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**The Studio and Art Collection of the ‘American Raphael’:  
Benjamin West, P.R.A. (1738-1820)**

Kaylin Haverstock Weber

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

History of Art

School of Culture and Creative Arts

College of Arts

University of Glasgow

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## **Abstract**

### **The Studio and Art Collection of the ‘American Raphael’:**

#### **Benjamin West, P.R.A., 1738-1820**

Kaylin Haverstock Weber

When the history painter Benjamin West (1738-1820) died in March 1820, he left behind a remarkable monument to his life and work in his residence at 14 Newman Street, in London’s fashionable West End. Here, he had created an elaborate ‘palace’ of art, dedicated to history painting and to himself – his artistic genius, his artistic heroes, and his unique transatlantic identity. This impressive establishment was nearly fifty years in the making and part of an elaborate strategy to develop an artistic reputation as the pre-eminent history painter of his generation. While his studio has been considered by scholars as a place of pilgrimage for dozens of American students, its physicality and contents have never been thoroughly explored. Using a variety of evidence, including bank records, contemporary descriptions, and visual material, this thesis reconstructs much of this important space and collection to reveal how it was shaped and utilised by West. It combines a documentation of the spaces and objects with an analysis of their use and meaning in terms of the painter’s engagement with art theory, pedagogy, practice, collecting, display, and legacy. West, who was History Painter to George III, inhabited 14 Newman Street from 1774 to 1820, a period of dramatic expansion and cultural ambition in the London art world. Indeed, this thesis argues that 14 Newman Street and its impressive contents were more than just a history painter’s ‘palace’ of art but a place symbolic of the ideals and ambitions of British art. Following an introduction that more fully defines the aims and scope of this thesis, four chapters explore the significance of West’s house, his collections, and their display in this context. Chapter one provides an overview of his home and studio, and considers how it was designed with West’s various audiences in mind. The scope and character of his impressive

collection is examined in the second chapter with a particular focus on a selection of Old and New World objects that represent particular areas of strength within the corpus of the collection. Chapter three examines the collection as a public and private artistic resource for West and his students as well as a statement of his commitment to the grand tradition. In chapter four, West's self-promotion and exhibition strategies at Newman Street are addressed, highlighted by his exhibition of *The Death of Lord Nelson* in 1806. Developed in the dynamic context of the establishment of the Royal Academy, the proliferation of public exhibitions, and ongoing debates about national art, West's collection and studio at 14 Newman Street exemplified the aspirations of British art.

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	ii
List of Illustrations	iv
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: 14 Newman Street: The House and Studio	15
Chapter 2: The Collection of a Modern Old Master	63
Chapter 3: The ‘Sacred Flame of Emulation’: The Collection as a Private and Public Resource	127
Chapter 4: <i>The Death of Nelson</i> , West’s Wests, and the Importance of Display at Newman Street	193
Conclusion	229
Bibliography	242
Illustrations	269

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Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, American Philosophical Society, Library Company of Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art, New-York Historical Society Library, Frick Art Reference Library, Metropolitan Museum of Art Print Room and Library, Yale Center for British Art Print Room and Library, the Pierpont Morgan Museum and Library, the New York Public Library, Hirsch Library, Winterthur Library, and the Library of Congress. My sincere thanks go to certain scholars, colleagues, fellow students, and friends who have also provided support and encouragement in a variety of ways including: Leslie Scattone, Christine Gervais, Marisa Hudson-Arney, Janice Sacher, Joanna Cobb, Robyne Calvert-Miles, Michael Michael, Ailsa Boyd, Richard Bapty, Andrew Greg, Peter Black, Leonard Folgarait, Leo Costello, Desmond Shawe-Taylor, David Steel, Mark Aronson, Meredith Gamer, Matthew Fiske, Chris Riopelle, Lucy Whitaker, Martin Postle, Donato Esposito, Roberto Ferrari, Anne Woodhouse, Edgar Peters Bowron, Cindi Strauss, Sarah Cash, Jon Evans, Lynn Wexler, the late Peter C. Marzio, and Lindy McGee. I also wish to thank Mark Hallett, Martina Droth, Matthew Hargraves, and Sarah Turner for inviting me to participate in the insightful graduate seminar at Yale, ‘Making Art, Picturing Practice: The Artist’s Studio in Britain, 1700–1900’, in 2011. I appreciate the generous funding for this purpose by the Andrew Mellon Foundation.

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## List of Illustrations

- Figure 1 Benjamin West, *The Death of General Wolfe*, 1770, oil on canvas, 151 x 213.5 cm (59 ½ x 84 inches), National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, no. 8007.
- Figure 2 Issac Tyson, after David J. Kennedy, *West's House, Swarthmore*, 19<sup>th</sup> century, albumen print, 9.5 x 5.7 cm (3 ¾ x 2 ¼ inches), The Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, Pennsylvania.
- Figure 3 Matthew Pratt, *The American School*, 1765, oil on canvas, 91.4 x 127.6 cm (36 x 50 ¼ inches), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 97.29.3.
- Figure 4 Thomas Hosmer Shepherd, *View in Panton Square, Coventry Street*, c. 1840, watercolour, 17.4 x 24 cm (6 ¾ x 9 ¾ inches), The British Museum, London, 1880,113.2994.
- Figure 5 Benjamin West, *The Artist and His Family*, c. 1772, oil on canvas, 52.1 x 66.7 cm (20 ½ x 26 ¼ inches), Paul Mellon Collection, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut, B1981.25.674.
- Figure 6 Richard Horwood, Detail from *Map of Cities of London and Westminster, and the Borough of Southwark*, 1799, sheet B2, 54.2 x 50.2 cm (21 ½ x 19 ¾ inches), The London Metropolitan Archives, London.
- Figure 7 Fred Adcock, *Benjamin West's House*, an illustration in Arthur St. John Adcock, *Famous Houses and Literary Shrines of London* (London and Toronto: Dent and Sons, and New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1912), 61.
- Figure 8 Thomas Rowlandson, *A Private View (The Portrait Painter's Ante-Room)* pen and watercolour on paper, c. 1802, 12 x 20 cm (4 ¾ x 8 inches), Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, WA1863.1179.
- Figure 9 Benjamin West, *Benjamin West's Visiting Card*, card stock, 3.8 x 7.6 cm (1 ½ x 3 inches), Early American History Auctions (Rancho Santa Fe, California), 17 December 2011, lot 141.
- Figure 10 Anon., *Portrait of Thomas Stothard*, c. 1800, oil on canvas, 91.1 x 71.1 cm (35 ¾ x 28 inches), Roy Davids Ltd., Oxfordshire.
- Figure 11 Benjamin West, *Mr. West's Family in the Garden of their Residence in Newman St. London*, c. 1785-1788, pen and ink on paper, 18.4 x 23.2 cm (7 ¼ x 9 ⅛ inches), Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, Ohio, 1912.581.
- Figure 12 Benjamin West, *Mr. West's Garden, and Painting-room*, c. 1808, oil on canvas, 33 x 40.6 cm (13 x 16 inches), The National Portrait Gallery, Washington, D.C., NPG.77.34.

- Figure 13 Emily Calmady, *Sir Thomas Lawrence's Painting Room in 1824*, 65 Russell Square, 1824, pencil, heightened with touches of white, on buff paper, 22.5 x 43.5 cm (8  $\frac{7}{8}$  x 17  $\frac{1}{8}$  inches), Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut, B2006.6.
- Figure 14 George Robins, *Plan of Benjamin West's House*, 1829, engraving and colour wash, 37.5 x 22.9 cm (14  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 9 inches), Westminster City Archives, London.
- Figure 15 Benjamin West, *Three Ladies Making Music*, 1798, oil on canvas, 33 x 45.7 cm (13 x 18 inches), Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Virginia, 2007.18.
- Figure 16 Benjamin West's Collector's Mark, illustrated in Frits Lugt, *Les Marques de Collections de Dessins & d'Estampes* (Amsterdam: Vereenigde Drukkerijen, 1921), 71.
- Figure 17 Conrad M. Metz, after Raphael and his school, *Leda and the Swan* from *Imitations of Ancient and Modern Drawings*, c. 1789, etching on paper, 32.8 x 25 cm (12  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 9  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches), The British Museum, London, 1980,U.1602.
- Figure 18 Henry Singleton, *The Royal Academicians in General Assembly*, 1795, oil on canvas, 198.1 x 259 cm (78 x 102 inches), The Royal Academy of Arts, London, 03/1310.
- Figure 19 Archibald Archer, *The Trustees in the Temporary Elgin Room*, 1819, oil on canvas, 93.9 x 132.7 cm (37 x 52  $\frac{1}{4}$  inches), The British Museum, London, P.30.
- Figure 20 Raphael, *Various Studies, Chiefly for the Borghese-Beckford St Catherine*, n.d., pen and brown ink on paper, 27.9 x 17.7 cm (11 x 6  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches), Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, WA1846.177.
- Figure 21 After Raphael, *A Seated Male Nude*, 1498-1520, pen and brown ink on paper, 34.9 x 24 cm (13  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 9  $\frac{1}{3}$  inches), The British Museum, London, Pp.1.69.
- Figure 22 Michelangelo, *Head and Shoulders of a Satyr*, 1501-1503, pen and brown and grey-brown ink on paper, 13 x 13 cm (5  $\frac{1}{8}$  x 5  $\frac{1}{8}$  inches), The British Museum, London, 1895,0915.495.
- Figure 23 Andrea Mantegna, *The Calumny of Apelles*, 1504-1506, pen and brown ink, with brown wash on paper, 20.6 x 37.9 cm (8  $\frac{1}{8}$  x 14  $\frac{7}{8}$  inches), The British Museum, London, 1860,0616.85.
- Figure 24 Rembrandt van Rijn, after Mantegna, *The Calumny of Apelles*, c. 1652-54, pen and brown ink with brown wash on paper prepared with brown wash, 26.3 x 43.2 cm (10  $\frac{1}{3}$  x 17 inches), The British Museum, London, 1860,0616.86.

- Figure 25 Fra Bartolommeo, *Drapery Study*, c. 1490-1517, chalk on paper, 29 x 21.6 cm (11  $\frac{3}{8}$  x 8  $\frac{1}{2}$  inches), Museum Boijmans -Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, The Netherlands, I563 M 65.
- Figure 26 Parmigianino, *Three Figures and Part of a Fourth in a Ferry Boat*, 1518-1540, pen and grey ink with brown wash on paper, 27.9 x 20.3 cm (11 x 8 inches), The British Museum, London, 1895,0915.753.
- Figure 27 Parmigianino, *Seven Gods and Three Goddesses Seated*, c. 1518-1540, pen and brown ink on paper, 8.5 x 12 cm (3  $\frac{1}{3}$  x 4  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches), The British Museum, London, 1861,0810.3.
- Figure 28 Unknown 16<sup>th</sup>-century artist, after Parmigianino, after Raphael, *Saint Peter and Saint John Healing the Cripples at the Gate of the Temple*, c. 1530, etching, 26.3 x 40.4 cm (10  $\frac{2}{3}$  x 15  $\frac{7}{8}$  inches), The Hunterian Gallery, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, GLAHA 6376.
- Figure 29 After Guido Reni, *Head of Christ Crowned with Thorns*, 1640-1749, oil on panel, 55.8 x 42.8 cm (22 x 16  $\frac{7}{8}$  inches), The National Gallery, London, NG271.
- Figure 30 Imitator of Giorgione, *A Man in Armour*, c. 17<sup>th</sup> century, oil on panel, 40 x 27.3 (15  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 10  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches), The National Gallery, London, NG269.
- Figure 31 Agostino Carracci (formerly attributed to Titian), *The Death of Actaeon*, 1557-1602, oil on canvas, 124.5 x 182.9 cm (49 x 72 inches), North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, North Carolina, 52.9.150.
- Figure 32 Titian, *Venus and Adonis*, c. 1555-1560, oil on canvas, 178 x 200 cm (70  $\frac{1}{8}$  x 78  $\frac{7}{8}$  inches), private collection.
- Figure 33 Claude Lorrain, *Italianate Landscape (The Mill)*, c. 1636, oil on canvas, 31.8 x 38.7 cm (12  $\frac{1}{2}$  x 15  $\frac{1}{4}$  inches), Agnew's Gallery, London.
- Figure 34 Rembrandt van Rijn, *The Concord of the State*, 1637-1645, oil on panel, 74.6 x 100.9 cm (29  $\frac{3}{8}$  x 39  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches), Museum Boijmans-Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, The Netherlands, no. 1717.
- Figure 35 Peter Paul Rubens, *Study of 'Fall of the Damned'*, 1614-1625, black chalk with light brown wash, worked up with brush and oil on paper, 70.5 x 48.3 cm (27  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 19 inches), The British Museum, London, 1994, 0514.33.
- Figure 36 Peter Paul Rubens, *The Virgin as the Woman of the Apocalypse*, c. 1623-24, oil on panel, 63.5 x 49.2 cm (25 x 19  $\frac{3}{8}$  inches), The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 85.PB.146.

- Figure 37 Unknown maker, *Memorial Enclosing George Washington's Hair*, c. late 18<sup>th</sup> century, early nineteenth century, wood, pearl, gilt, glass and human hair, 8.9 cm (3 ½ inches) diameter, Missouri History Museum and Library and Research Center, St. Louis, Missouri.
- Figure 38 Jean-Jacques Caffiéri, *Portrait Bust of Benjamin Franklin*, 1777, painted plaster, h. 71.1 cm (28 inches), The New-York Historical Society, New York, 1832.3.
- Figure 39 Benjamin West, *Self-Portrait*, 1793, oil on panel, 91.4 x 69.9 cm (36 x 27 ½ inches), The Society of Dilettanti, London.
- Figure 40 John Trumbull, *The Sortie Made by the Garrison of Gibraltar*, 1787, oil on canvas, 38.4 x 56.2 cm (15 ⅞ x 22 ⅞ inches), The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 66.18.
- Figure 41 George Stubbs, *Horse Attacked by a Lion (Episode C)*, c.1768-69, oil on panel, 25.7 x 29.5 cm (10 ⅞ x 11 ⅝ inches), Paul Mellon Collection, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut, B2006, 14.1.
- Figure 42 William Elliot, after Paul Sandby, *A View of the Great Cohoes Falls, on the Mohawk River* (from series *Eight Views of North America and the West Indies*), 1761, engraving, 36.2 x 53.0 cm (14 ¼ x 22 ⅞ inches), The Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., LC-USZ62-43549.
- Figure 43 Northeast Woodland American, *Soapstone Pipe Bowl*, before 1771, soapstone with metal, 10.1 x 9.8 x 5.4 cm (4 x 3 ⅞ x 2 ⅞ inches), The British Museum, London, Am1991,09.1.
- Figure 44 Northeast Woodland American, *Wampum/Garter*, 1700-1770, wool, skin, porcupine quill, glass, and fibre, 31.7 x 8.9 cm (12 ½ x 3 ⅓ inches), The British Museum, London, Am1991,09.9.
- Figure 45 Benjamin West, *William Penn's Treaty with the Indians*, c. 1771-1772, oil on canvas, 192 x 273 cm (75 ½ x 107 ¾ inches), Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1878.1.10.
- Figure 46 Benjamin West, *The Departure of Regulus*, 1769, oil on canvas, 229.9 x 304.8 (88 ½ x 120 inches), The Royal Collection, RCIN 405417.
- Figure 47 Benjamin West, *Drawing After a Painting of the Annunciation*, Italian Sketchbook, 1760s, pencil on laid paper, 10.2 x 9 cm (4 x 3 ⅓ inches), The Royal Academy of Arts, London, 08/4498.
- Figure 48 Benjamin West, *Silhouette drawings of figure groups*, Italian Sketchbook, 1760s, pencil on laid paper, 12 x 8.5 cm (4 ¾ x 3 ⅓ inches), The Royal Academy of Arts, London, 08/4469.

- Figure 49 Benjamin West, *Sketch of a Neoclassical Building and Vase*, Italian Sketchbook, 1760s, pen and ink on laid paper, 12.2 x 8.3 cm (4  $\frac{7}{8}$  x 3  $\frac{1}{3}$  inches), The Royal Academy of Arts, London, 08/4486.
- Figure 50 Alfred Edward Chalon, *Students at the British Institution*, 1805, pen and brown ink, with watercolour on paper, 31.1 x 53.1 cm (12  $\frac{1}{4}$  x 20  $\frac{7}{8}$  inches), The British Museum, London, 1879,0614.757.
- Figure 51 Benjamin West, *The Artist's Wife, Elizabeth, and Their Son Raphael*, c. 1773, oil on canvas, 67.3 x 67.3 cm (26  $\frac{1}{2}$  x 26  $\frac{1}{2}$  inches), Paul Mellon Collection, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut, B1977.14.112.
- Figure 52 Jacopo Tintoretto, *Christ on the Cross*, c. 1540-1594, black chalk heightened with whites on grey paper, 39.4 x 26 cm (15  $\frac{1}{2}$  x 10  $\frac{1}{4}$  inches), The Victoria and Albert Museum, London, DYCE.235.
- Figure 53 Benjamin West, *Venus Lamenting the Death of Adonis*, 1768-1819, oil on canvas, 157.5 x 172.7 cm (62 x 68 inches), Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 11.2.
- Figure 54 Benjamin West, *Cupid and Psyche*, 1808, oil on canvas, 134.6 x 142.2 cm (53 x 56 inches), Crystal Bridges Museum of Art, Arkansas.
- Figure 55 Benjamin West, *Design for the Ceiling of the Royal Chapel, Windsor Castle*, c. 1780, pen, wash, and watercolour, heightened with white on paper, 52.7 x 33 cm (20  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 13 inches), The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas, 2007.1461.a,b.
- Figure 56 Benjamin West, *Death on the Pale Horse*, 1796, oil on canvas, 59.7 x 128.3 cm (23  $\frac{1}{2}$  x 50  $\frac{1}{2}$  inches), Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, Michigan, 79.33.
- Figure 57 Schelte A. Bolswert, after Rubens, *The Lion Hunt*, 1630-1645, engraving, 42.3 x 59.3 cm (16  $\frac{5}{8}$  x 23  $\frac{1}{3}$  inches), The British Museum, London, R,5.4.
- Figure 58 Titian, *Horse and Rider Falling*, n.d., black chalk on grey paper, 27.3 x 26.2 cm (10  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 10  $\frac{1}{4}$  inches), The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, WA1895.6.
- Figure 59 Benjamin West, *Landscape Representing the Country Near Windsor (A View in Windsor Great Park)*, c. 1785, oil on canvas, 152.4 x 215.3 cm (60 x 84  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches), The Royal Collection, RCIN 406917.
- Figure 60 Benjamin West, *Landscape Study with a Tool Shed*, n.d., pen, ink and wash over graphite on three joined sheets of paper, 17.1 x 33.6 cm (6  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 13  $\frac{1}{4}$  inches), The British Museum, London, 1887,0613.4.

- Figure 61      Salvator Rosa, *A Man Seated on a Bank Beneath a Large Tree*, c. 1650-1660, pen and brown ink, 41.3 x 31.1 cm (16 ¼ x 12 ¼ inches), The British Museum, London, Pp,5.105.
- Figure 62      Claude Lorrain, *Tomb of Cecilia Metella*, 1669, black chalk with pen and brown ink and grey-brown washes on a fine-surfaced, off-white paper, 17.7 x 25.2 cm (6 ⅞ x 9 ⅞ inches), Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, WA1855.55.
- Figure 63      Benjamin West, *Herne's Tree*, 1788, graphite and brown wash touched with cream, light blue, and green chalk on grey-brown paper, 23.8 x 17.1 cm (9 ⅜ x 6 ¾ inches), The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts, 42.596.
- Figure 64      Rembrandt van Rijn, *Cottage near the Entrance to a Wood*, 1644, pen and ink on paper, 29.8 x 45.4 cm (11 ¾ x 17 ⅞ inches), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1975.1.792.
- Figure 65      Northeast Woodland American, *Pouch*, 1750-1770, wool, quill, metal, glass and hair, 66 x 18 cm (25 ⅞ x 7 ⅞ inches), The British Museum, London, Am1991.09.4.
- Figure 66      Bartolomeo Passarotti, *Studies of Hands*, n.d., pen and brown ink on paper, 41.9 x 28.6 cm (16 ½ x 11 ¼ inches), Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, WA1846.137.
- Figure 67      Annibale Carracci, *A Series of Caricature Heads in Profile*, 1575-1609, pen and grey brown ink on paper, 19.4 x 13.5 cm (7 ¾ x 5 ¼ inches), The British Museum, London, Pp,3.17.
- Figure 68      Bartolommeo Mazza, after Jan van der Straet, *The Practitioners of the Visual Arts; an Academy*, 1580, engraving, 45.4 x 29.5 cm (17 ¾ x 11 ⅝ inches), The British Museum, London, Ii,5.111.
- Figure 69      Edward Francis Burney, *The Antique School at New Somerset House*, c. 1780, pen and ink with watercolour wash on laid paper, 33.5 x 48.5 cm (13 ¼ x 19 ⅞ inches), The Royal Academy of Arts, London, 03/7484.
- Figure 70      Matthew Pratt, after West, after Correggio, *Madonna and Child with St. Jerome*, 1764-66, oil on canvas, 77.7 x 60 cm (30 ⅝ x 23 ⅝ inches), The National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C, 1944.17.1.
- Figure 71      Benjamin West, *The Death of Lord Nelson*, 1806, oil on canvas, 178 x 244 cm (70 x 96 inches), Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, WAG3132.
- Figure 72      Thomas Sandby, *The Royal Academy Annual Exhibition of 1792: The Great Room, East Wall*, 1792, pen and ink with wash on laid paper, 22.2 x 33 cm (8 ¾ x 13 inches), The Royal Academy of Arts, London, 08/2013.

- Figure 73 John Singleton Copley, *The Death of the Earl of Chatham*, 1779-1781, oil on canvas, 228.6 x 307.3 cm (90 x 121 inches), National Portrait Gallery, London (lent by Tate Britain, 1968), NPG L146.
- Figure 74 John Trumbull, *Death of General Warren at the Battle of Bunker's Hill, June 17, 1775*, 1786, oil on canvas, 63.5 x 86.4 cm (25 x 34 inches), Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut, 1832.1.
- Figure 75 Benjamin West, *The Death of the Earl of Chatham*, c. 1778-1786, oil on canvas, 71 x 90.8 cm (28 x 35  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches), Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut, B2009.10.
- Figure 76 Benjamin West, *Signing of the Preliminary Treaty of Peace in 1782*, 1783-84, oil on canvas, 72.4 x 92.7 cm (28  $\frac{1}{2}$  x 36  $\frac{1}{2}$  inches), Henry Francis Du Pont Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Delaware, 1957.856.
- Figure 77 Arthur William Devis, *The Death of Nelson, 21 October 1805*, 1807, oil on canvas, 195.6 x 261.6 cm (77  $\frac{1}{8}$  x 102  $\frac{7}{8}$  inches), National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, BHC2894.
- Figure 78 James Heath, after Benjamin West, *Key to the Portraits &c in the Print from Mr. West's Picture of the Death of Lord Nelson*, 1811, engraving on paper, 42.7 x 62.4 cm (16  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 24  $\frac{1}{2}$  inches), The British Museum, London, 1841,0809.148.a.
- Figure 79 Benjamin West, *The Immortality of Nelson*, 1807, oil on canvas, 90 x 75 cm (35  $\frac{1}{2}$  x 29  $\frac{1}{2}$  inches), National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, BHC2905.
- Figure 80 Benjamin West, *The Death of Lord Nelson in the Cockpit of the Victory*, 1808, oil on canvas, 87.5 x 72.5 cm (34  $\frac{1}{2}$  x 28  $\frac{1}{2}$  inches), National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, BHC0566.
- Figure 81 Benjamin West, *Sketch for a Monument to Lord Nelson (The Apotheosis of Nelson)*, 1807, oil on canvas, 100.5 x 74.5 cm (39  $\frac{5}{8}$  x 29  $\frac{1}{4}$  inches), Paul Mellon Collection, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut, B1977.14.109.
- Figure 82 Benjamin West, *The Battle of La Hogue*, 1778-1806, oil on canvas, 164 x 244 cm (64  $\frac{1}{2}$  x 96 inches), Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut, B2009.2.
- Figure 83 Benjamin West, *Study for the Picture of The Destruction of the French Fleet at La Hogue*, 1780, pen and brown ink, with grey wash on paper, 16 x 24.8 cm (6  $\frac{1}{3}$  x 9  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches), The British Museum, London, 1860,0609.1.

- Figure 84 Benjamin West, *Sketch for the Installation of 'Christ Rejected by the Jews'*, 1813, pen and brown ink, on heavy oatmeal paper, 36.5 x 51.9 cm (14  $\frac{3}{8}$  x 29  $\frac{3}{8}$  inches), The Pierpont Morgan Library and Museum, New York, 1970.11:28.
- Figure 85 John Pasmore, *West's Gallery*, c. 1821, oil on canvas, 74.8 x 61.6 cm (29  $\frac{1}{2}$  x 24  $\frac{1}{4}$  inches), Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut, 1956.75.
- Figure 86 Kaylin Weber, *14 Newman Street*, 2010, digital photograph, London.
- Figure 87 John Le Keux, after George Cattermole, *West's Picture Gallery*, 1821, engraving on paper, 10.8 x 17.5 cm (4  $\frac{1}{4}$  x 6  $\frac{7}{8}$  inches), The British Museum, London, 1937,0729.189.
- Figure 88 Thomas Lawrence, *Benjamin West*, 1818-1821, oil on canvas, 271.7 x 176.5 cm (107 x 69  $\frac{1}{2}$  inches), Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut, 1855.1.





## Introduction

In a review of the 1774 Royal Academy exhibition, a writer for *The Public Advertiser* expounded on the remarkable success of the history painter Benjamin West (1738-1820):

Mr. West undoubtedly stands amongst the first Artists in the present Age in the Line of Historical Painting; and I do not scruple to place him before Mr. Hamilton in Rome, Pompeo Battoni, or even the Chevalier Menks...Mr. West has already executed many large Historical Pieces, which are generally well composed and well group'd...I have heard it frequently asserted many Years ago, that if a good Historical Painter was to arise in this Country, yet he would not find sufficient Encouragement as the People here have no Taste, except for Landscapes or Portraits...Mr. West has happily experienced the contrary, as many of his Historical Pictures are to be found in the Cabinets of the Nobility &c...<sup>1</sup>

Though eighteenth-century theory expounded history painting as the most elevated category of art, as the reviewer conveyed, there was a pervading doubt as to whether the country would ever have a successful exponent of the genre, much less the patronage and audience to support them. Hence, the 'contrary' experience of West, with the unprecedented success of his seminal *The Death of General Wolfe* (fig. 1), as well as the exclusive patronage of George III, beginning in 1772, made him an exemplary anomaly in the London art world. West capitalised on his distinctive position. In the same year as the cited review, he purchased his new residence at 14 Newman Street which, over the course of the next nearly fifty years, would develop into an elaborate 'temple' to history painting and to himself. His impressive establishment was part of an elaborate plan to cultivate his artistic reputation as one of the pre-eminent history painters of his generation.

West had a distinct vision for his career and his place within the history of British art, as it began to take shape during the reign of George III. He built his reputation on being a

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<sup>1</sup> *The Public Advertiser*, 30 April 1774, 2. The anonymous reviewer signed his name 'Dilettante'. Throughout this thesis, I have retained the original spelling from contemporary documents.

modern history painter deeply indebted to the Old Masters with a unique New World perspective. To underscore the beginnings of his identity-making process one only has to consider the triumph of *The Death of General Wolfe*, a model for decades of death-of-hero pictures, which married the conventions of Old Master paintings with elements of ‘historical truth’, including reportage, portraiture, North American topography, authentic uniforms, and Native American costumes. Aligning himself with the Royal Academy, which he helped to found in 1768, West was deeply indebted to the art of the past throughout his career. His veneration of Old Masters was not only inherent in his art, but was also exemplified in his collection, and became a life-long preoccupation in his theories on art and pedagogy. Though less prominent, his transatlantic identity maintained an underlying presence in his life and art, particularly in his contemporary history paintings, and was embodied in his collection of contemporary art and his network of transatlantic friends. West sought to reinforce and develop these aspects of his identity throughout his life, and nowhere did it come together more fluently than inside 14 Newman Street.

West’s evolution from a colonial portraitist to a royal painter and President of the Royal Academy (elected 1792) paralleled the increasing grandeur of the studios that he inhabited during his long career, from a rented room in a small alley in 1750s Philadelphia to the private house of a gentleman-artist in late-eighteenth-century London.<sup>2</sup> His residence at Newman Street was the culmination of his artistic achievements and identity. In the late eighteenth century, establishing a fashionable residence filled with a notable art collection in a part of town near aristocratic patrons was almost requisite for artists of West’s position and

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<sup>2</sup> West was named Historical Painter to the King in 1772 (often referred to as ‘History Painter to the King’) and succeeded Sir Joshua Reynolds in 1792 as the second president of the Royal Academy of Arts in London. His first studio was a rented one-room accommodation in Strawberry Alley in Philadelphia in c.1756, which will be discussed in the first chapter of this thesis. W. Dunlap, *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States*, 2 vols. (1834; repr., New York: Dover Publications, 1969), 1:43-44, and H. Von Erffa and A. Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986), 434-435.

especially one with his level of cultural and social ambition. The model of aspiration for such houses and collections was that of the most prominent artist in London, Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792) at 47 Leicester Square, with its famous octagon-shaped painting room and adjoining gallery filled with his Old Master collection.<sup>3</sup> Reynolds's studio and home set the standard as a symbol of artistic achievement and became an important artistic, cultural, and social centre. Aware of the studio's role in attracting an audience and patronage, West created a residence that was equal to Reynolds's house and other contemporaries, but that was differentiated by its particular focus and his particular niche – history painting.

With the proliferation of public art exhibitions from the 1760s onwards, artists' studios became just one of several arenas for the display of modern British art. The primary platform for displaying art from 1769 onwards was the Royal Academy. In its annual exhibitions, history paintings, because of their elevated position in the hierarchy of art and large physical dimensions, were given prominent positions on the walls. Though these exhibitions offered greater exposure to the public than ever before, artists had very little control over the display and reception of their works. In this new and dynamic exhibition culture, powerful hanging committees, often composed of only a few Academicians, dictated the way art was displayed and in many ways interpreted.<sup>4</sup> The crowded displays, filled with all genres of pictures, yet dominated by portraiture, were less than ideal for the presentation of large-scale, complex history paintings. Artists clamoured for more attention and sought new ways to promote their art, often changing their production – revising canvas sizes, colouring, and subject matter – in an effort to get better placement in the exhibition and draw

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<sup>3</sup> R. Wendorf, *Sir Joshua Reynolds: The Painter in Society* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996), 103-104.

<sup>4</sup> For more about the Royal Academy Hanging Committee, see J. Sunderland and D. Solkin, 'Staging the Spectacle', in D. Solkin, ed., *Art on the Line* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 23-38.

more attention visually.<sup>5</sup> In the arena of the Academy exhibitions, West excelled. A master of self-promotion and display, his grand-scale, vibrantly-painted history paintings were prominently presented. Many of his contemporaries found the environment challenging, and in the case of monumental contemporary paintings impossible to deal with, so they sought other venues for the exhibition of their pictures. By the mid-1780s, one-man and one-picture shows outside the confines of the Academy became the dominant form of display and advertisement for history paintings and their associated prints. Throughout this period, West, a devoted Academician and royal painter, dutifully continued to exhibit his history paintings at the Academy annually.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout the rest of the year, however, his studio became his principal exhibition stage where he introduced patrons to his newest history paintings before and after their public display at the Academy. Here, West could wield greater control over the display of his paintings, showcasing his broader talent and developing his reputation. His displays were staged to communicate his expertise in ways not possible in the public exhibitions, such as exhibiting history paintings in various stages of production and demonstrating his painting skills live in front of visitors. The very personal form and content of his studio and collection evolved over a period of nearly fifty years supporting his calculated process of identity-making and, of course, selling art. He designed every part of the building, its interior and contents, to showcase his grand-scale history paintings and his impressive art collection. Over the years, he adapted the space frequently to suit his changing needs and the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., and M. Hallett, 'The Business of Criticism: The Press and the Royal Academy Exhibition in Eighteenth-Century London', in Solkin 2001, 68.

<sup>6</sup> During West's presidency from 1792-1805 and 1806-1820, he felt obliged to have a presence at the annual exhibitions. Beginning with the inaugural exhibition in 1769, he exhibited continuously at the Academy until his death. The year 1806, when he resigned the presidency amid controversy, was the only year that he did not send a painting to the exhibition. Chapter 4 of this thesis will explore the 1806 exhibition in his studio.

expectations of his various audiences. His home and collection were a theatrical backdrop for the presentation of his history paintings to his patrons and public; a place of inspiration for dozens of American artists who made a pilgrimage to London in hopes of elevating their own art; and the setting of a variety of social and political gatherings. When the German novelist Sophie von la Roche (1731-1807) visited West's house in 1786, she described the visitor experience:

We found West, the painter of historical scenes, there in person, surrounded by pupils and masterpieces by his own hand. He received us nobly, though unassumingly, in the manner of all great achievement. He works in a room lit from above, and the gallery leading to it is hung with sketches of completed pictures of which engravings had been made. He showed us some of the large historical canvases he is painting... Then he led us to his collection of old and modern masters, for he possesses one choice piece by every famous painter.<sup>7</sup>

As her observation reveals and as most visitors reiterated, the great history painter, teacher, and art collector could always be found at the centre of this lively artistic space, surrounded by a unique assemblage of the art, objects, and people that defined him. Every aspect of 14 Newman Street articulated that this was the domain of a modern history painter, from his large-scale pictures, representing biblical, mythological, classical, and modern subjects, to his plaster casts after antiquity and Native American artefacts.

Newman Street housed West's collection of his own works as well as an impressive collection of the art and objects of others. In his collecting, he followed an established European lineage of artist-collectors that included Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), Peter Lely (1618-1680), Jonathan Richardson (1665-1745), and Reynolds. However, West's collection was not just the collection of an artist, but that of a royal painter, President of the Royal Academy, aspiring gentleman, and transatlantic figure. In his collection, like in his art and

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<sup>7</sup> S. von la Roche, *Sophie in London, 1786, Being the Diary of Sophie v. la Roche*, eds. C. Williams and G. M. Trevelyan (London: Jonathan Cape, 1933), 152-153.

life, West brought together the Old and New Worlds. He assembled an extensive, yet relatively unknown, collection of Old Master and contemporary prints, drawings, paintings and sculpture, as well as ethnographic artefacts and curiosities from several parts of the world.

West's studio and collection developed over a dynamic fifty-year period that not only witnessed the great highs and lows of his long career, but also a pivotal moment in the development of British art. This era was characterised by collective and individual efforts to create and define a national school of painting, centred on history painting, which was highlighted in various highly-prescribed treatises and discourses of the period dealing with everything from painting practices to professional ambition. In this context, West's studio and collection exemplified many of the particularities of collecting, display, patronage, art-making, and training of the period. Though West's studio is well-known and pervasive in the annals of American art history as a place of pilgrimage for three generations of American students, an actual study of the physical environment does not exist.<sup>8</sup> Indeed though his collection was described in an 1820 Christie's sale catalogue as 'the splendid collection...so universally known', there have been no publications dedicated to the subject.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, despite the significance of West's activities as an art collector and as an advisor to several important eighteenth-century collectors, including George III, this aspect of his career has not been given serious attention, having only been mentioned in passing in the litany of West

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<sup>8</sup> West's inclusion in recent studies of artists' houses and neighbourhoods has reinforced the prominence of his studio in the late eighteenth century as the 'nucleus of the artistic community' around which younger generations of artists gravitated. See G. Walkley, *Artists' Houses in London, 1764-1914* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1994), 14-15, and K. Wedd, *Artist's London: Holbein to Hirst* (London: Merrell, 2001), 66-72.

<sup>9</sup> The only part of the collection to be published was a group of twelve Native American artefacts that remained among the West descendants and now belong to the British Museum, London. For a detailed examination of these objects, see J. C. H. King, 'Woodland Artifacts from the Studio of Benjamin West, 1738-1820', *American Indian Art Magazine* 17, no. 1 (Winter 1991): 34-45.

scholarship, and never within the context of the history of collecting.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the first biography written about West by the Scottish writer John Galt (1779-1839), which is largely interpreted as West's own calculated effort to mythologise his life, does not address the studio or collection.<sup>11</sup> Galt's biography remains the basis for many studies of West. Given West's prominence as a public figure during this significant period in the history of British art and his widely-considered positions as the 'Father of British History Painting' as well as the 'Father of American Art', the study of his studio and collection is an important one.

This thesis examines the studio and collection of West in aesthetic, ideological, and functional terms as an expression of his unique artistic identity and his personal vision for British history painting. Through an exploration of the spaces and objects that surrounded his artistic practice, the various ways he aligned with and supported the key aspects of his identity will become clear. The period covered by this study will be primarily from 1774 to 1820, during West's inhabitancy of Newman Street, which coincides roughly with his royal patronage by George III. By bringing together a variety of evidence, including bank accounts, floor plans, auction catalogues, diaries, contemporary descriptions, and visual material, this thesis will partially reconstruct this important space and collection to reveal how it was developed, shaped, and utilised by West. This study will focus on what the

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<sup>10</sup> J. Galt, *The Life, Studies, and Works of Benjamin West, Esq., President of the Royal Academy of London / Composed from Materials Furnished by Himself*, 2 vols. (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1820). Though universally seen as part of West's calculated plan to craft his own identity, the Galt biography formed the basis of many studies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, beginning with William Dunlap (who does have some criticism of the absurdities of some of the passages, see Dunlap 1834/1969, 1:34-35), and A. Cunningham, *The Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters and Sculptors*, 3 vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1837). The chief publications on West's life and career published within the last fifty years include: R. Kraemer, *Drawings by Benjamin West and His Son, Raphael Lamar West* (Boston: D. R. Godine and New York: The Pierpont Morgan Library, 1975); R. Alberts, *Benjamin West: A Biography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978); D. Evans, *Benjamin West and His American Students* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1980); A. Abrams, *The Valiant Hero: Benjamin West and Grand-Style History Painting* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1985); Von Erffa and Staley 1986; and A. Trumble and M. Aronson, *Benjamin West and the Venetian Secret* (New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, 2008). With the exception of Alberts and Evans, all of these publications include little more than a page description on West's studio and collection.

<sup>11</sup> One of the most compelling recent analyses of the Galt biography is S. Rather, 'Benjamin West, John Galt, and the Biography of 1816', *The Art Bulletin* 86, no. 2 (June 2004): 324-345.



objects, their production, acquisition, composition, arrangement, display, function, and use within the context of 14 Newman Street reveal in terms of West's artistic life, identity, and legacy. This approach provides a new means of investigating West's career in terms of his artistic practice, training, collecting, patronage, and display, as well as his overall strategy for crafting his own reputation and identity.

The first two chapters of the study set the stage by documenting physical aspects and contents of the home and collection. The first chapter examines the physical details of the house, its layout and arrangement, and explores how it was designed with West's audience in mind. In the second chapter, the scope and character of his impressive collection will be examined and expressed through a selection of Old and New World objects that represent particular areas of focus within the corpus of the collection. Chapters 3 and 4 will use the objects as a point of departure to explore the function, use, and meaning of the collection as a public and private artistic resource for him and his students as well as a statement of his theories. West's self-promotion and exhibition strategies at Newman Street will also be examined, highlighted by the preparation and execution of his exhibition of *The Death of Lord Nelson* in 1806.

Research and scholarship in the history of collecting, and particularly the sub-field of artist-collectors, has blossomed in recent decades. The majority of such studies about prominent British artist-collectors have been monographic and largely focus on the dominant field of portrait painters, principally those who were native-born. The studies of the art collections of Richardson, Reynolds, and Richard Cosway (1742-1821) have brought new understanding to eighteenth-century artists' tastes, theories, and networks.<sup>12</sup> This study will

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<sup>12</sup> For the collection of Richardson, see C. Gibson-Wood, 'A Judiciously Disposed Collection: Jonathan Richardson Senior's Cabinet of Drawings', in C. Baker, C. Elam and G. Warwick, eds., *Collecting Prints and Drawings in Europe, c. 1500-1750* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 155-172. For the collection of Cosway, see S.

add to the growing body of literature by examining the unique environment and collection of a specialist history painter. The majority of existing artist-collector literature has taken one of two forms: inventories and, for lack of better terms, synopses and summaries. While this study intends to be the most extensive documentation of West's collection, this is not an exhaustive inventory. The composition of the collection will be revealed using an episodic approach, through a representative selection of objects that are either extant in public collections or are well-documented by West or his contemporaries. The objects selected will attest to West's choices and selection of objects that either resonated closely with his own art, were representative of his transatlantic world, or that exemplified his skills as a connoisseur. The entire 'lives' of these objects, their history from creation until today, will not be documented, but rather the period when they belonged to West. Additionally, the paintings by West that remained in the house will be considered as part of his collection, but will not be given the same level of attention as the objects he owned by other artists. Several archival and published contemporary documents already detail the hundreds of works by him that remained in the studio, and those sources will be leveraged in this analysis.<sup>13</sup>

In the absence of an inventory, most of our knowledge about the collection is based on the posthumous sale catalogues, beginning in 1820 and the last occurring in 1898.<sup>14</sup> A

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Lloyd, 'Richard Cosway, R.A.: The Artist as Collector, Connoisseur and Virtuoso', *Apollo* 133, no. 352 (June 1991): 398-405, and S. Lloyd, 'The Cosway Inventory of 1820: Listing Unpaid Commissions and the Contents of 20 Stratford Place, Oxford Street, London', *The Walpole Society* 66 (2004): 163-217. For Reynolds's collection, see F. Broun, 'Sir Joshua Reynolds's Collection of Paintings', doctoral thesis, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey, 1987; and Wendorf 1996.

<sup>13</sup> 'A Correct Catalogue of the Works of Mr. West,' *Public Characters of 1805* (London, 1805): 559-569; 'A Correct List of the Works of Mr. West', *Universal Magazine* 3 (1805): 527-532; and 'A Correct Catalogue of the Works of Benjamin West, Esq.,' *La Belle Assemblée* 4 (1808): Supplement, 13-20.

<sup>14</sup> The sales of West's collection include: Christie's, 9-14 June 1820 (Lugt 9819); Christie's, 23-24 June 1820 (Lugt 9830); Christie's, 1 July 1820 (Lugt 9833); Christie's, 28 May, 1824 (Lugt 10687); Robins, 20-22 June 1829 (Lugt 12094); Robins, 16 July 1831 (Lugt 12725); Sotheby's, 11 May 1836 (Lugt 14347); and Christie's, 18-19 March 1898 (Lugt 56083). The majority of the collection was sold between 1820 and 1836. The Lugt references given can be found in F. Lugt, *Répertoire des Catalogues de Ventes Publiques Intéressant l'Art ou la*

variety of contemporary documents provide supplemental, valuable details about the collection in the context of the studio and about West as a collector. For example, West's account records at Coutts Bank in London, though not complete, are useful for understanding his expenditures for the collection and alterations to the property.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, an account book kept by his wife, Elizabeth West (1741-1814), during a five-year period in the 1780s records similar types of financial expenditures.<sup>16</sup> The diaries of fellow artists Joseph Farington (1747-1821) and William Dunlap (1766-1839), in particular, reveal a great deal about the late history (c. 1800-1820) of the collection and studio.<sup>17</sup> These sources enable the objects to be restored to the social, intellectual, and functional contexts through which they were viewed and used during the period they were owned by West. Eighteenth-century auction catalogues also provide an essential understanding of West's activities as a buyer and seller in the public market. Since he did not personally record these types of activities, the catalogues where he is annotated as a buyer enable a better understanding of the types of art he bought and the prices paid. The absence of West's acquisition records precludes a precise and complete chronology of the development of the collection. However, by examining the acquisition of several well-documented objects in the collection, West's methods of selection, modes of acquisition, and international art networks, including his relationships with dealers

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*Curiosité, Vers 1600-1825* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1938). The primary sales of West's collection will be discussed in detail in chapter two of this thesis.

<sup>15</sup> Benjamin West Account Ledgers, Thomas Coutts Bank Archives, London. I appreciate the help of West descendent, Giles de Margary, whose permission enabled my access to these important financial records.

<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth West, Mrs. West's 5-Year Account Book (1785-1789), SAFE 037, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania.

<sup>17</sup> J. Farington, *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, 16 vols, 1-7, ed. K. Garlick and A. Macintyre, 8-16, ed. K. Cave (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978-1998), and W. Dunlap, *Diary of William Dunlap (1766-1839): The Memoirs of a Dramatist, Theatrical Manager, Painter, Critic, Novelist, and Historian*, 3 vols. (New York: New York Historical Society, 1930; New York and London: Benjamin Blom, 1969).

such as the American auctioneer-artist John Greenwood (1727-1792), and intermediaries such as the American artist John Trumbull (1756-1843), will also be elucidated.

West's collection functioned on both public and private levels as a source of artistic inspiration and identity, and a model of taste. As an artist he collected objects that inspired and challenged his own art, and as a public figure and teacher he collected objects that inspired and educated others while also reinforcing his artistic identity. By studying his paintings in relation to objects in his collection, the particular impact of the collection on the production of art in West's studio becomes clear. A number of recent studies have similarly addressed the relationships of artists of this period with the Old Masters, most notable among them the edited volume by David Solkin, *Turner and the Masters*.<sup>18</sup> West's traditional artistic methods were guided largely by academic theory from seventeenth-century France and Italy, which were accepted as well as challenged inside and outside the Academy during this time. His use of Old Master models and conventions can be viewed in the context of the changing notions of art and practice in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries with a move away from academic rigidity towards naturalism. West's collection was also a pedagogic resource for his students and fellow Academicians.<sup>19</sup> His academic curriculum for his students naturally complemented that of the Royal Academy, and was supported by his collection as a resource for the contemplation and study of what he called 'the sources of true taste'.<sup>20</sup> The students' interactions with the collection reveal the role of replication, imitation,

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<sup>18</sup> D. Solkin, ed., *Turner and the Masters* (London: Tate Publishing, 2009).

<sup>19</sup> Evans 1980, 148-151. This important publication about West and his American Students was the first to define the range of pupils and their chronology; however, it did not focus extensively on West's artistic activities or the environment, and only briefly mentioned the collection.

<sup>20</sup> Letter from Benjamin West to John Singleton Copley, 6 January 1773, in J. S. Copley and H. Pelham, *The Letters & Papers of John Singleton Copley and Henry Pelham, 1739-1776*, ed. Guernsey Jones, (1914, repr., New York: Da Capo, 1970), 194.

and originality in his artistic practice and pedagogy, and reinforce West's unwavering alignment with the Academy.

West selected 14 Newman Street as a suitable address and structure to house his family, large artistic practice, and art collection. Several recent studies have been especially useful for understanding the significance of his choice of location in London and the building itself, notably by Giles Walkley and Kit Wedd, which emphasise the importance of proximity to patrons, suppliers, and the greater artistic community.<sup>21</sup> The alterations West made to the house to meet his distinct specifications will be addressed as well as the role the house played, through its contents, design, layout, and general ambiance, as a vehicle for promoting his artistic ideologies, creative process, and aesthetic taste – and, above all, for displaying and selling art. Most writers who examine the commercial business of painting during this period, most notably Marcia Pointon in *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England*, focus on the pervasive portrait painter's studio.<sup>22</sup> This study provides a complementary view of how commercial concerns directly impacted art production and display in a history painter's studio.

West devised novel strategies for the display and arrangement of his paintings and works from his collection inside Newman Street to promote his art and to attract visitors. Understanding how the collection and West's own works were displayed and arranged enriches our understanding of how the art was understood, interpreted, and experienced in the space. Recent scholarship in the history of collecting recognises the importance of different

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<sup>21</sup> See Walkley 1994 and Wedd 2001.

<sup>22</sup> See M. Pointon, 'Portrait Painting as a Business Enterprise in London in the 1780s', *Art History* 7 (1984): 187-205, and M. Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993). For a discussion of the commercial issues for history painters, see L. Lippincott, 'Expanding on Portraiture: The Market, the public, and the hierarchy of genres in eighteenth-century Britain', in A. Bermingham and J. Brewer, eds., *The Consumption of Culture 1600-1800: Image, Object and Text* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 75-88.

meanings invested in works of art depending on their setting and arrangement.<sup>23</sup> West's modern display techniques, including his use of a series of connected rooms, tilted hangs, dramatic draperies, and top-lighting, will be addressed in the context of the other types of exhibitions prevalent at the time, and against which he was competing for the attention of the London audience. Furthermore, recent studies on public exhibitions and displays of art, most prominent among them, David Solkin's edited volume *Art on the Line*, consider the issues of politics, self-promotion, pictorial dialogue, and various spectator-driven display techniques within the Royal Academy exhibitions that relate to the types of exhibition strategies West employed in his studio.<sup>24</sup> The studies of individual history painting shows of contemporary artists such as John Singleton Copley (1738-1815) and Joseph Wright of Derby (1734-1797) by scholars including Emily Neff and John Bonehill address the particular importance of display strategies in the commercial success of history paintings.<sup>25</sup> While West was not exhibiting exclusively in his studio, it was the only venue where he displayed his paintings in dialogue with his collection. In the instance of his *Death of Lord Nelson* exhibition in 1806 in his studio, he manipulated the space using several of his earlier masterpieces and Old Master pictures to create narratives and associations that asserted his belief that his art was the culmination of a long lineage of artistic achievement in the progress of arts.

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<sup>23</sup> The importance of the setting of a collection has been most fully studied in the publications dedicated to aristocratic and merchant collectors where the houses are often considered as important as the collections. For a detailed study of the London setting of a collection, see H. McCormack, 'Housing the Collection: The Great Windmill Street Anatomy Theatre and Museum', in P. Black, ed., *My Highest Pleasure: William Hunter's Art Collection* (London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2011), 101-116. Several recent studies have situated the collection within the artist's home. For example, see K. Belkin, F. Healy, and J. Muller, *A House of Art: Rubens as Collector* (Antwerp: Rubenshuis & Rubenianum, 2004).

<sup>24</sup> Solkin 2001. For a further look at pictorial dialogue and interactions in the exhibition, see M. Hallett, 'Reading the Walls: Pictorial Dialogue at the British Royal Academy', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 37, no. 4 (Summer 2004): 581-604.

<sup>25</sup> E. Neff, *John Singleton Copley in England* (Houston: Museum of Fine Arts in association with London: Merrell Holberton, 1995), and J. Bonehill, 'Laying Siege to the Royal Academy: Wright of Derby's *View of Gibraltar* at Robin's Rooms, Covent Garden, April 1785', *Art History* 30, no. 4 (September 2007): 521-544.

Keenly aware of his own legacy from very early on in his career, West consciously created a space and collection that made an ambitious statement about his social ambitions, artistic achievements, and vision for British history painting, as well as his unique identity that combined the new and old, ‘the American Raphael’.<sup>26</sup> It all came together at Newman Street. As Sophie von la Roche surmised, he was an artist who lived ‘as if in the hall of the temple of the Muses, in rooms of magnificent style, fit for true genius to unfold’.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *The Public Advertiser*, 23 April 1764, 2.

<sup>27</sup> Roche 1933, 153. When Sophie von la Roche made this statement, she had just left West’s house and arrived at his former student Gilbert Stuart’s (1755-1828) home, where she equated his house to his master’s.

## Chapter 1: 14 Newman Street: The House and Studio

Fourteen Newman Street made an ambitious statement about Benjamin West's social ambition, professional approach, and artistic achievements. Inside the house, with its elegant spaces, heroic history paintings, and extensive art collection, West created a space that helped construct and reinforce the public image and identity he wanted to portray, of being the preeminent history painter and modern 'Old Master' in the capital and, more than that, a transatlantic one with an international audience.

The house of an artist is a unique type of space: a combination of private domestic living quarters and public creative professional environment. The multi-functional purpose of the house is reflected in its overall design and contents. Eighteenth-century artists had very practical requirements for their homes. They needed suitable lighting, preferably northern light, and generous space for their artistic practice and living quarters. Like other eighteenth-century artists' studios, West's studio was not just a functionary work space for the artist, and his assistants and students; it was a showplace, which expanded the requirements of his home. His home and studio needed to support his various interests and be a space for artistic creation, production, solicitation, instruction, and socialization. During this period, successful artists, including Cosway and Reynolds, established fashionable premises as symbols of their success and prosperity.<sup>1</sup> In the eighteenth century, artists' studios were developing identities as spaces of sophisticated taste and erudition as a result of

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<sup>1</sup> For recent scholarship on studio environments of this period, see A. Blaugrund, 'The Evolution of American Artists' Studios, 1740-1860', *Antiques* 141 (January 1992): 214-225; Walkley 1994; Wedd 2001; and G. Waterfield, *The Artist's Studio* (London: Hogarth Arts in association with Compton Verney, 2009). For individual artists' studios, see Wendorf 1996, 103, and 129-158, and M. Phillips, 'No. 36 Castle Street East: A Reconstruction of James Barry's House, Painting and Printmaking Studio, and the Making of The Birth of Pandora', *The British Art Journal* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 15-27.



the artists' own social and professional advancements and aspirations.<sup>2</sup> Because patrons, and in the case of West royal patrons, frequented these environments, the spaces needed to be of a suitable level of elegance to make them feel comfortable and suggest an equivalent status and respect. As Angelica Kauffman (1741-1807) once wrote to her father, she 'could not possibly receive people in a poorly furnished house'.<sup>3</sup> The attention paid to these spaces is emblematic of the shift in status of the artist from artisan to intellectual and gentleman.<sup>4</sup> According to West's early biographer, John Galt, West acknowledged this shift when he first voiced his desire to become an artist, a profession he described as 'a companion for kings'.<sup>5</sup> Many artists spent so lavishly on their residences and art collections housed inside that it proved ruinous.<sup>6</sup> During the eighteenth century, the house's location also made a statement about the status and respectability of the artist, professionally and socially. The location, and its proximity to patrons and other artists, determined the artist's accessibility.<sup>7</sup>

With all of these important expressive, functional, and symbolic weights on the choice and decoration of the artist's home, it is not surprising that artists during this period worked very hard to create just the 'right' home and studio. It was deeply personal and assembled to represent every aspect of their professional, national, and social lives. According to Giles

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<sup>2</sup> Wendorf 1996, 102-103.

<sup>3</sup> A. Rosenthal, 'Kauffman and Portraiture', in W. Roworth, ed., *Angelica Kauffman: A Continental Artist in Georgian England* (London: Reaktion Books, 1992), 102.

<sup>4</sup> R. Zakon, *The Artist in the Studio in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1978), 9, and M. Cole and M. Pardo, eds., *Inventions of the Studio* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 22.

<sup>5</sup> Galt 1820, 1:30, and Cunningham 1837, 2:11. West, of course, made this statement in 1815 or 1816, when he had already been a 'companion' to a king for decades.

<sup>6</sup> Alberts 1978, 168. One of West's former students and assistant, Gilbert Stuart, lived in 'extreme elegance' in London and ultimately went bankrupt.

<sup>7</sup> Beginning in the 1760s, exhibition catalogues in London listed the artists' addresses, making their locations more public.

Walkley, the artists' studios during this period were used as 'an inspirational tool[s]' and 'material proof of the professional approach'.<sup>8</sup> For West everything about his home and studio reinforced the idea that he was a modern history painter with a New World perspective, practicing the highest form of art and deeply indebted to the traditions of the Old Masters and antiquity.

West's unique environment will be partially reconstructed in this chapter as a means of documenting the physical setting of his artistic life. The aim of this chapter is to not only reconstruct, as far as possible, the house's physical spaces but to also understand it as both a lived, social environment, in an everyday sense, as well as a vehicle for building West's artistic persona and identity. It will be considered as a suitable and unique setting for cultural exchange, artistic display, and art production in the context of the late-eighteenth-century transatlantic world he inhabited.

### **From Strawberry Alley to Newman Street**

At the beginning of West's career his studios were functional, primarily private, and in some instances portable. His early working environments are indicative of the young artist's priorities – study and practice – and reflect his meagre financial situation. In America, the physical settings of his artistic life were far from grand or professional. He either worked in the same room where he was sleeping, in a temporary space in his patron's house, or in the studio of another artist. According to Galt, his first artistic experiences were in the setting of his bedroom in his parents' home (fig. 2) in the Quaker community of Springfield, Pennsylvania, using a range of rudimentary artistic implements and tools,

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<sup>8</sup> Walkley 1994, xxiv.

including his cat's tail hairs and Indian pigments.<sup>9</sup> West's first exposure to the studio of a professional artist was that of his early master, the British-born William Williams (1727-1791). Of this time West said, 'From the year [17]47 to [17]60 my attention was directed to every point necessary to accomplish me for the profession of painting; this often brought me to the house of Williams'.<sup>10</sup> It was in the elder artist's studio that West began to study and understand the art of the past and to comprehend the importance of an artist's personal collection. Williams provided him with prints by 'eminent masters' from his collection to study as well as books on art, including one by Charles-Alphonse du Fresnoy (1611-1668) and another by Richardson.<sup>11</sup> West studied Williams' collection, claiming 'It was to his books and prints that I was indebted for all the knowledge I possessed of the progress of fine arts had made in the world'.<sup>12</sup> During the mid-1750s, West lived in his first independent lodgings, a rented room in a house on Strawberry Alley in Philadelphia.<sup>13</sup> At this time, the young aspiring history painter made his living as a portraitist earning a modest income, reportedly charging 'two guineas and a half for a head, and five for a half-length'.<sup>14</sup> Very little is known about his accommodations here, but when he left the property he left behind

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<sup>9</sup> Galt 1820, 1:18-19. The simple three-storey limestone house that at one point belonged to John West (1690-1776) and Sarah Pearson West (1697-1756) still stands on the campus of Swarthmore College in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania (formerly Springfield). It is called 'The Benjamin West House' and is currently occupied by the university police department.

<sup>10</sup> Letter from Benjamin West to Thomas Eagles, 10 October 1810, reproduced in D. Dickason, 'Benjamin West on William Williams: A Previously Unpublished Letter', *Winterthur Portfolio* 6 (1970): 131.

<sup>11</sup> Galt 1820, 1:28-29. Though Galt only specifies the authors' names, most scholars believe that West was given Charles-Alphonse du Fresnoy's *De Arte Graphica: The Art of Painting*, trans. J. Dryden (London: W. Rogers, 1695) and Jonathan Richardson's *An Essay on the Theory of Painting*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: A. Bettesworth, 1725). For more on Williams' print collection, see W. Gerds, 'William Williams: New American Discoveries', *Winterthur Portfolio* 4 (1968): 159.

<sup>12</sup> Alberts 1978, 16.

<sup>13</sup> J. F. Watson, *Annals of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania, in the olden time: being a collection of memoirs, anecdotes, and incidents of the city and its inhabitants*, 2 vols., (Philadelphia: A. Hart, J.W. Moore, J. Penington, U. Hunt, and H. F. Anners, 1850), 1:40, and Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 434-435.

<sup>14</sup> Dunlap 1834/1969, 1:44.

two paintings: his first known landscape and seascape that functioned as over doors or over mantel decorations.<sup>15</sup>

In 1760 West set off on a three-year Grand Tour of Italy supported by his Philadelphia patrons.<sup>16</sup> Though West's career was progressing, he and his patrons agreed that if he wanted to elevate his skills and pursue his goal of becoming a history painter, a genre with no precedence or support in America, he would have to go abroad to study.<sup>17</sup> One of his patrons, William Allen (1704-1780), wrote to his bankers about West at this time, 'From all accounts he is like to turn out a very extraordinary person in the painting Way'.<sup>18</sup> Motivated by his need for training, West made his way around Italy, living for the longest periods in Rome, Florence, and Leghorn (Livorno). The significance of this voyage for a young artist from a country with no established art schools and no major art collections was profound. Here, as he would advise a student to do decades later, he studied 'the Antique, Michel Angelo, and Raphael'.<sup>19</sup> Though West spent much of his time looking at the art of

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<sup>15</sup> Benjamin West, *Storm at Sea*, c. 1752-1753, oil on panel, 33.5 x 109 cm (13 ¼ x 43 inches), Pennsylvania Hospital, Philadelphia, and Benjamin West, *Landscape with Cow*, c. 1752-1754, oil on panel, 68 x 127.5 cm (26 ¾ x 50 ¼ inches), Pennsylvania Hospital, Philadelphia. For more information about the paintings, see Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 434-435, and Abrams 1985, 48-49. Von Erffa and Staley suggested that these paintings were produced as payments for his accommodations.

<sup>16</sup> Galt 1820, 1:88-90; Alberts 1978, 29; and J. Ingamells, *A Dictionary of British and Irish Travelers in Italy 1701-1800* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), 990. On 12 April 1760, West left America and sailed for Italy on a ship called the *Betty Sally* sponsored by patrons, Chief Justice William Allen and Governor James Hamilton (1710-1783).

<sup>17</sup> The Edward Shippen (1729-1806) letter book at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (Shippen Family Papers (1749-1860), 0595C) is an invaluable resource of the details and financing of West's stay in Italy. The latter half of the book contains the correspondence of its original owner and the chief financier of West's trip, William Allen, for the years 1753-1770, and contains the most pertinent letters to his agents in London, David Barclay & Sons, and his agents in Leghorn, Messrs. Jackson & Rutherford that managed West's finances abroad.

<sup>18</sup> Letter from William Allen to Messrs. David Barclay & Son, London, 19 August 1761, The Edward Shippen Letter Book, 0595C, Shippen Family Papers (1749-1860), Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 137-138.

<sup>19</sup> F. 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): 368. West's interactions with art in Italy and its influences on his art will be discussed in the fourth chapter of this thesis.

the past, he was also exposed to the art of contemporary Italian and Continental artists during his stay.<sup>20</sup> Integrating quickly into the international communities of both Rome and Florence, West visited and spent time in large-scale professional artists' studios, including that of his one-time master the German-born Anton Raphael Mengs (1728-1779), as well as Pompeo Batoni (1708-1787), Gavin Hamilton (1723-1798), and Kauffman.<sup>21</sup> Though he acknowledged that the 'italian artists talked of nothing, looked at nothing but the works of Pompeo Batoni', West claimed to be more influenced by the studio and operations of Mengs whom he later described as his 'favourite master'.<sup>22</sup> Mengs's studio at Via Vittoria 54 in Rome would have made an impression on the young West. When he was there in 1760-1761, Mengs's studio was a centre for artistic education attracting a wide-variety of artists and connoisseurs of various nationalities and boasting an impressive collection of casts of antique statues.<sup>23</sup>

West's own lodgings in Italy can best be described as temporary, portable, and rather insignificant. The purpose of his trip was to study, converse, and explore, not to set up his

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<sup>20</sup> For the two primary accounts of West's Italian sojourn, see Galt 1820, 1:101-49 and W. Carey, 'Memoirs of Benjamin West, Esq., Late President of the Royal Academy of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture, in London', *New Monthly Magazine* 8 (1820): 515-517. Both of these accounts place importance on Mengs's impact. West studied with Mengs before the artist left Italy for Spain in August 1761. For further reading about his trip, see E.P. Richardson, 'West's Voyage to Italy, 1760, and William Allen', *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 102, no. 1 (January 1978): 3-26.

<sup>21</sup> Galt 1820, 1:101-149; A. Marks, 'Angelica Kauffman and Some Americans on the Grand Tour', *American Art Journal* 12, no. 2 (Spring, 1980): 4-24; Ingamells 1997, 990; and D. Shawe-Taylor, 'The Modern...Who Recommends *Himself*: Italian Painters and British Taste in Eighteenth-Century Rome', in D. Marshall, S. Russell, and K. Wolfe, eds., *Roma Britannica: Art Patronage and Cultural Exchange in Eighteenth-Century Rome* (London: The British School at Rome at The British Academy, 2011), 287 and 293.

<sup>22</sup> A. Clark, 'Batoni's Professional Career and Style', *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 35 (1980): 323. The 'my favourite master' quote comes from a letter from Benjamin West to Col. Joseph Shippen, 1 September 1763, Balch Papers, lxi, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. Mengs advised him to travel outside of Rome to Venice, Parma, and Florence to see the greatest examples of art in the Western canon and then return home and paint a 'historical composition to be exhibited' publicly. See also Galt 1820, 1:122; Alberts 1978, 45; Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 445-446; and Ingamells 1997, 990.

<sup>23</sup> S. Roettgen, *Anton Raphael Mengs 1728-1779 and His British Patrons* (London: A. Zwemmer Ltd and English Heritage, 1993), 15.

professional practice. As such, West lodged with friends or in rented rooms in popular expatriate areas. West's first lodgings in Italy were in Leghorn at the home of Robert Rutherford (1719-1794), one of the merchants of Jackson & Rutherford, who worked with the Shippen and Allen families and were in charge of West's finances.<sup>24</sup> When he arrived in Rome later in 1760, he hired a room in a lodging house in the Piazza di Spagna area, the popular centre of the British expatriate community.<sup>25</sup> While in Italy, West was either travelling or bedridden. His Italian sojourn was plagued by various periods of infirmities, forcing him to spend months 'in the house...most of the Time confined to my Bed'.<sup>26</sup> In Florence in 1761, he 'remaind for near fore Months in a most deplorable Condition Lodged in a House over against the Palazzo Pitti without being able to stir out to see anything there' recuperating from a surgery.<sup>27</sup> According to an anonymous biographer in *La Belle Assemblée* in 1808, confinement to his bed did not deter West from painting:

In the severest paroxysms of sickness Mr. West never desisted from drawing, reading, and composing historical subjects. He had a frame constructed in order to enable him to paint when obliged to keep his bed, and in that situation he amused himself by painting several ideal pictures and portraits.<sup>28</sup>

None of his Italian lodgings were intended as spaces to display art or entertain guests. While there, he exhibited his work rarely and when he did, he did it elsewhere. On one occasion, West was invited to display a portrait at the house of Roman sophisticate Mr.

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<sup>24</sup> Alberts 1978, 30. For the dates of West's stays in the various Italian cities, see Ingamells 1997, 990. For West's subsequent stays with Rutherford during two periods of illness, see Alberts 1978, 39-40, and 46.

<sup>25</sup> Alberts 1978, 31.

<sup>26</sup> Letter from Benjamin West to Joseph Shippen, Jr., Florence, 11 May 1762, Benjamin West Papers, coll. 394, The Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts, Winterthur Library, Delaware.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> 'A Correct Catalogue of the Works of Benjamin West, Esq', *La Belle Assemblée or Bell's Court and Fashionable Magazine* 4 (1808): Supplement, 13-20, and quoted in W. Whitley, *Artists and Their Friends in England 1700-1799*, 2 vols. (1928; repr., New York and London: Benjamin Blom, 1968), 1:195.

Crespin (d. 1789) during one of his famous evening social gatherings where the tightly-knit international community assembled.<sup>29</sup> West's Italian journey was not about selling his work as he was comfortably supported financially by his American patrons. Considering he only produced a few paintings while in Italy, and most of them were copies of Old Masters, this period of his life seems to be predominantly about training and improvement.<sup>30</sup>

In 1763 Benjamin West arrived in London. Though he only intended for it to be a short stop en route home to America to begin his career as a history painter, he never left.<sup>31</sup> Settling in the cultural capital of the 'mother country' provided West with greater opportunities for success in his chosen field. His meteoric success is well-documented in the annals of art history.<sup>32</sup> Referring to his rapid reception in London, his friend William Allen wrote to a friend back in Pennsylvania,

He is really a wonder of a man and has so far outstripped all the painters of his time as to get into high esteem at once, whereas the famous Reynolds was five years at work before he go into Vogue, as has been the case with all the others who generally drudged a longer time before they had any thing of a name: If

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<sup>29</sup> Galt 1820, 1:102 and 119-122, and Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 548. See also C. Paul, *The Borghese Collections and the Display of Art in the Age of the Grand Tour* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 9. Galt referred to him as 'Mr. Crispigné, an English gentleman who had long resided at Rome'. Galt 1820, 1:102. See also the entry for 'Daniel Crespin' in Ingamells 1997, 254. The portrait that West selected to display at Crespin's house was of his friend Thomas Robinson (1738-1786, later 2nd Baron Grantham). For more information about this unlocated painting, see Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 548.

<sup>30</sup> In 1810 Anthony Pasquin (1761-1818, pseudonym of John Williams), a satirical writer who frequently targeted artists, satirized West's portability in his ode to the artist and his countryman Copley entitled 'A Burlesque by Pasquin'. He said of West: 'I took my easel on my back and crossed the seas to London'. Pasquin's ode was reprinted in full in W. Whitley, *Art in England*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928; New York: Hacker, 1973), 1:168-169.

<sup>31</sup> H. Von Erffa, 'Benjamin West: The Early Years in London', *American Art Journal* 5, no. 2 (November 1973): 4. West arrived at Dover on 20 August 1763, and his first stop along the ride into London was for dinner at the Bull Browning Tavern on Shooter's Hill near Greenwich. For the details of his first activities in Britain, see Farington 1978-1998, 12:4413-4414 (20 August 1813).

<sup>32</sup> Among the most prominent of the publications chronically his 'meteoric' rise are: E. Wind, 'The Revolution of History Painting', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 2, no. 2 (1938): 116-127; C. Mitchell, 'Benjamin West's *Death of General Wolfe* and the Popular History Piece', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 7 (1944): 20-33; and H. Von Erffa, 'Benjamin West at the Height of His Career', *American Art Journal* 1 (1969): 19-33.

he keeps his health he will make money very fast, he is not like to return among us.<sup>33</sup>

Once intent on settling in the capital, his focus turned to establishing himself as a professional artist and thus setting up a proper studio became a priority. West lived at several addresses during the decade between his arrival in London and when he purchased 14 Newman Street. West's first lodgings in London were rented rooms at an inn in Lincoln's Inn Fields, where he stayed for a brief time.<sup>34</sup> Over the course of the next decade, West established studios in the fashionable, artistic centre of London, the West End. During this period, artists lived in close geographical clusters, so there was a natural gravitation for West to move to certain neighbourhoods.<sup>35</sup> In his selection of geographies, he followed a typical trajectory for an artist trying to establish himself in the London art world, moving westward from Lincoln's Inn Fields to Covent Garden to Leicester Square and its environs. During his first decade in London, these frequent movements coincided with the development of his career and his aspirations. His movements also followed the general movement westward that began in the early 1760s as Georgian London witnessed significant expansion of its population and footprint.<sup>36</sup> Throughout the eighteenth century, fashionable society seemed to move westward with the advent of more modern, smarter housing and more space, and artists

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<sup>33</sup> Letter from William Allen to Benjamin Chew, Philadelphia, 27 January 1764, reproduced in D. Kimbell and M. Quinn, 'William Allen – Benjamin Chew Correspondence, 1763-1764', *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 90, no. 2 (April 1966): 221.

<sup>34</sup> E. Walford and G. W. Thornbury, *Old and New London*, 6 vols. (London, Paris, and New York: Cassell and Co., Ltd., 1880), 4:208. The inn was supposedly The White Bear, a busy coaching-house. See also Benjamin West, *West Sketchbook*, c. 1763, B1977.14.4078, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut. The first page of the Yale sketchbook includes West's notes regarding his expenditures during his stay at the inn.

<sup>35</sup> Pointon 1993, 40-41. Pointon provides a useful bar graph illustrating the percentage of artists living in each of the fashionable areas in 1783 based on the addresses they listed in the Royal Academy catalogue.

<sup>36</sup> J. Summerson, *Georgian London* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1946), 5, and R. Stewart, *The Town House in Georgian London* (New Haven and London: Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art by Yale University Press, 2009), 25-27.



followed suit.<sup>37</sup> As his career developed and his collection of art grew, it was necessary for West to find more elegant and spacious studio settings. In 1893 a writer for *The Athenaeum* described the progression and chronology of his London studios:

West's residences in London are perfectly well known, in an unbroken series, to have been, first, 1763, in Bedford Street, Covent Garden' from 1763 till 1768 in Castle Street, Leicester Square; from 1768 till 1774 in Panton Square, Haymarket; and thence forth till his death, March 10<sup>th</sup>, 1820, 'on a sofa in the first floor front room,' at No. 14, Newman Street, Oxford Street.<sup>38</sup>

His first permanent residence in London was at 19 Bedford Street, Covent Garden, where he 'set up his easel' and where he lived for about a year.<sup>39</sup> The comfortable artistic community around Covent Garden had been popular with earlier generations of British artists such as James Thornhill (1675-1734) and Thomas Hudson (1701-1779), and was home to one of the only spaces for art instruction in the area, St. Martin's Lane Academy.<sup>40</sup> One gets the sense that West was just getting settled and probably needed to economise as he familiarised himself with his new surroundings. By the mid-century the area was less fashionable, but a number of old guard artists still lived there, including Richard Wilson (1713-1782), one of the first artists West met in London.<sup>41</sup> During his first few months in London, West

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<sup>37</sup> Wedd 2001, 68.

<sup>38</sup> Anon., Review of 'The Life of John Linnell', *The Athenaeum* 3402, 7 January 1893, 31.

<sup>39</sup> Cunningham 1837, 2:28. By the time of the 1764 Society of Artists' exhibition, West had already moved and listed his residence as 'Castle Street, Leicester Fields'. See A. Graves, *The Society of Artists of Great Britain, 1760-1791; the Free Society of Artists, 1761-1783, A Complete Dictionary of Contributors and Their Work from the Foundation of the Societies to 1791* (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1907), 275. For his Bedford Street studio, see also F. H.W. Sheppard, ed., *Survey of London, The Parish of St. Paul, Covent Garden*, vol. 36 (London: Athlone Press, University of London for Greater London Council, 1970), 253-263. He rented this property and thus his inhabitation was not recorded officially in the tax records.

<sup>40</sup> For the history of the geography of Covent Garden as an artistic community, see Wedd 2001, 34-47.

<sup>41</sup> W. G. Constable, *Richard Wilson* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, and London: Routledge and Paul, 1953), 41, and Alberts 1978, 55 and 58. West went to Wilson's studio in Convent Garden soon after his arrival in London. He had been given a letter of introduction to the artist by Thomas Jenkins (1722-1798) while in Italy. For the role Wilson and Reynolds played in inducing West to submit pictures for public display at the Society of Artists' exhibitions, see Galt 1820, 2:5-6; Carey 1820, 517-518; Whitley 1928/1968, 1:195; and Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 262.

integrated himself into the London art world, astutely making connections with prominent artists and quickly understanding the importance of public exhibitions, which were new to London as of 1760, just three years before his arrival. West, who was considered one of the first trained history painters in Britain, was recruited by Wilson and others to exhibit pictures at the Society of Artists' annual exhibition.<sup>42</sup> The Society of Artists was the most prominent of the two main artists' associations and exhibiting bodies at the time, attracting the majority of fashionable artists and mounting the most popular and commercially successful exhibitions.<sup>43</sup> In his study of the Society, Matthew Hargraves has suggested that 'recruiting a specialist history painter like West added to the lustre of the exhibitions and the Society's overall prestige' as they were trying to promote the genre.<sup>44</sup> It was equally important for West, as a new artist in the city, to be affiliated with the Society as it added a certain level of cachet and confirmation of his developing reputation. It was this affiliation with the Society that also facilitated his swift integration into the patronage networks of London. West's Bedford Street studio was where he prepared his first history paintings for public exhibition at the Society's show in 1764, and where he invited patrons to his studio to see the pictures before their public display.<sup>45</sup> Although little is known specifically about the size and details of the Bedford Street studio, it provided enough space to produce his large-scale paintings, display his art, and welcome prospective clients and patrons.

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<sup>42</sup> M. Hargraves, *Candidates for Fame: The Society of Artists of Great Britain 1760-1791* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2006), 47.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 1. The two rival artistic societies of the time were: the Free Society of Artists (FSA) and the Society of Artists of Great Britain (SAGB). West was affiliated with the latter.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>45</sup> Lady Juliana Penn and William Allen went to see his paintings on 27 January 1764, which Allen recounted in his correspondence. See Letter from William Allen to Benjamin Chew, Philadelphia, 27 January 1764, reproduced in Kimbell and Quinn 1966, 221. For the paintings exhibited by West at the Society of Artists' exhibition in 1764 in Spring Gardens, see Carey 1820, 518 and Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 262, 264-265, and 534-535. His exhibited paintings were: 'A Gentleman, whole length' (*General Robert Monckton*) (SA no. 133), *Cymon and Iphigenia* (SA no. 132), and *Angelica and Medoro* (SA no. 131).

In April 1764 West moved into a larger home in Castle Street, Leicester Fields. A writer in *The Public Advertiser* in that year announced his new address and his developing reputation as a traditional history painter: ‘Mr. West, a celebrated Painter in Castle-Street, Leicester-Fields, known in Italy by the name of the American Raphael’.<sup>46</sup> His decision to move may have been prompted by his need for additional space, both professionally and domestically. On 4 August 1764, his fiancée, Elizabeth Shewell, arrived from America and the couple were married about a month later at St. Martin-in-the-Fields in London.<sup>47</sup> The move was also a strategic one on West’s part to locate to the more fashionable environs of Leicester Fields, where he would be identified with his more renowned artist neighbours, such as Reynolds, and be closer to the aristocratic patrons whose business he sought. West lived in Castle Street for about three years, from 1764 to 1767. Here, for the first time, he was able to accommodate students. In 1764, one of West’s first students, Matthew Pratt (1734-1805), who was also a cousin of his wife, moved into rooms in the Castle Street house and described it as,

...a very elegant house, completely fitted up, to accommodate a very large family, and where he followed his occupation, in great repute, as a Historical & Portrait painter. And where he kindly accommodated me with Rooms, and rendered me every good & kind office he could bestow on me.<sup>48</sup>

In 1765 Pratt painted an image of West’s painting room inside the Castle Street house entitled *The American School* (fig. 3) that ostensibly announced his studio as a private art academy

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<sup>46</sup> ‘W.G’, *The Public Advertiser*, 23 April 1764, 2, quoted also in Whitley 1928/1968, 1:197.

<sup>47</sup> Alberts 1978, 64. The wedding took place on 2 September 1764. Elizabeth had been escorted to London by West’s father, John, and her cousin and later a pupil of West, Pratt. The date of her arrival derives from her pocket almanac located in the Princeton University Library, Princeton, New Jersey.

<sup>48</sup> M. Pratt, ‘Autobiographical Notes of Matthew Pratt, Painter’, *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 19, no. 4 (1895): 462.

when it was exhibited the next year at the annual exhibition of the Society of Artists.<sup>49</sup> The painting's exhibition coincided closely with West's recent election as a Fellow of the Society of Artists in the company of several other artists, including Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788), Reynolds, and Johan Zoffany (1733-1810).<sup>50</sup> Pratt's painting seems to advertise the ideal traditional methods of training that were occurring inside the studio that aligned closely with those being promoted in published treatises and by the Society.<sup>51</sup>

As the picture indicates or perhaps imagines, West's Castle Street house was large enough to give separate space to his professional and private lives. The painting also gives a suggestion as to the type of interior decoration of West's early working environment. In this modest room, the interior decoration is fashionable with dark green damask wall coverings, panelled walls and doors, Chippendale-style chairs and a table. On the table, the students refer to objects in West's newly established collection, some chalk drawings and a plaster bust.<sup>52</sup> The red chalk drawings represent the Italian drawings in West's collection, some probably acquired in Italy, but also recently purchased in London.<sup>53</sup> The bust on the table

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<sup>49</sup> For a detailed analysis of this picture, see S. Rather, 'A Painter's Progress: Matthew Pratt and *The American School*', *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 28 (1993): 169-183.

<sup>50</sup> Director's Meeting Notes, February 1765, SA/10, The Society of Artists Papers, The Royal Academy of Arts Archives, London, and Hargraves 2006, 67.

<sup>51</sup> This painting and its relationship to artistic education in West's studio will be discussed further in the third chapter of this thesis.

<sup>52</sup> Christie's, 6 July 1820, lots 6 and 24.

<sup>53</sup> West may have shipped objects like drawings and busts in cases with paintings. In a letter written to a friend back home, he asked that the case that transported several of his Old Master copies be returned to him in London as 'it is full of things I am desirous not to have seen, as they are little particulars belonging to painters'. Letter from Benjamin West to Joseph Shippen, 1 September 1763, Balch Papers, lxix, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

makes a reference to his developing collection of casts after the antique. In these references, the picture reveals West's developing reliance and association with the art of the past.<sup>54</sup>

The year 1768 was a pivotal year for West. He played a significant role in the founding of the Royal Academy and was given his first royal commission by George III.<sup>55</sup> As he was becoming a more prominent, public figure in the art world, he needed to move beyond adequate, functional studios to a more elegant and distinguished one.<sup>56</sup> West moved to an appropriately stylish and genteel house in Panton Square, just off Coventry Street, that year.<sup>57</sup> Still centrally located within the environs of Leicester Fields, the 'airy little square' contained 19 houses with inhabitants including the Ambassador of Morocco and Mrs. Dod's Coffee House.<sup>58</sup> It is thought that he lived at the north end of the square.<sup>59</sup> A nineteenth-

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<sup>54</sup> The paintings he produced at this time, such as *Pylades and Orestes* (1766, oil on canvas, 100.3 x 126.4 cm (39 ½ x 49 ¾ inches), Tate Britain, London), refer deliberately to Old Master compositions, making this connection being developed in the studio more potent.

<sup>55</sup> Carey 1820, 690-694, and Galt 1820, 2:25-26.

<sup>56</sup> Blaugrund 1992, 219. Blaugrund describes West's early ateliers as simply 'adequate' in comparison to 14 Newman Street.

<sup>57</sup> His house number is not known exactly as it is not recorded in the rate books. He moved here in either late 1767 or early 1768, and his name first appears in the rate books in 1768. He listed 'Panton Square' as his address in the 1768 Royal Academy exhibition catalogue. For the taxes West paid each year of his occupancy, see the rate books at Westminster City Archive, box 685, vols. D634-D642. For example: Golden Square Collector's Book/ Watch Rates (1768), 2 ('Benj.n West 50-16-8'); Golden Square Watch Rates 'Panton Square' (1768), 2 ('Benj. West 5-16-6'); Golden Square Watch Rates 'Panton Square' (1769), 2 ('Benjamin West 50-16-8'); St. James's Watch Rate Books 'Panton-Square Ward' (1772), 2 ('Benjamin West, 50-16-8'); St. James's Watch Rate Books/Parish Records (1773), 2 ('2 Benjamin West 50-16-8. '); St. James's Watch Rates (1774), 2 ('6. Benjamin West II 50-16-8'). For more information about Panton Square, see F. H. W. Sheppard, ed., *The Survey of London, The Parish of St. Paul, Covent Garden*, vol. 36 (London: Athlone Press, University of London for Greater London Council, 1970), 8, and London County Council, Members' Library, file 442, English Heritage Society, London.

<sup>58</sup> The 'airy little square' quote comes from an advertisement in *The Daily Advertiser*, 3 February 1772, 4. For the Moroccan Ambassador's residence, see *St. James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, 18 February 1764, 3. For the coffee house in Panton Square, see *The Public Advertiser*, 6 May 1769, 4. The number of houses in the square comes from notes in the file on West and his studios at English Heritage Society, London.

<sup>59</sup> F. H. W. Sheppard, ed., *Survey of London, The Parish of St. James, Westminster, Part 2*, vol. 31 (London: Athlone Press, 1963), 42-43, and J. D. Prown, *Art as Evidence* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 131. Though Prown suggested West's house was located on the south end of the square, period maps suggest that it was on the north end, across from the opening into Panton Street and Arundel Street.

century watercolour (fig. 4) reveals the square's architecture, a series of simple three- and four-storied townhouses on the north side overlooking the pavement square.<sup>60</sup>

While West was living at these larger premises in Panton Square, he painted a picture entitled *The Artist and His Family* (fig. 5), described by a writer in *The Morning Chronicle* as a 'neat little scene of domestic happiness'.<sup>61</sup> In the painting, West's immediate family, which also includes his father and half-brother, are gathered in the setting of an elegant parlour room. Mrs. West is seated in an upright green damask upholstered chair, trimmed with brass studs resting her feet on a matching green footstool. The furniture coordinates with the green brocade draperies and wall coverings. The dark wood panelled door is accented by elegant gold beading. The elegantly dressed West leans casually on a chair holding the implements of his profession, a pallet and maulstick, in the domestic setting, suggesting the integration of the private and public spaces of his home.<sup>62</sup>

The painting was produced in 1772, the same year that West was named History Painter to the King. According to Farington, had West not secured this royal patronage, he would not have been able to continue as a history painter because of the 'little encouragement He had had for Historical painting' otherwise.<sup>63</sup> The year before he had also completed and exhibited his seminal painting, *The Death of General Wolfe* (fig. 1), which had received critical acclaim and induced Reynolds to predict that it would occasion 'a revolution in art'.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> For more about the square, see E. B. Chancellor, *The History of the Squares of London Topographical and Historical* (London: Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co, 1907).

<sup>61</sup> *The Morning Chronicle*, 25 April 1777, 1. For more on the painting, see Alberts 1978, 112; Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 461-462; and Prown 2001, 117-132.

<sup>62</sup> For more on the mingling of the private and public in the London studio spaces, see A. Rosenthal, *Angelica Kauffman: Art and Sensibility* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 79-80.

<sup>63</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 6:2336 (31 May 1804).

<sup>64</sup> Galt 1820, 2:49-50.

The success of *Death of Wolfe* and in turn West's growing reputation meant that his studio was frequently visited by patrons and society and was 'thronged' by students wanting to see the modern history picture.<sup>65</sup> West's success was aided by the Royal Academy's commitment to the success of history painting and the centrality of exhibitions within the purpose of the institution.<sup>66</sup> With his accolades and the accompanying financial security, West was able to establish a second residence at this time, a country villa not '200 yards from the Thames' in Hammersmith as a retreat for his young family in 1769.<sup>67</sup> The house was located in Hammersmith Terrace, a series of 17 Georgian tall, narrow townhouses.<sup>68</sup> West is thought to have occupied 3, Hammersmith Terrace.<sup>69</sup> Other successful artists had maintained country houses, including Hogarth and Reynolds at Richmond. The cachet of having a second residence for gentlemanly pursuits away from the studio appealed to West as another sign of his success and achievement. While his family stayed at the villa during the summer months, West commuted back and forth (the roughly four miles) to Panton Square.<sup>70</sup> The American scholar Jules David Prown has suggested that the interior in *The Artist and His*

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<sup>65</sup> Alberts 1978, 106, and L. Lippincott, *Selling Art in Georgian London: The Rise of Arthur Pond* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), 33.

<sup>66</sup> N. Pevsner, *Academies of Art: Past and Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940; New York: Da Capo Press, 1973), 185, and H. Hoock, *The King's Artists: The Royal Academy of Arts and the Politics of British Culture, 1760-1840* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 71

<sup>67</sup> Letter from Thomas Combe, Jr. to Miss Sally Combe, 17 August 1770, A. L. S. Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Alberts 1978, 102.

<sup>68</sup> J. Bird and P. Norman, eds., *Survey of London, Hammersmith*, vol. 6 (London: London County Council, 1915), 92.

<sup>69</sup> A. T. Story, *The Life of John Linnell* (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1892), 1:13, and Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 428. John Linnell (1792-1882), who was briefly a student of West c. 1804-5, later purchased No. 3, Hammersmith Terrace where he said he visited the older artist as a child. The artist Philippe-Jacques de Loutherbourg (1740-1812) also lived at Hammersmith Terrace for a time.

<sup>70</sup> Letter from Thomas Combe, Jr., to Sally Combe, 17 August, 1770, A. L. S. Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, and Alberts 1978, 102-103.

*Family* is the Hammersmith house rather than the London home.<sup>71</sup> Whether it depicts the Panton Square or Hammersmith residence, it is suggestive of West's lifestyle and environment during this exceptionally important period of his career.

#### **14 Newman Street and Moving Up**

In 1774 West was at the height of his career and had reached a level of financial security. As a statement of his artistic achievements and material success, West sought a larger, more impressive residence. That year he purchased a grander, more-substantial, though less centrally located, modern Georgian house at 14 Newman Street in Marylebone. The four-storey house was situated in a prominent and central location on the street with a grand vista down Castle Street, just north of Oxford Street (fig 6).

West's choice of the Newman Street location made an important statement about his social position and artistic status at the time. In 1774 this area was not yet fashionable among artists.<sup>72</sup> The American artist Rembrandt Peale (1778-1860) described the street: 'On establishing himself in London, Mr. West selected a retired street in the West End – himself the only artist in that quarter – but such was the effect of his growing celebrity, that Newman Street finally became a street of artists, and their studios in the greatest demand'.<sup>73</sup> The so-called 'retired street' was, however, already popular among a variety of suppliers, such as framers, colour merchants, printmakers, and engravers. These essential artistic providers were established in Oxford Street and Newman Street and on the street just behind West's house, Rathbone Place. While still remaining within acceptable distance to his patrons and

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<sup>71</sup> Prown 2001, 117. Prown's assessment of the location of this picture relies on the date of Benjamin West, Jr.'s birth, which was either May or August 1772.

<sup>72</sup> Wedd 2001, 70.

<sup>73</sup> R. Peale, 'Notes and Queries', *The Crayon* 4 (October 1857): 308.



the Royal Academy, his close proximity and easy access to this network would have been attractive. His artistic operations, which included large-scale canvases and frames and relied closely on the print industry, made this nearby system of support even more appealing for him than it might have been for other artists.

Always considered somewhat of an outsider within the Academy because of his American heritage and nearly unparalleled success in history painting, West's geographic independence from the centrality of Somerset House and Leicester Square is not altogether surprising. He moved north from the popular and more expensive addresses of the fashionable West End residential squares. Though still within close proximity, the ability of West to attract patrons and students to his studio also says something about the status of artists at this time, especially those aligned with the Academy during its first decade of existence. His prominent role in the London art world and his important position as a teacher and advisor to the younger generation of American and British artists meant that he attracted a community to this area north of Oxford Street. In the years that followed until his death in 1820, this street and area would become more fashionable as a domestic outpost of the Academy, even for a short time earning the moniker 'the artists' street'.<sup>74</sup> By about 1800, artists such as Thomas Banks (1735-1805), John Bacon (1740-1799), Thomas Stothard (1755-1834), and James Ward (1769-1859) lived on Newman Street.<sup>75</sup> Eventually, many of West's American students resided in this area to be near his studio.

While ambition primarily drove him to purchase a home that indicated his success, West also had very practical reasons for upgrading his property. He needed more physical

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<sup>74</sup> Walkley 1994, 16, and Phillips 2008, 16.

<sup>75</sup> Walkley 1994, 15-16, and Wedd 2001, 72-73. Banks lived at no. 5, Bacon lived at no. 17, Stothard lived at no. 28, and Ward lived at no. 6.

space to house his large-scale history paintings and growing art collection. In 1770 14

Newman Street was described in an advertisement by Christie's auction house as:

A spacious and substantial leasehold messuage, with coach-house and stabling, and convenient offices, a large garden delicately laid out, an attentive, green-house and pinery, at the bottom of the garden is a superb music-room, 23 feet by 30, and 15 feet high, finished with exquisite taste, late in the possession of SAMUEL MORE, Esq; deceased. The said premises were built for his own residence, and finished with great taste and elegance at a vast expense, most conveniently laid out and completed with a great number of valuable fixtures, are situate in the best part of Newman-street, No. 14, opposite Castle-street.<sup>76</sup>

As the advertisement indicates, when West moved into 14 Newman Street in 1774, the house was already spacious enough to accommodate his large artistic practice and, after several structural alterations, to display his large-scale history paintings and extensive art collection.

West purchased the 99-year leasehold on 14 Newman Street from Mr. Hugh Baillie.<sup>77</sup>

Though the construction date of the house is unknown, the Marylebone Rate Books, which record taxes collected from residences, document at least one house on Newman Street as early as 1746, but not at number 14.<sup>78</sup> The street was a relatively new development, and its north end was still described as 'open fields and hills'.<sup>79</sup> West's friend and one-time student, John Thomas Smith (1766-1833), described the state of Newman Street in 1774 saying, 'In this year the houses of the north end of Newman Street commanded a view of the fields over hillocks of ground now occupied by Norfolk Street, and the north and east outer sides of Middlesex Hospital garden-wall were entirely exposed'.<sup>80</sup> West moved into the house at

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<sup>76</sup> *The Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, 16 October 1770, 3.

<sup>77</sup> 1774 Vol. 3/No. 467, Hugh Baillie and Benjamin West, 13 May 1774, Middlesex Deeds, London Metropolitan Archives, London.

<sup>78</sup> 'Newman Street', St. Marylebone Rates Books Street Index, Westminster City Archive, London.

<sup>79</sup> Alberts 1978, 120.

<sup>80</sup> J. T. Smith, *A Book for a Rainy Day; or, Recollections of the Events of the Years 1766-1833*, ed. Wilfred Whitten (London: Methuen & Co., 1905), 46.

some point during the middle of 1774 and began paying taxes around Michaelmas.<sup>81</sup> When Copley moved to London, he wrote to his brother on 5 August 1774 that West ‘was just prepaireng to move to his New house’, so he was likely settled in by August or September of that year.<sup>82</sup>

From the facade, 14 Newman Street appeared to be a modest-sized traditional four-storey terraced house (fig. 7). The street view was deceiving, however, because the property actually extended back nearly to the street behind, which was Rathbone Place, and included a complex of buildings. The main house included standard double parlours with extensive private family quarters on the first and second floors, and servants’ quarters on the basement and third level. At the rear of the property, there was a cluster of small buildings that included a carriage house. Soon after acquiring the property, West began making renovations to suit his needs and requirements.<sup>83</sup> The elegant ‘23 feet by 30 feet’ music room was immediately converted into a painting room and gallery. The hall was extended to connect the residence to the music room and back building, and altered to become a picture gallery.<sup>84</sup> The writer Leigh Hunt (1784-1859), a relative of Mrs. West, described the initial changes to the house: ‘Mr. West...had bought his house, I believe, not long after he came to England; and he added a gallery to the back of it, terminating in a couple of lofty rooms’.<sup>85</sup> Behind

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<sup>81</sup> St. Marylebone Rate Books, 1773-1775, Reel 16, ‘Wards: Ox, East, West’, 5 and 63 (1774), Westminster City Archive, London. The rate book noted West’s payment on ‘Michas’, which probably refers to Michaelmas, the beginning of Autumn on the Christian calendar on 29 September.

<sup>82</sup> Letter from John Singleton Copley to Henry Pelham, 5 August 1774, in Copley and Pelham 1914/1970, 236.

<sup>83</sup> The evidence for the various alterations is primarily found in contemporary descriptions of the house as there are no extant floor plans before West’s death in 1820.

<sup>84</sup> Mrs. West records on 12 January 1788 that sky lights were added to the long gallery at a cost of £20. Mrs. West’s 5-Year Account Book (1785-1789), SAFE 037, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania.

<sup>85</sup> L. Hunt, *The Autobiography of Leigh Hunt*, ed. J. E. Morpurgo (London: Cressett Press, 1949), 86.

the main house and its additions was a yard that led to the back buildings. These spaces were made into two colour rooms and a light gallery or secondary studio, revealing practical, behind-the-scenes aspects of a large productive history painter's studio.<sup>86</sup> West now had the large establishment he had been striving for with room for additional buildings he planned to build later to accommodate the growth of his practice and collection.<sup>87</sup> Over the course of his nearly fifty-year occupancy at Newman Street, he made several alterations to the house but very few of them are documented.<sup>88</sup>

After the initial alterations to the house, the ground floor flowed as a series of rooms. The configuration of the elegant 'suite of rooms' at 14 Newman Street would have been attractive to West as a means of manipulating the experience of his visitors.<sup>89</sup> In this type of space, with its continuation of galleries, West could control the setting and manner in which his works were introduced and understood.<sup>90</sup> West designed his home so that the painting room was the last public space at the end of a series of rooms. Visitors peeled back the layers of his theories and process essentially – looking at Old Master works that West admired, works by his students and his own preliminary works for larger projects, and ultimately his final grand-scale productions. The long gallery traversed the house and connected the various spaces, and it was a key component in the staging of the display.

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<sup>86</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 8:3173 (17 December 1807). See also Robins 1829 pamphlet, floor plan of 14 Newman Street, Ashbridge Pamphlet 160/NEW, Westminster City Archives, London.

<sup>87</sup> Alberts 1978, 120-121.

<sup>88</sup> Benjamin West, Personal Thomas Coutts Account Book, 1790-1804 credit and debits account; AM1861 v.2, no. 704, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. This personal account book kept by West records a number of payments for various indeterminate structural and decorative alterations to the property, including: 'Oct 8 1791 Mr Evans (Bricklayer) 12-0-0', 'March 14 1792 Mr Dodd – the plasterer 30-19-0'; 'July 6 1792 Mr. Hill the painter 20-0-0'; 'Oct. 6, 1792 Mr. Wm. Hill, the painter on account 10-0-0'; and 'Jan 17 1793 Mr John Devall stone mason 93-4-0'.

<sup>89</sup> Dunlap 1834/1969, 1:71-72.

<sup>90</sup> Wedd 2001, 70.

The layout, which had precedence in the apartments of royal palaces and aristocratic country houses, enabled the visitors to progress through a series of spaces, in many cases entering more private and exclusive areas as a result. There were a number of the capital's collectors and artists who preferred a series of exhibition spaces in their homes, including Charles Townley (1737-1805), who described his as a 'Palace in London', suggesting the connection to the tradition of series of rooms and levels of privacy and privilege in royal houses.<sup>91</sup> The idea of the progression of space was also in use during the Royal Academy's annual exhibitions at Somerset House and in museums on the continent. Visitors to the Academy's exhibitions would enter on the ground level through the Front Hall and drawing schools and progress upward via the spiral staircase to the Great Room on the top floor.<sup>92</sup> This idea of progression and layers of art culminating with a 'temple' of art is similar to the arrangement of West's rooms.<sup>93</sup> If invited, the visitor could ultimately enter the last room, which was his painting room, the inner sanctum.

West's enfilade-style layout was actually remarkably like Reynolds's 'superior mansion' at No. 47 Leicester Fields, where he lived from 1760 until his death in 1792.<sup>94</sup> Forty-Seven Leicester Fields was a narrow, three-storey brick Georgian townhouse with a large garden. The back space of the house, like West's, underwent an extensive addition that

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<sup>91</sup> Charles Townley Letters, 29 October 1777, TY7/376, Townley Archive, The British Museum, London, and quoted in V. Coltman, *Classical Sculpture and the Culture of Collecting in Britain Since 1760* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 205.

<sup>92</sup> J. Murdoch, 'Architecture and Experience: The Visitor and the Spaces of Somerset House, 1780-1796', in Solkin 2001, 14-15.

<sup>93</sup> My use of 'temple' throughout refers back to Sophie von la Roche's statement that was used in the introduction of this thesis about West and Stuart living in temples of the muses. See Roche 1933, 153.

<sup>94</sup> Wedd 2001, 36, and D. Mannings, *Sir Joshua Reynolds: A Complete Catalogue of His Paintings*, 2 vols. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 1:23.

linked the main house by a gallery to the painter's renowned octagonal painting room.<sup>95</sup> According to Reynolds's assistant James Northcote (1746-1831), 'he added a splendid gallery for the exhibition of his paintings, and a commodious and elegant room for his sitters'.<sup>96</sup> The gallery leading to his studio was hung with his own paintings as well as pictures from his famed private collection.<sup>97</sup> Other prominent artists of the period, such as Francis Cotes (1726-1770) and George Romney (1734-1802), had galleries in which to display their paintings as well as their collection before leading into the painting room.<sup>98</sup> Romney's impressive house in Cavendish Square was designed this way and was described by a visitor in 1785: 'a passage fill'd with pictures leads into a room lighted from the top in which the principal Pictures are placed'.<sup>99</sup> The most important of these artists' studios and residences was Reynolds's. West, who once remarked on Reynolds's 'gentlemanly liberality in the style of his living', frequently visited his fashionable residence.<sup>100</sup> The prominent portraitist's studio was a destination for London society, and West undoubtedly viewed it as a model for his house.

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<sup>95</sup> Wendorf 1996, 112. For more about Reynolds's studio, see J. Northcote, *The Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds: Comprising Original Anecdotes of Many Distinguished Persons, His Contemporaries; and a Brief Analysis of His Discourses*, 2 vols. (London: Henry Colburn, 1819), 1:102-103; Walkley 1994, 3-5, and Wendorf 1996, 102-108 and 112-128.

<sup>96</sup> Northcote 1819, 1:102.

<sup>97</sup> Wendorf 1996, 112.

<sup>98</sup> Walkley 1994, 9-10. According the sale catalogue of his house at 24 Cavendish Square, Cotes spent a significant sum on 'two large and well-portioned rooms with skylight and dome ceilings, added to the first floor, forming an elegant suite' together with 'a pupil's room'. See sale catalogue of 24 Cavendish Square, February 1771, National Art Library, London. Romney purchased Cotes' house after his death.

<sup>99</sup> Dorothy Richardson, *Travel Journals*, 5 vols., MS 1124, John Rylands Library, University of Manchester, 311-312 (1785).

<sup>100</sup> Galt 1820, 2:3, and Frances Burney, *Fanny Burney Manuscript Diary*, Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library, New York, 2364 (October 1786). Burney records first meeting West at Reynolds's house.

Jean Andre Rouquet (1701-1758) commented in 1755 that, ‘Every portrait painter in England has a room to shew his pictures, separate from that in which he works. People who have nothing to do, make it one of their morning amusements to go and see these collections’.<sup>101</sup> Artists devised the layout of their studios to cater to their visitors. During the second half of the eighteenth century, visiting artists’ studios was a popular pastime among certain sections of the public. Popular guidebooks, such as *Leigh’s New Picture of London* (1818), listed artists’ houses, including West’s, as recommended places to visit to see a fine collection of ‘valuable pictures’ alongside aristocratic houses and collections, such as those of the Earl Grosvenor and the Duke of Devonshire.<sup>102</sup> Thomas Rowlandson (1756/57-1827) portrays the popular social environment of artists’ studios in his *A Private View* (fig. 8). Rowlandson depicts how the typical gallery or showroom adjoined the artist’s painting room, and shows the visitors occupying both spaces. Many visitors, especially those from foreign countries, went to visit the prominent artists’ studios one after another. Sophie von la Roche toured Reynolds’s house followed by Gainsborough’s and West’s.<sup>103</sup> She commented on how the studios collectively represented the elevated status enjoyed by these British artists, saying,

To my mind, in the homes of these men the English character glistens like the gold they employ for the encouragement and reward of diligence in art; the numerous orders and the artists’ prosperity are evidence of this. Lovely homes, apartments hung with pictures by famous old masters, bronze and marble ornaments – these are one’s first impressions.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> J. A. Rouquet, *The Present State of the Arts in England* (1755; repr., London: Cornmarket Press, 1970), 42-43.

<sup>102</sup> S. Leigh, *Leigh’s New Picture of London* (London: Printed for Samuel Leigh, 1818), 217.

<sup>103</sup> Roche 1933, 151-153.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

Knowing that their studios attracted wealthy and fashionable visitors, West and other artists became more aware of the purpose of these spaces as showrooms.<sup>105</sup> It also undoubtedly increased the levels of competition among them to have the most fashionable studios.

West's entire house was decorated as a form of artistic self-representation, from his own paintings to those of his artistic heroes, to objects relating to his social and transatlantic worlds.<sup>106</sup> The objects inside were works of art that could be appreciated in and of themselves, but also took on greater meaning and associations in the context of the setting. Here, he showcased his grand-scale history paintings and impressive art collection that together made a grand statement about him as a preeminent and royal history painter who considered himself to be the greatest successor to the great Old Masters.

### **The Exterior**

What in effect West created was a 'temple' to himself and to British history painting. Every aspect of the building and its interior was carefully selected or produced to reinforce this message by creating certain meanings and associations with the artist. Visitors entering the house from the street would immediately enter his world beginning with the front façade of the house. To the side of the front doors was a copper plaque that read simply 'Mr. West'.<sup>107</sup> This indicated the residence of a gentleman artist. Anything more, particularly the inclusion of a first or Christian name, would have suggested the lower status of a tradesman.<sup>108</sup> This was in keeping with the simplicity of his personal visiting card, which

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<sup>105</sup> West's display strategies in his studio will be discussed in the fourth chapter of this thesis.

<sup>106</sup> Rosenthal 2006, 91. Kauffman, like West, was a master of staging a studio space that brought together objects. Her studio was described as 'a Muse's temple with statues, busts, and marvelous paintings'. Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Peale 1857, 307-308.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 308.



read 'Mr. West – 14 Newman Street' (fig. 9). Above the large double-doorway stood two full-size classical female figures (fig. 7) on small pedestals mounted to the brick exterior.<sup>109</sup> Although it is not possible to identify the figures precisely, nor is it possible to identify the artist responsible, a number of assumptions can be made about them. The classical figures on the exterior functioned as emblems of the purpose and function of the house. It was common for artists dating back to the Renaissance to use decorative motifs on the exterior of their house as identification. Indeed, Rubens had the classical gods *Minerva* and *Mercury* represented in sculpture, carved after his designs, on the façade of his house to indicate its purpose and owner.<sup>110</sup> These gods had meaning for the learned artist: Mercury was considered the god of the painters and Minerva the goddess of wisdom and learning.<sup>111</sup> It is probable that West conceived of these objects for their symbolic and ideological value as well. In the context of this setting, the classical figures represent West's allegiance to the art of the past, and specifically the ideals expressed in antique sculpture. Though West worked with several contemporary sculptors on occasion, including his Newman Street neighbour Thomas Banks as well as Francis Chantrey (1781-1841), it is not beyond the realm of possibilities to suggest that these sculptures may have been of West's own design.<sup>112</sup> The sculptures are no longer extant and there is no documentary evidence of their design,

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<sup>109</sup> A. St. John Adcock, *Famous Houses and Literary Shrines of London* (London and Toronto: Dent and Sons, and New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1912), 61. West's house is illustrated by Fred Adcock in this publication before its demolition in the 1930s.

<sup>110</sup> J. Muller, *Rubens: The Artist as Collector* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 26.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> For West's order from Chantrey, see Letter from Benjamin West to Mr. Chantrey, 28 September 1811, Benjamin West Papers, SC/142, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania. For West's payments to Banks, see Benjamin West, Personal Thomas Coutts Account Book, 1790-1804 credit and debits account; AM1861 v.2, no. 704, , Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. Banks, in particular, was known to supplement his income with exterior architectural decorations, and was lauded by Reynolds as a producer of 'classical grace'. For more about this, see also M. Trusted, *The Return of the Gods: Neoclassical Sculpture in Britain* (London: Tate Publishing, 2008), 20-21.

commission, or purchase. West was actively involved as a designer of sculpture himself with the Coade factory, which manufactured garden sculpture and other exterior ornament composed of an artificial material that weathered well in the elements. The Coade factory, in fact, employed a number of contemporary artists and architects, including West, to produce designs for their sculptural productions.<sup>113</sup> West's most important commissions with the factory were in Greenwich at the Royal Naval Chapel for which he designed numerous bas-reliefs and four full-scale figures as well as his designs for the Nelson pediment at the Old Royal Naval College.<sup>114</sup> The four Coade stone figures he designed in 1789 for the chapel represented the virtues, *Faith, Hope, Charity* and *Innocence*.<sup>115</sup> The figures on the front of West's house seem to relate to mythological god or goddess figures, perhaps *Minerva*, virtues or caryatids.<sup>116</sup> In addition to making a statement about his elevated social and professional status, the entrance through its decoration and ornament made a proclamation about the traditional artist and connoisseur inside.

## The Interior

The interior decoration of the home was befitting a gentleman artist, particularly one who believed that he was descended from English nobility.<sup>117</sup> According to Galt, West laid

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<sup>113</sup> H. van Lemmon, *Coade Stone* (Buckinghamshire: Shire Books, 2006), 20. Mrs. Coade employed Bacon, Banks, John Flaxman (1755-1826), and several other Royal Academicians.

<sup>114</sup> A. Kelly, *Mrs. Coade's Stone* (Reading: Eastern Press, 1990), 235-237, and Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 224. According to Farington, West complained of exhaustion from 'Having had to superintend the progress of work carrying on at Coade's Manufactory, to commemorate Lord Nelson, from my designs for Greenwich Hospital...by day and by night'. Farington 1978-98, 11:4033-4034 (20 November 1811).

<sup>115</sup> Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 385-386. These figures were previously ascribed to John Bacon, but drawings by West and studio in the National Maritime Museum suggest his designs. The four figures are also listed in one of the early inventories of West's works in *Public Characters* 1805, 562.

<sup>116</sup> Lemmen 2006, 18. The Coade factory produced caryatid figures for the façade of the architect Sir John Soane's (1753-1837) House in Lincoln's Inn Fields.

<sup>117</sup> Galt 1820, 2:72-73 and 189-190, and Alberts 1978, 443. According to various contemporary accounts, West turned down a knighthood waiting instead for a hereditary title given his 'noble' descendants. He claimed to be

claim that his ancestors, the Wests of Long Crandon, were descended from ‘the ancient Earls of Delawarre’.<sup>118</sup> West also dressed the part of a gentleman. According to Dunlap, ‘his countenance was surrounded by the powder and the curls, considered decorations of the time, and his well-formed limbs covered by garments of texture and colour such were worn by other gentlemen’.<sup>119</sup> His residence was decorated in ‘magnificent style’ in the same taste as the London homes of his aristocratic patrons, replete with Old Master and contemporary paintings, prints and sculpture, West’s history paintings and studies, state-of-the-art lighting, velvet hangings, Wilton carpets, and fine furnishings.<sup>120</sup> His renowned art collection, housed throughout the public and private spaces of the interior, was a key component of the overall decorative scheme. The interiors were all carefully designed by the artist to impress prospective patrons and manipulate their experience. It was a visible statement of his artistic distinction and social aspirations.

West spared little expense in creating his splendid and grand environment. One of his assistants, Gilbert Stuart (1755-1828) recognised his large financial outlay saying:

When I had finished a copy of a portrait for my old master, that I knew he was to have a good price for, and he gave me a guinea, I used to think it hard – but when I looked on the establishment around me, which with his instruction I enjoyed, and knew it was yet to be paid for, I fully exonerated West from the charge of niggardliness.<sup>121</sup>

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a descendent of Reginald, the sixth Baron de la Warre, and the ‘ancient Earls of Delawarre’. As if in anticipation of a peerage, West sketched a Delawarre family crest, which is now located in the Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania.

<sup>118</sup> Galt 1820, 2:72-73. According to Galt, the Marquis of Buckingham supplied West with the history of his ancestors.

<sup>119</sup> Dunlap 1834/1969, 1:73-74. Dunlap mentions that his description of West is in contrast to Cunningham’s erroneous characterization of West’s dress as typically ‘Quaker’.

<sup>120</sup> Roche 1933, 153.

<sup>121</sup> Dunlap 1834/1969, 1:66.

Indeed, the Wests maintained an expensive lifestyle. The house and servants cost them about £1,600 per annum to maintain.<sup>122</sup> West was one of the few contemporary artists who could afford his lifestyle and lavish surroundings.<sup>123</sup> His professional success had resulted in sustained royal patronage and commissions that enabled him to accumulate great wealth rapidly.<sup>124</sup> Beginning in 1772, he received £1000 per annum from the Crown for his position as Historical Painter to the King plus individual payments for commissions from the royal family. He also received an annual salary of £300 for his role as Surveyor of the King's Pictures, a position he assumed in 1791. Then in 1792, following the death of Reynolds, West was elected as the second President of the Royal Academy, which provided additional income. Subscriptions for the prints made after his history paintings were undoubtedly his largest sources of income and provided a steady stream of revenue.<sup>125</sup>

When visitors entered the house they were greeted by the Wests' liveried servants who escorted them into rooms on the ground floor.<sup>126</sup> When the Quaker bookseller from Philadelphia, Benjamin Johnson (1766-1822), visited West in 1796, he described a visitor's first experiences in the space: 'We were received at the door by the servants and handed into an antechamber whilst my name was carried in – after a while [West] made his appearance

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<sup>122</sup> Alberts 1978, 165.

<sup>123</sup> West was worth £100,000 at his death. Will of Benjamin West, PROB 11/1634/16, The National Archives, Kew.

<sup>124</sup> Alberts 1978, 240.

<sup>125</sup> Mitchell 1944, 33, and Altick 1978, 106. The successes of *The Death of Wolfe* print alone compensated West generously. Though he made an undisclosed amount, his partners, John Boydell (1719-1804) and William Woollett (1735-1785) made £15,000 and £7,000 respectively.

<sup>126</sup> According to Mrs. West's Account Book, they had a number of household servants. At one point they had three maids, who were all given new matching gowns on 8 May 1787. For more about the expenditures on the servants and their livery, see Mrs. West's 5-year Account Book (1785-1789), SAFE O37, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania, and Alberts 1978, 171.

and received us much more friendly than the formality of the door keeper promised'.<sup>127</sup>

When West was out or otherwise unavailable, the servants gave visitors a tour of the public spaces on the ground floor. Rouquet commented on the role of the servants and the typical visitor's experience in an artist's studio during the eighteenth century:

They are introduced by a footman without disturbing the master, who does not stir out of his closet unless he is particularly wanted. The footman knows by heart all the names, real or imaginary, of the persons, whose portraits, finished and unfinished, decorate the picture room: after they have stared a good deal, they applaud loudly, or condemn softly, and giving some money to the footman, they go about their business.<sup>128</sup>

Although Rouquet referred specifically to a portrait painter's studio, the servants employed by West seem to have been equally well-versed in the variety of his history subjects as well as the Old Master and contemporary art on view. William Dunlap recalled a period when one of West's pictures attracted so much public attention that his servant 'was employed from morning till night in opening the door to visitors, and the man received a considerable sum of money showing it'.<sup>129</sup> Ever the teacher and businessman, West seized the opportunity to guide visitors around himself most of the time. Sophie von la Roche recalled from her personal tour that 'He showed us some of the large historical canvases he is painting...Then he led us to his collection of old and modern masters'.<sup>130</sup> His visitors were given access to the entire ground floor of the house, so the level of attention to the decoration and display of the spaces was impeccable throughout. The malleable and interchangeable space of the suite of rooms on the ground floor enabled West to rehang the rooms based on his current work or recent additions to his prized collection. By all accounts, every room was densely hung with

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<sup>127</sup> Benjamin Johnson, *Benjamin Johnson's Diary*, 1796-1797, document 260, The Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts, The Winterthur Library, Delaware, 73 (20 July 1796).

<sup>128</sup> Rouquet 1755/1970, 42-43.

<sup>129</sup> Dunlap 1834/1969, 1:55.

<sup>130</sup> Roche 1933, 152-53.

pictures. One visitor recalled seeing over 200 pictures displayed in one of the galleries.<sup>131</sup>

The dense presentation enabled West to showcase more objects from his large collection.

During his occupancy of 14 Newman Street, the display and arrangement of his collection, both his own works and the art of others, changed frequently. His prolific output of history paintings and his acquisitive collecting nature undoubtedly necessitated the constant rearrangement of the spaces to accommodate the new objects being produced or acquired.

With the rooms throughout the house filled with Old Master paintings and prints and Antique casts, West marked his identification with the great artists of earlier generations.<sup>132</sup> Though

the interior decoration seemed to conform to traditional taste, West's eclectic collection gave the spaces a distinctive and unique feel. He displayed modern history paintings, classical sculpture, and Native American artefacts in the same setting. Though West's display was unique, the idea of mixed picture arranging in general was common in artists' residences.

Contemporary artists displayed their works in conjunction with Old Master works to create a pictorial dialogue and elevate their art in the eyes of the visitors. It was advocated by

Reynolds. According to Northcote, he said: 'It never did a painter much credit to have no other pictures than his own in a collection, as it becomes tiresome to the spectator from the want of variety, and also, because the painter's particular defects become more conspicuous by seeing them so oft repeated'.<sup>133</sup>

The grand interior was filled with fine furnishings, floor coverings, and draperies.

The material decoration throughout suggested the influence of British interiors on West, and shows little evidence of his modest upbringing in an American Quaker community, which

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<sup>131</sup> S. I. Prime, *The Life of S. F. B. Morse* (New York: Appleton, 1875), 35-36.

<sup>132</sup> J. Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, ed. R. Wark, (1975; repr., New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 17.

<sup>133</sup> Northcote 1819, 2:42.

rejected such lavish, ostentatious decorations. The colour scheme was cohesive throughout the ground floor. The walls in many of the rooms were covered in crimson or green baize (a heavy woollen cloth); colours intended to complement the pictures hung on the walls.<sup>134</sup>

West manipulated the space frequently, changing the configuration of the art and curiosities, but also redecorating walls and floor coverings. His American friend, Samuel Shoemaker (1725-1800), visited the house in 1785 to find the artist 'very busy having just finished painting the inside of his house anew and was employd in arranging and putting up his fine Collection of Paintings'.<sup>135</sup> According to Farington, his frequent wall painting campaigns bothered Mrs. West: 'West's House is painting, which obliges them to live in the Great Painting Room, which is bad for Her, as the smell of White Paint brings on frequently paralytic complaints'.<sup>136</sup> Mrs. West's account book reveals that the Wests also made frequent updates and additions to their furniture collection to keep the spaces modern and fashionable. They purchased furniture from contemporary British cabinetmakers such as Chippendale and also made purchases at auction.<sup>137</sup> They had a preference for pieces with modern finishes, including Japanned, satinwood, and other veneer surfaces.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> West was interested in colour theory which was expressed in his paintings as well as his wall colour selection inside Newman Street. West also advised others on their selection of wall colours, including the Royal Academy exhibition rooms. According to Farington, he also selected the initial wall colours for the new Dulwich Picture Gallery. Farington 1978-1998, 13:4577 (31 August 1814).

<sup>135</sup> Samuel Shoemaker Diary (1783-1785), Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 481-482 (24 September 1785).

<sup>136</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 8:2906 (14 November 1806).

<sup>137</sup> For furniture expenditures, see Mrs. West's 5-Year Account Book (1785-1789), SAFE 037, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania, and Benjamin West, Personal Thomas Coutts Account Book, 1790-1804 credit and debits account; AM1861 v.2, no. 704, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

<sup>138</sup> In 1788, The Wests bought a set of six lacquered chairs and a commode for Newman Street as well as a satinwood table with coordinating chairs for their house in Windsor. See entries for 25 February 1788 and 15 March 1788 in Mrs. West's 5-Year Account Book (1785-1789), SAFE 037, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, Pennsylvania.

## The Parlour Rooms

A long hallway began at the front door and connected the residence with the gallery and studio spaces at the rear of the house. When visitors entered the house, they walked through this broad gallery, which integrated the private and public spaces of the ground floor. Off of the long gallery to the right were two parlour rooms: the first, a private sitting room and antechamber for guests, the second, a private dining room. The front parlour room immediately to the right of the front door was also referred to as the ‘front breakfast room’ and measured 15 by about 18 feet.<sup>139</sup> Very little is known about this room, as the back parlour seems to have been more frequently used by the Wests for entertaining. The format of the room can be garnered from a portrait of his neighbour Thomas Stothard (fig. 10) at 28 Newman Street in his ground floor parlour room that he used as a studio.<sup>140</sup> His front room would have been roughly the same size as West’s on this street with a relatively similar profile of houses. The painting of Stothard exhibits a typical Georgian room with large paned windows (with interior solid wood shutters) looking out to the street; it is simply furnished and the walls are decorated partially with wood panelling. In West’s house, this small front room was of a similar layout, however, it was elegantly decorated with the most expensive type of floor covering of the period, a Wilton carpet.<sup>141</sup> The Robins 1829 house sale pamphlet the decoration of this room as ‘Stuccoed and Painted’ as well.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Robins, 25 May 1829, Sale of 14 Newman Street, ‘house particulars’, Ashbridge pamphlet 160/NEW, Westminster City Archives, London.

<sup>140</sup> Wedd 2001, 73.

<sup>141</sup> On 3 November 1785, Mrs. West recorded the installation of ‘Wilton Carpet in the front Parlour’. Mrs. West’s 5-Year Account Book (1785-1789), SAFE 037, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania.

<sup>142</sup> Robins 1829, ‘house particulars’.



The back parlour room was slightly more spacious measuring 15 feet by 21 feet. It was described by Hunt as ‘a good-sized room, with two windows looking out on the little garden...and opening to it from of them [the windows] by a flight of steps’.<sup>143</sup> The exterior steps leading from this room into the garden are visible in a drawing by West of his family in the garden, entitled *Mr. West’s Family in the Garden of Their Residence in Newman St.* (fig. 11). The drawing also depicts the doorway of the parlour which exposes a view of the room with a bust on a pedestal and the corner of a framed picture. The bust is representative of West’s extensive modern portrait bust collection, which consisted of political and artistic figures from both sides of the Atlantic that were displayed on pedestals throughout the house.<sup>144</sup> The arrangement of the back parlour room in the early nineteenth century was described by Hunt:

The room was hung with engravings and coloured prints. Among them was the Lion Hunt, from Rubens; the Hierarchy with the Godhead, from Raphael...and two screens by the fireside, containing prints (from Angelica Kauffmann, I think, but I am not sure that Mr. West himself was not the designer) of the Loves of Angelica and Medoro.<sup>145</sup>

As he observed, this room was primarily hung with Old Master prints and small cabinet pictures from the collection.<sup>146</sup> The room was used by the family as a sitting room and for intimate dinners and entertaining. According to Hunt, Mrs. West could usually be found in this room reading, while her husband worked in his studio.<sup>147</sup> The Wests commonly referred

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<sup>143</sup> Hunt 1949, 88.

<sup>144</sup> The portrait busts in his collection will be discussed in the second chapter of this thesis.

<sup>145</sup> Hunt 1949, 88.

<sup>146</sup> At the time of West’s death, this room was still primarily hung with pictures from his collection. For a listing of the pictures on view at that time, see *A Catalogue of a Very Superior Collection of Pictures by the Old Masters; Collected During the Last Half Century, with so much Taste and Judgment, by the Late Benjamin West, Esq., President of the Royal Academy, are now on view... 14, Newman Street, Oxford Street* (London: Reynell, 1822).

<sup>147</sup> Hunt 1949, 88.

to this room as the back parlour room, and covered the floor in ‘Scotch Carpet’ in 1785.<sup>148</sup>

This type of carpet was less grand than the popular Wilton carpets, but it was useful for rooms with greater traffic as it had no pile and was usually reversible.<sup>149</sup> This type of flooring combined with many prints and drawings and busts on pedestals and a fireplace would have created a comfortable, intimate atmosphere.

## The Garden

In the garden, which was accessible from the steps leading out of the back parlour room, West created a private tranquil environment for him and his family. He only produced two known images of his Newman Street house, and both are set outside in the garden depicting his family, one, the previously mentioned drawing (fig. 11), and the other, a painting entitled *Mr. West’s Garden, and Painting-room* (fig. 12).<sup>150</sup> These images correspond with the written descriptions of the garden. Hunt described the outdoor space as a ‘very small, but elegant, with a grass plot in the middle and busts upon stands under an arcade’.<sup>151</sup> He went on to say that the ornaments in the garden, like the pictures inside the house, ‘had an Italian look’.<sup>152</sup> The busts on pedestals, two of which are depicted in West’s painting of the garden, appear to be classical busts, perhaps ancient philosophers or muses, meant to reinforce West’s strong affiliation with art and knowledge of the past. Other aspects

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<sup>148</sup> Mrs. West recorded the installation of this carpet on 3 November 1785. Mrs. West’s 5-year Account Book (1785-1789), SAFE 037, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, Pennsylvania.

<sup>149</sup> P. Thornton, *Authentic Décor: The Domestic Interior, 1620-1920* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1984), 101, and S. Parissien, *The Georgian House in America and Britain* (New York: Rizzoli, 1995), 212.

<sup>150</sup> For more information about the painting by West of his garden and the exterior of the house, see Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 425-426.

<sup>151</sup> Hunt 1949, 86.

<sup>152</sup> Hunt 1949, 88; Alberts 1978, 166, and T. Longstaffe-Gowan, *The London Town Garden 1700-1840* (New Haven and London: Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art by Yale University Press, 2001), 50, and 52-53.

of the garden reflected these associations, including the series of alcoves or niches visible along the exterior of the long gallery building and the ground level of the rear building (that housed the painting room and gallery). In West's drawing, a classical urn is situated on a plinth at the top of the staircase. The material of the urn is not apparent in the drawing, but it could be the one that the Wests had bronzed in 1786.<sup>153</sup> In the 1780s, West added onto the galleries and extended the existing long gallery, which may have reduced the size of the garden.<sup>154</sup>

### **The Long Gallery**

The long gallery was 47 feet long and 6 feet to 8 feet wide at different points.<sup>155</sup> Most of the ground floor rooms were accessible from this broad hall, and it also contained the staircase to the first floor.<sup>156</sup> Dunlap described the space as 'the long gallery leading from the dwelling-house to the lofty suite of painting rooms'.<sup>157</sup> The space was decorated much like a typical gallery or grand entrance hall of the period. It was hung with pictures and articulated with sculptures on pedestals. The floor was covered in a patterned oil cloth. This type of flooring, essentially a large canvas painted with thick pigments, was often decorated with simple patterns, such as squares and diamonds, to emulate more expensive materials like inlaid stones and marble.<sup>158</sup> This durable and less expensive flooring served a protective as

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<sup>153</sup> On 27 April 1786, Mrs. West recorded a payment to Mr. Palmers for 'Bronzing Urn'. Mrs. West's 5-year Account Book (1785-1789), SAFE 037, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania.

<sup>154</sup> Longstaffe-Gowan 2001, 138.

<sup>155</sup> Robins, 29 May 1829, ground plan of 14 Newman Street, Ashbridge Pamphlet NEW/160, Westminster City Archives, London. According to the plan, the long gallery or hall was widest in the area near the staircase.

<sup>156</sup> In January 1788, the Wests cover the staircase with Wilton carpet with brass holds (18 January 1788, 'Bt 31 yds Wilton Stair Carpet with 5 brass 3-8-0'). Mrs. West's 5-year Account Book (1785-1789), SAFE 037, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, Pennsylvania.

<sup>157</sup> Dunlap 1834/1969, 1:67.

<sup>158</sup> Thornton 1984, 101-102.

well as decorative function and was commonly installed in high-traffic public areas of a house such as this gallery.<sup>159</sup> Although there are no paintings or drawings of the interior of this space, numerous contemporary descriptions survive that suggest it was a changing exhibition gallery. In this way, it functioned in part as an orientation or education gallery, guiding the visitor to the square gallery and painting room where many of West's large paintings were on view. Depending on West's current project, the gallery might be hung with finished drawings and oil sketches for his newest history painting on view in the rooms beyond.<sup>160</sup> In 1811, one of West's American students, Samuel F.B. Morse (1791-1872) described the display: 'I walked through his gallery of paintings of his own productions. There were upward of two hundred, consisting principally of the original sketches of his large pieces.'<sup>161</sup> According to Mrs. West's account book, in 1788, they added sky lights to this gallery, a common device to produce optimal viewing of pictures.<sup>162</sup> The modern sky lights are visible on the roof of the long gallery in his *Mr. West's Garden* (fig. 12). At the end of the long gallery were a set of double doors flanked by sculptures of *Venus de' Medici* and *Apollo Belvedere*.<sup>163</sup> These plaster casts of the iconic antique sculptures marked West's reverence to the past and the centrality of the antique in his own art. At Somerset House, *Venus de' Medici* and *Apollo Belvedere* were also among the centrepieces of the Royal

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<sup>159</sup> Mrs. West recorded with noticeable dissatisfaction on 3 November 1785, 'Mr Smith of Knightsbridge sent an oil cloth for the Passage, which he has promised us the...of, till he has prepared the one for us, which has been bespoke 3 years past, & which he has several times disappointed us of'. Mrs. West's 5-year Account Book (1785-1789), SAFE 037, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, Pennsylvania.

<sup>160</sup> Roche 1933, 152-153.

<sup>161</sup> Prime 1875, 35-36. This quote comes from a letter from Morse while he was living in London to his parents in America.

<sup>162</sup> On 12 January 1788, Mrs. West noted: 'Pd. Bill for Sky Lightn in Gallery 20-13-0'. Mrs. West's 5-year Account Book (1785-1789), SAFE 037, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania.

<sup>163</sup> Hunt 1949, 86.

Academy's sculpture collection.<sup>164</sup> The cast of *Apollo* also had a personal association with West from his time in Italy. According to Galt, upon first seeing the statue there West exclaimed, 'My God, how like a Mohawk Warrior he is', suggesting a romantic link between the Greek hero and the indigenous people of his native North America.<sup>165</sup> Thus, its presence in the house signified his personal artistic journey. West's cast collection was housed throughout the house, creating a classical environment.

### **The Painting Room and Gallery**

Through the double doors at the end of West's long gallery, visitors would enter another gallery and the painting room. In 1785 the Yorkshire traveller Dorothy Richardson (1748 - c.1802) described the transition from the long gallery to the back rooms: '[we] were conducted down a long gallery furnished with drawings into a large square room lighted from the roof & filled with paintings'.<sup>166</sup> Another visitor, the novelist Jane Porter (1776-1850), suggested that at the end of the long gallery there were steps into the next room. She recalled that 'Mr. West came to us, in his long gallery down the steps which lead from the little room, the door of which you may remember is situated between the statue of the *Dancing Fawn* and the Wall'.<sup>167</sup>

In the exterior views of the gallery and painting room (figs. 11 and 12), the elevation of the back building is two-storey, suggesting that the rooms were of double height. These

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<sup>164</sup> J. Murdoch, 'Architecture and Experience: The Visitor and the Spaces of Somerset House, 1780-1796', in Solkin 2001, 10.

<sup>165</sup> Galt 1820, 1:105.

<sup>166</sup> Dorothy Richardson, *Travel Journals*, 5 vols., MS 1124, John Rylands Library, University of Manchester, Manchester, 311-312 (1785).

<sup>167</sup> Letter from Jane Porter to Robert Ker Porter, September 1818, POR 2042, The Huntington Library, California. A fragment of the letter was published in J. Porter and T. McLean, 'Jane Porter's Portrait of Benjamin West', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 66, no. 1/2 (2003): 174-175.

were the rooms that Hunt described as ‘a couple of lofty rooms’, and he also said that ‘the two rooms contained the largest of his pictures’.<sup>168</sup> During a visit to the studio in April 1776, one of West’s American friends, Samuel Curwen (1715-1802), commented on seeing some of the grand-scale paintings in these two rooms, including the original *Death of Wolfe* on loan from Lord Grosvenor, his *Lord Clive Receiving from the Mogul the Grant of Duanney* (c.1774-1795), and the altarpiece *Devout Men Taking the Body of St. Stephen* (1776) commissioned by St. Stephen, Walbrook church.<sup>169</sup> Curwen remarked on the dimensions of two of the monumental pictures: ‘*Clive* fifteen feet by eight’ and ‘*Walbrook* sixteen feet by seven’.<sup>170</sup> These rooms were lit by five large windows located on the first floor, visible in *Mr. West’s Garden* (fig 12). The elevation of these windows would have provided downward light into the gallery and painting room. This type of natural lighting from above was optimal for the display of pictures as well as for the artist’s working conditions.

These two rooms, the square gallery and painting room, were possibly separated by a door. Richardson described the transition between the two spaces: ‘The door into an inner room being left a little open... [we] were introduced into Mr. West’s painting room’.<sup>171</sup> Hunt further described the first of the two rooms, the gallery, recalling the large-scale pictures that were on view:

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<sup>168</sup> Hunt 1949, 86.

<sup>169</sup> Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 211-213, 216-217, and 380-381. Benjamin West, *Lord Clive Receiving from the Mogul the Grant of Duanney*, c.1774-95, oil on canvas, 292 x 457 cm (115 x 180 inches), The Earl of Plymouth, and Benjamin West, *Devout Men Taking the Body of St. Stephen*, 1776, oil on canvas, 549 x 305 cm (216 x 120 inches), St. Stephen, Walbrook, London.

<sup>170</sup> S. Curwen, *Journal and Letters of the Late Samuel Curwen, Judge of Admiralty, etc., an American refugee in England from 1775-1784, comprising remarks on the prominent men and measures of that period : to which are added biographical notices of many American loyalists, and other eminent persons*, ed. G. Atkinson Ward (New York: C. S. Francis, 1842), 52 (10 April 1776).

<sup>171</sup> Dorothy Richardson, *Travel Journals*, 5 vols., MS 1124, John Rylands Library, University of Manchester, 311 (1785).

The quiet of Mr. West's gallery, the tranquil, intent beauty of the statues, and the subjects of some of the pictures, particularly Death on the Pale Horse, the Deluge, the Scotch King hunting the Stag, Moses on Mount Sinai, Christ Healing the Sick (a sketch), Sir Philip Sidney giving up the Water to the Dying Soldier, the Installation of the Knights of the Garter, and Ophelia before the King and Queen...made a great impression on me.<sup>172</sup>

Most of the pictures Hunt described in the gallery were sizable. Many visitors do not differentiate between the painting room and gallery, so it is probable that the large finished canvases were displayed in both rooms.<sup>173</sup> Sophie von la Roche recorded her impression of the artist's painting room in 1786, observing: 'He works in a room lit from above, and the gallery leading to it is hung with sketches of completed pictures of which engravings have been made. He showed us some of the large historical canvases he is painting.'<sup>174</sup> His first painting room measured about 23 x 30 feet and was 15 feet high, and was the old Music room of the existing house. According to the 1829 Robins house sale pamphlet, he used another studio, the one measuring '29 feet by 22 feet' at the back of the property later and until his death.<sup>175</sup> Many of the contemporary descriptions of the space described finding the artist at work in the painting room. As Hunt explained, 'Mr. West was almost sure to be found at work, in the farthest room, habited in his white woollen gown'.<sup>176</sup> An American student, John Blake White (1781-1859), recalled that 'He rises generally with the sun and goes into his painting room to work upon some of his pictures, in light morning undress, just before breakfast his valet shaves and dresses him, and after breakfast he returns & generally sits or

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<sup>172</sup> Hunt 1949, 87.

<sup>173</sup> The dimensions of the square gallery adjacent to the painting room were '17 feet 6 inches by 19 feet', and on the Robins 1829 ground plan it is simply listed as 'Renewable Room'. See Robins 1829, ground plan.

<sup>174</sup> Roche 1933, 152-153.

<sup>175</sup> Robins 1829, 'house particulars'.

<sup>176</sup> Hunt 1949, 88.

stands steadily at painting'.<sup>177</sup> The contemporary biographer Allan Cunningham (1784-1842) described his morning schedule similarly adding that he worked all day painting 'with little intermission till four – washed, dressed, and saw visitors, and having dined, recommenced his studies anew'.<sup>178</sup> West was a showman, and his presence and performative qualities brought these spaces to life, and nowhere more so than in the painting room. Hunt recalled how West 'would talk of his art all day long, painting all the while' in this room.<sup>179</sup> In front of his paintings, West was confident and proud. In 1786 the writer Fanny Burney (1752-1840), commented on his marked self-assurance when he was showing her one of his paintings. She said that 'He spoke of the performance with just such frank praise, and open satisfaction, as he might have mentioned it if the work of any other artist; pointing out its excellencies and expressing his happiness in the execution. Yet all with a simplicity that turned his self-commendation rather with candour than conceit.'<sup>180</sup>

The studio itself became an important symbol of 'creation' for West. As many of the visitors' and students' descriptions revealed, West had an almost 'open-door' policy to his studio, allowing most visitors to witness the artist's daily activities within his private realm.<sup>181</sup> In contrast to Reynolds, who kept even his assistants at a distance while he was working, West painted, instructed students, and entertained visitors on a daily basis and rather

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<sup>177</sup> J. B. White and P. R. Weidner, 'The Journal of John Blake White', *The South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 42, no. 2 (April 1941): 64.

<sup>178</sup> Cunningham 1837, 2:41.

<sup>179</sup> Hunt 1949, 87.

<sup>180</sup> Frances Burney, *Fanny Burney Manuscript Diary*, Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library, New York, 2364 (October 1786).

<sup>181</sup> For working methods and process in West's studio, see J. Carson, 'Art Theory and Production in the Studio of Benjamin West', doctoral thesis, The City University of New York, 2000.



informally.<sup>182</sup> West's many students were constantly present. As is well known, he was a generous teacher, and John Thomas Smith recalled that he 'gave up whole mornings to the instruction of those students...and I am clearly of opinion that there are very few artists now basking in the sunshine of patronage, who have not benefitted essentially by his generous and able communications'.<sup>183</sup> In the numerous student descriptions of this space, one gets the impression of an informal, friendly studio atmosphere conducive to open pedagogic exchange.<sup>184</sup> Here, West provided students and assistants with opportunities for practical, hands-on training that complemented the more formal and theoretical art education offered at the Academy.<sup>185</sup> As Royal Academy president, West felt it his duty to provide for their training needs inside his studio. West expressed his sense of dutiful commitment to the students and their 'open' access to his residence in a letter to George III in 1801: 'In the station which I fill in the Academy I have been zealous in promoting merit; ingenious artists have received my ready aid, and my galleries and my purse have been opened to their studies and their distresses'.<sup>186</sup>

The painting room was displayed with West's work, as well as some of his Old Master inspirations. When Trumbull first visited his house, he saw West's copy of Raphael's

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<sup>182</sup> Northcote 1819, 2:20-21; S. Gwynn, *Memorials of an Eighteenth Century Painter (James Northcote)* (London: T. F. Unwin, 1898), 49; M. K. Talley, "All Good Pictures Crack' – Sir Joshua Reynolds's Practice and Studio,' in N. Penny, ed., *Reynolds* (New York: Abrams in association with the Royal Academy of Arts, London, 1986), 55-70; and Rather 1993, 175.

<sup>183</sup> J. T. Smith, *Nollekens and His Times*, ed. W. Whitten, 2 vols. (1829; repr., London and New York: John Lane, 1917), 2:301.

<sup>184</sup> Rather 1993, 176.

<sup>185</sup> Art education in West's studio will be discussed in third chapter of this thesis.

<sup>186</sup> Dunlap 1834/1969, 1:77.

*Madonna della Sedia* (1514), on view in this room amidst the artist's history paintings.<sup>187</sup>

This was a space for inspiration and creation. In the painting room, visitors would have seen some of the essential tools of the history painter's daily life, including extra-large rolling easels, anatomy studies, Old Master prints, costume prints, and even models. The size of two of his rolling easels alone, 23 feet in length, suggests the spaciousness of the room.<sup>188</sup>

Although his painting room was spacious by artist studio standards, it could not always accommodate the large number of monumental works that he was working on simultaneously. During the 1780s and 1790s, he produced dozens of large-scale paintings for George III's 'Chapel of Revealed Religion' at Windsor. Because of the number and scale of these works, West would often begin the paintings at Newman Street and then move them to his Windsor studio for completion.<sup>189</sup> In an inventory of his works published in *Public Characters of 1805*, the number of pictures apparently located in his painting room far exceeded the space.<sup>190</sup> One can imagine that during a particularly productive period, this room had pictures densely hung on the walls and perhaps stacked against the wall, similar to that depicted in a drawing by amateur artist Emily Calmady (fl. 1824) of *Sir Thomas Lawrence's Painting Room in 1824* (fig. 13).

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<sup>187</sup> Trumbull 1841/1953, 61. For the unlocated copy after Raphael in West's collection, see Christie's, 1 July 1820, day 5, lot 89. It was a copy after Raphael's, *Madonna della Sedia*, 1514, oil on panel, 71 cm (27 7/8 inches) diameter, Palazzo Pitti, Florence.

<sup>188</sup> Christie's, 6 July 1820, lots 133 and 134. See also Farington 1978-1998, 11:4072 (31 January 1812).

<sup>189</sup> West was given a studio by George III in Windsor Castle, and he and his family also maintained a secondary residence on Park Street nearby. West rented the Windsor house from the 1780s to about 1809 for approximately £34 annually. For more details, see West's letter to his landlord, Letter from Benjamin West to Rev. Samuel Sewell, 24 November 1809, Benjamin West Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, and Alberts 1978, 124, 241 and 323. For more information on West's painting room in the castle, see Samuel Shoemaker's Diary, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, and excerpts in S. 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 (1878): 35-39.

<sup>190</sup> *Public Characters* 1805, 564-566.

## The Back Buildings

The rear complex of buildings, visible on the 1829 ground plan of the property (fig. 14), consisted of two colour rooms, a 'light' gallery, a secondary studio, stables, and a coach house. These subsidiary rooms provided a supportive, 'behind the scenes' function and reflect the requirements of a large productive history painter's studio. It was in these working spaces that the actual art making took place. For instance, the small colour rooms would have been filled with pigments and bonding oils for students and assistants to mix the master's paints. The colour rooms were adjacent to the secondary studio, referred to as 'Ingram's Studio' on the 1829 ground plan, which measured 22 by 29 feet.<sup>191</sup> This studio was used by West and his assistants, including Stuart and Trumbull, who were either painting copies after his works or working on their own projects.<sup>192</sup> The use of the 'light gallery' is unclear, but is listed on the Robins house sale pamphlet as 'a light gallery or Painting Room, about 24 feet by 9 feet 6'.<sup>193</sup> This room may have been another studio used by the students and assistants or possibly a storage space for the plaster casts and other items in his collection. There were also extensive under crofts below the back buildings, accessed from two staircases that provided additional storage space for his collection, studio props, and other artists' implements.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> 'Ingram' probably refers to the rent paid on this part of the property to a Mrs. Ingram. These back buildings were on a separate leasehold than the main residence. For rent payment details, see Benjamin West Account Ledgers, Thomas Coutts Bank Archive, London.

<sup>192</sup> Dunlap 1834/1969, 1:356; Trumbull 1841/1953, 89; and Evans 1980, 52.

<sup>193</sup> Robins 1829, 'house particulars'.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid. and Walkley 1994, 15. The 1829 sales catalogue lists the basement below the back buildings as containing 'dry and convenient store rooms, cellars', measuring '49 feet by 12 feet'.

## The Principal and Second Floors

The first and second floor of the house contained the private, domestic living quarters of the West family. The principal floor had two large rooms that were roughly the same size as the two parlour rooms on the ground floor. These rooms, both referred to in the 1829 sale catalogue as drawing rooms, were used by the family for dining and private entertaining. The front room was referred to as ‘a noble lofty Drawing Room’ and measured ‘22 feet by 17 feet 6’.<sup>195</sup> The elegant drawing room had two large windows that overlooked the street. According to Smith, this room was displayed with ‘some of the choicest specimens of ancient Art, both in pictures and drawings’.<sup>196</sup> Smith also recorded that it was in this room in 1820 that West died.<sup>197</sup>

The front drawing room was the site of many of the Wests’ entertainments. The artist and his wife entertained on a regular basis. Mrs. West’s 1780s account book reveals a calendar of constant entertainments that included a variety of dinner guests, notably Reynolds, Copley, the American diplomat John Adams (1735-1826) and his wife Abigail, the dealer Noel Desenfans (1744–1807), the American statesman Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790), and frequent guest and fellow artist, Joseph Farington.<sup>198</sup> Farington’s diary also reveals the frequency of dinners, especially for fellow Academicians and dealers, hosted by the Wests at their home. Their house was quite the social arena. Mrs. West played an important role as hostess and mistress of the household. West once said that the woman of

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<sup>195</sup> Robins 1829, ‘house particulars’.

<sup>196</sup> Smith 1829/1917, 2:307.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> The various dinner guests are recorded throughout Mrs. West’s account book. Mrs. West’s 5-Year Account Book (1785-1789), SAFE 037, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania, and see a synopsis in Alberts 1978, 171.

the house should take care of everything as ‘an artist should be free from all domestic cares and be left wholly to his profession’.<sup>199</sup> Her attention to detail during their ‘genteel’ entertainments, ranging from the mixture of guests invited to the meals served, is obvious from the fastidious entries of her account book.<sup>200</sup> She frequently introduced colonial American flavours and delicacies to the menus, as for example, when she procured turkey during the holidays and served sweet corn and squash from her garden.<sup>201</sup> Beyond the colonial specialties and fare, the house was frequently crowded with their countrymen. It became an unofficial gathering place for Americans visiting London, many even collected their mail there.<sup>202</sup>

The back drawing room was also used for domestic dinners and activities. According to the Robins sale pamphlet, it was referred to as ‘the Bow Drawing Room’ and measured ‘26 feet by 16 feet’ and had an adjacent ‘Boudoir’.<sup>203</sup> According to Mrs. West’s account book, it was decorated with a fashionable wall paper imported from China and often referred to as ‘India’ paper or matt.<sup>204</sup> This may be the type of wallpaper depicted in West’s *Three Ladies Making Music* (fig. 15). In this painting, West portrayed several female members of his family engaged in genteel activities. They are seated amidst some of his modern neoclassical

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<sup>199</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 13:4667 (11 July 1815), and Alberts 1978, 370.

<sup>200</sup> Samuel Shoemaker’s Diary, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 178 (17 July 1784). Shoemaker said he was ‘very genteely entertained indeed’ as a dinner guest at their house.

<sup>201</sup> On 21 December 1786, Mrs. West noted the purchase of ‘Turkey 7/2 Fowls 3/6 0-20-6’. Mrs. West’s 5-Year Account Book (1785-1789), SAFE 037, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania. For Mrs. West’s sweet corn grown in her garden, see Samuel Shoemaker’s Diary, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 242 (4 October 1784).

<sup>202</sup> Alberts 1978, 167.

<sup>203</sup> Robins 1829, ‘house particulars’.

<sup>204</sup> Mrs. West noted on 12 August 1786: ‘Pd for India Matt. Back Drawing Room 5-10-0’. Mrs. West’s 5-year Account Book (1785-1789), SAFE 037, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, Pennsylvania. For more information about these imported wallpapers, see Parissien 1995, 191.

furnishings, including a variety of fashionable seating and a piano forte.<sup>205</sup> The tall ceilings and window suggest that this is one of the first floor rooms, though the view onto large wooded land is probably imagined.

The second floor contained the Wests' bedrooms. As described in the Robins 1829 pamphlet, there was 'a very capital and cheerful Front Bed Chamber', 'a large Bow Bed Chamber', 'a Dressing Room', and 'a closet' on the landing.<sup>206</sup> The third floor or 'attic story' accommodated the West children and the servants. There were 'Two large Bed Rooms', 'Two Smaller', and 'a light closet'. The Wests' sons, Raphael Lamar West (1769-1850) and Benjamin Junior (1772-1848), lived in the house in their youth, and the younger son moved back in with his wife following Mrs. West's death in 1814.<sup>207</sup> At least one of West's assistants, Trumbull, also lived in the house and was probably given accommodations on this floor.

Fourteen Newman Street was the setting of West's artistic and social life, but it was the history painter himself who brought this building and its contents to life.<sup>208</sup> His presence and identity with it gave it meaning. Given his varied interests and public position, his home took on a variety of uses and meanings. Fourteen Newman Street operated as a private home, an artist's studio, a teaching academy, a meeting centre, and a quasi-public gallery. Because

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<sup>205</sup> Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 423. Although the figures in this painting are not identified, this picture remained with the Margary family (West's descendants) until 1925 and it has been suggested that it represented members of his family. It is signed and dated 1798, and the furnishings are of a more recent style when compared to the furnishings in *The Artist and His Family* (1772).

<sup>206</sup> Robins 1829, 'house particulars'.

<sup>207</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 13:4618 (15 December 1814) and 4667 (11 July 1815), and Alberts 1978, 369-370.

<sup>208</sup> For further reading on the relationships between life, social identity, and the built environment around them, see Stewart 2009.

of all these functions, West's house was a lively, social place, full of activity and bustling with a wide-range of people from both sides of the Atlantic. For the various visitors, it was an important artistic space, but also a place to exchange ideas: artistic, political, social and intellectual. The erudite atmosphere filled with heroic paintings of self-sacrifice, honour, and piety, and busts of Old and New World political and intellectual figures made it an effective background for all different types of activities and gatherings. West's home and studio, just outside the centre of the metropolitan artistic community, became one of the sights to see in the city. Visitors came to see his history paintings specifically and some were attracted by his impressive collection of Old Masters. Many came to catch a glimpse of the venerable history painter in his creative environment.

West's close control of the layout, contents, decor, and display of the house, enabled him to have greater control of the understanding and reception of his paintings. By bringing the visitor through a progression of rooms, decorated with preparatory works for his own art, works by his artistic heroes, and his finished paintings, he took them on a journey of education about his role as a history painter within the history of British art. The carefully constructed 'house of art' gave greater context to his grand-scale history paintings, and his renowned art collection, in particular, was a key component of this scheme. In addition to its role as a domestic home, an artist's studio, and a private academy, the house was a major repository of the art of others. Represented on its walls were some of the great artists of various generations and geographies, from sixteenth-century Venetian masters, such as Titian, to contemporary American history painters, such as Trumbull. Beyond its decorative function, West's cabinet played an ideological role in illustrating his theories on art and his artistic process. To facilitate a better understanding of its purpose and meaning, the collection will first be examined in terms of its scope, content, and size.

## Chapter 2: The Collection of a Modern Old Master

When Benjamin West died at the age of 82 in March 1820, his collection of art numbered many hundreds of works by his own hand and thousands by others' hands. In May of that year, Christie's began advertising the sale of his collection. One such advertisement in *The Morning Chronicle* described a selection of the fine pictures to be found in the collection:

...the truly capital collection of superior ITALIAN, FRENCH, FLEMISH AND DUTCH PICTURES, selected from various distinguished Cabinets, under peculiar advantages, during the greater part of the last half century, by BENJAMIN WEST, Esq. deceased, the late venerable President of the Royal Academy. This very precious assemblage, which was formed for private gratification under the pure taste and correct judgment of the late proprietor, will be sold at his late residence, in Newman-street, that the public may be assured of the authenticity of every picture. It comprises many by Titian, particularly the celebrated Picture of the Death of Actaeon, formerly in the collection of King Charles I; several grand Historical and Poetical finished Pictures and Sketches by Rubens, in his boldest manner; the well-known Ecce Homo, by Guido, considered by the late President and his predecessor, Sir Joshua Reynolds, and the first connoisseurs, to be the most exquisite production in art; also, that highly finished Cabinet Picture by Wouvermans, painted in his silvery style, and well known by the appellation of the Red Cap; and other chef d'oeuvres equally distinguished, though too numerous to be detailed in an advertisement, but of which descriptive catalogues are preparing.<sup>1</sup>

This 'capital' collection was consigned for sale by West's two sons, Raphael and Benjamin, Junior.<sup>2</sup> West's collection of the art of others was so large that Christie's sold the works in three separate multi-day sales in the summer of 1820: (Part One) 9-13 June, (Part Two) 23-24

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<sup>1</sup> *The Morning Chronicle*, 26 May 1820, 4.

<sup>2</sup> The 1820 sales contained primarily the art of other artists and craftsmen. The sons retained most of West's own art, which was displayed for a number of years at Newman Street in a newly purpose-built private gallery. In 1829, these works of art were auctioned off by George Robins (1778-1847) along with the house.



June, and (Final Part) 1-6 July.<sup>3</sup> The first sale contained the masterpieces of his Old Master and contemporary prints and drawings, the second sale included the prized paintings, and the final sale consisted of the lesser-value prints, drawings and paintings, as well as sculpture, books, and various curiosities. The value of the collection was so intrinsically connected to its prestigious artist-owner and his studio that the auction house decided to sell the collection 'on the extensive premises of the late president, in Newman Street' instead of their auction rooms on Pall Mall.<sup>4</sup> The auction house considered it to be one of their principal sales of the year.<sup>5</sup> According to Farington, the first sale of prints and drawings achieved the best results and the other two sales were average to dismal.<sup>6</sup> Though a number of lots were bought in, the works of art that did sell went to major collectors of the period, including Samuel Woodburn (1786-1853), Richard Payne Knight (1751-1824), and Samuel Rogers (1763-1855).<sup>7</sup> Since the collection was widely dispersed by his impecunious sons after his death

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<sup>3</sup> Christie's, *Catalogue of the First Part of the Superb Collection of Prints and Drawings Formed by the Late Benjamin West, Esq., R.A. Historical Painter to His Majesty... Which be Sold by Auction by Mr. Christie, on Friday, June the 9<sup>th</sup> 1820, and successive days...* (London: Smeeton, 1820) (Lugt 9819), and Christie's, *A Catalogue of the Truly Capital Collection of Italian, French, Flemish, and Dutch Pictures Which were selected from Various Distinguished Cabinets... by Benjamin West, Esq., P.R.A., deceased... on Friday, June the 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1820, and following day...* (London: Smeeton, 1820) (Lugt 9830), and Christie's, *Catalogue of the Last Part of The Superb Collection of Drawings, Prints, and Books of Prints, formed by the Late Benjamin West, Esq., P.R.A.,... also... Plaster Casts... which will be sold by auction by Mr. Christie, on Saturday, July the 1<sup>st</sup>, 1820, and successive days...* (London: Smeeton, 1820) (Lugt 9833). The Lugt references for these sales can be found in Lugt 1938.

<sup>4</sup> Christie's, 9 June 1820, title page.

<sup>5</sup> W. Roberts, *Memorials of Christie's: A Record of Art Sales from 1766 to 1896* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1897), 1:94-96. Many of the objects that were 'bought in' or unsold during the sales were sold in later sales of the collection, including Christie's, 28 May 1824 (Lugt 10687); Robins, 22-25 May 1829 (Lugt 12063); Robins, 20-22 June 1829 (Lugt 12094); Robins, 16 July 1831 (Lugt 12725); Sotheby's, 11 May 1836 (Lugt 14347); Sotheby's, 1 June 1839 (Lugt 15474); Sotheby's, 10 November 1873 (Lugt 34252); and Christie's, 18-19 March 1898 (Lugt 56083). The references for these sales can be found in Lugt 1938.

<sup>6</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 16:5523 (19 June 1820), 5525 (23 June 1820), and 5534 (6 July 1820). For synopsis of sales, see also Whitley 1928/1973, 1:311-312.

<sup>7</sup> Christie's auctioneer logs (Christie's Archive, London) record these purchasers among many others. See also Farington 1978-1998, 15:5523 (19 June 1820). Several paintings that were purchased by Samuel Rogers from West's collection were later bequeathed to The National Gallery, London.

and there is no extant inventory, the sales catalogues remain the most comprehensive documents of its overall size, scope, and character.

In the front matter of the 9 June 1820 Christie's sale catalogue, West's collection of prints and drawings was described as 'so universally known; that any detailed account must be deemed unnecessary'.<sup>8</sup> *The Morning Chronicle's* advertisement for the sale alluded to the same universality of the collection as 'the high estimation in which this collection has been held by the admirers of the Fine Arts, renders it unnecessary to offer any comment on its distinguished merits'.<sup>9</sup> To be sure, West's many students, patrons, and invited guests had easy access to his collection at 14 Newman Street, thus its general contents were widely known. As was typical of auction catalogues of the period, frequently only the artists' names were given in the lot descriptions of the sale, and only those deemed important works had any description. This makes the identification of extant works using the catalogues problematic, if not impossible. However, following West's death his trustees and the executors of his estate placed a collector's mark, a blind stamp of his initials 'B-W' (fig. 16), which identifies at least the works on paper in his collection at the time of his death.<sup>10</sup> Many of the drawings and prints bearing this distinctive stamp are housed in private and public collections around the world today.

West had a decidedly eclectic yet fashionable and worldly taste. His well-charted journey from America to Britain by way of Italy, and his experiences with the people, places, and objects of these distinct geographies, cast an indelible mark on him as an artist and a

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<sup>8</sup> Christies, 9 June 1820, title page.

<sup>9</sup> *The Morning Chronicle*, 3 June 1820, 4.

<sup>10</sup> F. Lugt, *Les Marques de Collections de Dessins & d'Estampes – Supplément* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1956), 59-60, and F. Lugt, *Les Marques de Collections de Dessins & d'Estampes* (Amsterdam: Vereenigde Drukkerijen, 1921), 71-72.

collector. Although West was quite orthodox in his veneration of the works of Italian masters and generally conformed to the tastes of his time, his collecting interests were not confined exclusively to the major artists of the Western canon. The catholicity of his taste was illustrated in the diversity of his collection, which included a wide-range of works of art by the great artists of ancient and modern periods across several geographies.<sup>11</sup> His collection aligned with his belief that his art, and that of his contemporaries, represented the great achievements in the long, distinguished history of the ‘progress of art’.<sup>12</sup>

West began his inaugural 1792 discourse with his views on the history of art, beginning with ‘the original means of communicating ideas’ exemplified by Egyptian hieroglyphics and Native American pictorial designs.<sup>13</sup> In alignment with traditional academic theory, at the centre of his progress of art were the arts of ancient Greece and Rome and the masterpieces of the Renaissance.<sup>14</sup> At the end of the continuum, he placed himself and his chosen contemporaries and students, as inheritors of the artistic genius of the past.<sup>15</sup> He described his personal and their collective advancements, focusing on how modern British artists continue to go ‘beyond [their] predecessors’ to greater levels of artistic genius.<sup>16</sup> As President of the Royal Academy, West promoted the idea that contemporary art had seen unprecedented rapid advancements, saying to the students:

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<sup>11</sup> F. Herrmann, *The English as Collectors: A Documentary Sourcebook* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1972; New Castle Delaware: Oak Knoll Press, and London: John Murray, 1999), 13.

<sup>12</sup> Galt 1820, 2:144.

<sup>13</sup> B. West, *A Discourse, Delivered to the Students of the Royal Academy on the Distribution of the Prizes, December 10, 1792, by the President...To Which is Prefixed the Speech of the President to the Royal Academicians on the 24<sup>th</sup> of March 1792* (London: Thomas Cadell, 1793), 18-19, and Galt 1820: 2:87.

<sup>14</sup> Galt 1820, 2:115-116.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:137.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:130.

The British school has risen so much more speedily to that celebrity in art, which is too well known and established to need any illustration here, what should hinder [us] from becoming the most distinguished rivals of the fame acquired by the Greeks and Italians.<sup>17</sup>

He had a very patriotic vision of the development of art. The scope and content of West's Old Master collection asserted his beliefs in what schools, periods, and types of art influenced and related to his art and, more broadly, contemporary British and American art. In this way, it illustrated his and the British school's ideal artistic lineage. The collection of contemporary art that West surrounded himself with represented the various identities he constructed for himself, as artist and theorist, as well as his various interests, whether artistic, personal, social or political. As historian Susan Pearce has written, collectors use objects as they use language, 'to construct their social lives'.<sup>18</sup> This is true of West as a collector. The contemporary portraits, landscapes, and artefacts representing the people, places, and objects from both sides of the Atlantic in his collection reveal his wide-reaching artistic and social circles as well as his unique transatlantic identity. His collection of the Old and New Worlds had a strong sense of history, both of the artists and the range and type of subject matter represented, that also resonated closely with West's own art.<sup>19</sup> In this way, his collection was quite illustrative. It was the deeply personal collection of a history painter.

The Old Master and contemporary collection, when viewed as an ensemble, reflects the life and practice of the artist in the context of his times. Its overall diverse content, large size and scope resulted from a range of factors, some carefully considered and managed, but others more contingent and unplanned. While the collection was shaped by his own personal

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 2:141.

<sup>18</sup> S. Pearce, *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 28.

<sup>19</sup> This is a similar idea to those proposed by Rubens's scholars about his collection. See Muller 1989, 21.

predilections, tastes, and self-consciousness about his artistic persona, it also was impacted by the vicissitudes of the art market and wider cultural developments of the period. From Old Masters to contemporary art to Native American curiosities, his collection was a combination of the Old and New Worlds, and a statement of his place in both. It helped form his identity as a history painter indebted to the Old Masters and as well as a modern artist with a transatlantic history and connections. It also became the ultimate repository of images for the history painter. This chapter explores West's role as a collector, revealing his influence as an arbiter of taste and the international connections and sources which helped shape his distinct Old and New World collection. The collection will be partially reconstructed using a selection of identifiable objects and the posthumous sale catalogues to highlight its general form and character in the context of West's artistic and social life.

### **The Artist-Collector**

West was not a born collector. He did not grow up in an environment of collectors and connoisseurs. Indeed, he had very little exposure to the fine arts in his native Pennsylvania for there were no formal art schools in the 1750s in America, and private art collections were modest by European standards. West's first interactions with art were through several private collections, including that of his early master, William Williams, whose collection included engravings after Old Master paintings, and those of West's patrons, such as Governor James Hamilton (1710-1783), whose collection included a few copies of European paintings.<sup>20</sup> It was his three-year (1760-63) sojourn in Italy studying 'the costume of antiquity, and the beauties of the great works of modern genius' and other art

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<sup>20</sup> For West's various interactions with art and collections in America, see Galt 1820, 1:26, 71, and 82-83, and Cunningham 1837, 2:9.

treasures that provided the basis for his knowledge of art, connoisseurship, and collecting.<sup>21</sup>

The practice of looking and copying honed and polished West's eye. In a letter to a friend in Philadelphia in 1762, who had recently returned from Italy, West revealed his belief in the importance of studying the Old Masters in Italy as a means of elevating one's artistic skills as well as one's tastes and connoisseurial skills. He wrote:

It gives me great satisfaction to hear that the two copies of the Sybil and St. Cecilia are arrived safe, and judged deserving to be hung up in the Governors House, and I find I owe you many thanks for your favourable opinion about them, which must have set them off to greater advantage, as you had the opportunity of comparing them hear with the Originals and the Taste with which you have enjoyed the sight of the fine painting in Italy, may surely without making you any Compliment put you in the Rank of the Connoisseurs.<sup>22</sup>

His confidence and knowledge as a connoisseur developed during his time in Italy. While there, he also developed an impressive international network of artists, collectors, antiquarians, dealers and connoisseurs, including Kauffman and Mengs as well as Cardinal Albani (1692-1779), Richard Dalton (c.1715-1791), and Thomas Jenkins (1722-1798).<sup>23</sup>

West continued his course of study when he arrived in Britain in 1763. The private collections in the country houses of Britain were sizable and impressive, and West travelled to see many of the most important examples shortly after his arrival in the country. He visited the famous Raphael cartoons at Hampton Court and the impressive Old Master collections at Longford Castle, Blenheim Palace, Corsham Court, Stourhead, Fonthill Abbey,

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<sup>21</sup> Galt 1820, 1:142. For more on his Italian experiences, see Galt 1820, 1:90-145; Alberts 1978, 29-57; Abrams 1985, 73-90; Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 14-19; Richardson 1978, 3-26; and Marks 1980, 4-24.

<sup>22</sup> Letter from Benjamin West, Florence, to Joseph Shippen, Jr., Philadelphia, 11 May 1762, Benjamin West Papers, coll. 394, The Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts, Winterthur Library, Delaware.

<sup>23</sup> Galt 1820, 1:95-129, and Abrams 1985, 81-82.

and Wilton House, as well as the cast collection at Richmond House in London.<sup>24</sup> West's visits to these collections were entirely conventional and not only enabled him to encounter great works of art, but also introduced him to a network of potential patronage. These collections were filled with familiar Italian masters and important sculptures, but several of them also included modern British art and art of earlier generations by immigrant artists such as Lely and Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641). Flemish and Dutch art of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries pervaded British aristocratic collections, and artists such as Rubens became familiar to the young West.<sup>25</sup>

In the late 1760s, once West had established himself in London and began to achieve commercial success with his history paintings, he began collecting in earnest.<sup>26</sup> With financial success, came the desire to possess signifiers of professional accomplishment, sophistication, wealth, and taste. As discussed in the previous chapter, in his home and studio, West created an elaborate environment to impress and entertain perspective patrons and to elevate his own status as a gentleman. A fine art collection fit into this scheme as a visual statement of his arrival in the elite artistic world – and polite society. Though aristocratic collections were important models for West's own collection, it was the tradition of artists' collecting that was undoubtedly the most influential on him. In this pursuit, West was following an established lineage of artist-collectors, dating back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with artists including Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574), Rubens, and – in a

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<sup>24</sup> Galt 1820, 2:5-6. West visited the country house collections while staying with his American patron William Allen at Bath and his half-brother, Thomas West, in Reading. For the Duke of Richmond's collection at Whitehall, see A. MacGregor, *Curiosity and Enlightenment: Collectors and Collections from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), 98-99.

<sup>25</sup> Rubens became an important inspiration to West from very early in his career in Britain as an artist and as a royal courtier.

<sup>26</sup> For the development of his early career in London and his studios, see the first chapter of this thesis.

British context — Lely.<sup>27</sup> For centuries, artists traditionally collected objects like engravings and plaster casts for instruction and inspiration in their studios. In the 1680s, the private collection of Lely was sold at auction in England, and was one of the first instances in Britain that an artist's collection of significant merit was advertised as such and sold in a single public sale.<sup>28</sup> Lely was one of the first artists in Britain to collect on any scale, and in many ways he set the stage for numerous British artist-collectors over the next 150 years. Hudson, Richardson, Reynolds, West, and Thomas Lawrence (1769-1830) would all follow in his footsteps, following success in their profession with an accumulation of material goods that signified status and wealth. The tradition of collecting by artists coincides with and supports their efforts to elevate their professional and social status. An art collection was an aid in this process; it was a visual symbol of their elevated status as learned gentlemen rather than labouring craftsmen. Artists like Lely and Richardson were known as much for their important collections of drawings as they were for their own art.

In her *Companion to the Most Celebrated Private Galleries of Art in London* (1844), Mrs. Anna Jameson (1784-1860) commented on the eighteenth century's so-called golden period of collecting and categorised the collectors, beginning with artist-collectors:

Some people love pictures as they love friends; some, as they love music; some, as they love money. And the collectors of pictures take rank accordingly. There are those who collect them for instruction, as a student collects grammars, dictionaries, and commentaries; - these are artists; such were the collections of Rubens, of Sir Peter Lely, of the President West, of Lawrence, of Sir Joshua Reynolds. There are those who collect pictures around them as a king assembles his court – as significant of state, as subservient to ornament or pride; such were Buckingham and Talleyrand.

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<sup>27</sup>For Vasari as a collector, see C. Monbeig-Goguel, 'A Propos de Vasari, Historien et Collectionneur: Giulio Romano et Giorgio Vasari, le Dessin de la Chute d'Icare Retrouvé', *La Revue du Louvre* 29 (1979): 273–276. For Rubens as a collector, see Muller 1989. For Lely as a collector, see D. Dethloff, 'Sir Peter Lely's Collection of Prints and Drawings', in Baker, Elam and Warwick 2003, 123-140.

<sup>28</sup> *The London Gazette*, 13 February 1688, 2. See also D. Dethloff, 'The Executors Account Book and the Dispersal of Peter Lely's Collection', *Journal of the History of Collecting* 8, no. 1 (1996): 15-51.



There are those who collect pictures as a man speculates in funds; - picture-fanciers...amateur picture-dealers, who buy sell, exchange and bargain...Lastly, there are those who collect pictures for love, for companionship, for communion; to whom each picture, well-chosen at first, unfolds new beauties – becomes dearer every day; such a one was Sir George Beaumont – such a one is Mr. Rogers.<sup>29</sup>

As the anecdote conveys, even shortly after his death in the nineteenth century, West was considered a notable artist-collector in the company of more renowned ones such as Lely. However, in Jameson's rather narrow view, artists collected works purely to inform and instruct their own art. Although this was, of course, one of the strongest motivations for his collecting, it was not the only one for West. His collection was not just the collection of a practicing artist – his was the collection of a prominent art world figure. To suit his various needs and responsibilities, it was a public and private source of artistic inspiration, a visualisation of his theories on art, a tool for social aspirations as well as a source of personal pleasure and contemplation. During the final years of West's life, his friends and visitors noted that he occupied much of his time rearranging his collection of pictures and privately contemplating his Old Master drawings. Four days before his death, his friend John Thomas Smith recorded having found him just finished leafing through his treasured drawings:

He continued his fondness for his two volumes of Fra Bartolomeo's drawings with such zeal, that within four days of his death, when I last felt the warm pressure of his friendly hand, on book lay open upon, and the other resting against, a small settee within his reach, so that he could conveniently turn them over and enjoy them from his pillow.<sup>30</sup>

Suffering from various ailments and discomforts, the elderly artist was unable to paint, so during his solitary time, he immersed himself in his precious collection.<sup>31</sup> Collecting was an

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<sup>29</sup> A. Jameson, *Companion to the Most Celebrated Private Galleries of Art in London* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1844), 383.

<sup>30</sup> Smith 1829/1917, 2:308.

<sup>31</sup> Dunlap 1834/1969, 1:87; Smith 1829/1917, 2:308; and J. Fenton, *School of Genius: A History of the Royal Academy of Arts* (London: Royal Academy of Arts Publications, 2006), 161.

integral part of his life, a public pursuit and a private passion, for much of the history painter's long career.

West envisioned his collection as a private and public resource and therefore shared it with many. When Sophie von la Roche visited West in 1786, she described the personal tour the artist gave her of his home and collection, recounting that 'he led us to his collection of old and modern masters... I was proud on immediately recognizing a Titian...Guido Reni...and some other works once the property of Charles I'.<sup>32</sup> These types of observations, describing familiar Old Masters and prestigious provenance, were common in contemporary documents and suggest the basis for the reputation of the collection. In addition to the physical accessibility of the collection at Newman Street, many of West's Old Master drawings were also reproduced in contemporary publications, such as Conrad Martin Metz's (1749-1827) *Imitations of Ancient and Modern Drawings* (1789), which noted the names of the artists as well as their current owners. In this publication, there were at least twenty drawings that referenced West's ownership, including a *Leda and the Swan* after Raphael (fig. 17) that was inscribed 'In the Collection of Benj.n West Esq. R.A.'. <sup>33</sup> On several occasions, West also displayed important works from his collection publicly at the British Institution, an establishment that he supported and that frequently presented exhibitions of Old Master works. Like Reynolds before him, West also promoted his collection in his presidential discourses at the Royal Academy starting in 1792.<sup>34</sup> In his 1811 discourse, he declared that Titian's *Last Supper* stands 'in the very highest rank in art', and then noted 'his

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<sup>32</sup> Roche 1933, 153.

<sup>33</sup> Metz publication was first published in 1789 and subsequently reprinted in 1798, when it was dedicated to West, who was President of the Royal Academy at that time.

<sup>34</sup> Reynolds 1975/1981, 161. Likewise, Richardson promoted his collection as exemplars in his writings. For more about this, see C. Gibson-Wood, 'Jonathan Richardson and the Rationalization of Connoisseurship', *Art History* 7, no. 1 (March 1984): 38-56, and C. Gibson-Wood, 'A Judiciously Disposed Collection': Jonathan Richardson Senior's cabinet of drawings', in Baker, Elam, and Warwick 2003, 169.

original sketch in oil colours, which I have the good fortune to possess' as an exemplar.<sup>35</sup>

Through these various public displays of promotion and ownership, West attempted to control the perception of the quality of his collection and assert its importance.

### **The Development of the Collection**

West's rapid success in the London art world and his subsequent fortune enabled him to collect works beginning very early in his career. Though he did make a few acquisitions in Italy, including a circular porphyry slab and a 'muller' along with several prints, he probably did not procure anything substantial before his arrival in Britain.<sup>36</sup> Because West did not keep records of acquisitions until later in his career, it is impossible to determine exactly when he began collecting. Several objects from his collection are depicted in his paintings of the 1760s and 1770s, which gives clues as to the types of objects that established his collection. In Pratt's *The American School* (fig. 3) two marbled folios of Old Master engravings and red chalk drawings as well as a classical bust are prominently situated on the table in West's idealised studio. Additionally, several Native American objects from his collection are depicted in his early history paintings, including *The Death of General Wolfe* (fig.1).<sup>37</sup> These Old and New World objects, if indeed they represent the first acquisitions of his collection, symbolise the worlds with which West identified himself and his art. This

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<sup>35</sup> Galt 1820, 2:167-168.

<sup>36</sup> Robins, 20-22 June 1829, day 2, lot 281. According to the 1829 catalogue, the slab was 'between 3 and 4 inches thick, and 14 inches in diameter'. For more on the market in Rome around the time of West's visit, see J. Yarker and C. Hornsby, 'Buying Art in Rome in the 1770s', in M. D. Sánchez-Jáuregui and S. Wilcox, eds, *The English Prize: The Capture of the Westmoreland An Episode of the Grand Tour* (New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, 2012), 63-87.

<sup>37</sup> King 1991, 39-41.

underlying current of the two worlds and their interaction, chronologically as well as geographically, continued to develop in his collection over his career as an artist-collector.<sup>38</sup>

From the 1770s onward, West became an assiduous collector of art, taking advantage of the blossoming London art market to build his collection. His prominent public profile as a royal painter and later as Surveyor of the King's Pictures and President of the Academy meant that he was well placed to obtain inside market knowledge and take advantage of it for himself and his patrons. At this time, unprecedented numbers of Old Master pictures were being imported by dealers and artists into the country and being auctioned in well-publicised sales in London.<sup>39</sup> As a buyer, dealer, and spectator, West frequented the London auction rooms, attending numerous major auctions from the 1760s until his death in 1820. As evidence of this, the July 1820 West sale included nearly 100 annotated sale catalogues, most notably the drawings sales of artist-collectors Richardson, Reynolds, and Thomas Worlidge (1700-1766).<sup>40</sup> According to West's bank records, when he bought at auction, he primarily did so at Christie's, which had been established by proprietor James Christie (1730-1803) in 1766.<sup>41</sup> One of the London newspapers remarked on his presence at an auction in 1787: 'Mr. West was constant in his attendance at the late sale of Mr. Barnard's collection; and as that gentleman is not a niggard in the arts, he will no doubt continue to vend to the public eye, the beauties of all the lots he purchased, in some shape or other!'<sup>42</sup> As the commentator alluded,

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<sup>38</sup> The relationship of his collection to his art will be discussed in third chapter of this thesis.

<sup>39</sup> J. Stourton and C. Sebag-Montifiore, *The British as Art Collectors* (London: Scala Publishers, 2012), 115-125 and 153-163.

<sup>40</sup> Christie's, 1 July 1820, day 5, lots 52 and 53 (total of 99 catalogues, many with his notations).

<sup>41</sup> Stourton and Sebag-Montifiore 2012, 125.

<sup>42</sup> V & A Press Cuttings, 2:240 (February- July 1787). This citation is undated and unreferenced; however, since it refers to a sale that took place in February 1787, it is presumably from that time period.

West made some of his purchases quite public as a means of drawing attention to himself as a collector and connoisseur. However, in actuality, he bought at auction under his own name relatively infrequently, instead preferring to use his network of various dealers or agents as intermediaries. West also procured works of art directly from other art collectors. The title page of one of the Christie's sale catalogues promoted this fact, claiming that the prints and drawings from his collection were 'principally from the cabinets of Hillier, Burtells, Blackburn, Rogers, Hudson, Barnard &c.'<sup>43</sup> West was personally associated with several of the collectors listed, including John Barnard (1709-1784), who was Royal Librarian during part of his tenure as a royal painter.<sup>44</sup>

When it came to buying works of art, West was known to seek good deals and make artistic discoveries; however, he frequently paid inflated prices for big-name pictures. For instance, at the April 1802 sale of the late Paul D'Aigremont, West paid the highest price for a single picture at the auction which was a Rubens's *St. Cecilia*.<sup>45</sup> At the same time, he was typically on the hunt for an undiscovered masterpiece. In 1785 West found a painting that he deemed to be by Titian encrusted with dirt in the back of a London dealer's shop. With its authenticity unknown to its owner, West apparently bought it for only twenty guineas.<sup>46</sup>

West employed an international network of artists, dealers, collectors, and intermediaries to acquire and disperse works of art in London and abroad. When acquiring

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<sup>43</sup> Christie's, 9 June 1820, title page.

<sup>44</sup> Barnard's collection was sold through Greenwood's in London on 16 February 1787 and lasted eight days. The esteemed collector-scholar Frits Lugt thought Barnard's mark, of all the British collectors' marks, was the highest guarantee of exceptional quality. See Lugt 1921, 256, and A. Griffiths, 'The Reverend Clayton Mordaunt Cracherode (1730-99)', in A. Griffiths, ed., *Landmarks in Print Collecting* (London: Published by The British Museum Press and the Parnassus Foundation in association with The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1996), 48.

<sup>45</sup> Christie's, 23-24 April 1802, day 2, lot 66 (unlocated).

<sup>46</sup> *The Whitehall Evening Post*, 12 November 1785, 3; Alberts 1978, 185; and Whitley 1928/1968, 2:31-33.

works of art, especially by Old Masters, West worked primarily with several London-based dealers including Michael Bryan (1757-1821), Noel Desenfans, John Greenwood, and John Thomas Smith.<sup>47</sup> During this time, a number of dealers, most notably Bryan, Greenwood and the Glasgow-born dealer William Buchanan (1777-1864), specialised in the importation of Italian pictures from abroad.<sup>48</sup> West worked most frequently with Greenwood, the American artist and dealer who had come to Britain by way of Surinam, Holland, and France, arriving in London in 1763, the same year as West.<sup>49</sup> He became a successful dealer, print seller, and auctioneer, using his worldly connections to import a large number of Old Master pictures from abroad.<sup>50</sup> West made numerous acquisitions from the American dealer as his bank records indicate.<sup>51</sup> He also had a good working relationship with Smith, a former student who with his support later became the keeper of prints at the British Museum.<sup>52</sup> In 1784 Smith commented that ‘Mr. West...frequently engaged me to bid for him at auctions, an honour also occasionally conferred on me for similar services by Sir Joshua Reynolds’.<sup>53</sup> West worked closely as well with Desenfans, a French dealer-collector based in London starting in 1796, who bought extensively from the French collections streaming into Britain

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<sup>47</sup> For information about Bryan, Desenfans and other dealers who took advantage of the post-Revolution sales of aristocratic French collections, see Stourton and Sebag-Montifiore 2012, 153-163.

<sup>48</sup> G. F. Waagen, *Treasures of Art in Great Britain*, 3 vols. (London: John Murray, 1854), 1:22, and, I. Reist, ‘The Fate of the Palais Royal Collection: 1791-1800’, in R. Panzanelli and M. Preti-Hamard, eds., *The Circulation of Works of Art in the Revolutionary Era, 1789-1848* (Rennes: University of Rennes, 2007), 28.

<sup>49</sup> Alberts 1978, 114, and ‘John Greenwood (1727–1792)’, rev. R. H. Saunders, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004.

<sup>50</sup> C. White, D. Alexander, and E. D’Oench, *Rembrandt in Eighteenth Century England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), 58.

<sup>51</sup> Benjamin West Account Ledgers, Thomas Coutts Bank Archive, London. West’s bank documents record a number of payments to Greenwood, including: ‘11 Jan 1786 Mr Greenwood 50-8’, ‘1 Aug 1786 Mr Greenwood 145-11-6’, and ‘1 Nov 1791 Mr Greenwood 52-12’.

<sup>52</sup> Alberts 1978, 166.

<sup>53</sup> Smith 1905, 91-92.

during the Revolutionary period and its aftermath.<sup>54</sup> Although the exact purchases are not always known, West's bank records indicate that he made a number of large payments to the French dealer.<sup>55</sup> The two men also exchanged works of art on occasion. In the late 1780s, Desenfans offered to buy one of West's Titians in exchange for one of his fine Claudes, but West rejected the offer.<sup>56</sup> West's relationship with Desenfans was characterised by highs and lows. During the 1780s and 90s they frequently socialised together; however, in 1802, the dealer published a derogatory statement towards West and the Academy that temporarily severed their relationship.<sup>57</sup> According to Farington, the two men eventually reconciled, and at the end of his life, Desenfans made West one of the trustees in charge of his art collection, which was ultimately bequeathed to Dulwich Gallery.<sup>58</sup>

While West primarily acquired works of art in Britain through local dealers and auction houses, when pursuing some of the best works of art, he occasionally made purchases through agents operating abroad. West's position as an American in London gave him opportunities in art markets in France, America, and other parts of the Atlantic world. In 1795, West supplied Trumbull with financial backing to purchase nearly 100 paintings from the renowned French dealer, Jean-Baptiste-Pierre Le Brun (1748-1813), who was also husband of the contemporary artist, Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun (1755-1842).<sup>59</sup> According to

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<sup>54</sup> Stourton and Sebag-Montefiore 2012, 163.

<sup>55</sup> Benjamin West Account Ledgers, Thomas Coutts Bank Archive, London. His bank account records note a number of large payments to Desenfans, including: '3 Dec 1788 N. Desenfans 700-0-0', '6 July 1789 Noel Desenfans 500-0-0', '16 Feb 1791 N Desenfans 360', '23 Nov 1796 N Desenfans 214-19-4'.

<sup>56</sup> Whitley 1928/1968, 2:32. West was approached by a number of potential buyers. See *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, 27 September 1785.

<sup>57</sup> N. J. Desenfens, *A Letter to Benjamin West, Esq. President of the Royal Academy* (London: Cadell and Davies; and Hookham, 1802).

<sup>58</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 8:3082-3083 (8 July 1807), and Alberts 1978, 335.

<sup>59</sup> Alberts 1978, 242, and Farington 1978-1998, 3:774 (14 February 1797).

Farington, James Christie commented that the collection, which was consigned to the auctioneer, 'belongs to West, who supplied Trumbull with money to make the purchases in France'.<sup>60</sup> Although the paintings were destined for auction, West may have acquired or retained a number of works beforehand for his collection.<sup>61</sup> According to the Christie's auctioneer record of the sale, West also made several purchases on behalf of the King as his surveyor, including paintings by Berghem and Raphael.<sup>62</sup> West continued to make acquisitions abroad or through intermediaries in his international network throughout his career.<sup>63</sup> According to Farington, in 1797, West purchased a number of pictures in France through an unidentified agent. He invited Farington 'to come to his House to see the pictures He has obtained from France, particularly His Berghem'.<sup>64</sup> He described seeing 'the Berghem, the 4 pictures by Teniers, one by Morilio, Dijanira by Pordenone, Angelica & Medoro by Guercino, a Madona, Guido'.<sup>65</sup>

West used his extensive network of American patrons and friends to discreetly acquire works of art for his collection, particularly contemporary American art and Native American curiosities. In 1795, John Adams, who was resident in London at the time,

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<sup>60</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 3:774 (14 February 1797).

<sup>61</sup> The exact financial agreement between West and Trumbull is unclear, so the paintings West kept may have been part of the agreement.

<sup>62</sup> *St. James's Chronicle*, 18 February 1797, 1. The Christie's Auctioneer record of this sale records West as the purchaser for a number of lots 'on behalf of the King'. Whether for the King or himself, he bought the Berchem of a mountainous landscape for £945, one of the highest prices paid at the sale. See auctioneer log for Christie's, 17 February 1797 (John Trumbull Sale), Christie's Archive, London, and G. Reitlinger, *The Economics of Taste: The Rise and Fall of the Picture Market, 1760-1960* (1961; repr., New York, Chicago and San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), 249.

<sup>63</sup> As evidence of his activities buying abroad, the inventory of the contents of the captured merchant ship the *Westmoreland* in 1783, lists two boxes being sent from Italy to London to a 'Mr. Vest', which may have been a shipment to West. M. D. Sánchez-Jáuregui, catalogue entry for 'Compañía de Lonjistas de Madrid, Inventory of the Contents of the *Westmoreland*', in Sánchez-Jáuregui and Wilcox 2012, 174-175.

<sup>64</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 2:503 (6 March 1796).

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*



negotiated with West to sell him a picture of Angelica and Isadora by an artist referred to as 'Paduana'.<sup>66</sup> West's bank records show multiple payments to Adams for the picture, suggesting Adams allowed him to pay over a period time.<sup>67</sup> Another American diplomat and friend, Caleb Whitefoord (1734-1810), acquired for West a bust of their mutual friend Benjamin Franklin.<sup>68</sup> West also acquired works of art through his former American students who had returned home after their time in London. His extensive network provided a variety of New World objects for his collection, as will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

### **The Model Collector: West as Advisor and Dealer**

West's role as a collector was multi-faceted. He collected for himself as well as for his patrons. In an effort to better understand him as a collector, the role of West as an artist-advisor and dealer needs to be explored. Naturally, his expertise and experience with other collectors informed and shaped the content of his own collection and vice versa.

Eighteenth-century collectors were concerned with aspects of connoisseurship, such as authorship, quality, and originality, and this type of knowledge of art was considered a polite gentlemanly pursuit.<sup>69</sup> A growing distrust of commercially-driven dealers and auctioneers led many collectors to seek secondary, objective advice from prominent artists.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Letter from John Adams to Benjamin West, 11 September 1795, Benjamin West Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. The painting is unlocated.

<sup>67</sup> Benjamin West Account Ledger, Thomas Coutts Bank Archive, London. The bank records indicate payments on 31 October 1795 and 15 December 1795 to Mr. John Adams for the picture.

<sup>68</sup> Letter from Benjamin West to Benjamin Franklin, 28 April 1782, Benjamin Franklin Letters Collection, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

<sup>69</sup> C. Gibson-Wood, *Jonathan Richardson: Art Theorist of the English Enlightenment* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 179-180.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

Artists of the period, including West, welcomed this expansion of their role. Indeed, the assignment of such knowledge to artists also fitted into their wider process of professionalization, thereby increasing their status. As the architect John Gwynn (1713-1786) said in 1749, ‘Who can be so good Judges of Arts, as the Artists themselves?’<sup>71</sup> In the early eighteenth century, Richardson had acted in this advisor-connoisseur capacity, recognising ‘the Hand of the several Masters’ for others and publishing a book entitled *Two Discourses* (1719), which included an *Essay on the Whole Art of Criticism as it relates to Painting* and *Argument in Behalf of the Science of the Connoisseur*, as guidance for novice connoisseurs and collectors.<sup>72</sup> In the late eighteenth century, West’s positions as President of the Royal Academy and Surveyor of the King’s Pictures legitimated his position as an arbiter of taste and his practical experience as a collector appealed to those seeking advice on building their collections. As a result, his collection was seen as a model of taste. West highlighted the importance of artists and their dual roles, being both a practitioner of their art and a connoisseur of the art of others, in his inaugural speech as president at the Academy in 1792, when he said, ‘I know I am speaking to the first professional characters in Europe in every branch of elegant art, as well as those who are most distinguished in taste and judgment’.<sup>73</sup> West was known for his extensive knowledge of the history of art, and his own experience as a painter equipped him to recognise the techniques and style of other painters.<sup>74</sup> According to Gerald Reitlinger, these skills and his reputation made him the ‘expert-in-chief

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<sup>71</sup> J. Gwynn, *An Essay on Design, Including Proposals for Erecting a Public Academy* (London: Brindley, Harding and Payne, 1749), 37, and quoted in I. Pears, *The Discovery of Painting: The Growth of Interest in the Arts in England, 1680-1768* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 189.

<sup>72</sup> Gibson-Wood 2000, 180.

<sup>73</sup> Galt 1820, 2:91-92. This statement also makes reference to the audience of the Academy lectures that included artists, patrons, and collectors.

<sup>74</sup> Gavin Hamilton’s expertise was considered in the same way. See B. Cassidy, *The Life & Letters of Gavin Hamilton (1723-1798): Artist & Art Dealer in Eighteenth-Century Rome* (London: Harvey Miller, 2011), 26-27.

until his death' and his 'judgement on art was more valued than any other's and, though a foreigner, trained abroad, he somehow epitomised all that the English understood by art'.<sup>75</sup>

According to Cunningham, West's expertise was widely noted such that 'the word of West was the courtly sanction in matters of taste'.<sup>76</sup> Though the frequency of requests for his connoisseurial expertise and valuations was at its height during his Royal Academy presidency, he began this type of work years before he took office. In 1779 he and fellow Academician G. Battista Cipriani (1727-1785) assessed nearly 200 Old Master pictures owned by the late Sir Robert Walpole (1676-1745) in Houghton Hall at the overall value of £40,555, for which the Empress Catherine of Russia acquired the entire collection.<sup>77</sup> In accordance with the taste of the times, West and Cipriani placed the highest valuations on the Italian pictures and lower values on the Flemish and Dutch pictures. Beginning around 1790, when French Old Master collections started to stream into the London art market in the wake of the Revolution, West and others were frequently asked to value many of the pictures. As will be discussed later in the chapter, West was involved in the values of the famous Orleans collection. When treasures from the Escorial, left behind by a fleeing French Napoleonic army, were being auctioned in 1801 through Buchanan, West was asked to appraise several of the pictures, including Raphael's last finished picture, *Spasimo da Palermo*, which he valued at a staggering £10,000.<sup>78</sup> According to Reitlinger, West's rationale for his high valuations of certain art and artists was entirely based on his preference for the Italian Old Masters, who were his 'artistic heroes', as well as Northern artists like Nicolaes Berchem

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<sup>75</sup> Reitlinger 1961/1964, 57.

<sup>76</sup> Cunningham 1837, 2:35.

<sup>77</sup> Alberts 1978, 184, and Reitlinger 1961/1964, 141.

<sup>78</sup> Reitlinger 1961/1964, 55 and 110.

(Berghem) (1620-1683) that were well-represented in his own collection.<sup>79</sup> In this way, he may have been promoting certain artists to bolster the value of his own collection. He was also frequently asked to identify works of art that had no attribution or history. In 1800, the antiquarian Samuel Lysons (1763-1819) sent him a number of drawings from his collection to attribute. After examining them, West suggested they were sixteenth-century designs for painted glass, possibly completed by Flemish artists working in England.<sup>80</sup> Many collectors commented on West's assessment of works in their collection as a means of authoritative attribution. On the verso of an original mount on a drawing from the collection of Uvedale Price (1747-1829) is an authentication: 'Vandyck, thought so by Mr. West'.<sup>81</sup> There are numerous examples such as these that attest to the demands for his opinions and connoisseurial expertise.

In his capacity as an arbiter of taste, West also played a role in the public arena of institutional and government collecting. In 1791, following the death of Richard Dalton, West was asked by George III to take on the role of the Surveyor of the King's Pictures, a royal advisory position. Whereas Dalton's tenure is characterised by his astute acquisitions for the Royal Collection, including the sizable Consul Joseph Smith collection acquired in Venice, West's years in this position are marked more by reinstallations and conservation.<sup>82</sup> According to Farington, West was responsible for visitor access and for overseeing the packing of works, including the famous Raphael cartoons, in the collection before they were

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 12 and 23.

<sup>80</sup> Letter from Benjamin West, Newman Street, to Samuel Lysons, 16 May 1800, AND/10/217, Anderson Catalogues, The Royal Academy of Arts Archive, London.

<sup>81</sup> C. Watkins and B. Cowell, *Uvedale Price (1747-1829): Decoding the Picturesque* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2012), 123.

<sup>82</sup> For more about the Consul Smith Collection, see F. Vivian, *The Consul Smith Collection: Masterpieces of Italian Drawings from the Royal Library, Windsor Castle: Raphael to Canaletto* (Munich: Hirmer, 1989).

moved.<sup>83</sup> Though in actuality, West made few acquisitions for the Royal Collection, his notable position as art advisor to the King attracted others seeking his advice. As Royal Academy President, West played a role in trying to shape the institution's collection as a model of taste and was instrumental in the campaign for a national collection under the Academy's control.<sup>84</sup> In this, he believed a national collection should unite Old Masters and modern masters, showing the progress of art in Britain.<sup>85</sup> However, fractious relationships, differing opinions, and standard politics within the Academy and the government during the late eighteenth century made the formation of a national collection difficult to achieve. West could have more control over his own collection or private collections as ideal collection models.

Using his own collection as a model, West guided other collectors in the composition of their collection. To this end, he aided them in their pursuit of acquiring recognisable Old Master works. This type of collecting was fashionable. In 1803, Buchanan commented on the current taste and priorities of collectors, saying, 'The English now seem to be governed entirely by the Vanity of possessing Capital works of Art of a few favourite Masters...pictures too which have made a noise in the world or were well known in the Collections to which they belonged' and 'to possess a few rare and highly celebrated works...

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<sup>83</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 14:4944 (14 December 1816).

<sup>84</sup> D. Levi, 'Like the leaves of the Sybil': The Orléans Collection and the Debate on a National Gallery in Great Britain', in Panzanelli and Preti-Hamard 2007, 71. West had hoped to buy paintings from the Orleans collection for the Academy's collection.

<sup>85</sup> For more on this, see H. Hooock, 'Old Masters and the English School: The Royal Academy of the Arts and the Notion of a National Gallery at the Turn of the Century', *Journal of the History of Collections* 16, no. 1 (2004): 1-18, especially 4-5.

for that any money is given'.<sup>86</sup> According to Buchanan, West had significant influence and was leading the taste for certain 'favourite' artists,

The leading Masters are Titian and Rubens...The other fashionable Masters at present likewise are the Carracci, Leonardo da Vinci, Domenichino, Guido, Murillo, and very fine pictures of Albano. People are so bigotted here, or so led by the nose of Monsr. West and the like, that very fine pictures of Perino del Vaga, Fra Bartolomeo, and early pictures of the greatest masters pass unnoticed.<sup>87</sup>

Distinguished collectors such as William Beckford (1760-1844), who was West's patron for a number of projects at Fonthill Abbey, sought his advice and asked him to make purchases on his behalf. According to Farington, Beckford was not always satisfied with West's performance in this capacity and became particularly angered with him when he failed to secure several pictures he wanted at the Orleans sale. He reported that 'owing to some bungling West had not purchased for him four pictures for which he would have given any price – The 3 Marys – A Carrach – Moses striking the Rock, N. Poussin, - the last Judgment, L. Bassa, The Circumcision, G. Bassan & c'.<sup>88</sup> His contemporaries occasionally asked him to assist them in finding works of art. On one occasion, Reynolds wrote to West enquiring about where he could buy a copy of Gavin Hamilton's *Schola Italica Pictura*, a popular volume of engravings after well-known masterpieces published in 1773.<sup>89</sup> Contemporaries

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<sup>86</sup> Letter from William Buchanan to Mr. Irvine, 6 June 1803, transcribed in H. Brigstocke, *William Buchanan and the 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Art Trade: 100 Letters to His Agents in London and Italy* (London: The Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 1982), 82. For other similar comments by Buchanan, see Ibid, 78 and 207. See also J. Pomeroy, 'The Arbiters of Taste: Artists as Advisors in Early Nineteenth-Century England', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 139 (February 2002): 264.

<sup>87</sup> Letter from William Buchanan to Mr. Irvine, 6 June 1803, transcribed in Brigstocke 1982, 82. By 'greatest masters' of early paintings, Buchanan was undoubtedly referring to artists such as Bellini and Mantegna whose works were largely out of fashion with eighteenth-century collectors.

<sup>88</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 4:1259 (31 July 1799).

<sup>89</sup> Letter from Joshua Reynolds to Benjamin West, no date, B2 270 J, The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. See also J. Reynolds, *The Letters of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, ed. J. Ingamells and J. Edgcumbe (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 48, and Cassidy 2011, 1:25 fn. 56.

also asked him to sell works for him. One of his American students, Charles Willson Peale (1741-1827), asked West to sell one of his portraits of General George Washington (1732-1799) to a buyer in his London circle.<sup>90</sup> As Peale and many dealers and artists knew, West had a monopoly on the American market of patrons and collectors in the city. According to Buchanan, West worked with Andrew Wilson (1780-1848), a dealer based in Italy, to purchase 'pictures on his [own] account to be sold to his friends'.<sup>91</sup> Buchanan feared West's strong hold on his 'friends', saying that 'Wilson's Speculation is made with a view of offering some of the larger works to the Americans through West'.<sup>92</sup>

Collecting was a very social activity. Many visitors came to West's house specifically to see his collection. Beyond the social arena of the London sales rooms, it was common for collectors to visit each other's collections, comparing and lending works of art. West's artistic, social, and political circle brought him in contact with many important collectors, including Beckford and Price as well as John Julius Angerstein (c.1732-1823) and Sir George Beaumont (1753-1827). According to Farington, West frequently lent a number of his paintings, including a Hobbema and a Ruysdael to Beaumont, who was a collector as well as an amateur artist.<sup>93</sup> By sharing his collection, West was reciprocating with collectors who had often generously opened their collections to him and his contemporaries. The cover page of one of the sale catalogues of Price's collection commented on West's visits to the collection, 'Sir Joshua Reynolds, Gainsborough, and Benjamin West, who were frequent

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<sup>90</sup> Letter from Charles Willson Peale to Benjamin West, 9 April 1783, The Peale Papers, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia.

<sup>91</sup> Letter from Buchanan to Mr. Stewart, 21 April 1804, in Brigstocke 1982, 15.

<sup>92</sup> Letter from Buchanan to Mr. Stewart, 31 January 1804, in Ibid., 15 and 132.

<sup>93</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 2:550 (18 May 1796), and 3:837 (12 May 1797). For more about Beaumont's collection, see F. Owen and D. B. Brown, *Collector of Genius: A Life of Sir George Beaumont* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988).

visitors at Mr. Price's house, enjoying a sight of his folios'.<sup>94</sup> West's interactions with other collections influenced and directed his own collection.

### **The Corpus of the Collection**

West was a voracious collector of art. Over a period of nearly sixty years, he assembled a collection of a staggering 7,000 objects. Its size made it one of the larger collections of the time, particularly for an artist's collection. The Old Master prints and drawings composed the largest part of his collection; he owned approximately 1,400 Old Master drawings and 2,700 Old Master prints.<sup>95</sup> The size and scope of his prints and drawings collection made it comparable in size to Reynolds's and Lawrence's cabinets. Reynolds's prints and drawings collection comprised about 4,000 prints and drawings and Lawrence's was composed of 5,000 drawings.<sup>96</sup> The collection of Lely exceeded most of these artists' cabinets – with a prints and drawings collection of 10,000 objects.<sup>97</sup> West also owned around 200 paintings by various Old Masters. The collection was also composed of nearly 2,000 contemporary prints, 200 contemporary drawings, 200 pieces of sculpture, 30 contemporary paintings, 80 books of prints and drawings, 2 artists' sketchbooks, at least 15 Native American objects, 2 portrait miniatures, and 2 Egyptian mummified objects. If one includes the works of his own hand or reproductive prints after his art, the overall number

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<sup>94</sup> Sotheby's, 3-4 May 1854, and quoted in Watkins and Cowell 2012, 207.

<sup>95</sup> The calculations of the total number of paintings, prints, drawings, sculpture, and other objects in the collection are based on the early-nineteenth-century auction catalogues of his collection and the exhibitions of his collection at Newman Street. The contemporary reproductions of Old Master images have been classified as Old Master prints rather than contemporary prints.

<sup>96</sup> For Reynolds's collection totals, see Lugt 1921, 441-442; and T. Clifford, A. Griffiths, and M. Royalton-Kisch, *Gainsborough and Reynolds in the British Museum* (London: The British Museum Press, 1978), 61-72; and S. Smiles, ed., *Reynolds: The Acquisition of Genius* (Bristol: Sansom & Company with the University of Plymouth and Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery, 2009), 102. For Lawrence's collection, see M. S. Young, 'Sir Thomas Lawrence, R.A.: Millionaire Collector', *Art News* 54, no. 6 (October 1955): 24-27.

<sup>97</sup> D. Dethloff, 'Sir Peter Lely's Collection of Prints and Drawings', in Baker, Elam and Warwick 2003, 123.



would be increased by several hundreds, not to mention the 300 portrait medals of West as Royal Academy President that were in his possession at his death. As previously mentioned, his collection was so large and diverse that an inventory of it would not be possible in the scope of this thesis. However, by analysing a selection of objects representative of major categories of the collection, a distinct picture of its composition and strengths will become clear.

### **The Cast and Sculpture Collection**

In 1773 West wrote to John Singleton Copley that ‘works of Antient Statuaries’ were one of the ‘Sorce[s] from whence true tast in the arts have flow’d’.<sup>98</sup> In advising his fellow American artist, West was following a long tradition in academic theory that gave foundational status to Greek and Roman sculpture as perfect human forms and embodiments of ideal beauty.<sup>99</sup> To achieve success in history painting, West and his contemporaries believed that one had to master the human figure, a skill achieved largely through the study of antique figure sculpture. West had seen many of the canonical sculptures firsthand while in Italy in the early 1760s, and once in London he frequented the few private cast and sculpture collections, notably the Duke of Richmond’s collection, which was open to artists for the purpose of study. Like many artists, West also assembled a private collection of casts for the convenience of private study and constant contemplation. His choice of casts rather than antique sculpture was in large part because the latter were rare and expensive, and many of the canonical examples remained unattainably housed in Italy. West possessed only a few original antique sculptures, notably two ‘basso relieves, found at Herculaneum, and presented

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<sup>98</sup> Copley and Pelham 1914/1970, 194-197.

<sup>99</sup> Galt 1820, 2:107. For more on West’s interest and use of antique models, see J. D. Prown, ‘Benjamin West and the Use of Antiquity’, *American Art* 10, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 29.

by Sir William Hamilton'.<sup>100</sup> By and large, however, his collection was composed of small selection of plaster casts after antique masterpieces. Authenticity was of much less concern in the eighteenth century as it is in the twenty-first century. Casts and replicas were considered acceptable and affordable substitutes and even desirable because they enabled collectors to build a more complete collection.<sup>101</sup>

West began collecting sculpture very early in his career in England to support his artistic practice and to serve as a pedagogic resource to his growing group of students. One of the earliest acquisitions to the collection was possibly the bust depicted in Pratt's *The American School* (fig. 3). In the painting, one of the students is studying a bust of a young boy, possibly the 'small carving of a boy, in marble' in West's collection.<sup>102</sup> For West and his students, the cast collection supported the traditional academic practice of copying after the antique. West's collection also included a group of body fragments, useful for the study of the human form, which will be discussed further in chapter three. During the late eighteenth century, the academies throughout Europe were commissioning pedagogic collections of casts.<sup>103</sup> In his efforts to build up a cast collection to support his private academy and studio, West, in a way, emulated the ideas behind the conventional academic

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<sup>100</sup> Robins, 20 June 1829, day 2, lot 254. For more about William Hamilton's (1731-1803) collection, see I. Jenkins and K. Sloan, eds., *Vases and Volcanoes: Sir William Hamilton and His Collection* (London: The British Museum Press, 1996).

<sup>101</sup> For more about the reception and production of casts after antique sculpture in the eighteenth century, see A. Hughes and E. Ranfft, eds., *Sculpture and Its Reproductions* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997), 61-78; J. Scott, *The Pleasures of Antiquity: British Collectors of Greece and Rome* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 116-123; and V. Coltman, *Fabricating the Antique: Neoclassicism in Britain, 1760-1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 123-163.

<sup>102</sup> Christie's, 1 July 1820, day 5, lot 24. For identification of the sculpture as the young Nero, see Rather 1993, 181.

<sup>103</sup> F. Haskell and N. Penny, *Taste and the Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 88.

collection and other influential contemporary models.<sup>104</sup> The sources for West's collection of casts are unknown. However, given his role in the development of the plaster cast collection at the Royal Academy, they were likely a similar source, possibly sculptors in the Academy, the posthumous sale of another artist's collection, an Italian factory or workshop, or a local British workshop using existing moulds.<sup>105</sup> In the painting by Henry Singleton (1766-1839) entitled *The Royal Academicians in General Assembly* (fig. 18), West is seated in the president's chair amidst a group of Academicians surrounded by some of the masterpieces from the institution's developing cast collection, including the *Laocoön* and the *Apollo Belvedere*.

West's cast collection included a select group of his personal favourites of the iconic mythological deities and classical heroes of antiquity. West owned full-figure plaster versions of several iconic statues from the Vatican Museums, Capitoline Museum, Uffizi Gallery, and other famous Italian collections, including a *Venus de' Medici*, *Apollo Belvedere*, *The Dancing Faun*, and probably a version of the *Belvedere Torso*.<sup>106</sup> These statues were among the most celebrated and consequently the most often copied in plaster, bronze, and marble during the period. His selections reveal his interest in gathering a

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<sup>104</sup> For more on the use of the casts in the Royal Academy collection, see M. Postle, 'Naked Authority? Reproducing Antique Statuary in the English Academy, from Lely to Haydon', in Hughes and Ranfft, 1997, 79-99.

<sup>105</sup> A. Radcliffe, 'Acquisitions of Sculpture by the Royal Academy During its First century', *Apollo* 89, no. 83 (January 1969): 44-51. For more on the various plasterers in Britain, including John Cheere (1709-87) and various foundries at Hyde Park Corner, see T. Clifford, 'The Plaster Shops of the Rococo and Neo-Classical Era in Britain', *Journal for the History of Collections* 4, no. 1 (1992): 39-65; and M. Craske, 'Contacts and Contracts: Sir Henry Cheere and the Formation of a New Commercial World of Sculpture in Mid-Eighteenth-Century London', in C. Sicca and A. Yarrington, eds., *The Lustrous Trade: Material Culture and the History of Sculpture in England and Italy, c. 1700- c.1860* (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 2000), 94-113. For more information regarding the Anglo-Italian sculpture trade, see also Sicca and Yarrington 2000, 6-8, and 67-76; and for more on plaster cast factories and collections, see Penny and Haskell 1981, 79-85.

<sup>106</sup> There were numerous 'torsos' in the West sales. A version of the *Belvedere Torso* features in Benjamin West, *Self-Portrait*, 1793, oil on panel, 101.3 x 132.1 cm (39 7/8 x 52 inches), The Royal Academy of Arts, London, 03/285.

repository of iconic imagery in sculpture, and also reveal his predilection for strong, idealised figures and his interest in mythology, which remained a strong current in his own art. The popularity of *Venus*, *Apollo*, and *The Dancing Faun* among British collectors at the time was likely because of their inclusion in George Vertue's (1684-1756) influential early eighteenth-century list of the most desirable casts, which also included the *Borghese Gladiator* and the *Laocoön*.<sup>107</sup> West owned a group figure model of the *Laocoön* in terracotta as well as a plaster bust of the central figure.<sup>108</sup>

West also owned a cast of a horse's head after one from the Parthenon sculptures. Its inclusion in his collection conveys his enthusiasm for the noted Elgin marbles, which made their way to London during this period, as 'sublime specimens of the purest sculpture' and his subsequent involvement in their controversial acquisition for the British Museum.<sup>109</sup> As President of the Royal Academy at the time, West testified to the government selection committee as an expert in support of the artistic significance of these rare objects, defending their importance as models of emulation for British artists. When asked to comment on the aesthetic value of the various sculpture groupings in the Grecian cache, West responded with very Winkelmannian rhetoric saying they were 'In the first class of grandeur'.<sup>110</sup> Of the equestrian grouping in the frieze, he said, 'The Whole does not appear to be the efforts of the human hand, but those of some magic power, which brought the marble to life'.<sup>111</sup> In a

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<sup>107</sup> A. J. Finberg, ed., 'George Vertue Note Books, Volume II', *The Walpole Society* 20 (1931-1932): 153, and M. Whinney and J. Physick, *Sculpture in Britain: 1530 to 1830* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1988), 143.

<sup>108</sup> Christie's, 1 July 1820, day 5, lot 16; Robin's, 20 June 1829, day 2, lot 256; and Robin's, 20 June 1829, day 2, lot 249. For more on the popularity of the *Laocoön* in Britain, see Haskell and Penny 1981, 243-247.

<sup>109</sup> W. St. Clair, *Lord Elgin and the Marbles* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 167-168.

<sup>110</sup> For West's full comments to the committee, see *The Report from the Select Committee of the House of Commons on the Earl of Elgin's Collection of Sculptured Marbles* (London: John Murray, 1816), 148-154.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

painting by Archibald Archer (act. 1819) of *The Trustees in the Temporary Elgin Room* (fig 19), West and the Principle Librarian, Joseph Planta (1744-1827), are seated in the foreground surrounded by the marbles, including a horse's head situated prominently on the floor. The large-scale head depicted in the picture, of which West's was probably a replica, was from one of the horses pulling the chariot of Selene (the Moon) originally on the east pediment of the Parthenon.<sup>112</sup> Though his cast collection was not large by contemporary standards, he assembled a focused collection with his favourite sculptures and supportive material for the studio environment.

### **The Old Master Collection**

The largest and most reputable portion of his collection was dedicated to the Old Masters. These were the artists he admired artistically, and, by association, these artists reinforced the authority of his artistic genius. These were also the artists that would bring him greater recognition as an artist, connoisseur, and gentleman during this time. The conventional character of West's Old Master prints, drawings, and paintings collections draws upon his great reverence for the established artistic world and his devout connection with the Academy and its ideals. Like Reynolds, West revered the Roman masters, such as Michelangelo and Raphael, above all others, but saw strengths in artists of various schools. He had a personal passion for Venetian artists, and collected them for their expertise with colour. Additionally, he collected drawings, prints, and cabinet pictures by seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish masters, which were receiving growing interest from collectors at this time.<sup>113</sup> Though consisting of a much smaller portion of his collection, he also collected

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<sup>112</sup> B. F. Cook, *The Elgin Marbles* (1984; repr., London: The British Museum Press, 1997), 67.

<sup>113</sup> Stourton and Sebag-Montifiore 2012, 124. For more information on the taste for Rembrandt, in particular, see White, Alexander, and D'Oench 1983.

French and Spanish artists' works. As would be expected of a history painter's collection, the dominant subject across all schools and media was history, primarily religious, mythological and historical subjects. West collected across a range of media, drawings, prints and paintings, in an effort to assemble a repository of images by various Old Masters that would be useful to his artistic practice. While West had connoisseurial interests, he was driven as much by the imagery as by the objects themselves. In this way, he differed from his contemporary artist-collectors, such as Lawrence in particular, who were far more connoisseurial in their collecting interest. Thus, West's Old Master collection will be discussed largely by artist rather than by media as it represents West's larger interest in imagery.

Provenance, or the previous ownership of objects, was seemingly very important to West when it came to Old Master works. Prestigious provenance added cachet to his collection and helped bolster the perceived authenticity of individual works of art. He collected works of art purported to be from aristocratic collections in Britain as well as the continent. Additionally, he collected heavily from the cabinets of other artist-collectors, such as Lely, Richardson, and Thornhill.

Throughout the eighteenth century, works by Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), Raphael (Raffaello Santi) (1483-1520) and Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564) were considered prized pieces in any collection. Following his presidential predecessor, West lauded these artists constantly in his Academy discourses. In an undated discourse, he described Michelangelo and Raphael's art in terms of their 'farther advancement beyond the growth' of Leonardo, and praised their collective 'sublimity of style' and 'genius...quality equally original in both'.<sup>114</sup> Paintings by these artists, however, were extremely rare and competition for them in the open market was intense, creating price inflation. West

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<sup>114</sup> Galt 1820, 2:132.

principally owned drawings and prints after their masterpieces, which were more available and affordable, and enabled him to assemble images otherwise unattainable. The prevalence of Old Master drawings in general in his cabinet is suggestive not only of availability but also of West's interest in drawing and his desire to understand the artistic processes of his predecessors. Drawings had been collected for centuries by artists because of their inherent value as, according to Louise Lippincott, as the 'most telling indices of an artist's hand and thought process'.<sup>115</sup> At his death, the sale catalogues revealed that West possessed about two dozen drawings by Raphael, less than a dozen by Michelangelo, and a few by Leonardo. A fine drawing by Raphael from West's collection depicts various head and figure studies (fig. 20), chiefly preparatory studies for the artist's famed *St. Catherine of Alexandria* (c.1507).<sup>116</sup> The German artist Johann David Passavant (1787-1861), who toured Britain in 1831, noted a Raphael drawing in his published travel diary, *Tour of a German Artist in England* (1836), which had formerly been in West's collection.<sup>117</sup> The drawing, described by Passavant as a 'Study of a naked Male Figure, in a very forcible position' (fig. 21), was ascribed to Raphael and was already in the collection of the British Museum at the time.<sup>118</sup> Passavant made a point of noting the drawing's impressive provenance: 'This piece has been successively in the collections of Mr. Richardson, of Benj. West, J. Barnard and R. P. Knight'.<sup>119</sup> Though West owned relatively few works by Michelangelo, the purchase of one of them was important

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<sup>115</sup> Lippincott 1983, 118.

<sup>116</sup> Raphael, *St. Catherine of Alexandria*, c. 1507, oil on panel, 72.2 x 55.7 cm (28 ½ x 21 ⅞ inches), The National Gallery, London. For more information about the preparatory drawing for this picture in West's collection, see K. T. Parker, *Catalogue of the Collection of Drawings in the Ashmolean Museum*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938-1956), 2: 282-283.

<sup>117</sup> J. D. Passavant, *Tour of A German Artist in England*, 2 vols. (London: Saunders and Otley, 1836; London: EP Publishing Limited, 1978), 2:101-102.

<sup>118</sup> Christie's, 9 June 1820, day 1, lot 92.

<sup>119</sup> Passavant 1836/1978, 2:101-102.

enough to be noted by Mrs. West in her account book, as a ‘gt. [great] Head by M Angelo 0-12-0’ on 14 January 1788.<sup>120</sup> This may have been the pen and ink head of a satyr or Satan from West’s collection now in the British Museum (fig. 22).<sup>121</sup> To supplement his small collection of original works by these masters, West procured reproductive prints after their greatest masterpieces. Reproductive prints, especially after paintings that were in Italy, were desirable and attainable for collectors. West assembled an impressive array of images after Michelangelo’s and Leonardo’s canonical pictures, including the Sistine ceiling and *The Last Supper* respectively. West also owned over sixty prints after Raphael’s masterpieces, predominantly by the premier Italian engraver Marc Antonio Ramondi (c. 1440/82-c.1527-34), including his *St. Cecilia*.<sup>122</sup>

Though the works of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Italian artists, such as Andrea Mantegna (1430/1-1506), were less fashionable during the second half of the eighteenth century, West had a small representation of them in his collection.<sup>123</sup> For West personally, these artists did not represent models that he intended to emulate in his own art. However, from his point of view as a collector, Fra Filippo Lippi (c.1406-1469), Mantegna, and Pietro Perugino (c. 1450-1523), artists that Reynolds referred to as ‘old Painters’ and West called ‘the dry school’, were still part of the story of art’s progress, displaying the style that the revered High Renaissance artists moved beyond.<sup>124</sup> West owned a number of historical

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<sup>120</sup> See the entry for 14 January 1788, Mrs. West’s 5-Year Account Book (1785-1789), SAFE 037, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania. Mrs. West rarely recorded fine art acquisitions.

<sup>121</sup> H. Chapman, *Michelangelo Drawings: Closer to the Master* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 67.

<sup>122</sup> K. Oberhuber, ed., *The Illustrated Bartsch, The Works of Marcantonio Raimondi and his School*, vol. 26/27, (New York: Abaris Books, 1978), 177.

<sup>123</sup> Reitlinger 1961/1964, 4.

<sup>124</sup> Galt 1820, 2:133, and Reynolds 1975/1981, 160.



compositions by Mantegna, including his famous *The Calumny of Apelles* (fig. 23).<sup>125</sup> This exceptional drawing had previously been in the collection of seventeenth-century artist-collector Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669) as well as that of Richardson. The distinguished lineage of artist-collector ownership brought prestige and authentication to acquisitions like these for West. When the Mantegna drawing was in Rembrandt's cabinet, he apparently made a copy of it (fig. 24), which West acquired for his collection as well.<sup>126</sup> These two prized works, depicting an allegory of the famous classical Greek painter, Apelles, showed centuries of artistic genius and stylistic progress while asserting the historical importance of artistic models. They also represented West's intrigue with classical subjects within his own *oeuvre*. The inclusion of the original and a copy by an equally noted draughtsman might also suggest an interest in the histories of compositions.

West was particularly interested in the works of artists that had either been great influences on Leonardo, Raphael or Michelangelo or who had been influenced by them. Of these, he had a particular predilection for the master draughtsman, Fra Bartolommeo (1472-1517). In his sixth *Discourse*, Reynolds lauded the work of Bartolommeo as a primary source of study for the young Raphael.<sup>127</sup> This artistic connection would have appealed to West. As aforementioned, one of West's prized possessions was a set of volumes of Bartolommeo's drawings 'bound in Russia' that had a prestigious provenance, which

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<sup>125</sup> Christie's, 9 June 1820, day 4, lot 53. For more about this drawing, see A. E. Popham and P. Pouncey, *Italian Drawings in the British Museum, the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, 2 vols. (London: The British Museum Press 1950), 1: 97-99.

<sup>126</sup> Christie's, 13 June 1820, day 4, lot 53. At the 1820 sale, the drawing was bought by Samuel Woodburn for £10-0-0. For more information about the drawing, see M. Royalton-Kisch, *Catalogue of Drawings by Rembrandt and his School in the British Museum* (London: The British Museum Press, 2010), 46.

<sup>127</sup> Reynolds 1975/1981, 104.

included the Grand Duke of Tuscany.<sup>128</sup> West's collector's mark is prominently placed on the front page of both volumes.<sup>129</sup> The two volumes contained about 500 drawings, making Bartolommeo one of the most represented artists in the collection.<sup>130</sup> The volumes contained an exquisite array of drapery studies (fig. 25) and preliminary studies for many of his most celebrated paintings, and provided useful insight into the artist's working methods.

According to Samuel Woodburn, West 'took so much from the draperies in his pictures that he decided they should never be sold publicly'.<sup>131</sup> In fact, these precious volumes were not included in the sales following his death, but were sold privately to Lawrence, who negotiated to buy them from West's sons for the substantial sum of 800 guineas in 1824.<sup>132</sup> Lawrence's collection, respected for its exquisite array of Raphael and Michelangelo drawings, became the destination of many drawings from West's collection. Like West, Lawrence was concerned with artist-collector lineage and provenance. According to Passavant, 'The Lawrence collection comprises also many pieces, which in former times, lent their lustre to other cabinets of art in England, such for instance, as that of Sir Joshua Reynolds, Benjamin West, John Barnard, &c.'<sup>133</sup> Another prized possession of West's Italian collection was a set of sketchbooks by sixteenth-century Roman artist Giulio Romano

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<sup>128</sup> S. Woodburn, *The Lawrence Gallery, Seventh Exhibition, April, 1836, A Catalogue of One Hundred Original Drawings...collected by Sir Thomas Lawrence*, (London: C. Richards, 1836), 20.

<sup>129</sup> C. Fischer, *Fra Bartolommeo: Master Draughtsman of the High Renaissance* (Rotterdam: Museum Boymans-Van Beuningen, 1990), 15.

<sup>130</sup> Fra Bartolommeo, 2 volumes of drawings, c. 1490-1517, red morocco with stamped ornamentation (binding), chalk on paper drawings (dismounted from the albums), 29 x 21.6 cm (11 3/8 x 8 1/2 inches), Museum Boijmans-Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, The Netherlands.

<sup>131</sup> Letter from Samuel Woodburn to the Prince of Orange's Agent, 3 September 1840, Ms. A 40 VIII-128, Archives of the Royal House, The Hague, and quoted in Fisher 1990, 15.

<sup>132</sup> Letter from Raphael West to Thomas Lawrence, 14 October 1824, Benjamin West Papers, Gratz Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

<sup>133</sup> Passavant 1978, 1:240-241.

(c.1499-1546). Still in their original parchment covers, the sketchbooks contained '93 leaves filled on each side with studies of figures, heads and ornaments drawn at once with a pen, in a most spirited manner', and were esteemed by West 'as the rarest specimens of ancient art'.<sup>134</sup>

West's interest in drawing also led him to collect the works of a variety of other notable Italian Renaissance masters, including Antonio Correggio (1489-1534) and Parmigianino (or Francesco Mazzola) (1503-1540). In the 1760s, while in Italy, West had become enamoured with Correggio's *St. Jerome* (c. 1528) in Parma, and made a copy of the picture, which he kept in his collection.<sup>135</sup> But original Correggio paintings and drawings were rarities, especially in the London market. In his second *Discourse* in 1769, Reynolds remarked that the artist 'left few, if any finished drawings behind'.<sup>136</sup> The works by Correggio and Parmigianino were attractive to West and other collectors because, as Reynolds described in his eleventh *Discourse*, they 'give the idea of an whole' while being 'in every respect unfinished'.<sup>137</sup> This unfinished, subtle quality, an aspect present in West's own drawing process, appealed to him and resulted in a large number of preliminary drawings and sketches in the collection.<sup>138</sup> West held Parmigianino, in particular, in high regard, as did Reynolds who described his expertise in uniting 'the simplicity of the ancients and the grandeur and severity of Michael Angelo'.<sup>139</sup> West owned a substantial number of graphic works by the prolific artist. His collection of Parmigianino drawings had a wide

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<sup>134</sup> Christies, 1 July 1820, day 1, lot 66 (unlocated).

<sup>135</sup> Galt 1820, 1:144. The Correggio painting and its influence on West's practice and pedagogy will be discussed in the third chapter of this thesis.

<sup>136</sup> Reynolds 1975/1981, 35.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>138</sup> For a discussion of West's drawing process, see Carson 2000, 117-170.

<sup>139</sup> Reynolds 1975/1981, 72.

range of finishes and subject matter. One fine Parmigianino drawing in his collection, which had formerly been in Lely's cabinet, was *Three Figures and Part of a Fourth in a Ferry Boat* (fig. 26), a dynamic composition with a unique wide-angle perspective.<sup>140</sup> Another notable Parmigianino drawing in West's collection was the *Seven Gods and Three Goddesses Seated* (fig 27), depicting a tightly entangled group of figures. The drawing was greatly admired while in West's collection, and subsequently engraved in Metz's *Imitations of Ancient and Modern Drawings* (1789 and 1798), noting his ownership.<sup>141</sup> West owned over two hundred prints by or after Parmigianino, including a beautiful etching after the artist's version of Raphael's *Saint Peter and Saint John Healing the Cripples at the Gate of the Temple* (fig. 28). On the verso, it exhibits a rare personal mark of West's ownership, a manuscript 'BW' in ink rather than the more typical blind stamp.

West also collected the works of seventeenth-century Italian masters, including one of the most favoured and influential, Guido Reni (1575-1642). In his 1794 discourse, West declared Reni an artist of 'the first class'.<sup>142</sup> One of the best known paintings in West's collection was an oval panel by the artist entitled *Head of Christ Crowned with Thorns* or *Ecco Homo* (fig. 29). Though now deemed a copy after Reni's numerous versions of the subject, at the time it was prized by West and Reynolds as 'the most exquisite production in art' and was said to have come from the celebrated Gonzaga collection of Mantua as well as

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<sup>140</sup> M. Royalton-Kisch, H. Chapman, and S. Coppel, *Old Master Drawings from the Malcolm Collection* (London: The British Museum Press, 1996), 82-83, and A. Popham, *Catalogue of the Drawings of Parmigianino*, 3 vols. (New Haven and London: Published for the Pierpont Morgan Library by Yale University Press, 1971), 1:100.

<sup>141</sup> Popham 1971, 1:98.

<sup>142</sup> Galt 1820, 2:117.

Charles I's collection.<sup>143</sup> The small religious picture was almost constantly view in West's home and, in 1816, also exhibited at the British Institution.<sup>144</sup> After West's death, his association with the picture continued, and when Mrs. Anna Jameson saw the picture in Samuel Roger's home in the 1840s, she noted it as the one 'from Mr. West's collection'.<sup>145</sup>

Though West admired the Italian masters of *disegno*, his real passion as an artist and a collector was for the artists with recognised expertise with colour, notably the Venetian masters of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. West's aesthetic interest in the paintings of the Veneto was expressed in one of his discourses when he complemented the 'perfect arrangement of their colouring'.<sup>146</sup> West had choice examples by the school's major artists, including Paolo Veronese (1528-1588), Jacopo Bassano (c.1510-1592), and Jacopo Tintoretto (1519-1594), but his collection was particularly rich in the works of Titian. During this time, Venetian paintings were more readily available on the London art market than Roman and Florentine works.<sup>147</sup> Thus, West was able to assiduously collect these paintings from very early in his collecting career. He also owned a few examples of the earlier generation of the Venetian school, including a work by Giorgione (c.1477/8-1510) entitled *Man in Armour* (fig. 30).<sup>148</sup> These earlier artists were not very popular amongst most eighteenth-century

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<sup>143</sup> Christie's, 23 June 1820, day 2, lot 83. According to the painting's dossier in The National Gallery Archives, it was in the collection of Cardinal Valenti Gonzaga, Rome, by 1749; the collection of West by 1787; and bequeathed to the museum by Samuel Rogers, 1855.

<sup>144</sup> For the exhibition of this picture, see British Institution, *Catalogue of Pictures of the Italian and Spanish Schools: with which the proprietors have favoured the British Institution* (London: W. Bulmer and Co., 1816). For observations on its display at West's house, see Roche 1933, 153.

<sup>145</sup> Jameson 1844, 396.

<sup>146</sup> Galt 1820, 2:136.

<sup>147</sup> For more on the market for paintings in the late eighteenth century, see Herrmann 1999, Lippincott 1983, and Reitlinger 1961/1964.

<sup>148</sup> Though West considered it an autograph work by Giorgione, it is now considered to be by an imitator of the artist.

collectors in Britain.<sup>149</sup> However, West's collecting interest in them was probably based on his assertion that the great Venetian masters, like Veronese and Titian, were greatly indebted to these earlier masters. In an undated discourse, West positioned these earlier artists as important contributors to the development of systems of colour, referring to the 'accomplished system which John Bellini had first laboured to discover, and in which Giorgioni had made further advancements' and which matured 'under Titian'.<sup>150</sup> Reynolds was similarly compendious in his collecting taste; he too owned the work of these 'primitive' Italian artists, including Giovanni Bellini's (c.1431/6-1516) *The Agony in the Garden* (c. 1465).<sup>151</sup>

Of all the Venetian artists, West had a special predilection for the works of Titian, and he succeeded in collecting a select and notable group of subject pictures by the sixteenth-century master. Titian was very popular among collectors in Britain throughout the eighteenth century.<sup>152</sup> Mirroring this general favouritism, West felt that Titian was unmatched in his expertise in colour. In his 1811 discourse, he paid the Venetian artist the highest compliment by putting him on equal footing with Michelangelo, saying that 'The grandeur which Michael Angelo gave to the human figure, Titian has rivalled in colour'.<sup>153</sup> West owned at least five large oil paintings by Titian, including *The Death of Actaeon*, *Venus and Adonis*, *The Bath of Diana*, *The Magdalene in Prayer*, and *The Last Supper* as well as a

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<sup>149</sup> Stourton and Sebag-Montifiore 2012, 158.

<sup>150</sup> Galt 1820, 2:136.

<sup>151</sup> Giovanni Bellini, *The Agony in the Garden*, c. 1465, egg tempura on wood, 81.2 x 127 cm (32 x 50 inches), The National Gallery, London. For more on the taste for these artists, see Stourton and Sebag-Montifiore 2012, 123.

<sup>152</sup> Herrmann 1999, 71, and Stourton and Sebag-Montifiore 2012, 159.

<sup>153</sup> Galt 1820, 2:164 and 167.

number of smaller works.<sup>154</sup> During the eighteenth century, these paintings were thought to be autograph versions by the artist; today, two of them are lost, two have been reattributed as copies or works by another artist, and only the *Venus and Adonis* has maintained its authenticity.<sup>155</sup> Several of their attributions were even questioned during West's lifetime. At the time, the *Death of Actaeon* (fig. 31) was the most well-known painting in West's collection and was frequently referred to in the London newspapers as simply 'West's Titian'.<sup>156</sup> This picture's mysterious discovery by West in the back of Greenwood's London show room, brought immediate excitement and publicity. In a letter to a colleague in Dublin, the artist Paul Sandby (1731-1809) provides a contemporary account of it:

My son will tell you that half the town of vertu are crazy about a picture by Titian which Mr. West purchased of Greenwood for about £20 out of a lumber corner. Mr. Agar offered West £1,300 for it, and finding that he could not prevail upon him to part with it, visits his displeasure against West by ascertaining that it is a copy, and has procured a French artist to come to London who 'protests' that he has seen the original in Italy, and that West's picture is by Zucheritti's father...In the meantime West has proof positive of the picture having been one of King Charles's collection, and also that of King James. It is in my humble opinion the best picture in the country.<sup>157</sup>

The notorious story became attached to the painting permanently it seems, and later when Sophie von la Roche saw it in West's picture gallery, she retold it with little variation.

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<sup>154</sup> Christie's, 23 June 1820, day 1, lot 75 (Magdalene), lot 82 (Bath of Diana), day 2, lot 77 (Last Supper), and lot 85 (Death of Actaeon). The *Venus and Adonis* had been sold from the collection before West's death. The *Last Supper*, now considered after Titian, was in the Loyd collection at Lockinge House, Wantage, Berkshire as of 1967. For an illustration, see *The Loyd Collection of Paintings and Drawings at Betterton House, Lockinge, Berkshire* (London: Bradbury and Agnew, 1967), 38 and 57. West's Titian, *St. Mary Magdalene in Penitence*, is now considered a lost copy. It sold in 1820 to Thomas Martyn, but there are no further records. See H. Wethey, *Titian I. The Religious Paintings* (London: Phaidon, 1969), 151.

<sup>155</sup> W. R. Rearick, 'Titian's Later Mythologies', *Artibus et Historiae* 17, no 33 (1996): 23-67.

<sup>156</sup> *The London Chronicle*, 17 November 1785, 7; Roberts 1897, 95-96; and Herrmann 1999, 347. Roberts noted it as 'the most important work in the sale, *The Death of Actaeon*, 49 x 71, with Charles I and King of Spain proveance'.

<sup>157</sup> Whitley 1928/1968, 2:31-32.

West procured [it] in an auction for 15s., saying that the picture would sell now for more than the same number of hundred guineas. This is a very large picture, with the hunting of Acteon for subject; for Titian wanted to prove that he was just as great at landscape and animal work as he was famous for his human figures. There is a very touching story attached to the picture...<sup>158</sup>

In response to some of the scepticism as to its authenticity, which would have tarnished his reputation as an artist and connoisseur, West and his executors doggedly asserted that his *Death of Actaeon* was the original version commissioned by the King of Spain and given by him to Charles I of England.<sup>159</sup> The painting's notoriety attracted many visitors to see it displayed in West's home.

One of the most highly valued paintings in his collection was his Titian *Venus and Adonis* (fig. 32), which was thought to be one of the early versions of the subject and boasted a prestigious provenance, which included great royal collectors such as Queen Christina of Denmark, Charles I of England, and Louis-Philippe-Joseph, Duc d'Orléans (1747-1793).<sup>160</sup> In 1809, West sold the painting for the staggering sum of 4,000 guineas.<sup>161</sup> The painting was given in 1798 to West, then Royal Academy President, as remuneration for his appraisal of

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<sup>158</sup> Roche 1933, 153.

<sup>159</sup> Christie's, 24 June 1820, lot 85 (see description), and Whitley 1928/1968, 2:33. *Death of Actaeon* went unsold in the sales of 1820 and 1824, and remained in the West family until 1898 when it was sold at Christie's by his descendants to Lord Ronald Gower. The painting now attributed to Agostino Carracci and is owned by the North Carolina Museum of Art (NCMA). I greatly appreciate the information provided to me by Mark Aronson, Chief Paintings Conservator at the Yale Center for British Art, which disclosed the current location of this picture, and to David Steel, Curator at the NCMA, for providing me with useful information from the curatorial files. For more about the versions of Titian's *Death of Actaeon*, see H. Wethey, *The Paintings of Titian: III. The Mythological & Historical Paintings* (London: Phaidon, 1975), 136-138.

<sup>160</sup> A. Graves, *A Century of Loan Exhibitions 1813-1912*, 5 vols. (London: A. Graves, 1913-15), 3:213 and 1316; Wethey 1975, 3:191-192; and Rearick 1996, 34. In 1809, West sold *Venus and Adonis* to Richard Hart Davis of Bristol, who later sold it to Philip John Miles, MP, of Leigh Court. The Miles Family lent it to the British Institution's exhibition in 1822, where it was engraved by an unknown engraver. The Miles family sold the painting at Christie's on 13 May 1899 where it was bought on behalf of Baron Max von Heyl, who sold it in Munich in 1930. The painting is now in a private collection in Lausanne, Switzerland. See also Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 449.

<sup>161</sup> Rearick 1996, 34 and 64.



the famous Orleans collection before it went up for auction in London.<sup>162</sup> As discussed earlier, it was common for distinguished artists, particularly the present President of the Royal Academy, to be asked to do this and to be compensated in this way.<sup>163</sup> In 1798 a consortium of collectors, which included Francis Egerton, Duke of Bridgewater (1736-1803); Frederick Howard, the Earl of Carlisle (1748-1825), and George Granville Leveson-Gower, the Duke of Sutherland (1758-1833), sold several hundred of paintings from the collection of Duc d'Orléans through the dealer Michael Bryan in London.<sup>164</sup> This sale attracted scores of visitors and is usually identified as a turning point from which a greater number of authentic Old Master paintings, many with royal provenance, became available in England.<sup>165</sup> West's intimate knowledge of the Orleans collection and his ownership of an affiliated painting was a source of pride.

West's collection also included a variety of works by Italianate historical landscape artists of the seventeenth century. He assembled paintings, prints, and drawings by the primary exemplars of the French Italianate school, notably Nicholas Poussin (1594-1665) and Claude Lorrain (1600-1682), who were extremely popular at the time among British

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<sup>162</sup> A. Hume, *Notices of the Life and Works of Titian*, (London: John Rodwell, and Colnaghi, Son and Co., 1829), 65, and Rearick 1996, 34 and 64 fn. 40.

<sup>163</sup> See Hume 1829, 65 and Rearick 1996, 34-35 and 64-65. There were two Venus and Adonis paintings by Titian that supposedly came from Queen Christina's Collection in the Orleans Sale. West retained one and the other sold to 'Fitzhugh' for 300 pounds.

<sup>164</sup> For more information about Mr. Bryan's sale of the Orleans collection, see Waagen 1854, 1:18-20; J. Pomeroy, 'The Orléans Collection: Its Impact on the British Art World', *Apollo* 145, no. 420 (February 1997): 26-31; and D. Bindman, 'The Orleans Collection and Its Impact on British Art', in Panzanelli and Preti-Hamard 2007, 57-66.

<sup>165</sup> For its impact on British collectors, see W. Hazlitt, 'On the Pleasures of Painting', in W. Hazlitt, *The Complete Works*, ed. P. P. Howe, 21 vols., (London and Toronto; Toronto, J. M. Dent and Sons, 1930-34), 8:14, and quoted in F. Haskell, *Rediscoveries in Art: Some Aspects of Taste, Fashion and Collecting in England and France* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1976), 25. For more on the reception of the Orleans pictures and *chef d'oeuvres* sold, see Brigstocke 1982, 2-4, and Pomeroy 1997, 26-31.

collectors.<sup>166</sup> West's early interest and references to Poussin in his own paintings is well-known, so it is not surprising that he assembled an extensive collection of the artist's Arcadian scenes in paintings, prints, and drawings, which included a cache of fifteen 'grand historical landscapes in black and white chalks on blue paper'.<sup>167</sup> He also acquired two suites of prints after Poussin's *Seven Sacraments* (1637-1640), the famous paintings that were the subjects of great interest in London in 1785 when Reynolds advised the Duke of Rutland to purchase them.<sup>168</sup> West's collection of Claudes was smaller than his Poussin collection and was comprised mainly of landscape drawings and prints. The most distinctive work by Claude in West's collection was an octagon-shaped painting entitled *The Mill* (or *Italianate Landscape*) (fig. 33), which, like 'West's Titian', received a great deal of attention for its fabled story of artistic discovery.<sup>169</sup> In 1785 West was said to have 'picked up for a half guinea at an old iron shop, the small octagon picture by Claude, *The Mill*'.<sup>170</sup> Its association with West was recalled years after his death when Mrs. Jameson saw it in Rogers' home and noted it as the Claude 'from the collection of Benjamin West'.<sup>171</sup>

Though second to the Italians and the Italianate continental artists, West also had an interest in the works of Northern European artists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. During the 1780s, the taste for the Dutch and Flemish masters reached new levels among British collectors. In 1781 Reynolds, who initially denigrated these schools in his

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<sup>166</sup> Reitlinger 1961/1964, 10-11.

<sup>167</sup> Christie's, 1 July 1820, day 1, lots 51-65.

<sup>168</sup> Christie's, 9 June 1820, day 5, lots 13 and 16. For the Duke of Rutland purchase, see Penny 1986, 69.

<sup>169</sup> Christie's, 24 June 1820, lot 42.

<sup>170</sup> Whitley 1928/1968, 2:31.

<sup>171</sup> Jameson 1844, 393-399.

*Discourses*, made a trip to Holland and Flanders to see great works of art as well as make some acquisitions for his collection, which greatly encouraged the fashionable taste for these artists.<sup>172</sup> Likewise, after the French invasion of Holland in 1795, paintings by these artists were more accessible in London.<sup>173</sup> West's cabinet contained a number of paintings and drawings by notable Dutch and Flemish masters, including Berchem (or Berghem), Meindert Hobbema (c.1638-1709), Rembrandt, Rubens, and Willem Van de Velde (1611-1693). The works of Rubens and Rembrandt were perhaps the most coveted by collectors during this period, and West, who was keenly interested in both, acquired a variety of their works. One of the most exceptional works of art by Rembrandt in his collection was a small luminous historical composition entitled *The Concord of the State* (fig. 34), which depicts an unidentified military treaty.<sup>174</sup> The small oil sketch, which was probably a study for a large (never completed) history painting, displays Rembrandt's characteristic virtuosity and dramatic use of light and shade. West also owned another luminous composition by Rembrandt, entitled *Abraham and the Angels* (1646), a sketch for an unfinished allegorical composition, which the posthumous sale catalogue described as 'a little precious bijou of the greatest rarity'.<sup>175</sup> He built up quite a selection of images by Rembrandt, including more than sixty engravings by the sought after artist-printmaker, including a *St. Jerome*.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> J. Reynolds, *A Journey to Holland and Flanders*, ed. Henry Mount (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>173</sup> Reitlinger 1961/1964, 13.

<sup>174</sup> Christie's, 23 June 1820, lot 70, and C. Hofstede de Groot, *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch Painters of the Seventeenth Century: Based on the Work of John Smith*, 8 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1907-1927), 6:147.

<sup>175</sup> Rembrandt van Rijn, *Abraham and the Three Angels*, 1646, oil on panel, 16.5 x 21.3 cm (6 ½ x 8 ⅜ inches), Private Collection, New York. See Christie's, 23 June 1820, lot 58. For more information on the painting, see de Groot 1916, 6:25, and Roberts 1897, 95.

<sup>176</sup> Christie's, 9 June 1820, day 2, lot 109, and S. Dickey, ed. *The Illustrated Bartsch, Rembrandt (Supplement)*, vol. 50 (New York: Abaris, 1993), 86-92.

Of all the Northern artists that West collected, he admired the work of Rubens, renowned for his mastery with colour and brushwork, above all others. West assembled an impressive selection of the Flemish artist's oil studies and drawings for major commissions as well as reproductive prints after his historical masterpieces. Rubens, who was a collector of prints and drawings in his own right, was infamous for 'retouching' works in his collection, making improvements to compositions by adding 'colouring'.<sup>177</sup> West collected such 'improved' works, including a drawing entitled *A Roman Triumph* by Giulio Romano (1499-1546) with additions by Rubens. According to the lot description of this work in the West sale catalogue, he 'considered this drawing as one of the first of his collection'.<sup>178</sup> West also owned many autograph works by Rubens. The most notable drawings in his collection were a series of five colourful chalk and watercolour studies (fig. 35) for the artist's celebrated picture of *The Fall of the Damned* (c. 1620-1621) that previously had been in the collection of Thornhill.<sup>179</sup> Their large, presentation-style format and rich palette made them ideal for display, and, in fact, West framed and glazed them for that purpose.<sup>180</sup> West also owned a number of related engravings after Rubens's *The Fall of the Damned*, including several that were handcoloured.<sup>181</sup> West also assembled a number of oil sketches of religious scenes by the Flemish artist, including a small oil sketch or *modello* entitled *The Virgin as the Woman of the Apocalypse* (fig. 36), a preparatory work for an important altarpiece

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<sup>177</sup> For more information on Rubens's propensity to retouch works in his collection, see Belkin, Healy, and Muller, 2004, 310-313.

<sup>178</sup> Christie's, 1 July 1820, day 1, lot 82 (location unknown).

<sup>179</sup> Peter Paul Rubens, *The Fall of the Damned*, 1620-1621, 286 x 224 cm (112 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 88 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches), Alte Pinakothek, Munich. For more information about the studies, see J. Rowlands, *Rubens, Drawings and Sketches* (London: The British Museum Press, 1977), 84-87. The initial drawings are now thought not to be by Rubens.

<sup>180</sup> Christie's, 1 July 1820, day 1, lots 77-80.

<sup>181</sup> Christie's, 9 June 1820, day 1, lot 131, and F. W. H. Hollstein, *Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings, and Woodcuts*, 72 vols. (Amsterdam: M. Hertzberger, 1949-2010), 27: 227, and 28: 202.

commission for Freising Cathedral in Germany.<sup>182</sup> The dynamic biblical picture exemplifies his signature bravura style and gem-like palette. West was in the company of a number of artists in Britain that collected oil sketches by Rubens, which included Reynolds.<sup>183</sup> The primary interest for West and other artist-collectors in oil sketches, of course, was the insight it provided into their techniques. West also owned many prints after Rubens's most famous compositions, including one of his *The Garden of Love*, which was touched upon 'in water colour'.<sup>184</sup> His print collection often supported and in some cases augmented his drawings and paintings collections.

West owned a number of paintings by seventeenth-century masters Nicolaes Berchem and Meindert Hobbema. Hobbema, in particular, was virtually unknown to collectors in eighteenth-century London, and his works were rare, underappreciated and undervalued.<sup>185</sup> West owned at least one landscape by Hobbema entitled *River Landscape with Fishermen* (c.1659-1660), which was considered at the time of his death to be a 'fine chef d'oeuvre'.<sup>186</sup> In May 1797, Beaumont borrowed this painting to study and copy in watercolour.<sup>187</sup> According to Farington, Beaumont was eager to build up a substantial collection of his own

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<sup>182</sup> For a detailed provenance record of this painting, see the Getty Provenance Index, Painting Record 2554, <http://www.getty.edu/research/tools/provenance> (first accessed 30/3/2010).

<sup>183</sup> Broun 1987, 144-148. For more on Reynolds's collection of Rubens, see P. Sutton and M. Wieseman, *Drawn by the Brush: Oil Sketches by Peter Paul Rubens* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press in association with the Bruce Museum of Arts and Science, Greenwich, Connecticut, 2004), 56-58.

<sup>184</sup> Christie's, 9 June 1820, day 1, lot 127, and Hollstein 1949-2010, 9:189. See also, M. Myers, 'Rubens and the Woodcuts of Christoffel Jegher', *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 25, no. 1 (Summer 1966): 7-23.

<sup>185</sup> Reitlinger 1961/1964, 13.

<sup>186</sup> Miendert Hobbema, *River Landscape with Fishermen*, c.1659-1660, oil on panel, 46.6 x 67.3 cm (18 ½ x 26 ½ inches), The Kelvingrove Museum, Glasgow. See Christie's, 23 June 1820, day 2, lot 81, and for more information on the painting, see H. Miles, *Dutch and Flemish, Netherlandish and German Paintings*, 2 vols. (Glasgow: Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum, 1961), 2:53.

<sup>187</sup> Farington 1978-98, 3:837 (12 May 1797).

and ‘pleaded the advantage of having such pictures to constantly throw his eye upon.’<sup>188</sup> In contrast to Hobbema, Berchem’s name was almost as widely known as Raphael’s during the eighteenth century, and West, in particular, was exceedingly enthusiastic about the artist.<sup>189</sup> Berchem’s classical, Italianate-style landscapes aligned him with the much loved Italian masters and their adopted brethren Claude and Poussin. West owned several paintings by the Dutch artist, including *Peasants with Cattle at the Opening of a Cave/Stable*.<sup>190</sup> This was one of the paintings procured from France that Farington went to see at his house in 1796. Farington described his impressions of it:

I asked Hearne what He thought of the Berghem at *first sight*. He said it appeared to him to be a heavy picture. In this I concurred with. The composition is skilfully arranged, the forms elegant & the execution admirable, but it wants a general Hue, that *hue* which renders the pictures of Cuyp so exquisite.<sup>191</sup>

West considered it a prized piece in his collection and valued it as such. According to Farington, ‘after seeing Labordes [Orleans] collection’, West assessed ‘His Landscape by Berghem’ to be ‘worth £500’.<sup>192</sup> West’s high estimation of this artist, according to Reitlinger, helped to inflate the market prices for his works.<sup>193</sup>

One of the smallest and most distinctive parts of the Old Master collection is composed of the works of the seventeenth-century Spanish masters. West had a choice group of small cabinet pictures by the leading artists of the school, notably Bartolomé Esteban

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Reitlinger 1961/1964, 12.

<sup>190</sup> Christie’s, 23 June 1820, day 2, lot 84 (unlocated).

<sup>191</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 2:503 (6 March 1796).

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 3:850 (6 June 1797).

<sup>193</sup> Reitlinger 1961/1964, 12.

Murillo (c.1618-1682), Diego Velasquez (1599-1660), and Jusepe di Ribera (1591-1652).

During the late eighteenth century, Murillo was the most fashionable and highly regarded of these artists. According to Farington, West owned one painting by the master entitled *The Infant Christ Sleeping on his Cross*.<sup>194</sup> West also owned a 'small spirit study' by the virtually unknown Velasquez entitled *The Infante of Spain on Horseback Going Out Hawking*.<sup>195</sup>

West's interest in the artist was largely due to his associations with the work of Titian. This connection becomes evident when Farington recounted his first encounter with the picture:

'[West] shewed us a sketch by Velasquez to prove how much He borrowed of Titian.'<sup>196</sup> He also owned a sizable picture by Ribera entitled *A Philosopher in Contemplation*.<sup>197</sup>

### **The Contemporary Collection and the New World**

West collected the art of his contemporaries. A true mentor and colleague, he supported the artistic endeavours of his students, fellow Academicians, and friends. During his life, West was one of the strongest proponents of a British national school of art (in a dual sense as a group of artists and as a place of teaching in the context of coherent traditions). In one of his discourses to the Academy, West dutifully promoted native art versus Old Master and foreign contemporary art by advising that:

By collecting from other countries, [the patron or collector] may greatly enrich himself, but can never give celebrity to the country in which he lives. The encouragement extended to the genius of a single artist, though it may produce but one original work, adds more to the celebrity of a people, and is a higher proof of true patriotic ardour, and of a generous love for the progress of art,

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<sup>194</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 2:503 (6 March 1796), and Christie's, 23 June 1820, day 2, lot 22 (unlocated).

<sup>195</sup> Christie's, 23 June 1820, day 1, lot 63 (unlocated).

<sup>196</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 3:780 (26 February 1797).

<sup>197</sup> Christie's, 23 June 1820, day 2, lot 37 (unlocated).

than all the collections that ever were made by the productions of other countries, and all the expenditures that ever were bestowed in making them.<sup>198</sup>

West's own collection was in fact 'proof of true patriotic ardour', filled with the productions of 'living genius', the British and American artists in his circle.<sup>199</sup> Its general multiplicity and inclusiveness underscored his modern transatlantic identity, and probably, as Sarah Monks has argued, sustained his purposeful ambiguity about his national identity.<sup>200</sup> His selection of contemporary artists in the collection, as well as those he excluded, expose his relationships within the sometimes fractious and politically-driven Academy and the wider international artistic community in which he operated. These artists represent his friends, students, fellow Academicians and even his adversaries. As an ensemble, the collection illustrates West's ideal view of modern British art, including himself at the helm and his chosen contemporaries, as the culmination of the progress of the arts.

West's support of his contemporaries and students, and his intimate friendships with many of them had important consequences for his collection. Many of the modern paintings, drawings, and prints in the collection were given as gifts in gratitude for his generosity as a teacher, mentor, friend, or President of the Royal Academy. During the eighteenth century, it was common for artists to exchange art work as a sign of admiration and in the spirit of camaraderie. Likewise, because of West's public profile as an influential arbiter of taste, many artists wanted to give him examples of their work, perhaps for his aesthetic judgment or as means of advertisement knowing their works might be displayed in the artist's well-visited home. Though largely acquired as gifts, West also occasionally added to his contemporary

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<sup>198</sup> Galt 1820, 2:144-145.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 2:144.

<sup>200</sup> S. Monks, 'The Wolfe Man: Benjamin West's Anglo-American Accent', *Art History* 34, no. 4 (September 2011): 657.



collection through purchases directly from artists in his circle.<sup>201</sup> In 1770 he commissioned a landscape painting from his contemporary Thomas Jones (1742-1803), who claimed that West paid over his asking price which he justified as ‘a sufficient Acknowledgment of his Sense of its merit’.<sup>202</sup> West’s cultural exchange of objects went beyond his artistic circles and beyond London. His far-reaching transatlantic network, which included diplomatic figures and patrons like Franklin, provided a distinct source of exchange for many of the contemporary American objects in his collection as will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Though his collection of contemporary art of others was important and broad in scope, it was relatively small in size and represented approximately a third of his overall collection.

The contemporary collection included images of the people, culture, politics, contemporary events, and topography of his transatlantic world. He assembled an impressive collection of portraits of contemporary politicians, artists, patrons, and military heroes from both sides of the Atlantic. Showing his patriotic affiliation with his homeland, West owned numerous images of American luminaries, including at least eight engravings and one oil painting of George Washington, the first President of the United States and a national hero.<sup>203</sup> Images and objects relating to Washington were frequently brought across the Atlantic following 1783, and West was given several presidential items, including an exquisite

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<sup>201</sup> West purchased a copy of a painting of the engraver Sir Robert Strange (1721-1792) following his death directly from the portraitist George Romney. Benjamin West, Personal Thomas Coutts Account Book, 1790-1804 credit and debits account, AM 1862, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, (‘July 11, 1798 Mr. Romney for Sir Robert Strange portrait 50.0.0’).

<sup>202</sup> T. Jones, ‘The Memoirs of Thomas Jones’, ed. Adolf Paul Oppé, *The Walpole Society* 32 (1946-48): 22.

<sup>203</sup> For example, see John Trumbull (after Charles Willson Peale), *George Washington*, 1778, oil on canvas, 32 x 26.9 cm (12 5/8 x 10 5/8 inches), Yale University Art Gallery. Christie’s, 1 July 1820, day 5, lot 69, and Robins, 20-22 June 1829, lot 123. For more information about the Washington portrait by Trumbull in the collection, see Evans 1980, 72.

jewelled memorial encasing a lock of his hair (fig. 37).<sup>204</sup> West also owned a number of images Benjamin Franklin, who was a personal friend as well as godfather to his youngest son, Benjamin. In a letter to Franklin dated 28 April 1782, West enthusiastically reported that he had just received a portrait bust of him from Whitefoord.<sup>205</sup> It is likely the bust of Franklin by the sculptor Jean-Jacques Caffieri (1735-1792) modelled in 1777 (fig. 38) or the one by Jean Antoine Houdon (1741-1828) modelled in 1778, both produced while the American diplomat was in Paris.<sup>206</sup> His collection also included a dynamic plaster bust of Dr. Benjamin Rush (1745-1813), signer of the Declaration of Independence and an influential physician, by his cousin William Rush (1756-1833), one of the first professional American sculptors.<sup>207</sup> In a letter from Rush to West in 1815, the sculptor notifies him that he is sending a plaster cast of his terracotta bust for the Royal Academy.<sup>208</sup> Once in London, the bust remained in West's possession until his death and never entered the institution's collection.<sup>209</sup>

In admiration of his 'mother country' and adopted home, West judiciously collected images of British political, military, and artistic worthies, such as prints of his Royal

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<sup>204</sup> I am grateful to Anne Woodhouse, Curator of Domestic Life at the Missouri History Museum and Library, for bringing this object and its associated manuscript (attached to the back of the object) to my attention.

<sup>205</sup> Letter from Benjamin West to Benjamin Franklin, 28 April 1782, Benjamin Franklin Letters Collection, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

<sup>206</sup> Christie's, 1 July 1820, day 5, lot 1. A drawing of the bust by either West or his son Raphael is in the American Philosophical Society collection. Franklin was known to have brought back at least seven replicas of the bust in painted plaster by Caffieri from France to present as gifts to friends. Two fine examples are in the collection of The New-York Historical Society, 1832.3 and 1931.315.

<sup>207</sup> Christie's, 1 July 1820, day 5, lot 1.

<sup>208</sup> Letter from William Rush to Benjamin West, 12 March 1815, The New-York Historical Society, New York. For the various plaster casts of Benjamin Rush, see L. Bantel, *William Rush: American Sculptor* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, 1982), 128-129.

<sup>209</sup> Christie's, 1 July 1820, day 5, lot 1.

Academy presidential predecessor, Reynolds, the famous stage actress Sarah Siddons (1755-1831), the renowned collector Sir Joseph Banks (1743-1820) and the military hero, the Duke of Wellington (1769-1852) among others.<sup>210</sup> His collection also included portrait busts of the famous Whig statesman, Charles James Fox (1749–1806), and his political adversary, the Prime Minister William Pitt (1759-1806).<sup>211</sup> The pair of busts, the most notable produced by the sculptor Joseph Nollekens (1737-1823), were often displayed together in collectors' homes in a contrived political dialogue.<sup>212</sup> West also owned a bust of Lord Horatio Nelson (1758-1805), Vice-Admiral in his Majesty's navy and martyred national war hero. Images of Nelson proliferated following the Battle of Trafalgar, including West's own *The Death of Lord Nelson*, celebrating the decisive victory as well as remembering the Admiral's patriotic sacrifice.<sup>213</sup> He also possessed a bust of Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658), Lord Protector of England, Scotland and Ireland, as well as two casts of his gloves.<sup>214</sup> Collecting early British history figures alongside contemporary figures was popular during the period.<sup>215</sup>

Comparisons of the liberties and freedoms of the recent past appealed to the contemporary

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<sup>210</sup> Christie's, 1 July 1820, day 2, lots 16, 21 and 107.

<sup>211</sup> Christie's, 1 July 1820, day 5, lot 1.

<sup>212</sup> For examples of these busts, see Joseph Nollekens, *Bust of William Pitt*, 1808, marble, National Portrait Gallery, London, NPG 120, and After Nollekens, *Bust of Charles James Fox*, c. 1791, terracotta, National Portrait Gallery, London, NPG 139. Nollekens produced two busts of Fox, and the earlier version is the most recognized and was most frequently copied. For more information on these busts, see D. Saywell and S. Jacob, *Complete Illustrated Catalogue, National Portrait Gallery, London* (London: Third Millennium Publishing, 2004), 227 and 496.

<sup>213</sup> Benjamin West, *The Death of Lord Nelson*, 1806, oil on canvas, 70 x 96 inches, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool. This painting will be discussed in detail in the last chapter of this thesis.

<sup>214</sup> Christie's, 1 July 1820, day 5, lot 1. The portrait bust of Cromwell is likely a copy of the oft-reproduced one by Louis-Francois Roubiliac (1702-1762). See A. Dawson, *Portrait Sculpture: A Catalogue of the British Museum Collection c. 1675-1975* (London: The British Museum Press, 1999), 77.

<sup>215</sup> For the fashion for collecting portrait busts, in particular, of ancient and modern figures, see A. Dawson, 'Collectors and Commemoration: Portrait Sculpture and Paintings in the British Museum', in K. Sloan, ed., *Enlightenment: Discovering the World in the Eighteenth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books in association with The British Museum Press, 2003), 28-32.

audience and related closely to the current political events and ideological perspectives. Images of these recent-past historical figures served as visual representations of these important historical precedents.<sup>216</sup> Though there is a political current in terms of present and past in West's collection, it is not a consistent one, as the collection encompasses royals and republicans as well as Whigs and Tories for example. West owned several portrait engravings of members of the British royal family, including his great patron, George III. West undoubtedly also owned a portrait bust of the King, not least to remind visitors to his house of his royal patronage. Although there is no record of such a bust in the collection, West portrayed himself with one in his self-portrait of 1793 (fig. 39) that was painted for the Society of Dilettanti after his election as a member.<sup>217</sup> In the painting, the bust of George III, in the guise of a Roman Emperor, faces a seated West.<sup>218</sup>

As would be expected of a history painter's collection, West collected modern history paintings as well as preparatory studies and prints. This area of his collecting interests reflects his own prominent position in the field, his devotion to the development of a native school of history painting, as well as his pride in his students and young Academicians pursuing his specialty. He amassed a variety of his contemporaries' works, including prints and preparatory drawings, such as Copley's *The Death of Major Peirson* and *The Death of Earl of Chatham*, and Trumbull's *The Death of General Montgomery*.<sup>219</sup> One of the finest examples in his collection was an early version of Trumbull's first major history painting,

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<sup>216</sup> M. Baker, *Figured in Marble: The Making and Viewing of Eighteenth-Century Sculpture* (London: V & A Publications, 2000), 136.

<sup>217</sup> Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 452-453.

<sup>218</sup> The bust in West's painting resembles Peter Turnerelli, *Portrait Bust of George III in Roman Costume*, 1812, marble, 31 inches, Victory Art Gallery, Bath, 1983.601.

<sup>219</sup> Christie's, 1 July 1820, day 1, lots 26 and 48 (Copley), day 2, lots 141, 145 and 146 (Trumbull) and day 3, lots 2 and 3 (Trumbull).

*The Sortie Made by the Garrison of Gibraltar* (fig. 40), which was given to him and Mrs. West as a gift of the artist.<sup>220</sup> Trumbull's transparent American political sentiments often landed him in trouble, including once being incarcerated for espionage at the Tothill Fields prison. In this instance, West came to his student's rescue using his political connections in London as well as his favour with the King to facilitate his release.<sup>221</sup> His gift of the *Sortie* was accompanied by a note that read: 'Mr. Trumbull presents his Respects to Mrs. West with the little sketch of Gibraltar which he begs her to accept as a very small acknowledgment of his gratitude for the kindness which he has long and constantly experienced under [their] roof'.<sup>222</sup> The painting, which depicts a dramatic British victory over the Spanish, was prominently installed by West in the public spaces of his home, where it was purportedly admired by the eminent collector and connoisseur Horace Walpole (1717-1797), who described it as 'the finest picture he had ever seen, painted on the northern side of the Alps'.<sup>223</sup> To support his own history painting research and his students, West also assembled a collection of prints and books of prints of military costumes from Britain and America.<sup>224</sup> His sources for the American material, in particular, were his students either residing in London or who had returned home to America. For example, in 1783 West wrote to former

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<sup>220</sup> J. Trumbull, *The Autobiography of Colonel John Trumbull*, ed. T. Sizer (New York and London: Wiley and Putnam, 1841; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), 148.

<sup>221</sup> Alberts 1978, 138-39.

<sup>222</sup> Letter from John Trumbull to Benjamin West, 31 May 1788, Trumbull-Silliman Letters Collection, Connecticut Historical Society, and quoted in I. Jaffe, *John Trumbull: Patriot-Artist of the American Revolution* (Boston: New York Graphic Society 1975), 321.

<sup>223</sup> Whitley 1928/1968, 2:111.

<sup>224</sup> Christie's, 1 July 1820, day 5, lot 48.

student Charles Willson Peale asking him to ‘procure...drawings or small paintings of the dresses of the American Army, from the officer down to the common soldier’.<sup>225</sup>

West especially admired the works of his contemporaries that displayed a similar indebtedness to the art of the past as his own art. He collected several landscape paintings by his friend Richard Wilson whose works were often described in terms of their resonance with the works of Claude. One of the pictures by Wilson in the collection was described in an 1824 sale catalogue as, ‘A small Landscape with Water, which discharges itself at a Cascade; a Tower and Bridge in the distance. This little beautiful Picture was painted for the late President Mr. West’ indicating it was probably a gift of the artist.<sup>226</sup> According to Farington, West referred to one Wilson picture in his collection in the context of his stylistic resonance with several Old Masters, saying it was ‘coloured equal to Cuyp or Both & in parts like Titian’.<sup>227</sup> He also owned a distinctive octagon-shaped painting by his contemporary, George Stubbs (1724-1806), entitled *Horse Attacked by a Lion* (fig. 41). In this painting, Stubbs made overt and obvious references to antique sculpture and a famous composition by Rubens.<sup>228</sup>

For a man who lived in America, Italy, and Britain, geography and a sense of place held a natural interest for West. To this end, he assembled an impressive collection of topographical and landscape images of various geographies that related closely to his

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<sup>225</sup> Letter from Benjamin West to Charles Willson Peale, 15 June 1783, Robert C. Graham Collection of Artists' Letters, 1783-1935, The Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.

<sup>226</sup> Christie's, 5 March 1824, day 2, lot 74, and Constable 1953, 103. The picture was described in the sale catalogue as being on copper.

<sup>227</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 6:2137 (2 October 1803).

<sup>228</sup> For more information about these references, see B. Taylor, ‘George Stubbs: The Lion and Horse Theme’, *Burlington Magazine* 107, no.743 (February 1965): 81-87, and J. Egerton, *George Stubbs, Painter, Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), 296-297.

personal experiences.<sup>229</sup> He collected a range of pictures of his native land, which was dominated by landscapes and maps, including Thomas Jeffery's *American Atlas* (1776), one of the most important atlases of pre-Revolutionary America, as well as the *Falls of Niagara* (1804) engraved after paintings by John Vanderlyn (1775-1852).<sup>230</sup> He certainly also owned a print representing the famous Cohoes Falls (fig. 42), the view of which he referenced in the background of his *Colonel Guy Johnson and David Hill* (1776).<sup>231</sup> To complement the topographical pictures of his native North America, he assembled images and sculptures of animals closely linked with the land, such as the iconic buffalo.<sup>232</sup> His cabinet also contained numerous images of his adopted home, which included a large series of unattributed prints of various cathedrals of Britain, 'Views on the Thames' by Thornhill, and a 'tinted drawing' by Paul Sandby of 'A view of Windsor Castle from the Great Park'.<sup>233</sup> Reflecting his travels in Italy and his on-going interest in classical history, he assembled pictures of antiquities, classical architecture and landscapes, including a number of watercolours of the classic Italian campagna by John Robert Cozens (1752-1798) and books of archaeological prints such as *The Ruins of Pompeii* (1812) by Charles-François Mazois (1783-1826).<sup>234</sup> He also assembled a group of pictures depicting other Atlantic geographies, representing remote sites

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<sup>229</sup> For more about other types of topographical collections, especially that of George III representing his empire, see P. Barber, 'King George III's Topographical Collection: A Georgian View of Britain and the World', in Sloan 2003, 158-165.

<sup>230</sup> Christie's, 1 July 1820, day 4, lots 23-25 (American views), and day 5, lot 44 (Jeffery's). See also Benjamin West, Personal Thomas Coutts Account Book, 1790-1804 credit and debits account; AM1861 v.2, no. 704, , Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, ('Sept. 22, 1796 Mr. Edy for the Prints of the American Water Falls 6-6-0').

<sup>231</sup> Benjamin West, *Colonel Guy Johnson and and Karonghyontye (Captain David Hill)*, 1776, oil on canvas, 201.9 x 138.1 cm (79 ½ x 54 ¾ inches), National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C..

<sup>232</sup> Christie's, 1 July 1820, day 5, lot 4.

<sup>233</sup> Christie's, 1 July 1820, day 4, lots 1-20, and 23 June 1820, day1, lot 15 (Sandby), day 2, lot 86 (Thornhill).

<sup>234</sup> Christie's, 1 July 1820, day 1 lots 44-46 (Cozens) and lot 112 (Mazois).

of important imperial battles, notably a painting by Dominic Serres (1722-1793) of a 'View of Gibraltar'.<sup>235</sup>

## Native American Curiosities

West's collection also included a small group of eighteenth-century Native American artefacts that he began collecting in the mid-1760s. His identification with his native land was a point of differentiation amongst his contemporaries, and something that he frequently touted. In a letter to a American friend on 20 July 1798, West wrote nostalgically of his imagined personal journey from 'the Wigwoms of American savages' to 'the refinements of the Royal Palaces of Europe'.<sup>236</sup> His New World perspective directed the rationale and choice of this distinct group of objects. Though he was fairly unique among artist-collectors, there were many other types of collectors during this period that assiduously assembled objects representing and categorising the non-European world. These diverse collections had their origins in the cabinets of curiosities, or *Wunderkammer*, of the Renaissance.<sup>237</sup> During the mid to late eighteenth century, natural and artificial curiosities became readily available as a result of the major wars (the Seven Years' War, 1756 -1763, and the American Revolution, 1775-1783, in particular), colonization, and expeditions (such as those of Captain James Cook (1728-1779)).<sup>238</sup> West's interest in the broad category of curiosities is evident

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<sup>235</sup> Christie's, 1 July 1820, day 5, lot 74.

<sup>236</sup> Letter from Benjamin West to Dr. Jonathan Morris, 20 July 1798, Benjamin West Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, reproduced in B. West, 'Letters of Benjamin West', *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 18, no. 2 (1894): 221.

<sup>237</sup> MacGregor 2007, 11.

<sup>238</sup> N. Chambers, *Joseph Banks and the British Museum: The World of Collecting, 1770-1830* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2007), 15. For more details on Cook's expeditions and collections, see J. C. Beaglehole, ed, *The Journals of Captain James Cook on his Voyages of Discovery*, 4 vols (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1999), and A. Kaeppler, 'Artificial Curiosities': *Being An Exposition of Native Manufactures collected on the Three Pacific Voyages of Captain James Cook, R.N., at the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum* (Honolulu, Hawaii: Bishop Museum Press, 1978).



early in his career when he made the gift of a mummified woman's hand 'taken from an Egyptian Mummy' in 1767 to the Library Company of Philadelphia, an institution recently founded by his friend Franklin and filled with books, scientific instruments, and curiosities.<sup>239</sup> The gift was brought back from London by West and Franklin's mutual friend Francis Hopkinson (1737-1791), who was Secretary of the Library Company, with an affixed label on the box that identified it as a gift of 'Mr. Benjamin West formerly of this City, but now of London – Historical Painter'.<sup>240</sup>

During this period, collections were being developed to reflect British curiosity and scientific interest in the natural history and cultures of these newly discovered or controlled lands. There were an increasing number of collectors, military, scientific, antiquarian, and virtuoso, seeking ethnography, 'exotica', and other artificial and man-made 'curiosities', most notably Joseph Banks, Sir Ashton Lever (1729-1788), and William Bullock (c. 1773-1839).<sup>241</sup> Though their motivations varied from scholarly to commercial, these collectors had a particular interest in man-made and natural world curiosities that were representative of the 'exotic' and 'other' (to which they ascribed Native Americans).<sup>242</sup> During this period, it was primarily military collectors, such as General Jeffery Amherst (1717-1797), commander of

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<sup>239</sup> The Library Company Minutes, 1:253 (14 December 1767), Library Company of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. For more about the gift, see E. Wolf, J. Van Horne, and J. Green, *'At the Instance of Benjamin Franklin': A Brief History of the Library Company of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Printed for the Library Company of Philadelphia by York Graphic Services, 1995), 17-18.

<sup>240</sup> The inscription on the box is reproduced in E. Wolf, *Quarter of a Millennium: The Library Company of Philadelphia, 1731-1981* (Philadelphia: Library Company of Philadelphia, 1981), 25.

<sup>241</sup> Chambers 2007, 15. For more on Bullock's collection and his Egyptian Hall, see S. Pearce, 'William Bullock: Collections and exhibitions at the Egyptian Hall, London, 1816-25', *Journal of the History of Collections* 20, no.1 (May 2008): 17-35. For more on objects from Cook's voyages and their connection to Bullock, see A. Kaeppler, 'Cook Voyage Provenance of the 'Artificial Curiosities' of Bullocks Museum', *Man: The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 9, no. 1 (1974): 68-92. Interestingly, Bullock travelled to Mexico and America to acquire objects. For more on Lever's collection, see A. Kaeppler, *Holophusicon – The Leverian Museum: An Eighteenth-Century English Institution of Science, Curiosity, and Art* (Altenstadt, Germany: ZKF Publishers, 2011).

<sup>242</sup> For more on the collectors of curiosities, see MacGregor 2007.

the British forces during the Seven Years' War, and Lieutenant John Caldwell (born 1756) during the American War, who were collecting Native American artefacts on any scale. For them, these objects were symbols of diplomacy and cultural exchange from their various campaigns in the North American theatre.<sup>243</sup> These military collections were filled with ceremonial objects, including pipe bowls, decorated knife sheaths, and feathered headdresses.<sup>244</sup> Like these collectors who had spent significant time in North America, West's knowledge of and interest in these objects was related to the personal experiences of his youth and his continued identity with his native country. For him, these were not curious specimens of an unknown culture; rather, they represented his familiarity with lands and peoples thought to be 'distant' or 'exotic' to many around him in London. In his 1792 discourse to the Academy, he voiced his understanding of Native American culture as well as appreciation of their visual art forms, particularly pictograms:

In the arts of design were conveyed the original means of communicating ideas, which the discoverers of countries show us to have been seized upon, as it were involuntarily, by all the first stages of society. Although the people were rude in knowledge and manners, yet they were possessed of the means by which they could draw figures of things, and they could make those figures speak their purpose to others as well as to themselves. The Mexicans conversed in that way when Cortes came among them; and the savages of North America still employ the same means of communicating intelligence.<sup>245</sup>

West's collection of Native American objects was small and specific; it was representative of certain types of objects made by Eastern Woodland Indians, possibly Iroquois or

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<sup>243</sup> R. B. Phillips and D. Idiens, 'A Casket of Savage Curiosities': Eighteenth-Century Objects from North-Eastern North America in the Farquharson Collection', *Journal of the History of Collections* 6, no. 1 (1994): 21-33. For more information about military collecting, see R. B. Phillips, 'Reading and Writing Between the Lines: Soldiers, Curiosities, and Indigenous Art Histories', *Winterthur Portfolio* 45, no. 2/3 (Summer/Autumn 2011): 107-124.

<sup>244</sup> Phillips 2011, 112.

<sup>245</sup> Galt 1820, 2:87.

Algonquin.<sup>246</sup> West owned a soapstone pipe (fig.43), wampum belts, garters, moccasins, pouches and a number of other objects used for ceremonial and quotidian purposes. The experiences of West's youth in Pennsylvania undoubtedly led to his sensitivity to the people and objects of their culture. He understood the function and meaning of different types of Native American artefacts and was interested in possessing examples of their fine craftsmanship.<sup>247</sup> Several of the garters in his collection exhibit intricate decorations with quillwork and wampum, or imitation wampum beads. On one of his garters (fig. 44), sixteen carefully loom-woven rows of glass beads form a design with five figures representing either men and women or an alliance of Native Americans and their skirt-wearing European counterparts.<sup>248</sup> West owned a number of objects that were made by Native Americans but that contained European-manufactured products, such as glass beads rather than precious wampum shells. These hybrid types of objects exemplified the bridging of Old and New Worlds and represented the emerging global community and economy. As has been documented by Jonathan King, West's Native American objects also served a practical use as studio props portrayed in his history paintings set in North America such as *The Death of General Wolfe* and *William Penn's Treaty with the Indians* (fig. 45).<sup>249</sup> In these paintings, West depicts figures with wampum belts and garters, yet with no weapons, or weapons placed on the ground, as symbols of peace and harmony of coexistence between the Native

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<sup>246</sup> King 1991, 36, and S. Pratt, *American Indians in British Art, 1700-1840* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005), 84.

<sup>247</sup> Native Americans were producing souvenirs for tourists and the trade that were hybrid forms of both indigenous American and European cultures. For further reading on the objects created as souvenirs, see R. B. Phillips, *Trading Identities: The Souvenir in Native North American Art from the Northeast, 1700-1900* (Seattle: University of Washington Press; Montreal, Quebec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998).

<sup>248</sup> King 1991, 40.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 38-45. For further identification of objects and use in West's paintings, see A. Einhorn and T. Abler, 'Bonnets, Plumes and Headbands in West's painting of Penn's Treaty', *American Indian Art Magazine* 21, no. 3 (Summer 1996): 44-53, and L. Reinhardt, 'British and Indian Identities in a Picture by Benjamin West', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 31, no. 3 (Spring 1998): 283-305.

Americans and their Europeans counterparts.<sup>250</sup> West's appropriate use of these objects in his paintings suggests that he understood their specific meaning and function, such as the role of wampum belts as symbolic tools or records of communication and peaceful negotiation in Native American culture.<sup>251</sup> West sometimes obtained artefacts for his collection specifically to fill a need for his artistic practice, such as a feathered headdress that he obtained and used in *Penn's Treaty*.<sup>252</sup>

West's unique transatlantic network provided a source for these New World curiosities. Many Native American objects crossed the Atlantic during and following the Seven Years' War in the hands of West's friends, who were artists, diplomats, and soldiers. Though the exact sources remain uncertain, it is clear that West's patrons, dealers, students, and friends from both sides of the Atlantic were a constant source of contemporary material for his collection. It is possible that one of his sources was Franklin, who was sympathetic to the cause of the American Indians.<sup>253</sup> In his capacity as an American statesman and diplomat, Franklin travelled frequently between America, Britain, and France and had access to these types of objects. In a letter dated 24 June 1768, he described a 'piece of the bark cloth with which the new discovered people dress themselves' that he was sending as a gift.<sup>254</sup> Franklin had been exchanging objects from North America since the 1720s, when he

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<sup>250</sup> Abrams 1982, 70, and Pratt 2005, 84. Many of the Native American objects in West's collection also represent this fusion of European and American Indian cultures. The advent of manufacturing of glass beads meant that the wampum shells were no longer needed.

<sup>251</sup> Galt 1820, 1:134; King 1991, 43; Pratt 2005, 80; and A. Abrams, 'Benjamin West's Documentation of Colonial History: William Penn's Treaty with the Indians', *The Art Bulletin* 64, no. 2 (1982): 70.

<sup>252</sup> Pratt 2005, 86

<sup>253</sup> Alberts 1978, 112.

<sup>254</sup> Christie's, 16 December 1897, lot 278 ('Dr. Benj. Franklin Letter to Greg Cooper, Esq., dated June 24, 1768'). Franklin lived in London in 1768 though he continued to travel frequently.

sold a purse of woven asbestos to the great collector Sir Hans Sloane (1660-1753).<sup>255</sup>

Sloane's vast collection was composed primarily of natural history specimens, but also included ethnography from North America; he even displayed the plumed calumet that had been presented by the 'Indian Kings', who visited Queen Anne in 1710, as a symbol of peace in his home.<sup>256</sup>

In the 1760s and 1770s, West was painting portraits of important figures who also had access to these objects, including Banks, Sir William Johnson (1715-1774), Guy Johnson (c. 1740-1788), and General Robert Monckton (1726-1782).<sup>257</sup> Sir William Johnson, Superintendent of Indian Affairs for Britain's northern colonies, developed personal alliances with various tribes and assembled an extensive collection of objects as symbols of imperial diplomacy.<sup>258</sup> His position provided him with access to the choice specimens of Native American culture, which he seems to have kept for himself, and then passed out the surplus to other gentlemen collectors in appreciation of political favours or as a form of common gift exchange.<sup>259</sup> He owned a great variety of wampum and calumets that were used in meetings between himself and the members of the Six Nations.<sup>260</sup> Likewise, his nephew, Guy

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<sup>255</sup> H. Waterfield and J. C. H. King, *Provenance: Twelve Collectors of Ethnographic Art in England, 1760-1990* (Paris: Somogy Art Publishers; Geneva: Barbier-Mueller Museum, 2006), 10. For more information on Sloane's ethnographic collection, see J. C. H. King, 'Ethnographic Collections: Collecting in the Context of Sloane's Catalogue of 'Miscellanies'', in A. MacGregor, ed., *Sir Hans Sloane* (London: The British Museum Press, 1994), 228-244.

<sup>256</sup> Waterfield and King 2006, 10, and MacGregor, 2007, 121-122.

<sup>257</sup> For information about West's portraits of these men, see Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 210-211 (William Johnson, c. 1764-1768), 487 (Banks, c. 1771-73), 523-25 (Johnson & Hill, 1776), and 534-35 (Monckton, c. 1764).

<sup>258</sup> E. Miles, *American Paintings of the Eighteenth Century* (Washington D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1995), 328, and Pratt 2005, 84. William Johnson had given Native American objects to gentleman in Britain and America as gifts for political favours. For more on this practice, see W. Burch, 'Sir William Johnson's Cabinet of Curiosities', *New York History* 71, no. 3 (July 1990): 263.

<sup>259</sup> Burch 1990, 263.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, 266-267.

Johnson, who became Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the Iroquois Nations and travelled with a delegation of Mohawks to London in 1775-1776, had access to the same bounty of 'Indian curiosities'.<sup>261</sup> While he was in London, Guy Johnson commissioned West to paint his portrait with his friend and Mohawk chief, David Hill (Karonghyontye) (b.1745), which depicts a pair of moccasins known to be in West's collection.<sup>262</sup> Though no documentation exists as to the source of these Native American objects, West's rich international and highly-mobile community, composed of many people who had personal alliances and relationships with Native Americans, provided him with ample opportunities to obtain them.

### West's Wests

West also maintained a large collection of his own works. In an undated manuscript, he listed a group of his pictures under the heading: 'A catalogue of pictures painted by Benjamin West for his own collection'.<sup>263</sup> As the title indicates, it was West's intention, or at least his desired perception, that many of the works by his own hand that remained in the studio were meant to be there. The list, which included 73 paintings, read like a greatest hits of his *oeuvre* and was accompanied by values. The list began with some of his best-known history paintings, 'Regulus, Hannibal, Wolfe, Agrippina, Penn, Cromwell, La Hogue', and the highest valued painting was his *Thetis Bringing New Armour to Achilles* at 1000 pounds or guineas.<sup>264</sup> Many of these were actually studies or studio copies after his major history paintings by the same titles, but some of them were simply unsold or unclaimed singular

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<sup>261</sup> K. Muller, 'Pelts and Power, Mohawks and Myth: Benjamin West's Portrait of Guy Johnson', *Winterthur Portfolio* 40, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 64.

<sup>262</sup> For a detailed discussion of this portrait and the conditions surrounding it, see Muller 2005, 47-76.

<sup>263</sup> Benjamin West, manuscript ('A catalogue of pictures painted by Benjamin West for his own collection'), Benjamin West Papers, coll. 394, The Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts, Winterthur Library, Delaware.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

works that remained in his studio. In 1805, a partial record of West's Wests was included in a *Public Characters* article on the artist, which listed a catalogue raisonné of the artist's work organised by their current location and included specific rooms at Newman Street as well as his secondary residence at Windsor.<sup>265</sup> His large-scale history paintings were the anchors of his collection and enabled him to showcase his artistic achievements. His decisions to keep certain paintings or copies of paintings and to sell others, a process of selection, meant that West was acting as a collector of his own art. To this end, he kept examples of his work from various periods of his career to illustrate his own artistic development, promote his versatility, and highlight his greatest achievements.<sup>266</sup>

From casts after antiquities to Old Master pictures to contemporary art to Native American curiosities to his own history paintings, his collection was a combination of Old and New Worlds, and represented his vision for British art and collections. Its eclectic composition at once asserted the potency of the period's preoccupation with the authority of the Academy and at the same time exhibited the individuality and modernity of one of its most successful exponents. West's authoritative position and point of view would not have been possible without the context of the collection; it gave his complex paintings and the setting of Newman Street deeper meaning and history, and it helped reinforce his artistic identity.

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<sup>265</sup> *Public Characters* 1805, 559-569.

<sup>266</sup> Chapter four of this thesis will discuss West's Wests in the context of their display in the house.

### Chapter 3: The ‘Sacred Flame of Emulation’: The Collection as a Private and Public Resource

Benjamin West’s art was deeply rooted in the past. Typical of artists in Britain during the eighteenth century, he looked to his artistic predecessors for instruction, inspiration, and as measurements of success. In his art, he aspired to the celebrated ‘great style’ of history painting that ‘follows in the footsteps of the old masters’ and ‘promotes the glory of the country’ lauded by Reynolds and other writers of the period.<sup>1</sup> History painting was extolled as the highest genre of painting. West’s arrival in London in 1763, fresh from his traditional training in Italy, coincided with a time when the most influential artists in the metropolis were seeking to create a national school of history painting and he was to play a key role in its development.<sup>2</sup> The culmination of their efforts was the founding of the Royal Academy in 1768, established with the principal aim of fostering a native school of history painting. From the moment that West along with William Chambers (1723-1796), George Moser (1706-1783), and Francis Cotes (1726-1770) presented the petition and plan for the Academy to George III in that year, he stayed closely aligned with the institution’s theories, pedagogy, and practices.<sup>3</sup> To this end, he produced history paintings that were representations of the

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<sup>1</sup> Reynolds 1975/1981, 71-72. Reynolds spoke of the excellence of history painting and the ‘grand style’ throughout the *Discourses* and made it the focus of *Discourse IV*. There are a variety of recent publications regarding the development and rhetoric of the national school during this period, including: W. Vaughan, ‘The Englishness of British Art’, *Oxford Art Journal* 13, no. 2 (1990): 11-23; W. Vaughan, ‘David’s Brickdust and the Rise of the British School’, in A. Yarrington and K. Everest, eds., *Reflections of Revolution: Images of Romanticism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 134-158; J. Gage, ‘The British School and the British School’, in B. Allen, ed., *Towards a Modern Art World* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), 109-120; Hoock 2003, 52-67; and M. Postle, ‘Barry, Reynolds and the British School’, in T. Dunne and W. Pressly, eds., *James Barry, 1741-1806: History Painter* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010), 77-94.

<sup>2</sup> J. Roberts, ed., *George III & Queen Charlotte: Patronage, Collecting and Court Taste* (London: Royal Collection Publications, 2004), 184.

<sup>3</sup> Galt 1820, 2:36; S. Hutchinson, ‘The Royal Academy Schools, 1768-1830’, *The Walpole Society* 37 (1962): 125; and S. Hutchinson, *The History of the Royal Academy Schools, 1768-1968* (New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, 1968), 42.



institution's ideals, strongly reliant on the models of the art of the past. In the first exhibition of the Royal Academy in 1769, West was urged by his patron, George III, to exhibit his recent commission, *The Departure of Regulus* (fig. 46), as a statement of the monarch's patronage of the new institution, progressive taste for native history painting, and support of a young exemplary history painter. West's grand-scale classical Roman subject about honour, given traditional pictorial treatment, was believed by some to be the picture, out of the 136 works included, that most completely represented the elevated art that the Academy was founded to encourage and develop.<sup>4</sup> A rather consensual reviewer in *The Public Advertiser*, commenting on the inaugural 1769 show and the impact of *Regulus*, argued:

This Year's Exhibitions are perhaps the grandest that England ever produced. The Spirit of antient Italy is at length revived, and Raphael, Angelo and Titian seem to live over again in some of our illustrious Countrymen. – I do not mean to depreciate any Painter, because I extol the Works of another. But what can exceed our charming History Painter, Mr. West, in the Correctness of his Composition, the Harmony of his Stile, or the Delicacy of his Colouring? Let it be remembered likewise to the Praise of this admirable Artist, that he has ventured to walk in a Path unmarked by the Traces of any British Painter. Portrait-Painting has had it's Day, and the Name of Reynolds must be handed down with Honor to Posterity...But the Superiority of History-Painting, over Works of every Kind, is now universally acknowledged. West's *Regulus* is a striking Instance of the Powers of the Pencil in this Way. You cannot glance your Eye upon the Canvass without being insensibly led to examine the Story, and you derive the same Pleasure from a View of the whole Performance as you do from a well-wrought Tragedy...But the Town has given the Painter that Applause to which his modest Merit entitles him. His Majesty is to have the Picture, and Mr. West is no Doubt happy in such a Mark of Approbation from the belt of Monarchs.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Roberts 2004, 184. For more information on this painting, see Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 168.

<sup>5</sup> *The Public Advertiser*, 26 May 1769, 4. For a thorough analysis of the various forms of public criticism about the Royal Academy exhibitions and artists, see M. Hallett, "The Business of Criticism": The Press and the Royal Academy Exhibition in Eighteenth-Century London', in Solkin 2001, 64-75.

The writer's comments reflect the national excitement about the potential of a native school of history painting and the perceived importance of the Old Masters as artistic models. They also demonstrate the positive critical reception West's early exhibitions of history paintings garnered and highlight the value of the King's endorsement. West was one of the only artists in Britain during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to have a successful history painting career buoyed by royal patronage. West's early success in the superior field of history painting also secured him a number of artistic enemies and rivals. According to one of them, Henry Fuseli (1741-1825), West once said that there were two keys to success in history painting in Britain: 'the one is to paint for the king; the other, to meditate a scheme of your own'.<sup>6</sup> Fuseli and others complained that he could smugly make this pronouncement because he monopolized the former as History Painter to the King and dominated the latter with his record print sales after his paintings, providing financial stability and enhancing his international reputation as a history painter.

West established his reputation as a modern British history painter who was deeply indebted to the art of the past. His reputation as such took hold because this was the popular model of aspiration among contemporary artists at the time, and it was consistent with the ideals of the Academy and fashionable taste. Of the contemporary history painters, West undoubtedly carried the model to the farthest degree of consistency, asserting it in every aspect of his artistic life: his theories, his art, his teaching, and in his collecting. During the course of West's sixty-year career, he produced hundreds of history paintings, portraits, and landscapes based largely on traditional models. By basing his theories, art, and collection, on the academic models of the past, he exhibited an authoritative stylistic and theoretical

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<sup>6</sup> Dunlap 1834/1969, 1:79. Fuseli became a long-time opponent of West and was, in fact, the one dissenting vote in his otherwise unanimous re-election to the seat of Royal Academy President in 1806.

consistency.<sup>7</sup> This traditionally-focused consistency did not mean he lacked innovation.

While West used the traditional formula as the basis for his paintings, he also found ways to develop something wholly new beginning with *Death of Wolfe* in which he combined history, landscape, and portraiture. He also maintained an underlying ‘deep inclination to eclecticism’ and unique transatlantic perspective.<sup>8</sup>

West’s collection became a major source for the models he employed. This chapter examines the ways in which the various aspects of his artistic life aligned and looks at the ways the collection played an important role as a representation of his theories and as an integral component of his artistic practice and pedagogy. By studying his paintings in relation to objects in his collection, it becomes possible to give greater definition to his artistic practices and influences.

### **West, the Establishment, and Theory**

During this period, far more ink was devoted to theorising about history painting than there were actual paintings produced. In contrast to the period’s clear disjuncture between the ideal, universally acknowledged in theory, and the realities of artistic practice, West believed he was an exception as he was living the model British artist’s life by bridging theory and practice.<sup>9</sup> For him, the theory of painting and its actual practice were

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<sup>7</sup> West scholars often write about his early and late period styles in terms of a transition from smooth ‘neoclassical’ surfaces to painterly ‘romantic’ ones. However, many have trouble dealing with paintings of both types being produced at all points of his career. The best example of this is the oddity of *Death of General Nelson* (1806), which is stylistically closer to *Death of Wolfe* (1770) than it is to *Death on a Pale Horse* (1796 and second version 1817). As will be discussed later in this chapter, these stylistic inconsistencies relate more to the type of painting being produced and the models of emulation behind them. West’s contemporary history paintings of all periods exhibit the measured, smooth style of *Death of Wolfe* whereas the later mythological and religious paintings in general tend to be more painterly in their execution. As the diverse content of his collection illustrated, West’s ‘deep inclination to eclecticism’ might further explain some of his stylistic diversity.

<sup>8</sup> R. Hirsch, *The World of Benjamin West* (Allentown, Pennsylvania: Allentown Art Museum, 1962), 45.

<sup>9</sup> Dunne and Pressly 2010, 1.

synonymous, and he believed that his superior adherence gave him the authority to be a leading practitioner and theorist in the developing national school.<sup>10</sup> West's theories on art, delivered in public discourses as well as in written and verbal guidance to his students, reveal his artistic principles, guided largely by the 'traditional school of thought in which ancient and Renaissance art formed the principle foundation of the practice of painting and the formation of taste'.<sup>11</sup> In his own discourses as President, he combined theory, reiterated primarily from his predecessor Reynolds, and sensibility, with practical advice about technique for aspiring artists. It was undoubtedly expected that one of the most successful history painters of the period would generously impart some of his practical knowledge in his lectures. As would be expected of the second Academy President, however, West also dutifully followed Reynolds in espousing the intellectual, aesthetic, and moral principles of history painting and reinforcing the important models.<sup>12</sup> Using vocabulary very similar to his presidential predecessor, West advised students in one of his discourses to 'examine the great works of art to animate your feelings and to excite your emulation' and to follow the rules of art.<sup>13</sup> There are many more examples of his reliance on Reynoldsian rhetoric, to the point that some scholars have suggested he 'parroted' him.<sup>14</sup> Sir Martin Archer Shee (1769-1850), a later President of the Royal Academy and a colleague, described his presidential discourses, theories and style:

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<sup>10</sup> J. Gage, '*The British School and the British School*', in Allen 1995, 109. In these terms, West saw himself as leading by example for a generation that hoped to develop a body of art with a collective 'national' style.

<sup>11</sup> Carson 2000, 69. This unpublished thesis provides the most detailed analysis of the theory and practice within West's studio, but does not address the collection's role in his practice and pedagogy.

<sup>12</sup> Hoock 2003, 68-69 and 76.

<sup>13</sup> Dunlap 1834/1969, 1:70.

<sup>14</sup> Reitlinger 1961/1964, 121.

...though, in following the path of precept marked out by his great predecessor, and communicating the lessons of his experience in a similar way, he does not approach to a rivalry with Reynolds, as a teacher of his art; though his pen was not so ready as his pencil, and cannot be said to display the graces of language and style which distinguish the compositions of that eminent writer, yet the discourses of President West, delivered from this place, must be acknowledged to contain many ingenious remarks and much *useful information*.<sup>15</sup>

Though West lacked the intellectualism and eloquence of Reynolds, Richardson, or even fellow history painter-theorist James Barry (1741-1806), he compensated for these deficiencies and even exceeded them by putting theory into practice.<sup>16</sup> Even Reynolds recognised his own shortcomings and the obvious disconnect between theory and practice, claiming in the fifth *Discourse* that he was going to ‘bring you from abstraction nearer to practice’, although the examples that followed were frescoes, a technique that no British artist practiced at the time.<sup>17</sup> According to West’s student, William Dunlap, his discourses, in contrast, were instructive and ‘were distinguished for practical good sense’.<sup>18</sup> In the closing of his inaugural discourse as president in 1792, he advised students about the merits of combining theory with practice, placing the most emphasis on the latter, saying,

I must therefore recommend to the young artist, that all his executive studies be made with the pallet and pencil; for whatever may be his knowledge in theory, all that knowledge will be lost to mankind, if the execution of his picture does not accompany that theory with elegance and taste.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Dunlap 1834/1969, 1:94.

<sup>16</sup> For more on Barry’s theories on history painting and its ideal civic function, see J. Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986), 163-221. In 1799, Barry was expelled from the Royal Academy primarily for his criticisms of the institution’s principles during West’s Presidency. For details of Barry’s removal, see Royal Academy Council Minutes, RAA/PC/1/3., vol. 3 (24 Oct 1798 - 18 Dec 1806), 15-24, The Royal Academy of Arts Archives, London.

<sup>17</sup> Reynolds 1975/1981, 80-81.

<sup>18</sup> Dunlap 1834/1969, 1:70, and Cunningham 1837, 2:40-41 Cunningham reiterated Dunlap’s assessment of his discourses, saying they were ‘distinguished for plain practical sense’ and were ‘cold, sensible and instructive’.

<sup>19</sup> West 1793, 34.

West delivered his discourses beginning in 1792, when he succeeded Reynolds as president. Interestingly, over his almost thirty-year tenure as Academy president, only his inaugural discourse was published. His other discourses were not retained in even manuscript form, but several of them were discussed by his contemporaries. Galt's 1820 biography provides summaries of the discourses of 1794, 1797, and 1811 as well as an undated one.<sup>20</sup> Farington occasionally commented on West's discourses in his diary; however, several of his accounts of Academy meetings included nothing about the delivery of a discourse, suggesting that he did not always give them.<sup>21</sup> West was notoriously uncomfortable with writing. In a letter to a cousin named Peter Thompson in 1772, he expressed his unease saying, 'the truth [is] I don't like writeing – it's as difficult to me as painting would be to you...I could as soon paint you a description of things on this side [than] write'.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps his underlying verbal inadequacies, pronounced in the shadow of the erudite Reynolds, deterred him from wanting his discourses published. One wonders if his were perceived as too practical and pedantic, geared to the artist more than to connoisseurs and the general public, and thereby not worthy of broader publication. It might also have been due to the fact that most of his theories were simply reiterations of those given by Reynolds and therefore already published and accepted. Regardless, West seems to have been most comfortable giving impromptu informal lectures in the Academy and in his studio.

In line with his own interest in colour in his artistic practice, his lectures were dominated with ideas about colour, both in theory and application. Dunlap was a witness to

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<sup>20</sup> Galt 1820, 2:83, 93, 103, 121, and 147.

<sup>21</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 10:3818-3819 (10 December 1810). The Royal Academy of Arts Archives does not maintain a large holding of West's presidential papers, though indications of his presidential activities can be found in the records of the General Council Minutes.

<sup>22</sup> Letter from Benjamin West to Peter Thompson, 23 February 1772, Benjamin West Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. See also, Archives of American Art, Roll P23, 221-222.

one such address on colour, commonly referred to as West's 'Rainbow Theory' lecture, given extemporaneously at the Academy to an audience of many students and Academicians. Showing the spectrum of the rainbow on 'a board, on which was painted a globe and a rainbow', West suggested the relationship of the colours of the rainbow to those in the studies by Thornhill after Raphael's famous cartoons (on view in the same room of Somerset House at the time).<sup>23</sup> The cartoons exemplified his theory that 'the Order of the Colours in the Rainbow is the true arrangement for Colours in an Historical picture'.<sup>24</sup> West had previously discussed his theory on colour in more detail using the rainbow in his 1797 discourse. In this lecture, he tied his theory to both Old Masters' colour theories as well as recent scientific theories that discussed colour harmony using primary and secondary colours.<sup>25</sup> According to Farington, West,

...spoke much of a Ball being a form by studying which we may establish sound principles of light & shade with gradations and on this a principle of colours by adopting the arrangement of the rainbow. Yellow for focus of light, orange, red, violet, all for *light shade* – and the gradations green, blue, and purple on the shade side – these rules Titian, Corregio, Rubens, & Vandyke attended to.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Dunlap 1834/1969, 1:71 and C. R. Leslie, *Autobiographical Recollections by Charles Robert Leslie, R.A.*, ed. T. Taylor (London: John Murray, 1860; West Yorkshire, England: E.P. Publishing, 1978), 57. This lecture was attended by many and was apparently particularly impactful on the American students present. A number of years later, when a group of his students founded the American Academy of Fine Arts, they commissioned Lawrence to paint a portrait of West for their collection. They asked specifically that he be depicted as if giving this lecture, and they also wanted one of his copies of the Raphael cartoons to be situated behind him. For more details about this portrait commission, see C. Rebora, 'Sir Thomas Lawrence's 'Benjamin West' for the American Academy of the Fine Arts', *American Art Journal* 21, no. 3 (1989): 18-47. For West's description of the Raphael cartoons as the 'perfect arrangement of colours', see Farington 1978-1998, 14:4944 (14 December 1816).

<sup>24</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 14:5120-5121 (14 December 1817).

<sup>25</sup> For summaries of West's colour theory, see Galt 1820 2:110-115 and 139; G. Evans, *Benjamin West and the Taste of His Times* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1959), 105-107; and M. Kemp, *The Science of Art: Optical Themes in Western Art* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 293. West's colour system was illustrated in a published treatise by contemporary watercolourist Mary Gartside (act. 1781-1809). M. Gartside, *An Essay on Light and Shade, on Colours and on Composition in General* (London: T. Davison, 1805).

<sup>26</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 3:943-944 (11 December 1797).

As these examples suggest, West's theories and discourses combined the abstract and the practical with his interest in natural philosophy, in Newton's work in particular, and its relationship to the science of painting.<sup>27</sup> West, like Reynolds, took his interest in science into his studio and experimented with a variety of materials and techniques.<sup>28</sup> According to Copley, to give 'great richness to his Colours', West introduced a variety of novel materials including copal varnish and poppy oils into his paints.<sup>29</sup> He also used ground Egyptian mummies (of which he had several in his collection) to create a brown transparent glaze that mimicked the effects of Old Master paintings.<sup>30</sup> His experiments did not have the disastrous outcomes of Reynolds's, who famously experimented with spurious painting materials such as bitumen and scraped down the paint layers of paintings in his Old Master collection to understand artists' techniques.<sup>31</sup>

### **Old Masters and the 'Rules of Art'**

In practice as well as in theory, West abided by the rules in art that were based on the established principles and practices of the great Old Masters. His 'implicit obedience to the rules of art, as established by the practice of the great Masters' and his adherence to the ideals

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<sup>27</sup> Galt 1820, 2:136. In this undated discourse summarised in Galt, West discussed Newton and science in relation to the Venetian artists and their 'system of colouring'. For a detailed analysis of Newton's theories in relation to art, see J. Gage, *Color and Meaning: Art, Science, and Symbolism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 134-143.

<sup>28</sup> L. Mayer and G. Myers, *American Painters on Technique: The Colonial Period to 1860* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum Publications, 2011), 12-13.

<sup>29</sup> Letter from John Singleton Copley to Henry Pelham, 25 June – 2 July 1775, in Copley and Pelham 1914/1970, 333-343.

<sup>30</sup> Robins, 20-22 June 1829, day 2, lot 274 ('Egyptian Mummy'). For West's use of mummies in his artistic practice, see Farrington 1978-1998, 8: 2803 (2 July 1806) and Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 218.

<sup>31</sup> For more information on Reynolds's studio experimentations, see M. K. Talley, "All Good Pictures Crack': Sir Joshua Reynolds's Practice and Studio", in Penny 1986, 55-70.



of Reynoldsian high art was constantly commented on by his contemporaries.<sup>32</sup> Northcote once described him as,

...a learned painter, for he knew all that had been done in art from the beginning; he was exactly what is called 'the schools' in painting, for he did everything by the rule, and could give you chapter and verse for every touch he put on the canvas.<sup>33</sup>

His fastidious academic approach meant that he was highly reliant on models. He made his artistic connections to the earlier masters obvious, filling his paintings with reverential references to their works. West was not alone in his interest in the Old Masters; many history painters relied very closely on earlier models. During this time in Britain, there were not many contemporary British history painters for West or others to look to. Northcote snidely commented on this situation when speaking of West's early attractiveness to London audiences: '[because] as any attempt at history was, at that period, an almost unexampled effort'.<sup>34</sup> For earlier models, most contemporary history painters turned to antique sculpture and Old Master paintings by Italian Renaissance and Baroque artists, encountered largely in the form of plaster casts or prints. At the end of his career, James Barry, whose history paintings consistently referenced the classical past, said, 'my thoughts day and night run on nothing else but the antique'.<sup>35</sup> This near obsession of Barry's is indicative of West's similar fervour for Old Masters and antiquities. Indeed, it is difficult to look at any history painting by West, or his portraits and landscapes, and not see his indebtedness to the art of the past.

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<sup>32</sup> Reynolds 1975/1981, 17.

<sup>33</sup> J. Northcote and J. Ward, *Conversations with James Northcote, R.A. with James Ward on Art and Artists*, ed. E. Fletcher (London: Methuen, 1901), 153-154.

<sup>34</sup> H. W. Beechy, *The Literary Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds, ... to which is prefixed, A Memoir of the Author*, 2 vols. (London: Cadell, 1835), 1:170; quoted in C. W. Peale, *The Selected Papers of Charles Willson Peale and His Family*, ed. L. Miller (New Haven and London: Yale University Press for the National Portrait Gallery, 1983), 1:49 fn 6.

<sup>35</sup> Dunne and Pressly 2010, 3.

His paintings proclaim his reverence for and rivalry with his artistic predecessors as he established his own art in the grand tradition.

Artists had been looking to their predecessors for centuries. The established thinking was that in order to be inventive, one had to know the ideas of others that came before them. In his sixth *Discourse*, Reynolds made reference to this saying,

It is vain for painters or poets to endeavour to invent without materials on which the mind may work, and from which invention must originate. Nothing can come of nothing...A mind enriched by an assemblage of all the treasures of ancient and modern art, will be more elevated and fruitful in resources in proportion to the number of ideas which have been carefully collected and thoroughly digested. There can be no doubt but that he who has the most materials has the greatest means of invention.<sup>36</sup>

Reynolds looked to the art of the past for imitation and as a source of invention in his own art.<sup>37</sup> Although this was a common principle of practice and theory at the time, it was not always without criticism. In 1775 this aspect of Reynolds's painting practice was famously criticised in a satirical painting by Nathaniel Hone (1718-1784) entitled *The Pictorial Conjuror, Displaying the Whole Art of Optical Deception* (1775) that mocked the practice of imitation and quotation.<sup>38</sup> The picture, which was rejected from the Academy's exhibition in 1776, shows an elderly man, a 'conjuror', pointing a wand or stick towards a fire, which is being kindled by a pile of Old Master engravings.<sup>39</sup> From the pile, an oil painting emerges, suggestive of Reynolds's practice of piecing together Old Master motifs to create his own composition and as a means of elevating his own art. Although contradictory, given his own

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<sup>36</sup> Reynolds 1975/1981, 99.

<sup>37</sup> For a detailed analysis of his relationship with the art of Leonardo, in particular, see M. Burrell, 'Reynolds and Leonardo', *Apollo* 174, no. 593 (December 2011): 74-82.

<sup>38</sup> Nathaniel Hone, *The Pictorial Conjuror, displaying the Whole Art of Optical Deception*, 1775, oil on canvas, 144.7 x 172.7 cm (57 x 68 inches), The National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin.

<sup>39</sup> J. Newman, 'Reynolds and Hone: *The Conjuror* Unmasked', in Penny 1986, 345.

practices relating to Old Masters, the young Josphe Mallord William Turner (1775-1851) disagreed with this practice and harboured ‘contempt for painters who simply regurgitated their sources undigested’.<sup>40</sup> According to Farington, Turner would later describe this type of imagery as art ‘made up of art’.<sup>41</sup> This was exactly the point Hone was trying to make. He chose to represent engravings in the painting that were easily identifiable models for several paintings by Reynolds, so that his borrowings might become more public.<sup>42</sup> Although primarily targeting Reynolds as an artist, the implied message in *The Conjuror* is also suggestive of a larger conflict inside and outside the Academy between the academic ideal, guided by the Old Masters, and an interest in naturalism.<sup>43</sup>

Though Reynolds was criticised by Hone for his over-reliance on the Old Masters in his work, on the whole, artists’ obvious and reverential allusions to these masters were an aspect of their art that was reinforced in critical reviews, particularly early on.<sup>44</sup> According to David Solkin, the more apparent the appropriations, the easier it was for the critics to rationalise their judgment.<sup>45</sup> At the time, these writers transferred their connoisseurial skills to their audience in simple terms: basically, Old Masters equalled good taste. Painters during

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<sup>40</sup> I. Warrell, ‘Stolen Hints from Celebrated Pictures’: Turner as Copyist, Collector and Consumer of Old Master Paintings’, in Solkin 2009, 48.

<sup>41</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 5:1900 (4 October 1802).

<sup>42</sup> J. Newman, ‘Reynolds and Hone: *The Conjuror* Unmasked’, in Penny 1986, 345. For more details about this picture, especially its exhibition and reception, see M. Butlin, ‘An Eighteenth-Century Art-Scandal: Nathaniel Hone’s *The Conjuror*’, *Connoisseur* 174 (May 1970): 1-9, and J. Newman, ‘Reynolds and Hone, ‘The Conjuror’ Unmasked’, in Penny 1986, 344-354.

<sup>43</sup> The debate between these two schools of thought had been ongoing, beginning with Hogarth’s reluctance to embrace traditional academic ideals and culminating around 1800 with the growth of the school of landscape painting and watercolour that championed naturalism. Of course, even within the Academy, there were always dichotomies. For instance, William Hunter’s lectures on anatomy represented an interest in documenting nature, while, at the same time, Reynolds’s *Discourses* praised the beauties of the ideal form.

<sup>44</sup> D. Solkin, *Painting for Money: The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 189.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

this period were praised in the press for their stylistic resemblance to certain Old Masters. After all, the newspapers had provided West with the moniker the ‘American Raphael’. In a review of the Royal Academy exhibition of 1774, a critic, writing for the *Public Advertiser*, observed that ‘In Colouring, Reynolds, Barry and West are excellent, but very different: West seems to approximate Corregio’s manner, Barry Titian’s and Reynolds that of Rubens’.<sup>46</sup> These comparisons continued after West’s death, as Lawrence remarked in 1823 that he ‘was unequalled at any period below the schools of the Carracci’.<sup>47</sup> This sense of competition, of being equal to an Old Master or perhaps even better than one, was also inherent in the art criticism and discussions of the period. Zoffany once said that West’s talent rivalled one of his own artistic models, Poussin; he postured that ‘West has already beaten him out of the field’.<sup>48</sup>

The reception of West’s work during his lifetime, and even since, has been largely dominated by references to his overly academic and self-consciously ‘Old Master’ style. These characteristics of his paintings were lauded early in his career, but became one of the reasons his art was criticised and deemed old fashioned later. As early as 1780, a Royal Academy exhibition reviewer in *The London Courant* denigrated him, commenting: ‘In short, Mr. West is certainly possessed of real genius, but seems to have studied the antique with too close an attention, and to have been prevented by too humble an observance of established rules, from the attainment of that excellence, which a more free and confident exertion of his

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<sup>46</sup> *The Public Advertiser*, 4 May 1774, 2.

<sup>47</sup> Smith 1829/1917, 2:312-313, and R. Redgrave and S. Redgrave, *A Century of Painters of the English School* (London: Sampson Low and Marston, 1890), 76.

<sup>48</sup> H. C. W. Angelo, *Reminiscences of Henry Angelo, with Memoirs of His Late Father and Friends* (London: Coburn, 1828), 361.

own imagination might have supplied.’<sup>49</sup> A few years later in the Royal Academy show of 1786, his painting referred to as *Death of the Stag* or *Alexander the Third of Scotland* (1786), received criticism for his reliance on standard models: ‘Mr. West may cite *Titian* and *Rubens* to be his apologists; but nature ought to have been his guide, and not their examples’.<sup>50</sup> Showing the dichotomies present around this time in regard to academic tradition, another exhibition reviewer for the same year in *The London Chronicle* contradicted the previous critic and praised the same picture for West’s close attention to nature and optics.<sup>51</sup> These contrasting opinions reiterate the larger debate, occurring during the late eighteenth century as the traditional idea of British art as high art based on European models began to shift to an art with a greater emphasis on nature.<sup>52</sup>

### Imitation and Skimming Their Cream

In his popular art manual, *The Practice of Painting and Perspective Made Easy* (1756), Thomas Bardwell (1704-1767) discussed copying as a practice:

Men of common sense know, that Artists of all Ages have copied and studied each other, in whatever they found most for their Purpose, and for the Advancement of their Art...Rubens studied principally the Works of Titian, Paul Veronese, and Tintoret; that is, he copied such of their Pictures as he thought most worthy of his Imitation, and kept them for his own Use... Van

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<sup>49</sup> *The London Courant and Westminster Chronicle*, 3 May 1780, 4.

<sup>50</sup> *Morning Herald*, 4 May 1786, 3. Benjamin West, *Alexander III of Scotland Saved from a Stag* by Colin Fitzgerald (*The Death of the Stag*), 1786, oil on canvas, 365.7 x 521.3 cm (144 x 205 ¼ inches), National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh.

<sup>51</sup> *The London Chronicle*, 2-4 May 1786, 4.

<sup>52</sup> In the search for a more characteristically ‘British’ art, this transition from something of a broadly cosmopolitan outlook to one more insular and rooted in custom was largely driven by landscape art around the year 1800, and has been investigated by a number of art historians. For more information, see Vaughan 1990, 11-23; and M. Postle, ‘In Search of the ‘True Briton’: Reynolds, Hogarth, and the British School’, in Allen 1995, 121-143; and D. Kriz, *The Idea of the English Landscape Painter: Genius as Alibi in the Early Nineteenth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997); and Hoock 2003, 75-77.

Dyck copied Titian, and all the Venetian School; or, in De Pile's Phrase, skimmed their Cream.<sup>53</sup>

As Bardwell's statements relay, copying and imitation had been utilised by the Old Masters and the generations following as a way to 'catch [their] Excellencies' and was encouraged as 'highly useful, and worthy of Esteem'.<sup>54</sup> The artistic establishment believed that artists must 'imitate' the Old Masters, but what exactly did they mean by this? It was not just the art of copying exactly the work of another artist, though that was a standard practice among artists at the beginning of their training. Contemporary theories on imitation and invention were vague in terms of practice. In his sixth *Discourse* on the theory of imitation, Reynolds suggested his definition of the term as, 'By imitation I do not mean imitation in its largest sense, but simply the following of other masters and the advantages to be drawn from the study of their works'.<sup>55</sup> In concordance with Reynolds, West reinforced this idea in his discourses, but used 'emulation' more frequently than 'imitation'.<sup>56</sup> According to Dunlap, he advised in one of his discourses: 'examine the great works of art to animate your feelings and to excite your emulation'.<sup>57</sup> During this period, imitation and emulation of the geniuses of the artistic past served a greater purpose than just elevating the art of a single artist or genre; it was meant to elevate the national school of art more broadly and the taste of the art-going public. According to William Buchanan in his *Memoirs of Painting* (1824), West at one time remarked that,

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<sup>53</sup> T. Bardwell, *The Practice of Painting and Perspective Made Easy* (London: S. Richardson, 1756), 20-21.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>55</sup> Reynolds 1975/1981, 94.

<sup>56</sup> Galt 1820, 2:138.

<sup>57</sup> Dunlap 1834/1969, 1:70.

Next to the merit of having painted a picture which should do honour to the art, and become an ornament to the state wherein it was produced, was the credit of having brought from foreign countries works of the great masters. The importation of such works tends to enrich the nation which receives them, it holds out a bright example for imitation, and rouses and calls into action the native talents of those who feel the sacred flame of emulation.<sup>58</sup>

His advocacy of the importation of Old Master works into Britain to enable greater access to artists, collectors, and connoisseurs followed the common contemporary thought that increased exposure would elevate the country's art as a result. West and his generation of history painters, in particular, were trained to believe they were serving a greater common purpose in their art, which included referencing the art of the past, to enflame young artists to create virtuous and more sophisticated pictures and to educate the public in higher standards of art thereby building a 'republic of taste'.<sup>59</sup>

In his own artistic practice, West utilised the method of copying paintings by eminent Old Masters as a means of learning their techniques and creative processes. According to biographers John Galt and William Carey (1759-1839), as early as the 1750s in Philadelphia, West copied a painting 'ascribed to the school of Murillo' of *St. Ignatius Loyola* in one of his patron's collections.<sup>60</sup> Another patron, Provost William Smith (1727-1803), saw West's copy and suggested that he next paint his portrait 'in the style and attitude of the St. Ignatius'.<sup>61</sup> This idea that the copy was a step in the process of synthesising the technique or ideas of another's composition into one's own composition was the basis of contemporary

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<sup>58</sup> W. Buchanan, *Memoirs of Painting, with a chronological history of the importation of pictures by the great masters into England since the French Revolution* (London: R. Ackerman, 1824), 9, and quoted in Herrmann 1999, 134.

<sup>59</sup> J. Barrell, 'Sir Joshua Reynolds and the Political Theory of Painting', *Oxford Art Journal* 9, no. 2 (1986): 40.

<sup>60</sup> Galt 1820, 1:71-72, and Carey 1820, 515. For more information on the unlocated painting, see and Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 446.

<sup>61</sup> Galt 1820, 1:72.

theories on imitation. Pure copying was considered an academic practice, part of the learning process of an artist. The process of copying great masters' works enabled artists to comprehend how to structure a picture and to understand their techniques.<sup>62</sup> To develop his own formula for history painting based on the traditional models, West spent his early years closely studying a wide variety of Old Master compositions in Italy and England to understand and become fluent in the established conventions of the genre. During his three-year stay in Italy, West saw the canonical works of the past; it was the single most transformative and eye-opening experience in his developing career. West's responses to his initial interactions with Old Master paintings and antiquities are captured in a variety of forms, ranging from rough immediate sketches after a famous masterpiece to full-scale painted replicas. His Italian sketchbooks reveal a great deal about his early journey as an artist and his developing taste and skills. Many of his sketches after famous Old Master compositions are sketchy and summary, almost like memory maps or notations for the young artist (fig. 47). The majority of these studies focus on major works chiefly by artists including Raphael, the Carracci, Guido Reni, Correggio and Titian.<sup>63</sup> In some studies he captured the full image and in others he sketched only one figure from a larger group. He also produced a number of silhouette-like drawings of large groups of figures (fig. 48) showing his efforts to comprehend the overall construction of various groupings. There are also a number of figure studies after the male nude, many from antique sculptures and several from life, which probably derive from his introduction to life classes while in Rome. The sketchbooks capture details of his engagement with Italian architecture and decorative elements; these studies are more finished and often traced in ink, such as one of his sketches

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<sup>62</sup> I. Warrell, "Stolen Hints from Celebrated Pictures": Turner as Copyist, Collector and Consumer of Old Master Paintings', in Solkin 2009, 42.

<sup>63</sup> Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 36.



of a building and vase (fig. 49). Two of his pocket-sized Italian sketchbooks, one at the Yale Center for British Art and one in the Royal Academy, are dedicated primarily to vases and architectural details, suggesting some level of systemization on his part.<sup>64</sup> These categorised sketchbooks became easy references from which to pull ideas when he was working on his own paintings later. The influence of these moments of engagement with architecture would later be transposed as models for the background buildings of epic images such as *The Departure of Regulus* (fig. 46), bringing together an idealised classical story with elements of historic truth about place. While in Italy, he also produced a number of full-scale copies of famous paintings by earlier artists, some for his patrons back home and others for his personal reference.<sup>65</sup> He made at least two copies after paintings by his teacher, Mengs, during his first year there, one of a sibyl and another of a holy family. Both were produced in the style of seventeenth-century paintings of similar subjects.<sup>66</sup>

West continued the practice of imitating others throughout his career, albeit later with more interest in uncovering the methods of the masters than continuing to train his eye with the ‘drudgery of copying’.<sup>67</sup> According to Reynolds, ‘genius’ was not the result of innate talent alone, but the result of study and experience.<sup>68</sup> In his 1774 *Discourse*, Reynolds advised artists not to rely on ‘native genius’ too much and to keep looking to ‘higher models and better advisors’, and to continue the practice throughout their careers:

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<sup>64</sup> Benjamin West, *Sketchbook of Vase and Decoration Studies*, 1760s, pen and brown ink and graphite on laid paper, 12.7 x 8.6 cm (5 x 3 3/8 inches), Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut, and Benjamin West, *Sketches of three vases and a section of a ceiling painting*, Italian sketchbook, 1760s, pen and ink on laid paper, 12 x 8.5 cm (4 3/4 x 3 1/2 inches), The Royal Academy of Arts, London.

<sup>65</sup> For his copies of Old Master works in Italy, see Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 441-448.

<sup>66</sup> Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 445.

<sup>67</sup> Reynolds 1975/1981, 29.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

Study therefore the great works of great masters, for ever. Study as nearly as you can, in the order, in the manner, and on the principles on which they studied. Study nature attentively, but always with those masters in your company; consider them as models which you are to imitate, and at the same time as rivals with whom you are to contend.<sup>69</sup>

In a satirical image of artists and amateurs copying Old Master works in the British Institution in 1805 by Alfred Edward Chalon (1780-1860) (fig. 50), West is represented as an elderly artist standing in front of an easel copying Rembrandt's most famous landscape, *The Mill* (1645/1648), a painting on loan from Angerstein's collection.<sup>70</sup> According to Farington, who visited him while he was making the copy there, West was learning Rembrandt's process and masterful chiaroscuro, 'by laying on the high lights with pure white & giving tone to it by thin colours only'.<sup>71</sup>

As a result of his close study of objects over the years, West effectively developed his own visual library, a rich repository from which he could source ideas, compositions, and techniques for his own works. Having a wealth of imagery in one's mind and in copied form was useful to an artist, but having original works of art as resources was equally if not more important as it brought the artist closer to the invention of the work. For the professional artists, this idea of equipping oneself with a variety of visual resources, a store of knowledge, was a well-established tradition dating back to the Renaissance.

Throughout his long career, West assembled a collection that could serve a private role as a resource of artistic ideas, instruction, and inspiration. In this, he was not alone and was following an established practice among artists. Many artists of the time, and indeed

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 112-113.

<sup>70</sup> Whitley 1928/1973, 1:111; Farington 1978-1998, 8:2909 (18 November 1806); and Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 446-447. Rembrandt van Rijn, *The Mill*, 1645/1648, oil on canvas, 87.6 x 105.6 cm (34 ½ x 41 ⅝ inches), National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

<sup>71</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 8:2909 (18 November 1806).

during the previous centuries, had built collections, particularly of prints and casts, as visual libraries to assist in their study of great art of the past and aid them in the development of their own artistic productions.<sup>72</sup> In his own collection, West assembled objects that were representative of contemporary art theory, his personal interests, and practical needs. He acquired objects that could aid him in the development of his history paintings, and certain purchases were even motivated by current projects. His large collection, filled with a variety of subjects from classical and modern histories and representing an eclectic range of styles, provided the prolific painter with ideas and instruction for his own works. To this end, his collection played an integral and supportive role in his creative process.

### **Artistic Process**

The intellectual complexity of history painting, or at least the perception of it, meant that an artist like West needed to look to a variety of written and visual sources during the development of a grand-style narrative composition. The early stages of the process took a great deal of time and research. One reviewer of the 1780 Royal Academy exhibition in the *London Courant* described the laborious and time-consuming process of becoming a history painter and producing a history painting:

...the time and study requisite for an artist to qualify himself for the arduous province of history painting, to acquire a ready correctness in drawing, a perfect knowledge of anatomy, a strength and propriety of expression, to gain a thorough knowledge of that varied simplicity which is the great secret of composition, and to finish the whole with harmony and propriety of colouring, and to diffuse throughout, that enchanting grace, which is more easily imagined than described, is an infinite discouragement to him whose profession is his chief support.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> G. Warwick, 'Introduction', in Baker, Elam and Warwick 2003, 3.

<sup>73</sup> *London Courant and Westminster Chronicle*, 2 May 1780, 4. For an analysis of the commercial aspects of history painting and its production, see L. Lippincott, 'Expanding on Portraiture: The Market, the Public, and the Hierarchy of Genres in Eighteenth-Century Britain', in Bermingham and Brewer 1995, 75-88.

West's methods of painting were highly systematic and closely tied to academic traditions.<sup>74</sup> As recommended in Du Fresnoy's *Art of Painting* (1668), a popular text that West owned, and most of the other contemporary art manuals, the first stage of a painting was called invention, in which the artist developed the idea.<sup>75</sup> To develop ideas for new history paintings, West used his collection as a resource. Looking to his assemblage of books (primarily history-related publications) and his various Old and New World visual resources, West could peruse for interesting and unique subjects as well as ideas about how to depict them.<sup>76</sup> The genesis of a painting would begin to ruminate in his mind, and then he might discuss his initial ideas with students, colleagues or the patron, if there was one. From the inception to the finishing touches of a painting, West was surrounded by people in his studio. He preferred a communal creative environment. He advised a similar setting for his students, saying, 'Don't shut yourself up from visitors when engaged in any great work. Hear their remarks and encourage their criticisms. From the various opinions something useful may be gathered to improve your picture.'<sup>77</sup> For commissioned works, patrons would often suggest the subject matter for their picture. According to Galt, George III often did this, and even read to West himself 'the subject of my picture' from the Royal Library's volume of Livy for the commission of *The Departure of Regulus* (fig. 46).<sup>78</sup> When painting on speculation, West

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<sup>74</sup> Carson 2000, 117 and 220. Carson provides insight into West's 'highly systematic' creative process and production within his studio. For more information, see, in particular, the chapter entitled, 'West's Preparatory Drawings: Invention, Composition and Design', in Carson 2000, 117-170.

<sup>75</sup> Fresnoy 1695, 10-11.

<sup>76</sup> For some of the contents of West's library, see Christie's, 6 July 1820, lots 25-53, and Alberts 1978, 170. Among the notable holdings were the following: Goldsmith's *Roman History* and *Grecian History*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Pope's *Homer*, Warburton's *Shakespeare*, Jeffery's *American Atlas* and a copy of the American Constitution.

<sup>77</sup> Dunlap 1834/1969, 1:70.

<sup>78</sup> Galt 1820, 2:25-26.

frequently selected classical or modern subjects that would resonate with his contemporary British audience and that would be a statement of public art.

The paintings' ultimate audience, in public exhibitions or in reproductions, greatly influenced the choice of subjects and styles. Beginning in the 1770s, following the commercial success of prints produced after his early history paintings, most of West's paintings produced on speculation were developed to become published prints. As Timothy Clayton has suggested, by 1780, historical painting was almost entirely dependent on the print trade.<sup>79</sup> Prints after West's paintings reached a much broader audience than his paintings, so the subject matter and universal messages of his paintings were geared for this market. During this period of crowded exhibition culture, the context of the painting's ultimate display also played into the selection of the subject. To be impactful in the public exhibitions, it needed to be a simple, digestible story and familiar message that could be understood by a spectator rather easily and quickly – and visually.<sup>80</sup> Although many one-man and single-picture exhibitions were accompanied by a pamphlet full of detailed explanations of the subject and presentation, exhibition catalogues of the Royal Academy and other institutions did not always allow for such supplementary elaboration. Reynolds remarked on the importance of an instant visual impact of a single history painting saying that a painter 'has but one sentence to utter, but one moment to exhibit. He cannot, like the

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<sup>79</sup> T. Clayton, *The English Print: 1688-1802* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), 235.

<sup>80</sup> Solkin 1993, 186. Solkin describes West's simple, comprehensible stories as part of his strategy of constructing himself as 'the painter of the beautiful'.

poet or historian, expatiate'.<sup>81</sup> To this end, West typically relied on familiar and popular subjects for his history paintings rather than obscure literary sources.<sup>82</sup>

Once West decided on the subject and general concept, the next stage of the process was the exploration of the composition. He generally arranged the composition on paper, typically beginning with loose, spontaneous chalk drawings that enabled him to experiment with it. His later studies would explore light and shade as well as expressions, and once his composition was relatively set, he produced more finished oil sketches and ultimately the finished painting.<sup>83</sup> This final part of the process was often referred to as 'design'.<sup>84</sup> West's entire creative process was consistent with traditional practices and was advocated by Reynolds in his first *Discourse*. Reynolds drew parallels to the Old Masters' processes saying that after they 'conceived a subject, they first made a variety of sketches; then a finished drawing of the whole...then painted the picture'.<sup>85</sup> It was during the beginning stages of his artistic process that the collection played a particularly integral role.

West incorporated sophisticated ideas and aspects garnered from the art of others into his artistic productions. Though publicly West was not a proponent of literal transcriptions of motifs from other masters in his own art, in practice he frequently borrowed from earlier artists. From early in his painting career, West's Old-Masterly style was the subject of comments. In 1767, one of his American pupils wrote about the paintings he displayed in that year's Society of Artists' exhibition: 'they are painted in a Masterly Stile and in a

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<sup>81</sup> Reynolds 1975/1981, 60.

<sup>82</sup> Abrams 1985, 86.

<sup>83</sup> Carson 2000, 159 and 220.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>85</sup> Reynolds 1975/1981, 19.

Different Manner from Common Oil Paintng which gives great luster & Strength to the Coulering – a method or art no Painter here...knows any thing of'.<sup>86</sup> West, like Reynolds, knew that emulation had its limits. He cautioned his students against becoming too 'mannered' and producing art too close to a certain Old Master. In his 1797 discourse, he elaborated on this: 'if you consult your own mind, you will draw forth a style and character of your own, and therefore no man can ever be excused for sinking into a mannerist'.<sup>87</sup> Following the ideals of the past too closely could stifle invention and innovation – and thus differentiation. So West dipped in and out of his collection, using what he needed from it. At the most basic level, he was looking to artists represented in his collection for models of style, technique, and composition, but also for interesting subject matter and content. In this way, the collection enabled him to take short cuts, invaluable time-saving measures considering how labour intensive his process could be. For his signature complex large-scale compositions, filled with groups of figures, action, implicit moral messages and so forth, he usually looked to a number of visual sources, not just one artist or one composition. As Reynolds had suggested in his second *Discourse*, West looked to a 'variety of models' to 'avoid that narrowness and poverty of conception which attends a bigoted admiration of a single master'.<sup>88</sup>

West selected appropriate models based on his projects. He varied his model depending on the subject, style, and effect that was needed. To this end, he looked to artists like Correggio for the subtle, poetic manner of his early mythological pictures such as *Venus and Cupid* (1765), and to Poussin and Raphael for the smooth manner and serious figural

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<sup>86</sup> Peale 1983, 1:48.

<sup>87</sup> Galt 1820, 2:116.

<sup>88</sup> Reynolds 1975/1981, 26.

groupings in his early classical history paintings such as *Agrippina Landing at Brundisium with the Ashes of Germanicus* (1768).<sup>89</sup> As Reynolds said in his second *Discourse*, ‘With respect to the pictures that you are to choose for your models, I could wish that you would take the world’s opinion rather than your own. In other words, I would have you choose those of established reputation, rather than follow your own fancy.’<sup>90</sup> West’s taste was conventional; he looked to the ‘capital works of those who excelled in the great style’.<sup>91</sup>

His selection of models also aligned closely with the place within British art history that he imagined for himself. So who were his artistic heroes and who did he want to align himself with artistically? Although he did not make public statements about his theories on art until he became Royal Academy president in 1792, some of his pre-office correspondence reveals his thinking on this earlier in his career. In his previously mentioned 1773 letter to Copley, he recommended that he study the conventional models of ‘the Antiant Statuaries, Raphael, Michael Angelo, Correggio, and Titian’.<sup>92</sup> As his correspondence and discourses make clear, he was remarkably consistent in his models of emulation and alignment over the course of his career.

West collected art by artists that he admired and strove to emulate or perhaps rival and that had particular affinities with his own art. In theory, Raphael was probably the artist that he admired most. After all, he was called the ‘American Raphael’. Moreover, he lauded

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<sup>89</sup> Benjamin West, *Venus and Cupid*, 1765, oil on canvas, 95.2 x 81.9 cm (37 ½ x 32 ¼ inches), The Parthenon, Nashville, Tennessee, and Benjamin West, *Agrippina Landing at Brundisium with the Ashes of Germanicus*, 1768, oil on canvas, 163.8 x 240 cm (64 ½ x 94 ½ inches), Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven. According to Farington in 1808, West admitted to painting *Venus and Cupid* ‘while His mind was full of Correggio’. Farington 1978-1998, 9:3207 (26 January 1808). For a discussion of his early influences, see Solkin 1993, 184-189.

<sup>90</sup> Reynolds 1975/1981, 32.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>92</sup> Letter from Benjamin West to John Singleton Copley, 6 January 1773, Copley and Pelham 1914/1970, 194.



and copied the Italian artist's famous cartoons, and even named his first son in his honour. West believed Raphael excelled above the others because he learned from 'all the improvements which had been made before' him by earlier masters including Michelangelo, Perugino and Leonardo.<sup>93</sup> In his modern context, West wanted to be known similarly as an artist who excelled because of all the 'improvements' that came before him and that he learned from. When it came to painting one of the first pictures of his own family (a picture of his beloved wife and infant first son Raphael) (fig. 51), he chose Raphael's *Madonna dell Sedia*, a copy of which he had in his collection, as his model, which would seem to be an ultimate 'artistic tribute'.<sup>94</sup>

West had a variety of artistic heroes that were obvious choices for reference and emulation. He believed certain Old Masters excelled in certain areas, such as Michelangelo's and Raphael's excellence in design and Titian's excellence in colour. Reynolds noted that artists had 'the choice of the excellencies', and he recommended that artists unite 'all the excellencies of art'.<sup>95</sup> His collection became a repository of these artists and their 'excellencies', from preparatory studies to their finished works. In many of the preparatory objects, such as drawings 'squared' for transfer onto a canvas (fig. 52), West sought to garner an understanding of different artists' creative processes.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Galt 1820, 2:133 and 160.

<sup>94</sup> R. Cohen, 'A Benjamin West Discovery: A missing portrait of the painter's wife and son identified', *Apollo* 133, no. 349 (March 1991): 171. For West's painting of his family using this model, see Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 457-459, and Cohen 1991, 171-173. West produced five versions of this picture.

<sup>95</sup> Reynolds 1975/1981, 79.

<sup>96</sup> West owned numerous drawings squared for transfer onto a larger canvas. For example, Jacopo Tintoretto, *Christ on the Cross*, c. 1540-1594, black chalk heightened with whites on grey paper, 39.4 x 26 cm (15 ½ x 10 ¼ inches), The Victoria and Albert Museum, London; and Jacopo Tintoretto, *A Man with His Arms Outstretched*, c. 1566-67, black chalk on blue paper, squared in black chalk, 34.3 x 23.5 cm (13 ½ x 9 ¼ inches), National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh. The Victoria and Albert sheet is illustrated here.

West's use of his collection is not something he discussed openly in his correspondence or in his discourses. The evidence of his interactions with objects in his collection is predominantly visual, with the notable exception of Woodburn's recorded declaration that he 'took so much from the draperies' in his *Fra Bartolommeo* volumes.<sup>97</sup> This sort of recognition of direct object to object connections is rare. Through close study of the collection and West's *oeuvre*, numerous visual examples of his interactions with his collection in his own art have been uncovered; however, there are too many to elucidate here. What follows then are several instances of intersection and influence with artists and works represented in the collection. These examples will serve as exemplars of his interests and practical uses of the collection more broadly and will emphasise how the collection informed his practice.

## Titian

From the moment he first copied Titian's famous *Venus of Urbino* in Florence in the early 1760s, West became preoccupied with the artist and his 'deep, luscious hues' and particularly his ability to 'produce harmony by any arrangement'.<sup>98</sup> He believed that to be successful in history painting, after mastering the requisite skills of drawing, it was necessary to master colour, its technique and visual impact. To do this, he advised students to make themselves 'masters of the whole philosophy of colours, as Titian and Correggio did'.<sup>99</sup> In his 1797 discourse, West advised students to 'copy with attention some pieces of Titian,

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<sup>97</sup> Letter from Samuel Woodburn to the Prince of Orange's agent, 3 September 1840, The Hague, Archives of the Royal House, Ms. A 40 VIII-128 and quoted in Fisher 1990, 15 and 31 fn 36. Fischer makes several connections, including between one of the *Fra Bartolommeo* drawings and West's *Christ Rejected* (1811, Memorial Gallery of the University of Rochester, New York).

<sup>98</sup> Leslie 1860/1978, 58. See also Abrams 1985, 86.

<sup>99</sup> Galt 1820: 2:140.

Correggio, Reubens, and Van Dyke' as a means of learning about colours found in nature.<sup>100</sup>

West internalised his own advice and made every effort to excel with colour. To this end, the works of Titian, in particular, became great inspirations for his own art. His collection, rich in the works of sixteenth-century Venetian artists' paintings, drawings, and prints, provided a wealth of material for him to turn to study their expertise.

At the first Royal Academy exhibition of 1769, West exhibited a mythological picture entitled *Venus Lamenting the Death of Adonis* (fig. 53).<sup>101</sup> In the painting, West displays a fluency with the compositional devices and the characteristic jewel-tone colouring of a number of works by Titian, specifically the *Venus and Adonis* (c. 1554-9) (fig. 32) in his collection. The two pictures, though briefly in West's studio at the same time, share an interesting affinity by aspects of their composition as well as by subject matter. The visual relationships of the two pictures reveal how West incorporated pictorial conventions found in Titian's work: entangled figures, harmonious colouring, and even the large, distinctive, square-shaped canvas. Though West did not own the Titian before he painted *Venus Lamenting* in the late 1760s, he owned a print after the famous image and was undoubtedly familiar with a well-known oil version in the London house of the Earl of Sunderland at the time.<sup>102</sup> Thus, West's interactions with Titian's *Venus and Adonis* were probably varied, ranging from two original versions, to copies, to prints. Once he acquired his own version of painting in the 1790s, he made a full-scale copy of it, which remained in his studio until his

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 2:115.

<sup>101</sup> See Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 228.

<sup>102</sup> Titian, *Venus and Adonis*, c. 1560, oil on canvas, 106.8 x 136 cm (42 1/8 x 53 5/8 inches), National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. For more about the version owned by Sunderland, see Wethey 1975, 193.

death.<sup>103</sup> His ongoing interest in the composition undoubtedly impacted a variety of his works in progress over the years in addition to his *Venus Lamenting*. In 1808, the year before West sold the Titian, he painted his *Cupid and Psyche* (fig. 54), which exhibits similar positions of the figures and use of framing the draperies around their skin. Like Titian's picture, *Cupid and Psyche* is also a square-format canvas, fairly unique in West's *oeuvre*.<sup>104</sup>

West's *Venus Lamenting the Death of Adonis*, though started in 1768, was retouched in 1772 and 1818.<sup>105</sup> It is interesting to note that when he reworked his canvas in 1818, according to twentieth-century conservation reports, he cut down his canvas to make it roughly a square.<sup>106</sup> It then had a closer affiliation with the Titian, which was also roughly a square shape, measuring approximately '70 x 80 inches in its frame'.<sup>107</sup> Recent conservation research has also revealed that West also heavily repainted his composition in 1818. The two paintings have an interesting connection in terms of their subject matter. The subject itself, a story of two doomed lovers from Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, was an established subject in the tradition of European history painting. It is interesting to think of these two canvases, at least theoretically, as pendants. Given the alterations he made, perhaps West was thinking in this way. The two paintings illustrate contiguous moments in the narrative, with Titian's portraying the embrace of the lovers before the hunt, and West's portraying their sorrowful embrace after its fatal outcome. As pendants, West would be aligning himself with the artist,

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<sup>103</sup> Robins, London, 20-22 June 1829, lot 95, 'Venus and Adonis, a splendid copy from the celebrated picture of Titian in the Collection of Mr. Miles', and Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 448 (unknown location).

<sup>104</sup> Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 243.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Wethey 1975, 190-191.

even competing to some extent, clearly situating himself within a specific tradition in the history of art.

In a well-known chain of events, West's admiration for Titian led him, in the 1790s, on a disastrous quest to uncover the secrets of the master's colours, materials, and techniques, culminating in the famed 'Venetian Secret scandal'.<sup>108</sup> West's paintings, especially early in his career, had been characterised by their heightened, attention-grabbing colour.<sup>109</sup> Horace Walpole, who conceded that West's paintings were 'much admired' in early exhibitions, later described his palette as 'very tawdry' and 'abominably gaudy'.<sup>110</sup> Though West's colouring was of interest early on, by the 1790s, particularly during the so-called 'crisis of oil painting' when critical response to watercolour painting was bringing it to the fore, he was looking for new colours and techniques to bring renewed interest to this aspect of his art.<sup>111</sup> West was approached by a shady artist named Thomas Provis (fl.1797) and his daughter, who led him to believe that they had discovered a recipe for Titian's luminous colours that he longed to discover in his own art. West was easily seduced by the fraudulent promotion because he believed that Titian indeed had a scientific secret that had remained elusive for hundreds of years. West once said that Titian 'had prosecuted, with great ardour, the science of chemistry, then better to understand the properties of colour, their homogeneous blendings, purity and duration'.<sup>112</sup> Initially, West, then President of the Royal Academy, wanted

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<sup>108</sup> For more about the Venetian Secret, see Trumble and Aronson 2008, and Gage 1999, 153-161.

<sup>109</sup> Solkin 1993, 186.

<sup>110</sup> Walpole's quotes come from his annotations in the margins of two 1760s exhibition catalogues (Society of Artists and the Free Society of Artists) in the Lewis Walpole Library, Farmington, Connecticut, and quoted in Ibid., 185 and 291.

<sup>111</sup> For more on this 'crisis', see G. Smith, *The Emergence of the Professional Watercolourist: Contentions and Alliances in the Artistic Domain, 1760-1824*, (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2002).

<sup>112</sup> Galt 1820, 2:136.

exclusive rights to the recipe, so that he could exhibit a painting using the process and ‘come before the public with the advantages of the process exclusively’.<sup>113</sup> After his initial investigations, other artists, including Farington, were included in the secret and experimented with the recipe in several paintings that seemingly failed to present colours like the Venetians.<sup>114</sup> West’s ‘Venetian Secret’ pictures were also deemed unsuccessful, and the public scandal nearly destroyed his reputation. Yet this public debacle did not curtail his efforts to uncover the master’s secrets within the privacy of his studio. In fact, his collection of works by Titian aided him in his investigations. In 1803, according to Farington, West overzealously ‘restored’ and repainted parts of his *Death of Actaeon* by Titian, in an effort to enhance and understand the work of the master.<sup>115</sup> The Venetian colour palette and technique that West aspired to in his own art, led him to collect paintings, drawings, and prints by these artists so avidly – and then use them to his advantage in his artistic practice.

## Rubens

West admired the work of another renowned master of colour, Rubens. He collected a number of the Flemish artist’s oil studies and drawings for major commissions. As the author of the ceilings at Whitehall and numerous altarpieces, Rubens was a constant source of inspiration for West for his own commissions of this nature.<sup>116</sup> One such commission was the ‘Chapel of Revealed Religion’ at Windsor, which started in 1779. On nearly the scale of

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<sup>113</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 3:739 (6 January 1797).

<sup>114</sup> For more on the reception of these pictures, see Ibid., 3:832 (1 May 1797), and *The General Evening Post*, 29 April – 2 May 1797, 1.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 6: 2136-2137 (2 October 1803).

<sup>116</sup> West also styled himself as Rubens in Benjamin West, *Self-Portrait*, c. 1776, oil on canvas, 76.8 x 63.8 cm (30 ¼ x 25 ½ inches), Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, Maryland. He portrays himself with a wide-brimmed hat, dark shadows and similar angle to the artist’s famous self-portrait of (which was in the Royal Collection). For more information on the Rubensesque self-portrait, see Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 451.

Rubens' Whitehall project, the King proposed for West to design and decorate the royal chapel with a series of biblical pictures that would depict the subject of the progress of religion 'from its commencement to its completion'.<sup>117</sup> It was an enormous project for West, undoubtedly the largest undertaking of his career, extending over a twenty-year period during his most productive years and became what he called the 'great work of my life'.<sup>118</sup> The timing of the project followed only a few years after the collapse of what would have been another large religious painting project for West (alongside several artists, including Reynolds and Kauffman), the scheme to decorate St. Paul's Cathedral.<sup>119</sup> Securing the Windsor religious history project on his own, virtually unprecedented since Whitehall, was a major artistic and political coup at the time for West.<sup>120</sup>

The sequence of his designs for the chapel began with the expulsion of Adam and Eve from paradise from the book of Genesis and ended with the events foretold in the book of Revelations. In the early stages of the planning, West prepared a number of folio-size presentation pieces to introduce his pictorial ideas to the King and his council to facilitate discussion and final approval.<sup>121</sup> Many of these preparatory studies, as well as the finished

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<sup>117</sup> Galt 1820, 2:194.

<sup>118</sup> Draft of letter from Benjamin West to H. Rowland, 25 May 1811, interleaved in the manuscript Galt folios, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 5:43. The Galt folios are an extra-illustrated version of the 1820 biography that included prints and letters. For a detailed study of the Windsor project, see N. Pressly, *Revealed Religion: Benjamin West's Commissions for Windsor Castle and Fonthill Abbey* (San Antonio, Texas: San Antonio Museum of Art, 1983), 15.

<sup>119</sup> The plan for St. Paul's Cathedral was put forward by West, Reynolds and several other Academicians in 1773, and was rejected in October of that year. West produced a design for the project, a painting of *Moses Receiving the Laws*, which he exhibited in 1774 at the Academy (no. 312) and produced as a full scale oil painting for the 'Chapel of Revealed Religion' a decade later. For more on his design, see Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 299-300.

<sup>120</sup> For additional details about this project and its significance in terms of religious art at the time, see J. Meyer, 'Benjamin West's Chapel of Revealed Religion: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Protestant Religious Art', *Art Bulletin* 57, no. 2 (June 1975): 247-265, and Pressly 1983.

<sup>121</sup> For illustrations and details about these presentation studies, see 'Appendix 1: West's Paintings for the Royal Chapel in Windsor Castle', in Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 577-581.

oil paintings, were also exhibited at the Royal Academy as promotions of the project and his royal patronage.<sup>122</sup>

Painted in 1779, the design for the central oval of the ceiling (fig. 55) represents *The Last Judgement*, the grand finale of the proposed narrative of the chapel.<sup>123</sup> The dramatic entanglement of the figures in a sweeping curvilinear form is reminiscent of Baroque ceiling paintings from the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, reflecting West's interest in the work of Rubens. The composition exemplifies the 'ornamental style' that Reynolds ascribed to Rubens in his discourses as well as the artist's characteristic energy and expressiveness.<sup>124</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, West owned five large-scale oil and chalk studies by the Flemish master for his *Fall of the Damned* (c.1620-1621) altarpiece.<sup>125</sup> One of the studies (fig. 35), in particular, exhibits the sweeping downcast curve of the doomed figures and suggests a visual precedent for the West design. The high drama, energy, and expressiveness of the figures as well as the free-handling and immediacy of the technique in West's study are also reminiscent of the Rubens' studies. Although the ceiling decoration was never realised, its impressive design is a testament of West's ambitions as a history painter, and his perceived artistic alignment and identification with his predecessor.

In another painting for the Windsor project entitled *The Death on the Pale Horse* (fig. 56), the stylistic influence of Rubens is equally apparent, suggesting that West looked to the

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 577.

<sup>123</sup> For more on West's ceiling design, see K. Weber, catalogue entry for 'Benjamin West, Ceiling Design for the Royal Chapel at Windsor', in P. C. Marzio, *American Art & Philanthropy: Twenty Years of Collecting at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston* (Houston, Texas: Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2010), 88-89.

<sup>124</sup> Reynolds 1975/1981, 67 and 86.

<sup>125</sup> Rowlands 1977, 84-87. West also owned several coloured prints after Rubens' famous picture. For several examples, see Christie's, 24 June 1820, lot 29 ('The Fall of the Damed, After Rubens, a print, coloured'), and Christie's, 9 June 1820, lot 131 ('print, Two, the Fall of the Angels, After Rubens').



artist among other artistic sources for the project overall.<sup>126</sup> When the painting, which the artist called a sketch, was exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1802, visitors including Farington noted the connection between the two artists.<sup>127</sup> According to Farington, ‘the attempt was hardy & the only one of such a subject of difficulty that had succeeded since the time of Rubens’.<sup>128</sup> In *Death on the Pale Horse*, scholars have suggested that West looked to a print (fig. 57) after a famous hunting scene painting by Rubens of *The Lion Hunt* (c.1621) to aid in the development of his composition.<sup>129</sup> West owned a print of Rubens’ *Lion Hunt* that supposedly had been ‘touched upon in oils by Rubens for the engraver’.<sup>130</sup> The intensity of Rubens’ image and its popularity, particularly in printed form, made it an interesting model for West’s *Pale Horse*. West’s visual connection to the well-known masterpiece may have been obvious to his eighteenth-century audience. He seems to have appropriated some of Rubens’ motifs directly into his composition. The central white horse (atop Death sits) rears in a mirror-opposite form to Rubens’ central light-coloured horse, and the attacking lion relates to his lower rampant lion.<sup>131</sup> West may have looked to other sources in his collection as well. For instance, the expression of West’s white horse is reminiscent of a drawing of a horse and rider by Titian (fig. 58) that he owned. West’s coursing lion may have also been

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<sup>126</sup> A second and much larger version of this painting was produced years later. Benjamin West, *Death on the Pale Horse*, 1817, oil on canvas, 447 x 764.5 cm (176 x 301 inches), Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia. For further information regarding both of these paintings, see Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 388-392.

<sup>127</sup> For more about West and the Salon of 1802, see F. Kimball, ‘Benjamin West au Salon de 1802 La Mort sur le Cheval Pale’, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 7 (1932): 403-411.

<sup>128</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 5:823 (2 September 1802).

<sup>129</sup> Evans 1959, 74, and Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 389. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Lion Hunt*, c. 1621, oil on canvas, 248.7 x 377.3 cm (97 7/8 x 148 1/3 inches), Alte Pinakothek, Munich.

<sup>130</sup> Christie’s, 28 May 1824, lot 22 (‘The Lion Hunt, a print coloured and touched upon in oil by Rubens, for the engraver to work from – very splendid and fine’). According to the Christie’s auctioneer’s record, the highly-valued print sold for 99 guineas.

<sup>131</sup> The mirror-image of these motifs suggests that West was referencing the print after Rubens’ painting.

influenced by the small painting of a lion and horse in his collection by Stubbs (fig. 41), which was itself based on a well-known classical sculpture.<sup>132</sup> Although he undoubtedly looked to a variety of models for this picture, West used the famous Rubens' composition as a key model of theatrical energy, with figures and horses colliding in a large grouping right against the picture plane.<sup>133</sup> Although West's subject is a biblical story and Rubens' is a secular one, they both depict death in some form. The connections between the artists were made during West's lifetime. When Carey reviewed a later version of the painting in 1817, he made an association between West and Rubens as well as Poussin, focusing on how these influences enabled greater originality and even suggesting that any borrowings may have been coincidental and not mimicry. He said:

There is no trace of imitation in WEST's *Death on the Pale Horse*, although it consists of so many groups; and the accidental resemblance of the Back-figure to a figure in one of RUBEN'S compositions, only proves that, in the disposition of a single object, two artists may think alike, and each produce an original invention.<sup>134</sup>

Despite the obvious pictorial relationships to the Rubens' picture, West's composition is an inventive and dramatic approach to the biblical subject, and a powerful display of formal virtuosity. Although he is best known for his modern history paintings, such as *Death of Wolfe*, his *oeuvre* included a greater number of biblical and mythological subjects. With this picture, in particular, he attempted to invigorate the genre and take religious spectacle and

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<sup>132</sup> Egerton 2007, 296-297.

<sup>133</sup> The Rubens print also relates to West's own hunting scene, *Alexander III of Scotland Rescued from the Fury of a Stag by the Intrepidity of Colin Fitzgerald (The Death of the Stag)*, 1786, oil on canvas, 366 x 521 cm (144 x 205 ¼ inches), The National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh. For more about this painting, see Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 190-192, and T. Clifford, M. Gallagher, and H. Smailes, *Benjamin West and the Death of the Stag* (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 2009).

<sup>134</sup> W. Carey, *Critical Description and Analytical Review of 'Death on the Pale Horse', Painted by Benjamin West, P. R. A.: With Desultory References to the Works of Some Ancient Masters, and Living British Artists* (London: J. Turner, 1817), v and 11. Although in the introduction of his review pamphlet, Carey declares that he has not advised West, but has gone 'in to the picture as one of the Public' and let the work express its own meaning, the extremely promotional nature of the publication suggests that West may have had a hand in it. If so, this would suggest that West wanted to promote the connection between himself and Rubens.

fervour to a new level and scale. As a description of the painting in the *La Belle Assemblée* of 1808 relayed, the picture's lofty object was to 'express the triumph of Death over all things' and 'to depict all the methods by which a world may be destroyed'.<sup>135</sup> Perhaps West took it a bit too far, however, as several scholars have suggested that George III disliked *Death on the Pale Horse* as an image, and have even posited that it was partly to blame for the cancellation of the overall Windsor chapel project.<sup>136</sup> West completed over half the proposed paintings for the chapel, but none of them were actually installed in Windsor Castle. The project's ultimate demise in 1801 was primarily due to the King's illness and the Court's general disinterest.<sup>137</sup>

## Rembrandt

Over his nearly sixty-year career, West produced a wide variety of pictures across various genres, including history painting, portraiture, and landscape. Moreover, his work was characterised by a great deal of stylistic variety and a plethora of eclectic influences. As seen in the earlier examples in this chapter, West's allusions to and appropriations from other artists enabled the development and expansion of his repertory of styles. These influences and manners were often commented on in his subject pictures, but his landscape paintings, which have yet to be fully explored in the West scholarship, are usually discussed largely in terms of the sites depicted. Indeed, many of his landscapes depict specific places and locations, favouring Windsor and its environs. He produced what would be categorised as historical landscapes as well, ones that were modelled on classical seventeenth-century

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<sup>135</sup> *La Belle Assemblée* 1808, 55. For another contemporary description of the picture, see Carey 1817.

<sup>136</sup> A. Staley, 'West's 'Death on a Pale Horse'', *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts* 58 (1980): 141.

<sup>137</sup> West completed eighteen large-scale biblical paintings between 1781 and 1801. It is unclear how many he was to have produced, but he told statesman John Quincy Adams in 1816 that it would have been thirty-six had the project continued. See C. F. Adams, ed., *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, Comprising Portions of His Diary from 1795 to 1848*, 12 vols. (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1874-1877), 3:432-433.

examples.<sup>138</sup> Both types of landscapes revealed his interest in nature, but also relate stylistically and compositionally to various earlier artistic influences. To support his interests, West collected a large number of landscape paintings, drawings, and prints by artists including Claude, Poussin, Rembrandt, and Wilson.

In a lecture given at the Academy in 1833, prominent landscape artist John Constable (1776-1837) praised West as one of five exceptional British landscape artists, which also included Gainsborough, Wilson, Cozens, and Girtin.<sup>139</sup> Though not normally considered a landscape painter, West painted and exhibited a number of landscapes during his lifetime.<sup>140</sup> In the 1808 Academy show, he exhibited four landscapes, all views of Bath and Bristol.<sup>141</sup> When West was in Bath the year before, according to Farington, 'He spoke...with rapture [of it] as abounding with picturesque scenery' and 'employed his mornings in making sketches'.<sup>142</sup> When West travelled in Britain or elsewhere, he carried sketchbooks to record the scenery as well as note any works of art he saw in local collections. Scattered throughout his British sketchbooks are lovely scenes of fields and villages that captured his interest and imagination. These studies, characterised by their immediacy and free-handling in pencil, record his experiences and imitations of the natural settings around him. He also made designs and finished studies of these scenes, frequently adding figures and symbolic aspects. According to Farington, one such design prompted Beaumont to say that West's landscapes

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<sup>138</sup> For the most famous of his historical landscapes (and that exemplify his interest in Poussin and Claude), see Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 174, 226, 258-59, 286-87, and 288.

<sup>139</sup> C. R. Leslie, *Memoirs of the Life of John Constable*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London: J. Carpenter, 1843; London: Phaidon Press, 1951), 322.

<sup>140</sup> For fifteen landscapes West exhibited at the Royal Academy, see Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 424-436.

<sup>141</sup> Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 424 (nos. 458 - 461).

<sup>142</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 8:3138-3139 (10 November 1807).

‘were of as high a character as the designs of Nicolo Poussin, the true Heroic Landscape’.<sup>143</sup>

He often used the preliminary studies as ideas for his larger landscape paintings in oil.

According to Jenny Carson and Ann Shafer, West also utilised a camera obscura occasionally when studying light, colour, and shade found in nature.<sup>144</sup> After gathering these primarily outdoor impressions of the setting, West would then move into his studio, either in London or Windsor, to develop the composition and refer to the art of his predecessors for additional ideas. As sources of inspiration for his landscapes, particularly in the 1780s, West looked to the work of artists such as Rembrandt. His interest in the artist coincided with greater taste for the seventeenth-century Dutch artists during this period.<sup>145</sup>

While in Windsor in 1785, West produced a landscape view of the nearby countryside entitled *Landscape Representing the Country near Windsor* (fig. 59).<sup>146</sup> When he sent the painting to the Royal Academy exhibition later that year it received mixed reviews. One critic described the cows as appearing ‘out of nature’, while another criticised the lack of life in the foliage of the trees.<sup>147</sup> Much of the criticism of this picture can be seen in the context of the debates occurring at this time regarding the vision of what landscape should be. Questions revolved around whether landscapes were paintings depicting an ideal, historical vision or rooted in the observation of nature referring to specific geographies and places. In reality, landscape artists of the period were painting pictures that were not either one or the

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 8:3157 (4 December 1807).

<sup>144</sup> J. Carson and A. Shafer, ‘West, Copley, and the Camera Obscura’ *American Art* 22, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 24 – 41.

<sup>145</sup> D. Solkin, ‘Turner and the Masters: Gleaning to Excel’, in Solkin 2009, 23. See also White, Alexander, and D’Oench 1983.

<sup>146</sup> O. Millar, *The Later Georgian Pictures in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen*, 2 vols. (London: Phaidon, 1969), 1:135-136, and Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 429-430.

<sup>147</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 7 May 1785, 4.; *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, 2 May 1785, 3; and *London Chronicle*, 26-28 April 1785, 6.

other, rather a blending of the two, landscapes of both experience and imagination, observation and creativity. Like the paintings of the period, West's *Landscape Representing the Country near Windsor* reveals a close observation of nature while at the same time is imbued with distinct cultural and historical associations and references to Old Master landscapes.<sup>148</sup> In this way, and not too unlike his approach to history painting, West combined landscape with a sense of history as a means of elevating the genre.

West developed the image from sketches he made in Windsor Great Park while there working for George III. One of the preparatory drawings for this picture entitled *Landscape Study with a Tool Shed* (fig. 60) suggests that he employed a camera obscura for parts of the picture. According to Galt, West had invented such a device, without ever having seen one, at the age of fifteen in 1753, so he was apparently quite familiar with its usefulness by this time.<sup>149</sup> The study was drawn on three sheets of paper that were pieced together, a characteristic feature of the use of the device.<sup>150</sup> Using multiple sheets allowed the artist to study the view through the camera in sections. Parts of the study are also rendered with very precise outlines, which also indicate the use of the device. Reynolds criticised the use of such devices in his *Discourses* because they elicited 'truth' and 'exact representations of nature'.<sup>151</sup> During this period, however, there were also a number of popular practical guides that espoused the benefits of the camera beyond fidelity and tracing, emphasising the study of

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<sup>148</sup> J. Bonehill and S. Daniels, eds., *Paul Sandby: Picturing Britain* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2009), 18.

<sup>149</sup> Galt 1820, 1:45-48.

<sup>150</sup> Carson and Schafer 2008, 34.

<sup>151</sup> Reynolds 1975/1981, 239. A few years earlier, in 1777, Reynolds and West had been implicated by Horace Walpole as enthusiasts of a new optical device called an 'Accurate Delineator', invented by William Storer. See W. S. Lewis, G. Cronin, and C. H. Bennett, eds., *Horace Walpole's Correspondence with William Mason*, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), 1:329. For further research, there is also a digitized index to the 48 volumes of Walpole's correspondence available at <http://images.library.yale.edu/hwcorrespondence>.

light, shadow, and colour, the most popular among them being Francisco Algarotti's *An Essay on Painting* (1764).<sup>152</sup> These contrasts in opinion over its use and what it represented reiterate the issues involved in the landscape debate outlined above. West seems to have utilised it as a tool occasionally, among many resources he used in constructing a landscape that would blend the ideal and historical with the observed.

West combined first-hand observations with elements of the classical landscape tradition. In his desire to elevate landscape painting, West looked to established masters of the field and utilised his collection as a resource. The large, gnarled oak tree at the centre of West's composition is reminiscent of those in Salvator Rosa's (1615-1673) wild landscapes. West owned a number of tree studies by Rosa, including *A Man Seated on a Bank Beneath a Large Tree* (fig. 61).<sup>153</sup> The pastoral scene, framed by trees, recalls the landscapes of Claude in West's collection, including the *Tomb of Cecilia Metella* (fig. 62). The overall composition of West's Windsor study as well as his framing devices, such as the expansive vista piercing through the woodland, relate to pictorial conventions present in these studies from his collection. In the process of developing this landscape as well as several others, West produced some studies of trees around the Windsor Great Park, including the ancient Hernes's Oak (fig. 63), although none of them correspond directly to the trees in this painting.<sup>154</sup> Another element of the picture is even more startlingly close to a possible model in his collection. The dilapidated tool shed situated to the right of the centre of the

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<sup>152</sup> F. Algarotti, *An Essay on Painting* (Glasgow: Robert Urie, 1764).

<sup>153</sup> Christie's, 13 June 1820, lot 65.

<sup>154</sup> Kraemer 1975, 75-76, and Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 430-431. There was a great interest in tree portraiture at the time. For more information on the cultural significance of trees, see S. Daniels, 'The Political Iconography of Woodland in Later Georgian England', in D. Cosgrove and S. Daniels, eds., *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 43-82.

composition relates closely to a drawing (fig. 64) of a similar structure by Rembrandt that was in West's collection.<sup>155</sup> In this drawing by Rembrandt, the cottage or shed is the dominant focus of the composition and nearly overwhelms its natural setting. West appropriated the building with equal measure into his drawing (fig. 60). He likely included the rustic building to bring an element of picturesque irregularity to the scene, which anticipates the types of decaying cottages recommended by his friends John Thomas Smith and Uvedale Price in their essays on picturesque landscapes during the 1790s and early 1800s.<sup>156</sup> West included the shed in his finished oil painting with less emphasis than in the drawing, but still in the same form. In the finished oil painting (fig. 59), the shed and the tree have entirely different positions, and West inserts a number of additional elements to create a sense of place and a distinct narrative.

In *Landscape Representing the Country near Windsor* (fig. 59), West also looked to Rembrandt as a model of inspiration for the way he approached the light and shade of the composition. The entire foreground of the picture is cast in very dark shadow, with singular highlights on the figures and the pigs. In contrast, the sky, middle ground, and background all are rendered in strong, bright light, creating a poetic effect.<sup>157</sup> According to Trumbull, West described his theory on dominant areas of light and shade, suggesting that they 'should be distributed in masses & never cut up fine'.<sup>158</sup> West was very interested in Rembrandt's

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<sup>155</sup> Christie's, 1-5 July 1820, lot 31. See also John Barnard (Lugt 1420) sale at Greenwood's, 16-24 February 1787, lot 51, where West acquired it.

<sup>156</sup> J. T. Smith, *Remarks on Rural Scenery* (London: Nathaniel Smith, 1797), U. Price, *Essays on the Picturesque*, 3 vols. (London: J. Mawman, 1810); and A. Hemingway, *Landscape Imagery & Urban Culture in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 22-23.

<sup>157</sup> Hemingway 1992, 229.

<sup>158</sup> John Trumbull, manuscript on West's and Copley's painting techniques, n.d., 113 W14 Waldo, The Frick Art Reference Library Archives, New York.



tonality and light effects. According to Farington, West looked to Rembrandt to discover the method of creating 'sparkling light'.<sup>159</sup> While making his own copy of Rembrandt's *Mill*,

West talked a great deal abt. Process & of Umber with Ivory Black being used for preparation in Landscape painting, with White for the high lights, & a little blue mixed for distance. On a preparation thus painted in, to give the colouring by toning. He repeatedly mentioned that this was the way to obtain the diamond – the sparkling light so desirable in pictures.<sup>160</sup>

In West's painting, the scene is set in Windsor Great Park, the historic private hunting ground of the British monarchs that surrounds the Castle. In his choice of the setting, West celebrates his royal patron and the historic and symbolic associations of Windsor. Windsor Castle had seen a revival during the reign of George III; he spent £168,000 on renovations, cultivated the grounds, and deemed it his preferred residence.<sup>161</sup> West represents the royal castle in the background amidst undulating hills and the royal forest. In the middle distance, the King's hunting party pursues a stag, making reference to the history of the royal sport on these grounds and the monarch's favourite recreation.<sup>162</sup> In the foreground, in front of the royal scene, are a peasant family and a sow nestled with her pigs. The representation of the King in this setting, suggests the period's images of George as Nimrod, the huntsman, and as 'Farmer George', a family man with agrarian interests - a humble man of the people and a virtuous monarch.<sup>163</sup> For West, of course, these references to the monarch also underline his status and access as a court painter. In this image, West depicts a specific landscape using a

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<sup>159</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 8:2955 (26 January 1807).

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> L. Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (1992; repr., New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 212, and Hemingway 1992, 226.

<sup>162</sup> J. Brooke, *King George III* (1972; repr., London: Constable, 1985), 292.

<sup>163</sup> V. Carretta, *George III and the Satirists from Hogarth to Byron* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 92-93 and 277-281; For examples of satirical prints representing George III as 'Nimrod' and the related attitudes towards monarchy see, M. D. George, *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires in the British Museum*, 11 vols. (London: British Museum, 1938), 6:490.

traditional pictorial model and adding symbolic elements to create an historic and modern royal narrative. In this way, West was enhancing the landscape to elevate it to a status closer to history paintings. When the Windsor painting was put up for sale by West's sons in 1829, the catalogue entry described it as a 'veritable pastoral', a reference to the perfect blend of the genre.<sup>164</sup>

## Historical Truth

West's use of Old Master paintings, drawings, and prints in his collection as models of emulation was intentional and symbolic. As one student recalled: 'There is not a line or touch in his pictures which he cannot account for on philosophical principles. They are not the productions of accident, but of study'.<sup>165</sup> In landscape, he took it a step further and combined classical elements and references with the direct study of nature. However, it was in his contemporary history paintings that he challenged the artistic conventions of the age and found ways to combine history painting, portraiture, and landscape. To aid the development of these modern history paintings, his collection expanded to include a far greater number of contemporary objects.

West painted his seminal *Death of Wolfe* in 1770, over ten years after the event took place on 13 September 1759 on the Plains of Abraham in North America. The subject had already been painted by a number of his contemporaries, including Barry, Edward Penny (1714-1791), and Romney, but West believed that, as an American, he had a unique

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<sup>164</sup> Robins, 22-25 May 1829, lot 67.

<sup>165</sup> E. L. Morse, ed., *Samuel F. B. Morse: His Letters and Journals*, 2 vols. (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1914), 1:68.

perspective on the event.<sup>166</sup> Indeed, his radical departure from the established norms of the genre created a sensation.<sup>167</sup> Although the painting ultimately received much praise before its completion and public exhibition, there were several critics, notably Reynolds, Archbishop Drummond, and George III, who condemned West's unorthodox use of contemporary military dress.<sup>168</sup> West wanted the image to be of the moment, and declined to change the figures to classical dress as Reynolds suggested, to be 'more becoming the inherent greatness of [the] subject than the modern garb of war'.<sup>169</sup> According to Galt, he insisted that,

The event intended to be commemorated took place on the 13<sup>th</sup> of September, 1758, in a region of the world unknown to the Greeks and Romans, and at a period of time when no such nations, nor heroes in their costume, any longer existed. The subject I have to represent is the conquest of a great province of America by the British troops. It is a topic that history will proudly record, and the same truth that guides the pen of the historian should govern the pencil of the artist. I consider myself as undertaking to tell this great event to the eye of the world...I want to mark the date, the place, and the parties engaged in the event.<sup>170</sup>

In his explanation, West specifically adopted the language of Richardson in comparing the artist to the historian to perhaps counter Reynolds's known distaste for 'vulgar and strict

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<sup>166</sup> Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 212. Penny's two versions (1764) are located at Petworth and the Ashmolean, Romney's (1763) remains unlocated, and James Barry's (1776) is in the New Brunswick Museum, St. John, New Brunswick.

<sup>167</sup> See Wind 1938-39; Mitchell 1944; and Abrams 1985.

<sup>168</sup> For more on the details of the painting and its associated print, see the related catalogue entry by K. Weber in J. Clifton and L. Scattone, *The Plains of Mars: European War Prints, 1500-1825, From the Collection of the Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, and Houston: The Museum of Fine Arts Houston Publications, 2009), 187-190.

<sup>169</sup> Galt 1820, 2:48.

<sup>170</sup> Galt 1820, 2:48. The death of General James Wolfe in Quebec actually took place in 1759, not 1758, as quoted in Galt.

historical truth'.<sup>171</sup> In his *Theory of Painting*, which West owned, Richardson stated 'to paint a history, a man ought to have the main qualities of a good historian and something more'.<sup>172</sup>

West looked at this picture as making history, and he intended to mark 'the date, the place and the parties' and create an image that would remain in the minds of its viewers. As the event was still relatively recent, a powerful image could make its mark on history as it was still being formed. West researched the events to provide as much accurate detail as possible. He interviewed and painted portraits of the figures.<sup>173</sup> The use of portraits as well as the detailed landscape added to the illusion of historical accuracy and authenticity of the scene.<sup>174</sup> Though he studiously gathered the facts of the event, he also took artistic liberties in selecting what to record. During this period, the notion of historic truth or accuracy in the context of art as well as in histories by contemporary writers such as Edward Gibbons (1737-1794) was not just about documentation of a particular event.<sup>175</sup> It was also about providing a base of detail that enabled and opened up a wider dialogue about issues such as patriotism and empire.<sup>176</sup> To this end, West included figures in the group portrait that were not present at the death of the general, but who played key roles in the overall campaign, to provide a greater narrative and give context to the historic scene. In a similar effort to contextualise, West compressed the various events of the victorious battle into one picture, which enabled the viewer to see not just the death, but the moments leading up to it. The sense of place

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<sup>171</sup> Reynolds 1975/1981, 59.

<sup>172</sup> Richardson 1725, 18.

<sup>173</sup> Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 212-213.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>175</sup> E. Gibbons, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 6 vols. (London: Strahan and Cadell, 1776-1789)

<sup>176</sup> Pratt 2005, 71.

where the battle occurred was important to West. To develop the specific landscape of the Plains of Abraham, he consulted the witnesses, his collection of North American topographical prints (which included Canadian views), as well as his personal memory of land from his youth. He also utilised his collection of prints of military costumes to depict the appropriate uniforms for the various officers and other participants.

While other artists treated this subject as a remote event, West, as an American-born artist, showed familiarity with the place and people. Allen Staley has suggested that the North American subject was something West felt uniquely equipped to paint among his cohort of native-born British history painters.<sup>177</sup> He used his unique knowledge, or his claims to it, as a point of differentiation. To this end, West included a Native American figure in the foreground. According to Galt, West had a variety of interactions with local tribes in his native Pennsylvania.<sup>178</sup> A childhood American friend confirmed these interactions when he sent West a collection of letters relating to Native Americans to ‘revive in thy mind the many innocent & diverting hours thou hast spent in their Wigwams in PA woods in thy younger days’.<sup>179</sup> Part of the purpose of including a Native American in *Death of Wolfe* was to stress their importance in the wars in America, but also to suggest West’s familiarity with them. The Native American in *Death of Wolfe* is dressed in specific and authentic clothing and accoutrements that identify him distinctively as American. The pouch, body paint, knife, sheath, and earring are all based on actual ethnographic objects that West had in his collection at the time.<sup>180</sup> For the pouch, in particular, West closely transcribed the

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<sup>177</sup> Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 57.

<sup>178</sup> For example, see Galt 1820, 1: 18.

<sup>179</sup> Letter from Jonathan Morris to Benjamin West, 16 May 1796, Benjamin West Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

<sup>180</sup> For more about the use of West’s Native American collection in his studio, see King 1991, 35-47.

decoration, which included beadwork, and the earth tone colouring (fig. 65). For the Native American's profile, West used a soapstone pipe (fig. 43) from his collection that also served as the inspiration for the painted decoration on his face. These objects, in particular the wampum and soapstone pipe, had symbolic meaning in the context of war and negotiation that West wanted to be seen as understanding. He relied on his collection of Native American artefacts to create an aura of authenticity about the American Indian figure as well as the geography – North America. When the painting was commented on in Richard Bromley's *A Philosophical and Critical History of the Fine Arts* (1793), the Native American became quite literally the location signifier: 'this scene must be North America for the savage warrior shews us that the country was his'.<sup>181</sup> This perception of authenticity was important because most artists of this period painted American Indians in a generalised manner. West was one of the first to display them in a more complex, knowledgeable light. Of the many artists who painted *The Death of Wolfe*, West and Barry were the only ones who included a Native American, representing the supportive role the group played in the battles for the North American territories.<sup>182</sup> The artefacts became part of West's studio repertoire and were depicted in a number of contemporary and historical compositions that related to North American history, including *William Penn's Treaty with the Indians* (fig. 45).<sup>183</sup> In 1805, West wrote about the importance of authentic costumes, saying that 'by possessing the real dresses of the Indians, I was able to give that truth in representing their costumes which is so

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<sup>181</sup> R. A. Bromley, *Philosophical and Critical History of the Fine Arts: Painting, Sculpture and Architecture*, 2 vols. (London: Printed at the Philanthropic-press, for the author, 1793), 1:57-60. Given West's close relationship to Bromley, his interpretations of the Native American might suggest the artist's intentions. For more on Bromley, West, and the Native American, see V. G. Fryd, 'Rereading the Indian in Benjamin West's 'Death of General Wolfe'', *American Art* 9, no. 1 (Spring, 1995): 72-85.

<sup>182</sup> Pratt 2005, 70.

<sup>183</sup> For more about this painting, see Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 206-207.

evident in the picture of the treaty'.<sup>184</sup> Collecting Native American artefacts as props in the studio is a phenomenon fairly unique to West among artists in London and reveals how his collection developed to support his unique brand of contemporary history paintings.

To give his contemporary image the dignity of traditional history painting and to convey the history of heroism, West also looked to the Old Masters as a source of inspiration and allegory. In *Death of Wolfe*, the pyramidal composition of the central group and the languid pose of the fallen general refer to the established iconography of the Lamentation of Christ, thus transforming Wolfe himself into a martyr and creating new levels of meaning. West modelled these compositions and the expressions of the figures on traditional religious works of art possibly in his own collection. Parallels between Wolfe's languid pose and Van Dyck's Christ figure in his *Lamentation* have been drawn by a number of scholars, but none have looked to his own collection and the variety of images of this religious subject that it included.<sup>185</sup> In the *Head of Christ Crowned with Thorns* by Reni (fig. 29), the upward direction of the subject's eyes and general expression is suggestive of West's treatment of the head of Wolfe. Though West was not necessarily quoting directly from his models, he appropriated established conventions found in many of them. For instance, he divided the figures in *Death of Wolfe* into three distinct groups, a concept he deemed a perfect 'trinity' in his 1811 discourse while describing an altarpiece painting by Fra Bartolommeo.<sup>186</sup> His various references to traditional history paintings in his contemporary one, not only elevated

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<sup>184</sup> This quote is taken from a letter from Benjamin West to William Darton (1747-1819), 2 February 1805, which is reproduced in, C. Landis, 'Benjamin West and the Royal Academy', *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 50, no.2 (1926): 248; C. C. Sellers, *Symbols of Peace: William Penn's Treaty with the Indians* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, 1976), 12, and Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 207-208. West's comments relate specifically to the clothing represented in his *William Penn's Treaty with the Indians*.

<sup>185</sup> Mitchell 1944, 20-21, and Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 58.

<sup>186</sup> Galt 1820, 2:157-159.

his picture and its subject matter, but also provided an additional layer of meaning in which to engage the audience.

West's collection of Old and New world objects served him across a range of projects during his career. There are simply too many instances of references and interactions to elucidate completely, so only a selection of examples have been given here. They were chosen, however, to demonstrate the major stylistic influences on West's range of work, highlighting his engagement with the eclectic variety of artists, subjects, and compositions represented in his collection.

### **Pedagogic Resource for Students**

In addition to being a resource for his own work, West's collection was a pedagogic resource for his students. West had many pupils and he was described by Northcote as 'the best possible teacher' and by his pupil John Downman (c. 1750-1824) as 'my most beloved teacher'.<sup>187</sup> His generosity as a teacher was legendary. As Shee said of him, 'No man could be more liberally desirous than West to impart to others the knowledge which he possessed. He never, indeed, appeared to be more gratified than when engaged in enlightening the minds of those who looked up to him for instruction'.<sup>188</sup> He loved being a teacher and welcoming students into his studio. It became such a popular centre for artistic education and community that, according to Constable, when West died in 1820, his old servant, Robert Brenning, said 'where will they all go now?'.<sup>189</sup> Nearly every American artist of note from the late eighteenth century to the early nineteenth century spent time studying or working in

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<sup>187</sup> Northcote and Ward, 1901, 153-154, and G. C. Williamson, *John Downman, A.R.A.* (London: Otto, 1907), xii.

<sup>188</sup> Dunlap 1834/1969, 1:94.

<sup>189</sup> Leslie 1860/1978, 56.



his studio, earning it the monikers of the ‘The London School of Artists’, ‘The American School’, and the school of just ‘Mr. West’.<sup>190</sup> Among artists that considered him their ‘master’ were Peale, Pratt, Stuart, and Trumbull as well as Washington Allston (1779-1843), Mather Brown (1761-1831), and Thomas Sully (1783-1872) among many others.<sup>191</sup> Artists from both sides of the Atlantic credited West with inspired, foundational instruction, and many of them continued to recount his lessons throughout their careers. Constable spoke appreciatively of West’s advice to ‘Always remember, sir, that light and shadow never stand still’.<sup>192</sup>

West’s studio, the largest and most productive of its time, was an important centre for traditional artistic training; a private academy that naturally complemented the Royal Academy. From what is known, very little practical training occurred inside the Academy during its early history. The students dutifully attended lectures there given by the professors, and they attended life classes or drew from antique sculptures in the ‘Plaister Academy’ during the evenings.<sup>193</sup> By all accounts the lectures given by the professors were little more than theoretical discourses, not too unlike those espoused by the President. Practical training and application during the early years of the institution’s history was in its naissance and thus most artistic training still took place in artists’ studios. Besides ‘furnishing able men to direct the Student’, the Academy’s principal pedagogic purpose was to be ‘a repository for the great examples of Art’.<sup>194</sup> However, the Academy’s collection of

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<sup>190</sup> Evans 1980, 29.

<sup>191</sup> For a full listing and details of periods of study, see Evans 1980.

<sup>192</sup> Leslie 1843/ 1951, 14, and Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 121.

<sup>193</sup> Hutchinson 1960-1962, 130.

<sup>194</sup> Reynolds 1975/1981, 15.

the art of the past was minuscule in comparison to most private collections. Students were supplementing their studies with visits to various accessible private collections, including the Duke of Richmond's collection of casts in Whitehall. Even as late as 1797, Barry wrote in complaint of the collection's deficiencies, arguing that a 'collection of exemplars and materials of information and study [are] so absolutely necessary for advancing and perfecting the arts of Painting and Sculpture in a National Academy'.<sup>195</sup> When West was President, he spent a great deal of time corresponding with various collectors, including the Prince Regent, about borrowing Old Master paintings and sculpture from their collections to supplement the Academy's.<sup>196</sup> In 1816, he even wrote to Earl of Darnley (1767-1831) requesting to borrow his Titian *Venus and Adonis*, the version that West himself had previously owned, for students to copy from in the newly formed School of Painting.<sup>197</sup> In this context, West's studio environment offered a complementary model of practical training to the Academy's more formal place in the artist's progression, and provided a collection of readily available objects for study. His essentially open-door policy meant that he and his collection were at the students' disposal. According to student Charles Robert Leslie (1794-1859), West 'generally had a levee of artists in his house every morning before he began work'.<sup>198</sup> Leslie credited him with being the only 'eminent painter in London' who was willing to

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<sup>195</sup> R. W. Liscombe, 'The Diffusion of Knowledge and Taste: John Flaxman and the Improvement of the Study Facilities at the Royal Academy', *The Walpole Society* 53 (1987): 228 (see reproduced letter from Barry to Dilettanti in July 1797).

<sup>196</sup> The Royal Academy of Arts Archives holds a variety of documentation, including transport invoices and request letters, of West's efforts to supplement the collection using his connections. For example, see the letter from Duke of Wellington to West (rejecting his request to borrow Correggio's *Christ in the Garden*), 8 July 1817, RAA/SEC/1/73, The Royal Academy of Arts Archives, London. See also the invoice from David Ross (for moving pictures from Duke of Bedford's House to Somerset House), 12 May 1800, RAA/SEC/1/51, The Royal Academy of Arts Archives, London.

<sup>197</sup> Letter from Benjamin West and Henry Howard, Royal Academy, to the Earl of Darnley, 15 July 1816, RAA/SEC/1/116, The Royal Academy of Arts Archives, London.

<sup>198</sup> Leslie 1860/1978, 57.

‘communicate instruction to any of his brethren who need it, yet at that time there was not, nor indeed has there been since, any one so accessible as Mr. West, and I may add, so well qualified to give advice on every branch of art’.<sup>199</sup> Interestingly, few other prominent artists were able to establish private academies on the level of West’s during this time. Reynolds’s students, including Northcote, claimed he shut them away from his practice, and Lawrence’s students complained of being primarily used as studio assistants.<sup>200</sup> In contrast, as noted above, West lectured to his students frequently while painting. According to Constable, ‘in his own room, and with a picture before him, his instructions were invaluable; but as a public lecturer, he failed’.<sup>201</sup> In the studio, West encouraged the bevy of aspiring artists to copy from engravings and works of art by the Old Masters and himself as a means of learning and developing skills in invention and composition.<sup>202</sup> He also suggested they study his small, but representative cast collection.

Many of West’s students came from America specifically to study in his studio and were not affiliated with the Academy. For them, his studio and collection were important spaces and sources of learning that they lacked in America. In a letter to West in 1766, Copley remarked on the need for American artists to travel abroad to study because ‘In this Country as You rightly observe there is no examples of Art, except what is to be met with in a few prints indifferently executed , from which it is not possible to learn much’.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 56-57.

<sup>200</sup> Northcote 1819, 1:120. The aspirations of Lawrence as a teacher were described in a paper given by Martin Myrone during a conference related to the exhibition, ‘Thomas Lawrence: Regency Power and Brilliance’, 18-19 November 2010, at the Paul Mellon Centre for British Art, London.

<sup>201</sup> Leslie 1860/1978, 57.

<sup>202</sup> G. Warwick, ‘Introduction’, in Baker, Elam and Warwick 2003, 3.

<sup>203</sup> Letter from John Singleton Copley to Benjamin West, 12 November 1766, in Copley and Pelham 1914/1970, 50-51.

For all of his students and assistants, British or American, West's collection became an integral part of their artistic education. In Pratt's *The American School* (fig. 3), West's pedagogic practices, and specifically his methods of study, are displayed and portrayed to align closely with the ideal artist training espoused by contemporary art theory at the time. The picture reveals how his collection was used by his students and suggests it was developed to serve that purpose. Exhibited at the Society of Artists' 1766 exhibition, *The American School* made a public statement about West as a teacher and his teaching practice, presenting him as the master of an active studio presiding over a number of students. The picture's author, Pratt, had personal motivations for making this picture and displaying it publicly. He had recently arrived in London from America and wanted to be perceived as an academically trained, professional artist. As Susan Rather has posited: 'The picture, far from passively mirroring an actual situation, represents an active attempt to shape public perception of the colonial painter'.<sup>204</sup> For West, Pratt's image advertised his studio and developing academy, representing the ideal of the academic training taking place inside. In the mid-1760s, there were a number of similar conversational images of instruction in studios and private academies, including John Hamilton Mortimer's (1740-1779) *Self-Portrait with Joseph Wilton and a Student* (c. 1760-65) and Joseph Wright of Derby's *Three Persons Viewing the Gladiator by Candlelight* (1765), that collectively provided a view of the ideal types of instruction and access to works of art that British artists desired.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Rather 1993, 169.

<sup>205</sup> John Hamilton Mortimer, *John Hamilton Mortimer, A.R.A. with Joseph Wilton, R.A., and a Student*, c. 1760-65, oil on canvas, 76.2 x 63.5 cm (30 x 25 inches), The Royal Academy of Arts, London; and Joseph Wright, *Three Persons Viewing the Gladiator by Candlelight*, 1765, 101.6 x 127 cm (40 x 50 inches), oil on canvas, Private Collection.

In *The American School*, each student is engaged in an activity that relates to prescribed stages in the education of an artist.<sup>206</sup> According to Galt, West was a proponent of ‘Practical facility in your art’ first and foremost, ‘reading and reflection’ afterwards.<sup>207</sup> Thus, his studio became a place where artistic practice that was espoused and theorised in the manuals and treatises and promoted by the Academy – happened. He used his collection as a means of simplifying the rules or principles of art that ‘may have appeared difficult in this branch of art to young students’.<sup>208</sup> According to the rules of art described in art treatises and instructional manuals such as the popular *Practice of Painting and Perspective* (1756) by Bardwell, the first stage in the process was drawing the figure, beginning with parts of the body such as the hands and feet, then the head and torso, and eventually the whole body. West’s collection of sculptural fragments, which included hands, feet, torsos, and heads, would have been useful models from which the students could draw.<sup>209</sup> There were 32 fragments of hands and feet alone.<sup>210</sup> Additionally, he collected a number of drawings by Old Masters of singular parts of the body, including several studies of hands (fig. 66) by Bartolomeo Passarotti (1529-1592), and a set of head studies by Annibale Carracci (fig. 67), that would have been available to his students for study.<sup>211</sup> Contemporary art manuals advised copying Old Master prints to improve the artist’s ability to draw individual figures

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<sup>206</sup> Rather 1993, 169-183.

<sup>207</sup> Galt 1820, 2:116.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 2:110 and Carson 2000, 63.

<sup>209</sup> Christie’s, 6 July 1820, day 5, lots 1-24.

<sup>210</sup> Christie’s, 6 July 1820, day 5, lots 9.

<sup>211</sup> For the Carracci, see Christie’s, 9 June 1820, day 4, lot 65 (‘drawings, six, studies of heads’).

and to enable finer understanding of the idea behind a picture.<sup>212</sup> For this purpose, West's students were encouraged to use his extensive collection of engravings after Old Master paintings as a study resource. The idea behind these preliminary stages of the artists' training was to perfect their draughtsman skills by looking at body fragments or sections of a painting to make the process more digestible and to enhance their skills. This process allowed the artists to become comfortable with the assembly and anatomy of the human figure. This artificial process of building 'figures as assortments of gestures [and parts] adopted from famous sources, and their compositions as assortments of complete figures adopted from the same' was the traditional methodology put forth in the Royal Academy as well as in continental academies.<sup>213</sup> In his inaugural discourse at the Academy, West asserted his belief that the human figure, which he called 'the great alphabet of our art', was the key component of a composition.<sup>214</sup> He felt that once the figure and character were mastered, groups of figures could be formed and used to express a story.<sup>215</sup> Reinforcing the idea of assembly and the eloquent, expressive body, especially in the context of history pictures, West contended that the 'groups make words; and those words make sentences, by which the painter's tablet speaks an universal language'.<sup>216</sup>

Pratt's *The American School* projects the model processes and methods of study in West's studio. It is reminiscent of images from the Renaissance, such as Jan van der Straet's (1523-1605) *Practioners of the Visual Arts, an Academy* (fig. 68), that illustrated students and

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<sup>212</sup> T. Page, *The Art of Painting* (Norwich: W. Chase, 1720), vi, and R. de Piles, *The Principles of Painting* (London: J. Osborn, 1743), 234-243.

<sup>213</sup> Pevsner 1973, 203.

<sup>214</sup> West 1793, 33.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

masters involved in various processes. In the Pratt image, each student represents a different aspect of artistic training. Beginning with the central figure, the youngest boy removes several sheets from a large portfolio resting on the table, referring to the need for studying prints after the works of great Old Masters. These sheets are engravings as indicated by the grey tone of the printing. When copying engravings, as de Piles suggested, the artists honed their facility for drawing or ‘designing’ and ‘for exactness of eye’.<sup>217</sup> The next oldest student is engaged in drawing after the classical bust of a young boy that rests on the table, enabling him to focus on the head and neck of the body. This student has clearly been interrupted; his unfinished drawing of the head is apparent in the upper left hand corner of the paper in front of him. The presence of this bust also suggests the importance of looking to Greek and Roman antiquity for the modern artist as ideal models of ‘grace, character and expression’.<sup>218</sup> One of West’s students reinforced the importance of this theory, saying that ‘A good painter of either portrait or History must be acquainted with the Greesian and Roman Statues’.<sup>219</sup> Drawing after antique sculpture, with its three-dimensionality, enabled students to think about light and shadow in relation to the human form.

The student in the foreground, who is slightly older, sits with his drawing before him on blue paper. Although the image on the paper is indiscernible to the viewer, West, holding a palette and brushes, leans over the student’s shoulders offering advice or providing criticism. The young man listens intently as he looks at his drawing. In front of him, a portfolio filled with red chalk drawings rests on the table. These chalk drawings represent the large number of Old Master drawings in his collection that were available to his students. As

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<sup>217</sup> de Piles 1743, 241.

<sup>218</sup> Reynolds 1975/1981, 180.

<sup>219</sup> C. C. Sellers, *Charles Willson Peale* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1969), 104.

these interactions between the young students and the objects indicate, West's collection played an integral role in the early stages of art education occurring in his studio.

The most senior student, identified as Pratt, the author of the painting, is seated across from the group at an easel, which displays a blank canvas.<sup>220</sup> Painting on a canvas, of course, after mastering the other skills, was the final, culminating step for the aspiring artist. He too has been interrupted, still holding his palette brushes and maul stick, and has turned to listen to the discussion. The canvas appears blank with the exception of a small swoop of drapery in the upper right hand corner; however, ultraviolet technology in the 1990s revealed the underlying presence of a veiled classical female figure.<sup>221</sup> The implications of this discovery are interesting in terms of West's pedagogic practice. Although once thought to be a blank canvas ready for Pratt's original design, the final stage of the artistic process, it is plausible that the female figure was a copy of an Old Master painting or one of West's own copies. West owned a number of paintings of saints and Madonnas by earlier artists as well as his own copies of paintings from his time in Italy. Making painted copies of Old Master pictures was an important part of artistic training, but not one supported by the Academy during the early years. During its first decades, the Academy was primarily a drawing school, as seen in an image by Edward Francis Burney (1760-1848) entitled *The Antique School at New Somerset House* (fig. 69).<sup>222</sup> The Royal Academy did not have a study collection of paintings to speak of nor did it promote painting as part of the education curriculum until the establishment of the Painting School in 1815.<sup>223</sup> While the early stages of training focused

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<sup>220</sup> Rather 1993, 171.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 172 (see fig. 5 of this article for an illustration of painting under ultraviolet light).

<sup>222</sup> Pevsner 1973, 172-173.

<sup>223</sup> Hutchinson 1960-1962, 130. Even after the establishment of the Painting School, the Old Master collection was not an adequate resource. West and the Academy borrowed pictures from the new Dulwich Gallery and



on form and composition, the later stage of copying from Old Master paintings enabled artists to learn the 'hand' and manners of their artistic predecessors and understand colour. As previously discussed, this was a fundamental component of West's own early training in Italy. According to Page, understanding colouring could not be found in prints or casts, but the artist must 'work after the celebrated pieces of the best Colourists'.<sup>224</sup>

One of West's copies of an Old Master painting in his collection was frequently referenced by his students and became somewhat of a rite of passage for them to study and copy. While in Parma in 1762, West copied Correggio's *Madonna and Child with St. Jerome* and brought it with him to London.<sup>225</sup> His choice of this picture was undoubtedly the influence of Mengs, his early master, who 'regarded Correggio as one of the greatest painters'.<sup>226</sup> Correggio's painting was highly celebrated during the eighteenth century and was copied by a number of artists while in Italy.<sup>227</sup> According to Farington, West thought so highly of the original picture, that when he saw it for the second time in 1802 in the Musée Napoleon in Paris, he said that it was the picture he 'formed himself upon'.<sup>228</sup> One of West's friends, Dr. Robert Mackinlay (fl. 1761-1789), reiterated the importance of the picture to the artist in 1789, recalling, 'your journey to Parma, your colouring after Correggio soon

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private collectors for this purpose. See also W. R. M. Lamb, *The Royal Academy: A Short History of its Foundation and Development* (London: Bell & Sons, 1951), 29.

<sup>224</sup> Page 1720, ix.

<sup>225</sup> West's copy of the painting is unlocated. For more information about the picture, see Robin's, London, 20-22 June 1829, lot 76 ('St. Gerolimo, a fine copy from the celebrated picture by Correggio'); Alberts 1978, 49-55: and Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 442.

<sup>226</sup> Pevsner 1973, 188.

<sup>227</sup> Correggio, *Madonna and Child with Saint Jerome*, 1525-28, oil on panel, 235 x 141 cm (92 ½ x 55 ½ inches), Galleria Nazionale, Parma. In his *An Account of Some of the Statues, Bas-Reliefs, Drawings, and Pictures in Italy*, Jonathan Richardson mentions that there are ten copies of the painting in Parma. J. Richardson, *An Account of Some of the Statues, Bas-Reliefs, Drawings and Pictures in Italy* (London: J. Knapton, 1722), 331.

<sup>228</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 5:1852 (13 September 1802), and Alberts 1978, 266.

procured you the admiration of your brother painters in Rome'.<sup>229</sup> According to this account, West's copy after the painting was an early sign of his artistic genius and provided him with recognition before his arrival in London.

The painting became an instrument of instruction and was copied by a number of students, including Pratt (fig. 70) and Trumbull among others.<sup>230</sup> It was probably first copied by Pratt while he was a student in West's studio sometime between 1764 and 1766. Less than a decade later, in a 1773 letter to Copley, West advised the study of original works by certain masters, including Correggio, and he rather sloppily and excitedly complimented the artist's special assets:

...in the art he greatly surpass'd even those in and all others that came after him. Which was in the relieaf of his figures by the management of the clear obscure. The prodigious management in foreshortening of figures seen in the air, The greacefull smiles and turnes of heads, The magickcal uniteing of his Tints, The incensable blending of lights into Shades, and the beautyfull affect over the whole arising from thoss pices of management, is what charmes the eye of every beholder.<sup>231</sup>

In this letter, West spent far more time discussing the merits of Correggio than any of the other Italian artists. Copley made his own commissioned copy of the *Madonna and St.*

*Jerome* while he was in Parma the next year.<sup>232</sup> In 1780 Trumbull was so intent on finishing his copy of the picture that West delivered the 'beautiful little Correggio' to him in Tothill

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<sup>229</sup> Letter from Robert Mackinlay to Benjamin West, 13 April 1789, Benjamin West Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. See also, Alberts 1978, 55-56, and Ingamells 1997, 625.

<sup>230</sup> John Trumbull, *Copy after the Madonna and Child with St. Jerome by Correggio*, 1780-81, oil on canvas, 80 x 60 cm (31 ½ x 23 ⅝ inches), Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut.

<sup>231</sup> Letter from Benjamin West to John Singleton Copley, 6 January 1773, in Copley and Pelham 1914/1970, 196.

<sup>232</sup> Copley's copy of the Correggio is unlocated. For more information about the picture and its commission, see J. D. Prown, *John Singleton Copley*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1966), 2:443, and Alberts 1978, 120.

Field Prison while he was imprisoned there on espionage charges.<sup>233</sup> Trumbull described the work, which he only knew through West's copy, as 'universally regarded as one of the three most perfect works of art in existence'.<sup>234</sup> Then a few years later in 1788, West instructed his German student Johann Heinrich Ramberg (1763-1840) to copy the original while he was in Italy.<sup>235</sup> In his letter to Ramberg, he repeated his earlier pontifications on the importance of Correggio's work, placing particular emphasis on his excellence in colouring:

Correggio appears to me to have borrowed his stile from no source but nature and his own mind, his pictures have in them every thing that can afford delight to the lover of painting in the pleasing stile of painting...a brilliancy of colour so exalted as to give to his pictures the appearance of something carrying a light within its own Body this effect is so visible, that many of the ignorant painters suppose he layed on some preparation such as silver gold or some luminous surface – but you will observe when before some of his most perfect Pictures now at Parma the St. Jerolomo, that this effect arrises from the light and shades which Philosophy points out in colours exactly answering and accompaneing the light and shade of his picture, this united to his great attention and knowledge of the effect produced by contracting one colour in the other and never permitting two that belong in the same class...to act together such, as red and yellow, green and blue, Purple and Crimson, but to place by each of these mentioned colours, that which is in opposition, such as Red and Green...by this management of colours breliancy in Painting is acquired.<sup>236</sup>

As his detailed examination of the picture attests, West used the painting, the original and the copy, to discuss his theory on the perfect execution of complementary colours to harmonise the image. He probably had students copy his copy as a means of investigating and practicing colour and technique. West must have been proud of the quality of his copy

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<sup>233</sup> Alberts 1978, 141, and Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 442.

<sup>234</sup> Trumbull 1841/1953, 62, and H. Cooper, *John Trumbull: The Hand and Spirit of a Painter* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1982), 194-195.

<sup>235</sup> Forster-Hahn 1967, 382.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 378-379.

because he appears to have exhibited it at the Royal Academy in 1773 under the title ‘no. 303 A Holy Family, in imitation of Correggio’s manner’.<sup>237</sup> As an additional sign of its value to him, the copy remained in his studio until his death.<sup>238</sup> West’s students also copied several of his other Old Master copies as well as originals in his collection. There are numerous examples, including Trumbull’s copy of West’s copy of Raphael’s *Madonna dell Sedia* and Samuel Morse’s copy of one of West’s paintings by Van Dyck.<sup>239</sup>

West used the academic exercise of copying an Old Master work in his collection as a test of an artist’s ability before entering his studio. The process of becoming a professional painter in eighteenth-century Britain was a long one, and required hard work and dedication. Artists like West expected their students and assistants to come in with some natural talent and then be willing to invest the effort in intense study. As a means of understanding their base level of skill, most masters asked prospective students to show them an artwork, either an original or perhaps a copy of another artist’s work. When Trumbull first arrived at West’s studio from America (with a letter of introduction from their mutual countryman and friend, Franklin), West first asked him if he had brought a sample of his work, so that he could ‘judge his talent’.<sup>240</sup> When Trumbull answered that he had not, West said, ‘Then look around the room, and see if there is any thing which you would like to copy’.<sup>241</sup> After Trumbull made his selection, West congratulated him saying, ‘That, Mr. Trumbull, is called the

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<sup>237</sup> Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 442.

<sup>238</sup> Robins, London, 20-22 June 1829, lot 76 (‘St. Gerolimo, a fine copy from the celebrated picture by Correggio’).

<sup>239</sup> West’s Raphael *Holy Family* was sold in Christie’s 1-6 July 1820, lot 89, and another sold in his sale of 23 June 1820, lot 1. For Trumbull’s copy, see Trumbull 1841/1953, 61; For Morse’s copy of an undisclosed Van Dyck, see his letter to his family in 1812 in Morse 1914, 1:162-3, and Evans 1980, 161.

<sup>240</sup> Trumbull 1841/1953, 61.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

Madonna della Sedia, the Madonna of the Chair, one of the most admired works of Raphael; the selection of such a work is a good omen'.<sup>242</sup> When Trumbull's copy was completed, West complimented his efforts and said, 'I have now no hesitation to say that nature intended you for a painter. You possess the essential qualities', and accepted him into his studio.<sup>243</sup>

As was common in large studios, West also suggested that students copy his own original paintings. Students and assistants were often asked to do this as an academic exercise and to 'learn' the hand of their master. In addition to this purpose, West wanted them to copy his works as a means of positioning himself as another great master in the context of modern British art that needed to be studied. Exceptional students, like Stuart and Trumbull, who became masters after West, were asked to become studio assistants. Part of the assistant's role, as was common across large studios, was to complete minor parts of West's paintings, like drapery or backgrounds. Trumbull, his star protégé, developed a style that began to closely approximate his master's. In 1785, when Trumbull copied West's *Battle of La Hogue*, his style in the copy followed West's so closely that for years his hand in the painting was not recognised.<sup>244</sup> In the same way that he used Old Master works and copies, West frequently asked prospective students to copy his works as a means of evaluating their skills and decide whether to accept them. When Charles Willson Peale first arrived in West's studio in 1767 from America, West suggested he copy one of his recent biblical paintings entitled *Elisha Raising the Shunamite's Son* (1766) that he had exhibited

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid. West made a copy and also owned a small copy on copper by his British pupil John Downman. For the Downman copy, see Christie's, 23 June, 1820, lot 1 ('Raffaello – An elegant small copy from the Madonna della Sedia, by Downman, highly finished: circular, on copper, 11 inches in diameter').

<sup>243</sup> Trumbull 1841/1953, 62.

<sup>244</sup> Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 210. *The Battle of La Hogue* will be discussed in the last chapter of this thesis.

that year at the exhibition of the Society of Artists.<sup>245</sup> Peale dutifully produced a watercolour after the painting, and West was pleased enough with the copy that he agreed to accept him as a student.<sup>246</sup> In a March 1767 letter to his friend and patron John Beale Bordley (1726/27-1804), Peale relayed his excitement, saying, '[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'.<sup>247</sup>

West's paternal encouragement was frequently commented on by his students.<sup>248</sup> For the American students especially, he provided more than instruction: he fed them, housed some of them, introduced them to patrons, lent them works from his collection to study and copy, and provided them with access to various important private collections in London.<sup>249</sup> As Surveyor of the King's pictures starting in 1791, West provided his students with access to the Royal Collection, including the celebrated Raphael cartoons. Many students, including Sully, frequently referred to borrowing Old Master works from West's collection to take home with the understanding they would be returned to the studio.<sup>250</sup> West also lent paintings from his collection to the Royal Academy for the students to study and copy, including his Giorgione of *A Knight in Full Armour* (fig. 30).<sup>251</sup> As the King's history

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<sup>245</sup> Benjamin West, *Elisha Raising the Shunamite's Son*, 1766, oil on canvas, 101.6 x 127 cm (40 x 50 inches), J.B. Speed Museum, Louisville, Kentucky. For more information on this painting, see Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 314, and Evans 1980, 39.

<sup>246</sup> Charles Willson Peale, after Benjamin West, *Elisha Restoring to Life the Shunamite's Son*, 1767, watercolour on paper, mounted on canvas, 40.6 x 60.9 cm (16 x 24 inches), Estate of Charles Coleman Sellers.

<sup>247</sup> Letter from Charles Willson Peale to John Beale Bordley, London, March 1767 in Peale 1983, 1:47-48.

<sup>248</sup> Morse 1914, 1:47. Morse recalled that West 'talked to me like a father'.

<sup>249</sup> Alberts 1978, 68.

<sup>250</sup> Evans 1980, 151.

<sup>251</sup> School of Giorgione, *Knight in Armour*, probably 17<sup>th</sup> c., oil on wood, 39.7 x 26.9 cm (15 5/8 x 10 5/8 inches), National Gallery, London, NG269. See Christie's, 24 June 1820, lot 62 ('Giorgione...A Knight in full armour,

painter and Royal Academy President, West felt obliged to do these things in part to fulfill his authoritative role and to cultivate and stimulate interest in history painting in Britain and America.

Though West strongly encouraged the path of history painting for his students, he did not discourage students who had interest in other genres. He felt partly responsible for his students' successes, and frequently tailored their instruction to their skills and interests. To support this, he also collected an eclectic range and variety of genres, schools, and subject matter in his collection as a resource for all of his students. Artists like Stuart, who showed an early proclivity in portraiture, and others who showed expertise in other areas of specialization that were outside of West's primary interests, were encouraged to utilise other parts of his collection for study. He also solicited the help of other established painters, as he did with Stuart and Reynolds, to advise students in other areas.<sup>252</sup> He connected Sully with his friend Thomas Lawrence, knowing the fashionable portraitist would be a better instructor and mentor for the young artist interested in portraiture.<sup>253</sup> During his time in West's studio, Charles Bird King (1785-1862) produced a still-life painting entitled *Still Life, Game* (1806), a type of picture far outside the realm of West's *oeuvre*.<sup>254</sup> It is believed that King largely based the picture on drawings and paintings in West's collection, such as *A Dead Hare and*

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but with the head bare; small whole length figure. The admired little picture which the late President so often kindly permitted to be copied by the Students of the Academy, 15 ½ by near 11'). Several early nineteenth-century copies exist, one is in the Victoria and Albert Museum collection, no. 251-1866. For listing of the various copies see C. Gould, *Catalogue of the Sixteenth Century Venetian School*, (London: National Gallery Publications, 1959), 40.

<sup>252</sup> Evans 1980, 54.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>254</sup> Charles Bird King, *Still Life, Game*, 1806, oil on canvas, 35.6 x 27.9 cm (14 x 11 inches), IBM Corporation, New York.

*Other Game* by Jan Baptist Weenix (1621-1660/1).<sup>255</sup> Charles Willson Peale had an interest in becoming a miniature painter, a medium not represented in West's collection. So to aid in his studies, West borrowed examples from the 'best miniature painter' in town.<sup>256</sup> Although West was rigid in his insistence that students follow the prescribed rules of art, when it came to developing their own compositions, his guidance seemed more liberal. He advised Bird and others: 'If you will consult your own mind, you will draw forth a style and character of your own'.<sup>257</sup> West's collection, in its breadth and scale, as discussed in the second chapter, provided great versatility and a range of models for students interested in various genres of painting.

These various examples of West and his students interacting with objects from his collection reveal a great deal about his artistic practice as well as academic standards, theory, and education both inside and outside his studio during his sixty-year career. The examples also demonstrate how the collection played an integral and supportive role in the development of his history paintings and the fashioning of his artistic identity as a 'Modern Old Master' over the course of his long career. Throughout, West maintained a consistent message unequalled by any of his contemporaries. His collection, theories, practice, productions, and pedagogy of art aligned closely to the traditions founded on the art of the Old Masters. Incorporating the works of great Old Masters, his own work, and modern ethnographic objects, the collection represented academic traditions in the context of the contemporary transatlantic world and West's unique identity within it.

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<sup>255</sup> Christie's, 24 June 1820, lot 79 ('Weenix...A Dead Hare and other Game, and a spaniel overturning a basket of live pigeons, in a rich garden scene. One of the finest specimens of the master, on canvas, 48 in. by 39'). The Weenix is unlocated. For more on Charles Bird King and his copy, see also Evans 1980, 148.

<sup>256</sup> Sellers 1969, 57. The miniature painter was not named.

<sup>257</sup> Galt 1820, 2:116.



His close alignment with the Old Masters and academic tradition that seemed progressive at the beginning of his career became somewhat ‘old fashioned’ and retardaire at the end. As President of the Royal Academy, West had no choice but to maintain the academic ideals and traditional practices which the institution was founded to support. A member of the old guard, a ‘guardian of academic rigor’ and a staunch proponent of the Old Masters, West had some difficulty changing with the times.<sup>258</sup> West’s uncompromising approach to grand manner history paintings continued throughout his long career, even as the ‘old model’ was being challenged by new developments in artistic training and practice that no longer relied so strongly on artistic predecessors and prescribed structures of artistic production and that focused more on the centrality of nature. However, in the fields of contemporary history painting and landscape, West found ways to maintain established, Old Master traditions while incorporating innovative new formulas and his interest in natural and historic accuracy. And what West felt unable to do progressively in his own art he managed to do with his collection, by acquiring works by many next generation artists, and with his students, by being flexible and liberal in their instruction and encouragement within the privacy of his studio.

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<sup>258</sup> Woodmere Art Museum, *‘Hail-sacred Genius’ Drawings by Benjamin West from the Swarthmore College Collection* (Philadelphia: Woodmere Art Museum, 2008), 13.

#### Chapter 4: *The Death of Nelson*, West's Wests, and the Importance of Display at Newman Street

In 1806 West mounted an exhibition of his latest history painting, *The Death of Lord Nelson* (fig. 71), in his Newman Street studio. The ambitious and complex composition depicted a timely and already familiar heroic subject of national importance. Though West had established his reputation on contemporary history pictures such as *The Death of General Wolfe* (fig. 1), it had been over three decades since he had produced a picture of this type. Rather than concerning himself or lobbying the Royal Academy's Hanging Committee for optimal placement of his pictures 'above the line' at Somerset House, which he was usually given due to the enormous size of his canvases and his position as President, he opted to place his grand-scale painting in his own studio surrounded by works of his own hand as well as his art collection. In a move that marked his frustrations with the institution he helped found and his growing independence, West mounted an exhibition devoted to himself and to a lesser extent his artistic heroes and chosen contemporaries rather than competing visually with his artistic rivals. What made the 1806 installation of *Death of Nelson* such an exceptional event is that for the first and only time since 1769, he did not send one picture to the annual Academy exhibition. As the exhibition reviewer for the *The Morning Chronicle* bluntly reported that year, 'Mr. West has nothing'.<sup>1</sup>

In the years running up to the 1806 *Death of Nelson* exhibition, West's position of power, if indeed he ever really had more than that of a figurehead, was questioned and ultimately diminished. West had been embattled by discord between the various factions of the Royal Academy. In principle, as one of the most successful exemplars of history painting

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<sup>1</sup> *The Morning Chronicle*, 28 April 1806, 3.

in an institution devoted to the encouragement of the genre, West should have maintained a protected and revered status. But in actuality, his position as an outsider and a successful practitioner in a field that few could pursue exclusively, led to jealousy and exclusion that created many adversaries within the Academy, and none more so than his fellow countryman and history painter, John Singleton Copley. Although his mistakes in 1797 regarding the ‘Venetian Secret’ were damaging, much of his troubles truly began in 1803, when he presented a painting entitled *Hagar and Ishmael* (1776-1803) for the annual Royal Academy exhibition.<sup>2</sup> Many of his key artistic opponents in the Academy, notably Copley and John Yenn (1750-1821), argued that the picture could not be included in the exhibition since it had already been exhibited in 1776. As President and a founding member of the Academy, West knew the rules of the exhibition and did not deny exhibiting the picture previously, but he did defend his actions saying that he had so heavily repainted it that it was nearly a whole new picture.<sup>3</sup> In an effort to quell the debate, the painting was removed from the exhibition. The scenario damaged his reputation and ability to lead the discordant group, and the situation quickly declined from there. In addition, by this time, West no longer enjoyed the support of his primary patron, George III, who was suffering from porphyria. In 1801, with very little explanation, West’s commission for the King’s ‘Chapel of Revealed Religion’ paintings, the biggest project of his career, was withdrawn.<sup>4</sup> His favour at Court was further weakened by the fact that the Prince Regent had his own favoured artists and had little interest in him. Feeling isolated by the institution he helped to found in 1768 and abandoned by his once

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<sup>2</sup> Benjamin West, *Hagar and Ishmael*, 1776-1803, oil on canvas, 193 x 138.4 cm (76 x 54 ½ inches), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

<sup>3</sup> Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 136-7 and 288-89. Several other Academicians, namely Richard Wilson, had been allowed to show old pictures again at the Academy before, so singling West out may have been merely an excuse to question his authority.

<sup>4</sup> Galt 1820, 2:193-194.

protective patron, West resigned from his position as president in December 1805, a post that was subsequently filled by the King's architect James Wyatt (1746-1813).<sup>5</sup> So enraged by the choice of his non-painter replacement and his own fall from favour, on 11 May 1806, West confidently and retrospectively told Farington that 'it had been a great motive to induce him to paint that picture *The Death of Nelson*, to shew the Academy what they had done to cause the Author of it to withdraw himself, and an Architect to be placed in his room'.<sup>6</sup>

West's choice of subject and composition could not have sent a clearer message of dissatisfaction to the Academy. In *Death of Nelson*, West selected a highly patriotic subject and depicted it with his characteristic indebtedness to the grand traditions in art, a formula which seemed ideally made to be displayed in Britain's primary institution devoted to high art. By the 1780s, with the opening of Somerset House, the Academy occupied a secure position as the official centre for the exhibition of art in London.<sup>7</sup> However, contemporary history pictures, unlike biblical, mythological and classical literary subjects, occupied a grey area of acceptability under the institution's Reynoldsian definitions of 'high art'.

Contemporary history paintings were a hybrid type of art, combining high art with reportage, portraiture, landscape, marine painting and spectacle.<sup>8</sup> Though he was highly successful as a contemporary history painter, West remained an artist that operated under the aegis of the Royal Academy. To a fault, he was an academic spokesman devoted to the institution and to

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<sup>5</sup> For a transcript of West's resignation letter, see General Assembly Minutes, RAA/GA/1/2, The Royal Academy of Arts Archive, London.

<sup>6</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 7:2757 (11 May 1806).

<sup>7</sup> E. Hughes, 'Ships of the 'Line': Marine Paintings of the RA Exhibitions of 1784', in T. Barringer, G. Quilley and D. Fordham, eds., *Art and the British Empire* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2009), 142.

<sup>8</sup> Wind 1938, 120.

its aims in the development of a national school of history painting.<sup>9</sup> West staunch, overly pedantic devotion to the underlying framework set out in Reynolds's (and his own) *Discourses* probably influenced the curtailed production of his contemporary history pictures in the decades between *Death of Wolfe* and *Death of Nelson* and meant that he focused predominantly on biblical, mythological, and classical subjects.<sup>10</sup> As the King's history painter and later President of the Royal Academy, West was conscious of being seen as embodying the ideals of the institution and its patron. But in 1806, free of both his royal patron and his official leadership position, he returned to the genre that made *his* reputation – that brought about the so-called 'revolution in the art' – and confidently staged a one-man exhibition in his home.<sup>11</sup> To add further insult to the Academy, West also exhibited his controversial *Hagar and Ishmael* in the inaugural exhibition of the British Institution in 1806 which coincided with the Royal Academy's show. An article in *The Morning Chronicle* highlighted this picture on view in the institution's North Room, describing it as 'Hagar and Ishmael, which caused conflict years earlier' at the Academy.<sup>12</sup>

### **Exhibition Expertise**

West's career, like those of many of his contemporaries, developed in the public arena and he became a career exhibitor. For an artist of his generation, public exhibitions were an essential marketing tool and enabled artists to develop their career and reputation in front of the patrons and public that they wanted to take notice. These exhibitions were all-important

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<sup>9</sup> M. Myrone, 'The Sublime as Spectacle: The Transformation of Ideal Art at Somerset House', in Solkin 2001, 84.

<sup>10</sup> As will be discussed later in this chapter, this was only one factor for his curtailed production. Others factors included intense competition amongst contemporary history painters for commissions as well as problematic political subject matter for the American-born artist.

<sup>11</sup> Galt 1820, 2:50. See also Wind 1938.

<sup>12</sup> *The Morning Chronicle*, 17 April 1806, 3.

and indeed were the places and spaces in which art was given its definition and where reputations were made – and in some cases broken.<sup>13</sup> A master of self-promotion, West consciously exploited exhibitions from early on to build his career. In 1771, the year of his Royal Academy debut of *Death of Wolfe*, he wrote about the importance of exhibitions in steering him into history painting in a hastily written letter to an artist-friend in Philadelphia:

The Exhibitions here have drove men to pursue different departments in the art of painting– amongst which I have undertaken to wheel the club of Hercules – in plain English I have embarked on Historical painting - by which means I have removed that long opinion That was a department in the art that never would be encouraged in the Kingdom. But I can say I have been so far successful in it that I find my pictures sell for a price that no living artist ever received before. I hope this is a circumstance that will induce others to do the same.<sup>14</sup>

Though he benefitted greatly, the London institutions also initially exploited West; he was considered one of the few traditionally trained specialist history painters and later the only one with royal patronage.<sup>15</sup> Both the Society of Artists and the Royal Academy, institutions he was affiliated with from 1764 to 1768 and from 1769 to 1819 respectively, added cachet to their exhibitions, showcasing his prolific body of history paintings, the most esteemed category of the painting hierarchy.<sup>16</sup> West's large grand manner historical compositions, representing honourable and heroic scenes from mythology, the Bible, classical history as well as modern history, were often given prominent positions, for example on the Great Room's east wall at the Royal Academy.<sup>17</sup> His preferential treatment can be seen in an

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<sup>13</sup> A. Hemingway, 'Art Exhibitions as Leisure-Class Rituals in Early Nineteenth-Century London', in Allen 1995, 97.

<sup>14</sup> Letter from Benjamin West to John Green, 10 September 1771, in B. West, 'Letter from Benjamin West', *Journal of the Archives of American Art* 4 (January 1964): 11-12.

<sup>15</sup> Hargraves 2005, 47.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> J. Sunderland and D. Solkin, 'Staging the Spectacle', in Solkin 2001, 26.

image by Thomas Sandby (c.1723-1798) of *The Royal Academy Annual Exhibition of 1792: The Great Room, East Wall* (fig. 72), which shows a painting by West positioned prominently on the centre of the wall above the mantel. The critics of these exhibitions reinforced his dominance in the genre. In 1774, a reviewer in *The Public Advertiser* supplied a superlative statement about his position: ‘Mr. West undoubtedly stands amongst the first Artists in the present Age in the Line of Historical Painting’.<sup>18</sup> However, the rooms at Somerset House were not ideal for the display of large-scale, complex contemporary history pictures. First, the walls were dominated by portraits, the most popular of the genres. Additionally, the overcrowded display, poor viewing conditions, and the ‘pictorial profusion’ on the walls gave limited opportunities for visitors to contemplate and digest the complex narratives in individual history paintings.<sup>19</sup> Though the displays at the Academy were not ideally suited to showcase these pictures, West and his history paintings were a constant presence at the annual exhibitions, beginning with his first submissions in 1769. West felt it his duty to send several history paintings, usually at least three and often many more, to the annual exhibitions.<sup>20</sup>

To deal with the challenges of hanging pictures in Somerset House, West developed competitive advantages for his pictures to stand out among the densely hung display. He painted pictures with their ultimate public exhibition in mind. His ‘bigger is best strategy’ was frequently discussed by the critics as well as his powerful colour palette, which often

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<sup>18</sup> *The Public Advertiser*, 30 April 1774, 2.

<sup>19</sup> J. Murdoch, ‘Architecture and Experience: The Visitor and the Spaces of Somerset House, 1780-1796’, in Solkin 2001, 17, and M. Myrone, ‘The Sublime Spectacle: The Transformation of Ideal Art at Somerset House’, in Solkin 2001, 79.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 231. For a complete listing of West’s exhibited works at the Society of Artists, Royal Academy, and British Institution shows, see the appendix in J. Dillenberger, *Benjamin West: The Context of His Life’s Work* (San Antonio, Texas: Trinity University Press, 1977), 191-198. For further information, see A. Graves, *The Royal Academy of Arts: A Complete Dictionary of Contributors and Their Work from its Foundation in 1769 to 1904*, 8 vols. (London: Graves, 1906); Graves 1907; and A. Graves, *The British Institution 1806-1867: A Complete Dictionary of Contributors* (London: G. Bell and Sons and A. Graves, 1908).

brought greater attention to his works.<sup>21</sup> According to one of his students, he frequently advised others to ‘paint large as much as possible’.<sup>22</sup> The monumentality of West’s exhibited work was frequently commented on by the critics, including William Hazlitt’s assertion that he was ‘only great by the acre’.<sup>23</sup> In addition to their size and vivid palette, West’s epic pictures were more complex in subject-matter and composition than most of his contemporaries, demanding more attention and learning of the spectator.<sup>24</sup>

### **New Exhibition Styles of the 1780s**

Though he had not produced contemporary history paintings in over three decades, during that time West witnessed the rise of the one-man and one-picture exhibitions of such pictures favoured by artists like his principal rival, John Singleton Copley. Copley essentially invented the scheme with his exhibition of *The Death of the Earl of Chatham* (fig. 73) in 1781.<sup>25</sup> During the 1780s, dissatisfaction with the Academy’s display of works had prompted many artists to mount their own exhibitions in hired venues as well as in their own studios. In 1784, Gainsborough displayed twenty-five of his paintings in his house on Pall Mall instead of at the Royal Academy’s exhibition that year.<sup>26</sup> In the field of contemporary history painting, these ancillary exhibitions developed even greater levels of interest and spectacle. In addition to Copley’s showings of *Chatham*, *The Death of Major Peirson* (1782-

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<sup>21</sup> J. Sunderland and D. Solkin, ‘Staging the Spectacle’, in Solkin 2001, 26.

<sup>22</sup> Morse 1914, 1:69.

<sup>23</sup> Hazlitt 1930-34, 18:18-28, and quoted in Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 235-236.

<sup>24</sup> A. Staley, *Benjamin West: American Painter at the English Court* (Baltimore, Maryland: Baltimore Museum of Art, 1989), 36. For the developments in complexity of contemporary history paintings, see L. Costello, *J. M. W. Turner and the Subject of History* (Farnham, Surrey and Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2012), 18-19.

<sup>25</sup> Neff 1995, 70. John Singleton Copley, *The Death of the Earl of Chatham*, 1779-1781, oil on canvas, 228.6 x 307.3 cm (90 x 121 inches), National Portrait Gallery, London (lent by Tate Britain, 1968).

<sup>26</sup> Altick 1978, 105.



1784), and later his enormous *The Siege of Gibraltar* (1783-1791), artists such as Joseph Wright of Derby (1734-1797) and Philippe-Jacques de Loutherbourg (1740-1812) also hired out venues such as the Great Room in Spring Gardens and one of the most popular venues, 125 Pall Mall.<sup>27</sup> These shows coincided with growing public interest in spectacles such as the popular panoramas and ‘raree shows’ that provided the newest types of visitor experiences.<sup>28</sup> Various and numerous forms of modern visual entertainment in London competed for public interest with the contemporary history picture. To this end, contemporary artists staged their paintings dramatically, creating heightened experiences that rivalled theatre, panoramas and other forms of spectacle and popular entertainment. Some artists competed to a greater extent than others, such as de Loutherbourg, whose grand picture exhibitions of landscapes and battles were described by London newspapers, as a ‘new species of publick spectacle and entertainment’ that ‘engages the public on a very uncommon degree’.<sup>29</sup> These artists also profited greatly from such shows. Copley was one of the first to see the value of this independent model, supplementing what the painting could make twofold with exhibition admission fees and subscriptions to engravings after his pictures.<sup>30</sup> For his 1781 show of *Chatham* in Spring Gardens, Copley boasted that 20,000 people attended in just six weeks, paying a shilling per ticket.<sup>31</sup> Mounted to coincide with the Royal

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<sup>27</sup> For discussions of these exhibitions, see J. Bonehill, ‘Exhibiting War: John Singleton Copley’s *The Siege of Gibraltar* and the Staging of History’, in J. Bonehill and G. Quilley, eds., *Conflicting Visions: War and Visual Culture in Britain and France c. 1700-1830* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 139-168; I. McCalman, ‘Magic, Spectacle, and the Art of de Loutherbourg’s Eidophusikon’, in A. Bermingham, ed., *Sensation & Sensibility: Viewing Gainsborough’s Cottage Door* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 181-197; and Bonehill 2007, 521-544. John Singleton Copley, *The Death of Major Peirson*, oil on canvas, 246.4 x 365.8 cm (97 x 144 inches), Tate Britain, London; and John Singleton Copley, *The Siege of Gibraltar*, 1783-1791, oil on canvas, 532.6 x 754.4 cm (214 x 297 inches), Guildhall Art Gallery, London.

<sup>28</sup> For more on this interest, see J. Brewer, ‘Sensibility and the Urban Panorama’, *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 70, no.2 (2007): 229-249.

<sup>29</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 28 February 1781, 2, and *London Courant and Westminster Chronicle*, 6 February 1782, 3.

<sup>30</sup> Altick 1978, 105, and Neff 1995, 70-71.

<sup>31</sup> Altick 1978, 105.

Academy's exhibition that year, his show was in direct competition for the public's attention and as a result the Academy's attendance was reduced by a third.<sup>32</sup> These shows were antithetical to the aims of the Academy and directly challenged its underlying disdain for self-promotion.<sup>33</sup> In this modern exhibition culture outside of the Royal Academy, where the separate exhibition was the dominant advertisement and display form for contemporary history paintings, West was noticeably absent.

West had always been reliant on the official exhibitions of the Academy to promote his history paintings and utilised his studio primarily as a supplemental display space to support his current projects and promote print subscriptions. In the 1780s, when his contemporaries were mounting one-man and one-picture exhibitions at private venues, West was exhibiting annually at Somerset House. In the 1780s and early 1790s, West was primarily exhibiting biblical subjects related to his commission for George III at Windsor. In the late 1790s, West began to diffuse the range of his exhibited *oeuvre*, returning to classical subjects and introducing his historical landscapes.<sup>34</sup> In addition to his Academy showings, throughout the year he welcomed visitors to his studio to see new history paintings or recent acquisitions in his art collection. Though he remained absent from the 'new' separate picture shows being mounted by his contemporaries, West was influenced by their novelty and short-term singular focus on one picture or a certain group of pictures. Thus, in his studio, he constantly created new installations to highlight certain works and create better access and greater context for them. As discussed in the first chapter, the processional spaces of West's home enabled him to frequently change the display to not only highlight his newest history painting but also to be a visual articulation of his artistic practice and theories. During the

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<sup>32</sup> Whitley 1928/1968, 1:357; Prown 1966, 2:284; and Altick 1978, 105.

<sup>33</sup> Neff 1995, 70-71.

<sup>34</sup> Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 125.

1780s, West's house was hung with a number of his history paintings, such as a version of *Death of Wolfe* and dozens of biblical subjects being prepared for the King's 'Chapel of Revealed Religion'.<sup>35</sup> When Dorothy Richardson visited West's studio in 1785, she found the spaces filled with his royal commissions and only a few contemporary subjects, including a 'Destruction of the Gun Boats at Gibraltar' and 'Five Indian Chiefs who were in England'.<sup>36</sup> In the same year, Sophie von la Roche made similar observations describing an installation filled with West's paintings, including *Death of Wolfe* and 'sketches for completed pictures of which engravings had been made'.<sup>37</sup> West supplemented the display of his pictures with objects from his collection, which were sometimes integrated with his own paintings. This type of collection and display was ideal in the eyes of modern history painters, who were well aware that many of their patrons still preferred paintings by the Old Masters. At this time, most British collectors primarily acquired history paintings by foreign artists of earlier generations or portraits by contemporary artists. By integrating the old and the new, West was modelling the collection and ideal display that he and other artists hoped their patrons would accept and replicate. During this period, West gave the art of others as much or more prominence than his own paintings in his residence. Indeed, in the mid-1780s, West's reputation as a collector was as prominent as his role as an artist.<sup>38</sup> It was during this period that he was able to buy pictures by more renowned artists, from his 1785 purchase of Titian's *Death of Actaeon* (fig. 31) to his 1802 and 1804 purchases of Rubens' *St. Cecilia* and

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<sup>35</sup> Dorothy Richardson, *Travel Journals*, 5 vols., MS 1124, John Rylands Library, University of Manchester, 311 (1785). Richardson described many other works on view.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 311-312 (1785). These two pictures are unlocated and are not listed in Von Erffa and Staley 1986. The former picture probably relates to West's failed attempt to secure the City's commission for a commemorative Gibraltar painting, which went to his rival Copley. West's son Raphael produced a drawing of the subject. See A. Staley, 'Benjamin West, Raphael West and the Floating Batteries', *The Burlington Magazine* 155, no. 1321 (April 2013): 243-246. The picture of the 'Five Indian Chiefs' possibly relates to the famous visit of the Mohawk chiefs in 1710 to London or possibly a more recent visit of Native American diplomats.

<sup>37</sup> Roche 1933, 152.

<sup>38</sup> Whitley 1928/1968, 2:31.

Van Dyck's *Venus and Cupid*.<sup>39</sup> He used these types of pictures as marketing tools to attract visitors to his house and to attest to his skills as a connoisseur. As discussed previously, during the late eighteenth century, there were no public art collections, so it was very common for fashionable people to visit the art collections of notable individuals.<sup>40</sup> West's art collection, particularly of the Old Masters, became part of this circuit and several paintings became star attractions. For West, any means of attracting visitors into his home and promoting himself was advantageous. When he acquired his *Death of Actaeon* in the mid-1780s, a writer for *The Whitehall Evening Post* commented that he had set 'up his room on purpose for such a guest'.<sup>41</sup> He rearranged 'the principal gallery at his house in Newman Street, where it occupied a place of honour'.<sup>42</sup> During this same period, another visitor commented on seeing both his *Head of Christ Crowned with Thorns* (fig. 29) and a version of his *Death of Wolfe* in the painting room, drawing a visual parallel between the figure of Wolfe and Christ.<sup>43</sup> With rooms filled with Old Master paintings and prints and antique casts, West marked his identification with the masters of earlier generations, whom he believed were great inspirations and appropriate models to follow.<sup>44</sup> Their presence reinforced the artistic traditions that West promoted in his own art and his discourses at the Academy. Likewise, by installing his paintings alongside Old Master works in his collection, he was placing his art within a larger historical tradition. At the same time, West also displayed the work of his contemporaries, especially his students and assistants, such as

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<sup>39</sup> Christie's, 23-24 April 1802, day 2, lot 66 (property of the late Paul D'Aigremont, Esq.), and Christie's, 12 May 1804, lot 8 (pictures from the Colonna and Bernini Palaces of Rome). The Rubens and Van Dyck pictures are unlocated.

<sup>40</sup> Altick 1978, 100.

<sup>41</sup> *Whitehall Evening Post*, 15 November 1785, 3.

<sup>42</sup> Whitley 1928/1968, 2:33.

<sup>43</sup> Roche 1933, 153.

<sup>44</sup> Reynolds 1975/1981, 17.

Trumbull's first history painting of an American Revolutionary subject, *The Death of General Warren at the Battle of Bunker's Hill, 17 June 1775* (fig. 74). To introduce the work, West invited several friends and colleagues to the house, including Reynolds. According to Trumbull, West 'received his friends in his painting-room, where by his direction my picture was standing in advantageous light'.<sup>45</sup> In this same room, a version of West's *Death of Wolfe* was almost always on view, and the visual influence of the composition on Trumbull's *Death of General Warren* was undoubtedly obvious to most visitors. By showing American subjects and art, West was also reinforcing his New World perspective. By the mid-1780s, West, like his patron George III in his refurbishment of Buckingham House, had 'gone out of [his] way to be international in his perspective'.<sup>46</sup> West's unique installations of this period mark his reverence to the art of the past as well as his interest in the contemporary art of his generation. At the same time, they also reference his position within the Academy and at Court. Buoyed by the status conferred on him by both, West had had no need to compete with such popular and singular 'raree-shows' until 1806.<sup>47</sup>

In the wake of his fallout with the Academy and the cessation of his royal patronage, West was forced to re-evaluate his display strategies and the marketing of his pictures. Selecting the right environment to display his *Death of Nelson*, his first foray back into contemporary history painting, seems to have been an easy decision for West. Many of the available secondary, independent venues that could accommodate large-scale pictures had affiliations with institutions from which West was distancing himself, such as 125 Pall Mall, the former home of the Academy exhibitions before 1780, and Spring Gardens, a former

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<sup>45</sup> Trumbull 1841/1953, 89, and Alberts 1978, 154.

<sup>46</sup> Staley 1989, 68, and Colley 1992/2008, 214.

<sup>47</sup> Reitlinger 1961/1964, 68-69.

home to the Society of Artists' exhibitions. Instead the disenfranchised Academician chose to exhibit *Death of Nelson* in his studio and gallery. In this neutral and personal environment, West could exert the greatest control over the display of his own art. In a further act of detachment from the Academy and, at the same time, an acknowledgment of his gentlemanly domestic establishment distanced from the taint of commercial gain, West issued admittance cards, but accepted no fees.<sup>48</sup> By this time, waiving admittance charges had become the preferred strategy for those mounting independent shows of contemporary pictures in part to support the patriotism of the enterprise. In addition to West's normal traffic of studio visitors, he hoped to attract a wider audience, potentially detracting from the Academy's exhibition going on at the same time. Though he was worried about 'loss or damage' to the house with increased amounts of visitors, the commercial benefits outweighed all concerns.<sup>49</sup> The more people he could attract through the door, the more potential subscription fees for the engraving after his painting, which was the most lucrative part of his business.

For a subject that would appeal to a larger public, West chose to capitalise on the current patriotic fervour around military heroes by painting the most famous fallen hero of the moment, Admiral Horatio Nelson (1758-1805).<sup>50</sup> The Battle of Trafalgar, off the coast of Spain, was the most significant British naval victory over the French to occur in recent history. The honourable death of Nelson, who had been mortally wounded by an enemy bullet while on the deck of his ship, *Victory*, on 21 October 1805, was therefore a subject of national importance and pride.<sup>51</sup> Almost immediately, artists recognised the event's

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<sup>48</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 8:2802 (2 July 1806).

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> For more on the cult of heroism, see Colley 1992/2008, 178-180.

<sup>51</sup> For more on the cultural fascination with Nelson, see A. Yarrington, *The Commemoration of the Hero: 1800-1864* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1988), 79-101. For further reading, see also D. Cannadine, *Admiral Lord Nelson: Context and Legacy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

significance and an intense competition developed among them to take ownership of the popular subject by producing an iconic image.<sup>52</sup> The subject was popular across a variety of arts, including paintings, public monuments, graphic satire, poetry, theatrical plays, and even Mrs. Salmon's famous waxwork sculptures.<sup>53</sup> According to Geoff Quilley, the prolific imagery supported the maritime nation's need to commemorate its greatest naval hero and the consumer-driven desire for memorabilia and monuments.<sup>54</sup> A number of print-publishers and dealers produced classified ads soliciting artists to paint a picture for the express purpose of being made into a print. One of the first and most prominent of these was Josiah Boydell (1752-1817), Alderman John Boydell's nephew, who in late 1805 advertised his commercial scheme:

A Proposal. Offer of 500 guineas to a 'British' artist to paint either the Battle of Trafalgar or the Death of Lord Nelson from which a print will be produced (by Mr. Earlom) in the style, size and in the manner of the Death of General Wolfe. It will be presented to the Admiralty or such public body.<sup>55</sup>

Boydell's appeal to 'British' artists emphasised the patriotism of the composition, and its potential deposit with the State reinforced the moral and public intent of history paintings. Many similar advertisements suggested paintings and prints of Nelson in the 'manner' of *Death of Wolfe*. In the thirty years since West first painted *Death of Wolfe*, his composition, which included the fallen hero in an idealised pose of a deposed Christ figure and wearing contemporary dress, had become an artistic convention among pictures of similar subjects.

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<sup>52</sup> J. Bonehill, 'Shows of Strength', unpublished manuscript, unpaginated.

<sup>53</sup> For Mrs. Salmon's advertisement of the Nelson waxwork, see *The Morning Chronicle*, 5 December 1805, 1. For more on Salmon's displays, see Altick 1978, 52-53.

<sup>54</sup> G. Quilley, *Empire to Nation: Art, History and the Visualization of Maritime Britain, 1768-1829* (New Haven and London: Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art by Yale University Press, 2011), 222-223.

<sup>55</sup> *The Bury and Norwich Post: Or, Suffolk, Norfolk, Essex, and Cambridge Advertiser*, 4 December 1805, 1, and *The Morning Chronicle*, 13 January 1806, 2, and C. Mitchell, 'Benjamin West's *Death of Nelson*', in D. Fraser, ed., *Essays in the History of Art Presented to Rudolf Wittkower* (London: Phaidon, 1967), 266.

Though there were still lingering debates about the use of modern dress for the commemoration of a hero, the overall impact of *Death of Wolfe* made it a prototype and icon. West had been desirous of an auspicious sequel to *Death of Wolfe* for some time and was keenly aware of the commercial ramifications presented with the opportunity to do so.<sup>56</sup> Thus, he too entered the competition for an image of Nelson less than two weeks after news of the Admiral's death arrived in the capital. He moved quickly to insure his was one of the first commemorative images of Nelson to be displayed in public. In *The Morning Post* on 15 November 1805, he made his intentions known and advertised his painting and its associated print as a companion to his famous *Death of Wolfe* print.<sup>57</sup> As is well known, William Woollett's (1735-1785) print after West's *Death of Wolfe* was the most commercially successful print in the late eighteenth century. Though the painting was successful, it was actually the print that earned West an international reputation and a presumable profit of about £15,000.<sup>58</sup> In the advertisement, he and his printmaker-partner, James Heath (1757-1834), promoted their forthcoming *Death of Nelson* painting and attendant print, which 'will be brought forward with the united exertions of the Artists as soon as possible, to satisfy the feelings of a grateful People for so great a Victory, mixed as they are with sensations of the deepest regret for so great a loss'.<sup>59</sup> Heath, whose success with his engravings such as *Death of Major Peirson* after Copley, made him an obvious choice following Woollett's death in 1785.<sup>60</sup> According to Farington, it was actually Heath who had first approached West about

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<sup>56</sup> Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 63.

<sup>57</sup> *The Morning Post*, 15 November 1805, 1.

<sup>58</sup> Mitchell 1944, 33, and Altick 1978, 106. The print-publisher of the *Wolfe* print, John Boydell, who took the lion share of the profits, was deceased by 1805. For the *Nelson* print, West wanted more control and profit, and thus entered a partnership with only Heath, the engraver, eliminating the need for a publisher.

<sup>59</sup> *The Morning Post*, 15 November 1805, 1.

<sup>60</sup> James Heath, after John Singleton Copley, *The Death of Major Peirson*, 1796, engraving, 55.9 x 77.5 cm (22 3/8 x 30 1/2 inches), The British Museum, London. For more about this print, see Neff 1995, 69.



a private partnership.<sup>61</sup> Though years previously West might have been less receptive to such an overtly commercial scheme, his reduced income following his dismissal as a royal painter and his impending resignation as Academy president, likely enticed him to agree.<sup>62</sup>

According to their agreement, West would keep the painting and pay Heath 1200 guineas for engraving it, and they would share the subscription profits equally.<sup>63</sup> In the newspaper advertisements, which indicated that West's painting was in production, prospective print subscribers were invited to enlist at either West's or Heath's house. Then according to Farington on 29 November 1805, less than two months after Nelson's death, West had indeed already begun his design for the painting.<sup>64</sup>

*The Death of Lord Nelson* was a rare return to the subject of contemporary history for West. By his own account, he was led back into the genre by none other than Nelson himself. In May 1815, when West was showing his finished painting to a young American scholar named George Ticknor (1791-1871), he indicated that his interactions with the late Nelson encouraged the picture's creation. According to West, he sat next to Nelson at a dinner at William Beckford's Fonthill Abbey years previously.<sup>65</sup> The admiral lamented to him that he never had much interest in fine art, and said, 'But there is one picture whose power I do feel. I never pass a print-shop with your *Death of Wolfe* in the window, without being stopped by it'.<sup>66</sup> Nelson pressed West on why he had not painted pictures of a similar

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<sup>61</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 7:2652 (29 November 1805).

<sup>62</sup> Mitchell 1967, 267.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>64</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 7:2652 (29 November 1805).

<sup>65</sup> Alberts 1978, 324-325.

<sup>66</sup> G. Ticknor, *Life, Letters and Journals of George Ticknor*, ed. G. S. Hillard, 2 vols. (Boston: Osgood, 1876), 1:63; Whitley 1928/1968, 2:108-109; and Mitchell 1967, 265.

nature to which he responded, 'Because, my lord, there are no more subjects'.<sup>67</sup> West admirably added, 'But, my lord, I fear your intrepidity will yet furnish me such another scene; and, if it should, I shall certainly avail myself to it'.<sup>68</sup> To which Nelson responded, 'will you, Mr. West? Then I hope that I shall die in the next battle'.<sup>69</sup> The story was likely a fabrication to generate greater public interest in his picture and further mythologize West's own career. Regardless, it reinforces the issues of availability and acceptability of subjects that plagued West in his selection of contemporary history pictures.

West produced relatively few contemporary history paintings between the mid-1770s and 1806 undoubtedly in large part because the events taking place during this interim period made for subjects that he, as an American and painter to the King, could not engage. In his typical politically reticent manner, West abstained from painting contemporary scenes during the American war and its immediate aftermath.<sup>70</sup> Yet he encouraged other American artists, such as John Trumbull, to take on subjects relating to the revolution. West did come close to venturing back into the genre. There were a few notable exceptions to his otherwise dearth of contemporary pictures during this period, but all of them were either unrealised or unfinished. In 1778, West began a study for *The Death of the Earl of Chatham* (fig. 75), an unrealised picture for a commission that was ultimately won by Copley, and, a similarly unrealised picture for a scene from the battle at Gibraltar, for which Copley also succeeded in winning

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<sup>67</sup> Ticknor 1876, 1:63, and Whitley 1928/1968, 2:109.

<sup>68</sup> Ticknor 1876, 1:63.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. For Nelson's obsession with dying in battle, see A. Nicolson, *Seize the Fire: Heroism, Duty and the Battle of Trafalgar* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005), 91-92, and Costello 2012, 37.

<sup>70</sup> Many artists, not just American ones, during this period following the Seven Years' War were distancing themselves from militaristic and political themes as a means of keeping their artistic practice apolitical. For more about this period and this trend, see D. Fordham, 'Raising Standards: Art and Imperial Politics in London, 1745-1776', doctoral thesis, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, 2003, and D. Fordham, *British Art and the Seven Years' War: Allegiance and Autonomy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

the commission.<sup>71</sup> In addition, in 1783, he began a painting of the *Signing of the Preliminary Treaty of Peace in 1782* (fig. 76), which was left incomplete and never exhibited.<sup>72</sup> It must also be taken into consideration that he was also very preoccupied during the interim period with the previously-discussed pictures for George III's 'Chapel of Revealed Religion' at Windsor. For many years after the American war, there were some relative periods of peace and, then with the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, there were more subjects available again for history painters. Thus with Nelson, West chose a subject that represented renewed patriotic pride for the British public and was a safe subject for him to paint. To the public, he was an obvious artist to paint such a scene because of the success of *Death of Wolfe* as well as his supposed friendship with the fallen hero. The intimate relationship between West and Nelson was often cited in the press as affirmation of his particular expertise in representing the fallen hero. Their believed conversation, details of which were probably provided by the artist himself, was remarked upon frequently in the papers when the painting was reviewed in the year of its completion. On 4 June 1806, one such reviewer wrote:

It was a peculiar advantage to Mr. West to be personally intimate with the Hero whose glorious end he has represented with so much skill, and he was hence enabled to give a faithful portrait of his features; and to estimate in a great degree the noble qualities of his character. The following is an interesting fact: Lord Nelson was once speaking to Mr. West of his memorable picture, the Death of General Wolfe, and advising him to paint a companion to it. The Artist paused a moment, and then said, 'I shall never think of a companion to the glorious end of that patriotic Hero, unless, Sir, it should be your fate to fall in the service of your country, and mine to survive such a subject for natural lamentation'.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> For more on *Chatham*, see Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 218; and for the Gibraltar commission, see Neff 1995, 158-161.

<sup>72</sup> For more about this painting, see Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 218-219.

<sup>73</sup> *The Bury and Norwich Post*, 4 June 1806, 3.

With an acceptable and intensely popular subject of British victory, West began working on his picture in the environment of his studio. For six months, he worked day and night on the picture. In his efforts to paint the scene of the admiral's death accurately with 'historical truth', which characterised all of his modern history paintings, West invited various naval officers who had been present at the scene to come to the studio to tell their stories and have their portraits painted.<sup>74</sup> He also enhanced the immediacy of the image by paying close attention to the details of the military uniforms and ships. Although he carefully researched the factual evidence, he chose to place Nelson and the supporting figures on the deck of the *Victory* rather than below deck where he actually died. One of the seamen who was depicted in the picture commented that 'West had made a picture of what might have been, not of the circumstances as they happened'.<sup>75</sup> According to him, he 'never saw Lord Nelson after He was wounded for He was carried below immediately'.<sup>76</sup> As he had with *Death of Wolfe*, West took artistic license and manipulated the scene to produce the most dramatic effects. By positioning him on the deck with a background of tousling ships, rigging, and the smoke of a battle, he added context, scenery, and glory to the event. When he later exhibited the painting in 1811 at the Academy, he defended his inaccuracies in the catalogue with an extended explanation of his approach:

The Death of Lord Nelson, or the Naval Victory off Trafalgar; being one of the most distinguished that ever occurred in the annals of Great Britain, for heroism and national importance. Mr. West, conceiving that such an event demanded a composition every way appropriate to its dignity and high importance, form it into an Epic Composition. This enabled him to give it that character and interest which the subject demanded. Availing himself of that character in composition, he laid the heroic Nelson wounded on the quarterdeck of his ship, The Victory, with his Captain (now Sir Thomas Hardy) holding the dying Hero by the hand, and from a paper in the other, announcing to him the number of ships taken from the enemy's Combined

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<sup>74</sup> Mitchell 1967, 267.

<sup>75</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 8:2806 (8 July 1806).

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

Fleet. The surrounding groups of gallant officers and men are sympathizing with each other in the sufferings of their wounded Friend and expiring Commander: and the dead and wounded in several groups are introduced as episodes, to commemorate these with honour, who fell on board the Hero's ship in that distinguished action. The ships in the distance display the flags and signals of the other triumphant British Admirals, as well as those of the vanquished enemy, which are marked with all the wrack of battle, and that defeat which took place on the 21<sup>st</sup> of October, 1805.<sup>77</sup>

In 1807, when West saw Arthur William Devis's (1762-1822) smaller, more historically accurate, image of Nelson dying below deck (fig. 77), it only verified for him that his presentation of the subject was far superior and that 'there was no other way of representing the death of a Hero'.<sup>78</sup> According to Farington, he further elaborated on his choices by giving them the weight of civic duty, saying that,

There was no other way of representing the death of a Hero but by an *Epic* representation of it. It must exhibit the event in a way to excite awe & veneration & that which may be required to give superior interest to the representation must be introduced, all that can shew the importance of a Hero. Wolfe must not die like a common soldier under a Bush, neither should Nelson be represented dying in the gloomy hold of a ship, like a sick man in a Prison Hole. To move the mind there should be a spectacle presented to raise & warm the mind... No Boy... would be animated by the representation of Nelson dying like an ordinary man, His feelings must be roused & His mind inflamed by a scene great & extraordinary. A mere matter of fact will never produce this effect.<sup>79</sup>

West's 'epic' and glorified representation of Nelson was one of the most complex of the many pictures painted by his contemporaries, including Devis and Richard Westall (1765-1836). Its complexity necessitated a great deal of explanation. A long, detailed description of the picture appeared in *La Belle Assemblée* in May 1806, timed to coincide with West's exhibition in his studio.<sup>80</sup> When the engraving after his painting was published a few years

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<sup>77</sup> Graves 1906, 8:220, and quoted in Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 220-221.

<sup>78</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 8:3064 (10 June 1807).

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> 'Mr. West's Grand Historical Picture of the Death of Lord Nelson', *La Belle Assemblée* 1 (May 1806): 217-218.

later, it was accompanied by a key (fig. 78) that documented the nearly sixty portraits in the picture and the flags represented, and it included a brief synopsis of the event. Published keys became common as supplemental information for multifaceted contemporary history paintings of this nature. Those for West's *Death of Wolfe* and Copley's *Death of Chatham*, for example, offered more details and yet also simplified these complex pictures for the interested public. The keys provided another means to further advance their reputations as contemporary history painters, depicting newsworthy moments and portraits of participants with 'historical truth'.

The critical response to West's *Death of Nelson* was generally very positive. According to one newspaper in June 1806, 'Many poetical compositions have appeared of considerable merit; and the Artists of this country have been emulous to pay homage to the manes of the great Naval Hero. But the best work which has yet been produced on this great and interesting subject, has at length come from the pencil of Mr. West.'<sup>81</sup> There were, of course, those who took issue with the historical inaccuracies and the modern dress, as they did with his *Death of Wolfe*. Additionally, though this was West's most famous image of Nelson, it was not his only one. West painted several other compositions, including *The Immortality of Nelson* (fig. 79) and *The Death of Lord Nelson in the Cockpit of the Victory* (fig. 80).<sup>82</sup> In contrast to his earlier representation of Nelson, in *The Immortality of Nelson*, he presented an allegorical composition featuring the dead hero's body being accepted into the arms of a female personification of Britannia. A version of this painting also featured in West's design for the Nelson monument being proposed as a public commission for St. Paul's Cathedral by the King and the government's Committee of Taste, a national

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<sup>81</sup> *The Bury and Norwich Post*, 4 June 1806, 3.

<sup>82</sup> For more about West's Nelson pictures, see Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 222-225.

monument advisory group. In the design (fig. 81), his allegorical depiction of the death of Nelson is encased in a sculptural frame with columns that are flanked by six sculpted seamen in modern dress. The committee chose the sculptor John Flaxman's (1755-1826) design, which also featured a combination of allegory and realism, for the commission.<sup>83</sup> In his *The Death of Lord Nelson in the Cockpit*, West presented Nelson more factually, dying as he did in the 'gloomy hold of a ship', an acknowledged contradiction to his ruminations on the epic presentation of the hero that he shared with Farington and explained in the 1811 Royal Academy catalogue.<sup>84</sup> Both of the paintings (fig. 79 and 80) were painted and engraved to be illustrations for the first biography of Nelson entitled *Life of Nelson* by James Stanier Clarke and John McArthur in 1809.<sup>85</sup> When the book was reviewed in 1810, a critic chastised West's allegorical composition for its classicised figures and overall 'accumulation of incongruities'.<sup>86</sup> Though challenged by the mixed reception of his various painted Nelsons, a few years later West still managed to secure an important commission to design a public sculptural monument to Nelson for a pediment at Greenwich Hospital.<sup>87</sup> In his depictions of Nelson, West was grappling with the same issues as other contemporary artists producing paintings and monuments to heroes at this time. In their designs and productions, they were all oscillating between allegory and idealism, modernity and realism, and trying to find ways

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<sup>83</sup> Yarrington 1988, 79-92. See also A. Marks, 'The Impact of Admiral Horatio Nelson's Death on English Art, 1805-1825', master's dissertation, Columbia University, New York, 1965, 54-70, and Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 223-224.

<sup>84</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 8:3064 (10 June 1807).

<sup>85</sup> Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 225. See J. Stanier Clarke and J. McArthur, *The Life of Admiral Lord Nelson* KB, 2 vols., (London: Thomas Cadell and William Davies, 1809). West's *The Immortality of Nelson* was the frontispiece of the book.

<sup>86</sup> Anon., 'Lives of Nelson', *Quarterly Review* 3 (1810): 223-224.

<sup>87</sup> Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 224. Working with Coade and Sealy, West and Joseph Panzetta (1789-1830) modeled a design for the pediment based roughly on his allegorical picture, *The Immortality of Nelson*. The pediment was executed between 1810 and 1813.

to integrate the conventions of the past with the immediacy of the present.<sup>88</sup> The multiplicity and confusions of West's various depictions of Nelson speaks to the challenges of creating the 'right' image of modern heroes to suit both the artist's and the public's ideological and commercial ends.<sup>89</sup>

## Composition

The direction West took for his first depiction of *Nelson* was steeped in the conventions of high art and exhibited his own successful death-of-the-hero or 'death tableau' formula.<sup>90</sup> His idealisation of the subject transformed the period's most popular hero into a *Wolfe*-like, Christ-like figure. West's once innovative formula had been codified by numerous followers, notably in Copley's *Death of Major Peirson* and Trumbull's *Death of General Warren at the Battle of Bunker's Hill* (fig. 74). His successful *Death of Wolfe* and its 'epic' formula had also been deemed 'one of the most genuine models of historic painting in the world' by his friend Bromley in his first volume of *Philosophical and Critical History of the Fine Arts* (1793).<sup>91</sup> According to Bromley, in the figure of *Wolfe*, 'We behold him a hero in death; not by struggling against it...but by that placid serenity which great minds only can possess, and which must be inseparable from him whose sense of duty and of service to this country had found themselves in that instant so gloriously accomplished'.<sup>92</sup>

In the composition of *Nelson*, West attempted to recapture the essence of *Death of Wolfe* and promote himself as its successful author. Indeed, *Death of Nelson* had been

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<sup>88</sup> Yarrington 1988, 93 and 111.

<sup>89</sup> Quilley 2011, 225.

<sup>90</sup> Abrams 1985, 191, and Costello 2012, 18.

<sup>91</sup> Bromley 1793, 1:56-63. In the publication, West's prominent placement in the history of history painting prompted more jealousy from his rival Copley.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:56-59, and quoted in Abrams 1985, 180.



conceived as a companion piece to *Death of Wolfe*, in painted and engraved form.<sup>93</sup> The picture's remarkable resemblance to aspects of the earlier picture was therefore completely intentional. The focal point of the picture is the dying Admiral, in full dress uniform, laid out in the arms of his closest aides in a pose purposefully reminiscent of *Death of Wolfe*. Thirty years earlier, West's composition referred to established conventions of Lamentation and Deposition images of Christ found in pictures by his revered Old Masters, and now, his new composition was equally self-referential, referring to his own modernized view in *Death of Wolfe*. While his style and subject matter changed and evolved, West's veneration of the art of the past continued throughout his career and was always present in his paintings. As discussed in the previous chapter, appropriation from venerated models conferred an artistic pedigree on a painting and by association the artist.<sup>94</sup> In *Death of Nelson*, it was a synthesis of visually sophisticated prototypes, both old models and his own models, on display. These artistic borrowings were meant to create visual parallels between the figures of Wolfe, Nelson, and Christ. Along with this, of course, were the implied connections of sacrifice and honour, suggesting the apotheosis of these modern-day martyrs. The British public generally regarded Nelson as a 'secular saint'.<sup>95</sup> These literal and visual parallels added dignity and elevated status to the pictures' modern protagonists and increased the significance of the pictures themselves.

Like Wolfe, West depicted Nelson as a modern hero, in contemporary dress, to make him timely, historically accurate, but also approachable to the public. The issue of dress was still a contested debate in the production of paintings and monuments of modern heroes;

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<sup>93</sup> D. Montagna, 'Benjamin West's The Death of General Wolfe: A Nationalist Narrative', *American Art Journal* 13, no. 3 (Spring 1981): 87.

<sup>94</sup> L. Lipking, *The Ordering of the Arts in Eighteenth-Century England* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970), 176-177.

<sup>95</sup> Yarrington 1988, 109.

however, there was beginning to be a move away from the classical costumes which had once dominated the genre, especially in sculpture.<sup>96</sup> West had voiced his position years earlier when he defended his use of modern dress in *Death of Wolfe*. As discussed in the previous chapter, according to Galt, at that time, West told his critics that he intended to ‘mark the date, the place, and the parties engaged in the event; and if I am not able to dispose of the circumstances in a picturesque manner, no academical distribution of Greek or Roman costume will enable me to do justice to the subject’.<sup>97</sup> Likewise, in *Death of Nelson*, West represented the hero, an ordinary man who had extraordinary achievements in the name of his country, in the dignity of his own uniform.

During his own life, Nelson saw a connection between himself and Wolfe. He once wrote to William Hamilton: ‘What would the immortal Wolfe have done? As he did, beat the Enemy, if he perished in the attempt’.<sup>98</sup> The public made these same parallels between the two heroes after Nelson’s death. In his compositions, West continued to make these connections visually. The two pictures included the same number of figures supporting the Christ-like figures of the fallen heroes. Each of the attendant figures were depicted standing or kneeling with appropriate attitudes of concern and grief, while the action continued in the groupings of figures around them and in the background.<sup>99</sup> Within the background scenes, at least three simultaneous narratives, which he described as ‘episodes’, are represented.

Charles Mitchell described this narrative device, first used in *Death of Wolfe*, as ‘synchronistic vision’, which enabled him to show various aspects of the entire battle and

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>97</sup> Galt 1820, 2:49.

<sup>98</sup> N. H. Nicolas, *Dispatches and Letters of Lord Viscount Nelson*, 2nd edition (London: H. Colburn, 1845), 378, and quoted in Mitchell 1967, 265.

<sup>99</sup> Alberts 1978, 326.

additional characters in the victorious day.<sup>100</sup> In the background of *Death of Wolfe*, the sequence of events from earlier to later in the battle is read literally from right to left, ending with the figure in the middle ground who brings the news of victory.<sup>101</sup> This manipulation and compression of multiple events enabled West to engage the spectators' attention for longer as they digested the various 'episodes' often hidden around the painting. In an effort to outdo even *Death of Wolfe*, West filled the scene of Nelson's death with nearly sixty portraits, represented on multiple levels of the ship's deck. Though he used a similar horizontal, stage-like space as *Death of Wolfe*, the *Death of Nelson* setting was made more dramatic with the introduction of smoke as well as more intense light and dark contrasts. As Geoff Quilley has noted, a 'providential shaft of light' cuts across the scene diagonally hitting the Nelson grouping much like a theatrical production.<sup>102</sup> To bring the audience closer to the action, West depicted a figure, a man called Saunders, referred to in the key as 'a seaman', who sits close to the edge of the picture plane, holding a Spanish flag to represent the ships taken during the battle. This figure resonates closely with West's Native American figure in *Death of Wolfe*, who was also strategically positioned close to the picture plane to involve the viewer in the scene. This illusional device was adapted from the Old Masters whereby the audience completes the ring of figures around the dying figure.<sup>103</sup> This strategy of making his 'hero' pictures compositionally alike, albeit decades apart, was in use by many of his contemporaries, notably de Loutherbourg in his battle scenes of the 1790s.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Mitchell 1967, 267.

<sup>101</sup> Montagna 1981, 77.

<sup>102</sup> Quilley 2011, 221.

<sup>103</sup> P. Cannon-Brookes, ed., *The Painted Word: British History Painting, 1750-1830* (Woodbridge, Suffolk and Rochester, NY: Boydell Press for the Heim Gallery, 1991), 17.

<sup>104</sup> Quilley 2011, 221. At this point, de Loutherbourg was the main, most successful painter of contemporary histories. In his paintings, he brought the action right to the fore, leaving the pictures and older formulas of West

## Displaying the Hero

While dining at Newman Street in March 1806, Farington observed that West's *Death of Nelson* was 'all painted in & would employ him a month more to harmonise and give effect to it'.<sup>105</sup> Less than two months later, on a subsequent visit on 11 May 1806, Farington found him seated before the 'new finished picture' of Nelson.<sup>106</sup> As he had hoped, his picture was the first to enter the market. West hastened to open his exhibition of *Death of Nelson* at his own gallery just in time to coincide exactly with the Royal Academy's annual exhibition.<sup>107</sup> For the display, the picture was moved from his painting room into the adjoining gallery. When Farington saw the finished picture in West's gallery in May 1806 it was situated alongside versions of his *The Battle of La Hogue* (fig. 82) and *Death of Wolfe*.<sup>108</sup> The originals of these two paintings at the time were in the possession of Lord Grosvenor. Grosvenor had purchased *Death of Wolfe*, which was painted originally on speculation, and subsequently commissioned *Battle of La Hogue* and *The Battle of the Boyne* (1778) as companions a few years later.<sup>109</sup> The versions of these famous pictures present in West's gallery in 1806 had been painted by him and his assistants as copies or replicas expressly intended for display there. *The Death of Wolfe* had been painted in 1776 and *Battle of La Hogue* had been painted as its companion in 1778. It is thought that West's assistants, first his eldest son Raphael and then John Trumbull, worked on the copies, especially *Battle of La*

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and Copley looking stilted. West undoubtedly perceived de Louthembourg as a major force in the genre at this time.

<sup>105</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 7:2694 (16 March 1806).

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 7:2757 (11 May 1806).

<sup>107</sup> Mitchell 1967, 268.

<sup>108</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 7:2757 (11 May 1806), and quoted in Mitchell 1967, 267.

<sup>109</sup> Benjamin West, *The Battle of the Boyne*, 1778, oil on canvas, 152.5 x 211 cm (60 x 83 inches), The Collection of the Duke of Westminster. For Grosvenor's commission of the companion pictures, see Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 209-210.

*Hogue*.<sup>110</sup> Both paintings were subsequently retouched in 1806 in advance of their exhibition with the newly-painted *Death of Nelson*. West painted a number of versions of *Death of Wolfe*, and he always had one on view in his house as a constant reminder to visitors of his success and reputation. *The Battle of La Hogue* was also highly valued at the time by West's constituency, and according to the artist David Wilkie (1785-1841), was 'a complete work of art'.<sup>111</sup> Indeed, there were a number of paintings that West copied specifically to keep certain images constantly on view and to demonstrate the versatility and range of his *oeuvre*. In 1797, West relayed to Farington his desire to make 'up in the course of 8 or 10 years more a collection to sell at once'.<sup>112</sup> With his legacy in mind, West seems to have been planning a semi-permanent installation of his life's work at his studio, even long before *Death of Nelson*, and was already accumulating a body of his own works, the previously discussed 'West's Wests'.<sup>113</sup> In 1805 the publication of *Public Characters* included 'A Correct Catalogue of the Works of Mr. West', which noted about 200 works in his possession, many small studies for larger, finished works, but also many copies after his most famous paintings.<sup>114</sup> During this time, West began to foresee a permanent display of his work and to understand the potential of his own collected *oeuvre*.<sup>115</sup> Other artists were also forming their own galleries, full of their pictures and intended to build their legacy, notably Turner, who opened a gallery on Harley Street in 1804.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 215.

<sup>111</sup> Smith 1829/1917, 2:302.

<sup>112</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 3:842 (21 May 1797).

<sup>113</sup> See the second chapter of this thesis for the initial discussion of West's Wests, the paintings by his own hand that he maintained for his collection.

<sup>114</sup> *Public Characters* 1805, 564-569.

<sup>115</sup> Bryant 2009, 63.

<sup>116</sup> For more information about the gallery, see D. Brown and R. Mallord Turner, *Turner's Gallery: House and Library* (London: Tate Britain, 2001).

In his display of *Death of Nelson*, flanked by *Death of Wolfe* and *Battle of La Hogue*, West created a pictorial dialogue between the three pictures and their heroes of the past, recent past, and present.<sup>117</sup> This didactic portrayal of heroes and the associated military victories gave greater context to Nelson as a subject and as a painting. This was a great display of patriotism showcasing victorious battles of the British in 1692, 1759, and 1805 against their greatest and longstanding rival, France. During the Seven Years' War (1756-1763), the term 'British empire' came into use as a way of unifying Britain's disparate overseas possessions.<sup>118</sup> The installation enabled visitors to draw their own parallels between these past and present heroes, and the tactics of these successful engagements on land and water in defence of the empire. Two of the three pictures, *Death of Nelson* and *Battle of La Hogue*, depict battles at sea, which also paid homage to the importance of bodies of water to a maritime nation. For the normally reticent West, the display reveals his political motivations to stay in good graces with his British constituency, which demonstrates more generally the period's politicization of art and artistic culture.<sup>119</sup>

In his selection of subjects, West was also showcasing his transatlantic expertise, depicting scenes set in various geographies, including North America, the English Channel, and the waters off the coast of Spain. These geographies align with West's personal journey to London over forty years earlier, from America by way of Gibraltar (where his boat was stopped) and then Italy, and ultimately crossing the Channel to come to Britain. Though these are probably not intentional personal references in the pictures, the range of geographies reinforces West's identification with the Atlantic world. However, the personal

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<sup>117</sup> The actual Battle of La Hogue occurred in May 1692; General Wolfe was killed during the Seven Year's War in Quebec in September 1759; and the death of Nelson occurred in October 1805 at sea during the Battle of Trafalgar at Cape Trafalgar.

<sup>118</sup> D. Fordham, 'Scalping: Social Rites in Westminster Abbey', in Barringer, Quilley and Fordham 2009, 99.

<sup>119</sup> For more on the politicization of art, see Hoock 2003.

connections that he did want to impose on the spectator were how these three paintings represented aspects of his own artistic development. By clustering *Death of Wolfe*, *Battle of La Hogue*, and *Death of Nelson* together in this installation, he was highlighting the evolution of his history paintings, given the more than thirty-year span of their production. The juxtapositions were deliberate and forced visitors to think about history – the history of the British in battle and of the history paintings of West.

These comparisons were further enhanced by other objects displayed at the time in the house. Nearby, visitors could look at West's by-then famous Reni, *Head of Christ Crowned with Thorns* (fig. 29), and Lamentation scenes by the Carracci that related closely to aspects of *Death of Wolfe*.<sup>120</sup> Visitors could also find contemporary battle scenes from various periods, including *A Skirmish of Cavalry, and a Battle in the Distance*, a painting by the seventeenth-century history painter Jacques Coustois (called Il Borgognone, 1621-1676), as well as works by West's contemporaries such Trumbull's *The Sortie Made by the Garrison of Gibraltar* (fig. 40).<sup>121</sup> Additionally, seascapes and naval battle scenes by marine painters, such as seventeenth-century Dutch artist, Willem Van de Velde, as well as contemporary artist, Dominic Serres, would have been on view in the house and would have resonated with *Battle of La Hogue* and *Death of Nelson* for viewers.<sup>122</sup> These obvious references, however, were never made for his audience directly. Though West hung his Old Master and contemporary pictures nearby, he typically installed them in adjacent rooms to suggest influence, association, homage, and rivalry, but not mimicry.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Christie's, 23 June 1820, day 2, lot 83 (Reni), and Christie's, 23 June 1820, day 2, lot 55 and 56 (Carracci).

<sup>121</sup> Christie's, 23 June 1802, day 1, lot 21 (Il Borgognone), and Christie's, 1 July 1820, day 5, lot 97 (Trumbull). The Il Borgognone picture location is unknown.

<sup>122</sup> Christie's, 1 July 1820, day 5, lot 84 (Velde) and lot 74 (Serres).

<sup>123</sup> For details of Old Master paintings in specific rooms of the house, see the private sale catalogue produced by West's sons: *A Catalogue of a Very Superior Collection of Pictures by the Old Masters Collected During the*

West's interest in creating a series of compositions and their installation can be seen as an extension of his great passion for instruction and education, both of artists and the public. Inside his home, he tried to create an ideal environment for instruction and exhibition that emphasised the pedagogical role of his paintings and his collection. He parlayed these ideals to his former students who had returned to America and were trying to form an academy. In a letter to an American friend and founder of the Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia, William Rawle (1759-1836) on 21 September 1805, West expressed his ideals to 'instruct, not only the mind of the student in what is excellent in art – but that it should equally instruct the eye and judgement of the public to know, and properly appreciate excellence when it is produced – because the correct artist and a correct taste in the public must be in unison'.<sup>124</sup> In the same letter, he also stressed the importance of 'ancient and modern art' as a means of forming the judgement of artists and the public as to 'what was truly grate, just, and beautiful in art'. West had the educational role of his display in 1806 in mind, and this purpose was an undercurrent of many of his installations at Newman Street.

To stage his installation of *Death of Nelson*, West already had the ideal exhibition environment, nearly thirty years in the making. With its series of rooms, lit from above and walls covered in crimson and green, two colours known to visually enhance pictures, the spaces were primed to highlight his pictures and his collection to their best advantage. When visitors entered the house, they walked down the long gallery filled with his studies for various history paintings, which in 1806 would have included those for *Death of Wolfe*, *Battle of La Hogue* (fig. 83), and *Death of Nelson*, as well as associated engravings after other finished pictures. At the end of the long gallery, visitors then walked into the square

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*Last Half Century, with so much Taste and Judgement by the Late Benjamin West, Esq., President of the Royal Academy* (London: Reynell, 1822).

<sup>124</sup> Letter from Benjamin West to William Rawle, 21 September 1805, reproduced in B. West, 'Notes and Queries', *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 13, no. 4 (1890): 481-482.



gallery, where they saw these three physically large (each roughly 6 x 8 feet) history paintings. West had carefully staged this installation to lead the visitor through the development and narrative of his history paintings. He had a penchant for drama and spectacle in his installations, both inside his house and at other venues, often using hangings draped over frames. Though no image of the *Death of Nelson* installation exists, West's use of theatrical draperies can be seen in his study for an installation at 125 Pall Mall (fig. 84) during the exhibition of his *Christ Rejected by the Jews* (1814).<sup>125</sup> West's dramatic staging of *Death of Nelson* probably included such velvet hangings and other dramatic effects, as shown in John Pasmore's (fl.1821-1845) *West's Gallery* (fig. 85). The installation depicted in the Pasmore painting, though posthumous and depicting the later additions to the gallery, is based on West's intended plans and probably indicates the display strategies in use inside Newman Street before his death. Like the installations at Somerset House, West seemed to have organised his pictures around a central large picture on a wall and, to enable optimal viewing, he also utilised cantilevered tilting of pictures hung closest to the ceiling.

The space also had a unique, peaceful, and respectful atmosphere. In stark contrast to the descriptions of crowds and noise levels at the Academy exhibitions, visitors to 14 Newman Street often recalled the space with notions of reverence. Leigh Hunt described it in such terms commenting on its tranquillity and 'the quiet of West's gallery' that he and his mother used to walk through 'as if we were treading on wool'.<sup>126</sup> The reverential ambience of the space aligned with the intentions of the patriotic images on the wall. History paintings were meant to instruct and elevate the minds of the spectators and promote the public

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<sup>125</sup> Kraemer 1975, 55–56, and Von Erffa and Staley 1986, 359. Benjamin West, *Christ Rejected by the Jews*, 1814, oil on canvas, 508 x 660 cm (200 x 260 inches), Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia.

<sup>126</sup> Hunt 1949, 87.

good.<sup>127</sup> These heroic deaths and acts of valour were intended to be models of behaviour, inspiring similar virtues of duty, loyalty, and patriotism in the sympathetic public. Contemporary history paintings, in particular, engaged the emotions of the visitors, who were familiar with the stories depicted and who felt this history personally. West's own display of *Death of Wolfe* at the Academy in 1771 created a sensation and elicited such an emotional response that it famously brought some viewers to tears. In the context of these death-of-the-hero pictures, there was an even greater sense of loss and mourning amongst the spectators. In the case of Nelson, unlike Wolfe which was painted over a decade after the fact, the battle and his death had just occurred, creating a real immediacy about the picture. West created a space where visitors could pay tribute to the hero. When one of the naval officers depicted in the picture came to see *Death of Nelson* on view in July 1806, Farington found him kneeling before the picture.<sup>128</sup> In June 1807 when West witnessed visitors' reactions to an altarpiece by Rembrandt on view at Christie's, he equated the 'extraordinary effect of the picture' and how they were 'struck with reverence' to the reactions of visitors when they first saw *Death of Nelson* in his house.<sup>129</sup> According to Farington, he explained, 'The first time He saw such an effect produced by a picture was when His picture of the death of Lord Nelson was exhibited in His room. By an instinctive motion the hand accompanied the mind, & when the picture was approached the Hat was taken off.'<sup>130</sup> This solemn atmosphere was not unique to West and his *Death of Nelson*. Copley's display of *The Death of Chatham* elicited a similar response in what one writer for *The St. James's Chronicle* described as 'the room – whatever number of people it contains – is silent, or the company whispers as if at the bead of

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<sup>127</sup> Neff 1995, 82.

<sup>128</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 8:2806 (8 July 1806).

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 8:3064 (10 June 1807).

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

a sick person'.<sup>131</sup> It was undoubtedly West's intention to maintain a peaceful setting meant for admiration and tribute, but it would have been difficult during the three-month showing of *Death of Nelson*, which witnessed thousands of visitors, to keep the environment completely calm. Of the immense crowds, however, West told Farington that they 'behaved extremely well'.<sup>132</sup>

Many important British and American political, artistic, and society figures came to see West's *Death of Nelson* installation, and many became subscribers to the print made after the picture by Heath. According to Farington, when Lord Elgin (1766-1841) was viewing *Death of Nelson*, he pointed to *Death of Wolfe* and *Battle of La Hogue* and said he had fine prints of those two pictures, but asked West 'who painted them?'<sup>133</sup> This rare instance of non-recognition of two of West's most famous pictures probably also speaks to the fact that he had a number of other artists' works on view in his galleries. The observation also suggests the importance of prints, and in this case, companion prints of these pictures. West marketed print subscriptions for his prints after *Death of Nelson* to collectors to complete their series that already included *Death of Wolfe* and *Battle of La Hogue*. His well-planned exhibition strategies were motivated as much by selling these prints after the pictures as selling the paintings themselves.

*The Death of Lord Nelson* in its production and display tells a concurrent story of both individual artistic self-promotion and the representation and reception of contemporary history painting in the early nineteenth century.<sup>134</sup> It also chronicles a pivotal and distinct period in West's career that witnessed his return to the type of images that established his

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<sup>131</sup> *St. James's Chronicle* quoted in Whitley 1928/1968, 1:358, and Neff 1995, 83.

<sup>132</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 8:2802 (2 July 1806).

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 8:2806 (8 July 1806).

<sup>134</sup> Quilley 2011, 222.

name in Britain and America as a leader in the national school of history painting. In this way, *Death of Nelson* signified a valiant attempt to rehabilitate his reputation as a history painter, one that for the first time since 1772 could excel with or without the royal seal of approval, and establish his legacy. Of course, he still vied for royal praise and favour as did all artists of the period, and ultimately he longed to return to the comfortable days of royal patronage. The success of his exhibition of Nelson was thus sweetened when Queen Charlotte sent word for him to bring *Death of Nelson* to Buckingham House to be viewed and requested that her name be added to the list of subscribers to the print after the picture.<sup>135</sup> According to West, his rival exhibition was a hugely popular triumph, attracting 30,000 visitors in three months.<sup>136</sup> He told Farrington that he issued 6,500 cards and that most visitors came in 'parties of 8 or 10'.<sup>137</sup>

With the exhibition of *The Death of Lord Nelson* at his studio in 1806, he announced to the public that his career as one of the greatest history painters of his generation was inextricably linked to the nation, its sovereign, and the Royal Academy and was made distinctive by his unique transatlantic perspective. In an almost unanimous vote of confidence, West was returned to the helm of British art when, in late 1806, he was re-appointed as president of the Royal Academy. The following year, Lawrence commented to Farrington that 'in spite...of his failings, I am more and more convinced that his loss would be the greatest that the arts in this country could at this period suffer'.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Farrington 1978-1998, 8:2803 (2 July 1806), and Alberts 1978, 326.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 8:2802 (2 July 1806).

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Letter from Thomas Lawrence to Joseph Farrington, 8 October 1807, LAW/1/164, The Royal Academy of Arts Archives, London.

The painting's success in its display at the studio, and its subsequent showing at the Academy in 1811, however, did not elicit a buyer. In April 1807, a few months after West was restored to the Academy presidency, he expressed his dissatisfaction with the picture. According to Farington, he and West discussed,

...the Academy & of West being restored to the Chair, which He said was very proper, I remarked on West still continuing His application to study with as much perseverance as formerly. He said He could not allow it to be study; it was not the study of anything, it was only copying *Himself*; & proceeding in a fixed manner. He said His death of Lord Nelson was far inferior to His Death of General Wolfe.<sup>139</sup>

*The Death of Lord Nelson* remained in West's collection until his death and became part of the permanent display of his pictures from about 1821 to 1829.<sup>140</sup> The unprecedented number of visitors to his house and their positive response to the exhibition of his works gave West a great deal of confidence and influenced his plans for the space and his collection.

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<sup>139</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 8:3029 (21 April 1807).

<sup>140</sup> Robins, 22-25 May 1829, lot 91.

## Conclusion

Though today it is little more than a Royal Mail car park (fig. 86), over two hundred years ago West's Newman Street home was one of the most important artistic spaces in London.<sup>1</sup> The magnificent spaces and collection of objects expressed his unique artistic identity and his impact on history painting, its production, training, marketing, display, patronage, and collecting. When West's house was sold in 1829, along with the remainder of the collection, the auction sale catalogue affirmed its legacy as a place symbolic of the ideals and ambition of one of the generation's most successful history painters:

The great renown acquired by this illustrious Painter, associating his professional labours with the beneficence of the late Sovereign, and the founding of his Royal Academy, naturally excites the most agreeable reminiscences of the last reign. In WEST's Gallery, almost all the British and Foreign Nobility,—all the great and honoured of the age, for half a century, were used to assemble; and here were first discussed . . . the national importance of the culture of Fine Arts. Hence, no site is more sacred to Science and Arts than this Gallery, which, fondly familiar to the memory of three generations, almost from infancy, is about to close forever upon this last display of the genius of its venerable Founder.<sup>2</sup>

West projected the image of a successful history painter throughout his sixty-year career. Even during his most troubled years, in the early nineteenth century, West remained confident, reflecting on his career, reinvigorating his status, and ultimately defining his legacy. He was always mindful of his own history and consciously manipulated the public's perception of it.<sup>3</sup> His home and collection can be fitted into a much larger scheme of self-fashioning, of both his reputation and artistic identity, that runs right through his career, and

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<sup>1</sup> London City Council File Number AR/HB/SG/BP.442, English Heritage Society, London. Numbers 1-16 Newman Street were demolished c. 1938.

<sup>2</sup> Robins, 22-25 May 1829, title page.

<sup>3</sup> Von Erffa 1973, 5-6.

becomes increasingly amplified after his 1806 *Death of Nelson* display. Working with Galt, in 1816, the first volume of his biography was published, which mythologized his early career in America and Italy, focusing on his innate ‘genius’ and the foundations of his art based on two seemingly opposed concepts: interest in nature coupled with the emulation of the Old Masters.<sup>4</sup> The publication, along with the second volume published the year of West’s death, has long been understood as a product of the painter’s orchestrated effort to craft and control his own reputation at the end of his life.<sup>5</sup> During the late nineteenth century, many artists became increasingly concerned with forging a history of British art in which the generation of the 1760s would feature, which was part of the wider attempt to form a national school. West spent a great deal of his career adjusting and securing his place in the history of British art, and his home and art collection were manifestations of these efforts.

Inside 14 Newman Street, West created a monument to himself and to his vision of the larger aspirations of British history painting. His distinctive identity as a modern Old Master with a transatlantic perspective made the spaces and contents inside Newman Street incredibly eclectic, worldly, and modern. It was decorated as a form of artistic self-representation, encompassing the artist’s own grand-scale history paintings as well as objects offering iconographic and formal inspiration and those relating to his social, political, and geographic worlds.<sup>6</sup> Combining the Old and New Worlds, his extensive collection represented the ideals of eighteenth-century art theory through the conventional Old Master collection, while at the same time it addressed the expanding modern world, through contemporary history paintings and portraits as well as Native American artefacts. In the

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<sup>4</sup> Carson 2000, 218. For a detailed analysis of Galt in this context, see Rather 2004, 324-345.

<sup>5</sup> Costello 2012, 30-31.

<sup>6</sup> Rosenthal 2006, 91.

ideal world that he created inside his house, the collection became a contextualising component of his ever-changing displays centred on his current history paintings. His epic history paintings mingled comfortably with casts after antiquity, paintings by Titian, Native American objects, and the works of his British and American contemporaries. West curated strategic groupings of objects to create certain messages. For example, by placing himself alongside an artistic hero such as Rubens, West created associations with his own art, asserting his admiration but also engendering notions of equality and even competition. He also created displays that brought out comparisons and associations between his own works, such as with the *Death of Nelson* exhibition, which paired complementary contemporary history paintings. In addition, his use of drawings and studies in his displays enabled him to showcase his academic training and artistic process. These various display strategies and arrangements expressed his theories on art and the Academy's, and also emphasised his desire to combine the old and the new. His aims were, of course, personal and somewhat self-serving to showcase his achievements and genius, but he also sought to address a shared identity and vision for British art. West's status and leadership positions, particularly as history painter to the King and President of the Royal Academy, made him feel responsible for the greater effort.

His house and collection served as a vehicle of personal identity, and incorporated his views for a shared identity for modern British history painting. In his desire to be seen as the leader of the British school, West encouraged understanding, training, and patronage at large for history painting. His generosity and compassion for other artists was one of his greatest assets and in turn, his longest lasting legacy. To support the development of other history painters, West welcomed dozens of students into his home and provided artistic training as well as complete transparency of the development, production, and display of his history



paintings. His collection was not only an invaluable resource for his own artistic practice, but became the same for his students, assistants, and patrons. For his patrons and the collecting public, the diverse content of his collection and his intermingled displays, were meant to encourage taste for modern British art with the acknowledgement of the pre-existing taste for continental Old Masters.<sup>7</sup> In this, West was asserting his vision for British art during this highly contested period of the development of a national school and ideas about a national collection.<sup>8</sup>

West's house at 14 Newman Street was indeed the site of his artistic identity, yet it can also be seen as microcosm of the larger debates occurring at the time around a national school of history painting and the related issues of collecting, patronage, display, artistic practice, education, and status. Developed in the dynamic context of the establishment of the Royal Academy, the proliferation of public exhibitions, and the debates about national art, West's collection and studio exemplified the aspirations of history painting in Britain. West's career in Britain, spanning from 1763 to 1820, coincided almost exactly with the reign of George III and with a period of crucial development in the history of British art and culture. It also coincided with a distinct era of military successes and failures for the British in their global campaigns, from the Seven Years' War to the Battle of Waterloo, which supplied subjects for contemporary history paintings.

George III's and West's deaths, within months of each other in 1820, closed a chapter on an era retrospectively viewed as a golden age of British art. Their importance as figureheads of this period, along with Reynolds, of course, was discussed widely. In 1808,

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<sup>7</sup> Encouraging British art, when the ideas were still being forged, meant that there was great debate regarding its direction. For collecting patterns that excluded British art, see Bermingham 2005, 150-151.

<sup>8</sup> See Hoock 2004, 1-18, and H. Hoock, "Struggling Against a Vulgar Prejudice": Patriotism and The Collecting of British Art at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of British Studies* 49, no. 3 (July 2010): 566-591.

the writer Robert Hunt ‘hailed George III as the chief patron of history painting’, and had referred to his reign as a ‘glorious era’ for the arts in which the failure of the aristocracy to follow his example was ‘astonishing and disgraceful’.<sup>9</sup> As the royal history painter to George III and the last living founding member of the Royal Academy, West’s career was memorialised by association. The aforementioned 1829 Robins sale catalogue asserted this connection, stating that West’s house and collection naturally ‘excites the most agreeable reminiscences of the last reign’.<sup>10</sup> In addition, an advertisement for the sale of the house and the collection in *The Standard* on 23 May 1829 reiterated the collection’s importance in terms of marking the era and memorialising not only West, but also George III and British painting:

The British Institution and the National Gallery becoming the depository of this entire Collection, and thus transmit to posterity a proud record of what could be accomplished by an Englishman, and in that peculiar art which had so long remained in its infancy. It was by the generous devotion of his pencil to the noblest aim of his profession that first brought British Painting into direct association with the throne, and raised it into an object of national importance in the mind of his Sovereign.<sup>11</sup>

West’s house and collection was one of a number of memorial-type projects during this period. In 1820, the notion of commemorating this period of art and George III’s royal patronage was becoming widely accepted and resulted in a number of publications and retrospective exhibitions of British artists. The British Institution was one of the first to mount retrospective exhibitions dedicated to modern artists (recently deceased); in 1813, the works of Reynolds, and, in 1814, a group show of the works of Hogarth, Wilson,

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<sup>9</sup> R. Hunt, ‘State of the Arts in Great Britain’, *The Examiner*, 10 January 1808, 2, and quoted in Hemingway 1992, 117.

<sup>10</sup> Robins, 22-25 May 1829, title page.

<sup>11</sup> *The Standard*, 23 May 1829, 1.

Gainsborough, and Zoffany.<sup>12</sup> This was a particular moment of memorialising the founders of the British School as a group and individually. There were also galleries dedicated to modern British art, most notably Sir John Fleming Leicester's (1762-1827) gallery in London, which opened in 1818.<sup>13</sup> Fleming Leicester's collection included several paintings by West as well as a bust of the artist by William Behnes (1795-1864) situated at the gallery's entrance. Leicester also displayed a cast of the artist's hands that William Whitley (1858-1942) described as a 'memorial of Mr. West's genius'.<sup>14</sup> Though the leader of the British School was unquestionably considered Reynolds, West was widely-accepted as the 'Father of British History Painting', which gave him presence and prominence in many of these galleries and exhibitions. Additionally, even though history paintings were becoming increasingly less fashionable (superseded by an interest in naturalism and other genres of paintings), West's and his contemporaries' paintings held places of honour in these galleries and exhibitions, viewed anew as historically relevant for their role in representing a particular moment in the history of British art and British military successes.<sup>15</sup>

Still alive during the beginnings of these memorialising exhibitions and galleries, West planned for the preservation of his artistic legacy and the long term importance of 14 Newman Street. He was keenly aware of his legacy and of the larger role of his studio as one

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<sup>12</sup> British Institution, *Catalogue of the Pictures by the Late Sir Joshua Reynolds...British Institution* (London: W. Bulmer & Co., 1813), and British Institution, *Catalogue of the Pictures by the late William Hogarth, Richard Wilson, Thomas Gainsborough and J. Zoffani...British Institution* (London: W. Bulmer & Co., 1814).

<sup>13</sup> See Leicester's catalogue of 1825: *A catalogue of pictures by British artists in the possession of Sir John Fleming Leicester, Bart: with etchings from the whole collection: including the pictures in his gallery at Tabley House, Cheshire : executed by permission of the proprietor : and accompanied with historical and biographical notices* (London: Fleming Leicester, 1825) (see especially pages 13-14 (no. 29) and 23-24 (no. 50)). For studies of Leicester's gallery and collection, see D. Chun, 'Public Display, Private Glory: Sir John Leicester's Gallery of British Art', *Journal of the History of Collections* 13, no. 2 (2001):175-189, and A. Bermingham, 'Gainsborough's *Cottage Door* in Sir John Leicester's 'Tent Room'', in Bermingham 2005, 137-149.

<sup>14</sup> Fleming Leicester 1825, 23-24, and Whitley 1928/1973, 1:310.

<sup>15</sup> This 'glorious era' of George III is held to embody the successes of British art as well as the achievements of the military campaigns, beginning with the Seven Years' War and ending with Waterloo.

of the most important centres for the practice and presentation of history painting for Britain and America in the late eighteenth century. In 1806 and as discussed in Chapter four, in anticipation of the exhibition of his *Death of Nelson*, West and his assistants painted several replicas of his earlier masterpieces in an effort to develop his own collected *oeuvre* to be displayed in his house. He also became interested in documenting the body of his work, and in 1811, he and the engraver Henry Moses (c. 1782-1870), published *The Gallery of Pictures Painted by Benjamin West, Esqr. Historical Painter to His Majesty and President of the Royal Academy, Engraved in Outline* (1811), which included engravings and lengthy descriptions of many of his major history paintings.<sup>16</sup> In the printed catalogue for his exhibition of *Christ Rejected*, one of his last monumental paintings, in 1814 (and probably in response to the recent 1813 retrospective of Reynolds' work at the British Institution) West announced that he would show 'the entire body of his Works, produced in the last half century, which he intends shall appear in Exhibition before the Public in the course of the two subsequent years'.<sup>17</sup> Though unrealised, West planned for the retrospective exhibition to take place in the rich surroundings of his home and studio. He consulted with his friend and fashionable Regency architect John Nash (1752-1835) on plans to transform the house into a modern one-man museum, adding more exhibition space to accommodate his late monumental pictures, such as *Death on the Pale Horse* (1817).<sup>18</sup> In 1815, West spent several months with Nash at his East Cowes Castle on the Isle of Wight presumably discussing the

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<sup>16</sup> H. Moses, *The Gallery of Pictures Painted by Benjamin West, Esqr. Historical Painter to His Majesty and President of the Royal Academy Engraved in Outline* by Henry Moses (London: J. Thomas, 1811).

<sup>17</sup> *Christ Rejected: Catalogue of the Picture, Representing the Above Subject, Together with Sketches of other Scriptural Subjects; painted by Benjamin West, Esq. Now exhibiting, under the special protection of H.R.H. the Prince regent, at the room, formerly the Royal Academy, no. 125, Pall-Mall* (London: C.H. Reynell, 1814), 15.

<sup>18</sup> Benjamin West, *The Death on the Pale Horse*, 1817, oil on canvas, 447 x 765 cm (176 x 301 inches), The Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia.

plans for the gallery.<sup>19</sup> Though West died before the museum's completion, his sons carried out their father's intentions, adding two large exhibition galleries, one referred to as the 'Great Room' measuring about 76 feet in length and 45 feet in width, at the cost £3,100.<sup>20</sup> The new gallery, called 'West's Gallery', was, according to the late art historian Albert Gardner, one of the 'most remarkable structures designed by an artist for the display of his own work'.<sup>21</sup> It anticipated and exemplified the innovative and dramatic exhibition spaces of the early nineteenth century with walls covered in rich crimson velvet, velvet rope barriers in front of pictures, visitor seating, archways, and state-of-the-art lighting using a large skylight partially concealed by a false 'opaque' ceiling and velvet festoons to deflect the light onto the walls.<sup>22</sup> In keeping with West's original enfilades-of-rooms layout, the nearly 100 paintings on view were shown in four connected rooms: the Entrance Gallery, the Room of Drawings, the Great Room and the Inner Room.<sup>23</sup> The remainder of the Old Master collection that had not been sold in the 1820 sales was displayed in the ground-floor parlours and the first floor rooms. When 'West's Gallery' opened in May 1821, visitors paid a shilling to see the artist's masterpieces and another shilling for the associated catalogue.<sup>24</sup> The painting of the gallery by Pasmore (fig. 85) in the year of its opening depicts the elegant new spaces and the richly displayed grand-scale, epic academic history paintings. The painting also portrays the

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<sup>19</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 16:5744 (6 November 1821).

<sup>20</sup> John Nash Ledgers, Shide Hill Ledger, NAS/1, volume 1, 146, Royal Institute of British Architects, London.

<sup>21</sup> A. T. Gardner, 'West's Legacy', *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 24, no. 7 (March 1966): 226.

<sup>22</sup> For a full description of the room, see J. Sartain, *The Reminiscences of a Very Old Man, 1808-1897* (New York: Appleton & Co., 1899), 169.

<sup>23</sup> G. Waterfield, *Palaces of Art: Art Galleries in Britain, 1790-1990* (London: Dulwich Picture Gallery, 1992), 78.

<sup>24</sup> Gardner 1966, 226.

galleries crowded with visitors. The remarkable expanse of the space is made clear in an engraving of the galleries by John Le Keux (1783-1846) (fig. 87) at about the same time.

Over the course of the first year, apparently over 95,000 visitors came to the gallery.<sup>25</sup> When the artist Robert Smirke (1753-1845) visited, he said ‘he thought it very desirable that the works of eminent Artists could be *singly* thus collected’.<sup>26</sup> For a number of years, the space continued to be a centre for artistic, creative, and social exchange in London for people from both sides of the Atlantic and represented an important period for the arts, and specifically history painting, under the munificent royal patron George III. However, after a few years the visitor numbers significantly declined in part because the exhibition was relatively static.<sup>27</sup> Sir George Beaumont attributed the lack of sustained interest also to the gallery’s location north of Oxford Street: ‘being too far removed from the Great line of communication’.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the decline of taste for history paintings, particularly of West’s overtly Old-Masterly academic compositions, gave way to less interest in a gallery dedicated to their presentation. Beaumont lamented to Lawrence, ‘When we consider the determined perseverance he showed to persist in the high walk he had at first chosen, though there was not a grain of taste for it in the country at that time, it does him the highest honour, and I am ashamed of the recent ungrateful neglect of my countrymen – it surprised and grieved me’.<sup>29</sup> Lawrence, probably mindful of his own legacy, was equally concerned with the lack of public interest and, in his 1823 discourse, urged the Academy students to go to West’s Gallery:

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<sup>25</sup> Whitley 1928/1973, 2:9.

<sup>26</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 16:5668 (26 May 1821).

<sup>27</sup> Gardner 1966, 234.

<sup>28</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 16:5686 (24 June 1821).

<sup>29</sup> Letter from George Beaumont to Thomas Lawrence, undated, and quoted in C. E. Lester, *The Artists of America* (New York: Baker & Scribner, 1846), 66.

At an aera when Historical Painting was at the lowest ebb, Mr. West, sustained by the beneficent patronage of his late Majesty, produced a series of compositions from sacred and profane history, profoundly studied, and executed with the most facile power, which not only were superior to any former productions of English Art, but, far surpassing contemporary merit on the Continent, were unequalled at any period below the schools of the Carracci...It is now more than three years that we have witnessed at his own residence an exhibition of the accumulated labours of this venerable and great artist...-totally neglected and deserted! The spacious rooms in which they are arranged, erected in just respect to a parent's memory, and due attention to the imagined expectations of the public, as destitute of spectators as the vacant halls of some assembly...But though unnoticed by the public, the gallery of Mr. West remains, Gentlemen, for you, and exists for your instruction.<sup>30</sup>

The efforts of West's sons and friends like Beaumont and Lawrence were not enough. By 1824, the sons acknowledged the demise of their commercial venture. According to Farington, as a last desperate effort, they came to him asking if they should hold up 'placards held in the streets announcing' the exhibition to attract visitors, an idea which he quickly rejected knowing it was not in line with their father's intentions and would tarnish his reputation.<sup>31</sup> Visitor numbers continued to dwindle and the sons began to look at their options, keeping in mind their father's original intentions and his legacy.

Though West had grand plans for a memorial gallery at his home, he had even greater plans for his collection on its own. Indeed, he was a vociferous collector of art, that of others and his own art. His reputation as a collector and connoisseur during his lifetime sometimes even surpassed that of his reputation as an artist. He utilised his position and his international connections to secure great works of art from both sides of the Atlantic, and he maintained his large 7,000 object collection until his death. He also maintained a large number of his own works as representative of his artistic achievements. Like many important artists and collectors of the period, West shaped his collection in hopes that it might eventually form the

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<sup>30</sup> Smith 1829/1917, 2:312-313.

<sup>31</sup> Farington 1978-1998, 16:5686 (24 June 1821).

nucleus of a national gallery. He was a prominent promoter of a national collection during his lifetime and participated in the debate about what constitutes a British national collection. His own collecting activities can be seen as his personal vision of what a national collection should be, incorporating both old and modern art. At the time of his death, a national collection did not exist, but that changed with the founding of The National Gallery in 1824. In February 1825, his sons with the help of their advisor, William Carey, a fervent supporter of West and modern British art, attempted to sell the entire collection to the British government for the new gallery.<sup>32</sup> This idea had been ruminating in the press for several years. In an 1821 newspaper critique entitled ‘State of Historical Painting in England, Mr. West’s Gallery’, the watercolourist Thomas Heaphy (1775-1835) advocated the ‘purchase of Mr. West’s splendid series of Historical Pictures on the public ground of their high and acknowledged merits’ by the government to be placed in a national gallery.<sup>33</sup> However, having just purchased Angerstein’s Old Master collection for a sizable sum, the British government apparently rejected the Wests’ offer.<sup>34</sup>

In 1826, West’s sons and Carey wrote a letter to John W. Taylor (1784-1854), Speaker of the House of Representatives of the United States, offering the collection to the American government for the foundation of a national gallery there for £40,000.<sup>35</sup> In the

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<sup>32</sup> Gardner 1966, 234, and Alberts 1978, 389. For more on William Carey’s support of West, see M. Myrone, *Bodybuilding: Reforming Masculinities in British Art 1750-1810* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press for the Paul Mellon Centre for British Art, 2005), 312.

<sup>33</sup> ‘Newspaper cutting [1821]’, AND/17/119, Anderdon Catalogues, The Royal Academy of Arts Archives, London.

<sup>34</sup> Gardner 1966, 234.

<sup>35</sup> The letter was read in the House of Representatives on 11 December 1826, but no further action was taken with the offer. For the complete record, see House of Representatives Document 8, 19<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 11 December 1826, House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. For summaries of the events, see Gardner 1966, 234, and Alberts 1978, 389-390. Raphael West drafted the amount of the offer on the back of one of his drawings now in the Pierpont Morgan Library. For the drawing, see Kraemer 1975, 92.



letter, the sons expressed hope that ‘the works of their father should find their final resting place of destiny in his native country’ for the ‘commencing’ of ‘a truly National Gallery’.<sup>36</sup> Their last efforts failed as the United States did not yet have plans for a national gallery. In 1829, the auctioneer George Robins auctioned West’s house and the extensive collection in a three-day sale on the premises at Newman Street.<sup>37</sup>

Though the objects and their setting would not continue to remain together as a memorial to the artist, their legacy lived on in the experiences and memories of the visitors and students. West’s legacy, of course, had already made its way over the Atlantic. His American students who returned to the United States formed the first, second, and third generations of artists in that country and developed studios, academies, and one-man museums largely based on their exposure to West’s studio and the Royal Academy in London. The impact of his collection, in particular, can be seen in the related assemblages of his students, including Robert Fulton’s (1765–1815) impressive art collection and Charles Willson Peale’s eclectic museum in Philadelphia.<sup>38</sup> West’s London studio, as a large, productive studio and showplace, set the standard for artists’ studios in late eighteenth-century and early-nineteenth-century London and colonial and post-colonial America. The international prominence of 14 Newman Street and its collection as a site of artistic identity and pilgrimage also anticipated the grand London studio houses of the mid-nineteenth-

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<sup>36</sup> Alberts 1978, 389.

<sup>37</sup> Robins, 22-25 May 1829.

<sup>38</sup> C. Rebor, ‘Robert Fulton’s Art Collection’, *American Art Journal* 22, no. 3 (Autumn 1990): 40-63, and C. C. Sellers, *Mr. Peale’s Museum: Charles Willson Peale and the First Popular Museum of Natural Science and Art* (New York: Norton, 1980). For the development of artists’ studios in America, beginning with West’s London studio, see also Blaugrund 1992.

century British artists, such as Frederic Leighton (1830-1896) and George Frederick Watts (1817-1904).<sup>39</sup>

When West died on the 10<sup>th</sup> of March 1820, he was apparently ‘on the sofa, on which he was accustomed to sleep, in the front drawing-room, at his house, No. 14, Newman-street, surrounded by some of the choicest specimens of ancient Art, both in pictures and drawings’.<sup>40</sup> In these surroundings, West was simply part of the fabric (fig. 88). For almost half a century, he had carefully planned and produced his surroundings, as if writing a visual autobiography.

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<sup>39</sup> For the magnificent homes of artists in London during the later nineteenth century, see Bryant 2009, and C. Dakers, *Artists at Home: The Holland Park Circle: 1850-1900* (London: Leighton House Museum, 1999).

<sup>40</sup> Smith 1829/1917, 2:307.

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