftesbury’s assertion is the view that an idealized or more universal image is preferable to a carefully observed representation of nature’s imperfections – hence the contrast with the ‘poet’ (see p.126 above). Such attitudes are often associated with the culture of the Augustan era at the beginning of the eighteenth century, when classical sources and ideals (in particular, those accessible through Roman sources) became fashionable models for achievement. As an art form through which appearances were made public, portraiture was a powerful medium for the communication of social and cultural values and beliefs. Hence the growing popularity of ‘Grand
Manner’ portraits which provided more than a ‘likeness’ – which aggrandized or elevated the sitter through the use of historical, literary or classical references. Increasing demand for portraits from the growing middle class contributed to an expanding art market, and encouraged the upper classes (largely the nobility and landed gentry) to patronize forms of painting which could somehow represent ideas of ‘dignity’ and the social status with which they identified. Some of the aesthetic debates which ensued found a focus in the activities of the Royal Academy.

The growing instability of the portrait genre, particularly in relation to history painting, is revealed and exploited in the texts of Reynolds’s *Discourses*. He both represents it as a lower genre without full academic status and advocates a form of portraiture which follows the principles of what he calls the ‘Grand Style’. This value system is, in a sense, his own version of the ‘Grand Manner’; it involves the reworking of both antique and Renaissance sources in pursuit of some higher aesthetic formula. Moreover, in his attempts to develop an academic theory of portraiture, he actually plays down the idea that ‘likeness’ involves minute observation or copying. In *Discourse IV*, delivered in 1771, he argues:

> Even in portraits, the grace, and we may add, the likeness, consists more in taking the general air, than in observing the exact similitude of every feature.

*(Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, p.59)*

I indicated earlier that despite his theoretical exhortations to artists on the value of historical subjects, Reynolds, like many contemporary British artists, made his living largely through portrait commissions. Even in the annual shows held at the Royal Academy, portraiture was more commonly exhibited. Many shows included examples of Reynolds’s full-length portraits of noble clients, which were designed to hang on the walls of country houses, where they would be seen by a limited public of guests and visitors to the family house (see Plates 91 and 92). Through the exercise below, I want to develop these issues in relation to a number of paintings, selected to represent some different types of portraits which were popular during the period.

Please look at the following illustrations:

- *Hogarth, The Graham Children*, 1742 (Plate 114)
- *Hogarth, Benjamin Hoadly, Bishop of Winchester*, c.1743 (Plate 115)
- *Reynolds, Lord Middleton*, 1762 (Plate 116)
- *Reynolds, Mrs Hale as 'Euphrosyne', c.1764* (Plate 92)
- *Reynolds, Mrs Siddons as the Tragic Muse*, 1789 (Plate 94)

How would you describe the form and content of Hogarth’s *Graham Children*, and how would you distinguish it from the other portraits listed?
Plate 114

Plate 115 William Hogarth, Benjamin Hoadly, Bishop of Winchester, c.1743, oil on canvas, 127 x 102 cm, Tate Gallery, London. Copyright Tate Gallery, London.

Discussion

Hogarth’s *Graham Children* is a different sort of portrait in that it depicts a group rather than a single figure. (As such it is related to a subgenre called the ‘conversation piece’, for which Hogarth became renowned. This was usually a group portrait of adults, so-called because the sitters were often shown interacting or conversing within the painting.) At first glance the scene has an intimacy and air of informality about it appropriate to the subject of children, as opposed to some of the more formal, posed portraits of adults by both Hogarth and Reynolds which I have included in this list.

The interaction between the figures of *The Graham Children* suggests there may be a narrative meaning to the work. I would suggest that the seemingly informal organization of the composition of *The Graham Children* belies some other carefully orchestrated levels of meaning. The oldest girl seems to assume the most solemn and formal pose of the group, as she restrains the youngest from seizing a bunch of cherries. We’ve seen that Hogarth made extensive use of symbolic references in his painted and graphic work, so we can reasonably speculate about the symbolic meaning of this portrait. Thus the restraint of age (in the figure of the oldest girl) is set against the spontaneity and innocence of youth, and several images symbolize disasters to come (in adult life?). On the left a clock is mounted with a scythe-carrying Cupid, and the cat on the right seems about to pounce on the goldfinch’s cage. The terrified warble emitted by the bird is mistaken by the young boy as a happy response to the noise from his musical box. This painting is thus an intimate image of children and domesticity, but also evokes a more general poetic message of the loss of innocence and the decline of age which is more often found in history painting. Once again, Hogarth has produced a work which defies easy categorization.

The more formal paintings of adults could be described as ‘Grand Manner’ portraits. They show the sitter in elaborate robes or costume which revealed hereditary rank, or military, political or ecclesiastical office, a style of portraiture which had helped to establish the reputation of the seventeenth-century painter Anthony Van Dyck (Plate 117). Robes could thus be used to convey status, magnificence and power, a convention which is adopted in both Hogarth’s *Benjamin Hoadly* and Reynolds’s *Lord Middleton*. While the former wears the robes of his ecclesiastical office as a bishop, Lord Middleton sports the extravagant coronation robes of a baron, every detail of which expresses his affluent and noble status. His red velvet mantle and silk-lined tunic are both trimmed with ermine; his coat is brocaded silk and his shoes are fastened with gold buckles.

Despite these parallel uses of costume, the general effect of each of these masculine portraits is rather different. The full-length pose, the setting framed with a drape and a neo-classical column, and the aloof expression of Lord Middleton give the work a somewhat imperious grandeur. In contrast, Benjamin Hoadly appears slightly more informal in his seated pose and less generalized appearance. While Hogarth appears to have borrowed from the conventions of the ‘Grand Manner’ portrait, combining them with his own interests in more realistic forms of representation, Reynolds seems to be
developing his ‘Grand Style’ of portraiture to evoke ‘dignity’ and status in his sitter, conscious of the powerful public functions of portraits of the nobility. This form of portraiture, then, could have some claim to academic worthiness.

In Discourse IV, in which Reynolds discusses the main characteristics of the ‘Grand Style’ and history painting, he considers the importance of ‘expression’ to denote rank: ‘Those expressions alone should be given to the figures which their respective situations generally produce. Nor is this enough; each person should also have that expression which men of his rank generally exhibit’ (Reynolds, Discourses on Art, p.60). Not surprisingly, the issue of rank is exclusively associated here with the male subject. The display of political, hereditary or military rank was part of the public culture of the upper classes. As women of the same noble class were unenfranchised and rarely occupied comparable professional or political roles (although there were a few acceptable roles as hostesses, patrons, etc. through which upper-class women could exercise some social and economic power), the representation of rank was largely a male preserve. Given that women were largely denied the possibilities of representing political or ecclesiastical rank, what devices could be used to elevate the portrait of a female sitter? ‘Noble breeding’ was the only (hereditary) rank available to a few privileged women, and Reynolds developed various aesthetic conventions to represent a woman’s status, among them the famous classical disguises and associations which ennobled, for example, Lady Sarah Bunbury and Mrs Hale as ‘Euphrosyne’ (Plates 91 and 92).
Mrs Hale (born Mary Chaloner) was the sister-in-law of Edward Lascelles, who later became the first Earl of harewood, and this portrait still sits today in the music room of harewood House in yorkshire. as a large-scale, full-length portrait with mythological pretensions, the portrait epitomizes Reynolds's ambitions to raise the status of portraiture. Euphrosyne was one of the three mythological Charities or goddesses, daughters of Zeus who personified grace and beauty. Euphrosyne personified joyfulness, and shared with her two sisters the ability to add refinement and elegance to life. Allied with the Muses (see p.133), these goddesses watched over poetry and athletic skills. Mrs Hale's stylized pose (possibly taken from Raphael's Saint Margaret in the Louvre), her hybrid dress (part pseudo-classical, part modern), her sprightly manner and the array of symbolic figures behind her all contribute to the aggrandizing associations deemed appropriate to the sitter's character. And the extent to which Reynolds (and presumably the patron) intended such works to function both as portraits and as forms of history painting is reinforced by the artist's exhibiting policy. During the early Royal Academy shows, portraits of noble women were usually hung (and listed in the catalogue) without their names.13

Such elevating allegorical conventions were not, however, exclusively reserved for Reynolds's upper-class clients. His later large-scale portrait of Mrs Siddons as the Tragic Muse (of which Reynolds painted two versions in 1784 and 1789) brings me back to the theme of representation of the actress in eighteenth-century society, which I raised in relation to Hogarth's Strolling Players. Needless to say, the associations of class and public status evoked in Reynolds's work are very different to those of the Hogarth print. Mrs Siddons signified the more respectable face of the 'actress'; her work on the london stage in revered forms of classical drama gave her some claims to the 'professionalism' so sought after in the theatre at the time. During the 50 years since the appearance of Hogarth's print, much work had been done to raise the status of the acting profession and public perceptions of the 'actress', although social prejudices were deeply ingrained and 'actress' still signified for many a woman of ill-repute, a dangerous form of femininity.

I have chosen to finish this case study with a discussion of this portrait because I think that it both draws together many of the themes which I have been developing and raises some pertinent (but tricky) questions. Mrs Siddons assumes the disguise of the classical tragic Muse (Melpomene) and a pose which is probably borrowed from Michelangelo's figure of the prophet Isaiah on the Sistine Chapel ceiling. For a painting in what Reynolds called the 'Grand Style' (or the Grand Manner), these are impeccable credentials. But there is an ironic twist in the possible meanings suggested by this portrait. Mrs Siddons was famous for her part as the tragic Muse when she was actually wheeled on stage in the role in a performance of Garrick's play Jubilee at the Drury Lane Theatre in 1785. This is not simply a painting of a woman in disguise, removed from her actual role in society. Mrs Siddons is at one and

13 For example, in the first Royal Academy show in 1769, Reynolds exhibited four allegorical portraits of women, each listed without a name. I discuss the implications of these allegorical disguises both for contemporary notions of femininity and for academic culture in my essay, 'Women in disguise'. For a discussion of similar issues and problems within contemporary portrait conventions, see Pointon, Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England.
the same time a grand historical subject replete with ennobling allusions, a conventional image of woman as Muse, and a recognizable likeness and representation of an actual role played by the sitter. Thus several possible images of the femininity of Mrs Siddons are evoked at the same time: she is woman as consummate actress, woman as Muse and woman affirming her career as a ‘professional’.

Conclusion

What this discussion of Mrs Siddons should help reveal is that paintings (like prints) are complex texts which can often be read in a number of different ways. In this study I have been concerned with some of the ways in which artistic, social and moral values and interests can be mediated through painted and graphic images, and the implications of these values for the idea of a canon of art. In seeking to understand what these works might have meant to a contemporary audience, I have looked at some of the ways in which allegory and symbolism are employed by different artists. In the process, I have focused on the network of relationships between ideas of academic art, art theory, debates about the nature of portraiture, and the relationship between art and theatre in mid-eighteenth-century Britain.

The question which still remains open is: what is – or was – the canon of art during the period? I have suggested that although there are no easy answers to the question, we can identify certain processes and practices which have helped to establish the idea of a ‘canon’. These include contemporary attempts to give art practice an academic and institutional basis and to establish some recognized criteria of quality. I have argued that the canon is itself in part an educational force through which certain value systems are refined and reproduced. That said, what tends to be seen today as the canonical work of the period is not merely the most ‘elevated’ official or academic art – the history painting – but rather some of the varied forms of portrait painting which are now represented as the art of ‘quality’ of the period. Many of those works which during the eighteenth century were seen to have an ambivalent relationship with recognized canons of art, such as some of Hogarth’s painted and graphic work, are now widely acknowledged as belonging to a ‘great tradition’ of British art. As I suggested earlier, the canon is not static; perceptions of what constitutes the ‘great’ art of a particular period will vary and shift according to the historical perspective of the observer.

As I argued in the Preface, much work has been done in recent years which questions the whole concept of a canon. From this perspective, our perceptions of what constitutes the art of quality of a particular era will always be framed by ideological and institutional perceptions which are deeply embedded in our culture, and which have determined what gets written into art history and what gets excluded. These ideas are underscored by the belief that the canon is itself an ideological construct, and that by accepting it we subscribe to an ideology which marginalizes and excludes certain forms of artistic production. These arguments have been important in recent years in the development of feminist art history and gender studies, and the study of race and ethnicity in visual imagery.14 However, one of my projects in this

14 Perry, Gender and Art (Book 3 in this series) and King, Views of Difference (Book 5 in this series) explore these issues in greater detail.
case study has been to look more closely at what a canon of art might be, rather than to engage directly with this wider question of the ideological framework of the canon. Hence my emphasis on the work of Hogarth and Reynolds and the early British academies. But in trying to pinpoint some of the aesthetic and social processes which helped to produce—or to challenge—the idea of a canon, I hope I have helped to equip you to ask (if not necessarily to answer!) some of the wider questions.

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