

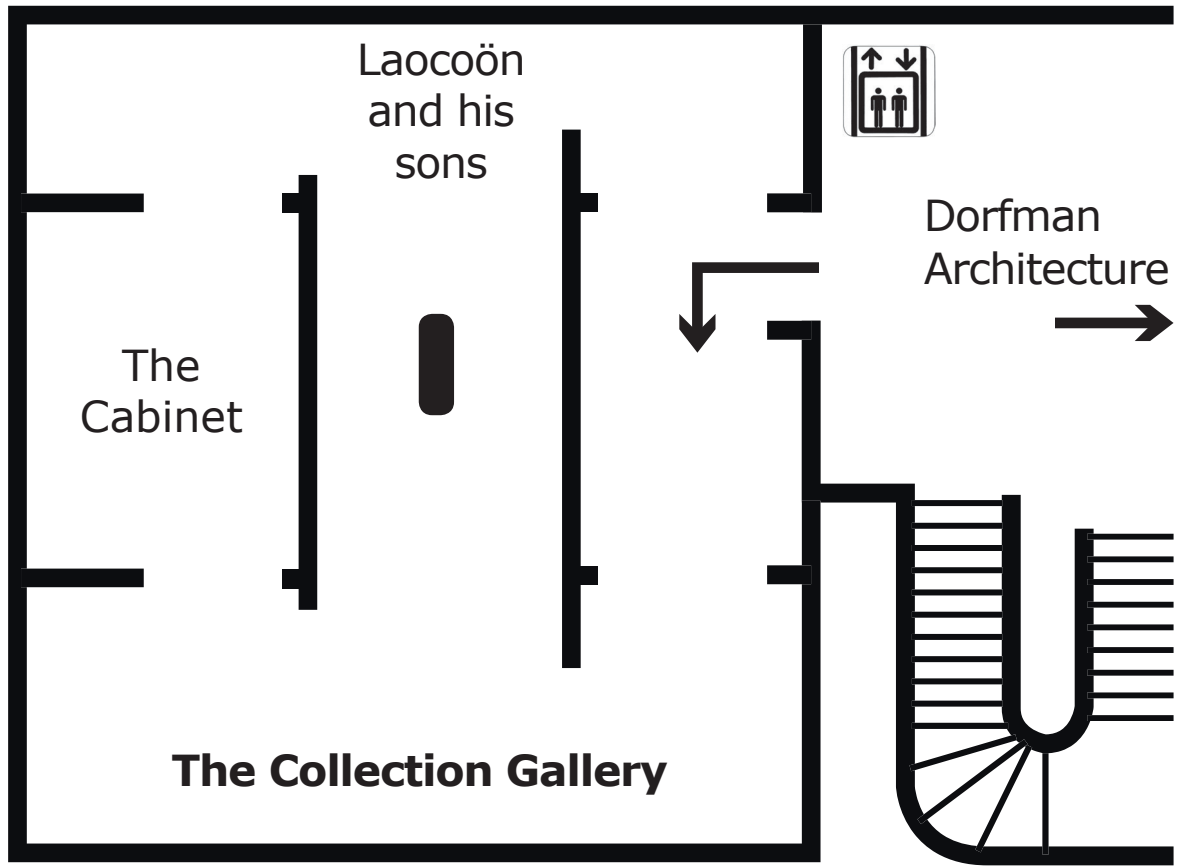


Large
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The Making of an Artist:
**The Great
Tradition**

The Collection Gallery

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Collection Gallery

 Seating

The Making of an Artist: The Great Tradition

The Collection Gallery

Contents

Page 3

Introduction

Page 5

List of works

The Making of an Artist: The Great Tradition

This display presents some of the leading artists of the early Academy alongside the work and ideas that influenced them. It demonstrates the rapid development of British art in the 50 years after the founding of the RA in 1768.

Christopher Le Brun, President of the Royal Academy, selected the display. He explains:

Sir Joshua Reynolds, the first President of the Royal Academy, delivered annual lectures known as Discourses to students in the RA Schools.

In the Discourses he promotes training for the young artist looking back to ancient Greece and Rome and based on knowledge of the works of the high renaissance masters, Raphael, Leonardo and above all Michelangelo – “the Great Tradition”.

Reynolds holds "history painting" to be superior to portraiture, landscape and still life. History painting usually has a moral lesson and shows subjects from mythology, religion, literature or history.

Reynolds says it should show "heroic action, or heroic suffering". The principal motif is often the male figure, with its clearly defined musculature and tension of form.

The nude was the chief object of study through drawing from casts of classical sculpture and the life model. This furnished the imagination and memory with materials for paintings of noble and uplifting subjects.

Sir Thomas Lawrence PRA (1769–1830)

Satan Summoning his Legions

1796–1797

Thomas Lawrence's grandest history painting is dominated by a muscular male figure, naked apart from his sword, helmet and some carefully placed drapery. He is Satan, the rebel angel, who has been sent to Hell.

Standing by a lake of fire, he summons other fallen angels. The painting was inspired by John Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost*.

Soon after he was elected a Royal Academician, Lawrence painted this striking picture as a public demonstration of the importance he attached to history painting. He thought it was one of his greatest works, but for the rest of his career he painted mainly portraits.

Oil on canvas

Given by Samuel Woodburn in 1837

Sir Thomas Lawrence PRA (1769–1830)

Self-portrait

c 1820

Thomas Lawrence painted the Satan that dominates the entrance to the gallery. As a teenager, he attended the RA Schools and later became President of the Royal Academy. Late in life he painted this self-portrait.

Lawrence took great care over the mouth, eyes and the rest of the face, but left the lower part of the canvas almost untouched. He used a limited range of colours and shows himself plainly against a simple background.

Oil on canvas

Purchased in 1867

Sir Joshua Reynolds PRA (1723–1792)

Portrait of Sir William Chambers
c 1780

The architect William Chambers (1723–1796) was a key figure in the early years of the RA.

He designed the RA's first purpose-built home at Somerset House, shown in the background, and was the RA's first Treasurer. His connections to King George III helped the Royal Academy, but sometimes irritated Joshua Reynolds, the first President of the RA.

Reynolds complained that "though he was President, Sir William was Viceroy over him".

Reynolds painted this formal portrait of Chambers to be a pair with his own self-portrait, displayed to the left.

Oil on canvas

Given by Sir Joshua Reynolds PRA in 1780

Thomas Gainsborough RA (1727–1788)

Romantic Landscape

c 1783

Thomas Gainsborough contrasts colossal rocks with resting sheep and shepherds. In the shadows a goat jumps up to drink from a spring.

Gainsborough painted portraits for money and landscapes for pleasure. He wrote: "I am sick of portraits and wish very much to walk off to some sweet village where I can paint landskips and enjoy the fag end of life in quietness and ease."

He sometimes sketched from nature but based many of his landscape paintings on models made from cork, moss and broccoli.

Oil on canvas

Given by Margaret Gainsborough in 1799

Supported by Harry Hyman and family

Sir Joshua Reynolds PRA (1723–1792)

Self-portrait

c 1780

Joshua Reynolds, the first President of the Royal Academy, presents himself as an intellectual heavyweight. Swathed in academic robes, he holds a document, perhaps one of his annual Discourses on Art.

He pays homage to two of his artistic heroes: his left hand rests on a bust of Michelangelo and the painting's play of light and shade evokes the work of Rembrandt.

Reynolds described Michelangelo's artistic style as "the language of the Gods". He finishes his final Discourse by stating: "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."

Henry Singleton's painting, to the right, shows this self-portrait hanging in the Royal Academy's rooms at Somerset House.

Oil on panel

Given by Sir Joshua Reynolds PRA in 1780

Supported by Mr and Mrs John Burns

Royal Academy Foundations

In 1768 a group of painters, sculptors and architects convinced King George III to support the creation of the Royal Academy of Arts. Their aim was to improve the quality of art in Britain and to raise the status of British artists and architects.

The new Academy had three key functions that continue today:

- Run an art school, training the next generation of artists
- Hold an exhibition selling contemporary art annually, now the Summer Exhibition
- Elect as Royal Academicians a small number of leading painters, sculptors and architects (and eventually printmakers).

Henry Singleton's painting shows the Academicians surrounded by key examples from the collection. Some of these are displayed nearby, including the Laocoön, the Belvedere Torso and Joshua Reynolds's self-portrait.

Angelica Kauffman RA (1741–1807)

Design

1778–1780

An artist intently studies the Belvedere Torso. She personifies 'Design' or drawing. Classical muses were often depicted as passive, but this figure is active and in control. Like most artists in the 1700s, Kauffman worked from casts after classical sculpture, but as a woman she was not allowed into the life room.

The Academy commissioned Kauffman to create four ceiling paintings for its new home at Somerset House. These represent elements of art: Colour, Composition and Invention sat alongside the Design displayed here. The others are now installed in the ceiling of the Burlington House entrance hall.

Oil on canvas

Commissioned for Somerset House c 1778

Supported by Ina De & James Spicer

Henry Singleton (1766–1839)

The Royal Academicians
Assembled in their Council
Chamber to Adjudge the Medals
to the Successful Students in
Painting, Sculpture, Architecture
and Drawing

1795

Forty confident Royal Academicians gather in their elegant rooms at Somerset House, surrounded by some of the Academy's contemporary paintings and casts of ancient sculpture.

The second RA President Benjamin West sits at the centre. Angelica Kauffman and Mary Moser, the two female founder Academicians, stand behind him. In practice, however, women Academicians were not allowed to participate fully in the Academy's activities.

(continued over)

To the left of the table is the Academy's Professor of Architecture Thomas Sandby. Along with the other Academicians he is judging which works made by students in the RA Schools will receive one of the medals on the table.

Oil on canvas

Given by Philip Hardwick RA in 1861

Supported by the Dr Lee MacCormick Edwards
Charitable Foundation

Supported anonymously in loving memory of Catarina
Vikingsdottir

John Francis Rigaud RA (1742–1810)

Samson and Delilah

c 1784

Delilah attempts to restrain Samson, but he has broken the rope around his feet and is just about to break the one around his wrists.

Delilah was persuaded to bind Samson, who loved her, by the lords of the Philistines, who wanted to find a way to overpower him. The Philistines are hiding behind the curtain at the left.

In a later stage of the Biblical story Delilah discovers that Samson's strength would be destroyed if she cut off his hair.

When he posed the model for Samson, Rigaud was perhaps thinking of the Belvedere Torso and Michelangelo's figures in the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.

Oil on canvas

Diploma Work given by John Francis Rigaud in 1784 following election as a Royal Academician

Learning from the Past

Sir Joshua Reynolds's Discourses on Art are the pre-eminent exposition of the aesthetic and artistic principles behind the teaching and appreciation of art at the early Academy.

He said: "Study the great works of the great masters, for ever..."

"Consider them as models which you are to imitate, and at the same time as rivals with whom you are to contend."

Classical sculptures from Greece and Rome represent the perfect, "ideal" form of the human body.

The RA collected plaster casts of ancient sculpture and copies of Renaissance paintings such as Leonardo's Last Supper and Raphael's Cartoons.

It also collected some original works, such as the Taddei Tondo, the only marble sculpture by Michelangelo in the UK.

Christopher Le Brun

Benjamin West PRA (1738–1820)

Thetis Bringing the Armour to Achilles

1805

In this scene from Homer's Iliad, Thetis brings a suit of armour to her distraught son Achilles. She places her hand on his shoulder and encourages him to take revenge for his friend Patroclus, who has been killed in battle. His dead body is at the right.

This work is the early stages of a painting West did not develop to a high level of finish. At the bottom right he tried two different arrangements of Patroclus's hand – one clenched and one relaxed.

West may have been thinking of the Belvedere Torso when he developed the pose for Achilles.

Oil on canvas

Acquisition details unknown

The Belvedere Torso

From Michelangelo onwards artists have taken inspiration from the well-developed musculature and slightly twisting pose of the ancient Greek sculpture called the Belvedere Torso.

Joshua Reynolds said that even though it is “a defaced and shattered fragment” it has “the traces of superlative genius”. There are many references to the Belvedere Torso in 18th-century British art. Several can be seen in this gallery.

Plaster cast. Cast c 1816 from a sculpture now in the Vatican Museums, Rome. It once stood in the Belvedere Courtyard in the Vatican Palace. It is signed ‘Apollonius, son of Nestor, Athenian’ and may date from the 1st century BC or may be a copy of a work from the 2nd century BC

Given by the Prince Regent (later George IV) in 1816
Supported by the Thompson Family Charitable Trust

Attributed to Timotheus (c 375–350 BC)

Draped Female Figure

c 375–350 BC

The Royal Academy owns many plaster casts of antique sculpture, but this is the only original sculpture from antiquity in the RA Collection.

This figure may be a nymph. The almost transparent drapery is so lightly carved that the body of the nymph appears almost naked. Originally the sculpture may have been part of the Temple of Asklepios in Greece. The back is not fully carved, suggesting it may originally have been placed in a niche.

Marble

Given by Henry Weekes RA in 1855

John Flaxman RA (1755–1826)

Apollo and Marpessa

c 1790–1794

The god Apollo catches the beautiful mortal Marpessa. The graceful gesture of her hand reaching behind her head to pull the drapery over her body halts Apollo's forward movement. Her drapery is perfectly balanced by his billowing cloak.

In the background a delicately carved sprig of ivy falls over the outline of a column.

Flaxman wrote that he wanted to "convert the beauty and grace of ancient poetry" into sculpture "without the intrusion of useless, impertinent or trivial objects".

Marble

Diploma Work given by John Flaxman in 1800 following election as a Royal Academician

Sir James Thornhill (1675–1734), copy after Raphael (1483–1520)

Right

The Blinding of Elymas

Elymas, a sorcerer and advisor to the Roman Proconsul, ordered that Paul should be punished for his Christian faith. In Paul's first miracle, Elymas is struck blind and the Proconsul converts to Christianity.

The narrative follows a series of gestures which circle round from St Paul to the Proconsul and then to the outstretched hands of blind Elymas.

Raphael creates a classical world with a complex series of arches and niches that frame the many figures crowded around the Roman Proconsul.

Oil on canvas

Copy made 1729–1731 from an original cartoon
(preparatory drawing) for tapestries in the Sistine
Chapel of 1515–1516

Given by Francis Russell, 5th Duke of Bedford, in 1800

Middle

Peter and John Curing the Lame Man

In the centre Peter holds the hand of the lame man while John blesses him. The setting of the miracle was the gate of the Temple in Jerusalem. Raphael based the ornate, twisted columns on ancient examples in St Peter's, Rome, that were thought to have come from Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem.

Oil on canvas

Copy made 1729–1731 from an original cartoon
(preparatory drawing) for tapestries in the Sistine
Chapel of 1515–1516

Given by Francis Russell, 5th Duke of Bedford, in 1800

Left

Paul Preaching in the Areopagus

Paul stands preaching in Athens in the area where the ruling council met. He spoke against worshiping false idols, represented here by the classical statue of a Greek hero, probably Achilles.

The painting includes an imagined classical architectural setting with a small round temple in the background.

Oil on canvas

Copy made 1729–1731 from an original cartoon (preparatory drawing) for tapestries in the Sistine Chapel of 1515–1516

Given by Francis Russell, 5th Duke of Bedford, in 1800

Copy after Leonardo da Vinci (1453–1519)

The Last Supper

Copy made c 1515–1520 from an original of c 1492–1497

Jesus startles his apostles by announcing that one of them will betray him. Judas, the only apostle whose face is in shadow, knocks over the salt-cellar, symbolising his future treachery.

Leonardo da Vinci painted the Last Supper on the refectory wall of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan. The original fresco deteriorated quickly and was further damaged when a door was cut into the wall through the feet of Jesus.

Recent scholarship suggests that several of Leonardo's pupils worked on this copy. It shows many details that are no longer visible in Leonardo's original fresco.

In the 17th century this copy was in a Carthusian monastery in Pavia. By 1817 it had arrived in London where it was soon purchased by the Academy to hang in the RA Schools and inspire its students.

Oil on canvas

The artists who made the copy may include Giampietrino (worked 1508–1549), Marco d'Oggiono (c 1467–c 1524) and Giovanni Antonio Boltraffio (c 1467–1516)

Purchased from H Fraville in 1821

Supported by Christian Levett and Mougins Museum of Classical Art

The Wrestlers or The Pancrastinae

In ancient Greece the martial art of pankration combined wrestling and boxing. It had very few rules and was included in the Olympic Games.

John Flaxman discussed the sculpture when he was the RA's professor of sculpture (1810–1826). He said that the wrestlers "exhibit the greatest muscular display in violent action" and admired "how rationally and justly the ancients copied nature".

Plaster cast. Cast in the late 18th or early 19th century from a Roman marble copy of a lost Greek bronze of the 4th century BC. The marble sculpture was found in Rome in 1583 and is now in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence.

Either in the RA by 1781, or given by the Prince Regent (later George IV) in 1816

Christopher Le Brun

Christopher Le Brun selected the works on display here in the Collection Gallery. He is a painter, printmaker and sculptor, and was elected President of the Royal Academy in 2011. He has been a Royal Academician since 1996 and became the RA's first Professor of Drawing in 2000. He says:

"Painting is essentially about appearances. The only way to encounter appearances is by looking. Not seeing, but looking. Looking immediately engages you in a questioning or wondering way.

"A painting can be used to carry messages and it can illustrate stories, and the bulk of paintings historically are illustrative of stories, but the type of painting that holds me contains innocent questions about the world.

"Why do things look like this? Why is there appearance at all?"

Laocoön and his Sons

Sea serpents are strangling Laocoön and his sons. The Greek god Poseidon sent them as punishment after Laocoön warned the citizens of Troy not to take the wooden horse, concealing Greek soldiers, into their city.

Artists in 18th-century Britain admired this portrayal of suffering and anguish. Joshua Reynolds declared that it has “more expression in the countenance than perhaps any other antique statue” and he admired “the writhing and contortion of the body”.

Plaster cast. Cast in the early 19th century from a Roman version of a lost Greek original made c 10–20 AD by Hagesandrus, Polidorus and Athenodorus of Rhodes. The Roman marble sculpture was discovered in Rome in 1506 and is now in the Vatican Museums
Given by the Prince Regent (later George IV) in 1816
Supported anonymously in loving memory of Catarina Vikingsdottir

Turner and Constable

Within a mere fifty years, British painting turns away from the stability of classical history painting with its focus on the figure. Turner and Constable looked to landscape, now depicted through nature's most fleeting effects of light and space.

Turner was a student and admirer of Reynolds, yet his landscapes of cloud, changing weather conditions and atmospheric colour represent a new insight into how the world appears.

Constable chose to paint places that were important to him, such as the valley of the River Stour on the border of Suffolk and Essex. He said: "These scenes made me a painter and I am grateful."

JMW Turner RA

(1775–1851)

Dolbadern Castle, North Wales

1800

This painting, one of Turner's earliest, depicts a remote Welsh castle where Prince Owain the Red was imprisoned in the late 1200s. Owain may be the person in a red tunic, being led away by soldiers.

The theme of lost liberty was important when Turner painted this picture. The government had curtailed personal freedom in fear that the French Revolution would spread to Britain.

When Turner exhibited this work, he accompanied the painting with some poetry he may have written himself:

How awful is the silence of the waste,
Where nature lifts her mountains to the sky.
Majestic solitude, behold the tower
Where hopeless OWEN, long imprison'd, pin'd,
And wrung his hands for liberty in vain.

(continued over)

Oil on canvas

Diploma Work given by JMW Turner in 1802 after election as a Royal Academician

John Constable RA (1776–1837)

The Leaping Horse

1825

The barge lowers its sail, the rope slackens and the tow horse leaps the barrier on the path. Here Constable depicts a scene in Suffolk where he spent his “careless boyhood”. He claimed that the Suffolk countryside “made him a painter”.

Constable paid great attention to weather and he described this painting as “a lovely subject, of the canal kind, lively – & soothing – calm and exhilarating, fresh – & blowing”.

Oil on canvas

Given by Mrs Dawkins in 1889

Supported by the Thompson Family Charitable Trust

Charles Robert Leslie RA (1794–1859)

Portrait of John Constable RA

c 1830

Charles Robert Leslie was a successful portrait painter but is today best known as John Constable's first biographer. Leslie painted Constable as a private memento of their friendship.

Later this became one of the most enduring public images of Constable. It contrasts with formal portraits of founding Royal Academicians such as Joshua Reynolds.

Christopher Le Brun, current RA President, says: "This modest image shows how art moved from rhetoric to conversation in the course of 50 years."

Oil on panel

Given by Isabel Constable 1886

Top row

**John Constable RA
(1776–1837)**

Landscape Study: Figures by a
Clump of Trees

c 1823

This scene is likely to be a central London park; it was once thought to show Hampstead

Oil on paper on board

Given by Isabel Constable in 1888

**John Constable RA
(1776–1837)**

Distant View of The Grove,
Hampstead

Probably 1822

A label on the back reads: "29 July 1822 looking east 10 in the morning – silvery clouds." This is likely to be a copy of Constable's original inscription.

Oil on paper on canvas

Given by Isabel Constable in 1888

John Constable RA (1776–1837)

**Landscape Study: Hampstead
Looking West**

14 July 1821

Constable sketched the view looking west towards the setting sun, with the spire of Harrow Church in the extreme distance on the left. On the back he wrote: "Hampstead July 14 1821 6 to 7 pm N.W. breeze strong."

Oil on paper on canvas

Given by Isabel Constable in 1888

Bottom row

John Constable RA (1776–1837)

Landscape Study: Scene in a Park
c 1823

It is not certain what scene is shown in this sketch. It probably shows Green Park with Apsley House on the left

Oil on paper on canvas

Given by Isabel Constable in 1888

John Constable RA (1776–1837)

Hampstead Looking West towards
Harrow (II)
c 1821

Hampstead Heath was only a short walk from Constable's London home. With its scrubby landscape of sand-hills and trees, this was one of his favourite views. A horse and carriage pass by Branch Hill Pond at the lower right hand corner. The central figure in red almost aligns with the distant church spire in Harrow village.

Oil on paper on canvas

Given by Isabel Constable in 1888

John Constable RA (1776–1837)

Hampstead Looking towards Harrow (I)

27 September 1821

Hampstead Heath was one of Constable's favourite sketching grounds for observing changing weather conditions. He often made notes on the reverse of his studies.

On this one he wrote that he made this study at 4pm on 27 September 1811 when the atmosphere was "very warm and bright after rain".

Oil on paper on board

Given by Isabel Constable in 1888

Top row

John Constable RA (1776–1837)

Waterloo Bridge from the Left
Bank of the Thames

c 1820

Constable shows the recently opened Waterloo Bridge with the teeming life of the River Thames. St Paul's Cathedral is silhouetted against the low horizon.

Oil on paper on canvas

Given by Isabel Constable in 1888

John Constable RA (1776–1837)

Seascape Study: Boat and Stormy Sky

c 1824–1828

Constable made many oil sketches on the beach at Brighton when he was visiting his wife, who stayed there in the hope of improving her health. He explained to a friend that these sketches were “done in the lid of my box on my knees as usual”.

Oil on paper on board

Given by Isabel Constable in 1888

Bottom row

John Constable RA (1776–1837)

Somerset House

c 1819

The unfinished south side of Somerset House has boats moored at its entrance arches.

The north wing was the home of the Royal Academy when Constable made this sketch.

When Constable moved to London he wrote to his fiancée: "I am hardly yet got reconciled to brick walls and dirty streets, after leaving the endearing scenes of Suffolk."

Oil on paper on canvas

Purchased in 1988

John Constable RA (1776–1837)

Seascape Study: Brighton Beach
Looking West

c 1824–1828

Constable found Brighton overcrowded with a “tumult of stage coaches”. He commented: “There is nothing here for the painter but the breakers – & the sky – which have been lovely indeed.”

Oil on paper on canvas

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