

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: THE GREAT HOUSE OF BENJAMIN WEST:
FAMILY, WORKSHOP, AND NATIONAL
IDENTITY IN LATE GEORGIAN ENGLAND

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Directed By: Professor William L. Pressly, Department of Art
History and Archaeology

Anglo-American painter Benjamin West (1738-1820) holds a unique position in the history of Western art. Active during the foundational periods of not one, but two, national schools of art to which he could rightfully claim membership, West recognized his inimitable position in the development of English and American art and sought to position himself at the forefront of each nation. This dissertation examines his fluid national and artistic identities over the course of his instructional relationships with his American students, and the shifting personal and professional goals harbored by each party. While scholars have acknowledged the relation of West's pedagogical practice to his identity as an artist, this study presents an organic account of the relationships between teacher and students as an embodiment of West's ongoing and unprecedented attempts at fame, fortune, and legacy.

This legacy was central to Benjamin West's identity as an artist. His professional career was dedicated to the self-aggrandizement of his identities as an

(exotic) American, a prolific painter of high-minded scenes of history and religion, and the head of a workshop teeming with artists who shared his heritage, though not always his aesthetic inclinations. Over his career he cultivated a reputation as a welcoming instructor, always willing to give advice or lessons to any artist who approached him. This was not solely an act of altruism. Instead, it was the cornerstone of his construction of a proverbial House of West, a workshop-family whose members and their works would reflect back on the genius of the master, just as strongly as his own oeuvre.

Through the examination of four case studies of his instruction of American students – that of Charles Willson Peale, Gilbert Stuart, John Trumbull, and a circle of students led by Washington Allston – this study integrates Benjamin West's teaching practice with his career aspirations, positioning his pedagogy within the greater framework of his self-presentation. In doing so, it presents a history painter engrossed in the promulgation of his name throughout history, through his own artistic output and those of his children and students, as the progenitor of American artists working in the European tradition.

THE GREAT HOUSE OF BENJAMIN WEST: FAMILY, WORKSHOP, AND
IDENTITY IN LATE GEORGIAN ENGLAND

By

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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Dedication

To Mom, Dad, and Sara.

Acknowledgments

In the course of my work I have relied on the steadfast support of a number of people, none more central than my advisor, Emeritus Professor William L. Pressly. It was Professor Pressly's undergraduate seminar on British painting in the spring of 2004 that cemented my desire to become an art historian, and he has guided me in every step of my studies since then. He has always encouraged the pursuit of my own scholarly interests, even those far afield from British art. He has been my counselor, editor, coach, and strongest proponent in the discipline. Without his direction I could never have reached this point. Mentorship from Professor Pressly comes with a very welcome bonus: mentorship from his wife, Nancy Pressly, as well. She has supported me with equal aplomb, and her own research has been influential to this study. She and Professor Pressly often welcomed me into their home, making me, by the eighteenth- and twenty-first-century conception of the idea, a member of their family.

I also owe a great deal of thanks to the remainder of my dissertation committee: Professors Marjorie Venit, June Hargrove, Renée Ater, and Gregory Staley. It was also Professor Venit's undergraduate class that inspired my undergraduate dreams of art history, and she remains my most important teaching mentor. Her office was also a second home for me for many years, and her various encouragement and criticism have made me a better writer and a better teacher. Professors Hargrove, Ater, and Staley have demonstrated supernatural patience with me through this dissertation process, and I am indebted for the knowledge they have bestowed upon me and for their support and assistance in my writing and research.

There are several other members of the University of Maryland Department of Art History and Archaeology family who have played central roles in the course of my study. Deborah Down has assisted me with more paperwork, scheduling, and other forms of bureaucratic procedure than I care to imagine, always with a positive outlook and words of encouragement. Without her intervention on multiple occasions, I may never have reached this point in my studies, and for that I am eternally grateful. Ania Waller and Theresa Morse have also always looked out for me, providing assistance whenever needed, especially helping me get out of troublesome situations of my own making. Lauree Sails and Quint Gregory in the Michelle Smith Collaboratory for Visual Culture have always encouraged me to push the boundaries of art history, and to think about the impact of emerging technology and pedagogy on my own work. The Collaboratory is a welcoming space for collaboration and conversation, and plays a major role in the department's positive environment.

This atmosphere extended to my fellow graduate students, who have made the experience of graduate studies an enjoyable one. In particular, I owe endless gratitude to Sarah Cantor, Breanne Robertson Chen, and Ginny Treanor for serving as models of success and providing mentorship during the completion of my own studies, and to Suzy Eschelbacher and Lara Langer for the mutual inspiration and commiseration about our own working processes. Amanda Visconti provided essential advice about digital humanities models which were central to informing my reconsideration of West's workshop. Lastly, I owe many thanks to Katie Wood Kirchhoff. Normally the discovery of another doctoral candidate writing a dissertation on the same artist is a cause for concern. Instead, Katie has been a constant friend and source of

encouragement as we have shared ideas and spurred each other's research, and I look forward to continuing to do so in the years to come.

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One of Benjamin West's central beliefs about artistic education was that advice should be given widely and freely, and that part of the job of the professional artist was to give back to those who followed in his footsteps. To that end, I have greatly benefited from scholars of all disciplines and institutions who have given their time and advice to me freely. I am indebted to their friendly assistance.

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents and to my wife. Without their support, patience, and charity, none of this could have been possible. My father is no longer here to celebrate with me, but I know that he would have been very proud.

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Introduction: Benjamin West and the Arts in Eighteenth-Century America

Matthew Pratt's *The American School*

This study of the Anglo-American artist Benjamin West (1738-1820), like so many others, begins with a painting by another man. At some point in 1765, while working and training in London, thirty-one-year-old artist Matthew Pratt (1734-1805) painted a scene of five artists at work in a studio (fig. 1). The five, all male, are of various ages and participate in different activities. One man sits on the right side of the composition in front of an easel, having begun to sketch in background drapery on his canvas. At the back of the table located in the middle of the room, the youngest figure focuses his attention on an assortment of engravings spread out in front of him. Next to him, a young man turns away from his sketch paper to peek at another artist working in chalk. The attention of that artist, as well as that of the artist in front of the easel, is directed not at his canvas but at the final member of the group, a standing man dressed neck to knee in a deep shade of green, holding a palette and paintbrush in his left hand while gesturing at the chalk drawing with the crayon in his right.

The standing man is Benjamin West; the man seated in front of the easel is almost certainly Matthew Pratt;¹ and, despite showing artists at work in London, the canvas was exhibited by Pratt at the 1766 Incorporated Society of Artists exhibition under the title *The American School*. The identities of the other figures in the

¹ Carrie Rebora Barratt, "Faces of a New Nation: American Portraits of the 18th and Early 19th Centuries," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 61, no. 1 (Summer, 2003): 19. The Metropolitan Museum of Art identifies the seated man at the easel as Pratt, as do other scholars. However, there are some small incongruities with the depiction – notably, the artist at the easel is right-handed, while Pratt was left-handed – that create space for alternate interpretations. See Susan Rather, "A Painter's Progress: Matthew Pratt and *The American School*," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 28 (1993): 174.

composition are unknown, and, for the purposes of this dissertation, irrelevant. The notion that, in 1760s London, there could even exist such a thing as an “American School” of art is the central argument of Pratt’s painting,² and a crucial insight into the role of Benjamin West in American art and the trajectory of his lengthy career.

American Art in the Mid-Eighteenth Century

The British colonies in North America were an artistic backwater in the middle of the eighteenth century. So too was Great Britain, relative to the rest of the Continent. To paraphrase literary scholar Joseph Allard, in terms of art and culture, Colonial America was the province of a province.³ That is not to say that either Britain or America were devoid of distinguished artists. English kings and queens had long imported Flemish and German artists, such as Hans Holbein the Younger (1497-1543), Sir Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), Sir Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641), and Sir Godfrey Kneller (1646-1723), to serve as court painters,⁴ and English artists, such as Nicholas Hilliard (c. 1547-1619), had long excelled in the genre of miniature painting.⁵ In the eighteenth century a number of English artists began to distinguish themselves in other genres, notably Sir James Thornhill (1675/76-1734) in history

² Margaretta Lovell expands on this assertion, claiming that *The American School* was an attempt to display the proper course of study in art education, from drawn copies of plaster casts to completed oil paintings. She also claims that Pratt was engaged in the first stages of a portrait, which at that point was viewed by West as the culmination of painting, a view that the artist would quickly move from. Margaretta M. Lovell, *Art in a Season of Revolution: Painters, Artisans, and Patrons in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2005), 39.

³ Joseph Allard, “West, Copley, and Eighteenth-Century Provincialism,” *Journal of American Studies* 17, no. 3 (Dec., 1983): 392.

⁴ Ellis Waterhouse, *Painting in Britain: 1530 to 1790* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 13-123.

⁵ Katherine Coombs, *The Portrait Miniature in England* (London: V&A Publications, 1998); Daphne Foskett, *Miniatures: Dictionary and Guide* (Suffolk, England: Antique Collectors’ Club, 1987).

painting and his son-in-law William Hogarth (1697-1764) in printmaking, and in what he termed “modern moral subjects.” More importantly, both Thornhill and Hogarth worked to improve artistic training in England through their support of formal and informal drawing academies.

Meanwhile, adventurous, and less-talented, European artists sought opportunities in the untapped Colonial American art market from the first years of the eighteenth century.⁶ By 1711 Swedish portraitist Gustavus Hesselius (1682-1755) was active in Delaware, and the Scottish portraitist John Smibert (1688-1751) had already achieved a positive reputation in England before venturing across the Atlantic to serve as professor of painting at Bishop George Berkeley’s proposed university in Bermuda in 1728. Berkeley’s plan fell through, and Smibert, like Hesselius before him and other notable European painters such as Robert Feke (c. 1708-c. 1751), John Wollaston (active 1742-1775), and William Williams (1727-1791) after, became an itinerant artist,⁷ traveling throughout the colonies in search of work, which could take on any variety of forms. Hesselius advertised along with a colleague in the October 16, 1740 issue of *The Pennsylvania Gazette* for:

⁶ One of the earliest known European-trained painters to move to America was Evert Duyckinck (1621-c. 1702), who emigrated to New Netherland (modern New York) with his family in 1638, and who trained his son Gerrit Duyckinck (1660-about 1710) and grandson Evert Duyckinck III (about 1677-1727) in painting. In North America Evert Duyckinck worked as a glazier by trade, only using his painting skills for the odd request, not as a portraitist. For more on the early appearance of art in the Dutch colonies in North America around the turn of the eighteenth century, see Roderic H. Blackburn, *Remembrance of Patria: Dutch Arts and Culture in Colonial America, 1609-1776* (New York: Produced by the Pub. Center for Cultural Resources for the Albany Institute of History and Art, 1988).

⁷ “Itinerant” artist is the accepted term for artists who lived and worked in multiple locations, although, as Jessie Poesch points out, the length of their stays was “measured in months and years than in days and weeks.” Jessie Poesch, “‘In just Lines to trace’—The Colonial Artist, 1700-1776,” in *The Portrait in Eighteenth-Century America*, ed. Ellen G. Miles (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1993), 63. For the nature of the travels of itinerant artists in the early nineteenth century, see Leah Lipton, “William Dunlap, Samuel F.B. Morse, John Wesley Jarvis, and Chester Harding: Their Careers as Itinerant Portrait Painters,” *American Art Journal* 13, no. 3 (Summer, 1981): 34-50.

Painting done in the best Manner, by GUSTAVUS HESSELIUS, from Stockholm, and JOHN WINTER, from London, viz. Coats of Arms drawn on Coaches, Chaises, &c. or any other kind of Ornaments, Landskips, Signs, Shew-boards, Ship and House Painting, Gilding of all Sorts, Writing in Gold or Colour, old Pictures clean'd and mended, &c.⁸

Their selling points were their European heritage and willingness to perform any type of painting, no matter how humble.

Collecting practices in North America were devoted almost solely to portraiture, an outgrowth of the colonial absence of state or private actors wealthy or interested enough to support large historical commissions, as well as the focus on portrait painting in England.⁹ North America was not just a major exporter to England, but from the middle of the eighteenth century the largest importer of English goods, seeking desperately to emulate the home nation. Since the colonists could not commission and import portraits from across the Atlantic, they imported portraitists instead.¹⁰ Margaretta Lovell argues that as commerce-focused members of a mercantile empire, colonial Americans focused solely on the use of art, commissioning portraits to serve as “generational documents” related to the identification and promulgation of family structures.¹¹ A family might commission a portrait to mark a momentous event such as a marriage, birth, or military or political promotion, but few would ever purchase more than one each generation. Artists

⁸ *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, October 16, 1740.

⁹ T.H. Breen, “The Meaning of ‘Likeness’: Portrait-Painting in an Eighteenth-Century Consumer Society,” in *The Portrait in Eighteenth-Century America*, ed. Ellen G. Miles (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1993), 37-60; Michael Quick, “Princely Images in the Wilderness: 1720-1775,” in *American Portraiture in the Grand Manner: 1720-1920*, ed. Michael Quick, (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1981), 10-20.

¹⁰ Barratt, “Faces of a New Nation,” 10.

¹¹ Lovell, *Art in a Season of Revolution*, 10.

discovered the difficulty of limiting their output to portraiture, instead, as with Hesselius, painting any surface that required it.¹²

While there was a small, but dedicated market, in America for portraiture, it was “unreceptive cultural soil for history painting” and other genres.¹³ American-born artists who held history painting as the grandest form of art but lacked experience in viewing or creating art in Europe were thus placed in a paradoxical position.¹⁴ Because they had access to European aesthetic treatises but not to the works they described, the appearance and purposes of art in the minds of American artists existed only in their imaginations. Every work by an Italian Old Master was the most perfect work in creation, and painting was the single most important moralizing influence on a society’s ethics. That the early American market did not recognize this importance was a source of frustration.¹⁵ John Singleton Copley (1738-1815) recognized this, and left for England, while ambitious Americans who insisted on working in America found themselves thwarted in attempts to expand beyond portraiture. Some, like John Trumbull (1756-1843) and Rembrandt Peale (1778-1860), refused to abandon their

¹² Smibert followed a different tack, turning his studio into “a place to see and be seen, with a sitting room, gallery, and artists’ supply shop all under one roof.” Barratt, “Faces of a New Nation,” 10.

¹³ Scott Paul Gordon, “Martial Art: Benjamin West’s *The Death of Socrates*, Colonial Politics, and the Puzzles of Patronage,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 65, no. 1 (Jan., 2008): 65.

¹⁴ Barbara J. Mitnick, “The History of History Painting,” in *Picturing History: American Painting 1770-1930*, ed. William Ayres (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), 31.

¹⁵ John Dillenberger, *Benjamin West: The Context of His Life’s Work, with Particular Attention to Paintings with Religious Subject Matter, Including a Correlated Version of Early Nineteenth-Century Lists of West’s Paintings, Exhibitions, and Sales Records of His Works, and also a Current Checklist of his Major Religious Works* (San Antonio, TX: Trinity University Press, 1977), 11-12. In a letter from 1767 John Singleton Copley bemoaned the state of art in the colonies, stating “...subjects are not so easily procured in this place. A taste of painting is too much Wanting to afford any kind of helps; and was it not for preserving the resemble[n]ce of perticular persons, painting woulde not be known in the place[e]. The people generally regard it no more than any other usefull trade...” Copley to Benjamin West or Captain R.G. Bruce, 1767?, in *Letters and Papers of John Singleton Copley and Henry Pelham, 1739-1776*, ed. Guernsey Jones, repr. ed. (New York: Kennedy Graphics, 1970), 65.

lofty dreams, often to disappointing results. Others, like Charles Willson Peale (1741-1827), Samuel F.B. Morse (1791-1872), and Robert Fulton (1765-1815), turned their creative minds to science and engineering, where they excelled.¹⁶

Even still, there were a small number of American artists who achieved notable fame and status as painters, albeit while working in England. In 1783 Benjamin Franklin, by way of bemoaning the lack of funding for arts in America, told a Dutch acquaintance, Jan Ingenhousz: “Our geniuses all go to Europe. In England at present, the best History Painter, West; the best Portrait Painter, Copley; and the best Landscape Painter, Taylor, at Bath are all Americans.”¹⁷ Three decades later, Boston socialite Anna Cabot Lowell repeated the same sentiment in a letter to a Scottish friend, declaring that America:

...has for a long time been distinguished for giving birth to painters, who having in this country no masters, and no models but the great sublime of nature, are self-taught. Some of these now hold a high rank in Europe. West, the President of the Royal Academy, was born and educated in our country. Copley, whose portraits and historical pieces are admitted into the first cabinets in England, did not leave this town till he was in middle life. Trumbull, whose paintings have received the highest praise, whose “Sortie of Gibraltar” alone would give him fame, is brother to the late Governor of

¹⁶ Peale, as will be discussed in Chapter 2, became a noted naturalist and director of one of the first museums in America. Morse, who was despondent over the length of time it took him to learn, via letter, of the illness and death of his wife Lucretia Pickering Walker Morse in New Haven, CT, while he was painting a portrait of the Marquis de Lafayette in Washington, D.C., later turned his attention from art to rapid long distance communication, and eventually developed the single-wire electromagnetic telegraph and the Morse code for transmitting text, both of which became international standards for communication. Fulton, unsuccessful in turning his passion for painting into a reliable income after seven years in London, instead used his technical drawing ability and boyhood training as a silversmith to turn his attention to mechanical engineering, developing the first commercially successful steam engine and first practical submarine in history, among other inventions. On Morse, see Kenneth Silverman, *Lightning Man: The Accursed Life of Samuel F.B. Morse* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2003), especially 147-195; on Fulton, see Cynthia Owen Philip, *Robert Fulton: A Biography* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1985), especially 17-27.

¹⁷ Franklin to Jan Ingenhousz, May 16, 1783, in *The Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 9, ed. A.H. Smyth (New York: Haskell House, 1970), 45. On the largely forgotten John Taylor of Bath, see Arthur S. Marks, “An Eighteenth-Century American Landscape Painter Rediscovered: John Taylor of Bath,” *American Art Journal* 10, no. 2 (Nov., 1978): 81-96.

Connecticut; he is not only a painter but a gentleman and a scholar... We have here now one of the first portrait painters-living, Stewart. He was many years in England and celebrated there. We also have a young man [Washington Allston] who bids fair to surpass them all... Does not this production of great painters prove that genius may spring up in our soil?¹⁸

West would not only answer “yes” to Lowell’s closing question, he would remind her of his centrality in the cultivation of genius. Trumbull, Gilbert Stuart (1755-1828), and Allston (1779-1843) were all his students, and John Singleton Copley was a frequent correspondent. In offering instruction and advice to numerous American students, West sought to ensure his position as the father of American art, through his role in training several generations of American artists as well as on the strength of his own genius as a history painter.

Approach and Objectives

This dissertation addresses the shifting role of Benjamin West in the formation and development of an American tradition of art, distinct from the also developing English school, across the span of his fifty-seven-year career in London, from 1763 to 1820. Existing studies of West’s role as an instructor and relationships with his American students viewed the artist in a passive role, giving primacy to the aims and goals of his students in seeking out West’s mentorship. Because West was not a prolific writer, especially compared to several loquacious students and friends, the scholarly focus on the interchange between West and his students has naturally tended to identify the students as the protagonists, since their thoughts and actions have been extensively detailed. Relying on primary source texts and visual evidence, this study presents a more holistic view of the educational system in which West and

¹⁸ Lowell to Anne Grant, July 23, 1810, in *Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings* vol. 18 (2nd ser., 1904), 314-315. The last names Stuart/Stewart were used interchangeably to refer to the artist.

his students participated. I situate the archival and visual evidence within the cultural contexts of England and America from the mid eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries to better understand West's motivations as an instructor and to position him as the protagonist over the course of his educational relationships. This argument falls in line with how West viewed himself, as the culmination of the history of Western art, possessing unparalleled imagination to match his talent with the brush, working harmoniously in the service of the betterment of mankind.

This dissertation consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 provides a biographical background on Benjamin West, upon which the following chapters build. As this study on West is centered on his instructional practice, the biography likewise concentrates on the artistic education he received and his later philosophies on how artistic training should be delivered. More broadly, it provides an overview of his life, tracking the course of his relationships with valuable patrons and contemporary artists, and highlights specific projects which he undertook or selectively ignored.

Chapter 2 focuses on West's friendship with one of his earliest students, the multi-faceted Charles Willson Peale. Roughly contemporary to West in age, Peale studied in London with West from 1767 to 1769, and maintained a lifelong correspondence with his former teacher. Both West and Peale possessed strong desires for their children to follow in their professional footsteps, indicating this aspiration on their canvases. This desire also colored their broader pedagogical beliefs on art education. Chapter 3 looks at West and Gilbert Stuart, part of a second generation of American students who viewed West as an establishment figure in the British art world rather than a singular symbol of North American genius. Stuart,

much like Peale, found his calling in the genre of portraiture rather than history painting, but a differing personality caused the younger American to take a far more confrontational approach with West during his education.

Chapter 4 examines West's precarious status as an American in England during and after the American Revolutionary War, and his efforts to forestall any public conversation about his politics in light of his desire to maintain favor with his friend King George III and continue his ascent in London high society. The return of unabashed American patriot-artist John Trumbull to West's studio in 1784 provided the artist an opportunity to shift his interest in the ripe historical subject matter provided by the Revolutionary War onto his student, which in turn demonstrated the continued difficulties of creating an American audience for that genre. Chapter 5 concerns West in the nineteenth century, during which he was a teacher to American students in name only, maintaining nominal contact with a tight-knit clique of young Americans through his mentorship of the head of this circle, Washington Allston. This chapter also explores West's late-life efforts to re-present himself as an American through the stories and anecdotes he gave his biographer, John Galt, which downplayed his long-standing efforts to present himself as culturally English. Finally, the conclusion re-evaluates the influence West exerted on the educational and artistic practice of American students during his lifetime and explores the quick decline his reputation underwent immediately after his death.

West in the Literature

The earliest long-form biography of West is John Galt's two-volume *The Life, Studies, and Work of Benjamin West: Esq., President of the Royal Academy of*

London; Compiled from Materials Furnished by Himself. The first volume, published in 1816 under the title *The Life and Studies of Benjamin West, Esq. ... Prior to his Arrival in England*, covers West's life from childhood through his Grand Tour to Italy and France undertaken from 1760 to 1763; the second volume, published in 1820 just weeks after its subject's death, spans from the moment he set foot in England in 1763 until the end of his life. *The Life of West* was a collaborative effort, with the subject providing all of the information to the author, who then crafted it into a narrative. Brief biographies of West, also written under his direction, had begun to appear in newspapers and magazines beginning in the 1790s, and Galt's text is the end result of the narrative refinement developed through those earlier accounts.¹⁹ Galt's manuscript is a traditional artist's biography, in that it is pandering, notoriously unreliable, and full of barely or un-believable tales, designed to demonstrate the subject's exceptional ability and unwavering resolve.²⁰ Nonetheless, it forms the backbone of many ensuing histories of West and is a clear representation of how West was attempting to re-inscribe his life's story at its end. *The Life of West* focuses almost entirely on the subject's early biography, rarely touching on his students or on any of his artistic theory, and only mentioning the highlights of his career in London while ignoring anything remotely negative.

Fourteen years after the second volume of *The Life of West* was published in Great Britain, one of West's former students, William Dunlap, published his three-

¹⁹ Susan Rather, "Benjamin West, John Galt, and the Biography of 1816," *The Art Bulletin* 86, no. 2 (Jun., 2004): 328-330.

²⁰ Kathryn A. Wat discusses the relationship of *The Life of West* to the tradition of artist biographies in Kathryn A. Wat, "Word over Image: Benjamin West, John Singleton Copley, Washington Allston, and the (Dis)Illusion of Grand Manner History Painting" (PhD diss., University of Delaware, 2000), 11-43.

volume *History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States*, an attempt at an encyclopedic record of American artists from the beginning of the eighteenth century. Benjamin West is unquestionably the hero of Dunlap's *The Arts of Design*, while John Trumbull, who was engaged in a debate with Dunlap and others in the 1830s over the structure of the American Academy of the Fine Arts, is the villain.²¹ Most of the first volume of *The Arts of Design* concerns itself with West's biography, much of it copied directly from Galt, although Dunlap harangued the Scottish author for the fantastic tales he included (many of which Dunlap repeated).²² Dunlap also provides details on West's teaching and pedagogy ignored by Galt, and presents his teacher as the proper model for American artistic education.

Despite Dunlap's attempts to venerate West, the artist's reputation was already in decline in the waning years of his life and continued to deteriorate after his death. Charles Godfrey Leland, an American journalist, savaged West in an 1862 article on the state of American art and literature: "Art sank from Renaissance to Rococo, from Michael Angelo to Bernini, from Raphael to Van der Werff and Watteau and Greuze, until in its last days it touched the last depth of the Abominable in Benjamin West."²³ The year prior, English art critic Walter Thornbury titled a chapter of his treatise *British Artists* "West, the Monarch of Mediocrity, in Newman

²¹ Maura Lyons, *William Dunlap and the Construction of an American Art History* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), 89-120.

²² See William Dunlap, *History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design*, vol. 1, ed. Alexander Wyckoff, rev. ed. (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1965), 33-34 for his criticism of Galt; also, Lyons, *William Dunlap and the Construction of an American Art History*, 65-66.

²³ Quoted in Stephen Mark Caffey, "An Heroics of Empire: Benjamin West and Anglophone History Painting 1764-1774" (PhD diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 2008), 17.

Street.”²⁴ The Pre-Raphaelite Dante Gabriel Rossetti used West as the punch line in a story about the deficiencies of his taste as a child, admitting he had enjoyed West’s *Christ Healing the Sick* (fig. 2) until his mother, “who made no pretence to technical knowledge in art, at once set him right by remarking that it was ‘commonplace and expressionless.’”²⁵ West’s status as an establishment figure, at the head of England’s Royal Academy of Arts, set him up as an easy foil for modern artists seeking to rebel against the status quo.²⁶ Furthermore, West’s double identity as an American and an Englishman resulted in him finding little purchase in the scholarship of either nation.

The modern attempt to rehabilitate West’s image and reincorporate him into American art history began with James Thomas Flexner, whose 1939 book *America’s Old Masters: First Artists of the New World* strikes a defensive tone in situating West within the history of American art (and in situating American art within an international context), an approach he continues in a later article on West and his American students, “The American School in London.”²⁷ Even Flexner’s attempted intervention quotes liberally and uncritically from Galt. Two decades later, Grose Evans published *Benjamin West and the Taste of His Times*, a history of West’s

²⁴ Walter Thornbury, *British Artists from Hogarth to Turner; Being a Series of Biographical Sketches*, vol. 2 (London: Hurst and Blackett, Publishers, 1861), 100.

²⁵ William Michael Rossetti, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti. His Family-Letters with a Memoir*, vol. 1 (New York City: AMS Press, 1970), 63.

²⁶ Caffey, “An Heroics of Empire,” 17-18.

²⁷ James Thomas Flexner, “The American School in London,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 7, no. 2 (Oct., 1948): 64-72. Similar sentiment can be seen in a 1925 article by H.M. Watts which traces a direct line from West to the contemporary painters of the 1920s, to prove that West was the founder of the American artistic tradition; H.M. Watts, “The American Background,” *Bulletin of the Pennsylvania Museum* 20, no. 94 (Apr., 1925): 123-130. Susan Rather notes that modern scholarship on West has been conducted almost entirely by American scholars, “as if they had more at stake in the case.” Susan Rather, “Benjamin West’s Professional Endgame and the Historical Conundrum of William Williams,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (Oct., 2002): 821-864.

stylistic development over the fifty-seven years of his life spent in London. A fascinating resource on West's style, Evans's book loses track of the artist himself – West is merely a specter, his biography and the cultural context in which he worked largely lost among the examination of his canvases.

It was not until the exhaustive catalogue raisonné *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, begun by Helmut von Erffa around 1951 and completed and published in 1986 by Allen Staley after von Erffa's death,²⁸ that scholars began to look at West with fresh eyes. Even before the catalogue raisonné was published, the research of von Erffa and Staley informed a number of scholarly studies of West spanning disciplines and taking different forms.²⁹ In 1976 John Dillenberger's *Benjamin West: The Context of His Life's Work, With Particular Attention to Paintings with Religious Subject Matter* responded to the gaps in Grose Evans's study by further contextualizing West's stylistic developments within his religious beliefs and interest in religious subjects. Robert C. Alberts's 1978 *Benjamin West: A Biography* turns a critical eye to Galt and Dunlap as well as West's career, and his work provides the backbone of research on West's life going forward. A more limited biographical approach on West, focused on his output as a history painter, is Ann Uhry Abrams's *The Valiant Hero: Benjamin West and Grand-Style History Painting* (1985). Nancy L. Pressly has detailed a great wealth of information in West's two massive and

²⁸ Von Erffa invited Staley to contribute to the catalogue in 1976, and died in 1979, before the two could begin working together. See Helmut von Erffa and Allen Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), vii-ix, for a timeline of the book's completion.

²⁹ While this literature review focuses on the books and exhibition catalogues which deal with West, I would be remiss in not citing a number of influential articles which encouraged new considerations on West, including: William Sawitzky, "The American Work of Benjamin West," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 63, no. 4 (Oct., 1938): 438-462; Edgar Wind, "The Revolution of History Painting," *Journal of the Warburg Institute* 2, no. 2 (Oct., 1938): 116-127; Arthur S. Marks, "Benjamin West and the American Revolution," *American Art Journal* 6, no. 2 (Nov., 1974): 15-35.

eventually unrealized mid-career series commissions, which revealed his hubris and the failings of his intellect relative to his aspirations, in the exhibition and accompanying catalogue for *Revealed Religion: Benjamin West's Commissions for Windsor Chapel and Fonthill Abbey*, from 1983.

Two additional exhibitions bookending the 1980s provided direct inspiration and invaluable information underpinning my dissertation research. Dorinda Evans's *Benjamin West and His American Students* (1980) traces the London experience of the twenty-four students of West identified by William Dunlap, juxtaposing their stylistic developments with West's oeuvre. Much as Dunlap had been in 1834, Evans is primarily concerned with the artists as individuals, addressing them one by one on their own and in terms of their relationship with West, rather than exploring threads of influence woven across multiple students.³⁰ At the end of the decade, Allen Staley followed his successful catalogue raisonné with a retrospective exhibit at the Baltimore Museum of Art, *Benjamin West: American Painter at the English Court* (1989), which distills West's corpus of works down to its strongest parts.

More recent critical approaches to West's American self-fashioning have been authored by Susan Rather, who has reconsidered the roles of two men, William Williams and John Galt, in that effort, in "Benjamin West's Professional Endgame and the Historical Conundrum of William Williams," from 2002, and "Benjamin West, John Galt, and the Biography of 1816," from 2004. New consideration of West's role within the greater spheres of English and American art at the turn of the nineteenth century have continued to spur exhibitions, including *Benjamin West:*

³⁰ For the same critique applied to Dunlap, see James Thomas Flexner, "Homage to William Dunlap," *American Art Journal* 1, no. 1 (Apr., 1969): 12.

General Wolfe and the Art of Empire, which opened in 2012, and *American Adversaries: West and Copley in a Transatlantic World*, which opened in 2013.

West's Students and Workshop: Who and What?

To speak of West's American students as a homogenous group, as I do throughout this dissertation, is a necessary reductive technique. They were all individual men – and they were, as far as scholars know, all men – with different backgrounds, personal and artistic interests, and understandings of their own place in artistic and American history. In general, however, they participated in the “alternative tradition of American painting” identified by Paul Neubauer, in which artists sailed across the Atlantic to receive training from West in London, only to return to America, where they were forced to reconcile their lofty European artistic ideals with the demands of the American market.³¹

Some of these students were born in British North America, some in the United States of America, and some in England before moving across the Atlantic as children; they were portraitists, miniaturists, and history painters. Even today, we do not know the precise numbers and identities of the students who studied under West. William Dunlap (1766-1839) listed in his *Diary* eighteen students who “felt the influence of this Sun of the West,”³² and added six more in *The Arts of Design*, finalizing a roster of twenty-four students which Dorinda Evans used as the basis for

³¹ Paul Neubauer, “American Painting in the Federal Period: Charles Willson Peale Between Popular Portraits and Political Portraiture,” *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 50, no. 3 (2005): 449.

³² William Dunlap, *Diary of William Dunlap (1766-1839): The Memoirs of a Dramatist, Theatrical Manager, Painter, Critic, Novelist, and Historian*, vol. 2 (New York: The New York Historical Society, 1930), 543.

her exhibition *Benjamin West and His American Students*.³³ As Evans admits, this list is not comprehensive, and the mere task of identifying an individual as West's student depends on how the word "student" is defined. Gilbert Stuart, who spent years working in West's studio, was unquestionably a student. Dunlap counts Edward G. Malbone (1777-1807), who only spent a few months in London and seemed to consider himself a competitor rather than a student of West, and Ralph Earl (1751-1801), of whom the only documentation of his working with West is Dunlap's imprecise account fifty years after the fact. Dunlap's twenty-four students are, in roughly chronological order of their time spent in West's studio: Matthew Pratt (1734-1805), Abraham Delanoy (1742-1795), Charles Willson Peale (1741-1827), Joseph Wright (1756-1793), Gilbert Stuart (1755-1828), Ralph Earl (1751-1801), John Trumbull (1756-1843), Mather Brown (1761-1831), West's son Raphael Lamar West (1769-1850), Thomas Spence Duché (1763-1790), William Dunlap (1766-1839), George William West (1770-1795), Henry Sargent (1770-1845), Robert Fulton (1765-1815), Washington Allston (1779-1843), Rembrandt Peale (1778-1860), Abraham G.D. Tuthill (1776-1843), Edward G. Malbone (1777-1807), Charles Bird King (1785-1862), Thomas Sully (1783-1872), Samuel Lovett Waldo (1783-1861), Samuel F.B. Morse (1791-1872), Charles Robert Leslie (1794-1859), and Gilbert Stuart Newton (1795-1835).

To this list, I add several more students. First, if Raphael West is counted as one of West's "American" students, then so too should his younger brother Benjamin West, Jr. (1771-1848). Dunlap rejected claims by Henry Benbridge (1743-1812) and

³³ Dorinda Evans, *Benjamin West and His American Students* (Washington, D.C.: Published for the National Portrait Gallery by the Smithsonian Institution Press, 1980), 11.

his relative James Peller Malcolm (1767-1815) to have studied with West, but a letter of introduction from West to Benjamin Franklin supports Benbridge's assertion.³⁴ Additionally, primary sources identify that Francis Hopkinson (1737-1791) spent a brief amount of time under West,³⁵ and that Edmond Brice (1751-1784) and John Blake White (1781-1859) spent several years in West's studio.³⁶ Edward Savage (1761-1817) is presumed by scholars to have spent at least part of his time in London in 1791-1793 under West's tutelage,³⁷ and James Akin (c. 1773-1846) claims to have done the same in 1798.³⁸ Edmond Brice James Earl (1761-1796) and Edmund T. Dana (1779-1859) were American artists who trained in London around the turn of the nineteenth century: Earl, the brother of Ralph Earl, and Dana a friend of Allston, White, and other young Americans artists.³⁹ While there is no documentary evidence

³⁴ On Benbridge, see Dunlap, *The Arts of Design*, vol. 1, 165; Robert G. Stewart, *Henry Benbridge (1743-1812): American Portrait Painter* (Washington, D.C.: National Portrait Gallery, 1971), 19. On Malcolm, see Dunlap, *The Arts of Design*, vol. 1, 389. Dunlap's sole reason for rejecting Malcolm as a student was his reliance on Benbridge's claim. As that objection to Benbridge has been refuted, there appears to be no reason to doubt Malcolm either.

³⁵ George Everett Hastings, *The Life and Works of Francis Hopkinson* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1926), 103.

³⁶ Charles Willson Peale to Benjamin West, June 6, 1772, quoted in Lillian B. Miller, Sidney Hart, and Toby A. Appel, eds., *The Selected Papers of Charles Willson Peale and His Family, Volume 1: Charles Willson Peale: Artist in Revolutionary America, 1735-1791* (New Haven, CT and London: Published for The National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, by Yale University Press, 1983), 122; Peale to Benjamin West, February 10, 1775, in Miller, Hart, and Appel, *Peale Papers*, vol. 1, 139; John Blake White, "The Journal of John Blake White," ed. Paul R. Weidner, *The South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 42, no. 2 (Apr., 1941): 55-71.

³⁷ Charles Henry Hart, "Edward Savage, Painter and Engraver, and his Unfinished Copperplate of 'The Congress Voting Independence,'" *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* (Jan., 1905): 6; Ellen G. Miles, *American Paintings of the Eighteenth Century* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1995), 145.

³⁸ Allison Stagg, "'All in my eye!': James Akin and his Newburyport Social Caricatures," *Common-Place* 10, no. 2 (Jan., 2010), accessed January 27, 2014, <http://www.common-place.org/vol-10/no-02/lessons/>.

³⁹ Robert G. Stewart, "James Earl: American Painter of Loyalists and His Career in England," *American Art Journal* 20, no. 4 (1988): 34-36; William Benton Museum of Art, *The American Earls*.

to suggest Dana or James Earl studied with West, the former was closely associated with other students, and the latter exhibited and studied at the Royal Academy, and for a time lived down the street from West. Both Dana and Earl would have encountered the elder artist frequently during the years each man spent in London. The most famous American artist working in England at the same time as West was John Singleton Copley, who briefly worked as an assistant to West, as well as to Nathaniel Dance (1735-1811) and Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792) upon his arrival in London, while he was attempting to establish his independent career.⁴⁰ For a decade the elder artist had provided frequent consultation to Copley in North America via letters, and while his employment of Copley may not have included additional teaching, he nonetheless bears some responsibility for the younger man's successes.⁴¹

In addition to this roster of over thirty definite or probable students, we can add a number of European artists who spent time learning from West. John Downman (1750-1824),⁴² Angelica Kauffmann (1741-1807),⁴³ Richard Livesay (d. 1823),⁴⁴ Johann Heinrich Ramberg (1763-1840),⁴⁵ Robert Ker Porter (1777-1842),⁴⁶ George

Ralph Earl, James Earl, R.E.W. Earl (Storrs, CT: William Benton Museum of Art, the University of Connecticut, 1972), 32-33. White, "The Journal of John Blake White," 68.

⁴⁰ Charles Merrill Mount, *Gilbert Stuart: A Biography* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1962), 56.

⁴¹ *Copley-Pelham Letters*, 43-45, 56-58, 72-73, 116, 194, 196-197.

⁴² D. Evans, *Benjamin West and His American Students*, 30.

⁴³ Robert C. Alberts, *Benjamin West: A Biography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978), 48.

⁴⁴ Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 100. Livesay appears in a group of West's family members and students who were included in his *The Institution of the Royal Order of the Garter* in 1787, most likely painted on the canvas by fellow student Gilbert Stuart. See Chapter 3 of this dissertation for more on *The Institution of the Garter* and Stuart's relationship with West.

⁴⁵ Franziska Forster-Hahn, "The Source of True Taste. Benjamin West's Instructions to a Young Painter for His Studies in Italy," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 30 (1967): 367-382.

Farington (1751-1788),⁴⁷ William Delamotte (1775-1863),⁴⁸ John Linnell (1792-1882),⁴⁹ Thomas Walker (active 1800?-1803?),⁵⁰ and a woman identified as Miss Hay (active 1806?)⁵¹ all received instruction from the American teacher. Almost certainly there were more. Pratt's *The American School* places four students alongside West: one is Pratt, but the identities of the other three are unknown. Susan Rather suggests *The American School* depicts an ideal training session rather than one which took place,⁵² which would obviate the frustrating inability to even guess at the identities of the other three students. Dunlap's *The Arts of Design* focuses solely on American artists, and as no records exist from West's workshop that would identify non-American students, we are forced to rely piecemeal on the intermittent discovery of primary sources to shed additional light on students who received training there.

To receive artistic training from Benjamin West was to show works to the master and receive his suggestions, to be present in his workshop while he was

⁴⁶ Later Sir Robert Ker Porter, as he was knighted by the Prince Regent in 1813. Thomas McLean, "Jane Porter's Portrait of Benjamin West," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 66, no. 1/2 (2003): 169-175.

⁴⁷ The brother of famous diarist Joseph Farington. Matthew Pilkington, *A Dictionary of Painters From the Revival of the Art to the Present Period; by The Rev. M. Pilkington, A.M. A New Edition, With Considerable Additions, an Appendix, and an Index; by Henry Fuseli, R.A.*, ed. Henry Fuseli (London: Printed for J. Walker; Wilkie and Robinson; R. Lea; J. Stockdale; Scatcherd and Letterman; Cuthele and Martin; Vernor, Hood, and Sharpe; Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme; Cadell and Davies; Lackington, Allen, and Co.; Black, Parry, and Kingsbury; W. Miller; J. Harding; J. Mawman; J. Murray; Crosby and Co.; J. Faulder; and J. Johnson and Co., 1810), 172.

⁴⁸ Gilbert R. Redgrave, *A History of Water-colour Painting in England* (London: Samson Low, Marston and Company, Ltd., 1892), 110.

⁴⁹ Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 122.

⁵⁰ White, "The Journal of John Blake White," 65.

⁵¹ Joseph Farington, *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, vol. 7, ed. Kathryn Cave (New Haven, CT: Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art by Yale University Press, 1982), 2734 (April 25, 1806), 2740 (May 1, 1806).

⁵² Rather, "A Painter's Progress," 174-175.

working on canvases, and to work as a studio assistant on his many massive historical canvases. This access was supplemental to instruction at St. Martin's Lane Academy, or later in the Royal Academy of Arts drawing classes, which in and of itself required the aspiring artist to have a connection with someone already associated with the Academy.⁵³ West was one of few history painters active in London during most of his lifetime, and the only one whose workshop included a significant number of assistants. Most English artists worked entirely on their own, or relied on professional specialists to add drapery and backgrounds to their canvases. Sir Joshua Reynolds employed his own assistants, zealously guarding his techniques rather than sharing them.⁵⁴ The more education-minded artists, like Hogarth, created or attended drawing clubs or academies to support artistic training, and occasionally advised students, but remained independent in the creation of their own work. Meanwhile, not only did West willingly engage in an unusual level of contact with his students, especially the early ones, his status within the artistic institutions of London allowed him to be a far more effective resource for his students than Copley or English artists not already predisposed to the assistance of Americans.⁵⁵

West was looking further back to artisans' guilds of the Middle Ages, and to the Italian, Dutch, and Flemish Old Masters who followed them, in the arrangement of his workshop as a grouping of young artists working under an acknowledged

⁵³ Dorinda Evans, *Mather Brown: Early American Artist in England* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1982), 22.

⁵⁴ M. Kirby Talley, "'All Good Pictures Crack'—Sir Joshua Reynolds's practice and studio," in *Reynolds*, ed. Nicholas Penny (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1986), 57. In this, Reynolds followed closely the model of Rubens, who kept close watch over which artists had access to his studio and the extent to which they could view his methods and share them with others. Hans Vlieghe, *Flemish Art and Architecture, 1585-1700* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 33.

⁵⁵ Henri Marceau, "B. West, Esq. of Newman Str., London," *Parnassus* 1, no. 4 (Apr., 1938): 7.

master and assisting on detail work on canvases.⁵⁶ In England, the guild model was replicated by Sir Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641), who had worked in a similar manner under his own mentor, Sir Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), in Antwerp, and after van Dyck's death by the Dutch portraitist Sir Peter Lely (1618-1680).⁵⁷ The exact character of West's workshop was dependent on the caliber of the artists within it; he was comfortable allowing someone like Gilbert Stuart or John Trumbull to make significant contributions to his canvases, but not so much with Abraham Delaney or Ralph Earl. Unlike Rubens, West did not receive the level of interest such that he could reject over a hundred applications to join his workshop,⁵⁸ nor did he possess that inclination. He believed that instruction was part of his job as an artist, and accepted any interested student and did not charge any fees for his services. He also, as Dorinda Evans points out, undoubtedly enjoyed the attention and adoration resulting from his mentorship.⁵⁹ This open-door policy endeared West to his students, who were able to view the master at work and thereby witness his best artistic efforts. West was renowned, for better or for worse, for the high quality of his drawings and oil sketches, relative to the compositional details of the finished work.⁶⁰ This criticism is encapsulated in a review of his 1788 painting *King Lear in the Storm* (fig. 3):

⁵⁶ Joshua Bruyn, "Rembrandt's Workshop: Function and Production," in *Rembrandt: The Master and His Workshop: Paintings*, eds. Christopher Brown, Jan Kelch, and Pieter van Thiel (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 68-89.

⁵⁷ Vlieghe, *Flemish Art and Architecture*, 36-39.

⁵⁸ Hans Vlieghe, "Erasmus Quellinus and Rubens's Studio Practice," *The Burlington Magazine* 119, no. 894, Special Issue Devoted to Peter Paul Rubens (Sept., 1977): 636.

⁵⁹ D. Evans, *Mather Brown*, 18-19.

⁶⁰ Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 100-101. While West relied on the assistance of studio assistants for the completion of his historical canvases, contemporary reviewers make it clear that they blame West, and not his assistants, for the defects of his finished canvases, identifying problems in conception of the central figures rather than issues with the detail work.

As his figures are given in the sketch, so they are exhibited in the finished picture. Like the laws of the Medes and Persians, he altereth not. But his finishing is not always an improvement: in clearing away their asperities he destroys their energy. With smoothness of surface they acquire a hardness of outline, and are sometimes polished until the spirit evaporates.⁶¹

West was also far less regimented in the demands he placed on his students, allowing them to set their own schedules and leaving them to their own devices if they chose not to take full advantage of the opportunities afforded them.

Conducting his workshop on a similar scale as Rubens and van Dyck was an act of self-aggrandizement as well as an act of altruism. It was an assertion of his worthiness as an artist to train others in the same manner as the Old Masters, placing himself squarely in that historical continuum.⁶² The significant portion of his students that were Americans working in a distant land also tied West's workshop to those of his Flemish precursors. The workshop van Dyck operated in London from 1632 to 1641 was populated by Flemish artist, and "there is no evidence...that any British painter of consequence learned directly from van Dyck."⁶³ West did take on British students, some of whom became painters of consequence, but his hallmark was working with Americans. Unlike Rubens and van Dyck, West recognized his workshop for its instructional value to its participants as well as its material utility to him as a history painter. While he did not keep records on his workshop, he also did

⁶¹ *Public Advertiser*, June 5, 1789, quoted in Rosie Dias, *Exhibiting Englishness: John Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery and the Formation of a National Aesthetic* (New Haven, CT: Published for The Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art by Yale University Press, 2013), 83.

⁶² West was well aware of the associations which he was drawing between himself and the Flemish artists, as Rubens and Rembrandt were popular artists in eighteenth-century England and he collected works by both, particularly Rubens, whom West also used as compositional inspiration for his designs for the Chapel of Revealed Religion. Kaylin H. Weber, "A Temple of History Painting: West's Newman Street Studio and Art Collection," in *American Adversaries: West and Copley in a Transatlantic World*, ed. Emily Ballew Neff with Kaylin H. Weber (Houston, TX: The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Distributed by Yale University Press, 2013), 34, 38.

⁶³ Waterhouse, *Painting in Britain*, 77.

not hide its membership, nor did he attempt to restrict access to his techniques and preparatory designs from only those assistants who absolutely needed to view them.⁶⁴ Members of his workshop received full access to his canvases and, as will be discussed further in Chapter 5, his ideas and techniques.

Little information remains on the specifics of West's actions in the studio. Many of his students, effusive in praise of their teacher's openness and encouragement, neglect to explain the particular instruction he provided them. More common are situations like the one described by Trumbull in his *Autobiography*, in which West simply invited the young artist to view his extensive galleries and copy works in the same area as the elder man and his other students.⁶⁵ West believed strongly in the educational value of viewing and copying Old Masters and his own work. Each of his students, with the exception of his two children, had significant prior artistic training, and many had already worked professionally in North America before entering his studio. Thus West was not asked to provide basic technical training, but rather to create an environment conducive to the advancement of artistic ability, provide general recommendations based on completed works, and demonstrate the proper application of academic theories of art.⁶⁶ Although the master

⁶⁴ West's studio was in fact the final stop on the tour which guests to his home at 14 Newman Street were given, where often they would find West at work. Weber, "A Temple of History Painting," 23.

⁶⁵ John Trumbull, *The Autobiography of Colonel John Trumbull, Patriot-Artist, 1756-1843*, ed. Theodore Sizer (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1958), 61-62. Trumbull was put to work not alongside West, but as he notes in the passage from his *Autobiography*, in an adjoining room which Stuart had set up as his own private studio space.

⁶⁶ Jenny Carson, "Art Theory and Production in the Studio of Benjamin West" (PhD diss., The City University of New York, 2000), 94-99. For examples of the recommendations West provided, see Dunlap, *The Arts of Design*, vol. 1, 309-310; Charles Robert Leslie, *Memoirs of the Life of John Constable Composed Chiefly of His Letters* (London: Phaidon Press, 1951), 29, 40; ; Miller, Hart, and Appel, *Peale Papers*, vol. 1, 48-49; Trumbull, *Autobiography*, 61-63; Allston to Charles Fraser, August

artist did not record his own thoughts on artistic training at length, existing documentary and visual evidence suggests that he hewed closely to the same methodologies he was introduced to as a young boy in seventeenth-century art treatises, reinforced by the training he received at the hands of Anton Raphael Mengs (1728-1779) in his early twenties.⁶⁷

To participate in Benjamin West's workshop was also to become a member of the West family, as the concept of "family" was understood in eighteenth-century England. A fundamental conceptual structural unit of family was the household, and a fundamental physical structural unit was the home. Membership in the household-family was not determined by blood relation, only by the presence within the same physical household under its nominal head; thus, a servant, apprentice, friend, or distant relative was understood as belonging to the family of the head of household, and his or her blood relatives living therein. The British eighteenth-century family was a structure organized around sociability and inclusion, rather than privacy and exclusion as in a modern family.⁶⁸ Rather than as a singular group, the family was "perceived as a collective unit," with permeable boundaries across which an individual could easily be taken in, and with more difficulty, pushed out. Naomi Tadmor identifies four ways that individuals could join or create a family. In addition

25, 1801, , in *The Correspondence of Washington Allston*, ed. Nathalia Wright (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1993), 26.

⁶⁷ See Carson, "Art Theory and Production in the Studio of Benjamin West," for an important and exhaustive discussion on the specifics of West's studio practice.

⁶⁸ Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship, and Patronage* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 18-38; Tamara K. Hareven, "The Home and the Family in Historical Perspective," *Social Research* 58, no. 1 (Spring, 1991): 255-257; Amanda Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 6-7. Blood relation was also a basic unit of structure of family, operating differently from the household-family. A servant would be seen as family of a head of a household, but not of that individual's adult child living outside of the house.

to access through blood or marriage, an individual could join a family through a contract, such as an apprenticeship; through an instrumental relationship, involving some sort of equal “exchange of work and material benefits;” and through occupational work, most commonly as a household servant.⁶⁹ Elements of each of these last three methods are evident in West’s studio practice, and the notion of the household-family must be extended to the artist’s workshop, a physical space under the aegis of a head of “household,” the master artist, in which dependent students spend significant amounts of time in close proximity. The identification of West’s workshop as a facet of his household-family especially holds true after 1775, when he moved his studio into the renovated rear of the West family home at 14 Newman Street in London.⁷⁰ Occasionally West’s students would stay temporarily in the West home, and often took lodgings close enough to the home to enable a constant presence. All became members of West’s studio-family, with both Benjamin and Elizabeth West exerting parental authority over students of later generations.⁷¹ As Staley notes, West took an interesting, almost obsessive approach to the depiction of his family. He often painted his own self-portrait as the only figure on the canvas, but “[e]very known likeness by West of his wife and of his sons shows at least two people. He depicted them not individually, as individuals, but collectively, as

⁶⁹ Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England*, 27-29, 57-60. In *The Peale Family from 1773*, for example, Charles Willson Peale includes the family nurse, Peggy Durgan, among the assemblage of his family. See Lovell, *Art in a Season of Revolution*, 40.

⁷⁰ For a comprehensive history of West’s home and studio at 14 Newman Street and its many functions as workspace, collection space, and gentlemanly residence, see Kaylin H. Weber, “A Temple of History Painting,” 14-49. In addition to the primary workshop area, his studio included several adjoining rooms which also functioned as workspaces and were usually where his students would work on their own canvases.

⁷¹ Elizabeth West once referred to Robert Fulton, who studied in London from 1786 to 1793 and was the same age as Raphael West, as “my favorite son,” while Fulton called her his “petite Maman.” Quoted in Cynthia Owen Philip, *Robert Fulton: A Biography* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1985), 18.

members of his family.”⁷² In doing so, West inserts himself into the composition. The viewer is reminded that Elizabeth, Raphael, and Benjamin, Jr. are all part of a larger structure, with Benjamin West at its head. I argue that West’s aim in the education of so many American students was the same, that eventually audiences would be unable to view a work by Peale, Stuart, Trumbull, and the rest without calling to mind the man who had trained them.

⁷² Allen Staley, *Benjamin West, American Painter at the English Court: June 4-August 20, 1789* (Baltimore, MD: Baltimore Museum of Art, 1989), 23.

Chapter 1: An Abridged Life of Benjamin West

The broad contours of West's early life are known, and his life after 1760, when he lived in Europe, is well-documented. The first volume of John Galt's biography, published in 1816, provides the bulk of information about West's youth. However, as has already been mentioned and will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter 5, when it comes to details of West's artistic training Galt is notoriously unreliable. More reliable are an 1805 memorandum written by Thomas Eagles after a conversation with West and an 1810 letter from West to Eagles,⁷³ both discussing the artist's relationship with one of his first instructors, William Williams. The 1810 Eagles letter is one of a small number of surviving correspondence involving West, whose notoriously poor sense of spelling and grammar, which he attributed to his lack of early schooling, resulted in a dearth of written output throughout his life.⁷⁴ Nonetheless, he relied on scholars and writers like Eagles, Galt, and others to ensure that the heights of his life and career became known to the general public in both England and America.

Benjamin West

Colonial America, 1738-1760

Benjamin West was born in the town of Springfield (present-day Swarthmore,

⁷³ Thomas Eagles's copy of the letter, including his grammar and spelling edits, is reproduced in full in David H. Dickason, "Benjamin West on William Williams: A Previously Unpublished Letter," *Winterthur Portfolio* 6 (1970): 127-133.

⁷⁴ Ann Uhry Abrams, *The Valiant Hero: Benjamin West and Grand-Style History Painting* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1985), 17-18. No records exist of West having been enrolled in any schools, Quaker or otherwise, as a child. His poor spelling is evident in the letters he wrote, quoted throughout this dissertation.

PA)⁷⁵ in the Province of Pennsylvania on October 10, 1738, the youngest of ten children of innkeeper John West and his wife Sarah West (née Pearson). His father had emigrated to Pennsylvania from England in 1714, leaving behind a pregnant wife, Elizabeth Beisley, who died during the birth of their son, Thomas. The other members of John West's family had previously traveled with William Penn on his second trip across the Atlantic in 1699, and Sarah Pearson's family had done so with Penn on his initial trip in 1781.⁷⁶ John West repeated that voyage in order to join his relatives and prepare a proper home for his new family. After his wife's death John West allowed his son to remain in England with his maternal grandparents. Father would not meet son until 1764, when the former was seventy-four-years old and the latter fifty.

Both John and Sarah West came from Quaker families and identified with Quaker culture, but were no longer registered members of any Society of Friends meeting at the times of their children's births, and none of their children were officially Quakers. Nonetheless, the West family lived in a Quaker environment, and Benjamin West would reference his Quaker heritage proudly.⁷⁷ He was quoted in an

⁷⁵ The Benjamin West House, which sits on the campus of Swarthmore College was declared a National Historic Landmark in 1965, and was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1966. For part of the nineteenth century the area where West had been born was known informally as "Westdale," in honor of the artist, until the founding of Swarthmore College in 1864.

⁷⁶ *The World of Benjamin West: Being the Account, ornamented by Reproductions, of the Art of a native Pennsylvanian, from his early attempts at Face-Painting and the painting of History to his final eminent station as President of the Royal Academy, & Followed by Notable Examples from the most Eminent Painters of the British Realm and of the Continent and those of the most assiduous Students of Mr. West's Instruction which further demonstrate the Rewards and Fame that attend virtuous and industrious Devotion to the Muses; to be freely admired by the Lovers of both Art and History between May 1st and July 31st of this Bi-Centennial year in Allentown* (Allentown, PA: Printed for the Allentown Art Museum, 1962), 10.

⁷⁷ John West had been born and raised a Quaker, but when he traveled to America he did not possess a certificate of transfer, indicating that he was no longer a member in good standing. He eventually rejoined the Society of Friends in 1759, three years after his wife died. Existing records indicate that Sarah Pearson was excommunicated from the Society in 1717 because of accusations of pre-marital sex, likely with John West. Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 8; Dillenberger, *Benjamin West*, 1-8.

1817 Pennsylvania Academy exhibition catalogue as having said the previous year, “I was once a Quaker and have never left the principle.”⁷⁸

According to Galt, West first became interested in art at the age of seven when he was inspired to sketch his sleeping infant niece on a sheet of notebook paper, amazing his mother and sister with his work.⁷⁹ He then learned how to make pigments from the Native Americans living near Springfield,⁸⁰ and constructed a primitive brush by plucking hairs from the tail of his cat Grimalkin.⁸¹ While so fantastic as to bear repeating, these stories are not to be believed. Instead, they place West squarely within the classical rhetorical tradition of the young artist who is inspired by, and responds to, Nature as his muse and teacher.⁸² More reliable is the anecdote that at some point in 1747 a Quaker relative living in Philadelphia, Edward Penington, visited the West family and was sufficiently impressed with the boy’s drawings that he prevailed on John and Sarah West to allow him to bring the young West to Philadelphia for a few weeks. While in the city, Penington purchased art supplies for the boy, who used them to produce a landscape painting which impressed

⁷⁸ Quoted in von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 450.

⁷⁹ John Galt, *The Life of Benjamin West*, (Gainesville, FL: 1960), Part 1, 9-11.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 18. West would constantly find ways to remind viewers of his paintings of his early engagement with Native Americans, through their inclusion in works like *The Death of General Wolfe* (fig. 11) or as central figures in canvases like *William Penn’s Treaty with the Indians* (fig. 39) or in his double portrait *Colonel Guy Johnson and Karonghyontye (Captain David Hill)* (fig. 23) from 1776. See Leslie Reinhardt, “British and Indian Identities in a Picture by Benjamin West,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 31, no. 3 (Apr., 1998): 283-305. Allan Cunningham, who lightly mocked this and similar assertions made of West by Galt, repeated them by way of describing the similar early career of John Singleton Copley. Allan Cunningham, *The Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, vol. 5 (London: John Murray, 1832), 163.

⁸¹ Galt, *The Life of West*, Part 1, 19.

⁸² Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), 8-17.

Pennington and his neighbor Samuel Shoemaker so much that Shoemaker arranged for West to meet the itinerant artist William Williams, who had recently moved to Philadelphia in search of work.⁸³

If Galt's recounting of West's childhood is heavily tinged with unlikely stories of the fantastic, then the accounts of Williams's early life are doubly so.⁸⁴ One of the few surviving pieces of information that can be taken at face value is that Williams was born in Bristol, England in 1727 and raised there, and as a teenager worked on the crew of a ship that sailed across the Atlantic to Virginia and then the Caribbean, where he was shipwrecked for at least a year before making his way back to the colonies, meeting his future wife, and moving to Philadelphia with her in 1747.⁸⁵ Much like West, Williams was largely self-taught, receiving a modicum of advice from an unknown older artist in Bristol as a child.⁸⁶ West told Eagles and Galt that Williams provided him aesthetic treatises from Jonathan Richardson, Sr. and Charles Alphonse du Fresnoy to read; more likely, Williams described their content to the barely literate West. Whether through Williams's presentation, West's naiveté, or a combination of the two, West seems to have understood their aesthetic theory as

⁸³ Galt, *The Life of West*, Part 1, 25-27; Dickason, "Benjamin West on William Williams," 130.

⁸⁴ Most of the details of Williams's life are recorded in Thomas Eagles's 1805 memoranda and the 1810 letter from West to Eagles, in both of which West recounted what he knew of Williams's biography, or interpolated from a quasi-autobiographical manuscript written by Williams about his life as a sailor. However, David Howard Dickason has revealed a significant number of historical inaccuracies in the biography Williams presented to West and others, such as basic facts as his year of birth (Williams claimed to be seventeen years older than he really was). I have included only those few facts which Dickason has confirmed. See David Howard Dickason, *William Williams: Novelist and Painter of Colonial America, 1727-1791* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1970).

⁸⁵ Dickason, *William Williams*, 35-36. Dickason is unsure of the length Williams was shipwrecked, stating it was most likely between one and two years, far fewer than the multiple decades Williams claimed in his stories to West.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

historical fact, which led to his desire to work as a history painter and was the basis of his life-long belief on the power of art as a positive moralizing influence on society.⁸⁷

Although his initial visit with Pennington only lasted a few weeks, West frequently made the ten-mile trip to and from Springfield to Philadelphia in the ensuing years to visit an older sister who had married and moved there, and continued to consult with Williams.⁸⁸ While in Philadelphia West would have also had the chance to view paintings by Smibert, Feke, and John Hesselius (1728-1778), the last of whom was active in the city at the time, as well as view additional engravings after Old Master works.⁸⁹ He also took advantage of the brief presence in the city in 1754-55 of John Valentine Haidt (1700-1780), a German-born Moravian preacher who had received several years of artistic training at the Royal Academy of Arts in Berlin as a young boy and continued to utilize his artistic abilities in the service of his church.⁹⁰ Ann Uhry Abrams sees the moralizing subject matter and classical motifs present in many of Haidt's works in West's first known history painting, *The Death of Socrates* (fig. 4),⁹¹ which was executed in 1756 while the artist was in Lancaster, Pennsylvania,⁹² where he met William Smith, a classical scholar and Anglican

⁸⁷ Staley, *Benjamin West*, 14.

⁸⁸ Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 15; Ann Uhry Abrams, "A New Light on Benjamin West's Pennsylvania Instruction," *Winterthur Portfolio* 17, no. 4, (Dec., 1982): 243-257.

⁸⁹ Abrams, *The Valiant Hero*, 46.

⁹⁰ Haidt was living in London when he was assigned to a church in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, spending a year in Philadelphia before joining his congregation. Garth A. Howland, "John Valentine Haidt, A Little-Known Eighteenth Century Painter," *Pennsylvania History* 8, no. 4 (Oct., 1941): 305-306.

⁹¹ Abrams, *The Valiant Hero*, 54-56.

⁹² While in Lancaster West is also believed to have studied with John Wollaston. Although no records of West having worked with Wollaston survive, and *The Death of Socrates* bears his stylistic influence. See Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 23.

minister who encouraged the youth's aspirations of being a history painter and allowed him to informally attend classes at the College of Philadelphia (now the University of Pennsylvania), where he was a provost.⁹³

The Death of Socrates is oppressively linear, blocky, and heavily colored, demonstrating an awkward sense of anatomy.⁹⁴ For an eighteen-year-old American with minimal training and access only to second-hand engravings after Old Master works, in an area of the world for which interest in painting was limited to portraiture, it was nonetheless an impressive effort. West's success with *The Death of Socrates* led to increased attention in Philadelphia and in other colonies. In the late 1750s West transitioned from a student to a professional artist, traveling to New York City in 1758 to execute a number of portrait commissions. In 1760, William Smith intervened on West's behalf, transforming the young artist's career. Smith was friends with Chief Justice William Allen, whose son was part of a venture to ship sugar to Italy. Smith persuaded Allen to allow West to tag along on the Italian expedition, and along with Pennsylvania Governor James Hamilton and several other investors he bankrolled the artist's trip. On April 12, 1760 West was aboard the *Betty*

⁹³ For more on the controversial life of Smith, see Albert Frank Gegenheimer, *William Smith, Educator and Churchman, 1727-1802* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1943). Smith possessed significant anti-Quaker sentiments and had been jailed in 1758 for publicly expressing his views, reinforcing the argument that West was not an active member of the Society of Friends.

⁹⁴ Ann Uhry Abrams notes that artistic instruction in the Americas did not include anatomical training, and usually bodies appear misshapen and "unnatural" unless copied from another work. West modeled the central figures of *The Death of Socrates* from the frontispiece to Charles Rollin's 1738-40 edition of *Ancient History*, volume 4, which was engraved by Jacques Philippe le Bas after a drawing by Hubert François Gravelot, and other figures in the composition as originally appear in several works by Haidt, but they show a discomfort with human anatomy that bedeviled West his entire career. Abrams, "A New Light on Benjamin West's Pennsylvania Instruction," 251. Gordon, "Martial Art," 65-100.

Sally as it left North America on a thirty-day voyage across the Atlantic.⁹⁵ His intention was to travel through Italy for three years and then return home, where his fiancée, Elizabeth Shewell, was waiting his return.

Italy, 1760-1763

After a brief encounter with a privateer, the *Betty Sally* arrived safely in Livorno, Italy, on June 16, 1760. West arrived in Rome in July and quickly fell in with Thomas Robinson, an Englishman who unwittingly spread the misunderstanding that West was an active Quaker.⁹⁶ It was through Robinson that West met Cardinal Albani, the instigator of two famous anecdotes involving West. The first occurred upon his introduction to the blind cardinal, who was told that West was American:

The Cardinal fancying that the American must be an Indian, exclaimed, “Is he black or white?” and on being told that he was very fair, “What as fair as I am?” cried the Cardinal still more surprised. This latter expression excited a good deal of mirth at the Cardinal’s expence, for his complexion was of the darkest Italian olive, and West’s was even of more than the usual degree of English fairness.⁹⁷

Having been sufficiently impressed by West, the cardinal then arranged for an “experiment” in which he would expose the American artist to a great sculptural work

⁹⁵ W.A. Richardson and Edgar P. Richardson, “West’s Voyage to Italy, 1760, and William Allen,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 102, no. 1 (Jan., 1978): 3-26.

⁹⁶ Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 31.

⁹⁷ Galt, *The Life of West*, Part 1, 103. Douglas Fordham discusses the racial undertones of this story, which “transform[s] [West] in the English reader’s mind from an American colonist (presumably well-tanned and perhaps a bit dirty) to a dark-skinned Native American to a nearly translucent figure ‘of more than the usual degree of English fairness.’” This reinforces West’s exotic nature while situating him as a worthy member of English high society. Douglas Fordham, *British Art and the Seven Years’ War: Allegiance and Allegory* (Philadelphia and Oxford: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 208.

from antiquity and gauge his response. Robinson tipped West off that he would be shown the *Apollo Belvedere* (fig. 5), and the two almost certainly practiced the response West gave when the *Apollo* was shown to him the next day: “My God! How like it is to a young Mohawk warrior!”⁹⁸ That comment would come to symbolize the unique mix of American experience with British training that West would promote as the centerpiece of his artistic identity.

While in Rome, West associated with a number of international artists and theorists, including Anton Raphael Mengs, Johann Joachim Winckelmann, and Gavin Hamilton (1723-1798). Through those three West was introduced to the nascent neoclassical movement, characterized by an awareness of, and interest in antiquity, in some cases depicting the “edle Einfalt, und eine stille Größe” (“noble simplicity and quiet grandeur”) admired by Winckelmann,⁹⁹ or used to other ends ranging from the horrific and erotic to the moralizing.¹⁰⁰ The latter was a mode in which West had already worked, in his early *Death of Socrates*.

Much of West’s education in Rome consisted of copying works by Raphael (1483-1520), Titian (c. 1488-1576), Michelangelo (1475-1564), Correggio (1489-1534), the Carracci family, and antique casts. This general program of study was recommended to him by Mengs,¹⁰¹ one which would also include visits to Florence, Bologna, Parma, Venice, and then a return to Rome, and one which West consistently

⁹⁸ Galt, *The Life of West*, Part 1, 104-106; Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 32-34. Galt continued that the Italians in attendance were first “excessively mortified” to hear the *Apollo Belvedere* “compared to a savage,” and then “delighted” after Robinson explained the positive associations intended by West.

⁹⁹ Quoted in Robert Rosenblum, *Transformations in Eighteenth-Century Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), 10.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, especially Chapter 1, “Neoclassicism: Some Problems of Definition,” 3-49.

¹⁰¹ Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 42-46.

repeated to artists who sought his advice on what to study in Italy.¹⁰² In 1773 he exhorted John Singleton Copley, then considering his travel to Europe, to “pursue the higher Exalances in the Art, and for the obtaining of which I recommend to your attention the works of the *Antiant Statuarys, Raphael, Michael Angilo, Corragio, and Titian*, as the Sorce from whence true tast in the arts have flow’d.”¹⁰³ As invaluable as this immersion into the great works of Europe was to West – and it would influence the course of his career – the young artist also benefited from the technical training he received at the Capitoline Academy, where Mengs was Professor of Painting.¹⁰⁴

In the summer of 1761 West was suffering from rheumatism and a leg infection which became so painful that he sought surgical intervention first in Livorno, and then in Florence. West underwent four leg surgeries between November 1761 and February 1762, and remained in Florence through August while recovering. While in that city he met Angelica Kauffmann, another young artist whom he provided instruction; Charles Willson Peale reported later that the twenty-two-year-old Kauffmann was enamored with the twenty-one-year-old West, although the young American did not reciprocate.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² See West to Johann Heinrich Ramberg, ca. 1787-88, reproduced in Forster-Hahn, “The Source of True Taste,” 376-381.

¹⁰³ West to John Singleton Copley, January 6, 1773, in *Copley-Pelham Letters*, 194, 196-197.

¹⁰⁴ Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 42-43.

¹⁰⁵ Lillian B. Miller, Sidney Hart, and David C. Ward, eds., *The Selected Papers of Charles Willson Peale and His Family, Volume 5: The Autobiography of Charles Willson Peale* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 320; Arthur S. Marks, “Angelica Kauffmann and Some Americans on the Grand Tour,” *American Art Journal* 12, no. 2 (Apr., 1980): 7. It is likely that the married Peale, who named his first daughter Angelica Kauffmann Peale, was smitten with her in return. Peale was not the only artist to feel that way. Thomas Hickey, Gavin Hamilton, Nathaniel Dance, and possibly Joshua Reynolds were also enamored with Kauffmann, and Dance and Kauffmann were briefly engaged. Farington, *Diary*, vol. 9, 3192 (January 6, 1808); Ian McIntyre, *Joshua Reynolds: The Life and Times of the First President of the Royal Academy*, (London: Allen Lane, 2003), 166.

West's lengthy recovery in Florence gave him the opportunity to copy works in the Uffizi Gallery, and after a fire broke out in its collections in August 1762, he continued the travels Mengs prescribed for him, visiting Bologna, Parma, Venice, and briefly returning to Florence before venturing south again to Rome.¹⁰⁶ He arrived in Rome in January 1763 and remained there until May. While his friend Kauffmann was by then in the city, working on a portrait of Winckelmann, Mengs had left for Spain and Robinson for England.¹⁰⁷ West took advantage of the final few months of his planned Grand Tour by focusing his studies on Raphael, in addition to copying a work by Guido Reni and executing his own Italianate compositions.¹⁰⁸ West's new personal focus on Raphael was tied to his acquisition of the sobriquet the "American Raphael," which he proudly retained the remainder of his life.¹⁰⁹ In the mid-eighteenth century Raphael was valued by collectors and connoisseurs as the greatest artist of the modern world. To be called the "American Raphael" was largely an

¹⁰⁶ Although he sold some copies of Old Master works while in Italy, West was largely reliant on funding from Allen and Governor Hamilton to remain abroad. For their part the investors, particularly Allen, were enthusiastic about West's progress and had no problems providing money when requested. W.A. Richardson and E. Richardson, "West's Voyage to Italy," 3-26.

¹⁰⁷ Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 52.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 53-54.

¹⁰⁹ It is unclear whether West acquired the nickname in Italy or England. The earliest known usages of the moniker appear around the time of the 1764 Society of Artists exhibition, and reference it as having already been assigned to West. The April 23, 1764 issue of the *Public Advertiser* included a poem dedicated "To Mr. West, a celebrated painter in Castle-street, Leicester-fields, known in Italy by the name of the American Raphael," quoted in Horace Walpole, *Anecdotes of Painting in England, in 4 Volumes*, vol. 4 (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 113. The May 5, 1764 issue of the *Public Advertiser* included an anonymous critique of the Royal Academy exhibition in which the author wrote: "Until Mr. West exhibits some more striking Performances than those he has already done, surely the glorious title of the American Raphael can never be, without Irony, bestowed upon him." Quoted in von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 262. West's friend Anton Raphael Mengs was also identified as a national Raphael, the "German Raphael," the same year by Winckelmann, which was less of a stretch. Even though Winckelmann was using it to rhetorical effect, it was also literally true: Mengs was a German whose middle name was "Raphael." Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *The History of Ancient Art*, vol. 2, trans. G. Henry Lodge (Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1849), 194.

acknowledgement of West's novelty as an American artist in Europe. West seems to have taken it to mean he was a modern-day Raphael, possessing prescient artistic prowess which would herald a new age of moralizing art, who happened to be American, rather than the more likely meaning: that he was the greatest American artist active in Europe only as a function of being the only such artist.

The desire to avoid the oppressive Roman summer of 1763 led West to begin planning his return home. His father sent him a letter in the spring encouraging him to travel first to England, where he could meet his half-brother Thomas before returning home. West did just that, traveling a circuitous route by land that included stops in Florence, Livorno, Parma, Genoa, Turin, Savoy, Lyons, Paris, and Calais, with time spent painting and shipping works back across the Atlantic to Allen and Hamilton.¹¹⁰

London, 1763-1768

West crossed the English Channel on August 20, 1763, arriving in London the next day bearing letters of introduction to landscape painter Richard Wilson (1714-1782) as well as letters of recommendation from merchants he had met in Livorno. He called on Wilson within a week of his arrival, where he also met the artist's student Joseph Farington (1747-1821) and showed Wilson two of the original compositions he had completed in his final months in Rome. Upon viewing them, Wilson remarked: "If you painted these pictures, remain in England. Stay here. If you did not, get away to America as fast as you can."¹¹¹ Wilson's advice was invaluable

¹¹⁰ Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 54-55.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 59. The exchange between West and Wilson occurred shortly after a minor scandal in London where an English artist had purchased works in Italy and shown them under his own name, hence Wilson's apprehension.

to West, as was the encounter with Farington, who would later become one of his greatest allies at the Royal Academy.

While his precocious talent immediately and novel transatlantic background drew attention to West, even more crucial to his first weeks and months in London was the lucky coincidence of the simultaneous presence of four of his American patrons – Provost William Smith, Chief Justice William Allen, Governor James Hamilton, and businessman Samuel Powel, who had been introduced to West’s work by the other three – in that city at the time of his arrival.¹¹² Through these men West was introduced to members of English society and secured a number of portrait commissions. Furthermore, through Dr. William Patoum, whom West had accompanied in his trip from Rome to London, the young man was introduced to Joshua Reynolds, one of the city’s leading portraitists. Reynolds encouraged West to exhibit one of his first portrait commissions, of Major-General Robert Monckton (fig. 6), as well as the history paintings he had shown to Wilson, at the April 1764 Society of Artists exhibition.¹¹³ To continue his training West also attended informal sketching sessions at St. Martin’s Lane Academy, where he further insinuated himself into the burgeoning English artistic culture.¹¹⁴

West had not anticipated the scope of the positive attention he received in England. Not only had he received the approval of Wilson and Reynolds, he had executed a number of portraits, and most importantly, he had become an overnight

¹¹² Ibid., 58.

¹¹³ Ibid., 60. Powel, who was in his mid-twenties at the time, would later become the Mayor of Philadelphia, and then a Pennsylvania state senator.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 60.

success, immediately garnering the sort of attention in London that most artists had to toil away for years to receive. He met with two of his leading patrons, Smith and Allen, who advised that West stay in England indefinitely to capitalize on interest in his work. The young man's worries about abandoning his fiancée, and she him, would be obviated by bringing her across the Atlantic to wed her betrothed, a plan to which Shewell agreed after an exchange of letters.¹¹⁵

At the age of twenty-six the American-born Benjamin West began to entrench himself in English art circles. Remaining in England allowed him to follow his passion as a history painter; returning to America would have forced him to remain a portraitist, a genre he disliked despite his talent for portraiture. He continued to train at St. Martin's Lane's Academy and exhibit at The Society of Artists of Great Britain (which obtained a royal charter in 1765 and added "Incorporated" to its name), becoming a director of the former, and a member and director of the latter in 1766.¹¹⁶ In that year West showed two neoclassical history paintings to great acclaim at the Society of Artists exhibition, *The Continnence of Scipio* (fig. 7) and *Pylades and Orestes Brought as Victims before Iphigenia* (fig. 8), while Pratt exhibited *The American School*. Within a year Abraham Delanoy and Francis Hopkinson also joined and left West's studio in 1766 prior to the unexpected arrival in early 1767 of Charles Willson Peale. At the same time West was attempting to establish himself as

¹¹⁵ West's friend Francis Hopkinson told the story that he, Benjamin Franklin, and Bishop William White had to smuggle Elizabeth Shewell out of her house in the dead of night to allow her to join West in London against her brother's wishes. This anecdote seems merely to be self-aggrandizement on the part of Hopkinson. While the news that Shewell was traveling to join West was received scandalously in Philadelphia social circles, the assurances of Smith and Allen, as well as Shewell's accompaniment by her cousin Matthew Pratt and West's father, assuaged fears of impropriety. West and Shewell were married at St. Martin's-in-the-Fields, in the heart of London, less than a month after her arrival. Hastings, *The Life and Works of Francis Hopkinson*, 102-103; Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 62-65.

¹¹⁶ Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 72.

a history painter in England his studio had become the premier destination for fellow American artists. Pratt and Hopkinson were friends seeking out training; Delanoy and Peale had shown up on West's London doorstep unannounced; and West had begun his correspondence with John Singleton Copley.¹¹⁷

With West already in London, Copley was the premier portraitist active in North America, having used the success of his portrait of Henry Pelham (1749-1806), known as *A Boy with a Flying Squirrel* (fig. 9), at the 1766 Society of Artists exhibition as a springboard for increased recognition.¹¹⁸ It also led to occasional correspondence between West and Copley over the next eight years, Copley expressing his interest in the styles of West and Joshua Reynolds, and West encouraging his fellow artist to follow in his own footsteps and visit Italy.¹¹⁹ However, it was fear which eventually spurred Copley to cross the Atlantic in 1774. His father-in-law, merchant Richard Clarke, was one of the consignees of the tea which was thrown into Boston Harbor by the Sons of Liberty on December 16, 1773. Copley, a well-known public figure in Boston who avoided politics and refused to take sides in the growing conflict – “I am desirous of avoideing every imputation of

¹¹⁷ West to John Singleton Copley, August 4, 1766, in *Copley-Pelham Letters*, 43-45.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. Copley had sent the painting unannounced and without identification to West, who loved the work and immediately recognized it as that of an American artist owing to the inclusion of an American squirrel. West was then informed of Copley's identity in a letter from the artist. The painting was entered in the Society of Artists exhibition where it gained the attention of Joshua Reynolds, and was first falsely attributed to talented young English artist Joseph Wright of Derby. In a letter dating August 4, 1766, West informs Copley of Reynolds' interest and the overall success of the work, and urges Copley to send more canvases for the 1767 exhibition and to visit London and Italy on a Grand Tour identical to West's own, as the young artist had nothing else to learn from artists and artworks present in the colonies.

¹¹⁹ Copley to Benjamin West, November 12, 1776, in *Copley-Pelham Letters*, 50-52; West to John Singleton Copley, June 20, 1767, in *Copley-Pelham Letters*, 56-58. Copley was also encouraged to travel abroad by Matthew Pratt in 1771, when Pratt met Copley in New York City while on his return home from London. Barratt, “Faces of a New Nation,” 19.

party spir[it], Political contests being neighter pleasing to an artist or advantageous to the Art itself,” he had told West in a letter in late 1770¹²⁰ – served as a disinterested delegate of the tea merchants in negotiations with the demonstrators.¹²¹ Several months later, a mob looking for Colonel George Watson, an agent of the king, threatened Copley with violence if he ever harbored a Loyalist.¹²² Watson had been staying with Copley, and in fact left hours prior to the mob’s arrival; the artist had unsuccessfully asked the Colonel to remain one more evening. Had Watson stayed, Copley reflected, “I must either have given up a friend to the insult of a Mob or had my house pulled down and perhaps my family murdered [*sic*].”¹²³ The experience shook Copley to his core. Months later he was aboard a ship bound for London,¹²⁴ his wife Susannah, children, father-in-law, and brothers-in-law following suit the next year as part of an influx of Loyalists into England at the start of the American Revolutionary War. West and Copley became artistic rivals, first friendly, then antagonistic, while Elizabeth West and Susannah Copley become fast friends over their shared experiences as American artists’ wives.¹²⁵

¹²⁰ Copley to Benjamin West, November 24, 1770, in *Copley-Pelham Letters*, 98.

¹²¹ Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 114-115.

¹²² Copley to Isaac Winslow Clarke, April 26, 1774, in *Copley-Pelham Letters*, 217-219.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 219.

¹²⁴ Shortly after arriving in London and making introductions with West and Sir Joshua Reynolds and availing himself of the Royal Academy’s life drawing classes, Copley embarked on an abbreviated nine-month Grand Tour to Rome. By the time he returned to London in June 1775 his wife and children had already arrived in that town, and his in-laws would arrive shortly after. Jules David Prown, *John Singleton Copley*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA: Published for the National Gallery of Art by Harvard University Press, 1966), 255-257.

¹²⁵ In a record book Elizabeth West kept from 1785 until 1790, the Copleys were the most frequently listed visitors to the West household; Alberts 171. Prown suggests that the relationship between West and Copley became strained after 1786, when West was awarded a commission for Greenwich

While Copley found safety in England, West found continued success after the execution of *The Landing of Agrippina at Brundisium with the Ashes of Germanicus* (fig. 10), a commission from Robert Hay Drummond, Archbishop of York. The archbishop was a steadfast supporter of the arts, and one of few patrons in England in the 1760s interested in collecting neoclassical history paintings.¹²⁶ He became an admirer of West's work, and invited the American artist into his social circle. At a dinner engagement in late 1767 Drummond suggested to West that the story of Agrippina, as recorded by the Roman historian Tacitus, was an appropriate subject for a moralizing history painting. Upon returning home the same evening West created a sketch of the scene, incorporating a frieze from the *Ara Pacis* which he had seen at the Uffizi, and drawings of Roman architecture by Robert Adam (1728-1792), as well as elements of a sketch of the same subject by Gavin Hamilton.¹²⁷ He showed the composition to Drummond the next day, who commissioned a full-sized canvas on the spot.

The finished canvas, with its "sharply focused realism"¹²⁸ and attention to detail, impressed Drummond so much that he attempted to raise 3,000 guineas through subscription so as to allow West to cease painting portraits for money and focus entirely on history painting instead. When that failed, Drummond went to the

Hospital Chapel that was first given to Copley, although the Copleys appear in Mrs. West's account book as visitors to 14 Newman Street through 1788. Prown, *John Singleton Copley*, vol. 2, 319n.

¹²⁶ Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 46-50.

¹²⁷ Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 83-85.

¹²⁸ Rosenblum, *Transformations in Eighteenth-Century Art*, 42-43. For more on *Agrippina's* novel combination of neoclassical morality and material beauty, see Alexander Nemerov, "The Ashes of Germanicus and the Skin of Painting: Sublimation and Money in Benjamin West's *Agrippina*," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 11, no. 1 (Spring, 1998): 11-27.

royal court to convince King George III to support West, as an example to his subjects of how to patronize the arts in England. The king agreed to meet West and view *Agrippina*. George III's approval of the painting was followed by the suggestion that the departure of Regulus might be another appropriate subject for a history painting.¹²⁹ When West agreed, as expected, the king asked him to prepare a sketch for his approval; thus began a thirty-year friendship between the American painter and the English king, which in turn sowed the seeds for West's ascension to the heights of English academic painting.

Already by 1768 West was a director of the Society of Artists, which was in the midst of a period of strife over issues of membership and governance. He was part of a dissenting faction of the Society which had been meeting in secret to discuss alternative plans. At the same time, West's ongoing work on his commission from King George III led to frequent royal invitations to visit Buckingham House, as the artist seems to have filled a recent void in the king's life as a confidant.¹³⁰ West therefore had the king's ear, and discussed the issues facing the Society of Artists, which the king had also learned of from another Society member, architect Sir William Chambers (1723-1796). The king told both Chambers and West that he was willing to serve as patron to another, more harmonious organization. The two artists, along with engraver George Michael Moser (1706-1783) and miniaturist Francis Cotes (1726-1770), formed a committee to figure out how to take advantage of the king's offer. Sidney C. Hutchinson details the resulting moves in which members of the dissenting faction either resigned from the Society or were voted out of leadership

¹²⁹ Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 89.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 89-90.

positions, all the while preparing a request to the king for his support of a royal academy.¹³¹ Galt positions West at the forefront of the initial negotiations between the group of artists and the king, and credits him with having taken a lead in the committee negotiations.¹³² West's signature was the first of twenty-two on the memorial presented to the king on November 28, 1768.¹³³ In response to the memorial George III gave tentative approval of the formation of a new organization, and a more detailed plan was written by Chambers and provided to the king, who signed the Instrument of Foundation of the Royal Academy into action on December 10, 1768. On the list of members on the Instrument, West's name appears second, after only presumptive president Joshua Reynolds.¹³⁴ West was elected as one of nine Visitors, or part-time professors, in the Academy's schools.

Benjamin West, R.A.

Buoyed by his leading position in the formation of the Royal Academy of Arts and the immediate status it conferred, West established himself as the paramount history painter in England with *The Death of General Wolfe* (fig. 11), executed in 1770.¹³⁵ The subject of Wolfe's tragic death at the moment of his victory in the Battle of Quebec was well-known in England, where Wolfe was celebrated as a national

¹³¹ Sidney C. Hutchison, *The History of the Royal Academy, 1768-1968* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1986), 39-45.

¹³² Galt, *The Life of West*, Part 2, 35-36.

¹³³ Hutchison, *The History of the Royal Academy*, 43-44.

¹³⁴ Hutchison, *The History of the Royal Academy*, 209.

¹³⁵ On *The Death of General Wolfe*, see von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 211-213; Wind, "The Revolution of History Painting," 116-127; Dennis Montagna, "Benjamin West's *The Death of General Wolfe*: A Nationalist Narrative," *American Art Journal* 13, no. 2 (Spring, 1981): 72-88; Peter Harrington, *British Artists and War: The Face of Battle in Paintings and Prints, 1700-1914* (London: Greenhill Books, 1993), 33-35; Fordham, *British Art and the Seven Years' War*, 218-238.

hero,¹³⁶ and had been painted several times before in the mid-1760s, including on two small canvases by Edward Penny (1714-1791) and one by George Romney (1734-1802).¹³⁷ Robert Monckton, whose portrait by West had gained the respect of Joshua Reynolds, was at that point a colonel serving as Wolfe's second-in-command at Quebec. Thus, although the specific reason for West's selection of Wolfe's death as a subject for a painting is unknown, he would have been acquainted with the details of the battle while living in London in the late 1760s. In crafting his composition, West was faced with two primary concerns: how to encapsulate the violence of the battlefield, and how to capture the contemporaneous event and costume within a canvas done in the Grand Manner, the "grand style" promoted by the recently-knighted Reynolds from his bully pulpit at the head of the Royal Academy.¹³⁸ He addressed those concerns by removing Wolfe's death from the heat of the battle, allowing the British and French forces to clash in the background while several

¹³⁶ For a history of the presentation of Wolfe in the arts in England, see Harrington, *British Artists and War*, 25-44; Alan McNairn, *Behold the Hero: General Wolfe and the Arts in the Eighteenth Century* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997); Fordham, *British Art and the Seven Years' War*, 103-119, 218-238.

¹³⁷ McNairn, *Behold the Hero*, 91-106. On the difference between the compositions by Penny and West, see Edgar Wind, "Penny, West, and the 'Death of Wolfe,'" *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 10 (1947): 159-162.

¹³⁸ See Reynolds's third Discourse, delivered on December 14, 1770, for one of the president's first essays on the grand style, in Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, ed. Robert Wark (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1983), 41-53; also, Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, 71-72 (Discourse IV); Vincent M. Bevilacqua, "'Ut Rhetorica Pictura': Sir Joshua Reynolds' Rhetorical Conception of Art," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (Nov., 1970): 59-78. Emily Ballew Neff argues that the well-known story of Sir Joshua Reynolds's opposition to the use of contemporary dress in a history painting was a result of West's strategic response to Reynolds's larger concerns about vernacular British art. Reynolds's opposition was not so much to the use of contemporary dress in *The Death of General Wolfe* as it was to depicting the actual death of Wolfe, instead of a classical subject as a referent to Wolfe. By isolating Reynolds's response to simply clothing, West successfully positioned himself as a dynamic thinker on contemporary history painting compared to the staid Reynolds. Emily Ballew Neff, "At the Wood's Edge: Benjamin West's *The Death of Wolfe* and the Middle Ground," in *American Adversaries: West and Copley in a Transatlantic World*, ed. Emily Ballew Neff with Kaylin H. Weber (Houston, TX: The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Distributed by Yale University Press, 2013), 69-70. For a further study of how West's depiction of the Battle of Quebec relates to the actual events of the battle, see Montagna, "Benjamin West's *The Death of General Wolfe*," 76-80.

groups of bystanders in the foreground shield the dying general from combat. West quotes liberally from Lamentation and Deposition scenes (figs. 12-13) in his depiction of Wolfe and the figures immediately supporting his dying body, and references Greek statuary (fig. 14) and Old Master engraving (fig. 15) in the figure of the Native American in the lower left foreground (fig. 16).¹³⁹ These quotations firmly place the *Death of Wolfe* within the moralizing tradition of the neoclassical and position the actions of its protagonist as equal to those of the heroes of antiquity who had previously been celebrated on canvas.¹⁴⁰ This effect was forceful enough to overcome criticism of the recognizable portraits and contemporary military attire in a canvas which depicted a great moral exemplar for humankind.

The Death of General Wolfe was exhibited at the 1771 Royal Academy exhibition, the organization's first show in its new London home in Old Somerset House. West's canvas was the most prominent work at the show, and its positive reception heralded in the new era of contemporary history painting in English art, in which the artist's goal was to make "the viewer feel that he was present at and a part of a great historic event of his time, that he was an accessory with others in a tragic but inspiring occasion."¹⁴¹ King George III, who had previously rejected the mere notion of purchasing *The Death of General Wolfe*, commissioned a copy from West after the original was sold to Lord Grosvenor, and appointed the artist Historical

¹³⁹ Vivien Green Fryd, "Rereading the Indian in Benjamin West's *Death of General Wolfe*," *American Art* 9, no. 1 (Spring, 1995): 79-82.

¹⁴⁰ Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 105.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 109.

Painter to the King.¹⁴² London Alderman John Boydell, who would play significant roles in various times of West's life, commissioned the engraver William Woollett (1735-1785) to create a print after the painting, which, upon its release in 1775, "created a new popularity and demand for history paintings and a vastly broadened market for prints taken from those pictures."¹⁴³

Perhaps the most striking painting West executed in the first half of the 1770s, after *The Death of General Wolfe*, was a group portrait of his own family from around 1772, *The Artist and His Family* (fig. 17).¹⁴⁴ It is a celebration of West's personal life and a demonstration of his ability to excel in multiple modes – portraiture, religious painting, historical subjects – in one painting. The small canvas celebrates the reunion and expansion of the West family,¹⁴⁵ while maintaining a clear dichotomy within it. On the right half of the canvas, Benjamin West leans against a chair in which his father John West sits. Next to John is his son, and Benjamin's half-brother, Thomas. On the left half of the canvas, Elizabeth West cradles the infant Benjamin West, Jr. in her lap, with a youthful Raphael West looking on. The right side of the canvas is the paternal (all the figures are adult males), the severe, the Quaker; the left side of the canvas is the maternal (all the figures are female or children), the gentle, the

¹⁴² Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 214.

¹⁴³ Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 110.

¹⁴⁴ Jules Prown calls the painting a "nativity in Hammersmith," owing both to its devotional appearance and the location of the subject depicted therein, at the West country house in Hammersmith, along the Thames River and four miles from West's studio in London. Jules David Prown, "Benjamin West's Family Picture: A Nativity in Hammersmith," in *Essays In Honor of Paul Mellon, Collector and Benefactor*, ed. John Wilmerding (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1986), 272.

¹⁴⁵ Benjamin's mother Sarah West had passed away in 1756.

Anglican. The right side is West's past, and the left side his future.¹⁴⁶ Not content to let the groupings of figures speak for themselves, West draws a harsh line between them, separating them by a gold-beaded door jamb which runs vertically down the middle of the canvas, the right three figures situated in front of a green wall and the left three figures in front of a brown door and white window. The juxtaposition disembodies the two Quaker men – they seem like Renaissance profile portraits, unable to even comprehend the loving affection and physical contact between mother and child. West straddles the two spheres, despite his presence in the back right corner of the space. His comfortable attire, relaxed pose, and loving gaze directed toward his wife and children position him in diametric opposition to the stern Quakers, suggesting a wholehearted abandonment of that aspect of his past in favor of his new life in England, and yet he still leans on his father's chair while holding his tools in his hands. He remains, on a basic level, reliant on his quasi-exotic past to make meaning of his identity as an artist, in an image which was almost certainly created as an advertisement. *The Artist and His Family* was publicly exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1777, and engraved and published by John Boydell two years later. The painting itself is almost the identical size as the engraving, suggesting it was intended as a *modello*.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ It would be incorrect, however, to suggest that the two sides of the canvas could be divided into American and English realms. Of the six people in the painting, only Benjamin and Elizabeth West had not been born in England. John West was an adult before emigrating to America, and Thomas West spent his entire life in England. In 1772, before the American Revolutionary War, all six members of the West family depicted in *The Artist and His Family* were proud Englishmen and women.

¹⁴⁷ Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 462. Kate Retford discusses the implications of this public display of paternal affection on the artists' in English society, and the minor backlash against it, in Retford, *The Art of Domestic Life*, 125-126; see also Emily Ballew Neff, *John Singleton Copley in England* (London: Merrell Holberton, in association with the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1995), 92-94. For another example of an image of family, including the artist, meant to

In depicting himself with the tools of his trade, a palette and maulstick, West plays the dual roles of creator and subject, a theme recognized and expanded by John Singleton Copley in *The Copley Family* of 1776/77 (fig. 18).¹⁴⁸ Both men position themselves in the back of the compositional space in a vantage point from which they can observe all the activities of their family group. Those activities differ greatly, however, the playful bustle of Copley's family juxtaposed against the quiet meditation of the Wests. Moreover, while Copley engages the viewer with a wry grin on his face, West turns his eyes to his wife and the newborn son who bears his name. Margaretta Lovell points out that "the visual emphasis on the maternal pair – enthroned in a generous, damask-covered easy chair – seems slightly hyperbolic or at least disproportionate given the dignity one would ordinarily attribute to the elder West or to the meteorically successful artist himself."¹⁴⁹ In fact, West's execution of the painting serves as a testament to his "meteoric" success and audacity, given his surmise that there would even be public interest in an image of his family. The presence of West on the right side of the canvas as part of a paternal trio references

make a statement about the role of paternal influence on an extended family, see Arthur S. Marks's discussion of Charles Willson Peale's *The Peale Family* (c. 1772-73, retouched 1808) in Arthur S. Marks, "Private and Public in *The Peale Family*: Charles Willson Peale as Pater and Painter," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 156, no. 2 (Jun., 2012): 109-187.

¹⁴⁸ Kate Retford, *The Art of Domestic Life: Family Portraiture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven, CT: Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies of British Art by Yale University Press, 2006), 124.

¹⁴⁹ Lovell, *Art in a Season of Revolution*, 142. The same year West painted *The Artist and His Family* he was named Historical Painter to the King, and had exhibited his revolutionary *The Death of General Wolfe* at the previous year's Royal Academy exhibition. Jules Prown argues that the engraving after the West family portrait would have been primarily intended for distribution and sale in Philadelphia and the rest of colonies, "a visual message telling distant friends and family that the Wests were doing very well in England." Prown, "Benjamin West's Family Picture," 273-274. It was used as such in 1780, when the Wests sent an engraving of the painting to Benjamin Franklin; see Franklin to Elizabeth and Benjamin West, August, 16, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 33, ed. Barbara B. Oberg (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1997), 196-197.

the patriarchal characteristic of his artistic output, which relied heavily on his fatherly relationship with students who served as studio assistants and who served notice of his skill as an artist and educator through their own successes on the canvas.¹⁵⁰

Perhaps the viewer would have recognized in West's look the contemplation not just of a family increased by one, but the future of art embodied by the newborn Benjamin, Jr. and his brother Raphael standing nearby.

Just as the Royal Academy expanded and then moved to a new home in the 1770s, the Wests did the same, moving to 14 Newman Street in London in 1775, where the West boys would grow up and West would execute numerous masterpieces over the next forty-five years. During the remainder of that decade West continued to produce massive contemporary history paintings and accumulate students, with Joseph Wright, Ralph Earl, and, most importantly, Gilbert Stuart seeking his guidance. Also arriving in London in the 1770s was West's frequent correspondent John Singleton Copley, who was escaping the increasing rebellious turmoil in the colonies and his anxiety about his position within it.¹⁵¹ West, having already insinuated himself in English society, did not face the same fears in reverse. Instead the king frequently discussed the war with West, largely to gauge the reliability of news he was hearing from America against what the painter had heard. There is no indication that West was supplying the king with inside information, or that West was sending secrets back across the Atlantic.¹⁵² Instead, the two men were friends,

¹⁵⁰ Margaretta M. Lovell, "Reading Eighteenth-Century American Family Portraits: Social Images and Self-Images," *Winterthur Portfolio* 22, no. 4 (Dec., 1987): 243.

¹⁵¹ Copley was uninterested in politics but had married into a merchant family who was targeted in the Boston Tea Party, and he had been threatened by a mob for harboring a British official.

¹⁵² Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 123.

conversing about current events which, even though they affected them both in significant ways, were happening over 3,000 miles away.

Despite the ongoing American Revolutionary War, in fact, West and the king became closer friends, with West undertaking a series of portraits of the royal family in the closing years of the 1770s and opening years of the following decade, and then a series of eight history paintings for the Audience Chamber at Windsor from 1786-1789.¹⁵³ The early 1780s saw Gilbert Stuart leaving West's workshop, and John Trumbull entering, leaving, and re-entering. Trumbull had served as an officer in the Continental Army and resigned his commission to practice art, traveling to London in 1780 to study with West, only to be arrested in response to the execution of a British military officer in North America. Eventually Trumbull was released with orders not to return to England until hostilities had ceased, which he did almost immediately after the Treaty of Paris was signed in 1783. Upon arriving in London a second time, in 1784, Trumbull began a series of paintings based on the American Revolution, an idea which West had considered, then abandoned. Instead, he was occupied with the Chapel of Revealed Religion, a planned addition to Windsor Castle. Although Galt maintains that West conceived, designed, and implemented the entire decorative plan on his own,¹⁵⁴ it was instead the case that he first worked from a proposal designed by a committee of English religious leaders, later subverting it along his own lines once he was in the process of execution.¹⁵⁵ The Chapel of Revealed Religion occupied

¹⁵³ Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 93-94, 96.

¹⁵⁴ Galt, *The Life of West*, Part 2, 52-58.

¹⁵⁵ I thank William L. Pressly for sharing his argument on the initial development of the Chapel of Revealed Religion layout by the king's committee of clergymen, and subsequent changes by West, which will appear in an essay titled "Benjamin West's Royal Chapel at Windsor: Who's in Charge, the

West for over a quarter century, from 1779 to 1806;¹⁵⁶ during the same period he also participated in a number of smaller efforts, submitting a work to John Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery in 1788 and designing decorations for William Beckford's unrealized Revelation Chamber at Fonthill Abbey between 1796 and 1799.

Benjamin West, P.R.A.

West's continuing relationship with the king afforded him a place of prominence in the Royal Academy, and positioned him from the late 1780s onward as the presumptive replacement for a sickly and half-blind Reynolds, who had ceased painting in 1789. Reynolds resigned on February 22, 1790 in part over a dispute of the failure to elect Joseph Bonomi a full Academician,¹⁵⁷ only to return to the position in the middle of March, without a replacement having been elected in the interim.¹⁵⁸ He resigned again in a letter to West on November 10, 1791, in an attempt to forestall his presumed reelection as President the next month.¹⁵⁹ West, acting on behalf of the Academy's General Assembly, refused to accept the resignation, and Reynolds was

Patron or the Painter?," in *Transatlantic Romanticism: An Anthology*, eds. Andrew Hemingway and Alan Wallach (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, forthcoming).

¹⁵⁶ For more on the Chapel of Revealed Religion see Nancy L. Pressly, *Revealed Religion: Benjamin West's Commissions for Windsor Castle and Fonthill Abbey* (San Antonio, TX: San Antonio Museum of Art, 1983), 15-56; Dillenberger, *Benjamin West*, 44-93.

¹⁵⁷ See Reynolds to Joseph Bonomi, February 11, 1790; Reynolds to Sir William Chambers, after February 11, 1790; Reynolds to John Richards, February 22, 1790; in *The Letters of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, eds. John Ingamells and John Edgcumbe (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 201-202, 202-203, 204-205, 205-206.

¹⁵⁸ For more on the so-called Bonomi Affair, see McIntyre, *Joshua Reynolds*, 491-503.

¹⁵⁹ Reynolds to Benjamin West, November 10, 1791, in *The Letters of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, 228-229. Reynolds's concern in November 1791 was over his failing health and ability to participate as a member of the Academy, not in response to any political or social slight.

indeed reelected, with West and Chambers authorized as his deputies.¹⁶⁰ His resignation attempt was prescient, however, as a few weeks after the election Reynolds's illness worsened, and he died in his London home on February 23, 1792.

West was elected to replace Reynolds as President of the Royal Academy in 1792 by a vote of twenty-nine to one. As President, West quickly proved himself to be less effective as an administrator and orator, and less creative a theorist, than his predecessor.¹⁶¹ He was more effective as a liaison with the royal patron, but even that status was on the decline. During this period he continued to paint history paintings and began to execute an increasing number of landscapes and genre pieces.¹⁶² Classical subjects, which had disappeared from West's oeuvre during the most active period of his royal patronage, also reappeared after he assumed the Royal Academy presidency, as he sought again to emulate the lofty ideals he was now forced to publicly express in his biannual discourses to the assembled organization.¹⁶³

One of the more famous anecdotes from West's life during his Presidency was his polite rejection of the king's offer of knighthood. Joshua Reynolds had been knighted the year after his election, and the king inquired through an intermediary in 1792 if West desired the same honor. West turned his friend down. According to Galt, West's reason was simple, "that he really thought he had already earned by his

¹⁶⁰ McIntyre, *Joshua Reynolds*, 524-525

¹⁶¹ For West's tenure as President of the Royal Academy, see Hutchison, *The History of the Royal Academy*, 73-92.

¹⁶² Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 111-120.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 125.

pencil more eminence than could be conferred on him by that rank.”¹⁶⁴ West was not asserting that his status as an artist was more than enough recognition; he was demanding a higher rank, a hereditary peerage. Knighthood designated a title which would die with West, while a peerage would live on in perpetuity, keeping his name alive in yet another permanent way.¹⁶⁵

West’s return to neoclassical work was encouraged when he took advantage of the Peace of Amiens in 1802 to visit Paris for the first time in forty years, finding inspiration in the works of Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825) and Pierre-Narcisse Guérin (1774-1833).¹⁶⁶ The American artist had brought a work of his own to exhibit at the Paris Salon of 1802, his oil sketch of *Death on the Pale Horse* (fig. 19) from 1796, which was itself a Romantic departure from his neoclassical approach of the preceding decades. In general, however, rather than execute new works based on his personal interests or in response to changing fashion, West largely spent his time in the nineteenth century reworking older canvases, owing to a combination of age, stubbornness, a decreasing amount of painting time due to responsibilities with the Royal Academy, and a lack of new ideas.¹⁶⁷ His tenure as president was marked by a number of minor scandals, which, combined with a decreasing amount of support

¹⁶⁴ Galt, *The Life of West*, Part 2, 189.

¹⁶⁵ Staley, *Benjamin West*, 25.

¹⁶⁶ West favored Guérin above all other French artists. Farington recorded the details of a dinner conversation between himself, West, and several other artists in which “Guerin’s [sic] merit was spoken of. West sd. that He had carried the art further than David or any other of their Artists.” Farington, *Diary*, vol. 5, 1935 (November 19, 1802). West repeated the sentiment after returning to England, in a speech to the Architects Club, Farington, *Diary*, vol. 5, 1961 (January, 13, 1803).

¹⁶⁷ Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 137-138. Many of his works bear multiple dates on them; for example, his drawing of *Death on the Pale Horse* is signed “B. West 1783, retouched 1803,” and his painting *The Battle of La Hogue* is signed “B. West. 1778, retouched 1806.” Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 210, 391.

from King George III stemming from an increasing amount of antagonism from a rival, James Wyatt (1746-1813), Surveyor General and Comptroller of the Works, caused West a great deal of stress.¹⁶⁸ West resigned from the presidency in 1805, with Wyatt elected in his place, only for Wyatt to prove himself so uninterested in the actual business of running the Academy that in the 1806 election West was again elected to serve as president, with Wyatt not even nominated for the position.¹⁶⁹

Even while holding the Royal Academy presidency, West continued to meet any aspiring artist who sought his audience, regardless of nationality. His name and rank had prestige even though the amount of direct attention he paid his students dwindled, and he continued to work actively toward the improvement of the arts in England. West was a leading supporter of the British government's acquisition of the Parthenon marbles from Lord Elgin, in part because the sculptures could be used by artists to work in the same neoclassical mode he had promoted decades prior.¹⁷⁰ This, like many of the other actions West took during his seventies, was focused on the preservation of his legacy. His goals had long been the public acknowledgment of his centrality in the formations of the English and the American schools of art. Certainly West felt that his work demanded that recognition on its own merit, and yet from the early years of the nineteenth century he realized that he was not receiving the type of recognition in England he felt he deserved but which was going to Reynolds and

¹⁶⁸ West detailed an 1804 attempted overthrow of his presidency, which was forestalled by King George III's support of West, in a February 6, 1805 letter to John Trumbull, reprinted in Theodore Sizer, "Benjamin West to His Former Pupil John Trumbull," *The Yale University Library Gazette* 25, no. 3 (Jan., 1951): 104-109.

¹⁶⁹ Hutchison, *The History of the Royal Academy*, 82-83.

¹⁷⁰ English painter Benjamin Robert Haydon was the first artist to view the marbles in England, and later alleged that West had attempted to prevent further access to the marbles until he could take full advantage of his own access to it. Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 349-350.

Hogarth instead. Thus, he developed a renewed interest in associating with American artists, and in the spread of his biography –conspicuously noting his American birth – in multiple sources, culminating with the 1816 publication of *The Life of West*. It was a tactical move on two fronts: first, to take full control of his presentation in print; second, to focus his energies in securing his position atop the growing pantheon of great American artists in the eyes of the American audience, which had always maintained its infatuation with West despite his frequent lack of reciprocation.

Benjamin West died in his home at 14 Newman Street on March 11, 1820 at the age of eighty-one, preceded six years by his wife Elizabeth. His body lay in state at the home of the Royal Academy in Somerset House, and he was buried in St. Paul's Cathedral, although not without a final controversy related to his nationality. The Bishop of Lincoln initially refused to allow West's burial because his parents had been Quakers and there was no proof of his baptism. Not until two attorneys interceded on behalf of the West family, with some creative legal arguments, did the bishop allow the burial, over two weeks later.¹⁷¹ Even in death, the issue of West's American heritage was central to his perception by others.

¹⁷¹ James Henry Henderson, the West family attorney, asked for assistance from a Dr. Adam, who argued that because West had “conformed to the usages of the church,” to refuse a man of his stature burial because of a lack of baptismal certificate would be poor church precedence, problematic for the bishop, and possible fuel to support the arguments of Dissenters. Farington, *Diary*, vol. 16, 5481-5482 (March 25, 1820), 5482 (March 26, 1820); Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 385-386. For details of the funeral itself, see Farington, *Diary*, vol. 16, 5484-5486 (March 29, 1820).

Chapter 2: Visions of Artistic Family: West and Charles Willson Peale

For much of his career, Benjamin West was best known for his monumental contemporary history paintings. Eminent art critic William Hazlitt joked upon viewing *Christ Healing the Sick* (fig. 2), which measured approximately seventeen by twenty-two feet, that if West was a great artist, he was “only great by the acre.”¹⁷² Nonetheless, West was also capable of capturing moving moments on a small scale. Several works from his most innovative period, the 1770s and early 1780s, when his sons were still children, demonstrate his intent to train them as artists. In his 1773 self-portrait with Raphael (fig. 20), West positions the boy behind him, watching as he sketches, Raphael literally learning over his master’s shoulder. The insinuation is that any young boy afforded such opportunity is destined for great things.

Similarly, one of West’s early students, noted family man Charles Willson Peale, also depicted his sons in optimistically tender ways. His best known image of any of his children is *Staircase Group (Portrait of Raphaelle Peale and Titian Ramsay Peale I)* (fig. 21), a 1795 trompe l’oeil double portrait of Raphaelle and Titian Ramsay Peale showing them climbing a twisting staircase while beckoning at the viewer. Although the meaning is less didactic than West’s portrait, showing the Peale children simply with the tools of art-making rather than at work or in a studio, the message remains the same: these are ascendant children, on the path to greatness.

¹⁷² Hazlitt, quoted in von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 235-36. This joke was often made at West’s expense. Gilbert Stuart once told a friend that West had asked the younger artist to begin a portrait of King George III because West was “busily employed upon one of his *ten-acre* pictures” at the time. Stuart, quoted in Dunlap, *The Arts of Design*, vol. 1, 212.

West and Peale: Young Artists and Young Fathers

When West's first child was born in April 1769, he and his wife Elizabeth named the boy Raphael Lamar West.¹⁷³ It was an unusual name for an Englishman in the eighteenth century, but slightly less so for one with Quaker heritage. While Benjamin West was not officially a Quaker, his parents were closely associated with and influenced by the group, and the West family lived in a predominantly Quaker region, outside of Philadelphia.¹⁷⁴ In his comprehensive overview of the Quaker migration to North America, David Hackett Fischer details the naming conventions of the Society of Friends in the Delaware Valley.¹⁷⁵ The Quaker tradition was to name their first-born children after either paternal or maternal grandparents, with the names of the father and mother often the next choices. West came from a line of Johns and Thomases going back at least four generations: his father John had named his son, Benjamin's half-brother, Thomas, after his father. Had Benjamin been an active Quaker it would have been reasonable for him to continue that tradition.¹⁷⁶

John and Sarah West had been raised as Quakers but were not officially members of a Quaker meeting,¹⁷⁷ and thus the names of their ten children were not recorded in any church rolls. The names of only three of their children – Benjamin, an

¹⁷³ Although he signed his works with his full birth name, Raphael West preferred to go by the nickname Ralph. Joseph Farington calls him Ralph West frequently in his *Diary*; see Farington, *Diary*, vol. 2, 377 (August 13, 1795); vol. 12, 4412-4414 (August 20, 1813) for examples.

¹⁷⁴ *The World of Benjamin West*, 10.

¹⁷⁵ See David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 419-603.

¹⁷⁶ Charles Henry Hart, "Benjamin West's Family. The American President of the Royal Academy of Arts Not a Quaker," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 32, no. 1 (Jan., 1908): 1-2.

¹⁷⁷ The term for an organization or congregation of Quakers.

older brother William and an older sister Rachel – are recorded by external sources.¹⁷⁸ William was also the name of John West’s brother, who accompanied him to America, and Rachel was the name of John’s mother. Since Benjamin was the youngest of ten children, with at least two and as many as eight older brothers or half-brothers, it would not be surprising if John and Sarah West had exhausted the roster of male family names prior to his birth. Regardless, the Society often turned to the Bible for names, so the name “Benjamin” fell squarely within Quaker onomastic traditions.¹⁷⁹ “Raphael” also referenced his father’s new affinity for Anglican practice, which West adopted “formally or informally” after his arrival in London,¹⁸⁰ while the boy’s middle name, “Lamar,” honored “a friend who had attended their wedding.”¹⁸¹ The name Raphael appears in the Book of Tobit, an Apocryphal text included in the King James Bible. Thus it was reasonable, if unusual, name to give to the son of a man who grew up surrounded by Quakers in the Delaware Valley and who now found himself among Anglicans in England.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ Charles Henry Hart provides the most detailed description of West’s family tree, which includes his brother William and sister Rachel. In addition, he discusses other claims to membership in the West family tree by his contemporaries, and identifies a number of other possible siblings: Sarah, Mary, Samuel, John, Joseph, and Elizabeth. John Galt also references a sister named Sally, which have been a nickname for one of the otherwise-suggested sisters, or a different one. As evident from the title of his article, Hart was determined to prove that while West came from a family of Quakers, he was incontrovertibly not one himself. Hart, “Benjamin West’s Family,” 10.

¹⁷⁹ Fischer, *Albion’s Seed*, 505. According to a study conducted by Fischer, “Benjamin” was the 8th most popular male name in Cheshire between 1680-1750 and the 9th most popular name in Derbyshire in the same time frame. “John” was the most popular male name in both counties. A majority of male Quaker names, and almost all female Quaker female names, were drawn from the Bible.

¹⁸⁰ Jules David Prown, “Benjamin West and the Use of Antiquity,” *American Art* 10, no. 2 (Summer, 1996): 35; Fordham, *British Art and the Seven Years’ War*, 213. For more on West’s Anglican practice in general, see Dillenberger, *Benjamin West*, especially 4-6.

¹⁸¹ Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 72.

¹⁸² It is also possible that one of Sarah Pearson or Elizabeth Shewell’s fathers or grandfathers were named Raphael, but very little information regarding those two family lineages has been preserved.

Whether the name Raphael existed in the West family tree prior to Raphael West is immaterial, because the name's true reference was the boy's father. West was dubbed the "American Raphael" in the early 1760s, and proudly maintained that mantle his entire life. It was a construction which was meant to identify his artistic genius and his singular presence as the greatest American artist who had ever lived – a position that he intended to hold well after his own death.

In eighteenth-century England, popular taste favored the Renaissance painter Raphael "as the first of Painters," above Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), and the other Old Masters as the epitome of the ideal artist.¹⁸³ Such an exalted view of Raphael added emphasis to West's nickname, signaling his position as America's most outstanding artist. Raphael West was not the first son of an artist to be given that name. The German-born Anton Raphael Mengs (1728-1779), whom West had met while in Italy and was ten years the American's elder, was given that prescient middle name by his father, Ismael Mengs (1688-1764), also a painter. Primarily known as an artist, Mengs was also a collector, connoisseur, and art theorist, although his role in influencing taste in Britain through the Grand Tour is often downplayed in favor of other German-speaking artists who also worked in London, such as Angelica Kauffmann, Henry Fuseli (1741-1825), and Johann Zoffany (1733-1810).¹⁸⁴ In West's first year in Rome he quickly became friends with

¹⁸³ Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, 198 (Discourse XI). Personal preference differed slightly between artists, and Reynolds himself held Michelangelo above all others, to the point where he ended his 1792 *Discourse* to the Royal Academy, delivered in failing health, with the statement "I should desire that the last words which I should pronounce in this Academy, and from this place, might be the name of—MICHEL ANGELO;" Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, 282.

¹⁸⁴ Steffi Roettgen, *Anton Raphael Mengs 1728-1779 and his British Patrons* (London: Zwemmer, 1993), 9.

Mengs, whom he called his “favourite master;”¹⁸⁵ certainly it would have been a transformative experience for the young American artist to fall under the wing of an artist at the leading edge of an artistic movement, the neoclassical, which enticed West and was becoming the focus of collecting in Britain.¹⁸⁶ The two may have bonded over their outsider status in Rome, and shared the stories of how each had made his way to the artistic center of the Italian peninsula.¹⁸⁷

Had Mengs also shared the history behind his name, West may not have followed the same path with his own son’s naming. Much like Raphael West, Anton Raphael Mengs was named with the express intention of determining the youth’s growth and career. By all accounts his father Ismael Mengs, a portraitist at the Royal Court of Dresden, was a horrific man. He fathered his four children, two boys and two girls, with Charlotte Bormann out of wedlock, and did his best to hide their existence from public view. He also projected his artistic goals onto his children, deciding that “all of them, regardless of sex or of personal wish or inclination, were to become famous artists.” Anton Raphael, the second son and third child, became the focus of Ismael Mengs’s dream. Just weeks after the boy’s birth, the father informed a friend that his son’s given name was “to declare before the world that he was to mature into an artist who would successfully combine the drawing of Raphael of

¹⁸⁵ West to Joseph Shippen, September 1, 1763, quoted in von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 445-446.

¹⁸⁶ For more on the relationship between West and Mengs, see von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 14-17, 445-446; Roettgen, *Anton Raphael Mengs 1728-1779*, 18, 110.

¹⁸⁷ Mengs was born in the provincial Bohemian town of Aussig (now the Czech Republic city of Ústí nad Labem), but the artist claimed to have been born in Dresden, where his father was employed. In fact, Ismael Mengs and mistress Charlotte Borman had traveled to Aussig, just across the border with Saxony, specifically so that Anton Raphael’s birth would not draw the attention of Church authorities, who presumably would not have been pleased to see the court painter – already viewed with skepticism as a Protestant with two illegitimate children – father another child out of wedlock. Thomas Pelzel, *Anton Raphael Mengs and Neoclassic[i]sm* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1979), 10-12.

Urbino with the color of Antonio Allegri da Corregio.”¹⁸⁸ Growing up, all four children were forced to remain indoors and receive artistic instruction from their father, whose motivation techniques usually included beatings and whippings for any errors. Mengs’s training techniques were effective, as Anton’s sisters Theresa Concordia (1725-1806/8) and Juliane Charlotte (1728-after 1789) each became proficient miniature painters, although eldest son Karl Moritz ran away and abandoned painting.¹⁸⁹ Luckily for Raphael West, he was born into a world with a much different outlook on children and the role of the father in the male child’s development, and to a much more nurturing father.

As if the connection between Raphael West and Benjamin West, the “American Raphael,” was not clear enough, the father continued the naming convention with his second son, Benjamin West, Jr. The reason for the Wests giving their second son his father’s name, rather than the first, makes sense in light of the name given to the firstborn son. Quaker onomastic conventions also supported the naming of a son after his father, usually after the names of both the maternal and paternal grandfathers were exhausted.¹⁹⁰ An expected sequence would have been for Benjamin West to name his third son after himself, not his second. Instead, both Raphael West and Benjamin West, Jr. are named after their father – the firstborn, Raphael, a reference to his father’s nickname, and the second, Benjamin Junior, his

¹⁸⁸ Pelzel, *Anton Raphael Mengs*, 13. According to one of his contemporaries, as a youth Mengs was forced to grow out his hair and wear it in the same style as Raphael. Pelzel, *Anton Raphael Mengs*, 28.

¹⁸⁹ For more on the specifics of Mengs’ childhood and training, and that of his siblings, see Pelzel, *Anton Raphael Mengs*, 13-23.

¹⁹⁰ Fischer, *Albion’s Seed*, 503-504. Benjamin is also a Biblical name, per Quaker tradition. As Jules Prown points out, Benjamin was the youngest and most favored son of Jacob, just as Benjamin West was the youngest and most favored son of John and Sarah West. Prown, “Benjamin West’s Family Picture,” 278-279.

father's given name.¹⁹¹ They are both named after the greatest artist of the most promising great artistic generation, in the eyes of their father: himself.¹⁹²

The Early Adventures of Charles Willson Peale

During the early years of Benjamin West's workshop in London his students were of the same generation as the master. One such pupil was Charles Willson Peale (1741-1827), a Marylander born in the small town of Chester on Kent Island, eighty-four miles southwest of West's family home in Springfield. Originally an apprentice saddlemaker, the gregarious Peale also demonstrated clever talent as a painter and in 1766 traveled from his home in Annapolis to London to train with West, with the goal of returning home to work as a portraitist. His trip abroad was financed by a group of Maryland businessmen who recognized an opportunity to encourage the development of a local progeny's skill in the high-demand genre of portraiture. In West, they recognized a means to encourage Peale to retain his American identity while still affording him the best European-style training possible.

Unlike West, who single-mindedly pursued painting from childhood, Charles Willson Peale was a polymath. For that reason William Dunlap had little positive to say about Peale as an artist in *The Arts of Design*, although he praised Peale's individual character in the course of a comprehensive listing of the artist's interests:

We shall sum up the trades, employments, and professions of Mr. Peale,

¹⁹¹ Benjamin Jr.'s name may pull triple duty, referring not just to his father and to the Biblical figure of Benjamin, but also to his godfather, Benjamin Franklin.

¹⁹² Establishing an artistic lineage through the naming of his sons also allowed West to establish a new lineage-family, an eighteenth-century structure in which families were established as notable through the mere fact of impetus desire to maintain the family name over time, trying the individual to a celebrated past and an anticipated future. The lineage-family was a way for untitled gentlemen to demonstrate their worthiness to associate with the aristocracy, a concept very familiar to West. Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England*, 92

somewhat as his biographer in the “Cabinet of Natural History” has done. He was a saddler; harnessmaker; clock and watchmakers; silversmith; painter in oil, crayons, and miniature; modeler in clay, wax, and plaster: he sawed his own ivory for his miniatures, moulded the glasses, and made the shagreen cases; he was a soldier; a legislator; a lecturer; a preserver of animals, — whose deficiencies he supplied by means of glass eyes and artificial limbs; he was a dentist — and he was, as his biographer truly says, “a mild, benevolent, and good man.”¹⁹³

Prior to his entry into West’s studio, Peale’s training had consisted largely of lessons from John Hesselius,¹⁹⁴ the son of Swedish-born painter Gustavus Hesselius.¹⁹⁵ The elder Hesselius emigrated to the United States in 1711 and worked in several locations, eventually settling in Philadelphia in 1735.¹⁹⁶ John Hesselius had left Philadelphia in the early 1750s to avoid competition from better-known American and European artists who were working in Pennsylvania. After working as an itinerant artist for several years, Hesselius eventually settled in Maryland’s Anne Arundel County in 1759 or 1760. He garnered significant local attention for his 1761 portraits of the children of wealthy planter Benedict Calvert, who became one of Peale’s supporters.¹⁹⁷ The next year, Peale approached Hesselius for artistic training, and the two men came to an agreement, with Peale “exchanging one of his best

¹⁹³ Dunlap, *The Arts of Design*, vol. 1, 162. In this passage Dunlap is quoting from John and Thomas Doughty, the introduction to *The Cabinet of Natural History and American Rural Sports* (1830).

¹⁹⁴ For more on Hesselius’s life and artistic style, see Richard K. Doud, “John Hesselius: Maryland Limner,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 5 (Jan., 1969): 129-153.

¹⁹⁵ Dunlap claimed that John Singleton Copley, rather than Hesselius, served as Peale’s primary instructor prior to his trip to study with West. Peale did meet with Copley during a 1765 trip to Boston and Newburyport, MA to execute several portraits, but at that point the Bostonian had yet to achieve the international fame brought on by his *A Boy with a Flying Squirrel*, and from all indications their primary interaction was Copley allowing Peale access to his private art collection rather than any direct lessons. Dunlap, *The Arts of Design*, vol. 1, 156-157, also 157 n1.

¹⁹⁶ Doud, “John Hesselius,” 129-131; Ann C. Van Devanter and Alfred V. Frankenstein, *American Self-Portraits, 1670-1973* (Washington, D.C.: International Exhibitions Foundation, 1974), 18.

¹⁹⁷ Doud, “John Hesselius,” 132.

saddles with its complete furniture” for a trio of “lessons” in Hesselius’s Annapolis studio.¹⁹⁸ Hesselius allowed Peale to complete a portion of a commissioned portrait he was working on, and view him at work on two others, which was the extent of the formal interaction between the two.¹⁹⁹ Peale’s later work does not reflect the “tilted features and ‘almond eyes’ that marked much of Hesselius’s work” at the time Peale was engaged with him.²⁰⁰ The more experienced artist had already reached the maturity of his style, while Peale’s career was in its infancy.

Although John Hesselius was a capable and popular artist, his educational experience was limited to North America, albeit at the hands of his Swedish father. This once-removed relationship with European artistic training was insufficient for an American-born artist in the mid-eighteenth century like Peale who sought to advance in his profession. A logical next step would have been lessons with an artist who was born or trained on the Continent, such as William Williams or John Wollaston; this was the path West had taken just a few years prior. Instead of continuing to seek additional training, however, Peale continued his work as a saddlemaker, which promised more financial stability. However, he did not entirely abandon his artistic inclinations. On April 7, 1763 Peale placed an advertisement in the *Maryland Gazette* for the new address of his saddlemaking shop in Annapolis, which also informed customers that “Painting of Signs is likewise performed at the same place.”²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ Peale to Rembrandt Peale, October 28, 1812, in Miller, Hart, and Appel, *Peale Papers*, vol. 1, 33.

¹⁹⁹ Doud, “John Hesselius,” 129; Miller, Hart, and Ward, *Peale Papers*, vol. 5, 16-17.

²⁰⁰ Charles Coleman Sellers, *Charles Willson Peale* (New York: Scribner, 1969), 33; Doud, “John Hesselius,” 137.

²⁰¹ Miller, Hart, and Appel, *Peale Papers*, vol. 1, 33-34.

Although business went well for Peale at first, when several of his creditors demanded repayment at the same time,²⁰² he briefly fled Maryland, traveling north to Boston.²⁰³ While in that city Peale “visited the studio of John Singleton Copley [where the] hospitable artist gave him advice and paintings to copy.”²⁰⁴ The Bostonian’s acceptance of a would-be rival demonstrates a sense of camaraderie among fellow American artists that would typify future examples of professional charity,²⁰⁵ even if, as Jules David Prown as noted, “the influence of John Hesselius and John Singleton Copley as reflected in Peale’s earliest surviving portraits does not seem to have been profound or lasting.”²⁰⁶ Charles Coleman Sellers promotes the idea of Peale as an artistic chameleon early in his career, picking up techniques and compositions from an artist and then dropping them as soon as the next example comes along, a process which only ended with his arrival in West’s studio in 1767.²⁰⁷

²⁰² Miller, Hart, and Appel, *Peale Papers*, vol. 1, 37; Edgar P. Richardson, “Charles Willson Peale and His World,” in *Charles Willson Peale and His World*, ed. Edgar P. Richardson, Brooke Hindle, and Lillian B. Miller (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1982), 27. Peale borrowed funds to set up his Annapolis shop. Two events in quick succession in 1764 resulted in Peale’s default. First, his business partner left with most of the profits, forcing Peale to take on the business’s debts. Second, Peale was active in local politics, and when a candidate he supported won Annapolis’s seat in the state Assembly, several of Peale’s creditors who supported the opposing candidate demanded repayment as revenge.

²⁰³ Miller, Hart, and Appel, *Peale Papers*, vol. 1 38-44.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 44. According to Richardson et al. Peale also visited a gallery of John Smibert’s works. Smibert had been dead for over a decade, but his nephew still ran a color shop and sold prints after Smibert’s copies of Italian paintings. While in Boston, Peale purchased prints after works by both Smibert and Reynolds.

²⁰⁵ Peale’s encounter in with Copley in 1765 was after Copley had sent his *A Boy with a Flying Squirrel* to West but before it had received overwhelming praise at the 1766 Society of Artists exhibition. Thus, the cachet Copley possessed for Peale in 1765 was as a talented local artist accustomed to the tastes of the area, rather than as a master artist.

²⁰⁶ Jules David Prown, “Charles Willson Peale in London,” in *New Perspectives on Charles Willson Peale: A 250th Anniversary Celebration*, eds. Lillian B. Miller and David C. Ward (Pittsburgh, PA: Published for the Smithsonian Institution by the University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991), 29.

²⁰⁷ Charles Coleman Sellers, *Portraits and Miniatures by Charles Willson Peale* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1952), 5.

In the course of a protracted return from Boston to Maryland, financed almost entirely through portrait commissions,²⁰⁸ Peale was first introduced to John Beale Bordley, who saw fit to organize the group of backers which sent the young artist to London to study with West. Thus, Peale was afforded an opportunity not available to American artists just a few years prior, the opportunity to train with a well-regarded fellow American with European training. West's location in London was an added boon, providing access to the larger sphere of the art world rather than a limited experience filtered through one individual.

Peale with West in London

Peale embarked on his voyage to London in December 1766, arriving in the city in February 1767. He stayed for just over two years, leaving in March 1769. The voyage was arranged by his friend Bordley, a lawyer and amateur painter who on occasion executed landscapes with Peale. Sellers calls Bordley "Peale's dearest friend," and identifies him as a lifelong supporter of Peale who constantly directed patrons to the artist until his own death in 1804.²⁰⁹ Bordley was a member of the Governor's Council and enlisted ten local businessmen to underwrite their fellow Marylander's training.²¹⁰ The financiers acted in the aim of the improvement of

²⁰⁸ From Boston Peale traveled south to Virginia to reunite with his family, and spent his time in Virginia completing further portrait commissions while waiting for his representative to finish negotiations with his creditors in Maryland. Miller, Hart, and Appel, *Peale Papers*, vol. 1, 44-45.

²⁰⁹ Sellers, *Portraits and Miniatures by Charles Willson Peale*, 36-37.

²¹⁰ Robert J.H. Janson-LaPalme, "Generous Marylanders: Paying for Peale's Study in England," in *New Perspectives on Charles Willson Peale: A 250th Anniversary Celebration*, eds. Lillian B. Miller and David C. Ward (Published for the Smithsonian Institution by the University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991). 11-27; Also see Karol A. Schmiegel, "Encouragement Exceeding Expectation: The Lloyd-Cadwalader Patronage of Charles Willson Peale," *Winterthur Portfolio* 12 (1977); Miller, Hart, and Appel, *Peale Papers*, vol. 1, 57-58. In addition to Bordley, the other subscribers were Benedict Calvert, a lawyer named Charles Carroll from Annapolis, his cousin Charles Carroll of Carrollton,

painting in Maryland and in the promotion, after Peale's return, of Annapolis as a cultural challenger to Philadelphia.²¹¹ They demanded no repayment in terms of money or the promise of future portraits, although Peale would execute portraits of a number of them or their families upon his return.²¹² As Robert J.H. Janson-LaPalme has noted, "no other budding student of art in colonial America received the same broad-based, generous patronage prior to 1790,"²¹³ including West. In return, Peale was glad to work with West, whom he considered as a better colorist and stronger artist in general than any of his English-born contemporaries.²¹⁴

In order to gain an audience with West, Peale traveled to London with an introduction letter from Chief Justice, William Allen, who had financed West's voyage to Italy seven years prior. West "observed that it was the best reference he could have brought but that being an American was recommendation enough."²¹⁵ The two men, Peale and West, became fast friends and associates. West arranged for Peale's lodgings in London near his own home, and when it became apparent in late 1767 that Peale would soon run out of money, West offered to house the younger man

Daniel Dulaney, Daniel of St. Thomas Jenifer, Robert Lloyd, Thomas Ringgold, Horatio Sharpe, Thomas Sprigg, and Benjamin Tasker. Several of Peale's subscribers distinguished themselves in nascent American politics: both Charles Carrolls were delegates to the Continental Congress, and Charles Carroll of Carrollton was a signatory of the Declaration of Independence; Jenifer was a delegate to the Constitutional Convention; and Sprigg served as in the House of Representatives.

²¹¹ Janson-LaPalme, "Generous Marylanders," 16-19.

²¹² This is counter to Dunlap's assertion that Peale's passage was paid for by subscription which he would repay through portraits executed upon his return. Dunlap, *The Arts of Design*, vol. 1, 157.

²¹³ Janson-LaPalme, "Generous Marylanders," 11.

²¹⁴ D. Evans, *Benjamin West and His American Students*, 37; Sellers, *Charles Willson Peale*, 57-58.

²¹⁵ E. Richardson, "Charles Willson Peale and His World," 29.

for six months, before Peale's sponsors sent him additional funds.²¹⁶ In addition to working with West as an assistant, Peale was the West household's jack-of-all-trades: the teacher joked that when not painting, Peale was his personal locksmith.²¹⁷

Artistically, Peale's primary interest in medium and subject matter was miniatures and portraiture, rather than West's preferred history painting.²¹⁸ Peale had dabbled in miniatures while in North America, and continued his exploration of that mode in London for financial reasons, to help cover additional expenses not covered by his subscribers' donations.²¹⁹ West was not an expert in miniature painting, but nonetheless encouraged Peale's pursuit, and reached out to contemporaries well-versed in the medium to provide his student with additional training,²²⁰ later doing the same when Peale sought to learn the art of sculpture.²²¹ In a letter to John Beale Bordley shortly after Peale's arrival in England, the young artist praised West's work and described the contents of his studio, then noted that "Mr. West is intimate with

²¹⁶ Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 99.

²¹⁷ Dunlap, *The Arts of Design*, vol. 1, 158.

²¹⁸ Peale's patrons did not send him to London to train as a history painter, which they occasionally reminded him in letters. When Peale described his interest in history painting in a 1767 letter to Charles Carroll, Barrister, the lawyer responded by reminding Peale "few arrive at a High Point of Perfection in [history painting] and indeed in this part of the World few have a Taste for it and very few can go thro' the Expence of giving that Encouragement that such an artist would Desire." Carroll to Charles Willson Peale, October 26, 1767, in Miller, Hart, and Appel, *Peale Papers*, vol. 1, 70-71.

²¹⁹ D. Evans, *Benjamin West and His American Students*, 39; Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 77. West had dabbled in miniature painting prior to traveling to Europe, executing the "first miniature known to have been painted in watercolor on ivory by an American-born artist." Robin Jaffee Frank, "Telling Tales: Three Small Portraits Punctuate a Bigger Story," *Yale University Art Gallery Bulletin* (2001): 33

²²⁰ Miller, Hart, and Appel, *Peale Papers*, vol. 1, 50, n9. We do not know who these miniature artists were, as Peale never names them in his letters and there are no other sources which provide any information on the subject. Leading miniaturists in London in the late 1760s included Samuel Finney, Richard Cosway, John Smart, and Richard Crosse. West knew all four from their membership in the Society of Artists. The first three seem the most likely candidates to have provided Peale additional instruction, while Crosse, who was deaf and mute, is less likely. For more on miniature painting in England in the late eighteenth century, see Coombs, *The Portrait Miniature in England*, 84-103.

²²¹ D. Evans, *Benjamin West and His American Students*, 39, 44.

the Best Miniature Painter [and] intends to borrow some Miniature Pieces for me to copy privately as he does nothing in that Way himself.”²²² In 1768 Peale exhibited a double portrait of Bordley’s sons Matthias and Thomas (fig. 22) at the annual Society of Artists exhibition.²²³ The two boys had recently traveled to London for education at Eton, where the older Thomas would die in 1771 of pulmonary tuberculosis. Peale’s double portrait possesses the strong draftsmanship, and weak coloring and composition, which characterized American artistic output in the mid-eighteenth century. The two boys are posed in front of a table with an open book in front of them, a bust of Minerva watching over them and St. Paul’s Cathedral visible in the back right. Peale situates the heads of the Bordley boys and Minerva on the same plane and dividing them by the strategic placement of a pilaster. The arrangement is puzzling, as the pilaster’s base is visible, making it appear to terminate either in mid-air or along a solid ledge behind the boys. The bust of Minerva paradoxically rests against the ledge while also level with Matthias and Thomas’s torsos. Furthermore, Thomas Bordley’s outfit is the same shade of gray as the bust, pilaster, and table, exacerbating the confusion. Improving his design abilities was one of Peale’s main concerns while studying under West, and one he addressed in his years in London.²²⁴

Benjamin West gave the same consideration to Peale’s pursuit of portraiture as he did with miniatures. West was no stranger to portraiture, particularly from the

²²² Peale to John Beale Bordley, March 1767, in *Miller, Hart, and Appel, Peale Papers*, vol. 1, 47-48. The identity of this particular miniature painter is unknown. In the letter Peale also describes meeting with Joshua Reynolds and Francis Cotes, and states that West’s work is better than both of them.

²²³ Sellers, *Portraits and Miniatures*, 38. Peale entered three miniatures in the exhibition, but the portrait of the Bordley children is the only one extant.

²²⁴ D. Evans, *Benjamin West and His American Students*, 39-42.

beginning of his professional career through the mid-1780s.²²⁵ During the length of Peale's stay in London West executed several portraits of American sitters, notably *Colonel Guy Johnson and Karonghyontye (Captain David Hill)*²²⁶ (fig. 23) and *Governor James Hamilton* (fig. 24), for which Peale posed for the governor's hand the day he arrived on West's doorstep.²²⁷ However, West's artistic passion was history painting, and he had neither the time nor inclination to provide Peale the level of training in portraiture that the student desired and deserved. In the same letter to Bordley from March 1767 discussed above, Peale indicated an understanding between him and West that his artistic education should include consultation with numerous additional sources:

I...am now at my Studies with Mr. West who gives me Encouragement to persue my Plan of Paintg. and Promises me all the Instruction he is capable of giving. I have been to See Reynolds & Cotes who are called the Best Painters and in my Humble Oppinion Mr. Wests works Exceeds them all by far—he Paints a great deal of History Latterly and is Excessively fond of it and there is no other Eminent in that way at present which leaves a great opening for him— he has two Pieces Ready for the Exhibision...they are Painted in a Masterly Stile and in a Different Manner from Common Oil Paint:g which gives great luster & Strength to the Coulering— a method or art no Painter here Else knows anything of—²²⁸

As Peale notes, West encouraged his friend to pursue his individual goals of painting while offering “all the Instruction he is capable of giving,” rather than all the instruction Peale is capable of receiving.²²⁹ Peale also excitedly mentions West's

²²⁵ Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 24.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 523-524.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 514, 516; Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 76.

²²⁸ Peale to John Beale Bordley, March 1767, in Miller, Hart, and Appel, *Peale Papers*, vol. 1, 47-48.

²²⁹ In the eighteenth century, a measure of true friendship between artists of different standing or talent level was both the free giving of advice, and the freedom of the friend to accept or reject the advice.

technical approach to painting and his fascination with color theory, and how they differed from mainstream English art.

The relationship between Benjamin West and Charles Willson Peale was warm, and Peale was present during some of the most crucial moments in West's career. Peale often posed for West, and did so as the eponymous subject of *The Departure of Regulus* in 1769 (fig. 25), the first work commissioned from West by his new patron King George III, placing Peale at the heart of an important shift in West's canvases.²³⁰ At the same time, Peale began to execute major portraits on his own,²³¹ and when he returned to Annapolis later in 1769 he quickly established himself as the most popular portraitist in the mid-Atlantic region, and perhaps second only to John Singleton Copley in North America. Shortly after Peale's return to Maryland, he sent a now-lost letter to West describing his enhanced opportunities for commissions; West wrote in return to say that "it gave me great pleasure to find you ware safe on the other side the water—and that there was so faire a Prospect Presented to you in Painting."²³² Meanwhile, Peale, not content to remain in Annapolis, planned a move to the larger metropolis of Philadelphia,²³³ and reached

Otherwise, the relationship was between master and student, not friends. Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England*, 243-244.

²³⁰ D. Evans, *Benjamin West and His American Students*, 43; Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 87-90.

²³¹ He was commissioned to execute a portrait of William Pitt the Younger by Edmund Jenings, a friend of John Beale Bordley who intended to donate the work to the Westmoreland County, Virginia courthouse. The resulting allegorical image, which depicted Pitt as a Roman orator, was also engraved by Peale, who had sought to expand his artistic abilities as wide as possible so as to profit from them upon his return home. D. Evans, *Benjamin West and His American Students*, 44.

²³² West to Charles Willson Peale, June 21, 1770, in Miller, Hart, and Appel, *Peale Papers*, vol. 1, 81.

²³³ As Peale wrote to John Cadwalader: "I am not certain that I shall not See Philadelphia this Winter for I have a great desire to Settle there, and at leasure Times be a Visitor in Maryland to do the Business I have here." Peale to John Cadwalader, September 7, 1770, in Miller, Hart, and Appel, *Peale*

out to Copley again, enclosing in his missive a mezzotint print of his portrait of William Pitt the Younger, a technique he had learned in London.²³⁴

For most of his time in London, Peale had West's undivided attention as an instructor. Matthew Pratt, Abraham Delanoy, and Francis Hopkinson studied under West prior to Peale's arrival in London; Pratt for approximately three years, Hopkinson two, and Delanoy one, and all three left England in 1767 prior to Peale's arrival. West's next known American student, Henry Benbridge, did not arrive in London until late 1769, giving Peale the time and space to profit from his master's full attention and for the two men to develop a lasting friendship. An unheralded but crucial aspect of Peale's relationship with West, as Dorinda Evans has pointed out, is the younger artist's presence in West's company during the elder artist's presidency of the Society of Artists and participation in the creation of the Royal Academy of Arts.²³⁵ Several decades after Peale returned to America he helped found the Columbianum, a short-lived organization based in Philadelphia which was closely modeled after the Royal Academy and offered "classes in drawing from casts and living models, a library, an annual exhibition of works by modern artists, and lectures by the president and professors of the academy."²³⁶

Papers, vol.1, 82. In fact, it took Peale until November of 1775 to begin shifting his family to Philadelphia, a move not completed until early 1776 after the birth of Angelica Kauffman Peale.

²³⁴ Copley to Charles Willson Peale, December 17, 1770, in Miller, Hart, and Appel, *Peale Papers*, vol. 1, 85-86. While Peale continued to work in mezzotint throughout his life, his initial efforts were largely his best due to the high level of access to resources in England relative to what was available in America upon his return. Wendy Wick Reaves, "'His Excellency Genl Washington': Charles Willson Peale's Long-Lost Mezzotint Discovered," *American Art Journal* 24, no. 1/2 (Jan., 1992): 45.

²³⁵ D. Evans, *Benjamin West and His American Students*, 46.

²³⁶ D. Evans, *Benjamin West and His American Students*, 46; Lillian B. Miller, Sidney Hart, and David C. Ward, eds., *The Selected Papers of Charles Willson Peale and His Family, Volume 2: Charles*

Peale was also present around the West household during Raphael West's childhood. It therefore should be no surprise that Peale emulated his mentor when it came to naming conventions for his children, and in particular naming his first son born after his return to America after the same artist, though with a different spelling.²³⁷ Raphaelle Peale (1774-1825) was the fifth child of Peale and his first wife, Rachel Brewer, and their first to survive past the age of two. Peale continued the same convention by naming most of his subsequent children after great artists.²³⁸ Percentages come into play because, compared to West, Peale had to come up with a great deal more names – he had eleven children with Brewer, whom he married in 1762 and who died in 1790, and another six with his second wife, Elizabeth DePeyster, whom he married in 1791 and who died in 1804.²³⁹ This predestination through naming also drew Dunlap's rancor: "Mr. Peale, among his many whims, had that of naming his numerous family after illustrious characters of bygone ages, particularly painters. A dangerous and sometimes ludicrous experiment."²⁴⁰

Willson Peale: The Artist in His Museum, 1791-1810, Part 2, (New Haven, CT and London: Published for The National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, by Yale University Press, 1988), 101-103.

²³⁷ Raphaelle's name is often spelled "Raphael," even by his own father, but the correct spelling of the child is the one utilized throughout this text.

²³⁸ Once Peale publicly retired from painting in 1794, he began naming his children after scientists in recognition of his newfound interest in science and public history.

²³⁹ A concise genealogy of Charles Willson Peale and his children may be found in Miller, Hart, and Appel, *Peale Papers*, vol. 1, xlv-xlvi. Children born to Peale and Rachel Brewer were: Margaret Jane, James Willson, Eleanor, Margaret Van Bordley, Raphaelle, Angelica Kauffmann, Rembrandt, Titian Ramsay, Rubens, Sophonisba Anguisciola, and Rosalba Carriera Peale. Born to Peale and Elizabeth DePeyster were Vandyke, Charles Linnaeus, Benjamin Franklin, Sybilla Miriam, Titian Ramsay (II), and Elizabeth DePeyster Peale. Peale had no children with his third wife, Hannah Moore, whom he married in 1805 and who died in 1821. Margaret Jane, Eleanor, Margaret Van Bordley, and Vandyke Peale all died in infancy; James Willson and Rosalba Carriera Peale both died before the age of two. After DePeyster's death, Peale married again, to Hannah Moore, in 1805. Peale was sixty-four years old at the time of their wedding, and Moore fifty. The two had no children together.

²⁴⁰ Dunlap, *The Arts of Design*, vol. 1, 162.

Fathers' Images of Sons

Whereas West preceded Peale in traveling to London, the younger Peale preceded his older counterpart in fatherhood. By the time Peale arrived in London in 1767, he was the proud father of James Willson, born in 1765. Unfortunately for the Peale family, James would die in 1767 while his father was studying abroad with West. Such tragedy was not unknown to Charles Willson Peale and Rachel Brewer, whose first child, Margaret Jane, perished shortly after her birth in 1763. Nonetheless, until news of James's death reached Peale, the young man was able to share in the state of fatherhood with his mentor. West made good on his son's name by training young Raphael as an artist, and Peale would do the same with each of the children he named after artists between 1774 and his public retirement from art in 1794.²⁴¹

Benjamin West's *The Artist and His Son Raphael*

The self-portrait of West with Raphael from 1773 (see fig. 20) reveals the father's conception of his relationship with his son. The circular composition presents the elder West at work on a sketch, his eyes momentarily fixed on the viewer. Over West's left shoulder, a seven-year-old Raphael rests his chin on his father's back and peers at the sketchbook. Of Benjamin, Raphael, and the viewer, only the son pays attention to the image on the page. His attentiveness to his father's work signals the extent to which Raphael has already been indoctrinated as an artist. Artistic training

²⁴¹ Peale's marriage to Elizabeth DePeyster in 1791 heralded in a new approach for Peale to naming and raising children. The first son born to Peale and DePeyster, in 1791, was named Vandyke, after the Flemish artist, while the second, born in 1794, was named Charles Linnaeus, after the influential scientist. Rather than continue to train all of his children as artists, Peale began to train them in a multitude of trades, so as to encourage their individual development and forestall competition amongst each other. Lillian B. Miller, "Charles Willson Peale: A Life of Harmony and Purpose," in *Charles Willson Peale and His World*, ed. Edgar P. Richardson, Brooke Hindle, and Lillian B. Miller (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1982), 196-197.

within families was a common occurrence in North America, with its dearth of trained artists and trained art instructors. Gustavus Hesselius was the primary instructor to his son John, and the English-born Peter Pelham (ca. 1695-1751) trained both his son Henry Pelham and stepson John Singleton Copley. James Claypoole, Sr. (1720/21-c. 1784) provided training to his nephew Matthew Pratt and to his son-in-law James Peale (1749-1831), the latter of whom had first studied with his older brother Charles Willson Peale.²⁴² To be related to an artist was to have access to a level of instruction difficult to find in North America in the eighteenth century.

The Artist and His Son Raphael is not a playful work depicting a boy and his father, but an image of a teacher instructing a student, who simply happen to be father and son. There is an aspect of tenderness in the way Raphael rests against his father's shoulder, but which does not placate the intensity of his stare directed toward the page. At the same time, Raphael takes a more active role in the double portrait than may be expected of a seven-year-old, even in an artistic family. Conceptually, *The Artist and His Son Raphael* is a pendant to an earlier double portrait of Raphael with his mother, Elizabeth (fig. 26), which West first executed in 1770 and then copied in 1773. Whereas the image of Raphael West at the age of four with his mother clearly references the Renaissance Raphael's *Madonna della Sedia* (fig. 27),²⁴³ the later double portrait is the artist's invention. The pairing argues for the importance of Benjamin West in the development of his son's life. As Kate Redford has pointed out, in *The Artist's Wife Elizabeth West and Their Son Raphael*, Raphael is clad in the

²⁴² Poesch, "The Colonial Artist, 1700-1776," 66

²⁴³ Ronald Cohen, "A Benjamin West Discovery: A Missing Portrait of the Painter's Wife and Son Identified," *Apollo Magazine* 133, no. 349 (Mar., 1991): 171.

traditional gown worn by all children during early childhood, while in *The Artist and His Son Raphael*, the boy wears distinctly masculine clothing.²⁴⁴ Raphael's education has become his father's responsibility, depicted through the change of the boy's attire.

Around the age of six, young boys underwent a rite of passage known as breeching which marked the status change from child to proto-adult.²⁴⁵ West mentions Raphael's own ascension to those ranks, which occurred earlier than usual and not long after the completion of *The Artist's Wife Elizabeth West and Their Son Raphael*, in a letter to Peale: "My little Boy that was when you ware hare is now become a man he is in Breches and gos to School."²⁴⁶ Prior to breeching, small boys were dressed identically to small girls, in petticoats, skirts, or dress-like robes. For example, in John Singleton Copley's 1776/77 portrait of his family (see fig. 18), his son John (later Baron Lyndhurst) wears the same style of petticoat as his three sisters, and the petticoat itself was likely handed down from his older sister Betsy. However, whereas the attire for females in the mid-eighteenth century remained essentially the same throughout their lives, undergoing only modest changes and decorative enhancements from childhood to adulthood, boys were marked as different once they were given breeches to wear. At this stage males existed in a liminal state, on the path to masculine adulthood but still subordinate to adult males.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁴ Retford, *The Art of Domestic Life*, 138.

²⁴⁵ For a broad discussion on breeching and rites of passage, see Karin Calvert, "Children in American Family Portraiture, 1670 to 1810," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (Jan., 1982), 92-94.

²⁴⁶ West to Charles Willson Peale, June 21, 1770, in Miller, Hart, and Appel, *Peale Papers*, vol. 1, 81.

²⁴⁷ Calvert, "Children in American Family Portraiture," 94-95. Margaretta Lovell discusses how this shift in understanding of the status of male and female children, and in their clothing, was expressed on the canvas in Lovell, *Art in a Season of Revolution*, 153-156.

Charles Willson Peale's *The Staircase Group*

Young Raphael West is a subordinate figure in *The Artist and His Son Raphael*, but he has matured and passed from the realm of his mother to that of his father. Years later Charles Willson Peale depicted two of his sons engaged in another rite of passage, from student to professional artist, while simultaneously marking the shift of his primary vocation from artist to museum director, in *Staircase Group (Portrait of Raphaelle Peale and Titian Ramsay Peale I)* from 1795 (see fig. 21). By the mid-1790s Charles Willson Peale had successfully established himself as a portraitist in two states, served as a member of the Philadelphia state legislature, and fathered fourteen of his eventual seventeen children. He also expressed an interest in the natural sciences, and beginning in the previous decade had begun collecting specimens of plants, animals, and minerals for display in a museum of natural history, which would take up much of the space previously inhabited by his gallery. Officially called the Philadelphia Museum, the institution was known colloquially as Peale's Museum. It was not the first natural history collection in Philadelphia, let alone the United States of America,²⁴⁸ but it was an early successful example of the stand-alone, systematically organized museum which was becoming popular in London and

²⁴⁸ That appellation belongs to Pierre Eugene du Simitière's American Museum, which preceded Peale's Museum in Philadelphia by approximately four years. For more on du Simitière's American Museum, see Martin Levey, "The First American Museum of Natural History," *Isis* 42, no. 1 (Apr., 1951): 10-12; William John Potts, "Du Simitière, Artist, Antiquary, and Naturalist, Projector of the First American Museum, with Some Extracts from His Note-Book," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 13, no. 3 (Oct., 1889): 341-375. For more on Peale's Museum, see Charles Coleman Sellers, *Mr. Peale's Museum: Charles Willson Peale and the First Popular Museum of Natural Science and Art* (New York: Norton, 1980); Sidney Hart and David C. Ward, "The Waning of an Enlightenment Ideal: Charles Willson Peale's Philadelphia Museum, 1790-1820," in *New Perspectives on Charles Willson Peale: A 250th Anniversary Celebration*, eds. Lillian B. Miller and David C. Ward (Pittsburgh, PA: Published for the Smithsonian Institution by the University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991), 219-235.

elsewhere in Europe.²⁴⁹ Peale announced the opening of his museum with an advertisement in the July 7, 1786 issue of the *Pennsylvania Packet* that stated in part:

MR. PEALE, ever desirous to please and entertain the Public, will make part of his House a Repository for Natural Curiosities— The Public he hopes will thereby be gratified by in the sight of many of the Wonderful Works of Nature which are now closeted and but seldom seen. The several Articles will be classed and arranged according to their several species; and for the greater ease to the Curious, on each piece will be inscribed the place from whence it came, and the name of the Donor, unless forbid, with such other information as may be necessary.²⁵⁰

Peale initially displayed these natural objects “at the end of my Gallery of portraits of Illustrious personages.”²⁵¹ He expanded on his purpose in the creation of this museum in a letter to his friend George Washington, noting: “I have lately undertaken to form a Museum and have acquired the means of preserving in the natural forms, Birds, Beasts and Fish, my Intention is to collect every thing that is curious of this Country, and to arrange them in the best manner I am able, to make the Collection amusing and In[s]tructive...”²⁵² Peale’s intention was to devote his full attention and financial resources to the operation of the museum, something not possible at its inception.²⁵³ This placed a heavy strain on him, as he attempted to work as a portraitist while adding to his collection, either by placing or responding to newspaper advertisements

²⁴⁹ Miller, Hart, and Appel, *Peale Papers*, vol. 1, 446; Richard D. Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1978), 28-33.

²⁵⁰ *Pennsylvania Packet*, July 7, 1786, quoted in Miller, Hart, and Appel, *Peale Papers*, vol. 1, 448.

²⁵¹ Peale to Christopher Richmond, October 22, 1786, in Miller, Hart, and Appel, *Peale Papers*, vol. 1, 457.

²⁵² Peale to George Washington, December 31, 1786, in Miller, Hart, and Appel, *Peale Papers*, vol. 1, 464.

²⁵³ Miller, Hart, and Appel, *Peale Papers*, vol. 1, 447.

regarding the sale of curiosities,²⁵⁴ trading items with fellow collectors in the United States and abroad, or going into the field to hunt local animal and plant specimens.²⁵⁵ The artist lamented his ensuing decline in commissions in a letter to his friend Christopher Richmond in October 1786: “I have left of painting in miniature, lowered my price in the larger portraits in order to fill up that space of time which would have been spent in the other branch and James [Peale, Charles Willson Peale’s younger brother and business partner] paints miniatures at 3 guineas each Now if we do not get bussiness times will be very hard for us.”²⁵⁶ Indeed, money was so tight for the Peale family in the winter of 1786 that on multiple occasions Peale was forced to borrow coal to heat his house,²⁵⁷ and the artist sought to generate additional income through “the making [of] Mezzotinto prints from [his] collection of portraits of Illustrious Personages,”²⁵⁸ still on display alongside his specimens and curiosities.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁴ The *Peale Papers* include a series of letters Peale wrote to his friends and collectors who had items Peale desired or who could put him in touch with individuals who did. See Peale to Benjamin Rush, July 31, 1786; Peale to John Beale Bordley, August 22, 1786; Peale to David Ramsay, October 15, 1786; Peale to Christopher Richmond, October 22, 1786; Peale to David Ramsay, November 1786; in Miller, Hart, and Appel, *Peale Papers*, vol. 1, 450-451, 451-453, 456-457, 457-459, 459-460.

²⁵⁵ David Brigham, “‘Ask the Beasts, and They Shall Teach Thee’: The Human Lesson of Charles Willson Peale’s Natural History Displays,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 59, no. 2/3 (Jan., 1996), 187-188.

²⁵⁶ Peale to Christopher Richmond, October 22, 1786, in Miller, Hart, and Appel, *Peale Papers*, vol. 1 458. Several years later, Peale had become so engrossed in organizing the museum that he felt it necessary to make an announcement in *Dunlap’s American Daily Advertiser* on December 3, 1793 that he was in fact still an active portraitist in seek of commissions. See Miller, Hart, and Ward, *Peale Papers*, vol. 2, part 1, 73.

²⁵⁷ Peale to John Swanwick, December 13, 1786, Miller, Hart, and Appel, *Peale Papers*, vol. 1, 463.

²⁵⁸ Peale to John David Ramsay, February 22, 1787, in Miller, Hart, and Appel, *Peale Papers*, vol. 1, 470.

²⁵⁹ With his advanced training in painting miniatures, one possibility for Peale would have been to continue executing portraits in that genre, as presumably he would have been able to command more per commission than the three guineas his brother James Peale earned for a work. However, Peale took great care to not compete with his brother, who was in even worse financial straits. Several years later

After several years of struggles Peale's Museum became self-sustaining in the 1790s, as the taste for such displays of specimens and natural objects grew in the United States and abroad.²⁶⁰ Not content with this accomplishment, Peale also played a major role in the 1794 establishment of the Columbianum academy, a school for fine arts and artists' association based out of Philadelphia.²⁶¹ With the museum and academy occupying his attention, Peale made a public display of stepping back from his artistic practice with a notice in the Philadelphia paper *Dunlap and Claypoole's American Daily Advertiser* on April 24, 1794:

CHARLES W. PEALE respectfully informs the Public that his time is so engrossed by his Museum, that he finds it necessary that he should bid adieu to Portrait Painting, when he shall have finished such pieces as he is engaged for. It is his fixed determination to encrease the subjects of the Museum with all his powers, whilst life and health will admit it.

He recommends his Sons *Raphael* and *Rembrandt* as Portrait Painters, whose likenesses, and the excellency of their colouring, he presumes to hope and believe, will give general satisfaction. They have a mode of colouring that will stand the test of time,— which, unfortunately, Peale himself was deficient in, in the earlier time of his painting.²⁶²

Thus, Peale simultaneously abandons portraiture himself and places two young men with familiar names into the public sphere as alternatives. At the time of the

when the older brother began painting miniatures again he largely took commissions in New York and Maryland, leaving the Philadelphia market to James. Sellers, *Portraits and Miniatures*, 15.

²⁶⁰ Encouraging Peale's shift from portraitist to museum director was the 1796 arrival in Philadelphia of Gilbert Stuart, who visited the city in order to capture George Washington's likeness during a session of Congress and stayed until 1803. Richard McLanathan, *Gilbert Stuart* (New York: Abrams in Association with the National Museum of Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1986), 81-114; Mount, *Gilbert Stuart*, 222-223; Carrie Rebora Barratt and Ellen G. Miles, *Gilbert Stuart* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004), 129-132.

²⁶¹ See Miller, Hart, and Ward, *Peale Papers*, vol. 2, part 1, 103-109 for the Association of Artists in America's resolutions to form the Columbianum academy.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 91. An additional, unstated reason for Peale's withdrawal from artistic creation may have been the appearance the previous year of Gilbert Stuart in Philadelphia. Although Stuart was not to stay in that city long, Peale may have recognized his inability to compete with Stuart as mature portraitists and backed off.

advertisement Raphaelle Peale was twenty-one-years old, and Rembrandt sixteen. Also training as an artist at the same time was fifteen-year-old Titian Ramsay Peale. These youths, Charles Willson Peale wanted his fellow Philadelphians to believe, were the future of American art.²⁶³ *The Staircase Group* serves as a visual representation of Peale's goals for his children, particularly in relation to the first (and only) exhibition of the Columbianum, in 1795, to which Raphaelle and his brother Rembrandt contributed. *The Staircase Group* was initially exhibited as part of the same six-week Columbianum exhibition, which was held in the Senate Chamber of the Pennsylvania State House. Peale created the work for eventual display in his Museum, which by 1795 was housed in the American Philosophical Society's Philosophical Hall, across the street from the State House. Furthermore, the artist planned *The Staircase Group* for an existing site within the Senate Chamber, using

²⁶³ Titian Ramsay Peale (1780-1798) is often referred to in modern literature as Titian Ramsay I, to distinguish himself of another of Peale's sons with the same name. Titian Ramsay I was born to Charles Willson Peale and Rachel Brewer, and died in 1798 at the age of eighteen during a yellow fever epidemic. By the time Titian Ramsay I had passed away, so too had his mother, and Charles Willson Peale was married to his second wife, Elizabeth DePeyster, with whom he had already fathered four children. Charles Willson and Elizabeth named their first son born after Titian Ramsay I's death Titian Ramsay as well. This Titian Ramsay, also known as Titian Ramsay II, was a noted naturalist and artist much like his father. Meanwhile, Raphaelle Peale (1774-1825) would demonstrate great talent as a painter, especially of still-lives, before poor health all but ceased his art-making in his 30s. The causes for Raphaelle's health issues are uncertain, and potentially scandalous. An impatient personality, Raphaelle became an alcoholic in the first decade of the nineteenth century, which led him into depression and an inability to secure patronage for his works. However, Phoebe Lloyd and Gordon Bendersky have argued that Peale's so-called intemperance was an excuse to mask the young man's poisoning through his service as a taxidermist for his father's museum, a job that included interaction with a number of dangerous chemical solutions and materials such as arsenic and mercury. Not just an unfortunate coincidence, the accusation continues that Charles Willson Peale knowingly exposed Raphaelle to a high amount of these materials because he was jealous of his son's artistic abilities, and most sinisterly, recognized his son's symptoms but neglected to provide the existing antidote to arsenic poisoning, instead identifying as symptoms of intemperance, to allow Raphaelle's suffering to continue. See Phoebe Lloyd and Gordon Bendersky, "Arsenic, an Old Case: The Chronic Heavy Metal Poisoning of Raphaelle Peale (1774-1825)," *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 36 (Summer, 1993), 654-665; Phoebe Lloyd and Gordon Bendersky, "The Peale Controversy: Guilty," *MD* 38, no. 4 (Apr., 1994): 10, 12. Lillian B. Miller has provided a counterpoint to these allegations in Lillian B. Miller, "Father and Son: The Relationship of Charles Willson Peale and Raphaelle Peale," *American Art Journal*, 25, no. 1/2 (1993): 5-61; Lillian B. Miller, "The Peale Controversy: Not Guilty," *MD* 38, no. 4 (Apr., 1994): 10, 12. I take Miller's stance, that Raphaelle Peale's poisoning was accidental, and that Charles Willson Peale was not "homicidal" or a "premeditated murderer" of his son.

Philadelphia's geography to allow his painting to create physical as well as theoretical dialogue with his museum and the Columbianum.²⁶⁴

The Staircase Group is a trompe l'oeil, an artistic technique which uses realistic imagery and forced perspective to create the optical illusion of three-dimensionality of an object or space.²⁶⁵ Raphaëlle and Titian Peale climb a spiral staircase; interrupted by someone outside the canvas, Raphaëlle, the older brother, turns in place to look at the viewer, and Titian, who is around the first bend in the stairs, rests his body against the center post as he pokes his head and body around the corner. Befitting their relative statuses as artists, Raphaëlle is firmly situated on the stairs, with both feet planted, while Titian's body is unsettled, and it is unclear if he is coming or going.²⁶⁶ Adding to the ambiguity of the composition, both Peales point upward, without indication of what lies above. The two young men are clad in the attire of adult men – both with navy coats with blue buttons, Raphaëlle in gray breeches and a white-and-gray waistcoat, and Titian in yellow breeches and a yellow-

²⁶⁴ Wendy Bellion, "Illusion and Allusion: Charles Willson Peale's *Staircase Group* at the Columbianum Exhibition," *American Art* 17, no. 2 (Jul., 2003), 37. Bellion figures out its exact placement in the space and how it would have functioned as trompe l'oeil.

²⁶⁵ For more on trompe l'oeil, see Martin Battersby, *Trompe l'Oeil: The Eye Deceived* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1974); M.L. d'Otrange Mastai, *Illusion in Art: A History of Pictorial Illusionism* (New York, 1975); and Miriam Milman, *Trompe l'Oeil Painting: Illusions of Reality* (New York, 1982). For more on American trompe l'oeil, and specifically relating to the Peale family, see William H. Gerdtz, "A Deception Unmasked: An Artist Uncovered," *American Art Journal* 18, no. 2, (Spring, 1986): 5-23; Wendy Bellion, *Citizen Spectator: Art, Illusion, and Visual Perception in Early National America* (Chapel Hill, NC: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, by the University of North Carolina Press, 2011). See also Lovell, *Art in a Season of Revolution*, 26-47, for the discussion over American artists' willingness to execute works which incorporated "simulation, visual puns, and illusionistic deceit" at a level far greater than their English counterparts.

²⁶⁶ David Steinberg, "Educating for Distinction? Art, Hierarchy, and Charles Willson Peale's *Staircase Group*," in *Seeing High and Low: Representing Social Conflict in American Visual Culture*, ed. Patricia Johnston (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006), 28, 34. As Steinberg notes, Raphaëlle's "feet, turned to accommodate different tread depth on two successive steps, are impractically positioned for climbing. Neither foot touches or overlaps any edge of any step, so that each foot conveys the impression of being placed to stay put."

and-brown waistcoat.²⁶⁷ They are, presumably, exiting the viewer's space in order to paint. Raphaelle holds a prepared palette and a crayon holder in his left hand, and leans against the maulstick in his right.²⁶⁸ Titian may be working as his brother's assistant, or may be the sitter of the presumptive work. Raphaelle is fully visible and lit by the strong light source to the upper left of the scene, while Titian is mostly in shadow, only his face and a heavily foreshortened right knee receiving direct light. This difference in lighting suggests the styles of the two namesakes for the two young American artists, with Raphaelle representative of the bright linear clarity of the High Renaissance and Titian of the atmospheric coloration of the Venetian school as well as the eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century fascination with the mystery of the Italian Titian's technique.²⁶⁹ The two Peale brothers inhabit a sparse environment. The spiral staircase is a confined space, mostly in shadow with the walls covered by green wallpaper decorated with red wreath designs. Lying next to Raphaelle's right foot is a ticket for entry to Peale's Museum, the work's eventual destination.

Peale's visual play begins with that darkened staircase, seemingly too claustrophobic for the background of a portrait. He provides respite with the light-colored staircase, which extends to the bottom of the canvas. In fact, it extends

²⁶⁷ They are dressed as gentlemen-artists, an important concern in Reynolds's discussion of the purpose of art and appearance of artists as befitting their dignity and importance. Miller, "Father and Son," 15.

²⁶⁸ These are traditional implements painters included in self-portraits. Steinberg has noted the visual punning at work with the maulstick. Usually used by the artist to balance and stabilize his or her hand while painting on a canvas, Raphaelle is using it to balance and stabilize himself on the stairs. Steinberg, "Art, Hierarchy, and Charles Willson Peale's *Staircase Group*," 27.

²⁶⁹ For English artists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the "Venetian Secret" was an ongoing source of inquiry, as many attempted to uncover the technique and technology behind the strong atmospheric coloration produced by the Venetian school. See Chapter 5 for a discussion of Benjamin West's negotiations with a con woman purporting to hold the secret, recounted in Angus Trumble and Mark Aronson, *Benjamin West and the Venetian Secret: Yale Center for British Art, September 18, 2008-January 4, 2009* (New Haven, CT: Yale Center for British Art, 2008).

beyond the canvas. Instead of a traditional frame, Peale set his work inside an actual doorframe. Projecting from the bottom of the canvas is a full step and a second riser and fragment of a second tread. *The Staircase Group* possesses the physical attributes of an actual staircase exiting a room. Viewed from the side, the door frame and staircase project into the viewer's physical space, while from straight on they blend seamlessly with the image on the canvas. Patterning effectively lures the viewer into a sense of complacency: cascading linearity in the treads of the stairs brings the observer into the composition, and the repetition of circles in the paints on Raphaele's palette, the buttons on the brothers' coats, and circular motifs on the wallpaper trap the viewer within the frame.

Several decades after *The Staircase Group*'s initial display, Rembrandt Peale told an apocryphal story in which George Washington was fooled by the painting when encountering it in Peale's Museum, tipping his hat at the figures depicted therein.²⁷⁰ Nonetheless, although best known as a trompe l'oeil, the work was always intended to hold a much nobler function. Wendy Bellion and David Steinberg argue convincingly for *The Staircase Group*'s function as an emblematic manifestation of Charles Willson Peale's vision for artistic education in the new nation. Bellion highlights how the painting embodies the types of Theory and Practice from Renaissance Italian iconographer Cesare Ripa's 1593 treatise *Iconologia*, which was reprinted and illustrated in 1779 in London by George Richardson,²⁷¹ while Steinberg also suggests a possible influence in Henry Homes, Lord Kames's 1762 two-volume

²⁷⁰ Rembrandt Peale, "Reminiscences, by Rembrandt Peale, The Person and Mien of Washington," *The Crayon* 3, part 3 (Apr., 1856): 100.

²⁷¹ Bellion, "Illusion and Allusion," 28-33; Bellion, *Citizen Spectator*, 102-104.

Elements of Criticism.²⁷² At play is a presentation and reenactment of the act of viewing, and a prescription for the advancement of artistic understanding in the new world. By spending significant time looking at a clever, multi-layered work of art such as *The Staircase Group*, viewers enhance their aesthetic sense and prepare themselves as future patrons. Furthermore, Steinberg argues that the lessons contained in *The Staircase Group* were intended by Peale to support his personal belief in hierarchical stasis within society.²⁷³ Raphaelle Peale, the artist in the painting, is unmoving on the stairs – although he appears to be climbing up, both of his feet are flat on the treads and Titian’s position directly above him precludes the older boy from actually preceding upwards. Instead, with the painter’s tools of the trade in his hands, Raphaelle points upward. Titian, meanwhile, points out of the canvas. As Wendy Bellion has observed, when *The Staircase Group* was hung in its original location in the Senate Chamber, Titian’s finger pointed toward the southern wall of the room, whose windows look out on the Philosophical Hall, the home of Peale’s Museum and the Columbianum. Thus, *The Staircase Group* literally points to Peale’s vision of artistic education and the purpose of art in the new nation.²⁷⁴

²⁷² Steinberg, “Art, Hierarchy, and Charles Willson Peale’s *Staircase Group*,” 27. Peale likely read this text while in London, as it probably was not available in America prior to the execution of *The Staircase Group*. The book does not appear on Janice G. Schimmelman’s list of artistic treatises available in North America prior to 1815. See Janice G. Schimmelman, *A Checklist of European Treatises on Art and Essays on Aesthetics Available in America Through 1815* (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 1983).

²⁷³ Steinberg, “Art, Hierarchy, and Charles Willson Peale’s *Staircase Group*,” 31-37. For more on Peale’s understanding of the hierarchical order of the world, and his attempts to depict that hierarchy through the organization of his museum, see Brigham, “The Human Lessons of Charles Willson Peale’s Natural History Displays,” and Hart and Ward, “The Waning of an Enlightenment Museum,” 219-235. In light of Peale’s newfound focus on systematic scientific organization, Charles Willson Peale and Elizabeth DePeyster deviated from their scheme of naming children after artists by naming their son born in 1794 Charles Linnaeus, after the groundbreaking Swedish scientist Carl Linnaeus.

²⁷⁴ Bellion, “Illusion and Allusion,” 37; Lovell, *Art in a Season of Revolution*, 34.

In Peale's view, although a person's status is unchangeable, art allows him to consider something greater.²⁷⁵ This consideration is not meant to allow the viewer to achieve that greatness; rather, according to Steinberg, "education in the ways of art was to allow meritorious middling-sort viewers who trained their lives on loftier things than matters of rank to occupy their stations with greater contentment."²⁷⁶ Such an interpretation challenges Peale's presentation of his son's artistic ability. It seems paradoxical to suggest that Raphaele is poised for higher achievement through his ascension of the stairs, while at the same time demonstrating the immovability of an individual's situation within society. For then, if Raphaele Peale represents the stasis of hierarchical society, this image suggests that at age twenty-one the young man has already reached the apex of his social standing, regardless of any future fame and fortune generated by his promising artistic career.

This ambitious, allegorical approach to the concept of artistic training and viewership is means for Peale to demonstrate his awareness of late-eighteenth-century European academic training, a powerful rhetorical stance in the internal political struggle over the direction of the Columbianum academy in which *The Staircase*

²⁷⁵ According to Neubauer, Peale's presentation is based on the same theory that inspired the arrangement of his museum: Peale "relies on the synchronicity of apperception and affirmation, the assumed simultaneity of seeing and knowing, visualizing and understanding." Neubauer, "American Painting in the Federal Period," 453.

²⁷⁶ Steinberg, "Art, Hierarchy, and Charles Willson Peale's *Staircase Group*," 37. Lillian B. Miller discusses Peale's interest in the heroic portrait, a way to "make the portrait carry the burden of history painting by including in it storytelling symbols and emblematic elements that would elevate it beyond portraiture by the expression of a significant theme," a concept which applies clearly to *The Staircase Group*. Lillian B. Miller, "Charles Willson Peale as History Painter," in *New Perspectives on Charles Willson Peale: A 250th Anniversary Celebration*, eds. Lillian B. Miller and David C. Ward (Pittsburgh, PA: Published for the Smithsonian Institution by the University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991), 153-154.

Group participated, shortly after the organization's foundation.²⁷⁷ Peale headed one faction largely composed of American-born supporters who conceived of the institution as artistic in focus and local in range, without an external patron, in line with Jeffersonian republican politics. Opposing them was an "English Fraction"²⁷⁸ composed primarily of artists who were born in Europe and had studied in England, which argued that the Columbianum should resemble more closely London's Royal Academy of Arts: national in scope, under the president's patronage, and focused on intellectual and aesthetic inquiry as well as artistic practice. Peale used his first-hand experience with the Royal Academy as a rebuttal, asserting instead that the London institution was first and foremost a site of artistic training, in particular the type of training he depicts in *The Staircase Group*, and thus a strong focus on education was the best way to draw a kinship between the Columbianum and the Royal Academy.²⁷⁹

Not only did Peale have experience in the informal life drawing classes held at the St. Martin's Lane Academy,²⁸⁰ his attempts to assert control over the direction of

²⁷⁷ David Brigham discusses Peale's systematic organization of his museum as a stand-in for his goals for the proper organization of government, which can be extended to his belief in the organization of an academy or a workshop. Brigham, "The Human Lesson of Charles Willson Peale's Natural History Displays," 183-206. Steinberg discusses the museum in terms of Peale's beliefs for the ordering of society. Steinberg, "Art, Hierarchy, and Charles Willson Peale's *Staircase Group*," 25-41.

²⁷⁸ See Miller, Hart, and Ward, *Peale Papers*, vol. 2, part 1, 101-113 for a sequence of letters and public pronouncements which trace the arc of this dispute and its abrupt end, with Peale's faction triumphant. Also, Rembrandt Peale, "Reminiscences," *The Crayon* 1, no. 19 (May 9, 1855): 290.

²⁷⁹ Peale's interest in the purpose and vision of art differed greatly from Sir Joshua Reynolds, whose approach characterized the Academy for much of Peale's career to that point. *The Staircase Group* was anti-idealizing, and its trompe l'oeil opposite Reynolds' focus on the natural world. Charles Robert Leslie typified the opposing reactions to the painting. When he saw *The Staircase Group* as a young boy he loved the painting, but once he traveled to London and had received artistic training in the Royal Academy schools he looked down on it as a purely illusionistic work, losing track of its allegorical meaning. Steinberg, "Art, Hierarchy, and Charles Willson Peale's *Staircase Group*," 30-32.

²⁸⁰ Lillian B. Miller, "In the Shadow of His Father: Rembrandt Peale, Charles Willson Peale, and the American Portrait Tradition," in *New Perspectives on Charles Willson Peale: A 250th Anniversary Celebration*, eds. Lillian B. Miller and David C. Ward (Pittsburgh, PA: Published for the Smithsonian

an American artistic academy were just a few years after his mentor's ascension to the head of the Royal Academy. The situations for the two men could hardly have been more different, however. West, long the Royal Academy's unofficial artists' liaison with the king and presumptive successor to Sir Joshua Reynolds, took over a "large, vigorous, successful operation"²⁸¹ after Reynolds's death in 1792. Meanwhile, Peale's efforts were focused both on the day-to-day and big pictures, attempting to cultivate an audience for American artistic output at the same time he was trying to drive artistic education in the States.²⁸²

Existing literature on *The Staircase Group*, as discussed previously, has placed the work within the socio-political context of early federal America and in relation to Peale's attempt to develop an American artistic tradition. Certainly the painting is more than just a witty trompe l'oeil, as early Peale biographer Charles Coleman Sellers argued.²⁸³ With that in mind, it is important to be cognizant of the fact that the work is a portrait of two of the artist's sons *as* artists. As an image of Charles Willson Peale's sons, the painting makes claims about the position of the father-artist in relation to his children-artists. The canvas was unusual in Peale's oeuvre: he rarely painted full-length portraits, and rarely executed works on canvases

Institution by the University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991), 91. The St. Martin's Lane Academy was created by William Hogarth (1697-1764) in 1735 and operated until 1771.

²⁸¹ Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 196.

²⁸² Bellion and Neubauer describe Peale's personal approach to art, while Bellion frames the debate over the creation of the Columbianum – a debate which would quickly tear it apart – through Peale's insistence that the new organization to closely follow the Royal Academy in terms of arrangement, including cast and life drawing classes, a library, lectures, and annual exhibitions. Bellion, "Illusion and Allusion," 22-23; Neubauer, "American Painting in the Federal Period," 449-461. See also Holger Hooek, *The King's Artists: The Royal Academy of Arts and the Politics of British Culture, 1760-1840* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 2003), 93.

²⁸³ Sellers, *Charles Wilson Peale*, 272.

so large.²⁸⁴ He also rarely painted trompe l'oeil works, but a group portrait of several members of his family, from c. 1782-1785, presages *The Staircase Group*. In Peale's *Self-Portrait with Angelica and a Portrait of Rachel* (fig. 28), the artist is seated in front of a canvas in the middle of his efforts on a portrait of his wife Rachel, with their daughter Angelica Kauffmann Peale watching him at work. Peale lavishes the same amount of detail on his wife's face as he does on the images of himself and his daughter, destabilizing the viewer: all three figures on the canvas appear to inhabit the same space as living beings. Only after longer consideration of the work does the viewer realize that Rachel Peale's presence is only as a portrait within a painting. The playful triple portrait is designed to reward a close viewing over a casual glance. The *Self-Portrait with Angelica and a Portrait of Rachel* also augurs Peale's desires for his daughter's artistic training. Angelica, who was ten years old at the time of the painting's completion, wraps her arm around her father so as to take the brush out of her father's hand, while pointing skyward with her other hand. Much as he would in *The Staircase Group*, Peale presents his child on the path to professional artistic practice, although at an age when she remains reliant on her father's assistance.²⁸⁵

The Staircase Group is Charles Willson Peale's challenge to his sons, Titian Ramsay standing on the cusp of professionalism and Raphaelle and Rembrandt just over that threshold. By all accounts the elder Peale was an ideal parent, teacher, and mentor for an aspiring artist. As Lillian B. Miller notes, all the Peale children were

²⁸⁴ Philadelphia Museum of Art, *Handbook of the Collections* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1995), 268.

²⁸⁵ Edgar P. Richardson, Brooke Hindle, and Lillian B. Miller, *Charles Willson Peale and His World* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1982), 208. The inclusion of Rachel Peale's portrait indicates Peale's recognition that his daughter was the beneficiary of two parents, drawing her beauty from her mother and her artistic talent from her father.

continuously exposed to art: Charles Willson Peale's own works, his lessons to his children and other students, and the social rewards of art-making through Peale's friendships with American luminaries and the lifestyle which his practice afforded.²⁸⁶ Within the paradigm of eighteenth-century American family life, the education of the adolescent Raphaelle, Rembrandt, and Titian Ramsay Peale – and the other Peale males – was the responsibility of their father, and so their artistic training was based on Charles Willson's "sense of parental duty as well as his belief that the artistic profession was noble and served valuable social and civic purposes."²⁸⁷

Expansive artistic training is celebrated in *The Staircase Group*, showing the full faculty of Charles Willson Peale's European artistic education applied toward a convincing illusion. Charles Willson was not the only Peale to submit a work of that genre to the Columbianum exhibition.²⁸⁸ Of Raphaelle's thirteen contributions to the show, three – titled *A Bill*, *A Covered Picture*, and *A Deception* – indicate some level of illusionism, although no records remain of their appearance and the works themselves are now lost.²⁸⁹ It is useful to consider Charles Willson Peale's execution of an illusionistic painting in light of the multiple illusions exhibited by his son. Although by 1795 he was nominally retired from painting, Peale still demonstrated professional pride in the skill of his legerdemain.

²⁸⁶ Miller, "In the Shadow of His Father," 90-91.

²⁸⁷ Miller, "Father and Son," 15.

²⁸⁸ Beyond the illusionistic works, the 1795 Columbianum show was in large part a Peale family gallery. Between Charles Willson Peale, his sons Raphaelle, and Rembrandt, and his brother James, approximately 20% of the works in the exhibition were by Peales. Bellion, "Illusion and Allusion," 24.

²⁸⁹ The work titled *A Deception* is not the better-known work by Raphaelle Peale also titled *A Deception*, from 1802. The ink-and-pencil drawing which was traditionally identified as Peale's 1802 *A Deception* was convincingly attributed by William H. Gerdts instead as an 1809 work by Samuel Lewis, which had fooled scholars since the early twentieth century on the basis of a faulty inscription on the back. See Gerdts, "A Deception Unmasked," 5-23.

By depicting Raphaelle as a painter on a literal upward ascension, Peale asks his son to recognize and fulfill his father's bold statement the previous spring about the young man's artistic ability. Raphaelle Peale exists in a liminal state, much like Raphael West in his father's *The Artist and His Son Raphael*, and while for each novice that state is different, they both are being demonstrably pushed forward out of the liminal space by their enthusiastically intense fathers.

Goals for American Art and Goals for Artistic Children

Charles Willson Peale and Benjamin West each envisioned themselves as the progenitor of American art, with divergent perceptions of what that art should look like. West played his role in that paradigm through his ongoing training of American artists for the bulk of his life, a theme that will continue in later chapters. Peale's claim to be the father of American art operates through his repeated attempts to organize artistic academies, the creation and curation of his museum, and, much like West but to a greater extent, the training and success of his artistic-minded children. Both men considered their material artistic production as crucial to their goals.

Through his London workshop, West encouraged the development of American art along traditional European lines by following the academic formulation of the hierarchy of genres.²⁹⁰ For artists like Peale, whose interests lay outside of history painting, West arranged for instruction in genres such as miniatures,

²⁹⁰ Most notably that of André Félibien as interpreted by Sir Joshua Reynolds into the Grand Style, the favorite of American art critics into the nineteenth century. William H. Gerdts, "On Elevated Heights: American Historical Paintings and its Critics," in *Grand Illusions: History Painting in America*, ed. William H. Gerdts and Mark Thistlewaite (Fort Worth, TX: Amon Carter Museum, 1988), 71; John Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt: The Body of the Public* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), 83. Reynolds discusses aspects of the hierarchy of genres in many of his Discourses, notably Discourse XI, delivered on December 10, 1782, and Discourse XIII, delivered on December 11, 1786; see Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, 191-204, 229-244.

portraiture, and sculpture, but the artist's own instruction was in the realm of history painting. Peale, as a mature artist and instructor, also held lofty goals for the purpose of art. His approach, however, recognized the pragmatic needs of American artists and society, ignoring theories on the status of genres in favor of a consideration of how art affected the shape of society.

Each man's approach can be found in portraits of their sons Raphael/le. West's *Portrait of the Artist with His Son, Raphael* foregrounds the father's role in his son's education, presenting the son as a student even at the age of seven, while impressing the importance of the father's instruction. West is ever-present, reminding the viewers that whatever comes of his son's artistic career – which presumably will be full of success – is owed to the father's presence.²⁹¹ Through his very existence Raphael West is a testament to his father, carrying not just the family surname but a first name which serves as a reminder of his father's artistic accomplishments. Meanwhile, Peale is absent as an artist in *The Staircase Group*. His presence is limited to the ticket for Peale's Museum sitting on the stairs next to Raphaelle Peale's right foot, a reference to his erudition, not his art-making. Having provided his sons the requisite technical training, he has stepped out, both within the canvas and (albeit temporarily) in the real world, allowing them to make their own career path. While encouraging his children's work, Peale appeared to have little concern about the actual content of their production as long as they were successful. The grand statements about art nestled within *The Staircase Group* are about the methods of

²⁹¹ In 1782 West informed family friend Benjamin Franklin in a letter that sixteen-year-old Raphael "has greatly improved in painting, and I have determined to do my utmost to cultivate those talents which appear in him; that they may some day I hope be an Orniment to the profession." West to Benjamin Franklin, April 28, 1782, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 37, ed. Ellen R. Cohn (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 236-237.

artistic training rather than its end product, which differs from those of his teacher West, who believed in the unequivocal ability of painting to encourage grand ideas and enhance the individual's morality. To that end West focused on history painting, and encouraged his children to do the same.

For all of West's interest in history painting, a majority of his students had little interest in continuing that genre of work. Charles Willson Peale was among that number. In what would be a theme throughout West's career, however, he was willing to train an artist in a genre in which he was not personally interested, and even to assist in seeking out teachers more suited to the student's interests. Thus Peale, who gladly assisted on West's historical canvases and proved handy elsewhere in the West household, was a valuable contributor to his studio. That Peale and West were just three years apart in age, from the same part of the colonies and with common acquaintances, and seemed to honestly enjoy each other's company only helped the cause. However, as will be discussed in the next chapter, West was pragmatic in accepting students. As long as the student assisted in West's own production, or at the very least did not actively detract from West's work, the master artist was willing to overlook dissent and even mockery. The greater the talent of the student, the more rebellion West was willing to tolerate. For him the point of taking on students was to attach his name to their success and send them out into the world to enhance his own name through their work. It was more important to take on a significant number of American students than it was that their talent level or preferred genre be of high quality. As long as they spread the belief that Benjamin West was a great American artist, the Pennsylvania-born history painter was satisfied.

Chapter 3: West's Problem Student: Gilbert Stuart's Challenge

Although Charles Willson Peale endeared himself to West, it was not until the 1775 arrival of a young man named Gilbert Stuart that the students of West began to challenge for respect on the European stage. Stuart's artistic flourish far out-stripped West, but his aims for his art were material, to make his career as a high-society portraitist rather than pursue the deeply moralizing path of history painting preferred by his teacher. Although West remained welcoming to his talented young charge, Stuart, a reluctant student by nature, was never fully comfortable working under West's watchful eye. His anxiety over his relationship with the established artist would define the tenor of his artistic output over a decade in London, and test West's patience in dealing with upstart young Americans.

Gilbert Stuart was born in the village of Saunderstown in the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations on December 3, 1755, on the second floor of a snuff mill located on the banks of the Pettaquamscutt River. An early account of Stuart's life, provided by his daughter Jane in a series of articles in *Scribner's Monthly* magazine in 1876 and 1877, suggested that Stuart's father – also named Gilbert Stuart – was a respectable merchant who emigrated from Scotland due to anti-Jacobite sensibilities after the Battle of Culloden.²⁹² However, much like John Galt's biography of Benjamin West, Jane Stuart's family history can be difficult to trust, and the circumstances about the elder Stuart's move to North America are still unclear.²⁹³

²⁹² Jane Stuart, "The Youth of Gilbert Stuart. By His Daughter," *Scribner's Monthly* 13, no. 5 (March 1877): 640-646.

²⁹³ Uncontroversial is the fact that almost immediately after arriving in North America, the elder Gilbert Stuart, a millwright, entered into business with a fellow Scotsman, Dr. John Moffatt, to open a

What is known is that when the young Gilbert was six years old, the Stuart family sold their mill and moved to Newport, a wealthy civic and intellectual center with a spirit of tolerance reflecting the religious diversity of Rhode Island.²⁹⁴

Newport attracted leading merchants, businessmen, clergymen, and craftsmen. There were some professional artists working in the city,²⁹⁵ but there is no evidence that Stuart ever interacted with them. The young boy's early artistic training entailed sketching lessons from a slave named Neptune Thurston and practicing his drawing with his lifelong friend Benjamin Waterhouse (1754-1846).²⁹⁶ Stuart's accepted first formal encounter with a professional artist came at age fourteen, when he encountered the Scottish painter Cosmo Alexander (1724-1772), an itinerant artist who traveled to Newport in 1769 to execute portraits for members of the city's Scottish community.²⁹⁷ While staying there, Alexander was hosted by a local

snuff mill in Newport. However, while the version of Stuart's emigration told by Jane Stuart and Charles Merrill Mount has Stuart fleeing persecution in Scotland and then meeting Moffatt in Rhode Island, Whitley, citing Stuart family friend Dr. Benjamin Waterhouse, argues that Moffatt saw a business opportunity in Newport and sent back home to Scotland to persuade Stuart to come and operate a mill. Stuart, "The Youth of Gilbert Stuart," 640-641; Mount, *Gilbert Stuart*, 26; William T. Whitley, *Gilbert Stuart* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1932), 3.

²⁹⁴ McLanathan, *Gilbert Stuart*, 15-19. Barratt and Miles, *Gilbert Stuart*, 11.

²⁹⁵ Barratt and Miles indicate that Samuel King was the only portraitist of note in Newport during Stuart's life. Prior to Stuart's birth, John Smibert, Joseph Blackburn, and Robert Feke had each set up shop in Newport, only to leave months or years later. Barratt and Miles, *Gilbert Stuart*, 12-13.

²⁹⁶ Samella S. Lewis, *African American Art and Artists*, rev. ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 8-9; Barratt and Miles, *Gilbert Stuart*, 13. Thurston worked in a Boston copper shop, and it is unclear when in Stuart's life he would have encountered the man. A number of other works of art existed in the city of Newport. A Swiss artist and naturalist, Pierre Eugène du Simitière, who later opened the American Museum in Philadelphia, visited Newport in 1769 and recorded the paintings he encountered, including a copy of Sir Godfrey Kneller's portrait of Tsar Peter I and several other copies of Old Master works in the collection of John Bannister. Whitley suggests that Stuart was acquainted with the Bannister collection and used it as inspiration. Whitley, *Gilbert Stuart*, 5-6. Jane Stuart mythologizes Stuart's artistic and sensory abilities in the same way as Galt does for West, describing a five-year-old Stuart stunning his mother and her friends with a likeness of an absent individual drawn during their conversation about him. Stuart, "The Youth of Gilbert Stuart," 641.

²⁹⁷ Barratt and Miles, *Gilbert Stuart*, 13.

physician, Dr. William Hunter, who was the Stuarts' family doctor.²⁹⁸ Stuart's biographer Richard McLanathan proposes that Dr. Hunter would have seen the boy's sketches hanging in the Stuart household when making a house call to the family.²⁹⁹ Regardless of the circumstances in which Dr. Hunter learned of the young Stuart's inchoate artistic abilities, the physician was the one who introduced him to Alexander, a meeting which changed the course of Stuart's life.

After meeting with the young boy, the elder Alexander agreed to give him lessons, and shortly thereafter relied on Stuart as an assistant. Much like William Williams for West and John Hesselius for Peale, Alexander was more valuable to Stuart's career as a living connection to European art culture than for the stylistic training he provided. The Scottish gentleman was a mediocre artist, and McLanathan suggests that the most important information Alexander bestowed on Stuart was knowledge of "how to grind and mix pigments, clean brushes, prepare panels and canvases, and lay out a palette with the colors arranged in neat dabs in the proper order."³⁰⁰ Alexander also profoundly influenced Stuart's artistic interests: the Scotsman was a portraitist, and Stuart would work almost entirely in that genre throughout his career. This professional preference in genre speaks to the extent of the effect on Stuart of Alexander's (supposed) lifestyle and ease within society.

Contrast this approach with that of Stuart's second mentor, Benjamin West, who also received his first formal artistic training from an itinerant European-born portraitist,

²⁹⁸ Stuart would have also benefited from his mentorship with Dr. Hunter, which would have been a resource for anatomical illustrations. Alexander, like Hunter, was a Jacobite, lending credence to Jane Stuart's assertion that her grandfather's political sympathies were at least a factor in, if not the reason for, his emigration to North America.

²⁹⁹ McLanathan, *Gilbert Stuart*, 19.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

Williams. The English-born Williams, of a similar talent level as Alexander, was a far more hardscrabble figure, having spent several years shipwrecked in the Caribbean as a teenager. West received significant artistic training from Williams for parts of thirteen years, but, recognizing that Williams was forced to operate on the fringes of society, did not desire to emulate his teacher the way Stuart did with Alexander.

Within two years of meeting Alexander, Stuart had demonstrated enough capacity as a student and assistant that his mentor brought the young man along when he left Rhode Island for a southward-bound painting tour of the colonies. By late 1770 or early 1771, Alexander departed for his native Scotland with Stuart in tow.³⁰¹ In Edinburgh Stuart continued to work with Alexander and attended school, where he was trained in the classics.³⁰² However, the idyllic experience for Stuart in this European intellectual center quickly disappeared when Cosmo Alexander unexpectedly died on August 25, 1772. Alexander's death meant that a seventeen-year-old Stuart was essentially abandoned – he became a ward of Alexander's destitute brother-in-law Sir George Chalmers (d. 1772), a fellow painter who died shortly after – an ocean from his family and home, with neither the artistic ability to establish himself as a professional painter in the culturally-advanced nation, nor the financial wherewithal to return to North America.³⁰³ Eventually Stuart left Scotland in

³⁰¹ Both the trips south and across the Atlantic to Edinburgh were likely enabled by Stuart's uncle Joseph Anthony, who owned a merchant shipping company. Barratt and Miles, *Gilbert Stuart*, 13.

³⁰² McLanathan, *Gilbert Stuart*, 21.

³⁰³ Upon Alexander's death Stuart became a ward of Alexander's destitute brother-in-law, painter Sir George Chalmers, who died later the same year. Before passing away Chalmers reportedly "abandon[ed] Stuart in financial straits at the University of Glasgow," according to Jane Stuart and repeated by Barratt and Miles. Stuart, "The Youth of Gilbert Stuart, 642" and Barratt and Miles, *Gilbert Stuart*, 13. John Hill Morgan questions that account, which was initiated by Stuart and repeated by Jouett and his daughter Jane, since Stuart was not listed as a student in the University's records.

1773 as a seaman himself, on a Nova Scotia-bound coal-carrying ship, and when he returned to Newport he refused to see anyone other than his family and closest friends for weeks. Stuart's good friend Waterhouse described the artist upon his return:

What his treatment was, I never could learn. I only know that it required a few weeks to equip him with suitable clothing to appear on the streets, or to allow any one of his former friends, save the writer, to know of his return. Suffice it to say that it was such as neither Gilbert Stuart, father or son, ever thought proper to mention. It is probable the youth worked for his passage to America.³⁰⁴

This early experience of professional and financial despair as a result of over-dependence on his master would heavily inform the length and breadth of the forty-five-year relationship between Stuart and Benjamin West, which began five years after Alexander's death.

Gilbert Stuart with Benjamin West

After recovering from his traumatic return home Stuart returned to his chosen profession, again independent of additional formal artistic training. He executed a number of portraits for Newport residents, and then in the summer of 1774 sought a greater audience in Boston. It is possible that Stuart's move to the City on the Hill was calculated to capitalize on the recent departure of John Singleton Copley to London. While in Boston, Stuart continued to execute portraits and, at the age of eighteen, even took on a student, twelve-year-old Mather Brown, who would later follow Stuart on his second transatlantic adventure.³⁰⁵

Morgan doubts that an individual of Stuart's prior education would have been admitted into any university. John Hill Morgan, *Gilbert Stuart and His Pupils* (New York: Kennedy Galleries, 1969) 12.

³⁰⁴ Benjamin Waterhouse, quoted in Dunlap, *The Arts of Design*, vol. 1, 198.

³⁰⁵ Morgan, *Gilbert Stuart and His Pupils*, 6-16. As Morgan points out, Stuart and Brown were both untrained artists at this point, so Brown's work bears no likeness to Stuart's later stylistic development.

Stuart's growing success in Boston was interrupted by the early tremors of the American Revolution, and shortly after the Battles of Lexington and Concord on April 19, 1775 he returned to Newport. While he did not appear to hold strong allegiances toward either side of the revolutionary conflict, his father, a loyalist, fled to Nova Scotia after the outbreak of war.³⁰⁶ Stuart in turn decided to go to London, following in the footsteps of Copley and West before him.³⁰⁷ To raise money for his voyage the young artist undertook a brief tour of the east coast, retracing many of the steps taken four years earlier with Alexander.³⁰⁸ His plan upon arriving in London was to stay with his friend Waterhouse, who had also recently traveled to the city to study medicine with pioneering physician and botanist Dr. John Fothergill. Stuart possessed only enough money to keep solvent for a few weeks, and traveled with just one letter of introduction to a Scottish gentleman named Sir Alexander Grant, who had relatives in Newport.³⁰⁹ His intention was to make an immediate splash in the London artistic scene, and he left himself no alternative. He was determined not to return home to Newport under the same circumstances as his previous North America-bound trip across the Atlantic.

³⁰⁶ Whitley, *Gilbert Stuart*, 13-14.

³⁰⁷ This path notably mirrors the political reasons for Copley's move. The Boston-born artist was largely apolitical, but he was intimately tied to revolutionary politics through his extended family. Copley's father-in-law Richard Clarke was a consignee of the tea at the heart of the Boston Tea Party on December 16, 1773, and artist served as a messenger for Clarke and the other consignees during negotiations with the mob stoked by the demonstration. That incident likely hastened Copley's 1774 departure for England, and when Clarke fled Boston for London in 1775, he lodged with the Copleys for the remaining two decades of his life. This reunion is recorded in Copley's *The Copley Family*. Jane Stuart states that Stuart traveled to England "with the express purpose of studying with Benjamin West," an assertion that she has difficulty reconciling with the length of time Stuart spent in London prior to contacting West, nearly one year. Stuart, "The Youth of Gilbert Stuart," 642.

³⁰⁸ McLanathan, *Gilbert Stuart*, 25.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

Upon his arrival in England at the end of 1775, Stuart's plan fell apart. Waterhouse had moved to Edinburgh to continue his studies, leaving Stuart without any friendly support on which to rely, let alone a place to live.³¹⁰ For the better part of 1775 and 1776 Stuart's attempts to establish himself in London were unsuccessful. He chose not to enroll in the Royal Academy schools,³¹¹ and the ongoing American Revolutionary War could not have helped his attempts to cultivate patrons, regardless of his personal sympathies.³¹² He did contact Sir Alexander Grant, but was unable to find enough work as an artist to support himself, and instead worked as an organist at Saint Catherine's Church, across from Saint Paul's Cathedral.³¹³ Once Waterhouse returned to London in 1776 the scientist connected Stuart with colleagues for an engraving commission and twice saved his friend from debtor's prisons by paying off his creditors.³¹⁴ Stuart's insistence on defining his own path in England speaks to his

³¹⁰ Ibid., 27.

³¹¹ Barratt and Miles, *Gilbert Stuart*, 26-27.

³¹² Much like West, Stuart kept his politics close to his vest publicly. He appeared to dislike the English treatment of the colonies, but did not care enough to speak out against it. Bryan Zygmunt describes Stuart's comfort in working with sitters of various political groups during his brief stint in New York City, noting that even though Stuart relied heavily on Federalist politician John Jay for contacts, he interacted with his sitters on a purely social level and painted Anti-Federalists on occasion too. Bryan John Zygmunt, "Portraiture and Politics in New York City, 1790-1825: Stuart, Vanderlyn, Trumbull, and Jarvis" (PhD diss., University of Maryland, 2006), 66.

³¹³ Dunlap, *The Arts of Design*, vol. 1, 203. Stuart was a talented organist, and Dunlap cites Waterhouse and others in describing the artist's love of music as equal to his love of art. According to Barratt and Miles, Stuart's habit wherever he took up new residence was to seek out employment as a musician first while securing work as an artist, a habit which Jane Stuart states he followed in London in 1776. Barratt and Miles, *Gilbert Stuart*, 13; Stuart, "The Youth of Gilbert Stuart," 643.

³¹⁴ Dunlap, *The Arts of Design*, vol. 1 205. Evidencing the procrastination which would serve as a hallmark of his career, Stuart never began work on the commission Waterhouse had arranged, an engraving of his teacher Dr. George Fordyce, forcing the scientist to repay the subscription fees his fellow students had pre-paid. That Waterhouse would cover for Stuart both in this instance and in twice bailing him out of a sponging-house, or temporary incarceration prior to transferal to a debtor's prison, speaks to either the strength of his friendship with Stuart or his level of gullibility. Even facing incarceration twice immediately after moving to England did not convince the fiscally irresponsible Stuart to change his ways, and he often found himself facing the same fate until he left Europe in 1787.

strong, sometimes-contentious personality. Later in life the artist would be known to friends and enemies as much for his determined professional independence as for his prodigious artistic abilities.³¹⁵

Eventually Stuart ran out of money and favors to call upon, and was forced to seek further support. A young artist born in the colonies, such as he, would have had at least two sympathetic mentors in London: Copley, a fellow New Englander and recent arrival in London, and West, whose time in Europe set the example for success by an American-born artist abroad. Stuart reached out to the man with an established reputation as an instructor. It remains unclear exactly how Stuart first initiated contact with West: William Dunlap recounts two versions, one in which Waterhouse serves as intercessor,³¹⁶ and one in which Stuart shows up unannounced on West's doorstep in the middle of a dinner party.³¹⁷ A heart-wrenching letter that survives in the collection of the New-York Historical Society suggests a third version, one in which

Upon hearing of Stuart's death in 1828, his friend Sir Thomas Lawrence remarked of the artist's 1787 return to North America: "I knew Stuart well, and I believe the real cause of his leaving England was his having become tired of the inside of some of our prisons." Lawrence, quoted in Leslie's *Autobiographical Recollections*, quoted in Whitley, *Gilbert Stuart*, 67. Jane Stuart defended her father, arguing that the cause of his financial troubles was an "utter inability to transact business," rather than any more nefarious habits means of wasting money. Stuart, "The Youth of Gilbert Stuart," 646.

³¹⁵ Susan Rather, "Contrary Stuart," *American Art* 24 (Spring, 2010): 66-93.

³¹⁶ Dunlap, *The Arts of Design*, vol. 1, 207. In this telling, which was related to Dunlap by Thomas Sully, West's response was to reach out to Stuart through a servant. Jane Stuart had very harsh words for Waterhouse, whom she never names directly, only calling him a "pretended friend" of her father and inferring that Waterhouse's autobiography was an attempt to piggyback off Stuart's fame. She blamed him for the delay in Stuart meeting West, claiming that Waterhouse did in fact attempt to arrange a meeting between the two artists, but only several months after the near-destitute Stuart took the initiative in approaching the elder artist. Stuart, "The Youth of Gilbert Stuart," 643-644.

³¹⁷ Dunlap, *The Arts of Design*, vol. 1, 207. Stuart reportedly showed up in the middle of a dinner party hosted by West for several American friends. Stuart told West that his uncle was Philadelphia businessman Joseph Anthony, and one of West's guests who knew Anthony well vouched for Stuart sight unseen. This telling, which was also related to Dunlap by Sully, is the one which Dunlap judges to be more "authentic," and is the version of events that Jane Stuart repeated in her 1877 biographical article about her father; see Stuart, "The Youth of Gilbert Stuart," 642-643.

Stuart reaches out to West in December 1776 prior to meeting him in person:

Pitty me Good Sir I've just arriv'd at the age of 21 an age when most young men have done something worthy of notice & find myself Ignorant without Business or Freinds, without the necessarys of life so far that for some time I have been reduced to one miserable meal a day & frequently not even that, destitute of the means of acquiring knowledge, my hopes from home Blasted & incapable of returning thither, pitching headlong into misery I have this only hope I pray that it may not be too great, to live & learn without being a Burthen.³¹⁸

Whether it was the letter, Waterhouse's intervention, or the fortuitous appearance during West's dinner party, Stuart joined West's studio around the beginning of 1777, receiving a weekly salary of a half-guinea as a copyist and assistant.³¹⁹ This financial reliance on West (which mirrored his prior dependence on Waterhouse), combined with Stuart's letter, demonstrates a position of weakness that Stuart was intent never to replicate, and which Susan Rather argues was the root cause of the measured distance Stuart kept from West throughout his career.³²⁰ As both men were aware, the younger artist's entry into West's studio and onto his payroll signaled Stuart's admittance into the West family household. Whereas Stuart had intended to work as an equal to the more established American-born artist, he instead found himself accountable to a surrogate father figure.

Diverging Styles and Interests

Where he faltered on his own, Stuart flourished under West's watchful, paternal eye. The elder artist provided the young Stuart the necessary training to

³¹⁸ Stuart to Benjamin West, December 1776, reprinted in Rather, "Contrary Stuart," 70.

³¹⁹ According to Matthew Harris Jouett, Stuart earned his keep by painting draperies on West's historical painting and by finishing his portraits. Morgan, *Gilbert Stuart*, 87.

³²⁰ Rather, "Contrary Stuart," 70.

compete with the skilled painters active in England, as well as access to a network of patrons, collectors, suppliers, and fellow artists necessary for success on a European stage. However, a source of tension between the two men arose over their preferred genres and desires for painting.

Like other artists whose careers started in the colonies, West and Stuart primarily executed portraits as a means of earning a living at the beginning of their careers. West, who was influenced as a youth by the aesthetic treatises of theorists Charles Alphonse du Fresnoy and Jonathan Richardson, Sr., saw painting as an essentially moralizing pursuit and believed he could best improve the morals of his audience through history painting. Stuart, on the other hand, was entranced by the lifestyle that portrait painting afforded his mentor Cosmo Alexander, and saw portraiture as his mode of entry into an echelon of European society he otherwise could not access. As an aspiring portraitist, Stuart looked to the leading artists working in that genre for inspiration even as he continued in West's studio. West's penchant for encouraging his students to consult experts in other genres and styles applied in this circumstance, much as it had when he had connected Charles Willson Peale with leading miniature painters several years prior.³²¹

While studying under West, Stuart copied works for his master and added drapery and other minutiae to the artist's canvases. Even as West and Stuart held diverging interests in genre and the greater purpose of art, they formed a symbiotic relationship in the pursuit of financial stability. An account of the 1782 Royal Academy exhibition, around the time Stuart was attempting to establish his own

³²¹ Dorinda Evans also makes this point, suggesting that West would have sent Stuart to train with Sir Joshua Reynolds in particular. D. Evans, *Benjamin West and His American Students*, 53-54.

independent practice, described how West deflected requests for portraits to Stuart, and how Stuart sent potential history painting commissions to his teacher in return.³²² This reciprocal relationship may not have been one that West envisioned when he took on the younger artist as a student, but the realization of a major pipeline to patrons through his mentorship of a student was the general type of benefit he had hoped for when cultivating his identity as a welcoming instructor.

In addition to the technical aspects of painting, West saw his purpose as an instructor in unlocking each of his student's ability to translate the great morals and histories of the past into pictorial form, for the moral education of the viewer.³²³ This education could only be achieved through history painting, something in which Stuart had no interest. His rejection of the need for morality in his art resulted in a move away from the classicizing technique which West championed, into a more fluid style resembling the works of artists like Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788), George Romney, and Sir Joshua Reynolds.³²⁴ Carrie Rebora Barratt and Ellen G. Miles suggest that West accepted this stylistic differentiation because Stuart remained effective in the rote work required of him as a studio assistant, and because for a short time his indifference to history painting was blunted by the presence of John Trumbull, an ambitious history painter who initially entered West's workshop at the same time as Stuart was working there.³²⁵

³²² Account from *St. James's Chronicle*, referenced in Barratt and Miles, *Gilbert Stuart*, 27.

³²³ Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 20.

³²⁴ Barratt and Miles make this observation first. See Barratt and Miles, *Gilbert Stuart*, 27. Also see Barratt's discussion of Stuart's 1784 portrait of Reynolds on pages 60-62.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

Inspiration from the Old Masters

Stuart's stylistic approach to portraiture is evident in his self-portrait of 1778, now in the Redwood Library and Athenaeum in Newport (fig. 29). A stylistic tour-de-force, the work presents the artist as a looming white face bursting out of a dark background, capped by a large broad-brimmed hat, as if he has been captured in a moment of surprise and is turning to look toward the disturbance. The supposed story behind its creation is similarly striking. Reportedly Stuart purchased a portrait by the English painter William Dobson (1611-1646), which West then offered to purchase from his student for several times what Stuart paid for it. Stuart responded that he would give West the work for free if his master would "tell me I can paint a portrait as good as this of Dobson's,"³²⁶ and then executed this self-portrait, which West acknowledged was equal if not better than that by Dobson.

As Dorinda Evans has pointed out, Stuart's *Self-Portrait* references both Benjamin West's own self-portrait of two years prior (fig. 30), now at the Baltimore Museum of Art, and a self-portrait by Sir Peter Paul Rubens (fig. 31) in the Royal Collection, which West and Stuart would either have seen directly or as an engraving.³²⁷ It also brings to mind a number of self-portraits by Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669), particularly an early image of the artist at age twenty-six (fig. 32), who was around the same age as Stuart when he painted this self-portrait. Stuart gave his

³²⁶ Quoted in Barratt and Miles, *Gilbert Stuart*, 31. Rather, "Contrary Stuart," 87. Rather doubts the story, finding it hard to believe that the often-in-debt Stuart would pass up the opportunity to earn additional money, and citing the lack of any record of either artist ever owning a Dobson painting, as well as the fact that Stuart first told this story to a friend approximately three decades after it supposedly took place. Nonetheless, the story is a compelling representation of Stuart's personality.

³²⁷ D. Evans, *Benjamin West and His American Students*, 52. Stuart's work was at one point even exhibited under the title *Self-Portrait in a Rubens Hat*, as it was described by McLanathan in 1986. McLanathan, *Gilbert Stuart*, 42.

work the appearance of an Old-Master painting through his use of heavy chiaroscuro and distinct handling, in which thick brushstrokes define the contours of his face.³²⁸ The canvas's ground layer is visible at points above Stuart's head, suggesting a haphazard approach to painting that was reflective of Rembrandt and anathema to West. In tone as well as attire, Stuart's self-portrait also recalls Rembrandt; namely the seventeenth-century Dutch vogue for *tronies*, a sub-genre of portraiture whose purpose was to depict character types or attitudes rather than capture specific individuals.³²⁹ Rembrandt was a master of these works, often using his own face as the model for his *tronies*, leading to confusion about whether or not the works are rightfully portraits. Stuart's focus on his face at the expense of any details in the rest of the composition, his piercing gaze, and his exotic attire for eighteenth-century England – *tronies* often depicted the sitters in unusual dress for the time period, such as the turban worn by the *Girl with a Pearl Earring*³³⁰ – place his 1778 self-portrait clearly in dialogue with the *trony* tradition.

The entire William Dobson story focuses on the relationship between Stuart's *Self-Portrait* and Old Master works, but this masterpiece should also be considered first and foremost a rebuttal to West's stylistic approach. While in 1778 Stuart was not quite ready to throw off the yoke of West's training and set out on an independent career, he was nonetheless attempting to create a distinction between himself and his master, a distinction which West rejected. Benjamin West's 1776 self-portrait was the

³²⁸ McLanathan, *Gilbert Stuart*, 42.

³²⁹ Quentin Buvelot and Ariana van Suchtelen, "Girl with a Pearl Earring by Johannes Vermeer: The Dutch Mona Lisa," in *Girl with a Pearl Earring: Dutch Paintings from the Mauritshuis*, ed. Lea van der Vinde (San Francisco, CA: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 2013), 39-45.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 43.

artist's attempt to present himself in the mold of Rubens, who viewed himself as a courtier first and an artist second.³³¹ After over a decade working in England, West was a fixture in London society through his membership in the Royal Academy and his close friendship with George III. Much like Rubens's self-portrait, which was commissioned by Charles I while Rubens was working in England, West's self-portrait depicts a courtly gentleman who only happens to be an artist by profession. The complexity of the composition – West's twisting body, direct engagement with the viewer, and emergence from the shadows – as well as the “vigorous touch,” in the words of von Erffa and Staley,³³² with which the artist applied the paint to canvas can be taken as signs of West's confidence in his abilities and status as an artist.³³³

Unlike the Rubens's *Self-Portrait*, a half-length depiction of the subject in gentlemanly attire with his arms at his side, his torso a large black mass with his hands hidden below the bottom of the composition, West shows himself with a drawing of the anonymous grenadier and his servant from *The Death of General Wolfe*,³³⁴ the 1770 masterpiece which vaulted West to the upper echelon of English history painting (fig. 33). The inclusion of *The Death of General Wolfe* references not only West's successful canvas, but the even more popular and recent engraving by William Woollett (1735-1785), which was published on January 1, 1776 and brought

³³¹ Staley, *Benjamin West*, 23.

³³² Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 451.

³³³ Staley, *Benjamin West*, 23

³³⁴ Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 212. They argue that because these two men were not among the six figures identified in a key published to accompany William Woollett's print after the painting in 1776 that they were intended to be types and not identifiable individuals.

greater attention and praise to the artist on both sides of the Atlantic.³³⁵ Whereas Rubens ignores his identity as an artist, portraying the sitter as a man of high society, West provides a prescription for his attainment of such great heights, serving as a model for his students, including Stuart, on how to similarly achieve success.

Stuart's 1778 *Self-Portrait* can thus be read as a rejection of West's viewpoint. The student is not completely brushing aside his master's admonitions to follow the model of an Old Master; he asserts a desire to stylistically follow Rubens rather than Raphael, while carrying himself like Rembrandt. In this, he aligns himself with Gainsborough and Romney, securing himself as a high-society portraitist and disengaging from history painting.

Stuart's *The Skater*: West and Stuart's Rivalry, On Ice

By 1782, Stuart had left West's shadow and struck out on his own,³³⁶ buoyed singlehandedly by the success of his portrait of William Grant of Congalton, now known as *The Skater* (fig. 34), at the 1782 Royal Academy exhibition.³³⁷ Stuart would later state that he was "suddenly lifted into fame by the exhibition of a single picture," this one.³³⁸ A melancholic masterpiece depicting the subject, a Scottish barrister,

³³⁵ Ibid., 451.

³³⁶ Even the notion that Stuart was fully independent in the early 1780s is problematic, as Barratt has pointed out that in the middle of the decade Stuart was reliant on Sir Joshua Reynolds for assistance in securing patrons and exhibiting at the Royal Academy. Barratt and Miles, *Gilbert Stuart*, 62-64. See also Susan Rather, "Stuart and Reynolds: A Portrait of Challenge," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 27 (Fall, 1993): 61-84.

³³⁷ Although Stuart submitted four portraits to the 1782 exhibition, *The Skater* was the only to garner significant acclaim. For more on *The Skater*, see William L. Pressly, "Gilbert Stuart's 'The Skater': An Essay in Romantic Melancholy," *American Art Journal* vol. 18, no. 1 (Winter, 1986): 42-51; Barratt and Miles, *Gilbert Stuart*, 34-39; Miles, *American Paintings of the Eighteenth Century*, 162-169.

³³⁸ Quoted in Josiah Quincy, *Figures of the Past from the Leaves of Old Journals* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1883), 84.

gliding along the Serpentine River in London's Hyde Park, the work mixes elegant Grand-Manner portraiture with an unusual conceit of depicting Grant on the ice, reportedly inspired by Grant's comment during his initial sitting that the cold winter day was better suited for skating than painting. Stuart, a talented skater and expert procrastinator, agreed with that assessment, and the two bundled off to the Serpentine, where a crack in the ice cut short their skating and forced Grant to hold onto Stuart's coattails as the artist returned both to safety.³³⁹

While existing scholarship has discussed the technical and symbolic features of the work, one aspect that has received scant attention is its potential as a critique of West. As Pressly, Barratt, Miles, and others have noted, Stuart was not the only expert skater in West's studio: West himself was one of the most talented skaters in Philadelphia in his youth, so much so that a Colonel William Howe – later General Howe, commander-in-chief of the British forces in the American Revolutionary War – recognized West on the ice in London's Kensington Gardens in 1764 solely through the artist's skillful execution of a maneuver called the Philadelphia Salute, which Howe had seen West perform four years prior while stationed in North America.³⁴⁰

If Dunlap's story is correct, then Stuart's *The Skater* would have been “recognized as a homage to his teacher or as mildly self-referential” while on display at the Academy exhibition, according to Barratt.³⁴¹ However, such an homage would not have purely served as a playful reminder of the West's skating ability. Underlying

³³⁹ Dunlap, *The Arts of Design*, vol. 1, 183.

³⁴⁰ Galt, *The Life of West*, Part 2, 27-31. See Dick Button, “The Art of Skating,” *The Magazine Antiques* 103 (Feb., 1973): 354, for the identification of Grant's skating maneuver as the Philadelphia Salute, and a description of the technique.

³⁴¹ Barratt and Miles, *Gilbert Stuart*, 39. The work was exhibited under the title “Portrait of a gentleman skating,” in line with the Academy tradition of not identifying portrait sitters.

the reference to West on the ice is a reminder of his early struggles in London. After Colonel Howe encountered West on the ice he introduced the artist to several noblemen, for whom West performed. Galt closes the anecdote by explaining:

Out of this trivial incident, an acquaintance arose between him and the young noblemen present; and their praise, in all their usual haunts, had such an effect, that, in the course of a few days, prodigious crowds of the fashionable world, and of all descriptions of people, assembled to see the American skater. When it was afterwards known to the public that he was an artist, many of the spectators called at his rooms; and he, perhaps, received more encouragement as a portrait-painter on account of his accomplishment as a skater, than he could have hoped for by any ordinary means to obtain.³⁴²

West's nascent artistic career is presented as the beneficiary of a talent entirely unrelated to his painting ability. The last clause of Galt's description is the most damning, suggesting that regardless of West's later artistic development, he would not have been able to establish himself as a painter in London without good luck and the ability to entertain a number of British noblemen. It is likely that West made the same observation to Stuart, four decades prior to recalling it to Galt. *The Skater* functions as a clear reference to West, asking viewers to remember not just the skating ability of Stuart's teacher but his debt on that ability to begin his painting career.³⁴³ Such public recognizance may very well have been a humiliating memory to West, and an effort on Stuart's part to compensate for the memory of his own reliance on West's paternal charity at the outset of his time in London.

³⁴² Galt, *The Life of West*, Part 2, 30-31.

³⁴³ Alberts even proposes that West could have "suggested that the skaters in the distant background should be doing the Philadelphia Salute," the same move which drew Colonel Howe's attention to Weston the ice in London. If so, that would change the tenor of *The Skater's* reference to West entirely. Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 147.

Three Portraits in Dialogue

The year following *The Skater*'s debut Stuart began work on a major series of portraits commissioned by John Boydell, a wealthy London politician and print publisher whose fortune was largely dependent on engravings made after works by West and other history painters. Boydell's series consisted of fifteen portraits of painters, engravers, and himself and his nephew Josiah Boydell, for the newly-renovated second-floor gallery at his office and shop at 90 Cheapside in London.³⁴⁴

Three of these portraits directly allude to Benjamin West and his relationships with Stuart and Boydell,³⁴⁵ which I argue should also be seen as pointed jabs at West and his fame. One of Stuart's earliest paintings for the Boydell commission was a portrait of the engraver William Woollett (fig. 35), the leading figure in his profession in the late eighteenth century until his death in 1785. West turned to Woollett to engrave *The Death of General Wolfe* (fig. 36), and Woollett's print, published on January 1, 1776, was an unprecedented commercial success.³⁴⁶ In the 1780s West, Woollett, and fellow engraver John Hall (1739-1797) combined to release four additional and highly profitable engravings based on subjects from seventeenth-century British history.³⁴⁷

³⁴⁴ For more on this commission, including a more detailed overview of the project at large, the identities of the numerous sitters, and discussion of Boydell's revolutionary business practice, see Barratt and Miles, *Gilbert Stuart*, 48-50.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 49. Barratt and Miles identify this relationship to West shared among the three portraits, but only as a matter of fact, and don't pursue the line of inquiry any further.

³⁴⁶ Altick, *The Shows of London*, 106. Between 1776 and 1790 Boydell's shop sold approximately £45,000 worth of prints after *Wolfe*.

³⁴⁷ Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 205-209. The works were *Oliver Cromwell Dissolving the Long Parliament* (1782), engraved 1789; *General Monk Receiving Charles II on the Beach at Dover* (1782), engraved 1789; *The Battle of the Boyne* (1778), engraved 1781; and *The Battle of La Hogue* (c. 1775-1780), engraved 1781.

The same year as Woollett's portrait, Stuart also began work on a portrait of Hall (fig. 37), who had also engraved West's paintings as early as 1769, and collaborated with Woollett to engrave several of his paintings in the 1780s.³⁴⁸ When Woollett completed his engraving of *The Death of General Wolfe* in 1775, a proof was shown to King George III, who by that point owned a version of the famous painting, and the king was so struck by the print that he appointed Woollett as Engraver in Ordinary to His Majesty.³⁴⁹ When Woollett died in 1785, Hall succeeded him in that position and as England's leading engraver.³⁵⁰ Much of Hall's success was also owed to his relationship with West, as his engraving of *William Penn's Treaty with the Indians* (fig. 38), published on June 12, 1775, was also a popular success and paved the way for West's financial windfall resulting from the publication of Woollett's print after *The Death of General Wolfe* months later.³⁵¹

Stuart depicts both engravers with attributes related to their trade. Woollett holds a burin in his right hand, which rests on top of a blank copper plate. His attire – a loose coat, or banyan, and velvet turban, both bright red – was a common outfit for artists of the time, allowing for ease of movement while imbuing the artist with an exotic aura.³⁵² Woollett twists to his left to address the viewer, turning away from the

³⁴⁸ Ibid., 167, 214, 226. Hall engraved *Pyrrhus when a Child, Brought before Galucias* and *Venus Relating to Adonis the Story of Hippomenes and Atalanta* for West in 1769.

³⁴⁹ Louis Fagan, *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Engraved Works of William Woollett* (London: The Fine Art Society Limited, 1885), x. Barratt and Miles, *Gilbert Stuart*, 52.

³⁵⁰ Barratt and Miles, *Gilbert Stuart*, 54.

³⁵¹ Ellen Starr Brinton, "Benjamin West's Painting of Penn's Treaty with the Indians," *Bulletin of Friends' Historical Society* 30, no. 2 (Autumn, 1941), 119-120.

³⁵² Barratt and Miles, *Gilbert Stuart*, 52. For more on the banyan as artistic or creative attire, see Brandon Brame Fortune's chapter entitled "Banyans and the Scholarly Image," in Brandon Brame Fortune, *Franklin and His Friends: Portraying the Man of Science in Eighteenth-Century America*,

previous object of his attention, a small copy of *The Death of General Wolfe*.³⁵³ Thus Woollett and West are inextricably bound together in Stuart's portrait of the former. *The Death of General Wolfe* was the climax of Woollett's career and marked the ascendancy of West to the upper stratosphere of the English academic art world.

Curious, however, is the selection from *The Death of General Wolfe* that Stuart includes in the background of Woollett's portrait. Woollett works on the identical section of the painting, showing an unknown grenadier and his assistant, that West included in his 1776 *Self-Portrait* (fig. 30). Stuart reminds the viewer that West, who presented himself as a singular genius, relied on a great deal of support from a variety of sources to execute his masterpieces.³⁵⁴ More importantly, the Woollett portrait removes agency for West's success from the painter himself and places it on the shoulders of the engraver. After all, most of the public recognition of *The Death of General Wolfe*, and of West's resulting monetary success, came not from the oil paint applied to canvas by West's hand but from the copy of the work as interpreted and inscribed by the master engraver, Woollett.

(Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery, 1999), 51-65. Jane Stuart describes a series of incidents in which Stuart's dog Dash, struck by Woollett's exotic appearance, had to be forcibly kept out of the room in which the painting was kept before being sent to Boydell, for fear he would attack it thinking it was the real Woollett. She suggests this happened with several other portraits as well. Stuart, "The Youth of Gilbert Stuart," 644. The story recalls similar myths about works by artists intended to demonstrate the artist's facility in the classical skill of *mimesis*. See Elizabeth C. Mansfield, *Too Beautiful to Picture: Zeuxis, Myth, and Mimesis* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Kris and Kurz, *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist*.

³⁵³ Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 216. Usually West would provide the full-sized canvas to the engraver for copying, but in the case of Wolfe, he created a smaller oil-on-panel version for Woollett to work from.

³⁵⁴ Stuart had entered West's studio after the execution of the multiple versions of *The Death of General Wolfe*, and after Woollett's engraving was published. Much of Stuart's responsibility within West's studio was to contribute drapery and other details to the master's history paintings, so in addition to acknowledging Woollett's contribution to West's success, this reminder of West's reliance on others also recognizes Stuart's contributions.

Whereas William Woollett is shown at work on his engraving of *The Death of General Wolfe*, John Hall is depicted with the end product of his labors, a proof copy of his mezzotint engraving of *William Penn's Treaty with the Indians*. Hall's engraving tools, his cutter and burnisher, lie on the table in front of him, but only as symbols of his trade, as he would have no need for them at this point in the process. Hall is dressed more formally than Woollett, wearing a jacket and waistcoat with a ruffled shirt and a wig. He is a gentleman first and an artisan second, a similar presentation to West's 1776 *Self-Portrait*. Again, the decision to identify Hall with West's *William Penn's Treaty with the Indians* (fig. 39) serves as a statement about that painter's reliance on engravers for the spread of his fame, and at the same time it is a statement about the engraver's own success through his collaboration with West.

In *William Woollett* only the edge of the source material is evident, while in *John Hall* the viewer is presented with the central scene of *Penn's Treaty*. Carrie Rebora Barratt argues that Stuart included *Penn's Treaty* in his portrait of Hall "[i]n honor of his teacher and in light of contemporary politics [and because] Stuart probably liked the resonance between the situation shown in this image...and the one just coming to a close between Britain and the American colonies."³⁵⁵ I suggest that Stuart's purpose should also be read as a subversive attempt to highlight, eight years after the fact, Hall's importance in West's ascendance. While it was a natural fit to include Hall's most successful print in his portrait, doing so also inexorably tied West's success with *Penn's Treaty* to the efforts of another artist.³⁵⁶

³⁵⁵ Barratt and Miles, *Gilbert Stuart*, 54.

³⁵⁶ This would have been a particularly cutting attack on West, who relied on his reported youthful encounters with Native Americans in order to set his childhood apart from other artists.

The central theme of *Penn's Treaty*, visible in the proof held by Hall, is a meeting between William Penn, founder of the Colony of Pennsylvania, and the Lenape Indian tribe in 1683, in Shackamaxon (part of present-day Philadelphia) along the Delaware River.³⁵⁷ Hall's engraving flipped the composition from how it appeared in West's painting,³⁵⁸ and Stuart has further altered the image by folding over the side of the proof in Hall's hands, thereby shifting Penn into the center of the visible composition. In Hall's engraving Penn stands just to the right of center, arms outstretched in a gesture of openness, standing among a group of settlers.³⁵⁹ The colonists address the Lenape chief Tamanend, standing opposite the Europeans and surrounded by his own tribesmen. In the space between the two leaders and their entourages, two settlers kneel on the ground and proffer gifts, most noticeably a bolt of white cloth, to the Native Americans. Smaller groups of onlookers from both camps flank the central composition, while the background is dominated by the growing cityscape of Philadelphia.³⁶⁰ As Ellen Brinton notes, the painting "was the first pictorial representation of life in America to be seen by many Europeans," and was trusted as a truthful rendering of the colonial experience.³⁶¹

³⁵⁷ The veracity of West's depiction to the actual event is unclear, as West's painting is the source of the earliest published account. Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 207.

³⁵⁸ Hall's print was also published under the longer, and chronologically incorrect, title *William Penn when he founded the Province of Pennsylvania in North America, 1681*.

³⁵⁹ West included the portraits of his father John and step-brother Thomas among the settlers. See von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 207.

³⁶⁰ The city was only a year old at the time of Penn's treaty. As Ann Uhry Abrams points out, the buildings depicted in *Penn's Treaty* closely resemble the Philadelphia of West's youth. The scene is noticeably anachronistic, as in addition to the city, Penn and his colleagues wear clothes in the style and colors of 1770s America, not 1680s. Ann Uhry Abrams, "Benjamin West's Documentation of Colonial History: William Penn's Treaty with the Indians," *The Art Bulletin* 64, no. 1 (Mar., 1982): 74.

³⁶¹ Brinton, "Benjamin West's Painting of Penn's Treaty with the Indians," 118.

In the hands of its engraver, the print of *Penn's Treaty* fittingly symbolized the productive working relationship between painter and engraver, each applying their own skills toward the creation of a work which brought both of them fame and fortune. Mediated by Stuart's intervention as a portraitist, the subject takes on a different character. West, as the head of a workshop, can be read as William Penn, with the presence of his coterie a tacit reminder of the role his student assistants played in the artistic process.³⁶² After all, while Penn leads the Pennsylvanian delegation, it is two younger settlers who hunch down and present the Lenape with the material goods which function as the economic basis of the transaction. Without the presence of underlings to conduct the contractual dirty work, neither Penn's treaty with the Lenape nor West's large-scale history paintings could exist.

Rounding out the group of related portraits from Boydell's commission is Stuart's composition of West (fig. 40), completed in 1784. Boydell's financial wellbeing was dependent on the output of artists and engravers; his engagement of Woollett to execute a print of Richard Wilson's *Destruction of the Children of Niobe* (fig. 41) established England's position in the continental print trade, and set the stage for Woollett's engraving of *The Death of General Wolfe*.³⁶³ Unlike many publishers who produced new material like atlases and travel guides, Boydell focused on reproductions of well-known works, so maintaining a strong working relationship with artists like Wilson and West was crucial. Famously, the idea for his 1786

³⁶² This association would become even more tantalizing in light of the nineteenth century rumor that West had painted himself as one of the kneeling settlers, who are dressed in anachronistic eighteenth-century attire. Ann Uhry Abrams, "Benjamin West's Documentation of Colonial History," 73.

³⁶³ Sven H.A. Bruntjen, *John Boydell, 1719-1804: A Study of Art Patronage and Publishing in Georgian London* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1985), 38.

Shakespeare Gallery came from a dinner whose guest list included West, George Romney, and landscape painter Paul Sandby (1731-1809). It therefore stands to reason that Boydell would commission portraits of the men whose physical and intellectual output provided the basis for his own profession. The manner in which Stuart depicts these men is unusual, but as Rather argues, appropriate:

[Stuart] declined to portray his fellow engravers and painters as conventional characters in a historical drama about the status of artists. Instead, he represented them as contemporaries and colleagues and as enterprising individuals, an approach that suited their display in Boydell's shop.³⁶⁴

In Stuart's portrait of West, the sitter, like Woollett and Hall, is presented with an output of his labor, a charcoal sketch of *Moses Receiving the Laws*.³⁶⁵ At the time Stuart executed this portrait West was working on a history painting of Moses receiving the law from God on Mount Sinai and intended for his ambitious Chapel of Revealed Religion at Windsor.³⁶⁶ However, the painting shown by Stuart is *not* West's *Moses Receiving the Laws* (fig. 42); rather, it is Stuart's own version (fig. 43), created for a commission for the Fitzroy Chapel, which West had been offered – the chapel was his family's house of worship – and passed to Stuart.³⁶⁷

³⁶⁴ Rather, "Contrary Stuart," 76.

³⁶⁵ West's attire and body shape are almost identical to John Hall (see fig. 37), which suggests that Stuart either replicated Hall's body for West's portrait, or invented it entirely. Neither result would have been particularly surprisingly in terms of eighteenth-century portraiture in general, but curious considering the prominence of both sitters and the personal relationship between West and Stuart, not to mention that both portraits were intended for the same gallery.

³⁶⁶ The intended arrangement of works in the Chapel of Revealed Religion frequently changed. *Moses Receiving the Laws* was to be placed on the altar wall of the chapel in early plans. When the King suspended work on the chapel in 1801, rather than abandon the project, West began to reconceive the space. In a diagram created days after the King's decision, West shifted *Moses Receiving the Laws* to another wall dedicated to Old Testament subjects, and placed a *Crucifixion* painting on the altar wall instead. N. Pressly, *Revealed Religion*, 18.

³⁶⁷ This identification is made by Mount, *Gilbert Stuart*, 86 acknowledged as a possibility by von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 302-303, and confirmed by Barratt in Barratt and Miles,

Carrie Reborra Barratt argues that Stuart's inclusion of his rendition of a subject painted simultaneously by West shows the student's respect for his master:

The aspect of West with a student painting on his easel refers either to his generosity as a teacher or to his passing off student work as his own. Stuart's unfailing respect for West argues for the former, even though by 1783 Stuart had struck out on his own and may have wished to make known just how much the student had done for the teacher.³⁶⁸

This interpretation relies on an understanding of West's receipt of approval from King George III for the Chapel of Revealed Religion as an analog for Moses receiving the laws on Mount Sinai.

However, as Susan Rather has explained, while the West-as-Moses interpretation holds true,³⁶⁹ Stuart's respect for West was anything but unfailing.³⁷⁰ The presence of his *Moses* in West's portrait confronts the viewer with the close working relationship of the two artists.³⁷¹ At the same time Stuart was painting West's portrait, the sitter dashed off a well-known sketch (fig. 44) of Stuart at work. Charles Merrill Mount describes Stuart's presence in the sketch evocatively: Stuart is "seated cross-legged, dressed as though for a ball, his hair disheveled, his expression

Gilbert Stuart, 57. Previously the painting in the background of Stuart's portrait of West had been identified as West's *Moses Receiving the Law*; see McLanathan, *Gilbert Stuart*, 52.

³⁶⁸ Barratt and Miles, *Gilbert Stuart*, 57.

³⁶⁹ This interpretation leads to further Biblical questioning. If West is Moses, then would Stuart want to be seen as Aaron, Moses's brother who was gifted in persuasive speech and usually spoke on behalf of his brother? The Moses-Aaron relationship does not map directly onto that of West and Stuart, but it does fit with Stuart's awareness of his persuasive talent in dealing with patrons compared to West's discomfort with personal written and spoken expression.

³⁷⁰ Rather, "Contrary Stuart," 70-77. Some of Stuart's mean-spirited critiques of West included frequent mockery of West's tendency to dress in fine clothes, and accusations of effeminate behavior.

³⁷¹ It also serves as a reminder of the presence of Stuart in West's painting of that subject. Stuart and John Trumbull, who was also part of West's studio during the execution of *Moses Receiving the Law*, both appear in the painting. Stuart is the man kneeling in the right foreground of the painting, while Trumbull is the man in profile, gazing up at Moses, on the left side of the canvas. Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 300.

grim, a pot of oil balanced precariously on the edge of his seat. That Stuart was deeply troubled West saw and recorded in a hollow grimacing face...³⁷² What Mount interpreted as Stuart's hesitation over another commissioned portrait in this series, of Sir Joshua Reynolds, should also be read as Stuart's trepidation about the intensity of the challenge presented in his portrait of West. It elevates Stuart to the level of West in terms of history painting, a genre which was not Stuart's specialty. If the upstart Stuart could equal Benjamin West in history painting, what accolades were possible for the Rhode Island native in his preferred field of portraiture?

Ambiguous Relationship

Presumably the jabs hidden by Stuart in his portraits of Woollett, Hall, and West were meant to be subtle. Even if they were fully understood by West, they did not lead to a schism between the two men. Stuart continued to work in London until 1787, when he followed a trail of commissions to Dublin and remained there for six years, pursuing additional work and establishing a life with his new bride Charlotte Coates. The year Stuart left London, and for several years after he left West's studio, he was engaged by the history painter to assist on a canvas for George III for the Audience Chamber at Windsor Castle. *The Institution of the Order of the Garter* (fig. 45)³⁷³ is a massive history painting depicting the creation of the Order of the Knights of the Garter³⁷⁴ in 1348 by Edward III, an event which took place in the very castle

³⁷² Mount, *Gilbert Stuart*, 86.

³⁷³ As von Erffa and Staley explain, *The Institution of the Order of the Garter* borrows its compositional structure heavily from Sir Peter Paul Rubens' *Coronation of Marie de' Medici*. Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 94, 200.

³⁷⁴ The Most Noble Order of the Garter was part of an early fourteenth-century development of monarchical orders of knighthood, which were composed of secular knights associated to a royal. Such

within which the painting was to hang as part of a series of eight works, all executed between 1787 and 1789. The right foreground shows the Bishops of Winchester and Salisbury performing mass, while Edward III and the Prince of Wales kneel on either side of the altar.³⁷⁵ Lined up behind Edward and the prince are the other original members of the Order, clad in identical purple velvet mantles embroidered with a pattern of the garter emblem of the Order in gold thread.³⁷⁶ Other members of the royal family, clergy, nobles, and ambassadors fill out the scene. The crowd also includes multiple prisoners, including the King of Scotland prominently placed in the balcony overlooking the altar and a group of captured French nobles in the background underneath the central arch.³⁷⁷ Roy Strong, analyzing West's Edward III series as a historical document, calls it "the most significant step forward in an accurate recreation of the Middle Ages made by any painter in late-eighteenth-century England. They are milestones in the emergence of the artist-antiquarian."³⁷⁸

Nonetheless, while West maintained strict fidelity to the attire of the Knights

orders had already appeared in Hungary, Spain, and France over the span of approximately two decades before King Edward decided to form the Order of the Garter after a chivalric tournament in 1344. According to Begent and Chesshyre, the emblem of the garter was selected because of its function in fourteenth-century military attire, although the specific symbolism remains unknown. Initially the Order functioned as a "sophisticated instrument of patronage" as well as a way for the King "to galvanise aristocratic support for the war with France," the Hundred Years' War he had initiated in 1337 when he refused to pay homage to Philip VI of France. Peter J. Begent and Hubert Chesshyre, *The Most Noble Order of the Garter: 650 Years* (London: Spink, 1999), 7-18.

³⁷⁵ Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 199.

³⁷⁶ West's depiction of the robes and regalia of the Order of the Garter reflects their appearance as described in Elias Ashmole's 1672 *The Institution, Laws and Ceremonies of the Most Noble Order of the Garter* and Joseph Strutt's 1773 *The Regal and Ecclesiastical Antiquities of England*, which describe and depict, respectively the mantles the Knights would have worn in 1348. Roy Strong, *Recreating the Past: British History and the Victorian Painter* (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 81-82. For more on the details of the attire of the Order of the Garter, see Begent and Chesshyre, *The Most Noble Order of the Garter: 650 Years*, 148-177.

³⁷⁷ Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 199-200.

³⁷⁸ Strong, *Recreating the Past*, 81.

of the Garter, the setting of *The Institution of the Order of the Garter*, is anachronistic, taking place in the nave of St. George's Chapel, a space which was not constructed until a century and a half after the ceremony depicted therein. Several of the figures are also temporally misplaced. In the background below the leftmost arch is a group of heads stacked into the small available space on the edge of the canvas (fig. 46). These seven faces are those of Benjamin West, Elizabeth West, Raphael West, Benjamin West, Jr., Richard Livesay, John Trumbull, and Gilbert Stuart. The presence of West within the *Order of the Garter* was at the behest of the king. Galt, in his characteristic fashion, describes George's reasoning in such a way as to confer nobility on West in the process:

In the composition for the Institution of the Garter, the late Marquis of Buckingham offered several suggestions, which were adopted; and on His Lordship mentioning to the King that Mr. West was descended of the Delaware family, the head of which bore a distinguished part in the great events of that time, His Majesty ordered Mr. West to insert his own portrait among the spectators represented in the gallery, and immediately over the shield bearing the arms of the Earl of Delaware. Mr. West himself was not, as that period, acquainted with the descent of his pedigree; but it happened in a conversation one day with Lord Buckingham, that His Lordship enquired from what part of England his family had been originally, and upon Mr. West telling him, His Lordship said, that the land which his ancestors had formerly possessed was become his by purchase; and that the Wests of Long Crandon were sprung from the ancient Earls of Delaware³⁷⁹

Galt's description only accounts for the addition of West's head to the painting, not those of his family and assistants. Presumably West, never short on confidence, thought that with his newfound noble heritage it was appropriate to include his entire family in the work. As discussed previously, for West this notion of family included his students and assistants, hence Stuart, Trumbull, and Livesay's presence within the grouping. Wanting to ensure the best likeness possible, West requested that Stuart

³⁷⁹ Galt, *The Life of West*, Part 2, 72-73.

execute his portrait in the *Order of the Garter*.³⁸⁰ Von Erffa and Staley postulate that Stuart may have painted the other likenesses of West's family and students,³⁸¹ while George Mason claims that West painted Stuart's head.³⁸²

When read against Susan Rather's detailed study of Stuart's personal and professional inclinations, the assistance the artist provided West on his monumental commission in 1787 is interesting. As Rather argues, Stuart spent a considerable amount of energy, almost from the moment he entered Benjamin West's studio, in presenting himself as an entirely different type of artist and man from West, with differing "ideals of regularity, decorum, and propriety that had been critical to his teacher West and other artists prominent during Stuart's formative years in the profession...Stuart shaped his image for posterity in the performance of a self that countered the person and practice of the gentleman-artist."³⁸³ In this way, Stuart was similar to his teacher. Both maintained crafted identities, developing personas to fit their circumstances and goals: West presented himself as a gentleman-artist,³⁸⁴ cultivating his friendship with the king and seeking out leadership roles within the Royal Academy of Arts so as to insinuate himself within the upper echelons of British

³⁸⁰ *Public Advertiser*, August 3, 1787, quoted in Whitley, *Gilbert Stuart*, 64. Prior to painting West's portrait, Stuart also posed as Charles I for artist. See Mount, *Gilbert Stuart*, 120. According to Mount, around the time Stuart was painting West into the *Order of the Garter* he borrowed from his former instructor a portrait Stuart had painted of West, presumably to assist Stuart in contributing to the *Order of the Garter*. Stuart then turned around and sold the portrait to John Boydell; West did not discover its sale until after Stuart had left for Dublin. Mount, *Gilbert Stuart*, 120-121.

³⁸¹ Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 200.

³⁸² George C. Mason, *The Life and Works of Gilbert Stuart* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1894), 82.

³⁸³ Rather, "Contrary Stuart," 69.

³⁸⁴ While paradoxically also drawing attention to the so-called exoticism of his American upbringing, usually through childhood friendships with Native Americans, when the situation availed itself; see Galt, *The Life of West*, Part 1, 17-18 for an example.

society; Stuart, on the other hand, “developed a more modern persona as a painter who...maintained studied independence from patrons and professional predecessors, insisted on personal artistic authority, and resisted social norms.”³⁸⁵

To suggest that Stuart was single-minded in his presentation as an artistic genius fails to acknowledge the artist’s deft negotiation of the social landscape of late-eighteenth-century England, something he achieved in common with West.³⁸⁶ While Stuart may have maintained an attitude of “combativeness, eccentricity, and humor...to distinguish himself from his cohort,”³⁸⁷ he was equally guilty of adapting his persona to fit the circumstances for various contexts, thereby mocking the pretentious displays of wealth seen in portraits by his contemporaries while filling his own portraits with excess, so long as the sitter did not question his handling.³⁸⁸

Stuart’s Return to America

Stuart’s contribution to *The Institution of the Order of the Garter* was one of the last acts of painting he completed in London. According to William Thomas Whitley, “there are no newspaper records of Stuart’s activities in London” after the mention of his contribution to the *Order of the Garter* in the August 3, 1787 issue of the *Public Advertiser*.³⁸⁹ He ventured to Dublin to seek further portraiture commissions and to avoid debtors, a combination which later encouraged his return to

³⁸⁵ Rather, “Contrary Stuart,” 69.

³⁸⁶ Ibid., 70.

³⁸⁷ Ibid., 69.

³⁸⁸ Ibid., 80. See Stuart’s portraits *Matilda Stoughton de Jaudenes y Nebot* and *Josef de Jaudenes y Nebot* in Barratt and Miles, *Gilbert Stuart*, 124-127 for an example of the excessive flashiness which Stuart derided while still creating.

³⁸⁹ Whitley, *Gilbert Stuart*, 64.

North America in 1793. More than just an escape from Europe, this return trip presented Stuart with an outstanding opportunity. By the early 1790s he had established himself as a wildly successful portraitist in Dublin.³⁹⁰ With West and Copley still firmly entrenched in the London art world, Stuart's need to stay one step ahead of his creditors became a reason to take advantage of the infancy of the American portraiture market. In particular, Stuart, a firsthand witness to the many windfalls West received at the hands of King George III, formulated a plan to execute a series of portraits of George Washington and thereby gain the favor of the chief executive of the United States of America.³⁹¹

In his pursuit of success Stuart traversed the Eastern seaboard. Upon arriving in the United States he started a studio in New York City, remaining there for two years until moving to Germantown, Pennsylvania (now part of Philadelphia) in 1795.³⁹² Between 1803 and 1805 he operated his studio in Washington, D.C., and in 1805 he traveled north to Boston, where he remained until his death in 1828.

Much like his erstwhile mentor, Stuart cultivated a reputation for accessibility to neophyte artists, both before and after his time in Europe. As previously mentioned, Stuart briefly taught both Mather Brown and John Trumbull before each man voyaged to London for West's instruction. Much of Stuart's time in the period between 1793 and 1805 was spent focused on portraiture, as the artist attempted to establish himself in three different cities in turn. Once Stuart traveled north to Boston

³⁹⁰ Barratt and Miles, *Gilbert Stuart*, 75.

³⁹¹ Mount, *Gilbert Stuart*, 156. Whitley, *Gilbert Stuart*, 94-109.

³⁹² For a comprehensive overview of Gilbert Stuart's time in New York City, see Zygmunt, "Portraiture and Politics in New York City," 12-67.

in 1805 he finally was able to secure a comfortable lifestyle, and it was there he settled into what Mount has termed “the long twilight,”³⁹³ a period in which he began teaching in earnest. According to his American colleague Washington Allston, Stuart “had a pleasure in praising. To the younger artists he was uniformly kind and indulgent, and most liberal of his advice; which no one ever properly asked but he received, and in a manner no less courteous than impressive.”³⁹⁴

In addition to accepting American artists who approached him, Stuart funneled several promising students – Thomas Sully, and Stuart’s namesake nephew Gilbert Stuart Newton – to West’s studio. Stuart’s willingness to train artists stemmed from financial need as well as personal altruism. In a nation essentially absent the aristocratic class on which English portraitists relied, Stuart had to drastically refigure his asking price for commissions. In New York City he charged \$50 for a bust portrait, a drop of almost two-thirds from what he charged in London and Dublin.³⁹⁵

As Mount writes, “Stuart was sought out by aspiring artists from all parts of America; to them he retained his essential kindness, a part of the London code that made a gentleman indulgent to those less fortunate.”³⁹⁶ John Hill Morgan, drawing his information largely from William Dunlap and Benjamin Waterhouse, lists twenty-

³⁹³ Mount uses the term as the title of a chapter describing Stuart’s life shortly after arriving in Boston in 1805, in which the biographer discusses Stuart’s final stylistic shifts away from Reynolds and Romney toward Sir Thomas Lawrence, and the artist’s acceptance of working in a location filled with what passed for an American aristocracy but far from any centers of political and social power; in Mount, *Gilbert Stuart*, 270-280

³⁹⁴ Allston’s tribute to Stuart after his death, in *Boston Daily Advertiser*, July 22, 1828, quoted in Morgan, *Gilbert Stuart and His Pupils*, 3.

³⁹⁵ Mount, *Gilbert Stuart*, 166. In London and Dublin, Stuart would have charged the equivalent of \$120 for a bust portrait, so his asking price dropped 58.33% in the United States. As Mount points out, not only did Stuart charge less in order to attract a merchant class audience, his cost for supplies was much higher than in Europe.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 287.

two students of Stuart during his lifetime.³⁹⁷ Morgan's criteria for identifying an artist as Stuart's student is less than rigorous, including as evidence documents which only prove that the artist copied Stuart's work as part of their instruction,³⁹⁸ or letters that indicate passing acquaintance.³⁹⁹ Nonetheless, it provides a helpful view for the artists who worked with Stuart and who sought to associate themselves with him by any means necessary,⁴⁰⁰ a situation he would have seen occur with his mentor and which Dunlap suggests happened with Stuart and West. Of this number, Brown and Trumbull worked with Stuart prior to his trip to London, while two others worked with him in Dublin and the remainder (ostensibly) studied with the master portraitist after he returned to North America.⁴⁰¹

Thus, despite a fraught relationship between Gilbert Stuart and Benjamin West, one in which the younger Stuart often bristled against his older teacher's advice, in the end the student began to closely resemble the master. Unlike earlier

³⁹⁷ See Morgan, *Gilbert Stuart and His Pupils*. The students are Mather Brown, John Trumbull, George Place, John Comerford, Benjamin Trott, John Vanderlyn, Rembrandt Peale, John R. Penniman, Thomas Sully, Gilbert Stuart Newton, Charles Gilbert Stuart, Jane Stuart, James Frothingham, Matthew Harris Jouett, Jacob Eichholtz, Sarah Goodridge, William James Hubbard, John Neagle, Fabius Whiting, Henry Sargent, Francis Alexander, and Samuel F.B. Morse. Of these twenty-two, seven – Brown, Trumbull, Peale, Sully, Newton, Sargent, and Morse – also studied with West.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 23-24, 33-35.

³⁹⁹ This is the case with Rembrandt Peale and Samuel F.B. Morse. See Morgan, *Gilbert Stuart and His Pupils*, 31-32, 76-77.

⁴⁰⁰ Stuart's daughter Jane, whom Morgan counts as one of Stuart's students while acknowledging that she likely received no "instruction" other than watching her father deal with other artists, described her father's popularity with outsiders: "His door would be besieged by persons who must see him... He was pursued, among others, by young aspirants for artistic fame, who brought drawings or paintings which he was expected to admire as a matter of course..." Jane Stuart, "Anecdotes of Gilbert Stuart. By His Daughter," *Scribner's Monthly* 14, no. 3 (Jul., 1877): 376.

⁴⁰¹ While Stuart was altruistic when it came to accepting students, he took pains to resist any suggestions that they were his equals. According to Whitley, when an ode to a portrait of Stuart by Charles Willson and Rembrandt Peale appeared in *The Portfolio*, Stuart laughed at the poem's suggestion that the two men had equaled him. Whitley, *Gilbert Stuart*, 121.

students like Charles Willson Peale, who identified public association with West as a boon to his artistic practice, Stuart resisted and then resented this association for the very reason West welcomed it, because it tied the student's success to the master. Stuart's personality was much like West's, in that he desired acknowledgement as a singular genius. The trajectory of Stuart's career evinces constant negotiation with West, as Stuart accepted the elder artist's support throughout his life when necessary, while always taking care to keep West at arm's length when the support became too stifling or too prohibitive of Stuart establishing an independent identity. By the end of his career, settled near his birthplace and firmly established as an independent artist, no less his nation's greatest portraitist, Stuart recognized the utility for his fellow artists and for his country to spread his knowledge willingly. However, at the end of the day, Stuart's goal was different than that of West. There was no great Stuart workshop, no menagerie of young students assisting on Stuart's grand canvases, for he attempted none. Instead, this was a more personal transmission of knowledge, reflecting Stuart's interaction with his initial teacher, Cosmo Alexander, and more fitting the developing status of the arts in the United States of America, rather than conforming to the European studio system emulated by West.

Chapter 4: West, Copley, John Trumbull, and the Development of American History Painting

The fourth and fifth decades of Benjamin West's life were hectic, yet productive. By the early 1770s he had established himself as the leading history painter in London thanks to the success of his American canvases, *The Death of General Wolfe* and *William Penn's Treaty with the Indians*. He was a member of the elite cadre of thirty artists who composed the initial membership of the Royal Academy of Arts, and had become the favorite artist of King George III, who in 1772 named West the Historical Painter to the King. The success of the mid-1770s proliferation of prints after his history paintings brought West significant financial gain, which, combined with the king's patronage, afforded him and his family a comfortable lifestyle.

In addition to his personal artistic output, the 1770s and 1780s saw an increase in West's teaching and in the critical acclaim afforded his students. While early students had exhibited at various London exhibitions, it was not until Gilbert Stuart's success in 1782 with *The Skater* (fig. 34) and then shortly after with his series of portraits for Alderman John Boydell (figs. 35, 37, 40), that West's students began to receive significant public recognition.

Increased attention also bred increased scrutiny on all aspects of West's life. Early in his career he had cultivated his identity as the American Raphael (emphasis on *American*) which gave him an air of the exotic to a European audience. That association with the land of his birth continued throughout West's career, and was not

a one-sided affair. As Benjamin Franklin's letter to Jan Ingenhousz showed,⁴⁰² West was seen as an American by Americans. His mentorship of Peale, Stuart, and other Americans had by then established his workshop as a premier destination for aspiring artists from the other side of the Atlantic Ocean.

West's American character, an integral part of his identity as an artist, became increasingly problematic in the years surrounding the American Revolution, especially in light of his friendship with George III. Adding to the difficulty of West's negotiation of his national identity in the 1780s was his close association with John Trumbull, a former officer in the Continental Army and accused American spy who spent several years in West's workshop, first in 1780 and then again in 1784-85. Trumbull's presence in London was initially a concern for the older artist, as it would have been for any father or father figure whose son had rebelled against the crown. However, after the war West found a way to transform his mentorship of Trumbull into a boon. He strategically abandoned multiple artistic projects with pro-American subjects, and encouraged Trumbull to take them up instead, thus positioning Trumbull as the most outwardly "American" artist active in England. In turn, this approach allowed West to forestall critiques over his own nationality and political interests, while his mentorship of Trumbull maintained his American associations to the citizens of that new nation.

West as American: Personal and Public Identity

West's political beliefs, and his opinion on the revolutionary spirit which engulfed North America in the 1770s, are evident in a letter to Charles Willson Peale

⁴⁰² Franklin to Jan Ingenhousz, May 16, 1783, in *The Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, 45.

written two months before the start of the American Revolutionary War:

The present commotions between this country and its colonies is a subject I could dwell long on, but prudence and the times will not permit my saying any thing on that head – as what I might say would have but little weight in the scale of opinions. If it would, I should stand forth and speak it boldly, though it were at the risk of my all.

As opposition and differing in opinion in regard to the right of taxing America, seems to be hastening to a crisis, I hope my countrymen will act with that wisdom and spirit which seems to have directed them as yet, and be the means of bringing about a more permanent union than has been for these some years past between that country and this.

Measures taken here relative to America show but little knowledge of that country...and should measures with you be as wrongly advised as with us, both countries are for some time undone, and which if pursued must finally break those extensive outlines of British Empire which those colonies alone must have procured her.⁴⁰³

Privately, West presented himself as a supporter of the patriots to supporters of the American cause, while refusing to publicly tip his hand on his political stance. His contemporaries do little to clarify West's beliefs. Trumbull claims in his *Autobiography* that West was a patriot,⁴⁰⁴ although that one would expect no less a statement from the claimant. Galt is no help when it comes to West's politics. As one of the prevailing themes of *The Life of West* is the artist's close association with King George III, Galt avoids any commentary on West's political stances, even though he claims that West and the king frequently discussed the American conflict: "The mind of Mr. West, however, had no enjoyment in political cabals, in the petty enmities of partizans, or the factious intrigues of party leaders."⁴⁰⁵ The makeup of West's studio during the war years supports this claim. After all, in 1780, West's circle of American

⁴⁰³ Benjamin West, quoted in Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 122. Alberts almost certainly edited this text for grammar and spelling, as it does not reflect West's usual deficiencies in those realms.

⁴⁰⁴ Trumbull, *Autobiography*, 75.

⁴⁰⁵ Galt, *The Life of West*, Part 2, 71-72.

students included Gilbert Stuart, the son of a proud Jacobite; Joseph Wright, the son of outspoken patriot and sculptor Patience Wright; Loyalist refugee Ralph Earl; and Colonel John Trumbull, recently resigned from the Continental Army. It would be difficult to find a more disparate set of political beliefs than those held among Stuart, Wright, Earl, and Trumbull, all working side-by-side in West's London studio.

The character of West's workshop did little to quell contemporary challenges to his nonpartisanship. Trumbull relates a story in which William Schaw, Lord Cathcart, asked the artist, in the presence of the king, whether he had celebrated the British victory in the Battle of Camden. It was an attempt to force West to reveal his American sympathies. He refused to take the bait, instead claiming that "I cannot say...that the calamities of my native country can ever give me pleasure," which was the appropriately respectful response in the king's eyes.⁴⁰⁶

Lord Cathcart was one of a small number of influential Britons who saw West's non-politicization in a negative light. The lord, who would later become the 1st Earl Cathcart, was eighteen years younger than West. He participated in the opening years of the American Revolutionary War as a cavalry officer, commanding the British Legion during the Battle of Monmouth. While stationed in North America Cathcart met and married Elizabeth Elliott, the daughter of the colonial governor of New York, and then returned to London with his bride. At home Cathcart appears to have taken up the harassment of West as a pet project, believing the artist to secretly

⁴⁰⁶ Trumbull, *Autobiography*, 312. There is no question that King George III had zero reservations about West's American identity and any potential for treason. The king often turned to West for questions about America, asking his thoughts about various major players in politics and the military. According to Alberts the king privately confided unrealized plans to abdicate to West, and both West and Copley were in attendance in the House of Lords when the king officially recognized the United States of America on December 2, 1782. See Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 142-143.

be a rebel.⁴⁰⁷ According to Alberts, as Lord Cathcart's "influence increased at court in the early years of a long and distinguished career, he and his wife worked persistently to end West's influence with the king and to stop the allowance paid him from the king's privy purse."⁴⁰⁸ Another of West's antagonists was the satirist Dr. John Wolcot, better known by his pen name "Peter Pindar." Wolcot often lampooned members of the Royal Academy, with West a particularly enjoyable target. In 1786 he criticized West's relationship with the king in a short verse:

And as Apelles, 'til well known,
Oft scratch'd and lous'd himself near the throne,
And warm'd with royal smiles his shiv'ring heart:
So West, solicitous to please
Where he can sun himself with ease,
Neglects the brush to play the courtier's part.⁴⁰⁹

While Lord Cathcart disliked West because of his American heritage, Wolcot's issues with the painter seem to stem from West's artistic output and his status as the king's sycophant. The artist's American by birth was simply another arrow in Peter Pindar's overflowing quiver of rhyming barbs.

Arthur S. Marks cautions against reading the revolutionary spirit into Trumbull's anecdote about Lord Cathcart and others like it. Instead he locates West's very real sympathy for America as stemming out of "sentimental" rather than political concerns, and argues that West "seems to have been not especially concerned with the claims made by either side" of the growing conflict.⁴¹⁰ Alberts similarly describes

⁴⁰⁷ James Thomas Flexner, *States Dyckman: American Loyalist* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1980), 56-57.

⁴⁰⁸ Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 126.

⁴⁰⁹ John Wolcot, quoted in Hooock, *The King's Artists*, 156.

⁴¹⁰ Marks, "Benjamin West and the American Revolution," 17.

West as “sympathetic to the American cause,” while noting his “peculiar” position as a confidant to the king, and further pointing out that West willingly aided Loyalist refugees from North America.⁴¹¹ Ann Uhry Abrams looks within West’s canvases to similarly identify political ambiguity, as his *The Allegory of Britannia Receiving the American Loyalists* – reportedly painted between 1783 and 1788, now lost but visible in the background of his portrait of John Eardley-Wilmot (fig. 47)⁴¹² – is unabashedly pro-English, while his unfinished *American Commissioners of the Preliminary Peace Negotiations with Great Britain* (fig. 48) from 1783 presents a pro-American image of triumph.⁴¹³ Holger Hock calls West “a Janus-faced patriot,” suggesting that, rather than remaining apolitical, the artist presented himself as in favor of the American or English cause depending on his audience.⁴¹⁴

Galt’s decision to ignore the American Revolutionary War and his subject’s politics in his biography acknowledges the political climate in England following the war. The first volume of *The Life of West* was published in 1816, the year after the end of the War of 1812, a conflict that was in essence a loss by Britain, as it resulted in no territorial gains, ended any possible consideration of a British recovery of its former colonies, and distracted resources and troops from the Napoleonic Wars.

Indeed, while British public opinion toward America waxed and waned in the

⁴¹¹ Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 122-124. See also the diary entries from Samuel Shoemaker reproduced in George III and Samuel Shoemaker, “A Pennsylvania Loyalist’s Interview with George III. Extract from the MS. Diary of Samuel Shoemaker,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 2, no. 1, (Jan., 1878): 35-39.

⁴¹² Von Erffa and Staley propose that *The Allegory of Britannia* “never existed as an independent painting but only as a picture within a picture” in the background of *John Eardley-Wilmot*, based on a lack of an exhibition record or any contemporary evidence of preparatory work for the painting. Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 219.

⁴¹³ Abrams, *The Valiant Hero*, 198-199.

⁴¹⁴ Hock, *The King’s Artists*, 156.

decades of West's career, often there were political, military, social, or cultural circumstances which made it a smart decision by the high-society artist to avoid any hint of partisanship. Obviously during the 1770s and early 1780s it was socially – and at times personally – dangerous for someone of West's stature and aspirations to espouse strong pro-American sentiments. His most valuable professional connections were his membership in the Royal Academy, his friendship with King George III, and the active pipeline of a wide variety of American students into his studio, and he would not have dared threaten any of them through the overt expression of any opinion on American independence. Von Erffa and Staley identify a shift in West's subjects in the early 1770s, away from the classics and toward British history as proof of the painter's desire to preempt critiques of his work as too American.⁴¹⁵ This revolutionary era was followed by a period of renewed British patriotism in the 1790s, particularly in terms of art patronage and collecting practice,⁴¹⁶ which coincided with the 1792 election of West as the second President of the Royal Academy of Arts after the death of Sir Joshua Reynolds. Again, in light of his professional stature, there was no reason for West to reveal his politics or develop any strong outward artistic associations with America, on canvas or elsewhere.

Nonetheless, his sympathy for America led him to consider the events of, and related to, the Revolutionary War as subjects for paintings even before the war's official end. As the man who popularized the genre of contemporary history painting it would only have made sense for West to turn his attention to the most pressing

⁴¹⁵ Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 77.

⁴¹⁶ Holger Hoock “‘Struggling Against a Vulgar Prejudice’: Patriotism and the Collecting of British Art at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century,” *The Journal of British Studies* 49, no. 3 (Jul., 2010): 567-568.

events of the day. In 1781 he began work on a canvas memorializing the dramatic collapse of the Earl of Chatham after giving an impassioned speech to the House of Lords, and in June of 1783 – after the end of fighting but before the signing of the Treaties of Paris and Versailles – he appealed to Charles Willson Peale for his former student’s portrait of George Washington and drawings of American military uniforms and other war-related ephemera to “enable me to form a few pictures of the great events of the American contest.”⁴¹⁷

West, Copley, and *The Death(s) of the Earl of Chatham*

Even while the outcome of the American Revolutionary War was very much in question, West was thinking about contemporary history subjects related to the American fight for independence. His first effort was a depiction of the collapse of William Pitt, the 1st Earl of Chatham, after giving a speech on April 7, 1778 opposing a motion, proposed by the Duke of Richmond, entreating the king to make peace with the American rebels. Chatham was, like Richmond, a supporter of the colonists’ demands, but he held a very different opinion over the sanctity of Great Britain. He had led the British government during the Seven Years’ War and was a firm believer in the nation’s strength, and had argued consistently in the years prior to the war for

⁴¹⁷ West to Charles Willson Peale, June 15, 1783, in Miller, Hart, and Ward, *Peale Papers*, vol. 1, 390-392. West was so anxious to begin work on his paintings that he sent a second letter to Peale two months later repeating his request. West to Charles Willson Peale, August 4, 1783, in Miller, Hart, and Ward, *Peale Papers*, vol. 1, 393-394. Arthur S. Marks argues against the interpretation of West’s letters as reflecting a personal interest in the war, claiming instead that West was solely interested in “historical reportage” for his works. Marks, “Benjamin West and the American Revolution,” 17. Allen Staley suggests that another work West was engaged on in 1783 also reflected his beliefs regarding the American Revolutionary War: a drawing of *Death on the Pale Horse* (fig. 19). Comparing it to Pablo Picasso’s *Guernica*, Staley notes that West had begun conceiving the drawing in 1780, at the heart of the war, and proposes that West expressed his tortured feelings regarding the war “by projecting them, probably unconsciously, onto a scene of conflict, illustrating a book of the Bible which itself has frequently been interpreted as a deliberately obscure allusion, by an author who feared censorship and reprisal, to contemporary acts of persecution.” Allen Staley, “West’s Death on the Pale Horse,” *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts* 58 (1980): 147.

the government to make concessions to the colonists to keep them within the union.⁴¹⁸ While Richmond saw the acknowledgement of American independence as an acceptable means to avoid continued conflict and allow Britain to prepare for direct war with France, Chatham was unwilling to accept any result which saw the colonists separated from the empire, especially since they had recently secured the aid of Pitt's "ancient inveterate enemy," the French.⁴¹⁹ By the spring of 1778 Chatham was sixty-nine years old and in poor health, and required the assistance of his son William Pitt the Younger in order to make his appearance in the House of Lords.⁴²⁰ In an emotional speech, he argued against the empire's "dismemberment," repeatedly expressing disgust at the possibility of defeat at the hands of the French, and closed by exclaiming: "...my Lords, any state is better than despair. Let us at least make one effort; and if we must fall, let us fall like men!"⁴²¹ After the completion of Chatham's speech Richmond made his own remarks; when Chatham stood up to respond, he pressed his hand to his chest and collapsed. Contrary to the titles of the paintings depicting the scene, the minister did not expire that day. Rather, he was taken to southeast London home, where he passed away a month later, on May 11, 1778.⁴²²

A heroic moment by a larger-than-life figure from contemporary British history related to the most pressing subject of the day, the Earl of Chatham's collapse

⁴¹⁸ Jeremy Black, *Pitt the Elder* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 295-296.

⁴¹⁹ See [John Almon], *Anecdotes of the Life of the Right Hon. William Pitt, Earl of Chatham: And of the Principal Events of His Time: With His Speeches in Parliament, from the Year 1736 to the Year 1778*, vol. 2, 6th edition (London: Printed for L.B. Seeley, 1797), 409-410 for Chatham's speech.

⁴²⁰ Jeremy Black, *Pitt the Elder*, 298-29.

⁴²¹ [Almon], *Anecdotes of the Life of the Right Hon. William Pitt, Earl of Chatham*, 410.

⁴²² J.C. Long, *Mr. Pitt and America's Birthright: A Biography of William Pitt, the Earl of Chatham, 1708-1778* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1940), 532-533.

was an irresistible topic for a contemporary history painting, and West began to work on a canvas depicting Chatham's collapse shortly after it occurred. His countryman Copley followed suit soon after, in a sketch for a contest to memorialize Chatham run by the London Court of Common Council.⁴²³

West's *The Death of the Earl of Chatham* (fig. 49) bears compositional similarities to *The Death of General Wolfe* (fig. 11), the work which had brought him acclaim for his contemporary history painting seven years prior. Just as in *Wolfe*, the Earl of Chatham collapses in a Christ-like pose against the bodies of several onlookers, in the middle ground of the composition. Concerned onlookers regard the scene from nearby, and it is clear that West intended for the work to serve as a record of all the persons in the House of Lords that day, as well as a tribute to Chatham's death. His small oil sketch is claustrophobic, largely due to its monochrome brown atmosphere. Notable about West's depiction of Chatham, who suffered from gout, is the crutch nestled in the crook of his left arm and his bandaged feet, reinforcing the mortality of Chatham, and marking a distinction from *The Death of General Wolfe*, in which the cause of the hero's pain is masked from the viewer's eyes.

While West went in an intimate direction with the space for *Death of Chatham* and in his portrayal of the dying minister, Copley took his version of the scene (fig. 50) in a different direction, based on the successful display of his large-scale dramatic history painting *Watson and the Shark* (fig. 51) at the 1778 Royal Academy exhibition and saw Chatham's collapse as an opportune subject to build on his reputation. Whereas West focused on Chatham and the small number of ministers

⁴²³ Prown, *John Singleton Copley*, vol. 2, 277-278. While West may have begun work on his *Death of Chatham* anticipating a contest, there is no evidence that he planned his sketch with the London Court contest in mind. Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 218.

surrounding him who were actually in attendance at the House of Lords that day, Copley's *The Death of the Earl of Chatham* included the portraits of fifty-five peers, some of whom were not witness to Chatham's collapse, to reinforce his skill at both history painting and portraiture within the same canvas. His composition is very similar to West's, also drawing heavily from *Wolfe* for inspiration, with a stronger spotlight on Chatham serving to increase its legibility compared to West's sketch. Copley hoped that the inclusion of so many likenesses would encourage public interest in his work, which he exhibited privately with an admission charge of one shilling and of which he sold subscriptions for an engraving after the canvas.⁴²⁴

Horace Walpole had viewed both West's sketch and Copley's canvas, and in 1779 offered his own critique, as well as the reason for West stopping his work:

Mr. West made a small sketch of the death of lord Chatham, much better expressed and disposed than Copley's. It has none but the principal persons present; Copley's almost the whole peerage, of whom seldom so many are there at once, and in Copley's most are mere spectators. But the great merit of West's is the principal figure, which has his crutch and gouty stockings, which express his feelings and account for his death. West would not finish it not to interfere with his friend Copley.⁴²⁵

Raphael West corroborated Walpole's claim that West stopped his own work after learning of Copley's own attempt on the subject, without delving any further into the reasons.⁴²⁶ As Alberts notes, "as a much faster worker than Copley and with fewer

⁴²⁴ Prown, *John Singleton Copley*, vol. 2, 284.

⁴²⁵ Walpole, *Anecdotes of Painting in England*, vol. 4, 116. Walpole's remarks were great praise, as the English politician and art critic was a harsh critic. Several years prior to viewing the two deaths of Chatham, he had remarked in a letter to frequent correspondent Sir Horace Mann bemoaning the state of arts in England after viewing the 1775 Royal Academy exhibition: "We have an American West, who deals in high history and is vastly admired, but he is heavier than Guercino, and has still less grace, and is very inferior." Walpole to Sir Horace Mann, April 17, 1775, in *Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, ed. W.S. Lewis, vol. 24 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 93.

⁴²⁶ Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 156.

figures to paint, West would certainly have produced his work first if he had continued with it.”⁴²⁷ Closeness between the two men certainly played a role in West’s decision, as von Erffa and Staley observe the existence of two drawings by Copley after West’s sketch, which indicates active assistance given by West to Copley on his colleague’s attempt at the subject.⁴²⁸ Against the possible benefits of executing an independent canvas and inserting himself into the ongoing debate on the utility of continuing war, West had to consider the option of remaining silent and guaranteeing the continuation of the king’s patronage, which at that point included the nascent plans for the Chapel of Revealed Religion series at Windsor Castle, and saw more value in the latter than the former.⁴²⁹ It was a poor decision. Copley’s canvas was widely praised and its private exhibition and engraving subscription financially successful, starting a new phase in Copley’s career as a contemporary history painter.⁴³⁰ Meanwhile, while he worked on it for several decades, West’s planned history of revealed religion program was never realized, and he would never again achieve such lofty heights for his canvases despite remaining a major player in the London art world and in the Royal Academy of Arts.

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

⁴²⁸ Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 218; Farington, *Diary*, vol. 8, 2803 (July 2, 1806).

⁴²⁹ N. Pressly, *Revealed Religion*, 15. As William H. Gerdtz notes, West was abandoning a series of contemporary history works which would have been poorly received in England but well received in America, in favor of a series of religious works which would have been poorly received in America but well received, theoretically, in England. Gerdtz, “On Elevated Heights,” 77-78.

⁴³⁰ For more on the brief trend of the one-man, spectacle exhibition begun by Copley’s display of *The Death of the Earl of Chatham*, see Harold E. Dickson, “Artists as Showmen,” *American Art Journal* 5, no. 1 (May, 1973): 4-17.

West's *The Peace Commissioners*

Although West decided in 1779 to halt his work on *The Death of the Earl of Chatham* (fig. 49) in part because of political appearances, American independence in 1783 reinvigorated his resolve to create, as he told Peale, “a set of pictures containing the great events which have affected the revolution of America.”⁴³¹ Peale eventually responded with West’s requested descriptions as well as a promise to deliver some actual pieces of clothing through an intermediary. In a second response from December 10, 1783, Peale informed West that he was sending copies of bust portraits of General George Washington and General Nathanael Greene to London for engraving, if West wanted to use them as guides for his work. Peale also recommended two events from 1776 as subjects: the Staten Island Peace Conference (involving West’s acquaintance General Howe) and the Battle of Trenton.⁴³²

Instead, West had started with a subject from the end of the war, not a battlefield scene or surrender, but a group portrait of diplomats. His chosen topic was the November 30, 1782 signing of the preliminary treaty between America and Great Britain which formed the basis of the Treaty of Paris. In an attempt to make his work as historically accurate as possible, perhaps in part a response to the inaccuracy of the crowd in Copley’s *Death of Chatham*, West sought to execute from life the portraits of the seven attendees at the treaty signing in Paris: for the Americans, signers Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, John Jay, and Henry Laurens, and secretary William

⁴³¹ West to Charles Willson Peale, August 4, 1783, in Miller, Hart, and Appel, *Peale Papers*, vol. 1, 390-392.

⁴³² Peale to Benjamin West, December 10, 1783, in Miller, Hart, and Appel, *Peale Papers*, vol. 1, 404-405. Peale’s friend General Reed, who was carrying the two portraits, was unable to find an engraver. At some point the works fell into the possession of publisher Joseph Brown, who commissioned Thomas Stothard to expand the images into full-length portraits, which Valentine Green engraved and Brown published on April 22, 1785.

Temple Franklin; and for the English, signer Richard Oswald and secretary Caleb Whitefoord. Although the painting is now known as *American Commissioners of the Preliminary Peace Negotiations with Great Britain* (fig. 48), that name is misleading, as the work was to include the delegations from both sides.

West's design for the canvas featured the seven men gathered around a table on which the preliminary treaty documents are arrayed. Because of the unfinished state of the canvas, it is unclear if the event is supposed to depict a moment before, during, or after the signing. The event takes place on an open porch, with drapery bracketing a view across the Seine of the south façade of the Palais du Louvre, a sightline which required West to significantly increase the height of the Hotel d'York, where the signing took place, and rotate the palace ninety degrees to situate Perrault's Colonnade along the southern side of the building rather than its true location along the easternmost side. He had presumably seen the building while in Paris in 1763 on his way to London, and would have had access to prints such as Sébastien Leclerc's *Representation des Machines qui ont servi a eslever les deux grandes pierres qui couvrent le fronton de la principale entrée du Louvre* (fig. 52) or the illustration of the façade from Jacques-François Blondel's book *Architecture française* (fig. 53). The composition of *The Peace Commissioners* groups the American commissioners on the left and center of the canvas and the British contingent on the right. West worked from left to right, executing the portrait of John Jay (standing on the left edge of the canvas) and John Adams (the leftmost seated figure) in the winter of 1783-84 when the two men were in London following the signing of the Treaty of Paris, followed by Henry Laurens (standing in the center of the canvas). West began with

the three American ministers as they were only in London briefly before planned returns to America, while the other sitters lived either in London or Paris and would theoretically have been more likely to call on West.

However, work on *The Peace Commissioners* halted while West faced difficulties in his attempt to capture the likeness of Benjamin Franklin, who was in Paris and was unwilling to travel to London for health and safety reasons, while West seemed uninterested to go to France. Eventually West requested help from his friend Whitefoord, who loaned him two images of Franklin: a 1777 portrait bust by Jean-Jacques Caffiéri (fig. 54) and a 1781 portrait painted by West's former student Joseph Wright (fig. 55).⁴³³ Whitefoord also contacted Franklin's grandson William Temple Franklin⁴³⁴ on West's behalf, requesting an oil portrait or miniature, which "shou'd be *in Colours*; the attitude of the Head *looking over the right Shoulder*."⁴³⁵ Temple Franklin apparently delivered the exact portrait requested, as West painted him seated to the right of the center of the canvas, head turned over his right shoulder. Temple Franklin looks toward his grandfather, whose portrait West copied from the one by Wright – which in turn borrowed heavily from Joseph-Siffred Duplessis's 1778 portrait of Franklin (fig. 56) – into the seat between Adams and Laurens.⁴³⁶

⁴³³ See Arthur S. Marks for the sequence of events of Whitefoord's acquisition of various images of Franklin and his loans of them to West. Marks, "Benjamin West and the American Revolution," 27-30.

⁴³⁴ Temple Franklin, who was a former schoolmate of Raphael West, was living with his grandfather in Paris at the time. On the schoolboy friendship between Temple Franklin and Raphael West, see Benjamin West to Benjamin Franklin, September 7, 1783. The Papers of Benjamin Franklin, www.franklinpapers.org.

⁴³⁵ Whitefoord to William Temple Franklin, June 30, 1784. The Papers of Benjamin Franklin. www.franklinpapers.org.

⁴³⁶ John Quincy Adams, who was present in London with his father during the treaty negotiations and his father's sittings for West, was shown the unfinished work by West in 1817. He reflected on the painting in his diary: "The most striking likeness in the picture is that of Mr. Jay. Those of Dr.

While both members of the British contingent are absent from West's canvas, Whitefoord was nonetheless crucial to West's ability to complete as much of the work as he did, thanks to the loan of his images of Franklin. Since Whitefoord was the secretary for the British he likely would have been standing to the far right of the composition, with the sole British commissioner, Richard Oswald, seated at the table. West's composition was eventually scuttled by Oswald's refusal to participate. As Dunlap once noted of his teacher's approach to art: "It was a maxim with West to paint nothing without studying the object, if it was to be obtained."⁴³⁷

Understandably, Oswald may not have wanted to participate in an image that memorialized his nation's defeat. West perceived another reason. When John Quincy Adams visited West in 1817 the artist showed the future president his unfinished canvas, which included the portrait of Adams's father. West's explanation to Adams for why the work was never finished was that "Mr. Oswald, the British Plenipotentiary, was an ugly looking man, blind of one eye, and he died without having leaving [*sic*] any picture of him extant."⁴³⁸

After the signing of the preliminary treaty Oswald was harshly criticized by the Duke of Richmond because of the concessions made by Britain in the agreement, and the elder statesman retreated from London to his estate in southern Scotland, where he died in November 1784 at the age of seventy-nine. Without the ability to

Franklin, and his grandson, W.T., who was Secretary to the American Commission, are also excellent. Mr. Laurens and my father, though less perfect resemblances, are yet very good." John Quincy Adams, *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, Comprising Portions of His Diary from 1795 to 1848*, ed. Charles Francis Adams, vol. 3, repr. ed. (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1969), 559.

⁴³⁷ Dunlap, *The Arts of Design*, vol. 1, 70.

⁴³⁸ Adams, *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams*, vol. 3, reprint, 559. As Marks notes, this explanation is backed up by other historical footnotes, in Marks, "Benjamin West and American Revolution," 32-33.

capture Oswald's likeness there was no reason for West to paint Whitefoord onto the canvas, which he instead abandoned.

The unfinished work provides insight into West's working method, which largely corresponded with the advice he gave his students. First rendering the portraits of the five sitters who had sat for him, he then began working from left to right filling in bodies as well as background detail. West had already conceived of the painting's organization, thus allowing him to capture the portrait of Temple Franklin with his left hand pressed to his cheek. While Franklin's upper body, all that would have been visible of the man seated behind a table, is fully realized, the forms of the other figures appear in various states of completion. Jay's body is painted in to a large extent, although bold strokes of black denote the outline of his standing form. Adams's body is barely sketched in from the waist down, while Laurens and Temple Franklin are essentially bust-length portraits floating in the air, blank canvas where their torsos would appear. West filled in Laurens's left arm where it falls behind Temple Franklin's head; the arm, along with Temple Franklin's hand on his chin and Adams leaning back in his chair, gives the composition a casual feel, as if this were a conversation about minutiae rather than an intense negotiation.

Despite the treaty sitting on the table in front of them, none of the five Americans looks at the documents. Franklin stares out at the viewer, an unavoidable gaze copied closely from Wright's copy of Duplessis's portrait of the American dignitary. The two men in the center, Laurens and Temple Franklin, both look at the standing Jay, though only Laurens's eyes focus on the then-Supreme Court Chief Justice. Jay and Adams also possess the same sense of being lost in thought, an

artifact of the canvas's lack of finish. Jay points at the documents on the table, and both he and Adams are looking toward the vacant space which was to be occupied by Oswald, indicated by a circular lacuna over the background cityscape. As an artist versed in the theories of composition and design espoused by thinkers such as Richardson and du Fresnoy, West would have reveled in the details and potential ambiguities of the relationships between figures in his work. In constructing this arrangement of notable figures in a recent major event in Anglo-American history, he would have seen his canvas not just as a historical record but as visual depiction of the heroic diplomatic struggles which underlay a crucial moment in history, and which provided a higher moral impetus to its subject.

West sets the scene on a portico with a view looking down on the Palais du Louvre across the River Seine – an impossible view, due to the unrealistic height differential of the buildings, the three city blocks worth of architecture separating the two sites, and the physical geometry of the palace. While in 1783 the Louvre was still the nominal seat of government, it had also begun its transformation into the artistic center of Paris. From 1750 to 1779 the Palais du Luxembourg in Paris, which was originally built in the early seventeenth century for Marie de' Medici, housed a public art gallery which displayed Rubens's *Marie de' Medici* cycle as well as other objects from the royal collection. In the mid-1770s the Comte d'Angiviller proposed to encourage the arts in France through a combination of patronage of living artists and the creation of a larger art gallery in the Louvre, because the Palais du Luxembourg was to be given to King Louis XVI's brother at the end of that decade.⁴³⁹ A 1779

⁴³⁹ Even before this assignment, it was assumed by members of Parisian society that the Luxembourg was a temporary home for art and that the Louvre was the preferred location for a permanent gallery.

portrait of d'Angiviller by Joseph-Siffred Duplessis (fig. 57) shows the Comte with a scroll of the floor plan for the proposed Grand Gallery of the Louvre, and as part of his patronage efforts he commissioned numerous works, most famously Jacques-Louis David's masterpiece *The Oath of the Horatii* (fig. 58).⁴⁴⁰ The Comte's proposal was bogged down by bureaucratic negotiation, but found renewed interest from the king and other governmental sources after the conclusion of the American Revolutionary War and subsequent improvement to the French economy.⁴⁴¹ While additional bureaucracy and political strife postponed the Louvre's opening until after the French Revolution, there was a public belief around the time that West was working on *The Peace Commissioners* that the Louvre was to be a grand museum of art, opening imminently. Thus, his inclusion of the palace in his image of American victory over England not only sets the scene physically within Paris, but argues that the next task for the new nation should be the creation of an artistic infrastructure similar to that underway in France, in large part through the commission of neoclassical history paintings like those which had propelled West to fame. It was a compelling argument, but one that became far more problematic from 1789 onward.

The American Revolution on Canvas: From West to John Trumbull

By the time West decided to halt work on *The Peace Commissioners* in late 1784, aspiring history painter John Trumbull had joined his studio in London for the

Andrew McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999): 51.

⁴⁴⁰ Andrew McClellan, "Musée du Louvre, Paris: Palace of the People, Art for All," in *The First Modern Museums of Art: The Birth of an Institution in 18th- and Early-19th-Century Europe*, ed. Carole Paul (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2012), 216.

⁴⁴¹ McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*, 58.

second time, thanks to the very negotiations at the heart of West's canvas. Although there were several other students active in or around the studio at that point, including Ralph Earl, Mather Brown, Thomas Spence Duché, William Dunlap, and West's son Raphael, the talented Trumbull became West's favorite student. Even Dunlap, who harbored a severe dislike for Trumbull, acknowledged that he was "the established successor of Gilbert Stuart in West's apartments."⁴⁴²

The youngest of six children born to colonial politician Jonathan Trumbull and Faith Trumbull, John Trumbull grew up in a privileged life in Lebanon, Connecticut. His father was a merchant and preacher who represented Lebanon in the colony's general assembly and later served as Governor of Connecticut Colony from 1769-1776 and then as Governor of Connecticut from 1776-1784, the only colonial governor to hold that office before the start of the Revolutionary War who continued after the Declaration of Independence.⁴⁴³

As a youth John Trumbull evinced an interest in art, despite a household accident at age four or five that essentially blinded him in his left eye.⁴⁴⁴ Befitting his family's social standing and in recognition of his father's desire for him to join the clergy,⁴⁴⁵ Trumbull received a classical education, first in Lebanon and then at Harvard College, where he was admitted as a junior in 1772 at the age of sixteen. By that point Trumbull had decided that he wanted to pursue a career as an artist and

⁴⁴² Dunlap, *The Arts of Design*, vol. 1, 356. On the rivalry between Trumbull and Dunlap, and Dunlap's anti-Trumbull rhetoric in *The Arts of Design*, see Lyons, *William Dunlap and the Construction of an American Art History*, 89-120.

⁴⁴³ George McLean Milne, *Lebanon: Three Centuries in a Connecticut Hilltop Town* (Canaan, NH: Published for the Lebanon Historical Society, Inc. by Phoenix Publishing, 1986), 19-54.

⁴⁴⁴ Trumbull, *Autobiography*, 6.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

attempted to convince his father to send him to study with John Singleton Copley in Boston rather than to waste money by sending him to college. As Trumbull recounts in his *Autobiography*, “this argument seemed to me not bad; but my father had not the same veneration for the fine arts that I had...[and] I was overruled.”⁴⁴⁶ While en route to Cambridge he visited Copley’s studio, where the experience of meeting the painter and viewing his paintings in person solidified Trumbull’s desire to become an artist. At school, the young man took advantage of Harvard’s library holdings on art theory and practice to supplement his own training for the ensuing year and a half.⁴⁴⁷

Colonial Boston was a fiercely independent town, reflecting the operation of the Province of Massachusetts Bay as a whole. The colony’s seventeenth-century Puritan religious determination was replaced by a “new emphasis on wealth, property, and material success” in the eighteenth century, and the establishment of a leisure class and the subsequent increase of materialism transformed Boston into one of the cultural and artistic capitals of the colonies.⁴⁴⁸ European artists such as John Smibert and Joseph Blackburn (c. 1730-c. 1788), and homegrown artists like Joseph Badger (1708-1765) and John Greenwood (1727-1792), were active in the city in the first half of the eighteenth century.⁴⁴⁹ Economic instability caused by the Seven Years’ War and the cessation of British subsidies and increase in taxation after war’s end in 1763,

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁷ Jules David Prown, “John Trumbull as History Painter,” in *John Trumbull: The Hand and Spirit of a Painter*, ed. Helen A. Cooper (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), 22-23.

⁴⁴⁸ Thomas H. O’Connor, *The Hub: Boston Past and Present* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2001), 35. See the chapters “Loyalty Versus Liberty” (26-46) and “From Colony to Commonwealth” (47-70) for an overview of Boston and Massachusetts during the periods immediately before and after the American Revolution.

⁴⁴⁹ Miles, *American Paintings in the Eighteenth Century*, 3-13, 104-108.

however, compounded by the Great Fire of 1760 which decimated downtown Boston, resulted in a struggling city reliant on its maritime industry. This context encouraged popular sentiment against English rule and set the stage for the formation of the Sons of Liberty and other American patriotic groups. Fortunately for Trumbull and his studies, Harvard College remained well insulated from the economic distress faced by its neighbor across the Charles River.

After graduating in July 1773 Trumbull continued his artistic self-training while working briefly as a schoolteacher, following the growing patriotic fervor as closely as possible and embracing the revolutionary spirit which swept across the colonies the first part of that decade.⁴⁵⁰ After the outbreak of war he joined the Connecticut militia as an adjutant under the command of Brigadier General Joseph Spencer. Spencer's forces were stationed in Roxbury during the Siege of Boston,⁴⁵¹ and Trumbull was tasked with sketching the enemy fortifications, a talent which drew the attention of General George Washington:

A few days after his [Washington's] arrival, I was told by my eldest brother, the commissary general, that the commander in chief was very desirous of obtaining a correct plan of the enemy's works, in front of our position on Boston neck; and he advised me (as I could draw) to attempt to execute a view and plan, as a means of introducing myself (probably) to the favorable notice of the general. I took his advice and began the attempt...My drawing was also shown to the general...This (probably) led to my future promotion.⁴⁵²

Trumbull was appointed as a second aide-de-camp to Washington and then three weeks later as deputy adjutant-general to General Horatio Gates, rising to the rank of

⁴⁵⁰ Trumbull, *Autobiography*, 15.

⁴⁵¹ Richard Frothingham, *History of the Siege of Boston, and of the Battles of Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill: Also an Account of the Bunker Hill Monument* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1903), 106.

⁴⁵² Trumbull, *Autobiography*, 21-22.

colonel. During his militia service Trumbull witnessed the Battle of Bunker Hill, a fact he often mentioned by way of justifying his interpretation of the battle, and its divergence from historical record, in his 1786 painting of the subject (fig. 59).

In February 1777 Trumbull resigned from the army after a dispute over the dating of his formal commission and returned to artistic practice.⁴⁵³ He moved to Boston in June of the next year to continue his training. Since Copley had left for London four years prior, Trumbull had to rely on studying the works left behind by the Scottish artist Smibert, who had died in 1758 and whose studio Trumbull rented.⁴⁵⁴ However, the ongoing war hampered the already-slim American interest in painting commissions. Trumbull proposed to his father a vague speculative commercial venture – he would “undertake the management of a considerable speculation, which required a voyage to Europe, and promised (upon paper) great results” using funds borrowed from friends and family and invested in public securities – seemingly designed solely to get him across the Atlantic to Paris, from where he could continue on to London to study art when the venture inevitably failed.⁴⁵⁵ His scheme fell apart even quicker than Trumbull had hoped when he received news that his startup capital had been severely devalued after news of the American loss in the Siege of Georgetown. From Paris, Trumbull continued to London, bearing a letter of introduction from Benjamin Franklin to West, although

⁴⁵³ His commission was dated September 12, 1776 rather than June 28, 1776, failing to acknowledge almost half of his military service to that point. For the sequence of events which led to Trumbull’s resignation, see Zygmunt, “Portraiture and Politics in New York City,” 153-156.

⁴⁵⁴ Prown, “John Trumbull as History Painter,” 25. Several of Smibert’s compositions had remained in his former studio, allowing Trumbull to study them.

⁴⁵⁵ Trumbull, *Autobiography*, 52; Irma Jaffe, *John Trumbull: Patriot-Artist of the American Revolution* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1975), 42-43.

based on the story of West's reception of Gilbert Stuart, such a letter was unnecessary. He was accepted into West's studio, where his artistic training consisted largely of making copies of West's own copies of works by Italian Renaissance masters, made during the latter's time in Rome two decades prior.⁴⁵⁶

Trumbull's initial foray to London was marked by intrigue. As the son of a treacherous colonial governor and a one-time officer and aide to the commander-in-chief of the Continental Army, Trumbull would have been unable to slip under the radar in England. Upon arriving in London he contacted his friend, influential diplomat John Temple, who in turn notified Lord George Germain, the English secretary of state. According to Trumbull, Lord Germain informed his staff that "so long as he [Trumbull] shall attend closely to the object of his pursuit, it is not the intention of government that he shall be interrupted."⁴⁵⁷ Nonetheless, the mere presence of Trumbull in London, as well as his abrupt resignation of his military commission three years prior, only encouraged rumors that the painter was also a spy.

Regardless of whether espionage was his initial goal, it is almost certain that Trumbull participated in a scheme involving one of his traveling companions, a Major Tyler, and several other patriots also living in England, though its details are unknown.⁴⁵⁸ Therefore, when news of the capture and execution of British officer

⁴⁵⁶ Trumbull, *Autobiography*, 61-62; D. Evans, *Benjamin West and His American Students*, 71-73.

⁴⁵⁷ Trumbull, *Autobiography*, 66.

⁴⁵⁸ Jaffe, *John Trumbull*, 47-50. Jaffe traces a series of letters between Trumbull, Tyler, and several other individuals in France and England which include cryptic language that could be taken for a plot of some sort. Jaffe suggests one particular plot, an attempt to place the Jacobite pretender to the British throne, Charles Stuart – more widely known as the Young Pretender (although, at age sixty, he was no longer "young") or Bonnie Prince Charlie – at the head of a Jacobite kingdom in North America. Perhaps related, Holger Hooek claims that West "coordinated a minor intelligence system among

John André by the Continental Army reached London in October 1780, Trumbull – who had held an identical rank and similar position to André – was quickly arrested in return, charged with treason for his service in the American army, and imprisoned in the Westminster Bridewell prison.⁴⁵⁹ According to Trumbull, he was destined for the hangman’s noose until West approached King George III, securing the promise that Trumbull would not be executed.⁴⁶⁰ With West’s political capital expended, Trumbull turned elsewhere for additional help. He was convinced by the young parliamentarian Charles James Fox, who had visited Trumbull in prison, to contact notable pro-American politician and philosopher Edmund Burke. Trumbull did, and it proved to be wise advice. In May 1781 Trumbull sent a letter to Burke, and soon after Burke arranged Trumbull’s release on a £400 bail – £200 of which was supplied by Trumbull, £100 by West, and £100 by Copley⁴⁶¹ – on the provision that the young artist leave the United Kingdom within thirty days and not return until the war had ended.⁴⁶² He did just that, exiting the country in late June of 1781, and after a circuitous and occasionally treacherous voyage that included stops in Amsterdam and Bilbao, Trumbull returned home to Lebanon, Connecticut in January 1782.

Americans arriving in London,” although it is unclear if he meant military intelligence or simply a social group of expatriates in the British capital. Hooch, *The King’s Artists*, 152.

⁴⁵⁹ While in prison Trumbull continued to practicing his painting, completing his copy after West’s copy of Correggio’s *Madonna and Child with Saints Jerome and Mary Magdalene* (fig. 80). Trumbull, *Autobiography*, 61-62.

⁴⁶⁰ Trumbull, *Autobiography*, 76-77. Alberts suggests that West was motivated in part by fear for ensuing negative reactions against his other students at the time, Ralph Earl and Gilbert Stuart, by fear of how poorly a conviction of Trumbull for treason would impact his own standing and his relationship with the King. Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 139-140.

⁴⁶¹ Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 140-141. Alberts claims that while it took Burke’s intervention to finally secure Trumbull’s release, West had been promised by Lord Germain months prior that Trumbull would be released as soon as attention on the case had diminished.

⁴⁶² Trumbull, *Autobiography*, 78

An arrest, the threat of execution, seven months in prison, and a six-month sea trip home sapped Trumbull's energy. Much like Gilbert Stuart after his first unsuccessful voyage to England, Trumbull was profoundly disappointed upon his return to America. While Stuart refused to discuss his trials overseas and the difficulty of his return home, most of Trumbull's difficulties were a matter of public record and his autobiography fills in many details. However, the artist had little to say of his time in America after his first English experience. Beset by depression over the loss of two years of his life to unfinished training, prison, and transatlantic journeys, Trumbull was further compromised by "a serious illness, which confined me to my bed, and endangered my life."⁴⁶³ He was unable to work for nearly a year, until his health recovered enough in the winter of 1782 to allow him to assist his older brother David, a merchant who held a supply contract with the Continental Army.⁴⁶⁴

Once war ended, Trumbull again decided to abandon his mercantile pursuits in favor of art.⁴⁶⁵ As Irma Jaffe quips, the "ink was hardly dry on the Treaty of Paris"⁴⁶⁶ when Trumbull left Lebanon to his return trip to West's studio in London. In rejoining West, Trumbull became part of the elder artist's ongoing attempts to negotiate his American identity in light of contemporary English politics and the

⁴⁶³ Ibid., 88.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁵ Trumbull's autobiography recalls the difficulty of this decision. Trumbull was strongly encouraged to study law by his father and to become a businessman by friends after the end of the war. Jonathan Trumbull correctly pointed out that his son's cultural aspirations were impossible to achieve in North America – in response to John Trumbull's admiration for the artistic culture of antiquity, his father responded that "Connecticut is not Athens" – and so the young artist decided to return to West's studio. Jonathan Trumbull made his son promise to first meet with family friend Jeremiah Wadsworth, a prominent businessman who was also traveling to London. If Wadsworth were to offer Trumbull a business proposition the aspiring artist would have to take it. Wadsworth did not, and thus Trumbull remained a painter. Trumbull, *Autobiography*, 88-89; Jaffe, *John Trumbull*, 54-57.

⁴⁶⁶ In fact, it was signed September 3, 1783. Jaffe, *John Trumbull*, 56.

potential difficulties with identifying strongly as American in light of his prominent role in the Royal Academy and as friend to King George III.

American Excellence in History Painting: West, Copley, Trumbull

Upon his return to London in 1784 Trumbull painted with West during the day and attended drawing classes at the Royal Academy School in the evenings, where he often sat next to future Academy president Thomas Lawrence (1769-1830).⁴⁶⁷ He quickly moved beyond second-hand copies of Old Masters to working as a studio assistant on copies of West's own work, including those of West's masterpiece *The Death of General Wolfe*⁴⁶⁸ and the more recent *The Battle of La Hogue* (fig. 60), the original of which West had completed in 1778 (fig. 61).

Trumbull later wrote that his work on the copy of *The Battle of La Hogue* "was of inestimable importance to me."⁴⁶⁹ It would have been invaluable experience for the young artist to work side-by-side with West on a large-scale history painting. The half-blind Trumbull typically worked on a smaller scale than the massive canvases which typified West's history paintings, an approach West recommended to him as well.⁴⁷⁰ It was a stylistic choice as well as a physical preference: Trumbull, like West, received much of his early artistic training through copying engravings, and unlike

⁴⁶⁷ Trumbull, *Autobiography*, 85.

⁴⁶⁸ The chronology provided by Trumbull indicates that the canvas he worked on is the largest existing version of *The Death of General Wolfe* (65 x 96 ¼ in.) now in the collection of the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto. Von Erffa and Staley acknowledge this canvas is largely the work of a studio assistant rather than West himself, but suggest that Trumbull was not that assistant, as he was otherwise occupied with the copy of *The Battle of La Hogue*. While Trumbull may not have been the primary assistant working on this version of *Wolfe*, that would not preclude him from contributing to it.

⁴⁶⁹ Trumbull, *Autobiography*, 87.

⁴⁷⁰ Trumbull to Benjamin West, quoted in D. Evans, *Benjamin West and His American Students*, 87; see also see Trumbull, *Autobiography*, Appendix, 325-327.

West, never grew out of his preference for thinking about and working on an intimate scale.⁴⁷¹ Thus West's out-of-character encouragement that Trumbull think about Revolutionary subjects on a large scale supports the argument that, having decided it would not be personally advantageous to paint scenes from the American Revolution, West hand-picked Trumbull to follow through on that concept and provided him the necessary training to do so.

Owing to his American heritage, continental artistic training, and first-hand experience of the war, Trumbull was theoretically the perfect artist to create a series of subjects based on the American Revolutionary War. In reality, his situation was more complicated. Trumbull grew up in an aristocratic environment as the son of a colonial governor, and was the first American artist to receive a college education. This experience set him apart from most other artists in America, who came from either the lower or middle-class backgrounds. Furthermore, his service in the Continental army was as a bureaucrat and draftsman, not a combatant, and his biographers Theodore Sizer and Irma Jaffe both intimate that his abrupt resignation was not as much out of actual disgust with his misdated commission as it was an opportunity to honorably resign.⁴⁷² Although Trumbull espoused American patriotic values throughout his life, he was uncomfortable with overt jingoism.⁴⁷³

In order to bridge the gap between aristocratic values and national pride, as well as avoid setting off another international incident, Trumbull followed in the footsteps of West and Copley by selecting subjects in which both sides in the war

⁴⁷¹ Jaffe, *John Trumbull*, 155.

⁴⁷² Trumbull, *Autobiography*, 41, n49; Jaffe, *John Trumbull*, 30.

⁴⁷³ Prown, "John Trumbull as History Painter," 40-41.

could find encouragement, beginning with two works, each of which focuses on the heroic death of an American general amid a British military victory: *The Battle of Bunker's Hill, June 17, 1775* (fig. 59),⁴⁷⁴ which focuses on the death of American Major General Joseph Warren, and *The Death of General Montgomery in the Attack on Quebec, December 31, 1775* (fig. 62). The two subjects were “a just tribute of gratitude to the memory of eminent men, who had given their lives for their country.”⁴⁷⁵ In combining American heroism with British victory, Trumbull provides opportunities for viewers from both sides to locate national pride.

Great men, rather than bloody fighting, were the focus of Trumbull's initial two revolutionary canvases. There certainly was bloody fighting in the background of both works, but it was not of the same kind as West's *Battle of La Hogue*, with which Trumbull was intimately familiar. He looked instead to *The Death of General Wolfe* and the recent success of John Singleton Copley's *The Death of Major Peirson, 6 January 1781* (fig. 63), which had been exhibited privately to great praise and healthy profit shortly after Trumbull returned to London in 1784.⁴⁷⁶ Those works are each moral subjects, and the compositional resonance is unmistakable. *Bunker's Hill* and *Quebec* depict the death of a hero, falling limp in the arms of a compatriot, spot-lit in the center of the canvas. *Bunker's Hill* mirrors the frieze-like composition of *Wolfe* and *Peirson*, with a central group located under flying colors and smaller groups in

⁴⁷⁴ Likely in deference to the British audience for the work, Copley referred to the battle site by its British name, “Bunker's Hill,” rather than the American “Bunker Hill.”

⁴⁷⁵ Trumbull, *Autobiography*, 89.

⁴⁷⁶ For more on *The Death of Major Peirson* see Emily Ballew Neff, “The History Theater: Production and Spectatorship in Copley's *The Death of Major Peirson*,” in *John Singleton Copley in England*, ed. Emily Ballew Neff (London: Merrell Holberton, in association with the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1995), 61-90; Richard Saunders, “Genius and Glory: John Singleton Copley's *The Death of Major Peirson*,” *American Art Journal* 22, no. 3 (Oct., 1990): 5-39.

the corners of the canvas indicating a range of emotional responses. *Bunker's Hill* copies the frenetic action of *Peirson* more closely than in *Wolfe*, as the primary group is part of the fighting, not removed behind the lines. One notable difference between *Bunker's Hill* and the other two canvases is the multiplicity of central heroic actions. Trumbull's canvas includes three major acts – General Warren's death, British Major John Small preventing a fellow soldier from bayoneting the dying Warren, and behind those two protagonists, the mortally wounded British Major John Pitcairn falling into the arms of his son William.

With *The Death of Major Peirson*, Copley did not just rely on contemporary eyewitness accounts of the battle; either he or his half-brother Henry Pelham traveled to Jersey in 1782 or 1783 to sketch the battle location firsthand.⁴⁷⁷ This effort toward absolute fidelity was a new development in contemporary history painting, and one which Trumbull knew he could trump by selecting a subject he had viewed firsthand.

There was one striking difference between Trumbull's two paintings *Bunker's Hill* and *Quebec* and West's *Wolfe* and *La Hogue* and Copley's *Peirson*: size. West's original *Wolfe* canvas measured 59 ½ by 84 inches, with the version Trumbull worked on six inches taller and a foot wider. West's first and second versions of *La Hogue* have the same basic dimensions as those two *Wolfe* versions, and Copley's *Peirson* is even larger, measuring 99 by 144 inches. West exhibited his canvases at the Royal Academy exhibitions of 1771 and 1780, with successful engravings after them published in 1776 and 1781, respectively.⁴⁷⁸ Copley's painting was

⁴⁷⁷ Saunders, "Genius and Glory," 13-14.

⁴⁷⁸ See von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 209-210, 211-213, on *La Hogue* and *Wolfe*, respectively.

commissioned by John Boydell in exchange for the right to publish an engraving after it, but rather than create a small canvas just for copying, Copley executed a massive canvas for private exhibition.⁴⁷⁹ With his two works Trumbull went the smaller route, executing paintings measuring 25 5/8 by 37 5/8 inches, in the case of *Bunker's Hill*, and 24 5/8 by 37 inches for *Quebec*. Both paintings were destined for engraving, and Trumbull played to his strengths as a detail-oriented artist. The scale at which he painted both works also reflects his awareness that exhibiting of a contemporary history painting of an event from the Revolutionary War was a risky proposition in terms of British public reception.⁴⁸⁰

Trumbull sought out the advice of his American compatriots West and Copley after completing *Bunker's Hill* and *Quebec*, and received encouragement from both. The artist contracted with Antonio di Poggi to publish prints after both works, and the two men traveled to Paris in the summer of 1786 to seek out an appropriate engraver.⁴⁸¹ While in Paris Trumbull showed his canvases to Thomas Jefferson, who had also heard about the project and sent encouragement to the artist, and to Jacques-

⁴⁷⁹ Prown, *John Singleton Copley*, vol. 2, 283-284. 20,000 people visited Copley's exhibition in its six weeks, each paying the one shilling admission fee. The artist also sold engravings commissioned after the painting, only enhancing his profit.

⁴⁸⁰ The death of Major Peirson occurred in the Battle of Jersey, which was nominally part of the Revolutionary War. However the primary combatants were the British and French, with the fighting taking place on the island of Jersey located in the English Channel. With the French alliance with the colonists and subsequent declaration of war against Britain in 1778, the American Revolutionary War became, in British eyes, one theater of a larger ongoing conflict with the French, which also included the Siege of Gibraltar. Therefore, the successful repulsion of the French attack on Jersey was seen as part of a conflict much larger than the fighting in North America. On British concerns over the French entry into the American Revolutionary War, see Stanley Weintraub, *Iron Tears: America's Battle for Freedom, Britain's Quagmire: 1775-1783* (New York: Free Press, 2005), 157-178.

⁴⁸¹ The two men sought out an engraver in Paris because of concerns over quality and speed. Prown, "John Trumbull as History Painter," 32.

Louis David, who gave the works tepid praise.⁴⁸² While in David's apartment Trumbull viewed his *The Oath of the Horatii* and *Belisarius Begging for Alms* (fig. 64), two works which had a significant effect on the subjects of his future Revolutionary canvases. Prior to traveling to Paris he had begun work on a third canvas, *The Death of General Mercer at the Battle of Princeton, January 3, 1777* (fig. 65), and the praise he received from his first two efforts convinced him to expand the series to fourteen, although he would only complete eight. Beginning with *Princeton* Trumbull recommitted to engraving as the primary form of public display for his series, shifting to even smaller canvases measuring roughly 20 by 30 inches for the remainder of his efforts.

At the same time he was deeply engaged in his American Revolution series, Trumbull began to work on a large scale with a securely British subject, *The Sortie Made by the Garrison of Gibraltar* (fig. 66). The idea for the work appears to have come from the mind of West, who had lost out to Copley on a City of London commission for a painting of the British victory over the Spanish floating batteries at Gibraltar in 1782.⁴⁸³ He initially convinced Trumbull to depict the identical scene as Copley, before Antonio di Poggi described to Trumbull a related event, a

⁴⁸² Prown, "John Trumbull as History Painter," 32-33.

⁴⁸³ West appeared obsessed with seeing his vision of the British defense at Gibraltar played out on canvas. Allen Staley recently identified a painting of the sortie at Gibraltar, previously identified as having been done by or after Joseph Wright of Derby, as Raphael Lamar West's *Destruction of the floating batteries before Gibraltar*, which was one of four versions of that subject hung at the 1783 Royal Academy exhibition. Allen Staley, "Benjamin West, Raphael West and the Floating Batteries," *The Burlington Magazine* 155, no. 1321 (Apr., 2013): 243-246. For more on the commission competition, see Harrington, *British Artists and War*, 45-54; Emily Ballew Neff and Kaylin H. Weber, "Laying Siege: West, Copley, and the Battle of History Painting," in *American Adversaries: West and Copley in a Transatlantic World*, eds. Emily Ballew Neff with Kaylin H. Weber (Houston, TX: The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Distributed by Yale University Press, 2013), 208-235.

counterattack by the British forces on Spanish battlements in 1781.⁴⁸⁴ Interestingly, much as with *Bunker's Hill*, in the *Sortie of Gibraltar* Trumbull's setting is a British military victory but his protagonist is a member of the opposing contingent, in this case young Spanish officer Don José de Barboza, who had been abandoned by his fellow soldiers and mortally wounded in a one-man attack on the advancing British forces. What makes this thematic focus on the interaction between the Spanish officer and British General George Elliott rather than solely on British heroism surprising is that Trumbull conceived of his work specifically to counter British critiques of his American subjects for the identical type of interaction between British and American characters. He noted in his *Autobiography*:

...as I knew by painting them [his American subjects], I had given offense to some extra-patriotic people in England, I now resolved to exert my utmost talent upon the Gibraltar, to show that noble and generous actions, by whomsoever performed, were the objects to whose celebration I meant to devote myself.⁴⁸⁵

Trumbull completed three versions of the painting, two small works in 1787 and 1788 and the massive canvas now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1789. Although Helen A. Cooper suggests that the second version – which corrected some factual errors in the first version, given as a gift to West – was intended for engraving, Trumbull sold it for 500 guineas to a London businessman without having the work engraved. He then began work on the third version, rearranging the grouping of English officers on the right side of the composition to more closely resemble a classical frieze, and altering Don José's head so as to make his entire body mimic a

⁴⁸⁴ Jaffe, *John Trumbull*, 131-132.

⁴⁸⁵ Trumbull, *Autobiography*, 149.

cast of the *Dying Gladiator* (fig. 67) he had viewed at the Royal Academy.⁴⁸⁶ Trumbull exhibited this canvas in a private exhibition at the Spring Gardens in 1790, where it competed against that year's Royal Academy exhibition and the recently opened Boydell Shakespeare Gallery. Although it received praise from influential connoisseur Horace Walpole, the work otherwise entertained only moderate attention and the exhibition was lightly attended. According to Trumbull: "Before the work was exhibited, I was offered twelve hundred guineas...for it, which I refused, under the persuasion that the exhibition, the print, and the ultimate sale of the picture, would produce more; the event has proved, that I made a mistake."⁴⁸⁷ Taking the lesson of the *Sortie of Gibraltar* to heart, Trumbull would not work on that large scale for a history painting again for the better part of three decades.

Trumbull's American Revolution: From Action to Thought

After returning to London from Paris in November 1786 Trumbull continued to work on *The Death of General Mercer* and began three other revolutionary subjects, *The Capture of the Hessians at Trenton, December 26, 1776* (fig. 68) and *The Surrender of Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown, October 19, 1781* (fig. 69), and *The Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776* (fig. 70), completing all but the portraits of the American figures in his paintings, which were necessary to maintain historical

⁴⁸⁶ Helen A. Cooper, ed., *John Trumbull: The Hand and Spirit of a Painter* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), 62; Jaffe, *John Trumbull*, 134. The choice to model Barboza on the *Dying Gladiator* (now known as the *Dying Gaul*) was meaningful as more than an example of reliance on classical models, as the theme of that sculpture was similar to that of *Gibraltar*: the celebration of a vanquished figure, likely on the battlefield. For more on the reception of the *Dying Gladiator/Gaul* in eighteenth-century Europe, see Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny, *Taste and the Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture, 1500-1900* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 224-227.

⁴⁸⁷ Trumbull, *Autobiography*, 151. Jaffe wonders if Walpole may have been the unnamed collector who offered to purchase the *Siege of Gibraltar*. Jaffe, *John Trumbull*, 137.

accuracy. He also assisted West with his work for the Chapel of Revealed Religion, an effort which provided necessary income.⁴⁸⁸ Trumbull returned to Paris in the fall of 1787 to capture Thomas Jefferson's likeness for *The Declaration of Independence*, as well as the portraits of several French officers for the *Surrender of Cornwallis*.⁴⁸⁹ In June 1789 Trumbull declined an offer from Jefferson to serve as his secretary, instead informing the ambassador of his desire to continue painting:

You see, sir, that my future movements depend entirely upon my reception in America, and as that shall be cordial or cold, I am to decide whether to abandon my country or my profession...Monuments have been in repeated instances voted to her heroes; why then should I doubt a readiness in our country to encourage me in producing monuments, not of heroes only, but of those events on which their title to the gratitude of the nation is founded, and which by being multiplied and little expensive, may be diffused over the world, instead of being bounded to one narrow spot?

Immediately therefore upon my arrival in America, I shall offer a subscription for prints to be published from such a series of pictures as I intend, with the condition of returning their money to subscribers, if the sum received shall not prove to be sufficient to justify me in proceeding with the work; and I shall first solicit the public protection of Congress.⁴⁹⁰

Arriving in New York City in late 1789, he published an announcement of his planned series, now numbering thirteen subjects, in the January 23, 1790 edition of the *Gazette of the United States*, adding a fourteenth to the list that spring. The two additional identified works which would eventually see completion were *The Surrender of General Burgoyne at Saratoga, October 16, 1777* (fig. 71), and *The Resignation of General Washington, December 23, 1783* (fig. 72), while Trumbull

⁴⁸⁸ Jaffe, *John Trumbull*, 126.

⁴⁸⁹ Trumbull, *Autobiography*, 152.

⁴⁹⁰ Trumbull to Thomas Jefferson, June 11, 1789, quoted in Trumbull, *Autobiography*, 160-161.

would eventually abandon the other six: *The Treaty with France*,⁴⁹¹ *The Treaty of Peace*,⁴⁹² *The Evacuation of New York by the British*, *The President Received by the Ladies of Trenton at the Arch*, *The Inauguration of the President*, and *The Battle of Eutaw Springs*. Subscriptions were three guineas per print, half due at time of subscription and half due upon receipt of the finished print.

There is a clear shift in the types of scenes Trumbull explored in his Revolutionary series. At first he executed battle scenes, but after traveling to Paris in 1786 and visiting Jefferson and David he moved from scenes of fighting to those of diplomatic and other types of non-combat action. Jules David Prown suggests that Trumbull's encounter with the neoclassical masterpiece *The Oath of the Horatii* encouraged this shift.⁴⁹³ This type of scene represented a vision of history familiar to the aristocratic Trumbull, of great men taking or benefiting from calculated action. His final five completed canvases consisted of three surrenders, a legislative action, and a bureaucratic procedure, a far cry from *Wolfe*, *La Hogue*, *Peirson*, and other contemporary history subjects which showed violence and death on the battlefield. Beyond indicating his own preference, this approach allowed Trumbull to stand apart from West and Copley, though not in the antagonistic manner of Gilbert Stuart. This shift in approach may not have been the best choice for Trumbull. West and Copley

⁴⁹¹ This would have almost certainly been the signing of the Treaties of Alliance and of Amity and Commerce on February 6, 1778, by representatives of the Second Continental Congress and King Louis XVI, forming a defensive and commercial alliance, respectively, between the United States of America and France. On the signing of the two treaties, see Samuel Flagg Bemis, *The Diplomacy of the American Revolution* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1957), 61-66.

⁴⁹² *The Treaty of Peace* is possibly the same subject as West's *American Commissioners of the Preliminary Peace Negotiations with Great Britain*, suggesting that West had passed this topic onto Trumbull as well. Marks, "Benjamin West and History Painting," 34-35.

⁴⁹³ Prown, "John Trumbull as History Painter," 33-35.

had achieved great success with their large canvases of action scenes, and Copley had made the private exhibition his own cottage industry. In diverging from his countrymen, Trumbull was diverging from what was proven to work in the British market, and betting that his formula would be successful in an American market which was unfamiliar with that type of canvas.

One of Trumbull's strengths in executing and promoting *Bunker's Hill* was his historical accuracy, since he had witnessed the fight. Because Trumbull could not make the same claim as a witness to other events of the war, subjects like *The Resignation of Washington* provided an alternative means of demonstrating accuracy through the inclusion of numerous portraits from life in his works. In this way he again followed and expanded Copley's precedent, taking the detailed portraiture from the *Death of Chatham* and spreading it across multiple canvases.

Completing his series would require a great number of individual sittings, necessitating Trumbull's return to North America.⁴⁹⁴ Congress was convened in New York City in the winter of 1789, and Trumbull traveled there first, completing a number of portraits and schedule sittings for others;⁴⁹⁵ George Washington sat for him on nine occasions in February and March 1790.⁴⁹⁶ Some portraits he added directly onto the relevant canvas, while others he painted on a series of small wood panels. For the most part Trumbull followed the historical record, including in his

⁴⁹⁴ In cases where the intended subject had died Trumbull either copied existing portraits or had the man's son sit in his stead. Jaffe, *John Trumbull*, 318-319.

⁴⁹⁵ John Hill Morgan, *The Paintings of John Trumbull*, 15.

⁴⁹⁶ *The Diaries of George Washington*, eds. Donald Jackson and Dorothy Twohig, vol. 6 (Charlottesville, VA: The University of Virginia Press, 1979), 30, 31, 36, 37, 38, 40, 51. Washington sat for Trumbull in the mornings, usually between 9 and 11 a.m. On March 1, 1790 Trumbull attended Washington's horseback exercises in order to get a sense of the general's manner on a horse, presumably for *The Capture of the Hessians at Trenton, December 26, 1776*.

works only those individuals who were present at the event depicted. He ran into an issue, however, with *The Declaration of Independence*. As John Hill Morgan asks: “Should [Trumbull] regard the fact of having been actually present in the room on the 4th of July, indispensable? Should he admit those only who were in favor of, and reject those who were opposed to the act?”⁴⁹⁷ While in Paris Trumbull had posed those questions to Jefferson, and to Adams in London. Both agreed that each signer should be included, regardless of whether or not he was present in Philadelphia that day, and that the canvas should include prominent representatives who did not sign the document.⁴⁹⁸ It is instructive that in a series of overly-descriptive titles, Trumbull titled this work simply *The Declaration of Independence*, not the *signing* thereof.

The inclusion of copious portraits in Trumbull’s canvases became one of his primary selling points for the series. In an advertisement in *The Gazette of the United States* in December 22, 1790, he first identifies the subjects of his first two paintings and then lists the major portraits which are contained within, ensuring readers that each subsequent engraving “will contain portraits of the principal characters who were present at the scene represented.”⁴⁹⁹ In between notes about portraiture, Trumbull makes the case to the public as to why they should purchase his prints:

No period of the history of man, is more interesting than that in which we have lived. The memory of scenes in which were laid the foundations of that free government, which secures our national and individual happiness, must ever remain dear to us, and to posterity; and if national pride be in any case justifiable, Americans have a right to glory in having given to the world

⁴⁹⁷ Morgan, *The Paintings of John Trumbull*, 35.

⁴⁹⁸ Jaffe, *John Trumbull*, 106-107.

⁴⁹⁹ [John Trumbull], “Proposals by John Trumbull, for Publishing by Subscription, Two Prints, from Original Pictures Painted by Himself; One Representing the Death of General Warren, at the Battle of Bunker’s Hill. The other, the Death of General Montgomery, in the Attack of Quebec,” *Gazette of the United States*, December 22, 1790, 680.

an example, whose influence is rapidly spreading the love of freedom through other nations, and every where ameliorating the condition of men.

To assist in preserving the memory of the illustrious events which have marked this period of our country's glory, as well as of the men who have been the most important actors in them, is the object of this undertaking. History will do justice to an æra so important; but to be read, the language in which it is written must be understood – the language of painting is universal, and intelligible in all nations, and every age.⁵⁰⁰

The End of Trumbull's American Revolution

Unfortunately for Trumbull, his efforts to reach an American audience through a series of engravings on the American Revolution met a drawn-out death. Even by the spring of 1789 he seemed to be aware that his endeavor was a folly. On May 6, 1789, a month before he rejected Jefferson's offer to serve as his secretary in favor of pursuing art, Trumbull observed to his older brother:

I have perhaps staked too much on the cast of a Single die.— but it is an experiment which will decide upon my future life— for if Five Years have not been sufficient with the Slavish application which I have given to my pursuit to raise me to some notice— it is at least time enough to have wasted in a hopeless pursuit— and as this affair ends I shall either feel myself justified in pursuing my profession honorably— or in quitting it before it be too late.⁵⁰¹

Delays with the engraving process hampered Trumbull's efforts. As Sizer notes, the Battle of Bunker Hill was fought in 1775; Trumbull finished his painting of the event in 1786 and delivered the painting to its Stuttgart-based engraver, Johann Gotthard von Müller, that same year; began taking subscriptions in 1790; received the engraved plate in 1797; and published the engravings in 1798.⁵⁰² This quarter-decade process made it difficult for Trumbull to acquire subscribers past a brief surge upon the project's announcement, and by 1797 he abandoned his efforts to have all but the

⁵⁰⁰ [Trumbull], "Proposals by John Trumbull," *Gazette of the United States*, December 22, 1790, 680.

⁵⁰¹ Trumbull to Jonathan Trumbull, Jr., May 6, 1789, quoted in Cooper, *John Trumbull*, 9-10.

⁵⁰² Trumbull, *Autobiography*, 219, n48.

two works already being engraved, *Bunker's Hill* and *Quebec*, put to paper, recognizing that his proposed series had long since run its course.⁵⁰³

The artist's own growing lack of interest in the project contributed to his derailment. After turning down Jefferson's 1789 offer of a position as his personal secretary, Trumbull could not resist the same offer made by then-Chief Justice of the Supreme Court John Jay in 1794 when Jay needed assistance on a diplomatic mission to England. Trumbull's decision was encouraged by the recent arrival in New York City of Gilbert Stuart, a superior portraitist, which negatively impacted Trumbull's business prospects.⁵⁰⁴ Trumbull served as Jay's secretary during the Jay Treaty negotiations and remained in London to serve on a commission, established by the treaty, which oversaw legal claims made by merchants who suffered commercial losses during the war.⁵⁰⁵ While working in Europe, Trumbull traveled to Stuttgart in 1797 to collect his completed plates for *Bunker's Hill*. On his return trip he visited Paris, where he was prevented from leaving the country without bribing the French government. Instead he enlisted the aid of David, who vouched that Trumbull was traveling as an artist, not as a governmental representative, with the plate of *Bunker's Hill* as proof. David's intervention secured Trumbull's safe passage, although it was based upon a lie: Trumbull may not have entered France as an agent of the American government but he left as one, carrying the first dispatches of the XYZ Affair.⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰³ Jaffe, *John Trumbull*, 187.

⁵⁰⁴ Barratt and Miles, *Gilbert Stuart*, 101-104.

⁵⁰⁵ Trumbull, *Autobiography*, 192-195; Samuel Flagg Bemis, *Jay's Treaty: A Study in Commerce and Diplomacy*, rev. ed. (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1962), 463-466.

⁵⁰⁶ For an overview of Trumbull's role in the XYZ Affair, see Carl Ludwig Lokke, "The Trumbull Episode: A Prelude to the 'X Y Z' Affair," *The New England Quarterly* 7, no. 1 (Mar, 1934): 100-114.

Trumbull remained a civil servant through 1804, when his service on the Jay Treaty commission ended. He had ceased painting in 1793, only to pick it up again in 1800, along with a desire to return to the United States: "...seeing the uncertainty of my present Situation, I have thought it wise to resume my Pencils."⁵⁰⁷ The next year he expanded his family from one to three, marrying Sarah Hope Harvey and accepting responsibility for an illegitimate son in the United States, the former a surprise to his friends and family, the latter a secret to them.⁵⁰⁸ In 1804 he returned to New York City,⁵⁰⁹ where he was elected a director of the New York Academy of the Fine Arts⁵¹⁰ signaling his new status as one of the elder statesmen of American art. The nation itself was becoming increasingly interested in the arts as well, and

⁵⁰⁷ Trumbull to Jonathan Trumbull, Jr., August 16, 1800, quoted in Cooper, *John Trumbull*, 12.

⁵⁰⁸ Jaffe, *John Trumbull*, 190-198. Trumbull hid the existence of his son, John Trumbull Ray. The boy does not appear in Trumbull's autobiography, and his existence was re-discovered by Trumbull's biographer Theodore Sizer in a series of unpublished letters from Trumbull to his friend James Wadsworth. Trumbull and one of his brother's servants, a woman named Temperance Ray, had slept together when Trumbull had visited his brother in Haddam, Connecticut in 1791. While Trumbull expressed initial uncertainty that the child was his, telling Wadsworth "the number of Fellow labourers rendered it a little difficult to ascertain precisely who was the Father; but, as I was the best able to pay the Bill, the Mother using her legal right, judiciously chose me." Wadsworth ventured in search of the boy on Trumbull's behalf in early 1801, and reported "for my own part I was not so struck with his resemblance that I should have distinguished him as yours among a number of boys—Tho on viewing him I have no doubt but he is your son." He revealed the boy's existence to Sarah Harvey shortly before their marriage, and she made a condition of her acceptance of his hand that he provide for the education of the child, which he did by posing as Ray's uncle and sending money to him. Eventually Trumbull would contact Ray directly, and brought him along when he and Sarah Trumbull returned to London in 1808. Later Ray enlisted in the British army so as to participate in the Napoleonic Wars, and was still serving abroad when his "aunt and uncle" returned back to the U.S.A. Ray remained under the impression that Trumbull was his uncle until 1818 when Trumbull, shocked at the news that Ray's new wife had given birth to a daughter less than nine months after his return from military service, angrily revealed the truth of Ray's birth as a warning to the man. Trumbull, *Autobiography*, 332-350.

⁵⁰⁹ Initially Trumbull wanted to move to Boston, but when informed by his friends that Stuart was moving to the city as well, Trumbull acknowledged that "Boston was then a small town...and did by no means offer an adequate field of success for two rival artists," and instead returned to New York City. Trumbull, *Autobiography*, 239.

⁵¹⁰ Founded in 1802 as the New York Academy of the Fine Arts, the organization changed its name later in 1804 to the American Academy of Arts, then in 1816 to the American Academy of the Arts, and in 1817 to the American Academy of the Fine Arts. Jaffe, *John Trumbull*, 207.

celebrated the recent creation of the New York Academy. An article in the July 10, 1804 edition of the New York *Commercial Advertiser* proclaimed:

An academy which may be considered as the germ of an extensive institution has already been established in this city, which does honor to the gentlemen who have exerted themselves in forming and executing the plan; and bids fair to be one of the most interesting ornaments of this city.

Examples are not wanting to prove that the soil of American Genius is good. Living witnesses may be brot [*sic*] to prove that encouragement only is wanting to extend our fame in the arts of peace. *Sir Benjamin West*, an American, is president of the Royal Academy of Painting, in Great-Britain, and names of his countrymen, *Copley*, *Trumbull*, *Stuart*, *Vanderlyn*, and [Edward G.] *Malbone*, will be handed down to posterity with his own.⁵¹¹

Trumbull again traveled to London in 1809 to seek treatment for worsening vision in his one good eye, and remained in England longer than anticipated after the outbreak of the War of 1812 made him a virtual prisoner in England.⁵¹² He executed a number of history paintings and some portrait commissions to support himself, “but not to an amount sufficient to defray my expenses,” forcing him into debt.⁵¹³ Even though the Trumbulls had to borrow money to maintain their lifestyle in England, John was not worried about his finances, anticipating that upon returning to the United States a combination of increased commissions and profits from land and Old Master speculation would allow him to remain solvent. By the time the couple was able to return to the United States of America in 1815, he already had his eye on a major commission that would allow him to succeed in his effort to become the painter of record of the American Revolution: the United States Capitol building.

⁵¹¹ Clio, “A View of Society and Manners in the United States,” *New-York Commercial Advertiser*, July 10, 1804, 3. The article incorrectly confers knighthood on West, a common error by the American press. Of the other artists, Trumbull, Stuart, and Malbone were all students of West, while Vanderlyn was the most prominent American artist of his time to train in Paris as opposed to London.

⁵¹² Trumbull, *Autobiography*, 247-254.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*, 248-249.

Trumbull as Elder Statesman of American Art

The United States Capitol Building

The war which forced John and Sarah Trumbull to remain in England longer than expected also halted the construction of the United States Capitol, the cornerstone of which had been laid by the now-deceased George Washington in 1793. Only the northern and southern wings of the building had been constructed prior to the War of 1812, with the spaces connected by a covered walkway. British architect William Thornton designed the original plan for the Capitol, and British architect Benjamin Latrobe had been tasked in 1803 with ensuring its completion. Both Thornton and Latrobe proposed that the Capitol's grand central room, the Rotunda, include statuary: Thornton first suggested an equestrian sculpture of George Washington, and then after Washington's death, his mausoleum; Latrobe planned for a series of portrait busts.⁵¹⁴ Neither plan came to fruition. The idea for a display of paintings in the Rotunda came from Trumbull, a series of large contemporary history paintings could succeed where his series of engravings had failed. Irma Jaffe notes:

Trumbull's artistic credentials for carrying out this plan were the best in the country. He alone among American artists had the portraits on which the documentary value of the paintings depended. No other artist in the nation had the training, experience, and skill to compose so many figures as the scenes required. He had, in fact, no competition, and his task was principally to persuade Congress to commission the work.⁵¹⁵

To support his case, Trumbull and his wife arrived in Washington on January 16, 1817 with four small works: *The Declaration of Independence*, which was nearly

⁵¹⁴ William C. Allen, *History of the United States Capitol: A Chronicle of Design, Construction, and Politics* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2001), 134.

⁵¹⁵ Jaffe, *John Trumbull*, 234.

finished, and *Trenton*, *Princeton*, and *Yorktown*, each of which was “far advanced.”⁵¹⁶ These works, as well as the support of his old friends Jefferson and Adams,⁵¹⁷ were successful in convincing Congress, which approved a commission later that month.⁵¹⁸ There was one primary modification from Trumbull’s original plan. He had desired to execute eight paintings, but Congress only commissioned four. In conversation with President James Madison, Trumbull proposed that he paint *The Declaration of Independence*, *Saratoga*, *Yorktown*, and the *Resignation of Washington* – two British military surrenders, two civil events, and no battle scenes. Madison agreed, and requested that Trumbull’s double the size of his planned canvases from 6 by 9 feet to 12 by 18 feet, so that the figures depicted would be full-sized.⁵¹⁹

Beginning work almost immediately, Trumbull completed his *Declaration of Independence* (fig. 73) in 1818, followed by *Surrender of Lord Cornwallis* (fig. 74) in 1820, *Surrender of General Burgoyne* (fig. 75) in 1821, and *General George Washington Resigning His Commission* (fig. 76) in 1824.⁵²⁰ For *The Declaration of Independence* and *Yorktown* Trumbull relied on his small compositions from several decades prior. *Saratoga* and *Washington Resigning His Commission*, however,

⁵¹⁶ Jaffe, *John Trumbull*, 236.

⁵¹⁷ Adams and Trumbull had remained friendly throughout the course of the early nineteenth century. However, Trumbull and Jefferson had a major falling out in 1793 over a political and religious dispute between Trumbull and American politician William Giles at a dinner party hosted by Jefferson, and had remained estranged until Trumbull reached out to him in 1816 for support on his commission. Jaffe, *John Trumbull*, 235.

⁵¹⁸ Trumbull lost much of his goodwill from Congress when he planned to start charging an admission fee to exhibit the completed *Declaration of Independence* prior to its installation. Ann Uhry Abrams, “National Paintings and American Character: Historical Murals in the Capitol Rotunda,” in *Picturing History: American Painting 1770-1930*, ed. William Ayres (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), 66.

⁵¹⁹ Jaffe, *John Trumbull*, 236.

⁵²⁰ The Yale University Art Gallery and the Architect of the Capitol give different titles to paintings of the same subject. I have retained the titles each institution uses to identify the work in their possession.

existed previously only as ideas, due to the lack of public interest in Trumbull's engraving series. Irma Jaffe has pointed out the compositional similarities between *The Surrender of General Burgoyne* and West's *Edward the Black Prince Receiving King John of France after the Battle of Poitiers* (fig. 77), on which Trumbull had assisted his master while a member of his studio.⁵²¹ For *Washington Resigning His Commission* he borrowed the composition of *The Declaration of Independence*, changing the architectural setting and flipping the orientation of the protagonist.

Less than a year after Trumbull was awarded his commission for the four history paintings Benjamin Latrobe had resigned as Architect of the Capitol, and was replaced by American-born architect Charles Bulfinch, a long-time friend of Trumbull. Difficulties in the design process, which had played a significant role in Latrobe's resignation, caused Bulfinch in early 1818 to consider removing the Rotunda in favor of meeting rooms, which would have necessitated moving Trumbull's paintings to a dedicated picture gallery on a separate floor.⁵²² Bulfinch proposed the idea to Trumbull, who immediately objected.⁵²³ Eventually the architect settled on a design which kept the Rotunda in place and allowed for the safe display of Trumbull's paintings in four of eight wall panels designed specifically for that purpose.⁵²⁴ Trumbull's four works were hung in 1826, to a mixed response of positive

⁵²¹ Jaffe, *John Trumbull*, 246.

⁵²² Allen, *History of the United States Capitol*, 135.

⁵²³ Trumbull copies his sequence of missives written to Bulfinch (though not the architect's replies) in Trumbull, *Autobiography*, 261-268.

⁵²⁴ Trumbull, and presumably Bulfinch as well, expected that he would be the artist who would execute the final four canvases to complete the space. That he did not was in part a result of the tepid responses to his initial four paintings and his attempts to have them engraved, and in part due to the 1826 interference of Samuel F.B. Morse, by then Trumbull's adversary over the governance of the American

admiration for their patriotic character alongside criticism for compositional flaws and a flatness of color.⁵²⁵ During the intervening period the artist enlisted a young artist named Asher B. Durand to engrave his *Declaration of Independence* in 1820, Trumbull refusing to give up his dream of a print series after his American Revolution works. Once again, however, poor subscriptions led to an abandonment of this plan, with Durand's *Declaration of Independence* (fig. 78) the only engraving completed, in 1823. Trumbull's records from the first year of sales show that his costs from the venture totaled \$3,756.92 while his profits totaled \$3,838, a profit margin too small to make future engravings worthwhile.⁵²⁶

The American Academy of the Fine Arts

January 1817 was an important month for Trumbull and the course of American art in another venue. In addition to receiving the Capitol Building commission, that month Trumbull was elected president of the American Academy of the Fine Arts. A great accomplishment for the artist, this also seemed to be the culmination of Benjamin West's efforts to place himself at the forefront of the development of art in North America, with one of his students at the head of the primary artistic academy operating in one of the leading cities of the United States of America. Trumbull celebrated that connection as well. The American Academy had acquired a new exhibition space in late 1816, and Trumbull curated a celebratory

Academy of the Fine Arts. Morse forestalled Trumbull's efforts by petitioning Congress to conduct a search for four history painters to complete the remaining four panels, an effort they did not take up until 1836. Abrams, "National Paintings and American Character," 70.

⁵²⁵ Mark Thistlewaite, "The Most Important Themes: History Painting and Its Place in American Art," in *Grand Illusions: History Painting in America*, ed. William H. Gerds and Mark Thistlewaite (Fort Worth, TX: Amon Carter Museum, 1988), 29.

⁵²⁶ Jaffe, *John Trumbull*, 241.

exhibition; the presence of several works by West in the exhibition was the focus of promotional material, reinforcing the conceptual linkage between the celebrated work of West and a justification of the existence of the American Academy.⁵²⁷

Having the opportunity for many years to witness West at the helm of the Royal Academy, Trumbull took a different approach to his own presidency. There were no discourses, and no broad attempts to determine the course of American art theory as with West for English art, following Sir Joshua Reynolds's example. This absence was a natural result of the organization's origin as compared to the Royal Academy of Arts. The New York Academy of the Fine Arts was founded by New York City businessmen and politicians who wanted to increase public interest and awareness of the arts, whereas the Royal Academy was founded by artists seeking to improve their own practice and status. The New York Academy, later the American Academy, looked outward for its audience and sought to cultivate popular taste by providing instructional and commission opportunities for artists, whereas the Royal Academy looked inward and believed that proper training in practice and theory would allow British artists to capture the eyes and pocketbooks of an audience already interested in the arts.⁵²⁸ Trumbull was the fourth president of the academy but the first who was an artist, following a succession of career politicians.⁵²⁹

⁵²⁷ Jaffe, *John Trumbull*, 266. West's *King Lear in the Storm* (fig. 3) and *Ophelia before the King and Queen*, both of which were owned by Robert Fulton, were exhibited in the annual Academy exhibition from 1816 to 1828. Mary Bartlett Cowdrey, *American Academy of Fine Arts and American Art-Union: Exhibition Record, 1816-1852* (New York: The New-York Historical Society, 1953), 391-393.

⁵²⁸ Hutchison, *The History of the Royal Academy*, 21-25.

⁵²⁹ The Academy was the brainchild of Robert Livingston, the American minister to France who negotiated the Louisiana Purchase. Its first president, serving from 1802-1804 was Robert's brother Edward Livingston, who was the Mayor of New York City at the time. Its second president, from 1804 until his death in 1813, was Robert Livingston himself, and its third, from 1813 to 1817, was DeWitt

As president of the American Academy, Trumbull demonstrated, much like West, that he was a far more talented painter than administrator. The academy's annual exhibitions of its collections were repetitive and reflective of the president's personal preference for history painting,⁵³⁰ and artistic instruction largely consisted of the establishment of a space for students to sketch casts rather than any real engagement between students and instructors, which seems not to have concerned Trumbull. An anecdote repeated by Dunlap details a moment when two students arrived to study the academy's collection of casts at its nominal opening hour, only to find the space closed. They were in the process of complaining to one of the directors when Trumbull arrived. Hearing their complaints, his response was disappointing:

When I commenced my study of painting, there were no casts to be found in the country. I was obliged to do as well as I could. These young men should remember that the *gentlemen* have gone to a great expense in importing casts, and that they [the students] have no property in them. They must remember beggars are not to be choosers.⁵³¹

While Dunlap was often guilty of exaggerating the negatives of Trumbull's presidency, this tone-deaf response required no further embellishment. His tenure was further marked by severe financial difficulties faced by the Academy, in part due to his sale of his and other works to the organization in order to stock its collection.⁵³²

Clinton, who was the Mayor of New York City at the start of his presidency, and Governor of New York shortly after the end. Mary Bartlett Cowdrey, *American Academy of Fine Arts and American Art-Union: Introduction, 1816-1852* (New York: The New-York Historical Society, 1953), 8-15.

⁵³⁰ Trumbull's focus on history painting, while perhaps not serving the population of its students, was attractive to audiences. Carrie Rebora argues that "history paintings kept the Academy open beyond what might be considered its functional existence." Carrie Rebora, "History Painting at the American Academy of the Fine Arts," in *Redefining American History Painting*, eds. Patricia M. Burnham and Lucretia Hoover Giese (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 229.

⁵³¹ Dunlap, *The Arts of Design*, vol. 3, 52-53.

⁵³² Jaffe, *John Trumbull*, 268-269.

Trumbull was aware that he was an ineffective leader, though perhaps not of the particular reasons why: that he possessed an overbearing personality further compounded by his constant recognition of his class and reputation. An attempt to resign in 1823 was rebuffed by the board of directors, who pointed out that there was no better option to take over the presidency. However, though Trumbull would remain in his position until 1836, the American Academy of the Fine Arts began its slow decline in 1825 when another former student of West, Samuel F.B. Morse, formed the New York Drawing Association.

Today Morse is best known as the inventor of the single-wire telegraph system and the signaling code that bears his name, but prior to his turn as an inventor he was a portraitist and history painter. Morse had demonstrated talent as a teenager at Yale College, and accompanied Washington Allston to London in 1811, where he trained under Allston and West and studied at the Royal Academy. After returning to the United States in 1815, Morse worked in New England until he gained national attention when he won a commission from New York City to paint a portrait of the Marquis de Lafayette in 1824.⁵³³ He had previously joined the American Academy, and disliked what he saw there, reflecting in an August 27, 1823 letter to his wife:

It requires some little time to become known in such a city as New York. Colonel T— is growing old, too, and there is no artist of education sufficiently prominent to take his place as President of the Academy of Arts. By becoming more known to the New York public, and exerting my talents to discover the best methods of promoting the arts and writing about them, I may possibly be promoted to his place, where I could have a better opportunity of doing *something for the arts in our country*, the object at which I aim.⁵³⁴

⁵³³ Paul J. Staiti, *Samuel F.B. Morse* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 116-126.

⁵³⁴ Samuel F.B. Morse, *Samuel F.B. Morse, His Letters and Journals, Edited and Supplemented by his Son Edward Lind Morse, Illustrated with Reproductions of his Paintings and with Notes and Diagrams*

Morse's first step in promoting the arts was forming the New York Drawing Association, a study group of young artists. Many members of the Drawing Association, including Dunlap and Durand, were also members of the American Academy and remained so, but they were clear that their organization was separate, and its existence in part necessitated by the Academy's failings. Trumbull recognized the New York Drawing Association as the insult it was meant to be, and interrupted one of its meetings to remind the students of his stature and their obligation to the Academy. In turn they formed the National Academy of Design several weeks later, with Morse at its head. The two organizations existed side by side in New York City until 1839, when the second of two fires in three years swept through the American Academy, destroying much of its records and collections and ending any desire to keep the institution alive. Trumbull had retired in 1836 shortly before the first fire, and was replaced as president by Rembrandt Peale. Morse continued as president of the National Academy until 1845.

It is telling that in Trumbull's expansive autobiography from 1841 he only makes two references to the American Academy, both times to note documents lost in the fires which swept through the institution's building.⁵³⁵ Samuel F.B. Morse is not referenced at all, nor are William Dunlap or Asher B. Durand. The elder artist's time with the American Academy of the Fine Arts was a disaster, and he pretended that it never happened while ignoring those artists who played a role in its downfall.

Bearing on the Invention of the Telegraph, vol. 1, ed. Edward L. Morse (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1914), 249.

⁵³⁵ Trumbull, *Autobiography*, 261, 286.

The Trumbull Gallery at Yale

Recognizing his failures with the American Academy of the Fine Arts, Trumbull made two last attempts to establish his legacy in the United States: an 1831 bequest of art to Yale College, and writing his *Autobiography*. According to Irma Jaffe, both attempts “were the result of acute distress, financial on the one hand, professional on the other.”⁵³⁶ Trumbull had been in debt for much of the nineteenth century, and although he had cleared his debts by 1830, at age seventy-six he had few prospects from portrait commissions and no assets other than some of his own works, including the small works from his American Revolution series and the miniatures he had painted in preparation for them. Realizing that the works related to that series were his last opportunity to achieve financial stability, he concocted a scheme to donate them to Yale in exchange for a lifetime annuity and enlisted Yale lecturer Benjamin Silliman, the husband of his niece Harriet, to negotiate with the school on his behalf. The school enthusiastically accepted the proposal and commissioned Trumbull to design the building in which the works would be held. His architectural plan included two galleries, a primary gallery to display his works and a second gallery for other works in Yale’s collection, with a crypt underneath the primary gallery to hold the tombs of himself and his wife Sarah, who had died in 1824. To preserve the integrity of his donation, he included in his contract with Yale a clause that his donation “shall never be sold, alienated, divided, or dispersed, but shall always be kept together.”⁵³⁷

⁵³⁶ Jaffe, *John Trumbull*, 276.

⁵³⁷ Trumbull would claim in a letter to the president of Harvard, Josiah Quincy, that he had chosen Yale rather than Harvard for his donation because Harvard was “very rich and Yale very poor.” More

One room of the Trumbull Gallery was to be devoted solely to works by the artist, and in addition to the Revolutionary War works it included a number of other history paintings and portraits, most notably a portrait of George Washington at Trenton (fig. 79) originally commissioned, and then rejected, by the city of Charleston, South Carolina. After the Trumbull Gallery was completed the artist continued to donate works, both older and more recent canvases.⁵³⁸

Despite his missteps as an administrator, and his longtime service to his nation as a governmental aide, Trumbull realized that his legacy would be as a painter, and that a perpetual exhibition at the leading college in his home state was an outstanding opportunity to secure that legacy. His donation was unprecedented: it created the first college-affiliated art gallery in the United States, and would lead to the creation of the first school of fine arts at a post-secondary institution decades after his death. It also ensured that his works which he viewed to be most important, his Revolutionary War paintings, would remain on view for perpetuity. By the 1830s Trumbull recognized that the historical value of those works had increased immensely. At the time of their execution they were inspired visual representations of crucial moments in recent history; by the time the Trumbull Gallery opened, they were invaluable documentary records. George Washington had been dead for thirty-two years; the Battle of Bunker Hill was fought over a half a century prior. The works were also records *by* a Revolutionary War veteran, of which Trumbull's preferred use of the title "Colonel"

likely he chose Yale for its location – he still lived in New York City in 1831, but would later move in with the Sillimans in New Haven – and because Benjamin Silliman already possessed strong connections to Yale and could negotiate on his behalf. Trumbull, *Autobiography*, 286.

⁵³⁸ For a full list of the works donated by Trumbull, see Trumbull, *Autobiography*, 287-288; Jaffe, *John Trumbull*, 281.

served as a constant reminder. With the Yale donation, both Trumbull's name and his interpretation of America's fight for independence would be preserved for all time.

Trumbull as Elder Statesman: Legacy

After the opening of the Trumbull Gallery the artist turned to his last major effort, his *Autobiography*. He wrote it between 1837 and 1841, while living in New Haven. The book did not receive a strong public response, and although Trumbull was disappointed with the lack of interest, his likely intended audience was not contemporary readers as much as it was future generations. His *Autobiography* was an attempt to take total control over the historical record of his life in direct mimicry, like much of Trumbull's professional career, of his mentor's similar efforts.

As a student in Benjamin West's studio, and later a friendly rival, Trumbull was well aware of his teacher's intense focus on his own legacy and how to best control it, both on the canvas and on the page. West had many opportunities: he was the leading American artist working in Europe, the head of a workshop of American artists, an innovator of contemporary history painting, the head of the Royal Academy of Arts for twenty-eight years. Once he found something that worked, he stuck with it, as in his repetition of the compositional formula from *The Death of General Wolfe*. Trumbull did the same with his continual return to his American Revolutionary series. Over forty years elapsed between West's encouragement to Trumbull to take up the series and the completion of his final canvas for the Capitol Rotunda, and a decade after that Trumbull executed yet another iteration of the series.⁵³⁹

⁵³⁹ Ibid. These canvases, half-life sized and executed without a particular destination in mind, were purchased from Trumbull's estate in 1844 by the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, CT.

Trumbull also recognized his own place in West's legacy as an American student. The course of Trumbull's career and his significant government service prevented him from becoming a consistent educator. He was one of West's protégés, but had none of his own. Asher B. Durand could have filled that role, as would have the landscape painter Thomas Cole (1801-1848), whom Trumbull reportedly discovered,⁵⁴⁰ except the two were among the many students mistreated by the American Academy of the Fine Arts who joined the New York Drawing Association and the National Academy of Design. Trumbull's involvement with the American Academy, and lengthy tumultuous presidency thereof, was an attempt to emulate West's role with the Royal Academy of Arts without any understanding in how to advance the education of young artists other than providing them sculptures to copy.

Thus, with several of West's paths to everlasting fame largely unavailable or unsuccessful for Trumbull, and the American Revolutionary series not quite enough in the artist's eyes, he turned to the Trumbull Gallery and his *Autobiography* to further enhance his stature. Interestingly, one strategy Trumbull consistently maintained with both of these attempts was to reinforce his association with West. His repetitive exhibitions for the American Academy often included works by West, and his donation of art to Yale included his copies of West's copies of Raphael's *Madonna della Sedia* and Correggio's *Madonna and Child with Saints Jerome and Mary Magdalene* (fig. 80), the latter the same work Trumbull used to occupy his time while imprisoned during the winter of 1780-1781.

Trumbull's trials demonstrate the difficulty of establishing a purely artistic legacy in early-nineteenth-century America. Although artistic standards had improved

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid., 220.

immensely since the childhoods of artists like West and Peale, the nation still faced a struggle when it came to the cultivation of effective artistic training institutions and of a market which demanded more than just portraits. Those efforts would not be realized until the maturation of artists like Durand and Cole in the middle of the century. Trumbull was present during these artists' development, but their development happened despite of, rather than because of, him. Indeed, the student of West who found the most success as an educator of multiple American artists did so only by working closely with West during the waning years of the elder artist's life.

Chapter 5: Manipulating His Legacy: West in the Nineteenth Century

A telling irony underlying the mid-nineteenth-century internal struggle between John Trumbull and Samuel F.B. Morse over the direction of the American Academy of the Fine Arts is that both men looked to Benjamin West as a paragon of the artistic education they sought to emulate in the United States of America. Of course, Trumbull and Morse were present in West's studio at different times in that artist's career. Trumbull's time with West in London in the 1780s corresponded with one of the headiest points in West's life, as his success as a contemporary history painter had led to his popularity, increased his social standing, and led to a commission to invent and execute a major commission for the king's chapel at Windsor Castle. Morse fell under West's influence three decades later, after he had risen to the presidency of the Royal Academy but also after the Windsor commission and his friendship with the king had fallen apart and old age and lack of innovation had slowed his artistic output.

As Trumbull was present in West's studio when his teacher was constantly engaged in historical commissions, much of his training consisted of detail work and copying West's canvases. It is no accident that the culmination of Trumbull's work under West was the execution of a version of *The Battle of La Hogue*, which West finished and then signed and dated with his own name.⁵⁴¹ Conversely, Morse was in

⁵⁴¹ The work is signed "B. West, 1778, retouched 1806." Von Erffa and Staley question that date, noting that West had told Joseph Farington that he had begun the copy of *The Battle of La Hogue* in 1781, which was the year his first version of the work was engraved after its 1780 exhibition. While they waver on 1778 or 1781 as the start date for the canvas, they note that regardless of the work's beginnings, "it seems in fact to have been painted largely in 1785 by John Trumbull." Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 210.

London in the early 1810s, when West was focused on his Royal Academy leadership with its incessant lobbying, portraiture, religious subjects, and most importantly, controlling and promoting his own legacy.

The identification of Morse as a student of West, as most sources do, is itself an oversimplification of the workings of West's studio in the nineteenth century.

While West nominally oversaw Morse's education, the young artist and future inventor also worked under the watchful eye of Washington Allston, himself a recent former West student who had trained in London from 1801 to 1803, returning to the English capital in 1811 with Morse in tow. While in London between 1811 and 1818 Allston presided over a small collective of American artists living together and studying at the Royal Academy. This group, which also included Charles Bird King, Thomas Sully, Samuel Lovett Waldo, Charles Robert Leslie, and Gilbert Stuart Newton, were largely students of West in name only, receiving their primary instruction from the Academy schools, Allston, and each other. Nonetheless they associated themselves with West for the purposes of establishing their credentials as artists, and West with them to reinforce his credentials as an educator through his paternal oversight over the entire group, which include arranging their lodging just blocks away from his home.⁵⁴²

The preceding chapters have presented a picture of Benjamin West, through his interactions with his students, which corresponds with descriptions by Dunlap and other younger artists. Gilbert Stuart said that West was "the wisest man" he ever

⁵⁴² Interestingly, under West's presidency the Royal Academy became increasingly resistant to membership by foreign artists as a result of the Bonomi Affair and Henry Fuseli's election as a full Academician in 1790, near the end of Reynolds's tenure. Allston was elected A.R.A. in 1818, and there was a perception among American artists that working under West was the only possible means of attaining the honor of election to the Academy. Hoock, *The King's Artists*, 115-116.

knew, and equally full of “goodness”;⁵⁴³ John Constable (1776-1837) fondly remembered, in letters to his future wife, the multiple occasions West gave him positive reinforcement;⁵⁴⁴ Charles Willson Peale described how West sought out artists talented in other genres to assist his student’s training;⁵⁴⁵ Dunlap glowingly stated that West “afforded instruction and the most paternal encouragement to many pupils, American and English.”⁵⁴⁶ Allston simply called West “a man overflowing with the milk of human kindness.”⁵⁴⁷ The historical record is quite clear that West offered great amounts of requested and unrequested assistance to aspiring artists, patrons, and connoisseurs, and went out of his way to advance the careers of other artists. The historical record is quite clear that he did. However, I situate his engagement with American artists, especially in the nineteenth century, within the greater context of his attempts to promote his image for posterity. Doing so first requires a deeper examination of West’s relationship with Washington Allston and the changing taste for art within the new republic.

Washington Allston and West’s Studio in the Early Nineteenth Century

Two years after Trumbull finished his military service under General George Washington, Captain William Allston and Rachel Moore Allston named their newborn son after the great military leader. Washington Allston was born on November 5, 1779, on his parents’ rice plantation near Georgetown, South Carolina,

⁵⁴³ Morgan, *Gilbert Stuart*, 84.

⁵⁴⁴ Leslie, *Memoirs of the Life of John Constable*, 29, 40.

⁵⁴⁵ Peale to John Beale Bordley, March, 1767, in Miller, Hart, and Appel, *Peale Papers*, vol. 1, 47-48.

⁵⁴⁶ Dunlap, *The Arts of Design*, vol. 1, 73.

⁵⁴⁷ Allston to William Dunlap, October 15, 1833, in Wright, *The Correspondence of Allston*, 337.

into a life of relative luxury. Early tragedy struck, however, when Captain Allston died unexpectedly after returning home from fighting in the Battle of Cowpens in 1781.⁵⁴⁸ In short order Rachel Allston remarried, to a Dr. Henry Flagg, the chief medical officer for General Nathanael Greene's army and son of a shipping magnate from Newport, Rhode Island.⁵⁴⁹ At the age of eight Allston was sent to live with his stepfather's family in Newport to attend school in preparation for college. Few specifics remain of Allston's childhood artistic training, other than (much like West, Stuart, Trumbull, and others) he demonstrated precocious talent. He was fortunate to have been sent to Newport, a cultural center that had recently produced Gilbert Stuart and would later produce Charles Bird King. In an 1833 letter, Allston reflected on his youthful artistic efforts, claiming that although he "never had any regular instructor in the art...I had much incidental instruction; which I have always through life been glad to receive from every one in advance of myself," namely, from Samuel King (1749-1819), an artist working in Newport "who made quadrants and compasses, and occasionally painted portraits."⁵⁵⁰

Allston made it clear that while Samuel King was an occasional portraitist, he drew more instruction from the prints he was able to view in King's shop than from direct advice from the man. He also copied works on paper by Edward G. Malbone,

⁵⁴⁸ On Allston's early life, see Jared B. Flagg, *The Life and Letters of Washington Allston* (New York: Kennedy Galleries, 1969); Edgar P. Richardson, *Washington Allston: A Study of the Romantic Artist in America* (New York: Crowell, 1967).

⁵⁴⁹ E. Richardson, *Washington Allston*, 28. Apparently Flagg's finances, medical career, and military service were not enough to convince Rachel Moore's family of his worthiness as a husband. The Moores considered themselves southern aristocrats, while Flagg was a Yankee, and never good enough for Rachel. Flagg, *The Life of Allston*, 6-7.

⁵⁵⁰ Allston to William Dunlap, ca. 28 June 1833, in Wright, *The Correspondence of Washington Allston*, 330-331.

who was just two years older than Allston but who had already established himself as a talented miniaturist in Newport prior to moving to Providence in 1794. Allston remained very much an amateur artist working with pencil and paper. His first known oil painting was a copy of a painting of Mt. Vesuvius, which he completed in early 1795 at the age of sixteen.⁵⁵¹ The next year he enrolled at Harvard, where, he told Dunlap, “[M]y leisure hours at college were chiefly devoted to the pencil.”⁵⁵² Certainly those efforts were encouraged by another stroke of luck: for his first two years at Harvard, Allston lodged with Dr. Benjamin Waterhouse, the man who had been Gilbert Stuart’s best friend in Boston and who claimed to have introduced Stuart to West in 1776.⁵⁵³ Although Allston’s first biographer Jared B. Flagg makes no mention of Waterhouse, and later his biographer Edgar P. Richardson only mentions him to identify Waterhouse as Allston’s landlord,⁵⁵⁴ it seems impossible that the professor would not have regaled his lodger with tales of Stuart’s talent and success. After all, Dunlap argued that Waterhouse attempted to publicly associate himself with Stuart’s fame, so one can only imagine that Allston could have served as a captive test audience for the physician.

An 1800 letter from Allston to his mother makes clear the young man’s desire to pursue an artistic career after graduation, as well as her disapproval of that choice:

It is so long since I have mentioned anything about my painting that I suppose you have concluded I had given it up. But my thoughts are far enough

⁵⁵¹ Allston to William Ellery Channing, 1795 before March 22, in Wright, *The Correspondence of Washington Allston*, 7. The painting is unlocated.

⁵⁵² Allston to William Dunlap, ca. June 28, 1833, in Wright, *The Correspondence of Washington Allston*, 331.

⁵⁵³ Dunlap, *The Arts of Design*, vol. 1, 207.

⁵⁵⁴ E. Richardson, *Washington Allston*, 10-11.

from that, I assure you. I am more attached to it than ever; and am determined, if resolution and perseverance will effect it, to be the first painter, at least, from America. Do not think me vain, for my boasting is only conditional; yet I am inclined to think from my own experience that the difficulty to eminence lies not in the road, but in the timidity of the traveller. Few minds capable of convincing that are not adequate to the accomplishing of great designs; and if there have been some failures, less blame, perhaps, is to be ascribed to the partiality of fortune than to their own want of confidence.

In a word, my dear mother, I feel a fortune in my fingers. With what little skill I possess at present, I am persuaded, did my pride permit, I could support myself with ease and respectability; but I am content to remain poor as I am until painting shall have been formally established as my profession.⁵⁵⁵

In order to pursue that end, Allston returned to South Carolina to sell his share of the family plantation to finance a trip to Europe. In 1801 he departed for London with his friend Malbone, with whom he had reconnected when Malbone moved to Boston the same year Allston matriculated at Harvard.⁵⁵⁶ Even though London was their destination, neither man had any particular interest in training with West: Allston had been unimpressed by prints after West's work, and Malbone saw himself as West's equal rather than an aspiring student, with primary goal "to measure his ability against his English contemporaries."⁵⁵⁷ Nonetheless, as Americans intent on using the Royal Academy's resources – Allston, the full breadth of its opportunities for students, and Malbone, its sketching room – both men, much like Stuart decades prior, found that engaging with West was inevitable. Allston, in particular, would find it just as beneficial as well.

⁵⁵⁵ Allston to Rachel Moore Allston, August 12, 1800, in Flagg, *The Life of Allston*, 20.

⁵⁵⁶ Daphne Foskett, *A Dictionary of British Miniature Painters*, vol. 1 (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), 397. Malbone continued to work as an itinerant artist in the 1790s, traveling to New York in 1797 and Philadelphia in 1798, but returned to Boston in time to accompany Allston to South Carolina in 1800 when the latter sold his land holdings to finance his London trip.

⁵⁵⁷ D. Evans, *Benjamin West and his American Students*, 146.

Allston's First Tour of London

While Gilbert Stuart retained his dislike for West throughout his time in London, Allston was converted from a skeptic to a believer in West soon after arriving in his studio, where he had a chance to meet the man in person, view his famous works and his highly-regarded collection of Old Master paintings,⁵⁵⁸ and see the works on his easel and hanging in his gallery. Most influential on Allston's reconsideration of West was a 1796 oil sketch of *Death on the Pale Horse* (fig. 19), an apocalyptic image from the Book of Revelation intended for the Chapel of Revealed Religion in Windsor Castle.⁵⁵⁹ The intensely Romantic scene, operating outside West's usual milieu,⁵⁶⁰ appealed to Allston's transcendental Christian beliefs,⁵⁶¹ and the young man described his change of heart regarding West to a friend shortly after arriving in London:

You will no doubt be surprised that among the many painters in London I should rank Mr. West as the first. I must own I myself was not a little surprised to find him such. I left America strongly prejudiced against him; and indeed I even *now* think with good reason, for those pictures from which I had seen prints would do no credit to a very inferior artist, much less to one of his reputation. But when I saw his gallery and the innumerable excellences which <they> it contained, I pronounced him one of the greatest men in [the] world. I had looked upon his understanding with indifference, and his imagination with contempt. But I have now reason to suppose them both vigorous in the highest degree. No fancy could have better conceived and

⁵⁵⁸ Through his constant collecting, and willingness to expound his opinions on older works of art, West became one of the most trusted connoisseurs of Old Master works in England by the late eighteenth century. Allston called him "one of the most learned in Europe in these things" when a friend requested assistance in identifying the artists of several drawings. Allston to James McMurtrie, June 13, 1816 in Wright, *The Correspondence of Washington Allston*, 90.

⁵⁵⁹ The 1796 version of the subject was the second of three exhibited at the Royal Academy by West. In 1783 he executed a drawing of the scene, which he exhibited the following year, and in 1817 he finished and exhibited a massive canvas. Staley, "West's Death on the Pale Horse," 137- 141.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid., 144.

⁵⁶¹ David Bjelajac, *Washington Allston, Secret Societies, and the Alchemy of Anglo-American Painting* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1-7.

no pencil more happily embodied the visions of sublimity, than he has in his inimitable picture from Revelation. Its subject is the opening of the seven seals; and a more sublime and awful picture I never beheld. It is impossible to conceive any thing more terrible than death on the white horse; and I am certain no painter has exceeded Mr. West in <the expression of> fury horror and despair which he has represented in the surrounding figures.⁵⁶²

While the young Washington Allston appreciated *Death on the Pale Horse*, the man who commissioned the chapel in which it was to be a part did not. The king looked unfavorably on excessively sublime religious subjects, and several years later derided the work as “a Bedlamite scene from the Revelation.”⁵⁶³ George III preferred works in the neoclassical mode, a style which West would never fully abandon, even in his final years. West’s 1806 *The Death of Nelson* (fig. 81), for example, relies on the same basic compositional formula as *The Death of General Wolfe* (see fig. 11) from 1770.⁵⁶⁴ His 1807 sketch *The Apotheosis of Nelson* (fig. 82), a design for a proposed monument, places a painting of the apotheosis of the vice-admiral in a sculptural setting flanked by Doric columns and topped with a frieze and other elements of Greek architecture. In drawing symbolism from classical sources and combining them with anachronistic notes like two groupings of contemporary sailors, the design becomes a pastiche.⁵⁶⁵ Although that monument was never constructed, West was later awarded the commission to design an even more classicizing tribute to Nelson,

⁵⁶² Allston to Charles Fraser, August 25, 1801 in Wright, *The Correspondence of Washington Allston*, 26. It is also quite likely that Allston’s impression of West was improved when the older artist gave high praise to Allston’s sketch of a cast of the *Borghese Warrior*, and all but guaranteed the young man that he would gain entry to the Royal Academy school on the strength of the drawing.

⁵⁶³ Farington, *Diary*, vol. 6, 2461 (December 1, 1804).

⁵⁶⁴ Emily Ballew Neff and Kaylin H. Weber also identify strong influences from John Singleton Copley’s 1798-99 *The Victory of Lord Duncan (Surrender of the Dutch Admiral DeWinter to Admiral Duncan, 11 October 1797)*, in West’s 1806 painting of Nelson; Neff and Weber, “Laying Siege,” 230.

⁵⁶⁵ Ann Uhry Abrams, *The Valiant Hero*, 206-207.

the pedimental sculptures for the King William Block of the Greenwich Hospital, which were completed in 1812.⁵⁶⁶

In addition to studying at the Academy schools, Allston availed himself of West's studio and his collection of Old-Master works as a central part of his artistic education.⁵⁶⁷ In November 1801, after five months abroad, Malbone returned to the United States having learned little other than that his abilities as a miniaturist were equal to those of artists working in London.⁵⁶⁸ Between 1802 and 1803 Allston was one of a number of students working with West. Rembrandt Peale was in London in 1802, and while he endeared himself to his father's friend, he ran afoul of other conservative Academicians.⁵⁶⁹ As Peale explained decades later, he began work on several drawings in order to gain admission to the Royal Academy schools, and that "after drawing from the antique in the Royal Academy, I was a candidate for admission to the life school; but a trick practiced on Mr. West deprived me of that

⁵⁶⁶ For more on these sculptures, which have been given little attention in the literature to this point, see Katie Wood Kirchoff's forthcoming dissertation, "Benjamin West's Nelson Memorial: Neoclassicism and the Atlantic World circa 1812," a manuscript of which she graciously shared with prior to completion. Kirchoff argues that the pedimental sculptures bridge West's neoclassicism and Romantic impulses in composition and conceit, despite their neoclassical stylistic approach. Katie Wood Kirchoff, "Benjamin West's Nelson Memorial: Neoclassicism and the Atlantic World circa 1812" (unpublished manuscript, February 13, 2014).

⁵⁶⁷ E. Richardson, *Washington Allston*, 50-51.

⁵⁶⁸ E. Richardson, *Washington Allston*, 52; D. Evans, *Benjamin West and His American Students*, 145-146; Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 341. West agreed that Malbone was just as talented as any British miniaturist, and unsuccessfully attempted to convince Malbone to stay in England.

⁵⁶⁹ Peale also possessed an artistic ideology reflective of the contemporary republican philosophy espoused by politicians such as Thomas Jefferson, arguing that the nation needed a new style of art which promoted its republication ideals and created a visual separation from the arts of Great Britain. Thus Peale was one of the only American artists, along with John Vanderlyn, who sought artistic instruction in France rather than England. William T. Oedel, "After Paris: Rembrandt Peale's Apollodorian Gallery," *Winterthur Portfolio* 27, no. 1 (Apr., 1992): 1-27.

favor.”⁵⁷⁰ Peale never revealed his trick, but in his 1855 “Reminiscences” he claimed that he and West remained friendly, with the older man originally planning on joining Peale on an 1803 trip to America before his doctors advised against it.⁵⁷¹

A longer presence in West’s workshop was John Blake White,⁵⁷² who like Allston was a South Carolinian. The two shared a common friend in Charles Fraser, and Allston traveled to London with a letter of introduction from Fraser to White, who had arrived in the English capital the previous year. Allston, Malbone, and White became fast friends.⁵⁷³ In his journal also White described the addition of three other young Americans to this social group, including a “Mr. Edwd. Dana...Son of the Chief Justice of Massachusetts, who, also fired, with a zeal for painting visited England for improvement.”⁵⁷⁴ White was in fact referring to Edmund T. Dana, whose “zeal for painting” fell more along the lines of criticism than practice.⁵⁷⁵

Allston’s first three years in West’s studio were largely uneventful. He trained in the Royal Academy schools, practiced his painting under West’s supervision, and exhibited three works at the 1802 Royal Academy exhibition. In 1803 Allston met John Vanderlyn (1775-1852), an American artist who had trained under Gilbert Stuart in Philadelphia and then traveled to Europe for further artistic training. Unlike nearly

⁵⁷⁰ Peale, “Reminiscences,” 290.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid.

⁵⁷² White is never mentioned by Dorinda Evans in *Benjamin West and His American Students*. Nonetheless, White’s description of his time in West’s studio is corroborated both in Allston’s correspondence and John Trumbull’s *Autobiography*, creating no doubt as to the veracity of his claim.

⁵⁷³ White would also remain friendly with Allston and his family after the two left London in 1803, and the next year would marry one of Allston’s relatives, Elizabeth Allston.

⁵⁷⁴ White, “The Journal of John Blake White,” 68.

⁵⁷⁵ Doreen Hunter, “America’s First Romantics: Richard Henry Dana, Sr. and Washington Allston,” *The New England Quarterly* 45, no. 1 (Mar., 1972): 7.

every other American artist of his day, Vanderlyn did not go to London for his artistic education. Instead he went to Paris, where despite the ongoing revolution he trained with François-André Vincent (1746-1816), a neoclassical portraitist, and took classes at the École des Beaux-Arts.⁵⁷⁶ While visiting Britain to seek out an engraver for a painting of Niagara Falls, he met Allston, who accompanied Vanderlyn to Holland, back to Paris, and then to Rome, where Allston spent the better part of the next four years. After Rome, Allston returned to the United States in 1808, moved to Boston, and opened a portraiture studio.⁵⁷⁷ While working in Boston, Allston sufficiently impressed local citizens with his artistic output that some were inclined to place him alongside West, Copley, and other great American artists in genius, if not in ability.⁵⁷⁸ Inspired by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, with whom he had become friends in Italy,⁵⁷⁹ Allston also turned his creative talents to verse. A collection of his poetry, *The Sylphs of the Seasons, with Other Poems*, was published simultaneously in London and Boston in 1813.⁵⁸⁰

Allston's departure from London in 1803 marked the start of a brief period in which no American artists in that city associated themselves with West. Charles Bird King and Samuel Lovett Waldo both arrived in 1806, encountering a Benjamin West

⁵⁷⁶ For a fuller discussion of Vanderlyn's reasons for going to Paris, which had nothing to do with Benjamin West and everything to do with Vanderlyn's patrons, political sympathies, and Revolutionary War-era grudges, see Wayne Craven, "The Grand Manner in Early Nineteenth-Century American Painting: Borrowings from Antiquity, the Renaissance, and the Baroque," *American Art Journal* 11, no. 2 (Apr., 1979): 11; Zygmunt, "Portraiture and Politics in New York City," 85-86.

⁵⁷⁷ E. Richardson, *Washington Allston*, 89-90.

⁵⁷⁸ Lowell to Anne Grant, July 23, 1810, in *Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings* 18 (2nd series, 1904), 314-15.

⁵⁷⁹ For more on Allston and Coleridge, see John R. Welsh, "An Anglo-American Friendship: Allston and Coleridge," *Journal of American Studies* 5, no. 1 (Apr., 1971): 81-91.

⁵⁸⁰ E. Richardson, *Washington Allston*, 94-96.

recently resigned from his presidency, at the nadir of his career. At this point he was sixty-eight, fighting to regain his status in the public's eyes and against several factions related to the Royal Court which sought to eliminate his waning influence on the king. West nominally oversaw King and Waldo's training, but his "instruction" consisted of allowing access to his workshop, and facilitating the connection of younger American artists under his purview – King roomed with Waldo for several months at the start of his London stay, which was likely arranged by West.⁵⁸¹

In his journal, John Blake White described the typical interaction between West and his students around 1800. He first met John Trumbull, who after an unsuccessful attempt to convince White to abandon painting in favor of the study of law, introduced the young man to West. After a tour of West's personal gallery, the "old Gentleman politely invited me generally to visit him whenever I was disposed, which I ever after availed myself of and seldom failed of being at his painting room two or three times every week."⁵⁸² This, White makes clear, was the extent of his "studies" with West, an amount of interaction for which the student was appreciative.

Waldo returned to North America in 1809, the same year Thomas Sully began a nine-month stay in the English capital, where he also became King's roommate.⁵⁸³ Sully's trip was paid for by a subscription by seven men from his hometown of Philadelphia, who expected him to copy Old-Master paintings for them in return. He relied on West's collection and all the advice West was willing to offer. The elder

⁵⁸¹ D. Evans, *Benjamin West and His American Students*, 146.

⁵⁸² White, "The Journal of John Blake White," 64.

⁵⁸³ In this instance West did not direct Sully to King. Sully came to London with a letter of introduction to King as well as to West, and became King's roommate after King pointed out that Sully's finances were not nearly enough to live in London on his own. D. Evans, *Benjamin West and His American Students*, 151; Dunlap, *The Arts of Design*, vol. 2, 255.

artist was, again, more interested in facilitating Sully's external education than providing his own. He encouraged Sully to further his study of bone structure, for which the young man and King hired a model, and when Sully expressed an interest in portraiture, West deferred instruction and instead told him to pursue training with his favorite portraitist, who at that point was Thomas Lawrence.⁵⁸⁴

Allston's Second Tour of London

The reshaping of West's pedagogical practice culminated with Washington Allston's return to London in 1811. He was no longer the aspiring young artist who had crossed the Atlantic a decade prior; in 1811 Allston was an accomplished portraitist looking to expand into large-scale religious painting, inspired in part by the example West set had with *Death on the Pale Horse* and his Windsor designs.⁵⁸⁵ Allston also brought his own student with him, the twenty-year old Samuel F.B. Morse. While looking to West for advice on his religious work, Allston also became the de facto head instructor of West's workshop and mentor to the other Americans working there.⁵⁸⁶ By this point in London "there was a recognizable American artistic quarter," whose residents included West, Copley, Trumbull, King, Allston, Morse, and Charles Robert Leslie (who had also arrived in England in 1811), in the immediate environs of Newman Street.⁵⁸⁷

⁵⁸⁴ D. Evans, *Benjamin West and His American Students*, 151, 153-154; Dunlap, *The Arts of Design*, vol. 2, 257.

⁵⁸⁵ D. Evans, *Benjamin West and His American Students*, 137; E. Richardson, *Washington Allston*, 103.

⁵⁸⁶ The lessons Allston provided these students were largely those West provided him, based on copying and studying Old Master works. Hugh R. Crean, "Samuel F.B. Morse's *Gallery of the Louvre*: Tribute to a Master and Diary of a Friendship," *American Art Journal* 16, no. 1 (Jan., 1984): 77.

⁵⁸⁷ Hoock, *The King's Artists*, 93.

In essence, upon reaching London Allston added King and Leslie as students, forming a tight-knit social group among young American artists working in England.⁵⁸⁸ Also part of this circle was Allston's wife Ann, English artists James Lonsdale (1777-1839), John Martin (1789-1854), and William Collins (1788-1847, American actor John Howard Payne, and the English poets Coleridge, William Wordsworth, and Robert Southey.⁵⁸⁹ The presence of so many poets in his circle inspired Allston to expand his interests into verse. More importantly, his association with the three primary Lake Poets – Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey⁵⁹⁰ – provided direct access to the growing focus on emotional and personal expression encouraged in other artistic realms. Allston's earlier positive reception of West's *Death on the Pale Horse* demonstrated his receptiveness to the fully-fledged Romantic movement in art and literature more than a decade later.

Three British Institutions: West, the King, and Shakespeare

Several decades prior to Allston's return to London, when John Trumbull made a return of his own to West's studio in 1784, the older artist made the strategic decision to abandon his plans for a series on the American Revolutionary War. Part of this decision was for political reasons, and part was because he was facing a significant amount of work on his proposed Chapel of Revealed Religion for King

⁵⁸⁸ The three major American-born artists working in London at this time were West and Copley, both born in 1738, and Trumbull, born in 1756. Twenty-three years separated Trumbull from Allston, born in 1779, while Charles Robert Leslie, born in 1794, was fifty-six years younger than West and Copley.

⁵⁸⁹ E. Richardson, *Washington Allston*, 99-100. Richardson also mentions the presence of the older art patron Sir George Beaumont, and, quoting M.F. Foster, notes the presence of "Collard, the merry musician" as part of this group, without providing any additional hints to the latter's identity.

⁵⁹⁰ For more on the Lake Poets see Brian Goldberg, *The Lake Poets and Professional Identity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007); David McCracken, *Wordsworth and the Lake District: A Guide to the Poems and their Places* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1984).

George III. In hindsight, West may have been faced with two losing propositions. Executing a series on the American Revolution would likely have drawn a great deal of public criticism and led to a major rift between the painter and his royal patron. However, his decision to forego the American series only forestalled an inevitable falling out with George III. The king became ill, both physically and mentally, and was removed from power briefly in 1789. From that point on he became more reliant on a series of advisors and confidants, including Queen Charlotte and James Wyatt, the latter a Royal Academician who had replaced Sir William Chambers, who died in 1796, as the Surveyor of the Ordnance. Both the queen and Wyatt strongly disliked West, and proceeded to systematically dismantle his influence on the king.⁵⁹¹ West stopped receiving new royal commissions after 1789, and while he continued to work on the Royal Chapel until 1801, he stopped using his residence at Windsor Castle and had difficulty receiving timely payment of money owed to him by the Crown.⁵⁹² Not until a decade after the end of the American Revolutionary War did West's political beliefs apparently become an issue for the king. The artist told Joseph Farington in late 1794 that he was concerned because the king had "been informed of his [West] holding democratic principles,"⁵⁹³ an increasingly problematic situation in light of the French Revolution.⁵⁹⁴ Whether it actually became a problem for George III, or some

⁵⁹¹ Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 97-98.

⁵⁹² *Ibid.*, 98.

⁵⁹³ Farington, *Diary*, vol. 1, 270 (December 6, 1794). Although the queen and Wyatt were West's primary antagonists, West believed that either bookseller George Nicol or John and Josiah Boydell had raised the issue of his political leanings with the king. John Boydell corroborated that claim a dozen years later in a conversation with Farington, Farington, *Diary*, vol. 7, 2675 (January 26, 1806).

⁵⁹⁴ Not helping things was West's willingness to meet with any American who called on him at 14 Newman Street, which led to an association in the 1780s with politician Joel Barlow and activist

combination of Wyatt and Queen Charlotte convinced the king that it was an issue, is unclear. What is known is that from the mid-1790s onward West could no longer count on royal patronage.⁵⁹⁵

At the same time West's royal commissions began to dry up, he participated in another major effort of British art, and of British nationalism, in the late eighteenth century, John Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery.⁵⁹⁶ The Shakespeare Gallery was the brainchild of either Boydell's nephew Josiah Boydell or painter George Romney, one of whom proposed the concept at a 1786 dinner party at which West was a guest. Alongside the public exhibition of commissioned paintings, Boydell proposed to publish a nine-volume illustrated edition of Shakespeare's plays, as well as a two-volume large set of engravings after each included work. The gallery and the illustrated Shakespeare text were to draw attention to the project, encouraging subscriptions to the engravings, which would be the real money makers for the Boydells and the participating artists.⁵⁹⁷ In time for the gallery's 1789 opening West contributed *King Lear in the Storm* (fig. 3), a depiction of Act III, Scene IV of the tragedy *King Lear*, in which the titular figure rages against a violent thunderstorm on

Thomas Paine, both of whom were outspoken supporters of the American and French Revolutions. Hoock, *The King's Artists*, 130, 192.

⁵⁹⁵ Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 97-98. West had maintained an apartment in Windsor Castle to allow him to work at the site, but by 1793 he was rarely in attendance, and stopped staying there entirely in 1796. As part of his Windsor commission West received an annual stipend of £1,000, which was only stopped in 1810. West confided in Farington that he was certain Queen Charlotte was behind that cessation of payments. Farington, *Diary*, vol. 6, 4075 (February 3, 1812).

⁵⁹⁶ For an overview of the Boydell Shakespeare Gallery, see Dias, *Exhibiting Englishness*; Bruntjen, *John Boydell, 1719-1804: A Study of Art Patronage and Publishing in Georgian England*; Winifred H. Friedman, *Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1976). Boydell spelled the name of his venture as the "Shakspeare" Gallery, while Joseph Farington referred to it as the "Shakespere" Gallery. Modern scholarship generally uses the spelling "Shakespeare."

⁵⁹⁷ Winifred H. Friedman, "Some Commercial Aspects of the Boydell Shakespeare Gallery," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 36 (1973), 396-401; Bruntjen, *John Boydell*, 69.

a Scottish heath while braced by his loyal supporter the Earl of Kent, as the figures of the Fool and Poor Tom – actually Edgar, the son of the Earl of Gloucester, in disguise – crouch on the ground bracketing Lear and situating him in his growing madness. A stunned Gloucester illuminates the scene with his torch, his wild-eyed apprehension of the scene standing in for the viewer’s own reaction. In the distance the small figures of Lear’s youngest daughter Cordelia and her maid Arante are barely visible. By including both Cordelia and the Fool, West conflates two versions of *King Lear*: Shakespeare’s original text, in which the Fool is present with Lear during the storm but Cordelia is not, and Nahum Tate’s 1681 adaptation, which includes Cordelia in the scene while eliminating the Fool entirely from the play.⁵⁹⁸

Presumably, as participants in the dinner party which birthed the Shakespeare Gallery, West and Romney would have had early, if not first, choice of subjects to commit to canvas, or been asked to work on the most desired commissions.⁵⁹⁹ Romney contributed *The Infant Shakespeare Attended by Nature and the Passions* (fig. 83), an allegorical invention which positions a melancholic child between personifications of Joy and Sorrow, who in turn epitomize Comedy and Tragedy. Rather than attempt to influence the baby Shakespeare, Joy, Sorrow, and their entourage vie for his attention, while a beatific Nature glows behind him and the

⁵⁹⁸ Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 272. Sund suggests that this decision may have been made by John Boydell, who had encouraged his artists to focus on popular conception of Shakespeare rather than strict literal interpretations. Judy Sund, "Benjamin West: A Scene from *King Lear*," *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts* 58, no. 3 (1980): 131.

⁵⁹⁹ West likely also had the opportunity to influence the selection of artists for other commissions, namely of his son Raphael West to execute a painting from Act IV, Scene 3 of *As You Like It*. Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 272.

name SHAKSPERE appears in the heavens above.⁶⁰⁰ West's prized scene, on the other hand, "was the most frequently depicted of all Shakespearean subjects" in the period 1700-1830.⁶⁰¹ It was one of three subjects from *King Lear* which hung at the opening of the Shakespeare Gallery, along with Henry Fuseli's *Lear Cursing Cordelia* (fig. 84) and James Barry's *Lear Weeping over the Dead Body of Cordelia* (fig. 85). Of the three artists, West received £525 for his commission, while Barry (1741-1806) was paid £315 and Fuseli £262.10.0.⁶⁰²

King Lear in the Storm marked a significant stylistic change in West's oeuvre, one which would entice his future student Allston. West was proud of his effort, later calling it "his best piece done in his greatest stile."⁶⁰³ The dramatic Lear, with wild hair, bare chest, wide stride, and arm outstretched to the sky, is a harsh contrast to West's previous historical protagonists, stoic or passive. Heavily influenced by the Sublime, *King Lear in the Storm* also marked a shift from prior popular conceptions of Lear as a frail old man to that of a dynamic figure.⁶⁰⁴ Even still, the drama of West's finished canvas was compared unfavorably to the excitement of his preparatory sketch (fig. 86), which was exhibited at the 1789 Royal Academy exhibition. William Beckford later acquired the sketch, and a visitor to his home described the work as a "most wonderful performance. The expression of the face of

⁶⁰⁰ See William L. Pressly, *The Artist as Original Genius: Shakespeare's "Fine Frenzy" in Late-Eighteenth-Century British Art* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2007), 152-153 for more on the contemporary poetic source material that informed Romney's composition, which was the only painting in the Gallery which did not depict a moment from one of Shakespeare's plays, fittingly, as its genesis predated the idea for the Gallery.

⁶⁰¹ Sund, "Benjamin West," 130.

⁶⁰² Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 272.

⁶⁰³ Quoted in von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 273.

⁶⁰⁴ Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 272.

the poor mad king is astonishing; the colouring rich and mellow – nothing of West’s usually hard outline. The whole picture is full of energy and fire...”⁶⁰⁵ As was his practice, West references preceding artistic movements with his quotation of Michelangelo in the body of Edgar/Poor Tom,⁶⁰⁶ but Lear is emphatically an original romantic figure. When James Gillray (1757-1815) published his satirical print *Shakespeare Sacrificed; or, The Offering to Avarice* (fig. 87) in 1789 he chose to highlight Barry’s even more dramatic Lear to symbolize the characters embarrassed by their painted depictions. Gillray referenced West’s canvas in a more subtle yet more accusatory way, placing his Fool at the base of a pyre, manning the bellows which encourage the flames directed by the magician-like John Boydell.⁶⁰⁷

Almost a decade after executing *King Lear in the Storm*, West produced another essay in the Sublime with his 1796 oil sketch *Death on the Pale Horse* (fig. 19). The subject is chapter six, verse eight from the Book of Revelation, which describes the aftermath of the opening of the fourth seal, which unleashes Death on the world.⁶⁰⁸ In West’s envisioning of the scene, the mounted Death appears in the center of the horizontal canvas, riding across the battlefield with a shocking grimace and Zeus-like thunderbolts in his hands. Death’s horse tramples over the bodies of

⁶⁰⁵ Unknown writer, quoted in von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 273.

⁶⁰⁶ Sund, “Benjamin West,” 127-36.

⁶⁰⁷ M. Dorothy George, *Hogarth to Cruikshank: Social Change in Graphic Satire* (New York: Walker and Company, 1967), 121, 126.

⁶⁰⁸ A pamphlet published in conjunction with the 1817 exhibition of a version of this work provides the following translation of the passage: “And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with beasts of the earth.” *A Description of Mr. West’s Picture of Death on the Pale Horse; or the Opening of the first Five Seals; exhibiting under the immediate Patronage of His Royal Highness the Prince Regent at no. 125 Pall Mall, near Carlton House* (London: Printed by C.H. Reynell, 1818), 3.

men, women, and children as he leads a frightening retinue of demonic beasts trailing out of the right background. On the right side of the canvas, the other three horsemen of the Apocalypse prepare to lay waste to humanity, while on the left, scenes of violence precede Death. The 1796 *Death on the Pale Horse* sketch was based on a pen-and-ink drawing of the same subject he had exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1784 (fig. 88).⁶⁰⁹ For the most part the composition of the 1796 sketch copies the 1784 drawing, with the only major change found in the group in the far left foreground, a figure kneeling in terror transformed into a spearman, and the entire group compacted closer together.⁶¹⁰ The artist would return to these preparatory images again in 1817, completing the massive canvas he had envisioned decades prior, in what would be his last history painting (fig. 89).

West's versions of *Death on the Pale Horse* reflect his engagement with the aesthetic theories Edmund Burke espoused in his 1757 treatise *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, which was of increasing interest to English artists in the second half of the eighteenth century. Inspired by the empirical thinking of the Enlightenment, Burke rejected the idea that beauty was inherent in an object, arguing instead that beauty, and its opposite, the Sublime, was created through an individual's emotional reactions to an object's characteristics, operating through three types of perception: sensory perception, mental association, and intuition.⁶¹¹ For both the Beautiful and the Sublime Burke

⁶⁰⁹ West retouched the drawing in 1803, largely to heighten dramatic elements with white color. Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 390-391.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid., 392.

⁶¹¹ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London: Printed for J. Dodsley, 1787), 241-310.

provided a hierarchical list of the requirements to evoke the necessary emotions in the viewer. Grose Evans argues that *Death on the Pale Horse* is a textbook illustration of Burke's principles of the Sublime, as it depicts all but one of Burke's listed requirements."⁶¹² West was not at the bleeding edge of the aesthetic theory of the Sublime, but he was one of the earliest artists to attempt to develop those ideas on canvas,⁶¹³ in a work aligned more closely to the bombastic canvases of Henry Fuseli than the nuanced approach to Burke's treatise shown by the young artist and poet William Blake (1757-1827).⁶¹⁴ West also recognized the importance of the 1796 sketch within his oeuvre. When he traveled to Paris during the Peace of Amiens he brought the work with him, and exhibited it at the 1802 Salon to positive reviews.⁶¹⁵

Presidential Embarrassment: The Venetian Secret Episode

Gillray's barbs hit West squarely again in 1797 with *Titianus Redivivus; or, The Seven-Wise-Men consulting the new Venetian Oracle* (fig. 90), a critique of a Royal Academy scandal in which West played a central role. In the intervening period between *Shakespeare Sacrificed* and *Titianus Redivivus*, West had been elected second president of the Royal Academy, succeeding Sir Joshua Reynolds in

⁶¹² Grose Evans, *Benjamin West and the Taste of His Times* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1959), 61-64.

⁶¹³ Dillenberger, *Benjamin West*, 93-94. Dillenberger also argues that West was unknowingly tapping into the apocalyptic currents of history seen by some contemporaries in the standing of King George III and the growing threat of the French Revolution to the traditional English way of government.

⁶¹⁴ G.E. Bentley, Jr., *The Stranger from Paradise: A Biography of William Blake* (New Haven, CT: Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art by Yale University Press, 2001), 26.

⁶¹⁵ Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 262-263.

1792.⁶¹⁶ He quickly “became aware that he was responsible to a highly volatile body of men,” and faced a sequence of minor scandals and quarrels.⁶¹⁷

Unquestionably the most embarrassing moment of West’s early presidency was the episode of the Venetian Secret, in which West and a number of other Royal Academicians were duped by two con artists, Thomas Provis and his daughter Ann Jemima Provis, who purported to possess a transcript of a lost Italian manuscript which explained the exact methods with which Titian and other Venetian artists of the Renaissance achieved the brilliant color effects on their canvases.⁶¹⁸ The Provises concocted a scheme in which they would sell access to their secret to interested artists via subscription, slowly revealing parts of the treatise to their subscribers, in such ways as for the artists to find it difficult to discern whether or not the techniques worked.⁶¹⁹ The allure of accessing the artistic secrets of sixteenth-century Venice, the

⁶¹⁶ West’s only competition for the presidency was Copley, who nominated himself; West won by a count of twenty-nine votes to one. He had been understood as the president-in-waiting for the final years of Reynolds’s life, due to his status as a history painter, his friendship with the Academy’s royal patron, his activity as a member of the Academy, and his generally easy-going personality. The last factor eliminated another likely candidate, the irascible James Barry, from even running for the position. As Allan Cunningham put it: “The death of Reynolds vacated the President’s chair, and no one then living was more worthy to fill it than Mr. West. The fierce temper of Barry left him no chance of the honour which his genius merited.” Allan Cunningham, *The Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, vol. 2 (London: John Murray, 1830), 42. For more on West’s election, see Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 190-193; Hutchison, *The History of the Royal Academy*, 73.

⁶¹⁷ Alberts relates a number of these minor scandals West faced, including three in 1794: casting the deciding vote in favor of Richard Westall over John Hoppner for Academy membership; offending Joseph Farington with some critical remarks made about Farington to Robert Smirke; and reportedly feeding criticism about British artists to a Reverend Mr. Bromley, who published two books on the British art world in 1793, and then refusing to remove the offending books from the Royal Academy library. Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 200-209. Also see Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 232-257 for a discussion of additional administrative disputes faced by West in the first decade of his Presidency.

⁶¹⁸ Farington provides a biographical sketch of Thomas and Ann Jemima Provis, including the history of their discovery of the Venetian Secret, in Farington, *Diary*, vol. 3, 772-773 (February 13, 1797). Also see Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 226.

⁶¹⁹ A cursory awareness of the history of pigments would have forestalled the process entirely. The various surviving manuscripts from the Provises all demand the inclusion of the pigment Prussian blue, which was invented in 1704 and not commercially produced until at least a decade later. Trumble and

fantastic story of the manuscript's discovery, and Ann Provis's artistic background – she had exhibited several miniatures at the 1787 Royal Academy exhibition – would be impossible to resist. The duo first contacted high society miniaturist Richard Cosway (1742-1821), who recommended they speak to West instead. At some point in the winter of 1794-95 they did just that. While their intention was for West to test out the system and then recommend it to some of his fellow Academicians, the Academy president refused. Instead he tried to steal their technique, sharing it only with his son Raphael with the intention that the two men would use it personally in order to dominate the 1797 Royal Academy exhibition.⁶²⁰ Recognizing, and perhaps hoping for, this turn of events, Thomas Provis contacted a number of Academicians in January 1797 to secure their participation in the subscription plan by revealing West's perfidious attempt to outshine his colleagues in that year's exhibition.⁶²¹

Joseph Farington, who along with John Opie (1761-1807), Robert Smirke (1752-1845), Richard Westall (1765-1836), John Hoppner (1758-1810), Thomas Stothard (1755-1834), and John Francis Rigaud (1742-1810) was part of the initial cabal of artists who agreed to subscribe to access the Venetian Secret, provides the most detailed record of the sequence of events involving Thomas and Ann Jemima Provis in his diary over the course of six months. A significant factor in their belief in the secret technique was the revelation of West's attempt to keep it to himself, which immediately afforded the Provises legitimacy and essentially obliged the president to

Aronson give artists in the late 1790s the benefit of the doubt, acknowledging that artists were not expected to, nor would they to, know the origins of the pigments they used. Trumble and Aronson, *Benjamin West and the Venetian Secret*, 28-29; John Gage, *Colour and Culture: Practice and Meaning from Antiquity to Abstraction* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1993), 213.

⁶²⁰ Trumble and Aronson, *Benjamin West and the Venetian Secret*, 9-10.

⁶²¹ Farington, *Diary*, vol. 3, 744 (January 11, 1797).

support his fellow Academicians in order to preserve his own position,⁶²² although not before he denied any knowledge of the Provis's scheme, claimed expertise in Venetian painting above what Thomas and Ann Provis claimed to have known,⁶²³ and feigned disinterest by correctly noting that throughout his career he had always been more skilled in composition than color.⁶²⁴

With West in the fold as a supporter, though not yet a subscriber,⁶²⁵ he worked under Ann Provis's advisement on a number of canvases, including a double portrait of his sons (fig. 91). By insisting on some distance from those artists paying for the Provis's lessons, he unwittingly encouraged their participation. Every time West declaimed intimate knowledge of the secretive techniques Thomas Provis would immediately inform the other artists of their president's efforts or insinuate that he was spreading the secrets to his non-paying students, which in turn only further convinced the growing group of subscribers of the efficacy of the technique.⁶²⁶ One point of contention between the subscribers and West were allegations that he passed the technique to artists working in his studio, which he almost certainly did. For Raphael West it was simply a matter of forcing the young man to pay the ten guinea fee. John Trumbull was another matter. West acknowledged that Trumbull had likely

⁶²² Trumble and Aronson, *Benjamin West and the Venetian Secret*, 12-13

⁶²³ Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 227-229. Galt also attempts to forestall critiques of West's role in the Venetian Secret by presenting the artist as an experimenter in Venetian coloring while on his Italian Grand Tour in 1760-63. Galt, *The Life of West*, Part 2, 130-131.

⁶²⁴ Farington, *Diary*, vol. 3, 750 (January 17, 1797).

⁶²⁵ Trumble and Aronson, *Benjamin West and the Venetian Secret*, 20. West would not subscribe until February 22, 1797, when pressed by Farington and Smirke about sharing the secret with his students. Farington, *Diary*, vol. 3, 777 (February 22, 1797).

⁶²⁶ For example, see Farington, *Diary*, vol. 3, 750 (January 17, 1797), 760 (January 31, 1797), and 777 (February 22, 1797).

picked up information related to the secret while working in West's studio, but to allow him to pay the subscription fee the group had to make an exception to their rule against admitting foreigners, a rule which either ignored West's birth, accepted him as a full Englishman, or acknowledged that because he was one of the initial artists privy to the secret, it would have been impossible to enforce that demand on him.⁶²⁷

When the annual Royal Academy exhibition opened on April 28, 1797, both Farington and West showed works executed along the Provis's guidelines, the former an unidentified landscape and the latter *Cicero Discovering the Tomb of Archimedes* (fig. 92), which was criticized for its dark coloration, the opposite of what was so admired of Titian's work.⁶²⁸ At this point, that the Provises claimed to possess the Venetian Secret, and that a number of Academicians had paid ten guineas apiece for it, was common knowledge, with some artists and members of the public believing it to be a hoax and others simply thinking that West and Farington had implemented it poorly.⁶²⁹ One artist who was certain of the Venetian Secret's deception was the Academy's professor of painting James Barry; his abuse of those who believed in it was the first volley in his lengthy *Letter to the Dilettanti Society* of July 25, 1797.⁶³⁰

THOSE who go no farther than mere Dilletantship, may well laugh at all the fuss about this new nostrum, this Venetian secret of Painting. Such a concurrence of ridiculous circumstances, so many, such gross absurdities, and such busy industrious folly, in contriving for the publicity an exposure of a quacking, disgraceful imposture, is, I believe, unparalleled in the history of

⁶²⁷ Farington, *Diary*, vol. 3, 777 (February 22, 1797).

⁶²⁸ Trumble and Aronson, *Benjamin West and the Venetian Secret*, 23.

⁶²⁹ A description of the secret in *The Times* after the exhibition opening does not presume to establish the effectiveness of the Provis's method, noting "the opinion of the Artists vary, and, as is commonly the case, each system has its advocates and opponents." "Royal Academy," *The Times*, May 1, 1797, 3.

⁶³⁰ For more on Barry's expulsion see William L. Pressly, *The Life and Art of James Barry* (New Haven, CT and London: Published for The Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art by Yale University Press, 1981), 139-141.

the art. I should laugh too, were I not withheld by considerations for the reputation of the country, of the English School of Art, for the character of the Royal Academy, and for the fate of its poor pupils, now sent adrift to search out for themselves that true Venetian Art of Painting, which must not be taught them, as the President and so many of the Academicians are each of them bound (most sovereignly ridiculous) under a forfeiture of £200 to keep it secret.”⁶³¹

While Barry claimed there was a forfeiture fee for revealing the Venetian Secret, rather than the actual subscription fee, his critique was otherwise accurate, which made it even more painful for West and his fellow artists. He puts more of the onus on West than Gillray did in *Titianus Redivivus*. The satirical print, published on November 2, 1797, focuses on the initial seven artists who paid to receive lessons in the Venetian Secret, depicting them engaged in art lessons underneath a rainbow on which Ann Provis stands, painting a grotesque head of Titian on an otherwise-black canvas. Her gown is covered in peacock feathers and she is attended by the Three Graces, while her petticoat underneath is tattered. Behind the primary seven subscribers, a crowd of additional dunce-like artists try to clamber onto the rainbow. In the front left foreground, a headless *Apollo Belvedere* shares a pedestal with a monkey-like creature which holds a list of the subscribers and urinates on canvases labeled with artists who rejected the secret, including Cosway, Sandby, and precocious landscape painter J.M.W. Turner (1775-1851). To the right of the statue the ghost of Sir Joshua Reynolds emerges from his tomb in disbelief. West, amazingly, is spared the most caustic criticism. He appears in the right foreground next to John Boydell and Thomas Macklin, two businessmen who feared the negative impact of the Venetian Secret on their commercial ventures. The three flee the scene,

⁶³¹ James Barry, *A Letter to the Dilettanti Society, respecting The Obtention of certain Matters essentially necessary for the Improvement of Public Taste, and for accomplishing the original Views of the Royal Academy of Great Britain*, (London: printed for J. Walker, Paternoster-Row, 1798), 1.

with West proclaiming to Boydell: “Charming Secret Friend, for thee to dash out another Gallery with! – but I’m off!!”⁶³²

Paul Sandby also mocked the Venetian Secret intrigue in his “Song for 1797,” a twenty-two stanza poem which describes the Academicians’ fascination with Ann Provis in tawdry sexual terms; for example, his stanza of West: “Miss brought her Titbit first to West a’/A President to all the rest a’/He to the Bottom Groped it best a’/Doodle &c.”⁶³³ Barry, Gillray, and Sandby all found that that there were so many potential targets in the Venetian Secret episode that it was impossible to focus their criticism on just one participant. However, Angus Trumble and Mark Aronson assert that added focus on West was not needed because his “embarrassment was far worse...than for the other victims, because it was largely through his influential position as President of the Academy that the perpetrators gained access to so many of his variously hapless, dim-witted, or simply greedy junior colleagues.”⁶³⁴ That is, the entire Venetian Secret was so securely West’s fault that its mere mention reminded everyone of this fact.

In the end, nothing much changed as a result of the Provis affair. West retained his presidency of the Royal Academy, and the other subscribers remained Academicians. No one resigned in protest, although Barry’s *Letter to the Dilettanti Society* was admitted as evidence during a 1799 inquest into his behavior as Professor of Painting which led to his expulsion.⁶³⁵ Neither Thomas nor Ann Provis were tried

⁶³² For more detail on *Titianus Redivivus*, see George, *Hogarth to Cruikshank*, 121, 126.

⁶³³ Reprinted in Appendix I of Trumble and Aronson, *Benjamin West and the Venetian Secret*, 50-51.

⁶³⁴ Trumble and Aronson, *Benjamin West and the Venetian Secret*, 4.

⁶³⁵ Hutchison, *The History of the Royal Academy*, 79.

or jailed, and Thomas, who was a servant of the Lord Chamberlain's office at St. James's Palace in 1797, was promoted to the position of Yeoman Porter of the Chapel Royal at Whitehall in 1802.⁶³⁶ At some point the Provises wrote down the details of the Venetian Secret, manuscripts of which were purchased by Farington and Rigaud. Unsurprisingly, each version describes a different technique for achieving the effect.⁶³⁷ Rigaud provided his own description of the method, and his impressions of its efficacy, in a memoir collected by his son Stephen Francis Dutilh Rigaud (1777-1862), who compiled his father's journal entries and added his own voice to the text in the 1850s. The elder Rigaud had purchased two additional subscriptions to the secret in order to share the knowledge with his children, Stephen and daughter Elizabeth Anne (1776-1852), and even in the nineteenth century Stephen Rigaud was convinced of the technique's efficacy.⁶³⁸ John Francis Rigaud was less convinced but still utilized aspects of the Provises's method in his own work more than a decade after the affair's conclusion.⁶³⁹

⁶³⁶ Trumble and Aronson, *Benjamin West and the Venetian Secret*, 49.

⁶³⁷ Trumble and Aronson, *Benjamin West and the Venetian Secret*, 26-27; Stephen Francis Dutilh Rigaud and William L. Pressly, "Facts and Recollections of the XVIIIth Century in a Memoir of John Francis Rigaud Esq., R.A.," *The Volume of the Walpole Society* 50 (1984): 100-103. John Gage analyzes the general technique described in all three manuscripts, which involved using a dark, absorbent ground, mixing pigments with pure linseed oil, and using a mixture of several dark pigments followed by a bright glaze. Gage, *Colour and Culture*, 213

⁶³⁸ In his father's memoir, Stephen Rigaud states that since both Provises had presumably died by then, "knowing the value of the System myself, I think it right, rather than it should die with me, to make a full disclosure of it to my brother Artists, for their benefit, and the general advancement of the Art." After detailing the method, he proudly notes: "I cannot quit this very important subject without expressing my persuasion of the excellence of that Venetian System of Painting, which I have thus unreservedly thrown open to the public, and my firm conviction that it was the very method practiced by the Great Masters of the Venetian School..." Rigaud and Pressly, "Facts and Recollections of the XVIIIth Century in a Memoir of John Francis Rigaud Esq., R.A.," 100, 102-103.

⁶³⁹ William L. Pressly, introduction to "Facts and Recollections of the XVIIIth Century in a Memoir of John Francis Rigaud Esq., R.A.," by Stephen Francis Dutilh Rigaud, *The Volume of the Walpole Society* 50 (1984): 28.

In stark opposition to the Rigauds's continued use of the technique, West made a public attempt to redeem himself in 1804 with a second version of *Cicero Discovering the Tomb of Archimedes* (fig. 93) that abandoned the overwhelming dark tones that characterized his 1797 effort at the subject. It seems strange that West would return to the scene of his most notable embarrassment less than a decade later, but as his status was continuing to decline he felt the need not only to redeem himself, but more generally to draw attention to his work by any means possible. The previous year he had submitted a reworked painting, *Hagar and Ishmael*, which he had exhibited twenty-seven years prior, defying the spirit – though not the letter – of a rule against exhibiting the same work more than once.⁶⁴⁰ Because of the outcry against him West withdrew *Hagar and Ishmael* from the 1803 exhibition, but once vindicated in his decision he re-submitted it, along with the second *Cicero*, in 1804. Nonetheless the incident was additional encouragement to a growing group of discontented Academicians led by West's newfound enemy James Wyatt.⁶⁴¹ This group was unsuccessful in its attempts to forestall West's reelection in 1805, but caused enough clamor that West resigned late in 1805, with Wyatt elected in his place.⁶⁴² Wyatt proved to be ineffective as a leader, however, and only served one

⁶⁴⁰ Hutchison, *The History of the Royal Academy*, 80. The head of the hanging committee, who led the charge against West for his impropriety, was his fellow American Copley, who was in part exacting revenge for West's opposition to Copley's request for a time extension for a work he intended to exhibit the same year, *The Knatchbull Family*. Prown, *John Singleton Copley*, vol. 2, 365-371.

⁶⁴¹ The debate over *Hagar and Ishmael* and Copley's rejected canvas encouraged spirited internal conflict over the power structure of the Royal Academy, between the general assembly, supported by West, and the governing council, which included Copley and Wyatt. The infighting led to the suspension of Copley, Wyatt, and three others. Eventually George III interceded and reinstated all five councilmembers while reproaching all men involved for their childish actions. This dispute significantly weakened West's authority, as the King was no longer his steadfast supporter, creating an opportunity for Wyatt. Prown, *John Singleton Copley*, vol. 2, 368-369.

⁶⁴² Hutchison, *The History of the Royal Academy*, 80.

term; he did not run for reelection in 1806, and West was elected to the Presidency again by an overwhelming margin.⁶⁴³

Worth noting is that, with the exception of Lord Cathcart, from the 1780s onward none of the complaints about West's status as a favored artist of the king or as the Royal Academy president were related to his nationality. It is not mentioned at all in relation to the Venetian Secret, nor part of the Wyatt faction's attempts to remove him from the presidency. The novelty of West's American identity had worn off on both sides of the Atlantic, as his earlier students were filtering back to the United States only to discover that the taste for history painting there continued to falter.⁶⁴⁴ There was also the issue of changing generations. As Richardson reminds his readers, Allston was born during the Revolutionary War, and "represents the first generation which had no memories of what the world was like before the political separation from Europe,"⁶⁴⁵ and thus failed to recognize the stakes under which West had operated as an American in London in the revolutionary period. Furthermore, younger British artists like Opie, Hoppner, Westall, and Turner, as well as younger

⁶⁴³ One of the bases for the Wyatt faction to appeal for a change in leadership was that West had fallen out of favor with George III. In fact West retained the king's support for his Presidency, or at the very least there was a lack of interest on the king's part to intercede in the affairs of the Royal Academy. According to Farington, West actually attempted to resign in 1803 after the issue with *Hagar and Ishmael* but was rebuffed by the king, who also approved of his 1805 election. Leading into the 1806 election painter Ozias Humphry inquired with a member of the Court if the king desired that Wyatt remain President, or if he would object if West were re-elected to the position. Humphry did not receive a reply, to which he "concluded that his Majesty was unwilling to supersede Mr Wyatt, or to signify any disapprobation of Mr West. The members of the Royal Academy, thinking themselves at liberty to choose for themselves, exercised their privilege and chose Mr West by a majority of four to one..." Hutchison, *The History of the Royal Academy*, 82.

⁶⁴⁴ In his "Reminiscences," Rembrandt Peale bemoans the state of art in his native Philadelphia in the mid-1790s, as Charles Willson Peale was preparing the Columbianum exhibition, complaining that "Philadelphia, then without a rival, imagined itself the Athens of America, but could scarcely support two portrait painters and one miniature painter." Peale, "Reminiscences," 290.

⁶⁴⁵ E. Richardson, *Washington Allston*, 1.

American artists like Allston and Morse, had never known a time when West was not working in London. After three decades, West was an English institution, a status difficult to reconcile with any heartfelt American identification or affiliation.

West's Late-Career "Rediscovery" of His American Identity

To call the Americans working in London in the early 1810s – Morse, King, and Leslie – West's "students" is largely a semantic distinction. They operated in West's greater circle through their connection to Allston, who himself still frequently consulted with West and who administered a course of study recommended by West.⁶⁴⁶ The three young artists occasionally sought direct advice from West as well, but so too did many other artists associated with the Royal Academy schools. Scholars of John Constable do not consider that artist to have ever been West's student, regardless of the well-known praise West gave him on one of his works in 1802.⁶⁴⁷ These American artists nonetheless identified themselves as his pupils. For them, artists, study with the venerable West became a badge of pride back home.⁶⁴⁸ West did nothing to quest that link. Continuing his association with American students was a tactical move in a larger effort to rewrite his own biography and introduce an emphasis on his paternal relationship to his students.⁶⁴⁹

⁶⁴⁶ Staiti, *Samuel F.B. Morse*, 17.

⁶⁴⁷ Leslie, *Memoirs of the Life of John Constable*, 29.

⁶⁴⁸ Susan Rather notes that American audiences, insulated from the frequent critiques and accusations faced by West in London newspapers and society gossip, consistently maintained a far higher level of respect for West than he received in England. Susan Rather, "Benjamin West, John Galt, and the Biography of 1816," 335. James Akin's unverified claims to have studied with West in 1798 were a major selling point in his advertisements in the nineteenth century. See Stagg, "James Akin and his Newburyport Social Caricatures."

⁶⁴⁹ Rather, "Benjamin West's Professional Endgame," 861.

Susan Rather has deftly shown that the period between 1805 and 1820 consisted of a “systematic reconsideration” by West of all aspects of his biography.⁶⁵⁰ His nationality was one major aspect of this process, as was his artistic style. By 1805, West had minimized the importance of his American identity in his personal and professional life. While he continued to consult with young American artists who sought him out, not since John Trumbull had any of West’s “students” relied on the elder artist for their primary instruction.⁶⁵¹ Instead they relied predominantly on the Royal Academy schools and working alongside fellow novices. Samuel F.B. Morse, in a letter to his parents after arriving in London in 1811 accompanying Allston, informed them that West “was very glad to see me and said he would render me every assistance in his power,” before revealing later on in the letter that “Mr. West is so industrious now that it is hard to get access to him, and then only between the hours of nine and ten in the morning.”⁶⁵²

As discussed above in Chapter 4, beginning in the early 1790s there was a growing interest in British patriotism in response to the increasing threat of the French Revolution, which had a significant impact on artistic patronage and collecting.⁶⁵³ One venue was in discussion of the character of the foundation of the school of English painting, and specifically the identity of its founding father(s). The 1792 death of the first President of the Royal Academy, Sir Joshua Reynolds,

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid., 822.

⁶⁵¹ Nor had any distinguished themselves in the increasingly-crowded British artistic scene. Charles Robert Leslie and Gilbert Stuart Newton would both eventually be elected to full membership to the Royal Academy, but not until after West’s death, in 1826 and 1832, respectively.

⁶⁵² Morse, quoted in Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 358-359.

⁶⁵³ Hoock, “Patriotism and the Collecting of British Art at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century,” 568.

provided the general public with its foundational hero. Despite spending the entirety of his career as a portraitist, with few history paintings to his credit,⁶⁵⁴ Reynolds became associated with history painting through his advocacy of the genre in his biannual *Discourses* to the Academy: “Through his role in life as a public figure, in death he was adopted as the figurehead for the improved social status of art during the crucial period from its transition from a gentrified luxury to a nationalist imperative.”⁶⁵⁵ West was thus robbed of the one important action in the history of British art for which he could reasonably claim agency. Alongside Reynolds, the mid-eighteenth-century artist William Hogarth was rediscovered as a second founder of British art,⁶⁵⁶ West correctly realized there was no public desire for a third.

West began to reconsider his public presentation of his background in 1805 when he was made aware of the contents of the papers of William Williams, by the man to whom they were bequeathed, English antiquarian Thomas Eagles. Williams, the English itinerant artist who was West’s first instructor in North America, had returned to London in 1776 and for a time relied on West for support before moving back to his hometown of Bristol, eventually dying in the Merchants’ and Sailors’

⁶⁵⁴ Martin Postle has authored an authoritative text on Reynolds’s non-portrait paintings, which include history paintings as well as genre scenes and other works, in Martin Postle, *Sir Joshua Reynolds: The Subject Pictures* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995). A full list of Reynolds’s exhibited works is available in Ellis Waterhouse, *Reynolds* (New York: Phaidon, 1973), 177-183.

⁶⁵⁵ Jenny Graham, “Posthumous Fortunes,” in *Sir Joshua Reynolds: The Acquisition of Genius*, ed. Sam Smiles (Bristol, UK: Sansom & Company with The University of Plymouth and Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery), 161.

⁶⁵⁶ Hogarth was part of a group retrospective exhibition, along with Thomas Gainsborough, Johann Zoffany, and Richard Wilson in 1814, a year after Reynolds was given an exhibition of his own at the same institution. These two shows were essentially attempts to create a distinct historical canon of British painters. Had West been deceased in 1814 he may have been included in that year’s exhibition, but as he was neither dead nor included, his attempts to establish himself as part of the same canon were dealt a serious blow. Rather, “Benjamin West, John Galt, and the Biography of 1816,” 330-331.

Almshouse therein 1791.⁶⁵⁷ While in Bristol Williams had made the acquaintance of Eagles, who often welcomed the aging artist into his home for meals and who arranged for Williams to spend the last days of his life in the almshouse instead of on the streets. When Eagles received Williams's effects after his death, he was stunned to find among them over 200 books, painter's paraphernalia, Williams's self-portrait and portraits of his two wives, and a manuscript titled "Lives of the Painter." This unexpected gift persuaded Eagles to look at another manuscript Williams had previously given him, titled "Mr. Penrose: The Journal of Penrose, Seaman," the story of an English sailor shipwrecked in the Caribbean for thirty years.⁶⁵⁸ Eagles was sufficiently impressed with latter the text that he edited it, commissioned watercolor illustrations from Edward Bird (1772-1819) and Nicholas Pocock (1741-1821), and shopped the manuscript to publishers to no avail. The story would end there, except that in 1805 West paid a social call on Eagles at his London residence and, while waiting for Eagles, paged through the unpublished manuscript and recognized the stories Williams regaled him with five decades prior.⁶⁵⁹

This end of this story seems too good to be true, and there is no way to prove the circumstances in which West was introduced to Williams's manuscript. Nothing in the text, which would be published in 1815 under the title *The Journal of Llewellyn Penrose, Seaman*, indicated any relationship to West. Perhaps West, as an American, would have been interested in a story of a sailor shipwrecked in the Americas. Eagles

⁶⁵⁷ Dickason, *William Williams*, 6-7.

⁶⁵⁸ See Dickason, *William Williams*, 70-75, on the composition of "Mr. Penrose." Based on the date range in which Williams would have had to have given Eagles his manuscript, Dickason argues that "Mr. Penrose: The Journal of Penrose, Seaman" was the first American novel.

⁶⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 129.

benefited from the verification of the broad outlines of Williams's tale, as well as the name recognition of having the novel associated with West. Of the entirety of England, Benjamin West appears to have been the only person acquainted with William Williams's life, and provided a comprehensive biography to Eagles twice: at that coincidental meeting in 1805, when Eagles wrote down a lengthy memoranda,⁶⁶⁰ and in a letter dated October 10, 1810.⁶⁶¹ Understandably, West focused part of his recollections on the role Williams played in his own training. However, as Rather points out, that role shifts distinctly between the 1805 memo and 1810 letter, and even more drastically so in West's own biography, written by John Galt and published in 1816. In Eagles's memorandum, West credits Williams for inspiring his love of art by lending him his manuscript about the lives of famous painters, while in his 1810 letter, West states that his desire to become an artist was inspired when Williams lent him theoretical texts by Jonathan Richardson, Sr. and Charles Alphonse du Fresnoy.⁶⁶² Similarly, in 1805 West described the process with which Williams showed him how to build a *camera obscura* when he was nine years old; in the 1816 biography, West invents his own camera independently at the age of sixteen.⁶⁶³

⁶⁶⁰ Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 345

⁶⁶¹ The letter is reprinted in its entirety in Dickason, "Benjamin West on William Williams," 127-133. Alberts incorrectly lists the date as November 10, 1810. Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 345.

⁶⁶² Rather, "Benjamin West's Professional Endgame," 847-848. Rather points out that the latter story seems unlikely if only because West was ten years old at the time. As she writes, "As an unlettered ten-year-old, he could have done little more than carry or sleep on" the books.

⁶⁶³ Rather, "Benjamin West's Professional Endgame," 844-845." On the implications of creating and using a *camera obscura* in the eighteenth century, see Jenny Carson and Ann Shafer, "West, Copley, and the Camera Obscura," *American Art* 22, no. 2 (Summer, 2008): 24-41. Carson and Shafer argue that West and John Singleton Copley, who both extolled the value of using a *camera obscura* in their own work, were primed to appreciate the use of the device through their reading of Continental manuals, which promoted its use more so than contemporary public discourse on art. Although Sir

West's two conversations with Eagles proved to be the impetus for a fuller reconsideration of the public performance of his own biography. In the 1790s, published newspaper and magazine articles about West – which almost certainly relied on the man himself for their background information – did not find any conflict in West's nationality, acknowledging his American birth and then proceeding to discuss him as an Englishman.⁶⁶⁴ That perception began to change in the early 1800s, as West's influence on King George III, and vice versa, was waning. Rather finds the tone of biographies published beginning in 1805 increasingly defensive about West's English identity, reflecting the artist's acknowledgement that his position as a founder of English art was becoming increasingly precarious.⁶⁶⁵ Rather claims that West's 1805 reintroduction to Williams's biography was the source of his reconsideration of American heritage. Certainly the presence, for the first time in decades, of a lively circle of American artists working under his auspices supported that cause.

John Galt's *The Life of West*

In attempting to rewrite his biography, West enlisted the assistance of John Galt, an entrepreneurial young Scottish businessman and author. West had met Galt no later than 1813, when the artist praised an essay written by Galt which appeared in that year's issue of the journal *Philosophical Magazine* that year. Galt mentioned that praise by way of reinforcing his artistic bona fides in the introduction to his essay collection *Letters from the Levant*, also from 1813. He had written a number of

Joshua Reynolds almost certainly experimented with a *camera obscura* in the 1770s, he spoke against its use in his thirteenth *Discourse*, whereas West consistently promoted its use.

⁶⁶⁴ Rather, "Benjamin West, John Galt, and the Biography of 1816," 328.

⁶⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 330.

journal articles, essays, poems, and biographies prior to that, effectively working as a freelance journalist on speculation, with few of his works finding publishers.⁶⁶⁶ How West and Galt met, and the circumstances of their relationship, is unknown. In his autobiography Galt claims that he and West first became acquaintances before Galt came up with the idea for a biography after listening to West's many stories about his youth.⁶⁶⁷ The official partnership between West and Galt had been established by April 1814, when an announcement in the first issue of *New Monthly Magazine* described a joint venture in which Galt was "engaged upon a life of the venerable President of the Royal Academy [which] will be drawn up under the immediate superintendence of Mr. West himself..."⁶⁶⁸

That book, *The Life, Studies, and Work of Benjamin West: Esq., President of the Royal Academy of London, Prior to His Arrival in England; Compiled from Materials Furnished by Himself*, was published in 1816. Public reception was neutral or negative. The text is almost all biography, with the only art theory coming from reprinted transcripts of West's Royal Academy discourses, reflecting Galt's lack of knowledge of theory and West's difficulty in articulating it.⁶⁶⁹ Most critics took issue with the fantastic stories presented about West's youth, correctly identifying their implausibility. A reviewer for the American journal *Analytic Magazine* wrote, "Mr.

⁶⁶⁶ Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 409.

⁶⁶⁷ John Galt, *The Autobiography of John Galt*, vol. 2, (London: Cochran and McCrone, 1833), 236.

⁶⁶⁸ "Intelligence in Literature and in the Arts and Sciences," *New Monthly Magazine* 1 (Apr. 1, 1814): 262.

⁶⁶⁹ Rather, "Benjamin West, John Galt, and the Biography of 1816," 335. According to Farington, West had described "His whole process of painting" to Farington in 1805, after spending thirty years attempting to "ascertain a good system." Farington transcribed West's theory, but that manuscript is unlocated. Farington, *Diary*, vol. 7, 2540 (April 7, 1805).

Galt, infected with the common biographical reverence for the subject, is sometimes inclined to make miracles of ordinary occurrences.⁶⁷⁰ The British journal *Critical Review* was fittingly more critical, mocking Galt's presentation of West as "an instrument chosen by Providence to disseminate the arts of peace in the world."⁶⁷¹ Fourteen years after the second volume of *The Life of West* was published, author and critic Allan Cunningham found the tales entertaining, and forgave West for them:

His vanity was amusing and amiable—and his belief—prominent in every page of the narrative which he dictated to his friend Mr. Galt—that preaching and prophecy had predestined him to play a great part before mankind, and be an example to all posterity, did no one any harm, and himself some good.⁶⁷²

Alberts, questioning why West allowed Galt to reproduce such clearly sentimentalized stories of his youth, proposes a number of theories behind the biography's content: that West "may simply have liked what he read;" that he found Galt's personality overpowering; that the young man's manuscript was so full of errors that he couldn't correct them all; that, such as with his inability to articulate theory, West was simply not a skilled enough reader to understand the net effect of Galt's text; or that at his advanced age West simply did not care.⁶⁷³ While spinning its fantastic tales, *The Life of West* gets basic facts wrong, like the date of West's marriage to Elizabeth Shewell and the date of her death.⁶⁷⁴ Nonetheless, Alberts

⁶⁷⁰ Review of John Galt, *The Life of West*, *Analytic Magazine* 8, (Sept., 1816): 209-210.

⁶⁷¹ Review of John Galt, *The Life of West*, *Critical Review* 3, 5th ser. (Jun., 1816): 576-90.

⁶⁷² Cunningham, *The Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, vol. 2, 56-57.

⁶⁷³ Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 411.

⁶⁷⁴ For example, Galt lists the year of West's marriage to Elizabeth Shewell as 1765 rather than 1764, and the year of her death as 1817 rather than 1814.

acknowledges that “most of [Galt’s] factual material checks out routinely.”⁶⁷⁵ Even later authors who have highlighted and critiqued Galt’s artistic license, notably William Dunlap, nonetheless rely heavily on the text as a source material, largely because it is the sole existing text written or dictated by West.

The first volume of Galt’s *The Life of West* covers the artist’s life through August 1763, ending on a cliffhanger with the artist in France, about to complete the final leg of his journey across the English Channel to fame. Volume two, published in 1820, begins with West’s arrival on England’s shore and ends with his death on March 10, 1820, the same year in which the second volume appeared.⁶⁷⁶ The final pages of Galt’s second text situate West within the Western artistic canon. Although the authorial voice for those paragraphs is clearly Galt, it is unclear, as with the remainder of the book, that the content was conceived by Galt or West. If it was conceived by West, it marks an incredible degree of hubris and lack of awareness of the recent context of some of his scandals:⁶⁷⁷

As an artist, he will stand in the first rank. His name will be classed with those of Michael Angelo and Raphael; but he possessed little in common with either. As the former has been compared to Homer, and the latter to Virgil, in Shakespeare we shall perhaps find the best likeness to the genius of Mr. West. He undoubtedly possessed, but in a slight degree, that peculiar energy and physical expression of character in which Michael Angelo excelled, and in a still less that serene sublimity which constitutes the charm of Raphael’s great productions. But he was their equal in the fullness, the perspicuity, and the prosperity of his compositions... But although his powers of conception were so superior, — equal in their excellence to Michael Angelo’s energy, or Raphael’s grandeur, — still in the inferior departments of drawing and colouring, he was one of the greatest artists of his age; it was not,

⁶⁷⁵ Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 410.

⁶⁷⁶ Galt, *The Life of West*, Part 2, 205.

⁶⁷⁷ West reportedly viewed a proof of the second volume on his deathbed, but it is not known if it included the coda at the end. Certainly it did not include the past-tense factual record of his death.

however, till late in life that he executed any of those works in which he thought the splendor of the Venetian school might be judiciously imitated.⁶⁷⁸

West's erstwhile student Rembrandt Peale, who retained a lifelong fondness for his teacher, detested Galt for this passage and others like it, comparing Galt to a predator and West as his "prey" and blaming Galt for the "work rendered ridiculous by the romantic and fabulous tales, gleaned from the family gossip."⁶⁷⁹

William Dunlap's *The Arts of Design*

The presentation of West as a full-blooded American in *The Life of West* was confirmed and canonized in 1834 with the *History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States*, a three-volume comprehensive record of biographies of American artists compiled by William Dunlap, a former student of West's based out of New York City who found that with the increasing growth of the city as an artistic center he was losing out on portrait commissions, and turned to writing as an alternative.⁶⁸⁰ His resulting biography tapped into a growing level of American interest in identifying the characteristics of national art from the 1830s onward, as a means of determining national identity and aspirations.⁶⁸¹ Dunlap was present in West's studio at the same time as John Trumbull, and was a member of the American Academy of the Fine Arts during Trumbull's disastrous tenure as president in the 1820s and 1830s. In his text, Dunlap identifies two major actors in the history of the arts in America: West is the unequivocal hero, exemplified by the "paternal

⁶⁷⁸ Galt, *The Life and of West*, Part 2, 203-204.

⁶⁷⁹ Peale, "Reminiscences," 290-291.

⁶⁸⁰ Lyons, *William Dunlap and the Construction of an American Art History*, 55-56.

⁶⁸¹ Lillian B. Miller, "Paintings, Sculpture, and the National Character, 1815-1860," *The Journal of American History* 53, no. 4 (Mar., 1967): 699-705.

encouragement” he provided each of his students,⁶⁸² and Trumbull the villain. In order to emphasize Trumbull’s poor actions as an educator and administrator, Dunlap lionizes West in turn, confirming his almost miraculous status as an artist to better distinguish him from his wayward student. Dunlap attempted to rely on interviews with artists or their friends and family for his material as much as possible; for West, who was born a century beforehand, Galt’s biography was an essential resource for Dunlap regarding his master’s early years.⁶⁸³ He admits within the first few pages of his first chapter on West, “as I hope I can separate the poetry from the facts, I will make use of the work in combination with such truth as I can collect from other sources, or possess of my own knowledge,” despite the “puerilities of the performance, and the absurd tales and speeches” which underpin Galt’s book.⁶⁸⁴

Dunlap insisted that Galt exerted a significant amount of authorial control over the content of *The Life of West*, something which Galt disputed. After all, the lengthy title of the book plainly states that it is “compiled from materials furnished by” West, and Galt claimed that *The Life of West* is “as nearly as it possibly can be, an autobiography.”⁶⁸⁵ He described a working process in which he took notes from conversations with West and crafted them into prose, occasionally submitting chapters to his subject for review and then presenting him with the completed

⁶⁸² Dunlap, *The Arts of Design*, vol. 1, 73.

⁶⁸³ Rather, “Benjamin West, John Galt, and the Biography of 1816,” 340. Galt also relied heavily on Allan Cunningham’s six-volume *The Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, published between 1829 and 1833. West is the first artist profiled in Cunningham’s second volume (1830), ranking just behind the quartet of Hogarth, Richard Wilson, Reynolds, and Thomas Gainsborough, who appeared in the first volume.

⁶⁸⁴ Dunlap, *The Arts of Design*, vol. 1, 33-34.

⁶⁸⁵ Galt, *Autobiography*, vol. 2, 235-236.

manuscript, in the case of the first volume, or a near-completed manuscript in the case of the second.⁶⁸⁶ Ann Uhry Abrams takes Galt's description at face value,⁶⁸⁷ while both Alberts and Rather agree with Dunlap that Galt purposefully downplayed his role in crafting the narrative of *The Life of West*. Alberts puts this on the shoulders of West for allowing it to occur,⁶⁸⁸ while Rather situates Galt's effort within his "lifelong habit of obscuring or creating confusion about his authorship."⁶⁸⁹ However, to give Alberts the final word on the matter: "Whatever its exaggerations and inaccuracies, there is nothing in John Galt's biography as improbable, as incredible, as the actual course of Benjamin West's career."⁶⁹⁰

⁶⁸⁶ Galt, *Autobiography*, vol. 2, 236; Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 410.

⁶⁸⁷ Abrams, *The Valiant Hero*, 31.

⁶⁸⁸ Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 410.

⁶⁸⁹ Rather, "Benjamin West, John Galt, and the Biography of 1816," 332. Ghostwriting was a new approach for Galt, who had previously published a number of texts written under pseudonyms or anonymously, as well as fictive biographies in which he had no relationship to the subject.

⁶⁹⁰ Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 412.

Conclusion: Benjamin West in Retrospect

West's likely final canvas was a self-portrait from late 1819, now hanging in the Smithsonian American Art Museum (fig. 94).⁶⁹¹ The sitter is immediately recognizable as West, with the same piercing eyes and downturned mouth as in his *Self-Portrait* of 1776 (fig. 30), their expressiveness enhanced by age. It is a portrait of a defiant old artist. He wears a loose gown suitable for painting, and atop his head sits the black hat West had introduced as his personal symbol of the Royal Academy presidency twenty-seven years prior, reminiscent of his Quaker heritage, with a touch of Anglican elegance.⁶⁹² There are a few symbols of his practice as an artist: he grasps a crayon holder in his right hand, and sits in front of a blank white sheet of paper resting on a table next to his crayon box and pen knife.⁶⁹³ Even at the end of his life, West is still hard at work at the profession which brought him to the heights of fame. It is a rebuttal to critics who claimed he was an unworthy beneficiary of royal patronage, an ineffective leader of the Academy, and, worst of all, a bad artist.⁶⁹⁴

⁶⁹¹ Von Erffa and Staley question the extent to which an unknown second artist contributed to the canvas, noting that this *Self-Portrait* demonstrates different handling than another work believed to have been executed at the same time. They also observe the similarities between West's face in this painting and his appearance in an 1818 bust by Sir Francis Chantrey, which was the sculptor's diploma work and would have been available in the Academy's schools, suggesting that an outside artist may have not known West personally. Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 454-455.

⁶⁹² After his election to the Royal Academy presidency in March 1792, West gave a speech to the Academy assembly, closing by informing his fellow members "not on account of any personal merits on my part, but to do honour to the office to which you have kindly elected me, I shall presume in future to wear my hat in this Assembly." West quoted in Samuel Felton, *Testimonies to the Genius and Memory of Sir Joshua Reynolds. By the Author of Imperfect Hints towards a New Edition of Shakespeare* (London: Printed for J. Walter, 1792), 115; Dillenberger, *Benjamin West*, 7-8.

⁶⁹³ Ann C. Van Devanter, "Benjamin West and His Self-Portraits," *The Magazine Antiques* 103 (Apr., 1973): 771.

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid. Ann C. Van Devanter disagrees with this assessment, seeing in the *Self-Portrait* "a weary old man, alone with himself, struggling with the bitterness of disillusionment," acknowledging that the

For all of its intense determination, the attribution of the 1819 *Self-Portrait* remains in question. Although the Smithsonian exhibits the work unequivocally as by West alone, von Erffa and Staley cast doubts on its authorship. Noting that in late 1819 West was an eighty-one-year-old artist in failing health, they question the vigorous handling in the painting, particularly compared to contemporaneous works which are far more skittish, and observe its resemblance to an 1818 bust (fig. 95) in the collection of the Royal Academy.⁶⁹⁵ If West was not the sole hand involved in the execution of this portrait, it begs the tantalizing question of the identity of his collaborator: Was it Raphael West, or perhaps one of West's late-career students still active in London? At a certain level, the identity of the hand which contributed to the work is irrelevant. West's reliance on another artist to complete his final painting speaks volumes about his determination to see this vision of self executed to the highest degree. Recognizing his failing health and unsteady hand, he relied on any means necessary to guarantee that this portrait captured every last detail in the highest quality. Decades later, West family relative Leigh Hunt reminisced about his experience of visiting West in his studio late in the artist's life: after traversing through the sequence of rooms at 14 Newman Street which took the visitor through galleries hung with works from his Old Master collection, and then his own sketches and the paintings of his students, "you generally found the mild and quiet artist at his

popular taste which had made his history paintings a success had long since moved on to other styles, leaving his work embarrassingly outdated.

⁶⁹⁵ Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 455.

work; happy, for he thought himself immortal.”⁶⁹⁶ The 1819 *Self-Portrait* shows a man who is neither mild nor quiet, but certainly believes in his own immortality.

Five months after West purportedly painted his last self-portrait, he died in his home, shortly after midnight on March 11, 1820. He left his house, the contents of his studio, and the remainder of his estate to his two sons to divide amongst themselves. At this the sons did poorly. They auctioned off the bulk of their father’s art collection, and built an addition to 14 Newman Street to serve as “West’s New Gallery” where they would exhibit their father’s paintings. The auction pulled in far less money than hoped, and the gallery failed to capture the public’s attention. Raphael and Benjamin, Jr. attempted to divest themselves of their father’s works by any means necessary, unsuccessfully offering *Death on the Pale Horse* and a number of other works to the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1824, and then attempting to sell the entire collection to the National Gallery in London in 1825, and to the United States of America in 1826. Eventually they liquidated West’s estate in an 1829 auction, which was apparently not enough to keep the two West men and their families solvent, as twice afterward they received financial assistance from the Royal Academy.⁶⁹⁷

The difficulty in selling the contents of West’s studio reflects a broader lack of public interest in his work in the period after his death, which Alberts relates in an epilogue to his biography of the artist.⁶⁹⁸ In the nineteenth century the long-lived West became representative of all of the negative aspects of eighteenth-century art,

⁶⁹⁶ Leigh Hunt, *The Autobiography of Leigh Hunt*, ed. J.E. Morpurgo (London: Cresset Press, 1948), 86. For an extensive description of a visit to West’s galleries, see Sophie von la Roche, *Sophie in London, 1786: Being the Diary of Sophie V. la Roche* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1933), 152-153.

⁶⁹⁷ Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 389-391.

⁶⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 393-402.

and of the academic system writ large. Thus, fifteen years after his death West was a source of amusement to Allan Cunningham, author of *The Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*,⁶⁹⁹ and by the middle of the century his work was “commonplace and expressionless” in the eyes of Frances Rossetti,⁷⁰⁰ and Walter Thornbury thought him the “monarch of mediocrity.”⁷⁰¹ He remained consistent in his approach to art and on his reliance on older artistic treatises for his approach to artistic education, even while the nineteenth-century world adapted and moved away from those traditional methods.⁷⁰²

West was, for all intents and purposes, rediscovered as a subject of scholarly inquiry in the middle of the twentieth century. Much attention has been paid to his history paintings of contemporary subjects, and to a lesser extent to his development of, or participation in, other grand schemes such as the Chapel of Revealed Religion, Boydell’s Shakespeare Gallery, Beckford’s Fonthill Abbey, and the Venetian Secret. He is a convenient, and compelling, foil to the English experience of fellow American-born artist John Singleton Copley. In studies of the history of American art he looms large as a specter of the eighteenth century, acknowledged as a model of inspiration for dozens of other American artists, more directly in the case of Stuart, Trumbull, and others who executed works of the highest quality. In all of this, West’s own motivations for his artistic choices and career moves can be difficult to discern, beyond a lust for fame and fortune.

⁶⁹⁹ Cunningham, *The Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, vol. 2, 56-57.

⁷⁰⁰ Rossetti, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, vol. 1, 63.

⁷⁰¹ Thornbury, *British Artists from Hogarth to Turner*, vol. 2, 100.

⁷⁰² Carson, “Art Theory and Production in the Studio of Benjamin West,” 64.

This study demonstrates the complexity of West's awareness of his own position in the evolving history of the arts in America, simultaneous to the same concern in English art, over the better part of the six decades spent in London. In position West's interest in providing paternal support and encouragement to dozens of students as a facet of his larger efforts to maintain an elevated status among artists and patrons and ensure the continuation of his name throughout history as the patriarch of American art. In doing so, this study contributes to the broader scholarship on art-making and training in eighteenth-century England and the related movement of aesthetic theory and practice westward to North America.

The first chapter of this dissertation presented an overview of West's life and career as an American-born artist in England, with the ensuing chapters case studies of specific moments in his biography examined through the lens of his relationship with a student who was part of his workshop at the time, and how that relationship reflected his broader ambitions and career trajectory. Chapter 2 discussed the origins of West's unchecked ambition to become the father of the schools of American and English art, through an examination of his friendship with Charles Willson Peale, scion of a prominent family of artists and naturalists, and of the conceptual approaches to artistic family found in paintings by each father of his children.

Although many of West's students were excited at the prospects of studying with the master, not all were, and the third chapter explored the complicated relationship between West and Gilbert Stuart, in turn clarifying the ambitions held by the elder artist in working with numerous American students. Chapter 4 addressed West's negotiation of his national identities through his students, revealing his use of

John Trumbull as a foil to protect his status in the royal court and sustain his popularity to the British public while ensuring the perpetuation of his lofty ideas for historical subjects. Finally, the fifth chapter brought West's national identity full circle, situating his stewardship of a clique of aspiring American artists operating in London within the framework of his late-career embrace of his American heritage, as the foundation of a strategy to ensure the preservation of his name throughout history.

Benjamin West's role as an educator was integral to his identity as a professional artist. From his early days in Philadelphia with William Williams, to his studies with Anton Raphael Mengs in Rome, to the encouragement he received from Richard Wilson and Joshua Reynolds upon his arrival in England, West benefited from the advice freely given him by more experienced artists, and believed that it was his moral duty as a successful artist to provide advice to any aspiring artists who sought it. That does not mean, however, that he accepted his students uncritically. I have argued for a distinct method to West's approach to mentorship, constantly shifting in relation to his personal and professional needs as an artist, a gentleman, the President of the Royal Academy, and either as an American, an Englishman, or a man of both nations. This presentation ascribes him more agency as an educator than existing scholarship, aligning the open doors of his studio and his unchecked personal ambition as two crucial and complementary aspects of the same transcendent vision. In considering the ways West contributed to the instruction and promotion of American artists in the period 1763-1820, this study provides a more complete picture of him as an artist and as a man, which in turn allows for a more nuanced understanding of artistic education and national identity in Late Georgian England.

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