

The background of the entire page is a painting of a woman in a black dress and veil, looking slightly to the right. The veil has a diamond pattern. In the background of the painting, there are other figures: a man in a brown jacket and hat on the left, and a woman in a grey coat on the right. The large red 'RA' logo is in the top left corner.

# RA

Royal Academy of Arts  
**Collections in Focus**

**An Introduction  
to the Paintings,  
Sculptures and  
Works on Paper**

# An Introduction to the Paintings, Sculptures and Works on Paper in the Collection of the Royal Academy of Arts for Teachers and Students

Written by Helena Bonett

Collections and Library Department

© Royal Academy of Arts, 2012



Front cover: Sir James Gunn RA (1893–1964), *Pauline Waiting*, 1939 (detail)

Back cover: C.R. Cockerell RA (1788–1863), *The Professor's Dream*, 1848 (detail)

**RA** Royal  
Academy  
of Arts

*The RA is a unique organisation that remains true to its origins in 1768 as a place where art is made, exhibited and debated. Our aim is simple: to be a clear, strong voice for art and artists. The Collections and Library Department fulfils this objective by enlivening the Royal Academy's heritage for the present and preserving it for the future.*

'[The elected artist] shall not receive his Letter of Admission, till he hath deposited in the Royal Academy, to remain there, a Picture, Bas relief or other Specimen of his Abilities approved of by the then sitting Council of the Academy'

The Instrument of Foundation, Article III, 10 December 1768

## Introduction

Written into the founding document of the Royal Academy of Arts when it was established by George III in 1768 is the commitment to build a collection of works of art. As the quotation above makes clear, a chief requirement of all artists elected Royal Academicians is that they donate a work of art (to be known as their Diploma Work). In the absence at that time of any national collection of either Old Master or British paintings, the Academy set out to collect works of art, not simply as memorials of the past, but as a spur for future generations of artists to attain greater heights. Initially, this meant amassing study collections of Classical and Renaissance exemplars of painting, sculpture and architecture in the form of prints and plaster casts. Gradually, however, it became possible (as it still is today) to sense within the Academy's collection the evolution of a distinctive 'British School' of artists, either as this has been directly nurtured by the professional training provided in its Schools, or more generally shaped by the Academy's influence on the appreciation, patronage and status of art in Britain for almost 250 years.

Today, the collection is still growing and continues to fulfil its original remit, holding some 940 paintings, 1,180 sculptures, over 8,000 prints and 10,000 drawings, 2,000 architectural design drawings and 5,000 early photographs. This short guide explores some highlights across the whole range of these holdings and suggests ways in which the aims and attitudes of the artists who joined the Academy are reflected in the works of art they gave, purchased or accepted for its collection to be preserved for posterity.

## The Early Years of the Collection

Henry Singleton's *The Royal Academicians in General Assembly*, painted in 1795, provides an insight into the contents of the collection in its first 27 years (fig. 1). The scene ostensibly depicts the whole body of Royal Academicians gathered in the Council Room at Somerset House to judge the work of that year's students of the RA Schools. However, the setting is

Fig. 1 overleaf  
Henry Singleton 1766–1839  
**The Royal Academicians  
in General Assembly**  
1795

Oil on canvas  
1981 x 2590 mm  
Given by Philip Hardwick RA,  
1861

© Royal Academy of Arts, London  
Photo: John Hammond / RA







constructed to tell us not only what the artists looked like as individuals but also, more importantly, about the ambitions of the Academy as an institution. Singleton achieves this by dividing the painting into three distinct sections: the foreground, in which we see Academicians holding up student works to judge; the middle ground, which comprises plaster cast copies of Classical sculptures that would have been drawn by students in the Schools (these casts were not actually kept in the Council Room but on the floor below in the Antique School); and the background, where we see works by Royal Academicians displayed on or near the walls. Singleton thus creates a dialogue between these three types of work, showing how new work is inspired by old.

The casts are copies of famous Classical sculptures. From left to right, these are the *Belvedere Torso* (original in the Vatican, Rome), the *Borghese Gladiator* (Louvre, Paris), the *Laocoön* (Vatican, Rome), the *Venus de' Medici* (Uffizi, Florence), the *Dog of Alcibiades* (British Museum, London) and the *Apollo Belvedere* (Vatican, Rome). Casts of many of the same sculptures, such as that of the *Laocoön*, are still in the collection today and are installed permanently in the Cast Corridor of the RA Schools.

The works by Royal Academicians seen here were deposited in the collection when the Academy moved to Somerset House in 1780, or shortly afterwards. For the occasion, the first President of the Royal Academy, Sir Joshua Reynolds, painted large-scale portraits of the Academy's royal founders and patrons, George III and Queen Charlotte, which can be seen on the back wall presiding over the General Assembly. Between them at the top is Benjamin West's *Christ Blessing Little Children* (West was then the newly elected President, sitting on the president's chair in the centre) and below this are two flower paintings by one of only two female Academicians, Mary Moser (who stands in front of them), and a model of an equestrian statue of George III by Agostino Carlini just in front. On the ceiling are two allegorical paintings, *Design* and *Composition*, by Angelica Kauffman (the other female Academician who stands to the left of Moser), which are now installed in the entrance hall of the Royal Academy at Burlington House. John Singleton Copley's *The Tribute Money*, depicting a biblical scene, is on the right wall, as well as one of the first paintings to enter the collection, in 1769, Mason Chamberlin's portrait of the Schools' first Professor of Anatomy, Dr William Hunter, who had died in 1783, over a decade before Henry Singleton's painting was made. In these early years, therefore, the collection was made up of a mixture of historical, allegorical and biblical painting, still-life, portraiture and sculpture.

Reynolds himself, who had died in 1792, is represented by his *Self-portrait* from around 1780, which is hung to the left of Copley's painting. In this work he stands alongside a bust of his great hero Michelangelo, the famous

Italian sculptor and painter of the Renaissance. Reynolds asserted the greatness of Michelangelo in several of his lectures, called *Discourses*, which he delivered during prize-giving ceremonies to students of the RA Schools. Almost 40 years after Reynolds's death, Sir George Beaumont bequeathed to the Royal Academy a Michelangelo sculpture, *The Virgin and Child with the Infant St John* (fig. 2). Beaumont, an amateur painter who had occasionally exhibited at the Royal Academy, was also a wealthy art patron whose collection contributed to the founding of the National Gallery in London. While the Academy had by this time amassed a large and wide-ranging number of copies after Old Masters in its print, cast and painting collections, this original sculpture by a renowned Renaissance artist both served as an important exemplar for students in the Schools and as a symbol of the Academy's prestige.

The circular marble, carved in high relief but also probably unfinished, depicts a religious scene. The young St John the Baptist, with his baptismal bowl tied around his waist, reaches out to Jesus to give him a goldfinch. The infant Jesus appears afraid of the bird and recoils into the comfort of his mother Mary's arms. The goldfinch is often interpreted as a symbol of the crucifixion as the bird eats the thistle seeds associated with Christ's crown of thorns. In this way, Jesus, here still only a child, is frightened by a sign of his future destiny.



Fig. 2  
Michelangelo Buonarroti  
1475–1564  
**The Virgin and Child  
with the Infant St John  
(‘The Taddei Tondo’)**  
c.1504–05  
Marble  
Diameter 1068 mm  
Bequeathed by Sir George  
Beaumont, 1830  
© Royal Academy of Arts, London

'The subject seems growing from the marble & emerging into life. It assumes by degrees its shape, features from an unformed mass. As it were you trace & watch its birth from the sculptor's mind as you would an animal from its birth, the chicken breaking thro' its shell. I have seen nothing but this that conveys the idea in the Greek epigram of a sculptor who says I have no merit but discovering the form which lies within the marble. One feels in beholding it to desire still to go on discovering, still to disclose more.'

Charles Robert Cockerell, writing in his diary after seeing the *Taddei Tondo* at George Beaumont's house in 1823

Originally commissioned in 1505 by the Florentine wool merchant Taddeo Taddei, the sculpture was bought by Beaumont in Rome in 1822. The painter John Constable, of whom Beaumont was a patron, was so excited when the marble entered the Royal Academy's collection in 1830 that he immediately drew a sketch of it upon its first display in the Council Room of Somerset House (this drawing is in the collection). He also wrote a letter to the *Athenaeum* describing its position: 'In this favourable situation the light falls from the left, showing the more finished parts to advantage, and causing those less perfect to become masses of shadow, having at a distance all the effect of a rich picture in *chiaroscuro*.' The *Taddei Tondo*, as it is popularly known, remains the only marble sculpture by Michelangelo in a British collection and is on permanent display in The Dame Jillian Sackler Sculpture Gallery.

## Turner and Constable

The Royal Academy in the early nineteenth century saw one of the great artistic rivalries: that between J.M.W. Turner and John Constable. Both are equally famous as painters of landscape, but while Turner favoured a universalising approach to such subjects, Constable always focused on the particularities of a specific landscape and people's interaction with it.

Born within a year of one another, in 1775 and 1776 respectively, they both trained at the RA Schools. But Turner was a precocious young artist, entering the Schools in 1789 at the unusually young age of fourteen, while Constable was 24 when he enrolled in 1800, having been discouraged by his family from pursuing an artistic career. By this time Turner had already been exhibiting at the Academy's Annual Exhibitions for ten years and had been recognised as a great talent by his contemporaries: he was elected an Associate Royal Academician in 1799 and a full Member in 1802. Less inclined towards self-publicity and practising a form of landscape painting that was seen to be less prestigious, Constable, though exhibiting at the Royal Academy from 1802, had to wait until 1819 to be elected an Associate Member and was not made a full Member until ten years later. On one occasion when paintings by the two were hung next to each other at the Annual Exhibition, Turner watched as Constable put the final touches to his painting before adding a dominant splash of red to his, designed to draw attention away from Constable's work. Upon returning to the gallery, Constable declared: 'He has been here and fired a gun.'

The Royal Academy has a number of works by these two artists in its collection, including paintings, drawings and prints. One large group by Turner is from his print series the *Liber Studiorum*, or book of studies, which

he began publishing in 1807. While many artists of the time employed printmakers to make commercial reproductions of their paintings, Turner made many original designs for these prints and also engraved some of them himself. To make these works, Turner utilised a printmaking method called mezzotint, which allows for subtle and atmospheric tonal variations. The *Liber Studiorum* comprises fourteen parts, published over the period 1807–19, which, the subtitle states, are 'Illustrative of Landscape Compositions, viz. Historical, Mountainous, Pastoral, Marine and Architectural'. The Royal Academy is unusual in having many of the artist's proofs made during the design process as well as unpublished prints, possibly made in the 1820s after the main series.

One scene from this unpublished set, *The Felucca*, shows a storm raging over the sea with the occupants of a boat signalling for help (fig.3). In the background a bolt of lightning strikes a lighthouse and a felucca, a type of boat associated with Mediterranean and North African countries, battles against the wind. The intensity of the storm is emphasised by the use of the mezzotint printmaking method, which allows for an atmospheric depiction of streaks of rain and the tempestuous sea. Interested in theories of the sublime, as elucidated by the philosopher and politician Edmund Burke, Turner sought to evoke this awe-inspiring and sometimes terror-filled emotion in his audience, using effects of contrasting light and shade, subtle tone and especially dramatic subject matter to induce the sensation. Combining the sea, which Burke argued was in itself 'an object of no small terror', with

'The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature, when those causes operate most powerfully, is astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror.'

Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, 1757

Fig. 3  
J.M.W. Turner RA 1775–1851  
**The Felucca**  
c.1824

Unpublished plate from the *Liber Studiorum*  
Mezzotint and etching  
191 x 265 mm  
Possibly engraved by Henry Dawe  
Given by Arthur Acland Allen, 1938

© Royal Academy of Arts, London





lightning, which is ‘certainly productive of grandeur’ because of ‘the extreme velocity of its motion’, as well as the sense of the noise that would accompany such a scene, which would awake ‘a great and awful sensation in the mind’, Turner here aims to induce a sublime impression in his audience. However, unlike the figures in the boat who are caught in the midst of the terrible scene, the observers of a work of art may feel terror but it is always combined with pleasure at the skilfulness of the artist’s composition.

While Turner sought the sublime in his work, often travelling to rugged, far-flung locations to find dramatic scenery, Constable found his subjects in more picturesque locations near his home in Suffolk. His biographer, Charles Robert Leslie, wrote of Constable: ‘I have heard him say the solitude of mountains oppressed his spirits. His nature was peculiarly social and could not feel satisfied with scenery, however grand in itself, that did not abound in human associations. He required villages, churches, farm-houses, and cottages.’



One expression of Constable’s views on the human interaction with the landscape can be found in *The Leaping Horse* (fig. 4). The artist described this painting, begun in 1825, as ‘a lovely subject, of the canal kind, lively – & soothing – calm and exhilarating, fresh – & blowing’. The scene shows a tow horse pulling a barge along the River Stour, about to jump one of the barriers that were erected to stop cattle from straying. In the background there are various indications of everyday life in rural Suffolk, with cows in the distance and a church to the right of the composition.

The scale of the painting, however, is not synonymous with its apparent everyday subject matter. Measuring almost two metres wide, *The Leaping Horse* is one of Constable’s so-called ‘six footers’ that he exhibited at the Royal Academy between 1819 and 1825. The monumental scale provides a grand conception of an everyday landscape and consequently encourages a reassessment of its subject matter. The shape of the trees and the clouds leads the eye down to the horse with its striking red bridle. Tow horses are known for their large size and heavy weight, but here we see one jump a hurdle like a racehorse. This dramatic leap lends the scene something of the miraculous, communicating the profundity of Constable’s feelings about his native Suffolk.

## Historical Legacy

The year 1814 had seen the abdication of the French Emperor Napoleon and his subsequent exile to the island of Elba in the Mediterranean. For one young explorer and soon-to-be architect, Charles Robert Cockerell, this meant that he could now complete the so-called ‘Grand Tour’ of the important cultural sites of antiquity and the Renaissance. Having set sail for Constantinople in April 1810 and then travelled through Greece, Cockerell was now free to enter Italy and France,

**‘The sound of water escaping from mill-dams, etc., willows, old rotten planks, slimy posts, and brickwork, I love such things ... As long as I do paint, I shall never cease to paint such places. They have always been my delight ... painting is with me but another word for feeling, and I associate “my careless boyhood” with all that lies on the banks of the Stour; those scenes made me a painter, and I am grateful!’**  
John Constable, letter to John Fisher, 23 October 1821

Fig. 4  
John Constable RA 1776–1837  
**The Leaping Horse**  
1825

Oil on canvas  
1420 x 1873 mm  
Given by Mrs Dawkins, 1889

© Royal Academy of Arts, London  
Photo: John Hammond / RA



which had until then been under Napoleon's control. While most Grand Tours would last less than three years, Cockerell did not return to England until June 1817.

While overseas, Cockerell became friends with an international group of intellectuals, explorers and architects, including the poet Lord Byron. With members of this group, he studied the art and architecture of Asia Minor, Greece, Sicily and Italy, making many new discoveries that went on to secure his fame. A key component of his studies was the accurate measuring of temples and sculptures. Made over 30 years after Cockerell returned from his Grand Tour, *The Professor's Dream* presents an accurate recording of the buildings of the past through which can be discerned Cockerell's personal views on architecture (fig.5).

When the drawing was exhibited at the Royal Academy's Annual Exhibition in 1849, a note in the catalogue described it as 'A synopsis of the principal architectural monuments of ancient and modern times, drawn to the same scale, in forms and dimensions ascertained from the best authorities, and arranged on four terraces – Egyptian, Grecian, Roman, and Mediæval and Modern; the last of which shews more particularly the comparative height'. By this time Cockerell had already been Professor of Architecture at the RA Schools for ten years, and this large drawing (measuring almost two metres wide) would have served as an important teaching aid in his lectures. This composite work depicts famous buildings and sculptures arranged on four levels all drawn to scale, including Notre Dame in Paris at the top left, St Paul's Cathedral in London to its right, the Colosseum in Rome stretching across the centre with St Peter's above it, and the Egyptian temple of Luxor in the bottom centre. In the foreground, travellers are shown about to enter this heavenly kingdom through the archway at Luxor. The architecture of Ancient Egypt frames the assemblage of buildings, with temples in the foreground and the pyramids at Giza in the background, its Great Pyramid being the oldest and still the tallest structure in the world in Cockerell's time. Consequently,

Cockerell does not create a hierarchy, with the architecture of early civilisations at the bottom and those of modern periods triumphing at the top, but rather a harmonious scene that illustrates the presence of both influence and diversity across different periods and different cultures.

*The Professor's Dream* is one of a large number of architectural drawings in the Royal Academy's collection, most of which are related to proposed or actual buildings rather than reflections on architectural history. For painters, on the other hand, it was common to create works inspired by stories from history, mythology, literature or religion. Since the Royal Academy's foundation, Sir Joshua Reynolds and subsequent presidents had championed history painting, as it was called, as the most superior genre of art and it continued to be seen as the noblest pursuit for the painter during the nineteenth century. However, painting historical subjects did not necessarily lead to sales, which meant that artists often turned to portraiture to make a living. But for some painters, making money was not so important. One such artist was Edward Armitage, whose financial independence allowed him to dedicate himself to painting historical and biblical scenes.

**'I am an artist & nothing but an artist. I am a good painter spoilt. The more I have seen of Italy the more persuaded I am that I was born to be a painter. If I must adopt architecture I must appear in this and this only, as professor of the beautiful in architecture.'**

Charles Robert Cockerell, letter to his father Samuel Pepys Cockerell, Milan, Italy, 1816



Fig. 5

**C.R. Cockerell RA 1788–1863**  
**The Professor's Dream**  
**1848**

Pencil, watercolour, and pen and ink on wove paper  
1122 x 1711 mm  
Given by Mrs Henry Noel, 1930

© Royal Academy of Arts, London  
Photo: Prudence Cuming Associates Limited / RA



In *The Festival of Esther*, Armitage depicts a dramatic scene from the Old Testament (fig. 6). Esther was married to the Persian King Ahasuerus but concealed from him that she was Jewish. The king's chief minister, Haman, loathed Esther's adoptive father, Mordecai, and, as a ploy to kill him, requested that the king issue a decree ordering the execution of all the Jews. Upon discovering this, Esther held a banquet at which she revealed to the king that she was Jewish and pleaded with him to revoke the decree so that her people would be saved. Ahasuerus, realising his minister's trickery, left the room to deliberate but upon returning found Haman kneeling at the queen's feet begging for his life. Thinking that Haman was assaulting Esther, the king ordered his execution. This is the climactic moment that Armitage has depicted in his painting, with Esther recoiling from the pleading Haman, Ahasuerus standing above them ordering his minister's death, and Mordecai looking down at his defeated enemy from the right of the composition.

By the time Armitage exhibited this painting at the Royal Academy in 1865 he was already well known for the archaeological accuracy of his biblical

scenes. In painting Old Testament stories, Armitage incorporated real Middle Eastern artefacts to lend his representations greater authenticity. In particular, he utilised the discoveries of ancient Assyria (modern-day Iraq), which had entered the collection of the British Museum in London from 1847. These archaeological finds were not just well known in scholarly circles but were widely reproduced in newspapers and periodicals; as one commentator joked, 'the fashion of the royal crown of Nineveh [in Assyria] is as familiar as the pattern of the last new Parisian bonnet'. When *The Festival of Esther* was exhibited, a critic noted that the objects portrayed in the scene were 'consonant with the remains of Assyrian magnificence which recent researches have brought to light'.

Specifically, it is the carved reliefs that form the backdrop to the scene together with the statue to the extreme left of the composition that are all taken from actual Assyrian artefacts unearthed from the palace at Nimrud, dating to the ninth century BCE, which are still on view in the British Museum today. Armitage did not slavishly copy the objects, however, but utilised particular components to create the scene. The most visible relief, at the top right of the composition, depicts the Assyrian crown prince killing a lion, a royal sport that expressed the monarch's role as the guardian of civilisation against savagery. Likewise, in Armitage's painting, the savage Haman – who is depicted in stark profile, in keeping with the figures in the relief – kneels on a tiger skin, signifying his imminent demise at the orders of the king. *The Festival of Esther* is one of many history paintings in the Royal Academy's collection.

Fig. 6  
Edward Armitage RA  
1817–1896  
*The Festival of Esther*  
1865  
Oil on canvas  
1200 x 1830 mm  
Diploma Work, accepted 1873  
© Royal Academy of Arts, London





'The little Dutch town of Volendam was made and designed expressly for the artist. It is a living picture-book, full of the most charming pictures – quaint Dutch people in quaint Dutch costumes, animals that might have come out of Noah's ark, and houses and trees that might have come out of a toy shop ... to artists it is so well known and so often visited as to be a veritable artist Mecca.' 'Volendam: The Artist's Mecca', *Akaroa Mail and Banks Peninsula Advertiser*, 11 April 1911

## Rural Idylls

By the late nineteenth century industrial growth had led to the mass migration, from the countryside to the city, of people looking for work. With many of the wealthier classes perceiving the city as a place of degeneracy and squalor, lost rural ways of life were increasingly mourned and eulogised. Some artists moved away from painting history subjects, in the manner of *The Festival of Esther*, to find inspiration in the world around them, particularly in the countryside.

One such artist was George Clausen, who was born in London but, like many artists of his generation, spent long periods in remote locations in northern France, the Netherlands, Belgium and England where the traditions of the local people remained supposedly unspoilt. During his time in the Netherlands and Belgium in the 1870s, Clausen drew and painted many depictions of the local people that are now in the Royal Academy's collection, including *Study of a Dutch Boy* (fig. 7). This oil sketch depicts a boy wearing the traditional costume worn in the area of Volendam and Marken, just twelve miles north of Amsterdam. At the time the region was not widely known, but Clausen brought it into the artistic consciousness by exhibiting paintings of the area at the Royal Academy from 1876.

Fig. 7  
Sir George Clausen RA  
1852–1944  
**Study of a Dutch Boy**  
mid–late 1870s  
Oil on canvas  
347 x 262 mm  
Given by Hugh Clausen, 1970  
© The Artist's Estate  
Photo: Prudence Cuming Associates  
Limited © Royal Academy of Arts, London



It was not just painters who were looking to rural ways of life for their subject matter. Using photography, then still a relatively new medium, practitioners also sought to capture the passing of rural traditions. One influential photographer of the day, Peter Henry Emerson, focused much of his work on picturing East Anglian life, as Constable had done earlier in the century. In *A Toad in the Path*, Emerson shows two children pausing on their way home apparently to look at a toad (fig. 8). The composition of the scene is carefully orchestrated, showing the influence of naturalist painting, such as that of Clausen, with whom Emerson was acquainted. Beyond simply the adoption of painterly composition, however, some photographers of the time would retouch, or alter, their photographs to create painterly effects. Emerson resisted this approach, although in his writings, such as that in his *Naturalistic Photography for Students of the Art* published in 1889, he argued that the principle object in a photographic composition should be in focus and the peripheries should be blurred, which would thus imitate human vision. The subtle gradations of grey in this image are a result of the photogravure process, of which Emerson was an advocate. This work was included in a portfolio of photogravures that Emerson presented to the Royal Academy in 1890. At the time he argued that photography should be seen on the same level as fine art, but later felt that it was a mechanical reproduction rather than an artistic process.

Fig. 8  
P.H. Emerson 1856–1936  
**A Toad in the Path**  
1890  
From *Pictures of East Anglian Life*  
Photogravure  
162 x 264 mm  
Given by the artist, 1890  
© Royal Academy of Arts, London  
Photo: John Hammond / RA



Fig. 9

Sir George Frampton RA  
1860–1928

**Lamia**  
1899–1900

Ivory, bronze, opals and glass  
610 x 553 x 254 mm  
Given by Meredith Frampton RA  
and Lady Frampton, 1938

© Royal Academy of Arts, London

**'Her head was serpent,  
but ah, bitter-sweet!  
She had a woman's  
mouth with all its  
pearls complete:  
And for her eyes: what  
could such eyes do there  
But weep, and weep, that  
they were born so fair?'**  
John Keats, *Lamia*, 1819

## Symbolism

While artists such as Clausen and Emerson aimed to represent the realities of everyday life, other artists of the late nineteenth century, often called Symbolists, turned their backs on realism and instead endeavoured to evoke great ideas and emotions in their art, including their own spiritual and emotional struggles. The sculptor George Frampton exhibited a number of Symbolist works at the Royal Academy and Paris Salon from 1888, culminating in the exhibition of *Lamia* at the Academy in 1900 (fig. 9). The sculpture is unusual in being made of a variety of imported exotic materials – ivory and bronze with opal and crystal adornments and a marble base – reflecting Frampton's interest in craft and the decorative arts. Opals are traditionally a symbol of doom, while the crystal ball that appears gripped by roots, below the large central opal, suggests divination, or foretelling of the future.

The title of the work alludes to the poem of the same name by the Romantic author John Keats, written in 1819, which in turn was inspired by the mythological tale from Ancient Greece. In Keats's poem, Lamia is a serpent-like yet beautiful creature who 'seem'd, at once, some penanced lady elf, / Some demon's mistress, or the demon's self'. She escapes from her serpent body and is about to marry a youth when her true form is revealed and 'Lamia, no longer fair, there sat a deadly white'. This moment of revelation is captured in Frampton's life-size bust, which contrasts ivory with bronze to accentuate the whiteness of the enchantress's skin against the tight grip of the dark headdress and cape. The stillness and symmetry of the pose exaggerates the sculpture's sense of a frozen instant of time, and intensifies its themes of doom and metamorphosis.

## Cultural Clashes

While many artists working on the Continent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were experimenting with new modes of artistic expression – from Impressionism, Post-Impressionism and Cubism to Futurism, Expressionism and Constructivism – the Royal Academy's Summer Exhibitions increasingly appeared to remain separate and altogether impervious to these movements. Instead of the RA Schools, many British artists now trained at the Slade School of Fine Art in London or at one of the many regional art colleges before finishing their studies at one of the numerous art schools in Paris. Artists formed exhibiting societies to show their work at the many new art galleries that had sprung up. In the face of





these changes, the Royal Academy appeared a bastion of conservatism. Yet it did exhibit work by a wide range of artists and also elected many to its membership.

One artist who encompassed many of these diverse developments was John Singer Sargent. Born in Florence, Italy, to American expatriate parents he trained there and in Paris. He spent time between Venice and Paris in the early 1880s before moving to London following the scandal provoked by the exhibition at the Paris Salon in 1884 of his sexually suggestive portrait *Madame X* (now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). In London he became a member of the New English Art Club, one of the exhibiting societies that had been set up in opposition to the Royal Academy. But he also exhibited to much acclaim at the Academy's Summer Exhibitions, and was elected an Associate Royal Academician in 1894 and a full Member in 1897.

As a portrait painter, Sargent was much in demand for his flamboyant and flattering portrayals. Having established his reputation in the 1890s, in the early years of the twentieth century he was free to devote more of his time to painting uncommissioned works, particularly landscapes. *At Torre Galli: Ladies in a Garden* (fig.10) was painted in 1910 at the Villa Torre Galli, near Lucca, just west of Florence, which was owned by the Marchese Farinola. Sargent stayed there with fellow artists Jane Erin Emmet de Glehn, Wilfrid de Glehn and Sir William Blake Richmond. The painting shows a view from

Fig. 10  
John Singer Sargent RA  
1856–1925  
*At Torre Galli: Ladies in a Garden*  
1910

Oil on canvas  
711 x 915 mm  
Given by Mrs Violet Sargent  
Ormond, 1936

© Royal Academy of Arts, London  
Photo: John Hammond / RA



Fig. 11  
Dame Laura Knight RA  
1877–1970  
*A Study of a Bareback Rider in a Circus*

Crayon on wove paper  
273 x 374 mm  
Unsigned and undated  
Given by the artist's executors,  
1972

© Reproduced with permission of The  
Estate of Dame Laura Knight DBE RA  
2012. All Rights Reserved  
Photo: Prudence Cuming Associates  
Limited © Royal Academy of Arts, London

the colonnaded loggia of the villa looking out towards the walled garden and the landscape beyond. In the bottom right corner are three women posed in sumptuous white dresses and cashmere shawls. Despite their close proximity they seem unaware of one another, lending the work a decorative rather than narrative focus. The similarity of the women's features and attire in the painting suggests that the same woman modelled for each pose, and it is thought she was Jane de Glehn.

The cloistered paradise envisioned in this painting was, however, anathema to some artists of the period. Many felt that artistic subject matter should be found in lower-class culture rather than in that of the aristocracy. In her portrayals of entertainments such as the circus, Laura Knight was one of these artists who aimed to represent popular culture in early twentieth-century Britain. To try and capture the ephemeral nature of these shows, Knight developed a dynamic drawing style with which she could encapsulate movement in a scene in just a few lines, as can be seen in her *Study of a Bareback Rider in a Circus* (fig.11). In this drawing Knight has sought to demonstrate the balance of the figure standing on one leg on a galloping horse. In 1936, Knight became the first woman artist to be elected a full Royal Academician since Moser and Kauffman had been made Foundation Members 168 years earlier. This drawing is from one of 26 sketchbooks by Knight that were given to the Royal Academy by her executors.



## The Inter-war Years

The First World War had seen a dramatic shift in the position of the artist in Britain. Many served in units such as the Artists' Rifles and the new role of the Official War Artist was also created. Following the end of the war in 1918, thousands of commemorative sculptures were needed and a committee, the Imperial War Graves Commission, was created to oversee their design. The sculptor Gilbert Ledward, who had served in the Royal Garrison Artillery, was appointed an Official War Artist and after the war made many memorials, the most famous of which is the Guards' Division Memorial in St James's Park, London. In the Royal Academy's collection are 85 of his sketchbooks, which his daughter gave to the Academy after his death. These chart his early studies as well as the development of his memorial sculpture and his later work.

*Earth Rests*, a life-size stone sculpture made in 1930, marks a move away from the sculpting techniques Ledward had used in his memorial commissions (fig. 12).

Having studied at the Royal College of Art from 1905 and the RA Schools from 1910, he had been trained to model his sculptures in clay before having them cast in bronze or copied in stone by assistants using pointing-machines. However, some artists had turned away from this method in favour of the sculptor 'carving direct' in stone, which enabled a greater connection with the material and a better understanding of its intrinsic nature, which was known as 'truth to materials'.

Ledward continued working on memorial commissions up until the late 1920s when he took up the role of Professor of Sculpture at the Royal College of Art with the young sculptor Henry Moore as his assistant. With the students and Moore all practising direct carving in stone, Ledward began to see this method as continuing a lineage from the methods used in Ancient Greek, Roman, medieval and Renaissance sculpture, all of which he admired. Consequently, Ledward fundamentally altered his working practice, becoming a carver rather than a modeller. When it was first exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1937, *Earth Rests* was accompanied by the verse: 'Earth rests, the ancient fires are still, / Her jewels are set, her knees drawn up like hills.' Ledward thus equates the form of the reclining figure with the undulations of the landscape.



Fig. 12  
Gilbert Ledward RA  
1888–1960  
*Earth Rests*  
1930  
Roman stone  
815 x 1550 x 390 mm  
Diploma Work, accepted 1937  
© Royal Academy of Arts, London  
Photo: Paul Highnam / RA





The Scottish painter James Gunn also served in the First World War, enlisting in the Artists' Rifles and later being commissioned into the 10th (Scottish) Rifles. Having studied the works of the seventeenth-century Spanish painter Diego Velázquez in his youth, in the late 1920s Gunn chose to devote his practice to portraiture. In 1929 he married Pauline Miller, who became the model for several of his most famous paintings, including *Pauline Waiting* (fig. 13).

In this painting a glamorous woman sits upright at a table in the luxurious setting of Claridge's hotel in Mayfair, London, her handbag resting beside her. She is still wearing her coat, hat and muff and holding her umbrella, as though she might be about to rise and leave. Her appearance is immaculate – her ivory skin enhanced by the red of her lipstick and nail varnish. Painted with small brushstrokes and thin paint, Gunn creates a smooth, blended effect.

The sharp focus of the portrait of the woman is contrasted with the indistinct figures in the background (one of whom wears the Gunn tartan). These figures are painted with little detail, giving the impression of a deep recession within the picture plane, similar to the use of focus in photography or cinema. Redolent of the stylish sense of mystery, mood and suspense in Hollywood cinema of the time, the viewer is left wondering: what is Pauline waiting for?

## Post-war

*Pauline Waiting* was painted in 1939, on the eve of the Second World War. This war claimed even more lives than the first and was brought to a bitter end in 1945 by the American dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan. The atrocities of the Nazi regime in Germany were revealed as concentration camps in places like Auschwitz exposed the genocide that had taken place. Living with the threat of nuclear annihilation, as the Cold War between America and Russia deepened, many artists responded to the anxieties of the post-war climate. The older generation were seen as culpable, guilty of fostering a society that had bred Nazi extremism and Soviet totalitarianism.

In the British Pavilion at the Venice Biennale of 1952, eight emerging sculptors, along with the established Henry Moore, exhibited their work. The influential art critic Herbert Read wrote an introduction to the exhibition catalogue, in which he described their work as evoking the 'geometry of fear'. These words have come to reflect a new type of sculpture where the human form takes on non-human attributes, such as that of the crustacean or insect, sheltered but also caged by its bony exterior.

Fig. 13

Sir James Gunn RA  
1893–1964  
Pauline Waiting  
1939

Oil on canvas  
760 x 640 mm  
Diploma Work, accepted 1961

© The Artist's Estate  
Photo: John Hammond © Royal Academy  
of Arts, London

**'These new images belong to the iconography of despair, or of defiance; and the more innocent the artist, the more effectively he transmits the collective guilt. Here are images of flight, of ragged claws "scuttling across the floors of silent seas", of excoriated flesh, frustrated sex, the geometry of fear.'**

Herbert Read, *New Aspects of British Sculpture*, 1952



Fig. 14

Lynn Chadwick RA  
1914–2003  
**Teddy Boy and Girl, 1955**  
2002 after a 1955  
version  
Patinated bronze  
1900 x 700 x 580 mm  
Diploma Work, accepted 2002  
© Royal Academy of Arts, London

One sculptor who exhibited in the British Pavilion, and whose work was often thought to express most overtly the ‘geometry of fear’, was Lynn Chadwick. However, Read also recognised the ‘playfulness’ inherent in Chadwick’s work and this can perhaps be seen in his *Teddy Boy and Girl, 1955* (fig. 14). The title of the sculpture refers to the 1950s subculture of working-class men and women who wore neo-Edwardian dress and came to be associated with gangs and rioting. The large male figure in this group stands upright with spindly arms aloft. A crevice that runs down its front appears as though it might open and engulf the more passive female figure, which leans tentatively to one side.

Another artist who exhibited in the British Pavilion in 1952 was the sculptor and printmaker Eduardo Paolozzi. That same year he also became a founder member of the Independent Group, whose artists challenged established fine-art ideals by utilising mass-cultural ‘found objects’ to create their work, so democratising the art object and founding the style known as Pop Art. However, Paolozzi’s appropriation of mass-cultural imagery was not uncritical. The writer J. G. Ballard wrote of his screenprints: ‘in the juxtapositions of Mickey Mouse, soft drink commercials and thermo-nuclear weapon systems, symbols taken from textbooks of heart surgery, advertisements for expensive watches, he is constantly searching for the real meanings that lie behind the flux of images that bombard us today’.

In *Moonstrips Empire News*, from 1967, Paolozzi made 100 screenprints and presented them in a luminous pink plastic box, layering one sheet on top of another, which may have reminded him of a Jewish flatbread called Moonstrips from which the series probably takes its title. One print from the sequence is a collage of imagery that comments upon French and American involvement in Vietnam through reference to their automobile industries (fig. 15). At the top of the image is a photograph of a line of cars made by the French company, Simca, with a representation of the Vietnamese dragon repeated on the wall in the background and Vietnamese people passing by. In the lower section of the collage are cut-outs of cars made by the American manufacturer Chrysler. The Chrysler logo sits above the word ‘SIMCA’ at the top right of the image and by the time Paolozzi made this print Chrysler was a majority shareholder in Simca.

Vietnam had been a colony of France for almost a century, but after the Second World War the Vietnamese, led by the communist Ho Chi Minh, declared independence, finally defeating the French in 1954 after an eight-year war. With the ensuing division of Vietnam into the communist north and capitalist south, the two quickly fell into conflict, with the United States supporting the south and Russia the north. By situating the French car in Vietnam and emphasising Chrysler’s takeover of Simca, Paolozzi suggests that capitalism is in itself a form of colonialism, or empire-building. The

**‘If the entire twentieth century were to vanish in some huge calamity, it would be possible to reconstitute a large part of it from his [Paolozzi’s] sculpture and screenprints.’**

J. G. Ballard, *The Glasgow Herald*, 5 December 1987







tumbling of Chrysler cars in the lower section, however, creates a disorderliness that is at odds with the car manufacturing ideal, suggesting a disruption to the capitalist system. Paolozzi became a Royal Academician in 1979 and was a champion of the Academy's collection, chairing its committee and donating many works, such as this print series and a small-scale plaster cast of the *Laocöon*.

Of a slightly older generation than Chadwick and Paolozzi, the painter Robert Medley nevertheless continued to reassess his practice throughout his long career. Having begun as a figurative painter, as part of the Euston Road School, he later began to experiment with abstraction, inspired by the American Abstract Expressionists, revelling in what he called 'open-ended forms discovered by chance, and the sensuous physicality of involvement in paint as paint'. A sense of this is reflected in the luxurious paint surface of *The Rough Field*, from 1962 (fig. 16). With bare indications of figures in the centre, a faint blue above suggesting the sky, and the yellow of what could be a field to the bottom left, Medley's painting evokes a visceral impression of the landscape, with the title perhaps referring to the aeroplane terminology for landing on difficult terrain. Having trained only briefly at the RA Schools in 1924, Medley had remained outside the bastion of the Academy in the ensuing decades. He was one of many notable twentieth-century artists to have perceived it as an establishment that should be railed against. But in the last few decades recent presidents of the Academy have done much to encourage artists to join its ranks. Medley was elected a Senior Royal Academician in 1985, after which he gave this painting, and he also bequeathed his sketchbooks to the collection.

Fig. 15  
Sir Eduardo Paolozzi RA  
1924–2005  
From *Moonstrips Empire News*  
1967

Screenprint  
380 x 253 mm  
Given by the artist, 1993  
© Trustees of the Paolozzi Foundation,  
Licensed by DACS 2012  
Photo © Royal Academy of Arts, London

Fig. 16  
Robert Medley RA 1905–1994  
*The Rough Field*  
1962

Oil on canvas  
990 x 1143 mm  
Diploma Work, accepted 1986  
© Royal Academy of Arts, London





## The Collection Today

In 2011, the Royal Academy collection was awarded Designated status by Arts Council England, which recognises its position as a preeminent collection of national and international importance. This guide has examined works from the historic collection, but works by contemporary Royal Academicians are donated regularly and much of the collection can be explored online on the Academy's dedicated collection website at [www.racollection.org.uk](http://www.racollection.org.uk). From its beginnings in 1768, the Royal Academy collection now stands not only as a reflection of the Academy's history but also of the development of art in Britain today. With Royal Academicians including the architects David Chipperfield and Zaha Hadid, the painters David Hockney and Jenny Saville, the sculptors Anish Kapoor, Richard Long and Cornelia Parker, and the mixed-media artists Tacita Dean, Tracey Emin, Michael Landy, Grayson Perry and Gillian Wearing, the collection continues to reflect this change and growth.

## Further Reading

Neil Bingham, *Masterworks: Architecture at the Royal Academy of Arts*, London, 2011

James Fenton, *School of Genius: A History of the Royal Academy of Arts*, London, 2006

Sydney C. Hutchison, *The History of the Royal Academy 1768–1986*, second edition, London, 1986

Peter Schmitt and Owen Hopkins, *Burlington House: A Brief History*, London, 2010

Dennis Toff, *The Architect and Sculptor RAs: A Guide to the Architect and Sculptor Members of the Royal Academy of Arts with Examples of their Work*, London, 2008

Dennis Toff, *The Painter RAs: A Guide to the Painter Members of the Royal Academy of Arts with Examples of their Work*, London, 2008

Access to the collection is available through displays, tours and by appointment; for information, visit [www.royalacademy.org.uk](http://www.royalacademy.org.uk)

Works of art, books and archives are searchable at [www.racollection.org.uk](http://www.racollection.org.uk)





**This guide is given out free to teachers and full-time students with ID at the Learning Desk and is available to other visitors for purchase from the RA Shop.**

