

Model Making and Anti-Competitive Practices in the Late Eighteenth-Century London Sculpture Trade

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Abstract

This article concerns the generation of anti-competitive practices, and the associated discontents, that rose to the fore in the London sculpture trade in the late eighteenth century (1770-1799). It charts the business strategies and technical procedures of the most economically successful practitioners, whose workshops had some of the characteristics of manufactories, and whose critics accused them of conducting a "monopoly" trade. Small-scale practitioners lost out in the competition for great public contracts on account of their design processes and their inability to represent any manifestation of "establishment". A combination of three factors increased the gap between a handful of powerful "manufacturers" and the rest of the trade: the foundation of the Royal Academy, shifts in the ways designs were evaluated, and a growing number of very lucrative contracts for public sculpture. I conclude that such were the discontents within the London trade that by the 1790s, there was a marked tendency for practitioners who were not manufacturers to be attracted to democratic political movements, to the Wilkite call for liberty and the rise of civic radicalism in the merchant population of London.

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How modelling became controversial

- [1] In 1785, the sculptor John Bacon contributed an article on his art to Rees' *Cyclopaedia or Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences*.¹ It is not difficult to see why Bacon was given this task. He was considered the greatest English authority on sculpture of the time. In 1782, he had been chosen to execute the bronze monument to George III at Somerset House, the most conspicuous public commission of the new era in which a Royal Academy controlled the visual arts in England. The expectation was, probably, that Bacon should take the role of Etienne-Maurice Falconet, who wrote a well-known article on sculpture for Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopedie*. However, Bacon's essay on sculpture was not accompanied by the sort of revealing diagrams and explications of the technicalities of manufacture that appeared in the famous French text. Most of his article was dedicated to an explanation of the comparative relationship between sculpture and painting. Only

¹ See my article "Reviving the School of Phidias. The Invention of a National School of Sculpture in Britain (1780-1830)," in: *Visual Culture in Britain* 7/2 (2006), 25-46. The article appears in the edition of Abraham Rees' *Cyclopaedia* that was published in 1786-1788, as a revision of Ephraim Chambers' publication.

rudimentary information on the making of sculpture was provided, certainly insufficient to guide in any process of making.

- [2] The publication of compendia of knowledge, such as encyclopaedias, is commonly regarded as a defining aspect of the "Enlightenment". These ventures were important agencies of progress or "improvement". Including accounts of technological processes in such publications, it was argued, was in the public interest. Manufacturing techniques, and knowledge used in the making of works of art, should not be shrouded in mystery. Secrecy in relation to the design and production of objects was seen to hold back healthy competition, a crucial pre-requisite to progress. A buying public knowledgeable that was well informed in these matters was regarded as an encouragement to technically proficient producers.
- [3] Bacon, then, might have been expected by an Encyclopaedia publisher to have had something definite to say about the way sculpture was made. That he was so unforthcoming was significant, and, perhaps, somewhat in character. Bacon, as we shall see in this essay, had a reputation for anti-competitive practices. Rees might not have known it, but Bacon was the least likely of practitioners to explain his manufacturing techniques to a wider world. However, it requires to be pointed out, by way of a context, that, had the article in Rees' *Cyclopaedia* provided a detailed account of technical processes of sculpture making in England, it would have become a unique source of historical knowledge. As it stands, the absence of such published information probably indicates that the British reading public, and consumers of sculpture, were not very interested in such things. Had there been a well-developed appetite for knowledge of such matters it is likely that someone in "the trade" would have provided for it.
- [4] That study of how sculpture was made in eighteenth-century London is so challenging today is, then, largely owing to the lack of public interest in such matters at the time. Most trade knowledge, from the most efficient ways to divide labour to the best techniques of construction, was communicated orally. As a consequence, it has been lost. Types of documentation that were never intended to be used in this way, such as the auction catalogues of closing yards, fire insurance records or bank accounts, now constitute our main hope of piecing together such histories of "facture".
- [5] Certain parts of the process of making sculpture are more obscure than others. As a rule, the parts of production that most involved hard manual labour were least open to public perusal. They are, as a consequence, very difficult to describe in historical hindsight. Of all the stories of sculpture's production, that of how marble was quarried, and how raw materials reached the yards, seems to have been farthest from public concerns. It is not a coincidence, thus, that no scholar, even in the social history of art *milieu*, has had enough knowledge to underscore an account of the art of making sculpture in eighteenth-century London with one of the marble trade. That is not to say that there

was a conspicuous demand for information about parts of the process of making that were less to do with dirty and dangerous manual labour. In this essay I argue that information about how sculpture was designed, on paper and through various types of modelling, remained restricted in the eighteenth century. This was mainly because there was little apparent public interest in the matter of authorship. There was, as we shall see in this essay, an angry understanding, building within the ranks of underlings, that powerful workshop masters were passing off their employees' three dimensional designs as their own. Public ignorance and indifference to the matter of how sculpture was made clearly allowed for these injustices to be perpetrated. There were those who thought that encouraging the public to care about these things was the key to preventing these injustices. However, my argument here is that these were voices in the wilderness. Most patrons and buyers seem to have been content with the illusion that when they commissioned or bought a piece of sculpture it was representative of the creative accomplishments and efforts of the owner of the business. This illusion served the interests of producers and consumers alike. The majority of the trade, who worked as employees, were the victims of the illusion.

[6] Although many of the details of manufacturing process remain arcane, enough is known to suggest that workshop methods and conditions varied widely. In order to comprehend the disputes concerning facture that are discussed in this essay it is necessary to appreciate the marked differences that existed in business models. Some London workshops were little more than one-man enterprises. Others were something like factories. The Milanese sculptor, Giovanni Battista Locatelli, who is the subject of one of the central topics of this article, seems to have worked on one major contract at a time. Owner of the business, and involved in every part of the process of making, he probably had few, if any, assistants. Other practitioners had dozens of concurrent projects in train when they were at the height of their powers. The most such men might do, when addressing the majority of commissions, was to sign off the contractual papers. Thereafter they were likely to take all of the credit, in all senses of the word. For someone like Joseph Wilton, the first secretary to the Royal Academy, designing a piece of sculpture could mean as little as approving other men's drawings and models. Wilton relied in many of his public works upon drawings made by his friends, Giovanni Battista Cipriani and William Chambers. He was also prone to turn the whole manufacturing process over to others. One work which was contracted to him, but he did not even design in three dimensions, was the colossal lead equestrian monument to George III in Berkeley Square (completed 1766). Having a lot of work on hand in his capacity as official sculptor to the King, Wilton turned to his former tutor in Paris, Jean-Baptiste Pigalle, to provide him with a good sub-contractor. The man who fitted the role, one Beaupré, had been in London, in a workshop in Covent Garden, for about two years when he was asked to make the royal monument. He left immediately afterward and only

decades later was it revealed, by J.T Smith, that Wilton had had no role in the making or design of the statue.² About four years after Smith published the information, the statue collapsed under its own weight. This suggests that the competence of Beaupré, who specialised in garlanding, had been over-estimated to solve an immediate problem.

[7] There are, then, good reasons for an art historian to be very cautious of believing that the three dimensional design of English eighteenth-century sculpture was always, even often, performed by the man who passed for the creator in the perception of the commissioner, purchaser, or broader viewing public. The main question for historians is whether this amounted, upon eighteenth-century terms, to exploitation; it being possible that concerns to establish the identity of designers in the twenty-first century are largely anachronistic. Moreover, it is legitimate to ask whether it became increasingly likely that division of labour would express itself in such patent injustices as to cause discontents between practitioners as we move into the world of the early Industrial Revolution. Across the eighteenth century, demand for sculpture made in London grew markedly. The number of competitors in this market did not grow accordingly. One only has to look at the number of commissions taken by John Bacon the elder, or Joseph Nollekens, by comparison to even the most successful practitioners of the first half of the century, to see this. I argue in this essay that anti-competitive practices were not just better reported in the late eighteenth century, they were probably a more serious problem. The fact that it is possible to read in the newspapers about discontents about the way sculpture was contracted only after the Seven Years War (1756-1763) may well reflect a growing understanding that the great workshop masters were exploitative. Moreover, there was, I argue, a manifest growth in the understanding that it was wrong for one man to live on the proceeds of the designs of another without either fully acknowledging the debt or paying generously to compensate.

[8] This essay claims to provide no more than indications of changing attitudes to the design process, and the part they played in the broader realm of facture. Much as it is best to admit to our lack of knowledge about manufacturing techniques, it is also necessary to be cautious in our claims to understand the business. It is important to note, for instance, that one of the workshop masters that is considered here as a farmer of contracts, Joseph Wilton, went bankrupt. Matters are not so simple, then, as describing how a few wealthy practitioners bullied the rest of the London trade. This is not a straightforward story of how an establishment, which arose within the producer classes, became fabulously wealthy and famous at the expense of their peers. Some practitioners, however, did become very wealthy and did use their social power to force those who might have competed with them to work for them. Others were, equally clearly, never able to grow their practices to the extent that they could broker out contracts. One of the

² John Thomas Smith, *Nollekens and his Times*, London, 1823, 2 vols, vol. 1, 112.

characters examined in this essay, Giovanni Battista Locatelli, appears to have been at the mercy of a single patron, Lord Orford. Broadly, the great majority of London's skilled marble carvers and model makers of the eighteenth century never had enough capital to set up an independent business. Even the most brilliant among them, the likes of Louis François Roubiliac and John Deare, remained employees for many years. Throughout the eighteenth century, only a tiny minority of sculptors who worked in London were serious contenders for ambitious contracts. This means that the labour market was, probably, perennially full of skilled modellers who did not have the resources, and thus the opportunities, to take credit for their talents. Sadly, it is likely that there were many men with skills as modellers as great as those of Deare and Roubiliac but who were fated never to be credited with any of their own work.

[9] There were two basic ways in which the three dimensional design of talented men could be passed off as that of a celebrated practitioner. The first was the process of subcontracting whole commissions to smaller workshops and not informing the client. We know that Henry Cheere used the shop of Richard Hayward in this manner.³ Most well-known workshop masters also needed to employ men who were fully skilled in every part of practice, including modelling. It is, perhaps, not surprising to find that large manufactories had such employees. John Cheere, for instance, made use of William Collins as a foreman of his lead works for many years. Collins eventually became an independent practitioner, specialising in shallow relief work of a very high standard. More remarkable is that Roubiliac had such employees. According to Nicolas Read, he was able to execute whole contracts for Roubiliac when the latter was on his tour of Rome. It was reported in Read's obituary in *The Gentleman's Magazine* of 1787 that he modelled and made the famous figure of Death in the Nightingale monument.

[10] There were other ways in which the modelling of works could be performed by someone other than the contracting workshop master. On certain occasions, it would seem, workshop masters who were in need of modelling work, at times of high demand, brought in the services of competitors. There are indications that this occurred in the Hyde Park Corner workshop of London's leading producer of lead and plaster casts, John Cheere. When John Cheere died, an advertisement appeared for the auction by Mr Greenwood of the contents of his workshop in *The Morning Post* of February 5 1788. One of the prime attractions of this sale was that many of the models and moulds on the premises had been made by famous names. The advertisement concluded with the boast that the terracotta models in the shop were "by Rysbrack, Stanley, Collins, Van Nost, Sponge, Bacon &co.". It may be that Cheere simply liked to collect the models of others. However, we know that one of those listed, William Collins, had once been John Cheere's

³ For an account of Cheere's business practises see my book *The Silent Rhetoric of the Body. A History of Monumental Sculpture and Commemorative Art in England, 1720-1770*, New Haven and London 2008.

foreman. It is possible that, on occasion, Cheere purchased the modelling work of the greatest workshop masters of the day, such as Rysbrack and Bacon. More likely, he had such men provide him with models which, given the division of labour in their shops, may well, in turn, have been made by their employees. It would seem, therefore, that the tendency for modelling work to pass between London's shops that even the productions of men more famous and respected than the workshop owner might be passed off as "in house" products. The implications of this for the twenty-first-century business of buying and selling eighteenth-century English sculpture, particularly in lead, are obvious. One might buy a piece "by" a lesser maker which was modelled by a more famous person. Alternatively, one might purchase a piece which is documented as "by" a famous name and be acquiring work designed in three dimensions by a completely forgotten figure.

[11] There were several reasons why the matter of how sculpture was designed began to be made public in newspaper articles – whether or not readers were initially interested in such matters. Firstly, there was the growth, after the Seven Years War (1756-1763), in the number of monuments that were made by contract with a public body and with public money. Before the War, only one monument, that to Captain Cornwall in Westminster Abbey (1746-1752), had been paid for by Parliament. The expenditure of public money led to the gradual rise in the frequency of competitions for contracts, whether or not the sculpture was commissioned by Parliament. The Corporation of the City of London, as we shall see below, increased the number of their sculptural contracts in the last three decades of the eighteenth century and put some of them through open competition. Inevitably, those who lost these competitions, especially on financial considerations, thought it in their interests to explain why they had not got the commissions. The public was considered to have a right to know about these matters because sculpture was no longer mainly about private contractual relations, and in consequence we see the gradual release of information about the design and making of sculpture and the calculations of cost.

[12] A second reason for the newsworthiness of such matters was the foundation of the Royal Academy, five years after the end of the Seven Years War, in 1768. The links became clear between holding office in the various committees of the new institution and preferment for public contracts. Although a lot of trade had, in the previous fifty years, been concentrated in a few hands, the involvement of a public institution in private enrichment had scandalous ramifications. Men such as Bacon were accused of being "monopolisers", and of using their role at the Academy to strangle competition. What was meant was that they operated a cartel with the co-operation of a department of state. Those who knew how the system worked but were not enriched by it, such as Locatelli, were anxious to expose its workings to a wider public.

- [13] Locatelli, as we shall see, became involved in a dispute with the Royal Academy in the mid-eighties, and released scurrilous details about the costing of public monuments by eminent academicians. Wilton was accused of making a profit of eight thousand five hundred pounds on the monument to General Wolfe which was completed in 1772.⁴ Locatelli claimed that such profiteering from martial patriotism was ubiquitous. In the *World* of July 1, 1788, Joseph Nollekens first appears in print as the kind of exploitative figure we later encounter in the pages of J.T. Smith's biography. He was accused of taking massive contract charges for patriotic monuments and paying workmen to design and manufacture large parts of them at fractional fees. William Armiger was said to have made two colossal emblematic figures for the monument to the Three Captains, at a charge of 85 and 95 pounds respectively, in the context of a project for which Nollekens had netted 3,500 pounds in sheer profit. For whatever reason, the cost of monumental sculpture massively outperformed inflation in the second half of the eighteenth century. Before 1760, the most expensive tombs, such as Scheemakers' colossal tribute to the family of Lord Shelbourne at High Wycombe, had cost around two thousand five hundred pounds. Wilton and Nollekens were, therefore, regularly receiving more in profit for big monuments than Rysbrack, Roubiliac and Scheemakers had asked for entire contracts.
- [14] Information about the sculpture business that was revealed for these reasons was likely to be scandalous, and therefore interesting to newspaper editors who had their own eye on profit. A select appetite slowly formed for gossip about how the men who designed sculpture in the back-rooms of workshops were exploited by their employers. This demand was eventually gratified, in style, by J.T. Smith in his 1823 biography of Nollekens. Smith's father, Nathaniel, was a childhood friend of Nollekens. He had worked as an assistant to Wilton for twenty years without much reward or credit. Not surprisingly, his son held Wilton in contempt and delighted in letting the world know about arrangements like the employment of the hapless Beaupré. In the 1780s, Nathaniel Smith was appointed Nollekens' foreman. Becoming fabulously wealthy, and leaving a fortune of more than eighty thousand pounds, Nollekens did little to reward fairly the Smith family. J.T. Smith was well aware that, for generations, employees in London's sculpture workshops had done far more than put their masters' ideas into execution. Poorly paid men in the dusty background had made the models for which the famous workshop masters had taken credit. Smith cited, for instance, the case of the making of the first monument funded by parliament, to the memory of Captain Cornwall. He told his readers about the endeavours of a sculptor, Bartholomew Cheney, who had never been known to the public but whose works were very familiar:

⁴ *The World*, July 19, 1788.

Bartholomew Cheney modelled and carved the figures of Fame and Britannia for Captain Cornwall's monument: Robert Taylor gave him four pounds and fifteen shillings a week.⁵

- [15] What Smith was referring to here was not just the making of the small terracotta models that were used to establish designs in this period. In this era, large, unfired models were made in terracotta, which were used as templates in the workshops for the carvers armed with measuring callipers. Because large masses of terracotta tend to shrink significantly on drying, these models were generally cast into plaster and broken up after the commissions were concluded to make space on the shop floor. These large models were seldom seen by the public, which is one of the reasons the public did not think to ask questions of who was actually designing sculpture. A case of one such model being seen was in the early 1760s, when Pierre Grosley was able to witness the making of the monument to General Wolfe which was "by" Joseph Wilton. Grosley described the model, and watching the assistants carving from it, in his *Tour of London*. This was published in Dublin in 1772 but referred to experiences of England in the immediate aftermath of the Seven Years War. One of those carving on the monument on that day was, almost certainly, Nathaniel Smith who, as his son later claimed, made all the figurative components over the course of three years.⁶ Smith had won six premiums for modelling work at the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce in the period between 1758 and 1762. It is, therefore, likely that Wilton did not just employ him as a carver. This helps to explain why Smith's son was so aware of the modelling work done by nameless minions on famous public monuments.
- [16] One of the functions of this essay is to show that Smith's complaints about the exploitation of employees, who worked as modellers, were not unprecedented. What follows are two case studies of public disputes, drawing on contemporary press coverage, that laid bare the way sculptors proceeded from model to finished marble.

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Nicholas Read and the politics of contracting for City monuments

- [17] The first two monuments commissioned by the Corporation of London for its Guildhall, those to the memory of Alderman Beckford and Lord Chatham, were the subject of exceptional press interest largely on account of their highly controversial political associations. Both works were intended to embarrass the court and in some way reflect the incursion into City politics of Wilkite sentiments. Beckford's monument was the vehicle for an inscription that celebrated the Alderman for a speech in which he had, allegedly, openly defied the King.⁷ The deceased was presented by the winner of the

⁵ Smith, *Nollekens*, vol. 1, 180.

⁶ Smith, *Nollekens*, vol. 2, 110.

⁷ For Beckford's status as a Wilkite hero, "no court dependant", see the obituary verses published in the *London Evening Post*, June 21, 1770.

competition, the Hanoverian sculptor J.F. Moore, in a vituperative pose indicative of his defiant oratory.⁸ Shortly after its completion, there were moves, albeit tongue-in-cheek, to pair it with a monument to Wilkes himself.⁹ It was in the same spirit that the initial commission for the monument to William Pitt the elder, Lord Chatham, proceeded. The point of the project was both to honour Pitt and embarrass the King and Lord North for their prosecution and management of the war with America. Pitt had a fatal collapse delivering a speech which criticised the court's policy as a barrier to trade and imperial prosperity. Sympathetic to this stance, the Corporation sought to shame the court by requesting the King's support for a scheme to erect the monument in St. Paul's Cathedral.¹⁰ Seeing this political ploy for what it was, the King declined, and the decision to place the work in the Guildhall instead was, at least initially, a means of registering the City's discontent with state and crown policy for posterity.¹¹

[18] In many respects, the political nature of the monuments erected in the Guildhall was of direct consequence to the technical controversies that surrounded them. Both monuments were essentially testimonies to the Corporation's disapproval of traditional privilege. It was, then, particularly important that the commissioning process appeared open to scrutiny in a way that prevented underhand partiality of an establishment operating against the individual.¹² Based on the Corporation's claim to represent the interests of men of business, if necessary against those of men of political power, there was a perception that these contracts needed to consider the monuments' makers as people entitled to proper ethical treatment.

[19] A letter, under the pseudonym "Tom Gallit" that was sent to the *Gazetteer* for publication on July 24, 1770, suggested a rigorously impartial competition procedure for the Beckford commission. The only prejudice suggested was in favour of the sculptor's proposal and against those of architects who presented designs on paper. Much of the opening political sentiments of "Gallit's" letter were Wilkite in tone, and their support of the position of "the workman" practitioner are in line with a "radical" ideology in defence of popular liberties.

⁸ *London Evening Post*, June 20, 1772.

⁹ *The Morning Chronicle*, November 26, 1772.

¹⁰ It was even planned to situate the monument "directly under the dome" of the Cathedral. *Morning Post*, August 19, 1779.

¹¹ John Almon, *Anecdotes of the Life of the Right. Hon. William Pitt, Earl of Chatham*, London 1797, vol. 3, 330-339.

¹² An interesting letter by "No Conjuror but a friend to English artists" (*Lloyd's Evening Post*, September 19, 1770) debated the fairness of the committee's deliberations. With regard to "Gallit's" criticisms, it is important to note that Moore was recorded as submitting his first design in the form of a drawing; this indicates that he was not the writer's preferred candidate. The letter reveals that the original competition had been a choice between seventeen drawings.

[20] Although the writer described himself only as having "some acquaintance among the statuaries", he clearly represented a particular aspect of the business. The letter began with a long account of the deficiencies of recently erected sculpture that was based on a drawn design. John Michael Rysbrack, who had suffered from "dropsy" in later life and was unable to model or carve, was held as an example of a sculptor whose work had declined owing to a diminishing capacity in three-dimensional design. In the final years in which he was able to take commissions (1760-1763), Rysbrack was largely limited to drawing in imitation of relief sculpture. Unmentioned by name, though clearly at issue, were the architects, in particular James Stuart, William Chambers and Robert Adam, who had, in the previous decade, taken numerous major monumental commissions on the basis of committees' preference for two-dimensional schemes. A number of recently erected public war monuments had a remarkably flat appearance, in particular that to Admiral Watson at Westminster Abbey (1757), commissioned by the East India Company from James Stuart and handed by him for execution to Peter Scheemakers. "Tom Gallit" spoke for sculpture in the tradition of Louis-François Roubiliac, which, he maintained, had been outstandingly satisfactory because it was conceived in three dimensions from the very start:

Mr Roubiliac, the most eminent statuary that has ever exhibited in this country, could not produce so much as a sketch on paper of his own performance, but showed little rough sketches in clay, and whatever sketch was approved of he afterwards made a larger and correct model.¹³

[21] Although seemingly just concerning the design process, the letter was, more subtly, a plea for a certain type of sculptor who had learned his craft largely on the job. Inevitably, it was suggested, sculptors who worked in three dimensions all the time became rusty in their drawing and were obliged, if a contract were judged upon drawn designs, to pay external draughtsmen:

When a pupil (just come from drawing school) commences his study as a statuary he seldom applies himself to drawing, as the little knowledge he has already acquired sufficiently qualifies him for his business, but is forwarded as much as possible in modelling and carving sculptor, so that many good workmen, who are capable of making an excellent design on paper, or in clay, and of executing the said design in clay or marble, when finished, if they have occasion of it, are obliged to apply to a draughtsman.

[22] The letter, therefore, took the cause of a certain kind of workshop master, the graduated "workman" who was, from a very early age, schooled to think in three dimensions. This kind of man, essentially the product of the day-to-day life of modelling in the workshop, was considered the most effective at producing sculpture that would impress in the round when erected, rather than as a drawn design in the planning stage. It was argued that when workshops were simply employed to produce sculpture that had initially been

¹³ The accuracy of this statement is strongly supported by the kind of models which survive from Roubiliac's hand and have been documented by Malcolm Baker.

imagined in two dimensions, the result was bound to be inferior. "Tom Gallit's" proposal to the committee, therefore, was that they only consider ideas for composition that were first presented in clay sketches, and, if chosen thereafter, worked up into finished models (Roubiliac's method). A description of the design of these models should be sent to the newspapers, but the sculptors' names should not be disclosed at this point. Although the ranking of the designs in the estimation of the committee was proposed to be published, and each paid according to his place in the competition, it was requested that failed candidates be kept anonymous "to secure every artist's reputation". Our pseudonymous writer, therefore, appears to have been voicing the concerns of those who took part in the increasingly common competitions for public works, and who feared that simply by taking part, their names would become associated with failure. This letter represented an understanding that it was in the interests of sculpture that "workmen" who understood three-dimensional design were given every chance of succeeding in competitions.

[23] "Tom Gallit" asked that the process of choosing designs for big public commissions did not fall into the remit of men, such as Robert Adam, who took a substantial part of the fee, and control of the relationship with the client, simply because they were good at the kind of two-dimensional designing that was required by some competition committees. Such architect-designers treated an entire workshop, including its master, as inferior simply because clients were unaware of the fact, in our writer's understanding, that "fine", finished, drawing had no real place within the sculpture workshop. In his view, the best public monuments arose from Roubiliac's methods, methods which were most likely to translate into a visually satisfying three-dimensional composition in the finished work. Although his name was not mentioned, and he did not enter this commission, the sculptor best suited to this method was Nicholas Read, the onetime foreman of Roubiliac who had taken over his St. Martin's Lane shop. However, "Gallit's" letter was not written specifically in support of Read, but championed the cause of a whole generation of sculptors, from William Collins (trained by Henry and John Cheere) to John Van Nost Jnr. (trained by Roubiliac), who had over the past two decades graduated from assistants in the great London shops to independent masters.

[24] In many respects, the letter explains the discontent expressed by Nicolas Read, as a representative of the workshop-trained practitioner, in his conflicts with the Corporation over the monument to Lord Chatham a few years later. On this occasion, the workshop-trained sculptor did not face competition from a person most comfortable with producing fine drawings. Rather, it came from a modeller, John Bacon, who was obliged to teach himself to move from clay design to marble work. From Read's point of view, this deficiency in training resulted in much the same problematic outcome as a dependency on drawings: the designs did not translate into finished marble pieces that showed a command of space and did not solve the particular problems of making large three-

dimensional compositions in marble that were properly proportionate. A workshop-trained sculptor such as Read not only suffered from competition with architects, he was also the victim of a new brand of sculptor, exemplified by Bacon, who lacked experience in moving between clay or plaster and marble. Such a figure could impress clients by modelling, but it was debatable whether he understood any other aspect of sculpture. Another sculptor who came into practice by this route was John Flaxman. He had trained in the shop of his father, who seems to have specialised in a craft then known as "figure making", which was limited to modelling and making plaster cast. This training suited Flaxman Jnr. initially, in his work for Wedgwood as a product designer. However, from these origins, he was then required to teach himself to carve and run a shop making works in marble.

[25] The reason why young modellers, not fully trained as carvers, came into the late eighteenth-century market for marble work was the development of the separate practice of "figure making" from the middle of the eighteenth century. This craft became much patronised. Robert Campbell, for instance, advised parents who wanted to put children in trades in 1740s London that there was more demand for modelled terracotta busts than for any other type of portraiture.¹⁴ We probably no longer grasp the scope of this business because so many of its works have been destroyed, leaving only a handful of busts by the most important practitioners, the elder John Flaxman and Benjamin Rackstrow. Although much in demand, such work was not necessarily very profitable. Clients were not prepared to pay much for works that were modelled or cast in cheap materials such as plaster or terracotta. For those brought up in "figure making", who wanted to make reasonable sums of money, it was necessary to re-train and move into "statuary work". Although unaccustomed as children to the most physical aspects of sculpting, those trained in figure making shops had some advantages. They had never been exposed to the "labour" aspect of sculpture and were therefore more suited to adopt the polite manners that oiled the engagement with prospective clients. Bacon was reported by J.T. Smith to have dampened his clay, when in elegant company, with a silver syringe. As we shall see, in the context of an increasingly "polite" trade, these men were able to establish an advantage over those brought up to the physical business of carving. Moreover, those who understood modelling, even at the expense of other skills, were capable of controlling the design process and it was that which enabled overall control of a great marble carving workshop.

[26] What was to be Read's public humiliation over the Chatham monument competition owed much to the fact that not all of "Gallit's" suggestions had been adopted by the Corporation's committee. As in the competition for the Beckford monument, two

¹⁴ Robert Campbell, *The London Tradesman, being a compendious view of all the trades, professions, arts, both liberal and mechanic, now practised in the cities of London and Westminster*, London 1747.

sculptors were selected to compete, publicly and head to head, for the contract.¹⁵ Failure was public and the risk to either man's reputation was great. Read was particularly sensitive to this kind of public humiliation because his first great independent commission, the huge monument to Admiral Tyrell in Westminster Abbey (1767-1770), had ended in an unprecedented critical debacle.¹⁶ Struggling to maintain his reputation, Read could not afford another public failure. Yet his career steadily declined from the period of this competition and he died a decade later, in a state of insanity. His extensive press obituary suggests that his poor health was strongly connected to his many professional travails.¹⁷

[27] Read was, in fact, one of four named competitors for the contract. The committee openly considered a painted monument. The American painters, Benjamin West and John Singleton Copley, submitted schemes for a "Death" scene that were ultimately rejected. Bacon's candidacy was supported by Alderman John Boydell. As an influential print dealer who made his living from the arts of design, Boydell was the most influential member of the committee.¹⁸ He had also encouraged Copley, and both profited enormously from the painter's *Death of Chatham*, through a jointly-organised fee-paying exhibition of the work and a reproductive print. Boydell's open partiality for Bacon and Copley's designs was only one indication that the Corporation did not act unanimously in this matter, and that the contract was awarded when one of the evidently partial lobbies prevailed.¹⁹ As far as Read was concerned, Bacon appeared to have a privileged position in what was ostensibly a fair competition. Reports in the press were published concerning the committee's dealings with Bacon alone, some months before Read was officially rejected.²⁰ Indeed, Read evidently laboured on his submission with a strong sense of failure, long before it actually happened.²¹ As a result, he had a lot of time to work up resentment of Bacon and of certain members of the committee.

[28] The debates about sculptural technicalities which arose were inseparable from broader issues of political justice. Read presented two designs that openly evinced what are now

¹⁵ The protocols of this competition were explained in the *General Evening Post*, January 15, 1771.

¹⁶ Gunnis, *Dictionary*, 316. I have an article forthcoming on the Tyrell monument and its critical failure.

¹⁷ *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1787, part II, 644.

¹⁸ As explained in *The Morning Chronicle*, December 17, 1779.

¹⁹ An interesting report in the *General Advertiser*, December 5, 1778, revealed that in the first ballot it was decided, by a considerable majority, that a painted monument be adopted. Boydell was appointed to the committee on this day, and from that time a sculpture by Bacon was the preferred option.

²⁰ A report in the *St. James Chronicle*, October 29, 1778, suggests that Bacon was dealing separately with the committee from an early stage, and that his model was presented without any competitor's equivalent being seen.

²¹ The final lines of the open letter in the *Morning Post* of June 8, 1779 which challenged the committee to "shew at once your impartiality" suggests that Read knew that he was not favoured.

described as "radical" politics, and it is likely that he was shortlisted with the help of a Wilkite lobby within the Corporation, who wanted an uncompromisingly anti-court monument. He produced a third model, not used in the competition, which he sent to the exhibition of the Free Society of Arts in order to allow the public to see it.²² In terms of subject-matter, this design was carefully contrived to mimic that proposed by Bacon. This was, presumably, to show visitors to the Free Society exhibition that, had fair play prevailed, the competition between the sculptors might have been settled on technical differences alone. Yet, in the final analysis, the competition was between Read's politically daring, and Bacon's ultra-cautious conceptions. At a closer look, Read's first "radical" design, as he described it in the *Morning Post* of June 8, 1779, appealed to the understanding that America, whose emblematic figure was paired with Justice, was the wronged party in the current war:

The Earl of Chatham, standing on a pedestal, the principal object to the sight, dressed as an English Senator, in a graceful attitude, seeming to recommend peace with America; his countenance expressive of heartfelt concern. Over his head are the emblems of Learning and Eloquence. Posterity, represented as an infant, with emblems of Vigilance and Fidelity, lamenting his loss. Britannia, sitting, records his expostulations on the peace, so often recommended by the Earl. Every figure is distinct expressive and well grouped; Britannia and America judiciously contrasted; the latter standing supporting Liberty and Justice, mourning over her loss; by her side is her favourite son, depending on Trade and War resting on Fortitude.

[29] This design was first announced to the public in an open letter sent to the *Morning Post* of June 8, 1779, and was published under a pseudonym, "A Friend to Truth". The actual author was, almost certainly, the sculptor. The letter centred on a direct comparison between Bacon's model and Read's first "radical" design. It ended with an undertaking to perform the contract for half the price quoted by Bacon. In many respects this was a clever ploy from a man facing failure, for it made public the committee's determination to contract with Bacon whatever his price. In 1770, Bacon had struck up a personal acquaintance with the King when he was employed by the archbishop of York to make a royal bust. At the sittings George III grew to like Bacon and, though Wilton remained official sculptor to the King, he had no work from court influence thereafter. It was Bacon who, on George III's personal advice and without due competition, was awarded the contract for the monument to Chatham at Westminster Abbey. Read understood that, although the City monument was a protest against the King's policies in America, the political message was to be watered down by the employment of a court favourite. The employment of Bacon was, effectively, a backing away from the spirit of protest that had initially prompted the commission, and Read, who had stuck with the original brief to embarrass the court, was its casualty.

²² As explained in the catalogue of the Free Society for 1778, 10, entry 136.

[30] When considering the apparently reckless nature of Read's proposed composition, it is important to realise that it probably represented the protest of a man, and his supporters, who knew they were not going to prevail. Sensing that Bacon was bound to get the contract, Read behaved in an unusual, though not necessarily irrational, manner. He decided to create two models to be judged at the final committee. The second of these was an even more overtly pro-American version than that described above. It was bound to be rejected, allowing the sculptor and his supporters the consolation of having been too controversial to be embraced by any aspect of the British establishment, even the rebellious City. The description began in the following terms:²³

British and American Posterity mutually lamenting the Parliament's petition of Congress, presented by Mr Penn, with a map of the colonies annexed. The noble Lord Chatham's remonstrance upon Peace with America, recorded by History in her Book.

[31] The subject of the narrative was specific: that of the so-called Olive Branch Petition presented in the summer of 1775 by Richard Penn, descendant of the founder of Pennsylvania, in the hope of preventing a complete split with the mother country. This placating gesture was immediately, and personally, rejected by George III, pushing the colonists to the extreme of declaring their independence. By adopting this as his subject, Read intimated that the King could not bring himself to agree terms with even the most conservative of the colonists, and publicly declared himself to be a political "radical".

[32] Although ostensibly about competing designs, at stake here was the rivalry between contemporaries who represented very different kinds of sculptural practice. As Read's long vindictory obituary makes clear, he claimed to have been the only one of Roubiliac's trained apprentices capable of executing whole commissions on his master's behalf.²⁴ Bacon, by contrast, did not train in one of London's great marble carving workshops. He was a clay modeller who had served an apprenticeship in the Bow china works and, thereafter, worked extensively for prominent ceramic firms, principally Coade and Wedgwood.²⁵ Only during the 1770s did Bacon manage to gather around him a workshop capable of executing large commissions in marble.²⁶ As Read was all too aware, Bacon was able to secure both of the most lucrative marble carving commissions of the late-1770s, the two great monuments to Chatham, without a previous record of such work.²⁷ Indeed, it was rumoured that he had never carved marble before his bust of

²³ As described in numerous newspapers including the *Morning Chronicle*, December 17, 1779.

²⁴ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 1787, part II, 644.

²⁵ For Bacon's period at Bow, see "An Account of John Bacon, Esq. F.R.," in: *The European Magazine*, August 1790, 83-84. For an interesting account of the importance of Bacon to the Coade works see *The European Magazine*, January 1802, 7-8.

²⁶ As far as I can discern, Bacon did not exhibit a work carved in marble until 1770, when he was thirty years old.

²⁷ Read appears to have been so furious at the appointment of Bacon to make the Westminster Abbey monument that he wrote to the *Morning Post* of August 23, 1778 claiming to have received

George III, and that the King had chosen him in the baseless belief that he could work in this material as sculptor of the Westminster Abbey monument to Chatham in that year.²⁸ Read's letters make it clear that he doubted the capacity of the committee of Aldermen, little equipped to understand the technicalities, to make an informed judgement about whether Bacon could design or make a large marble monument.

- [33] Implied in the letter of 1779, Read's opinion became overt in another correspondence sent to *The Morning Chronicle* as Bacon's monument reached completion. Published on October 22, 1782, this letter was published under the pseudonym, "A Friend to Merit". In the letter, Read identified Bacon's design as an incomprehensible jumble that communicated its maker's technical incompetence and his employers' lack of discernment. He observed, by way of introduction, that "the whole is injudiciously crowded, and overcharged with little meaning and expense". He proceeded to list a litany of faults that can be summarised in some of the descriptive words employed: "poverty", "unintelligible", "too small". The main point of attack was upon Bacon's shortcomings in the command of perspective, allegedly raising an array of figures on a stepped marble platform above the viewer's head without taking any account of optical distortions:

The mass, and many of the objects, seem hanging in the air. A structure so large should diminish from the ground gradually upwards, and might have agreed more with the addition of some architecture with emblems, which would have made it appear more agreeable to the place and eye and better supported the objects that seem piled on one another.

- [34] The attack concluded with the observation that:

The Lion's head and legs are too small, and the animal appears as tame as a spaniel. The cap of liberty seems stuck to the tablet, and makes Liberty appear at great distance from the principal figure.

- [35] Such criticisms fulfilled the prediction, in the open letter of June 8, 1779, that the model proposed by Bacon was bound to be undignified on account of an inadequate grasp of perspective:

The Earl of Chatham is represented to the public in the habit of a Roman, with chopped hair, not unlike our coachman's wig. Over his head – nothing – he being placed on the very pinnacle of a high mountain, so far out of sight, that one can hardly perceive the figure with a naked eye.²⁹

- [36] The essence of these vitriolic attacks was that Bacon had no practical understanding of how a small-scale design would translate into a large work where matters of perspective and optics came into the equation. Employed by Roubiliac to make and install large

the contract himself.

²⁸ Pasquin (pseudo.), *Memoirs of the Royal Academicians, being an attempt to improve the National Taste*, London 1796, 110. Like Read, Pasquin, probably exaggerated for effect. It would be more accurate to suggest that Bacon began to be associated with marble works in the early 1770s and it is not certain whether he got others to carve them from his models.

²⁹ *The Morning Post*, June 8, 1779.

allegorical monuments well above head height, such as that to General Hargrave (completed 1757) in Westminster Abbey, Read seems to have regarded himself as an expert in this matter. His letter ended with the direct claim that this "medley and lump of inconsistency" could have been made better for a third of the price, and was "the monument of partiality and monopoly".³⁰

[37] This case turned upon the implication that comprehension of a sculptor's process of mensuration was so limited that a bold, politically favoured, claimant could name his price. As Read's letter implies, the preference given to Bacon could only be explained by the fact that decisions taken by those overseeing great public contracts were made on "social" considerations, and were not based on technical competence, of which patrons were ignorant. Given the anti-court nature of this commission, it is ironic that Bacon's preferential treatment began with the personal favour of George III. As the King was personally funding the Royal Academy's grand new premises at Somerset House, his opinion came to be of particular importance in that institution. In 1778, Bacon exhibited a large model of "Thames" at the Royal Academy which was intended for a monument at Somerset House, and later turned into the monument to George III as pilot of state begun in 1782.³¹ As early as 1778, Bacon was, thus, in line for the greatest sculptural commission to be awarded by that institution during the period of the American War.³² Bacon typically cast the King in the same role as had previously been given to Pitt, holding the rudder of a marine state. This reduced any possibility that his design of the Guildhall monument would be interpreted as an indication that Pitt, and not the King, was in charge of the politics of empire and war.³³ Magnificent as Bacon's final work at Guildhall appears, it was, in terms of imagery, somewhat back-tracking from any initial "radical" intention. Completed at the close of the American war, it did not attract criticism about its political meaning and conformed to the imperatives of a broader loyalist movement to rally round the authority of the crown in the context of defeat.³⁴ The Corporation employed Edmund Burke to write the inscription, who succeeded in burying the original

³⁰ The difference between Read and Bacon's quote went from double to triple when, at the close of the contract, the latter submitted a further bill for one thousand five hundred pounds. See the *Whitehall Evening Post*, January 3, 1783.

³¹ For a review of this work, not mentioned in the secondary literature, consult the *General Advertiser*, May 5, 1778.

³² For an announcement of this contract, which was completed in 1789, see *St James's Chronicle*, May 14, 1782. I understand that the figure of Thames exhibited in the Academy in this year related to a version of this monument, possibly intended for the embankment frontage. It did, however, find its way into the bronze that was eventually commissioned. This suggests that Bacon, just one of the sculptors involved in the adornment of Chambers' building, had already been ear-marked for this central contract.

³³ For an account of the degree to which the Academy identified itself with the imagery of this monument in their forecourt, see *The London Chronicle*, April 11, 1789. The monument was specially completed for the Academy exhibition in this year, when George III, to much public rejoicing, had recovered from his first episode of mental illness.

³⁴ For a typical positive review consult the *Whitehall Evening Post*, September 26, 1782.

"radical" message under unobjectionable rhetorical phraseology.³⁵ It seems that this contract was, from the start, only really open to subtle political operators.

- [38] The politically awkward firebrand Read, then, seems to have been the stooge, plucked from a declining "workman" tradition and advanced to make it seem that Bacon had competition. In reality, the contract was never within the reach of a small workshop that lacked favour in the current political establishment. By the late 1770s, a seat on the committee of the Royal Academy, an establishment with which Read was not associated, was essential to securing any big metropolitan contract for marble sculpture. Technical matters, such as the full mastery of three-dimensional design, were less important than political influence, as the "Friend to Truth" made very clear.

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Locatelli's controversy with Lord Orford and the Royal Academy in 1788

- [39] Although Read's dispute with Bacon and the Corporation was complex, it was a far less tortuous affair than that which broke out over a colossal piece of gallery sculpture made by a one-time member of the Venetian Academy, Giovanni Battista Locatelli. The controversy can be traced through many primary sources: numerous published letters by Locatelli in *The World*, supportive verses, and counter-attacks in rival newspapers. It is easy to get lost in the details of this case, which spread into matters far beyond the concern of this essay, and to miss the essential dynamics of the contest. Locatelli came under the patronage of the mentally imbalanced Lord Orford who had inherited Robert Walpole's Houghton Hall. Over the course of two years (c.1785-1787), the sculptor made a colossal statue of Theseus and Hercules. This piece, which is now lost, was cast in *scagliola* from a giant terracotta model made entirely by Locatelli. At the conclusion of the contract, the sculptor set a price of £2400 on his work, which Orford refused to pay. The dispute was essentially based on two grounds: firstly, the statue was cast and made without a contract, which would have been drawn up as a matter of course in the case of a major commemorative monument. No sculptor would have embarked upon a monument that was commissioned at a fee of over a thousand pounds without a complicated legal agreement in place. Secondly, the cast sculpture that was designed to be seen in "classical" sculpture galleries, rather than inserted into decorative niches as plaster furniture, was normally made in bronze. Locatelli was vulnerable in this matter because he made the figure in an unusual, experimental, material which meant that it could not be sold on as a product when rejected at the asking price. *Scagliola*, a gypsum and glue composite made in imitation of marble, had, until this point, only been used in the making of columns and ornamental work. There are no indications that any contemporary thought of it as a material for figurative sculpture.

³⁵ The most important document in this regard is a very substantial puff in *The British Magazine* of October 1782, 252-256. This not only names Burke, but gives the story of the monument's commission and design a tactful political gloss.

- [40] The case of Locatelli versus Orford reflects the legal and financial uncertainties that governed the production of a kind of sculpture that was far more important at the close, than at the beginning, of the eighteenth century: the large classicising "gallery" piece.³⁶ Very few contracts survive for this type of sculpture. This is probably because such a work, unlike a funeral monument, was not necessarily particular to the purchaser, although it might have been made with his gallery specifically in mind. Theoretically capable of being sold on as speculative pieces, such works did not strictly require a contract and therefore placed the maker at a particular hazard. Sculptors accepted such commissions for the status they conferred on maker and patron alike, similar to the contemporary "history" piece in the field of painting. This encouraged sculptors to proceed enthusiastically to production, where cool judgement might have advised caution. In accepting a commission for the massive marble group *The Fury of Athamus* from the 4th Earl of Bristol in 1790, the young John Flaxman, – ironically himself one of the leading "manufacturers" of sculpture in later years, – was paid a derisory £500, and was defrauded to an even greater degree than Locatelli, but did not resort to the law.³⁷
- [41] Flattered by discovering a patron for such prestigious work, sculptors such as Locatelli and Flaxman seem to have embarked upon these commissions on the basis of "gentlemen's agreements". Sometimes, as in the Orford case, the patron seems to have conveniently forgotten to mention, or the sculptor politely neglected to ask, a contract price. According to his apologists, Lord Orford was shocked at the asking price, and refused to pay. These issues were complicated by the fact that the colossal group, which was soon after lost in a fire at Houghton, was a cast.³⁸ Those attacking Locatelli claimed it to be made of plaster, he corrected this by stating that it was a piece of *scagliola* work.³⁹ It was partly on the basis that the sculpture was not carved marble that Lord Orford refused to pay and that a committee of sculptors belonging to the Royal Academy (Bacon, Banks, Carlini, Nollekens, Wilton and Tyler) agreed to support the patron's claim. On this last point, the case became revealing from a technical, or workshop practice, perspective.
- [42] Locatelli was all too aware of a technical aspect of the committee's judgement, which was overlooked by the appointed arbiter, the noted connoisseur, and owner of a famous sculpture gallery, John Locke of Norbury Park. The masters who were asked to assess his prices, were accustomed to include in the general contract invoice the cost of making the large-scale plaster models from which their shops carved large works in marble. An

³⁶ Purposely designed sculpture galleries, of the type encountered at Woburn or Chatsworth, were very much a fashion of the second half of the reign of George III.

³⁷ This is the price quoted in a letter published in W.G. Constable, *John Flaxman, 1755-1826*, London 1927, 39.

³⁸ The destruction of the figure was recorded in the *Whitehall Evening Post*, December 9, 1789.

³⁹ *The Morning Herald*, July 7, 1788. Locatelli identified his medium as *Scagliola* and discussed casting techniques in *The World*, July 11, 1788.

insider in London's workshops, Locatelli knew that John Bacon in particular, who had begun his career as a model maker, charged his customers handsomely for the original modelling work and proceeded to add to this the cost of having the workshop translate it into marble. Locatelli understood that a large marble monument or group was essentially a full-scale model turned into statuary by underpaid hirelings. It was hinted that the tight costing of translation allowed the workshop master to award himself generously for the "design" aspect. From Locatelli's point of view, it was therefore hypocritical for men like Bacon to accuse him of overcharging for a mere cast after a model, when their far higher modelling costs were carefully lost in the workshop master's alchemical process of "mensuration".

- [43] Like J.T. Smith, Locatelli was further aware that the large models, cast in plaster from clay, from which workshop teams carved were not generally made, wholly or even in part, by the workshop master himself. It was clear to him that the price at which the great workshop masters had assessed his labours reflected their view of large-scale modelling work, which was not much. By contrast, Locatelli claimed that the modelling of the figure had taken two and half years to complete. When materials were discounted, his daily rate, as fixed by the committee, was calculated at "thirty-pence per diem".⁴⁰ Locatelli was outraged: as a member of the Academy of Venice, which he considered of greater international standing than London's Royal Academy, he considered his work the equal of anything produced in the committee members' shops, although they had priced it only as manual labour.
- [44] The case is significant because it reflected the reason why London's sculpture workshops became so large in the eighteenth century: famous "names" were able to tighten costs on manual labour, demand high prices on the basis of a public reputation their employees did not share, and use the profits to control the contracting process. Towards the end of the controversy, Locatelli unsurprisingly resorted to direct attacks, calling John Bacon not just a "monopoly" trader but an "emperor of the arts", who had "never seen Italy and Rome".⁴¹ He was not alone in this opinion. Seeing how much the sculptor was enriched by public contracts in an era of war, Fuseli was to comment facetiously that if Bacon was given all the marble work for army and navy, they might as well award him the contract for "hams and pork".⁴²
- [45] This case also reveals how long it took a single man, however skilful, to make a colossal group. As his published letters show, Locatelli was crushed by Orford's refusal to pay because he had dedicated himself to this commission for two and a half years – an

⁴⁰ *The World*, July 1, 1788.

⁴¹ *The World*, July 18, 1788.

⁴² Gunnis, *Dictionary*, 25. Visiting Somerset House regularly, Fuseli was probably put in mind of this by the fact that Bacon's monument to George III stood not only outside the Royal Academy premises but those of the navy victualing offices, too.

indication how long it took a single person to make and cast an ambitious model. In most commissions, modelling was only the start of a process which ended in carving and polishing. Perusing the lists of commissions that were undertaken by John Bacon in his twenty-five-year career as the master of a major sculpture workshop, it is clear that he must have been the overseer of a process of "manufacture" rather than "facture". Indeed, it is relevant to remember that the man whom Read and Locatelli saw as the prime "monopoly" trader of their generation had begun life as a modeller for what we now call ceramic "factories". He had been the leading figurative modeller for the Coade casting works, a cross between a ceramics factory and a Hyde Park Corner workshop of the type that was run by John Cheere. Bacon understood manufactories, which is probably why he later introduced pointing machines to the London sculpture trade to improve the efficiency of moving from models to marbles. As Locatelli loudly complained, the costings produced by the likes of Bacon and Nollekens valued him as little more than an "ignorant" worker in a manufactory.⁴³

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Conclusion

[46] There was a great deal of nationalist discourse on the progress of the art of sculpture in the period following the foundation of the Royal Academy, and particularly during the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars.⁴⁴ It seems reasonable to ask, whose progress? The great majority of working sculptors who never had a chance of being elected full academicians certainly played their role, but got almost no credit. The very works that were often indicated as examples of "improvement" in the art – the large public war monuments – were most likely to enable the kind of profiteering described above. J.T. Smith and Locatelli were, by no coincidence, most keen to divulge information about how the three dimensional designs of uncredited men had been used in great monuments in Westminster Abbey and St Paul's Cathedral. This was, in some measure, because it was all the more disconcerting that the works that were used to point to Britain's new found splendour in matters of "arts and arms" were actually the sculpture of exploited minions. It was a step away, in terms of the politics of war, from coming to the realisation that it might not have necessarily been the decisions of men in command that had won certain battles.

[47] The opportunities for profiteering that were presented by the rising demand for war monuments rendered "monopoly" trading, already prevalent before the Seven Years War, a great deal worse. As the London sculpture market grew during the reigns of George III and George IV, we see the emergence of a number of figures who seem to have been

⁴³ *The World*, June 19, 1788.

⁴⁴ See Craske, *Reviving the School of Phidias*, for an account of the role of war in the creation of the idea that a national school of sculpture had emerged, after the foundation of the Royal Academy, and that it was superior to anything in the past.

involved in the large-scale manufacturing of sculpture: Bacon, Nollekens, Chantrey and Flaxman. Between them, they absorbed many more contracts than any of their predecessors before the Seven Years War, and their profits grew accordingly. Chantrey left approximately one hundred and fifty thousand pounds in his will, nearly twice as much as Nollekens who died twenty years earlier.

[48] It is significant that both Bacon and Flaxman were grounded in modelling and casting techniques, the latter's father having been an important plaster "figure maker".⁴⁵ Excellence in modelling and casting allowed both men to regard the marble carving business as auxiliary to practice; encouraging a factory mentality in which design was considered in separation from efficient manual production. It is no coincidence that both men were conspicuous Christian capitalists; like many prominent manufacturers of the early "Industrial Revolution" they emerged from fringe or dissenting groups in which evangelical paternalism was a central cultural ideal. In Robert Cecil's biography, Bacon, who attended Whitefield's Tabernacle, and was buried there, was largely remembered as an instrument of evangelical piety. Bacon's and Flaxman's apologists stated that the sculptors' evangelical sentiments were evident in the fair way they treated their many dependent workmen. As outlined in the full, two-volume version of *Nollekens and his Times*, J.T. Smith's view of Flaxman was profoundly coloured by the notion that he had treated his workmen in the manner of a Christian father. Nollekens, by contrast, was accused of worshipping mammon alone, and was not protected by a similar veneer of pious intentions. He became the butt of Smith's witty and devastating claims of exploitation and suffered permanent damage to his reputation as an artist.

[49] The evangelical beliefs of John Bacon (Jnr & Snr) and Flaxman rendered them true believers in the moral mission of the war monuments that enriched them. Flaxman personally campaigned to erect, by patriotic subscription, a colossal monument of Britannia on Greenwich Hill. Had this been made, it would have been a fitting symbol of the nation's aspiration to world dominion. To reach out across the globe, while raising profits for Protestantism, answered to evangelism's deep-held dreams. Bacon was probably likewise committed to Imperial War not just because it enriched him personally, but also because it created opportunities for his brand of evangelical faith. According to a long obituary that appeared in *The Gentleman's Magazine* in 1799, Bacon spent the final years of his life turning his fortune to the cause of monarchy as a bulwark of

⁴⁵ To some degree, it explains John Flaxman's clear preference for modelling in plaster over terracotta that he had trained in the shop of a plaster "figure maker", his father. It must also be added that Flaxman's modelling techniques, as revealed in the collection of his studio kept at University College London, were typical of the times. For some reason, not fully accounted, the models of early nineteenth-century British sculptors, such as Chantrey and Richard Westmacott, do not survive in terracotta. These shops all worked from plasters, which were preserved.

Protestantism, against revolution.⁴⁶ He established his own loyalist militia regiment in his Newman Street premises and contributed handsomely to loyalist fundraising initiatives.

[50] It was clearly in the vested interest of a man wishing to be a large-scale producer of sculpture to become a proponent of a conservative social order. This was most completely exemplified by Francis Chantrey, although he was far too practical and prosaic to be swayed by evangelical sentiments. At the outset of his career, Chantrey, whose immediate family were humble, seems to have moved in "radical" circles.⁴⁷ His breakthrough work was a terracotta bust of the definitive "radical", Horne Tooke, which was shown at the Royal Academy in 1811. Chantrey, however, like many of the "great" workshop masters was fortunate in his relations and made a good marriage. His wife, a cousin from a wealthy branch of his family, brought him a considerable dowry with which he was enabled to head a hugely productive workshop. Based on the letters published by George Jones, Chantrey the workshop master gave every appearance of turning into an arch-conservative, whose friendship with Walter Scott was based on a common political view of the world. As in Bacon's case, the road to economic and social advancement started with a bust of George III. Put on exhibition at the Guildhall in 1811, this bust established Chantrey as the natural choice for a courtly elite.

[51] In hindsight, it is difficult to determine whether struggling small-scale producers turned against various manifestations of "establishment" because of their professional hardships, or whether these troubles were caused by their political reluctance to play at being socially acceptable gentlemen. There was, however, a record of political radicalism among those London sculptors who did not become large-scale manufacturers or chose not to be "monopolisers". Thirty years after coming to London, where he spent much of his time as a sub-contracted relief carver, the erstwhile Prussian court sculptor John Eckstein moved to Philadelphia in 1794.⁴⁸ Thomas Banks was, famously, called to witness in the Treason Trials of 1794, and was implicated, along with Horne Tooke, in a conspiracy against the crown. Banks took a number of important commissions for public monuments but even a cursory look at his list of contracts suffices to see how much smaller his workshop was than Bacon's. Locatelli, like Eckstein, left Britain for the Continent in the midst of the Revolution (1796), when other, more courtly, European artists headed in the opposite direction. He eventually found himself in the employ of Napoleon.⁴⁹ Locatelli's compatriot and associate, Joseph Ceracchi, who served as similar role to him in the workshops of London between 1772 and 1791, definitely became a firebrand revolutionary. He moved

⁴⁶ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 1799, 810.

⁴⁷ See the account of Chantrey in *The European Magazine*, January 1822, 3-5. It does not mention Chantrey's youthful politics but suggests an early struggle which may well explain an identification with Tooke.

⁴⁸ Gunnis, *Dictionary*, 139-140.

⁴⁹ Gunnis, *Dictionary*, 240-241.

first to Philadelphia, and then back to Europe where, in 1801, he was executed for his role in a Republican conspiracy against Napoleon.⁵⁰

- [52] The espousal of radical political causes among London-based sculptors that began with Nicolas Read's outspoken conflict with the Corporation of London was no idiosyncratic choice. Rather it was closely connected to the working practices of the handful of large workshops who have become the "face" of late eighteenth-century sculpture. These practices were mostly hidden, were sometimes sensationally disclosed to the public and are only now beginning to emerge as a subject for serious scholarly consideration.

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⁵⁰ Gunnis, *Dictionary*, 89-90.