Institutional Hierarchies

Art and Craft

Establishing a Fine Art Tradition: The Spread of Academies

The French Encyclopedia or Philosophical Dictionary of the Sciences, Arts and Crafts (Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, hereafter the Encyclopédie), published between 1751 and 1772 in 17 volumes of text and 11 of plates, contained articles spanning the full range of human knowledge and activity. The article “Art” was careful to distinguish between on the one hand the liberal arts (also referred to in this period as the “fine” or “beautiful” arts), and on the other the “mechanical” arts such as the manual crafts of glassmaking, weaving or ceramics. From late antiquity, the “liberal arts” had included grammar, rhetoric, dialectic (the debating of different points of view to find reasoned truth), arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music. In 1746 the Abbé Charles Batteux (1713–1780) had established in his book The Fine Arts Reduced to a Common Principle (Les Beaux-Arts réduits à un même principe) a tradition of defining as “fine” the arts of poetry, music, painting, sculpture and architecture. Dance, engraving and landscape gardening were also often included in this category, but anything produced primarily for functional, ornamental or decorative purposes; for example, over-door, carriage or fire-screen paintings, was excluded.

Journeyman artists catered for a large market in decorative paintings, textiles and sacred images for homes and churches, and objects of domestic folk art were popular. Many of these have not survived for us to study, but they are valued increasingly highly: the Metropolitan Museum of Art
in New York has, for example, some good samples of eighteenth-century needlework. These “jobbing” artists created most of the visual culture known to those living outside cities, museums and palaces. The liberal arts were regarded principally as a product of the mind, the “mechanical” of the hand. An association with laborious physical effort (dirty hands), commerce and mass production had tainted for the intelligentsia the reputation of the mechanical arts. The liberal arts had, by contrast, benefited from their association with the dignity of human intellect. The Encyclopédie was in the vanguard of those calling for a change of attitude, and Denis Diderot (1713–1784), author of the article “Art” as well as one of the co-editors of the Encyclopédie proclaimed:

Craftsmen have thought of themselves as contemptible because we have held them in contempt; let us teach them to think better of themselves.
(Diderot and d’Alembert, 2013; I:717, my translation)

This heartfelt challenge to prejudice reflects eighteenth-century European concerns with status and hierarchy. These pitted the claims of the intellect and of knowledge (of history, literature, classical and Christian art and culture) against those of manual dexterity; study of the humanities against the messy materials of art; the disinterested artist against the “sordid” seeker of financial gain; and the unique products of genius and the imagination against the mass-produced. Such prejudices were often based on false assumptions and oppositions. “Craft” products could demonstrate originality; fine or liberal artists were often concerned with copying past art and with financial gain. In eighteenth-century Europe, however, theoretical statements crystallized into powerful discourse as they were institutionally strengthened and disseminated. By the end of the century the term “artist” was most closely associated with the liberal or fine arts. Prestigious academies of art, especially those conferred with “royal” status, defined their interests primarily in opposition to those of craftsmen. They were dedicated to the gentrification and professionalization of artists (Hoock, 2003, 2–7).

The physical craft of painting (mixing colors, preparing canvases, basic painting and drawing techniques) and sculpture (carving and casting) were taught traditionally through studio and workshop apprenticeships (Hallett, 2014, 41–42). The artist Henri Testelin (1616–1695), Secretary and Professor at the Académie royale, decried the fact that before the foundation of this Academy, painters and sculptors had sunk to the level of mere church decorators (Duro, 1997, 10–11). In 1685 the writer William Aglionby (c.1642–1705) lamented the fact that the British showed so little
serious interest in art and treated their artists as “little nobler than Joyners or Carpenters” (cited in Bindman, 2008, 195). In the Biographical History (1769) by the biographer, clergyman and print collector James Granger (1723–1776), consisting of engraved portrait heads of famous Englishmen up to and including the Glorious Revolution of 1688, “Painters” are ranked alongside “Artificers” and “Mechanics,” and below “Physicians, Poets, and other ingenious Persons” (cited in Pointon, 1993, 56). Artists in England were often ranked socially alongside carpenters, farriers and pin-makers (Brewer, 1997, 290). In Germany Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) admired the neoclassical designs of Flaxman, while deprecating their use in the ceramics produced by Josiah Wedgwood (1730–1795):

…the English, with their modern “antique” pottery and wares made of paste, their gaudy black and red art, gather piles of money from all over the globe: but if one is truthful one gets no more out of [this] antiquity than from a porcelain bowl, pretty wallpaper or a pair of shoe buckles. (Italian Journey (1786–1788), cited in Brewer, 1997, xxiii)

The massive increase in academies of art throughout the eighteenth century responded to the desire for respectability in occupations that had previously enjoyed a more ambiguous status. In this respect, art underwent a similar process to that of other professionalized activities such as medicine.

The term “academy” had first been applied to informal gatherings of philosophers and scholars held by the ancient Greek philosopher Plato. It was later applied in the early Renaissance to informal gatherings of artists and amateurs (those with a serious, scholarly interest in art) held in artists’ studios or collectors’ homes, sometimes supported by influential patrons such as members of the Medici family. The first official academy established on more formal lines, to include training, informed discussion, exhibiting opportunities and the representation of artists’ interests with a wider public, was the Academy of the Arts of Drawing or Accademia del Disegno in Florence, later known as the Accademia di Belle Arti, when it merged with other drawing academies in the city. Giorgio Vasari (1511–1574) assisted with the inauguration of this academy in 1563, in an attempt to raise the status of artists above that of craft guild members. However the academy incorporated a guild for the benefit of all (not just exclusively the best) artists and continued to offer some training in craft skills. Some recent accounts have played down its success in establishing a higher status for fine artists (Hughes, 1986, 50–61). This was followed in 1593 by the establishment of the Academy of Saint Luke (Accademia di San Luca) in
Rome, which implemented more successfully a methodical art education embracing the study of anatomy, geometry, perspective, life drawing, mathematics, proportion, architecture and debates on theory (Percy, 2000, 462–463). The Accademia di San Luca remained the only site of life-drawing classes in Rome until the foundation in 1754 of the city’s Life Drawing Academy (Accademia del Nudo) set up by Pope Benedict XIV (in office 1740–1758) as an affiliated institution and as a means of bolstering such provision (MacDonald, 1989, 77–91; Percy, 2000, 461). Papal support for these and other Roman academies led to their dominance in public commissions and they received many visiting foreign students, especially those who lacked such facilities in their own countries (Barroero and Susinno, 2000, 49). An academy was established in Milan in 1620.

The Académie royale in Paris (established in 1648) was greatly influenced by its Italian forebears. It benefited from the active support, including funding for salaried posts, of Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619–1683), the minister of Louis XIV (reigned 1643–1715) in charge of Fine Arts policy. It enjoyed a virtual monopoly in France over the teaching of “elevated” art, as well as the most prestigious royal commissions. It offered artists the opportunity to exhibit in regular Salons or public exhibitions, and established the paradigm for all subsequent European institutions in the “academic tradition” that aspired to teach and support the visual liberal arts. Its influence spread further through the establishment in 1666 of a partner institution, the Académie de France à Rome (the French Academy in Rome), where its best students were awarded scholarships in order to study at first hand ancient, Renaissance and seventeenth-century works recommended as models of excellence. A number of art schools and wealthy patrons in other European countries such as the Netherlands and Poland sponsored artists to study at the Académie royale.

The influence of the Académie royale in Paris and of its British equivalent, the Royal Academy of Arts founded in 1768, was extensive throughout the eighteenth century. Both of these institutions, however, were preceded by other groups and societies established to protect the interests and extend the expertise of artists. In France the Académie royale had originated in power struggles in the 1660s between the Maîtrise (a guild representing since the Middle Ages craftsmen of all kinds, including painters) and brevetaires, artists privileged and protected by the court and allowed to operate outside guild restrictions. The foundation of the Académie royale eventually established some clear distinctions; for example, academicians were not allowed to keep shops, “tainted” by association with commerce (Crow, 1985, 23–25). The ground had already been prepared for the craft–fine art distinction through the formation, in early seventeenth-century France, of a number of private academies, salons and
learned societies encouraging intellectual debates about the content and form of the arts. Generous patronage from the royal court and the Catholic Church had rewarded the talents of history painters versed in antique art and educated partly through visits to Italy.

Prior to the foundation of the Royal Academy in London, informal societies and academies had offered artists support with their work. From the late seventeenth century gatherings in London taverns and coffee houses had brought artists into regular contact with collectors, connoisseurs and antiquarians with the wealth, knowledge and social status necessary to support and promote artistic careers (Hallett, 2014, 25–32). This was the case with the Society of the Virtuosi of Saint Luke, a forerunner of the Royal Academy in London with an emphasis on connoisseurship and studying old masters (Hargraves, 2005, 8). Founded in 1689 (and active until 1743) its members included practicing artists and lovers of art. It held meetings in taverns, where portraits and architectural drawings were discussed and some works of art raffled (Bignamini, 1991, 21–44; Figure 1.1). The Rose and Crown Club (c.1704–1745) was a “conversations

Figure 1.1 Gawen Hamilton (1698–1737): *A Conversation of Virtuosis ... at the Kings Arms*, oil on canvas, 87.6 × 111.5 cm, 1735. National Portrait Gallery, London. Source: © National Portrait Gallery, London.
Clubb [sic]” and almost a parody of the Virtuosis that was active in promoting the genre of the conversation piece or informal group portrait (Bignamini, 1991, 44–61; Hargraves, 2005, 9). A private academy (or fee-paying art school) in Great Queen Street was set up in 1711–1720 by a group of artists, its first Governor being Sir Godfrey Kneller (1646–1723). This included a life class (Bignamini, 1991, 61–82). Between 1720 and 1768, private academies were set up in Britain not only in London but also in other cities including Dublin, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Birmingham (Bignamini, 1989, 443–444). In Edinburgh, the Cape Club was established in 1764 in order to bring together actors, painters, poets and musicians. Some of its members later joined the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, founded in 1781.

Such societies were “social formations” in the Marxian sense that contemporary historical, social and market conditions played a key role in their development. They were often founded on and helped to disseminate a discourse of sociability, politeness, gentility and refinement (Myrone, 2008, 196), and prepared the ground for artistic markets, practices and audiences that continued throughout the eighteenth century to provide a wider context for artistic production than that offered by academies of high art. This issue will be discussed further in Chapter 3, but it is perhaps worth mentioning here that communities such as the Society of Dilettanti founded in the early 1730s as a society of art patrons, connoisseurs and Grand Tourists, continued throughout the eighteenth century to bring together over the fine wines and dining tables of gentlemen’s clubs artists, connoisseurs and other arbiters of taste. This particular society sponsored research into antiquities and granted practical support to artists in the form, for example, of travel grants to Greece and Rome.

An important early institution in London was the Saint Martin’s Lane Academy, which brought together members of these early groups and remained active until the Royal Academy was established. This was set up in 1720 by the artists John Vanderbank (1694–1739) and Louis Chéron (1660–1725), and formally re-established in 1735 by Hogarth (Bignaminim 1991, 83–124). It offered training in anatomy and drawing, including the copying of abstract shapes, parts of the body and of the whole body. Unlike the later Royal Academy it did not give precedence to an Italianate idealizing style, but placed emphasis on the close observation of nature. Under Hogarth’s leadership it offered an alternative to continental academic approaches: the artist disliked intensely the reverence for antiquity, hierarchical structures and “foreign” values of continental academies. Hogarth found these to be over-bureaucratic and undemocratic and challenged, in his *Analysis of Beauty*, what he saw as a pretentious continental aesthetic. He instituted an egalitarian constitution at Saint
Martin’s (Hargraves, 2005, 10–15). Unlike the Académie royale in France, Saint Martin’s Lane was a privately, not publicly, regulated institution; it was financially self-supporting (through uniform subscription rates) and did not include court-sponsored, salaried, hierarchical posts. Hogarth was more involved in day-to-day teaching there than Reynolds would later be at the Royal Academy in London. He set up at the Saint Martin’s Lane Academy a life-drawing class that was run on democratic lines, with those attending able to take it in turns to “set [pose] the Figure,” and was large enough to accommodate a substantial number of artists at any one time rather than being exclusive. Hogarth was keen, however, for artists to seek other ways of working from observation.

As well as offering teaching, Saint Martin’s Lane functioned as a gentleman’s club, but one in which students might rub shoulders with their teachers, connoisseurs and patrons (Hallett, 2006b, 56). Like many of his contemporaries, Hogarth valued more informal kinds of social intercourse between artists, their students and assistants. He disliked the “high art” practice of copying old masters without necessarily understanding the visual “grammar” or underlying principles that unified the separate parts of a work (Fenton, 2006, 59–62). Toward the end of his life, he was critical of the view that it was necessary to travel abroad or to learn from continental masters working in the antique tradition even though he himself had continued to draw inspiration from French art and artists in particular (Simon, 2007, 1–68):

> Everything requisite to compleat [sic] the consummate painter or sculptor may be had with the utmost ease without going out of London at this time. Going to study abroad is an errant farce and more likely to confound a true genius than to improve him. Do skyes look more like skies, trees more like trees? Are not all living objects as visible as to light or shade or colour? Do mens bodys [sic] act and move as freely as in Rome? If so, all their limbs must be the same. (Hogarth, 1968 [1760–1761], 85; some original spelling and punctuation corrected)

Hogarth was among those artists who took part in exhibitions hosted by the Society of Artists, which grew out of the Society of Arts. The Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce (subsequently often known as the Society of Arts) was founded in 1754, with a view to improving the nation’s commercial successes in trade and manufacturing (Craske, 1997, 25; Green, 2015). It offered the first significant opportunity for many British artists to exhibit their works in public. The Society focused mainly on the “lesser” genres of conversation pieces, genre
paintings and novel treatments of, for example, fashionable subjects and northern-style light effects. It particularly encouraged less experienced and amateur artists. It was later subject to internal division, with breakaway groups focusing on the competing aims of practical (including monetary) support for artists and a role in public education (see Chapter 3).

Many official academies or proto-academies were set up in eighteenth-century Europe, although not all survived. They varied in the degree to which they tried to emulate a liberal arts culture, some moving on to do so some years after their foundation, but all provided artists with a more secure professional base. Those specializing in the fine arts were in a minority (Hoock, 2003, 27). Many (such as those at Berlin, Stockholm and Dresden) reorganized in order to serve better the needs of national manufacturing and commerce. Eighteenth-century academies or art schools included those in Antwerp (1663), Perugia (1673), Vienna (1692, transformed in the 1720s in line with the more exclusive fine art, French Académie royale model), Berlin (1696, reorganized 1786), Dresden (1705, reorganized in 1762), Edinburgh (where the short-lived Saint Luke’s Academy was formed in 1729 in order to protect the interests of Scottish artists and culture, following the union with Britain in 1707; Macmillan, 1986, 12), Madrid (1744), Brussels (1711), Glasgow (1753), Copenhagen (1754), Naples (1752), Venice (1750), Mainz and St Petersburg (1757), Kassel (1760), Düsseldorf (1762), Leipzig and Meissen (1764), London (1768), Stockholm (1768, reorganized 1779) and Mannheim (1769).

The Académie royale in Paris went on to influence branch schools in the French provinces as well as academies in other countries, which sometimes appointed French academicians and artists as directors or teachers. At the Kongelige Danske Kunstakademi (Danish Royal Academy) the French artist Jean-François-Joseph Saly (1717–1776) supervised drawing classes and competitions and generally “transplanted” French academic traditions until 1771 when Danish artists took over leadership roles and helped to establish a national tradition of painting that drew on both French and German examples (Saabye, 1989, 525–529). The internationalization of academic training is also evident in the fact that the German diplomat and arts administrator Christian Ludwig von Hagedorn (1712–1780) was among the directors of this academy (Craske, 1997, 132–133). By such means, academic art attained in the eighteenth century an unprecedented international consensus on the values and education relevant to high art.

By 1790 there were over 100 art academies, some of which extended beyond Europe to, for example, Mexico (1785) and, later, the first North American academy at Pennsylvania (1805). The rise of the academy has
been linked with a move away from court and church patronage as the growth of industry, commerce and a wider art-buying public facilitated fresh thinking on the forms and purposes of art. The growth of cities as centers of cultural excellence and consumerism was also influential. The burgeoning of academies undermined extensively, from the eighteenth century, the role of the guilds as social and economic communities for artists. Although “royal” or fine arts academies such as those in Paris and London tended to distance themselves from tuition in the “messy” or practical aspects of painting (mixing and applying paint, priming canvases), and left these to the realm of studio apprenticeships, other academies taught the technical skills traditionally required for the physical making of objects, and were thus commensurate with the power of the guilds. Academies varied with respect to the amount of control exercised over them by political leaders. The French monarchy gave a grant to cover all costs of the Académie royale and often intervened in matters of policy, regarding public culture as an arm of government, to be controlled through court-appointed Directors of Public Buildings.

The Royal Academy in London used royal support mainly as a temporary form of sponsorship until its income from exhibitions allowed a self-funded approach. This did not, however, prevent its members from feeling they were servants to the king, forced to seek his favor. This led to tensions at times, particularly from the 1790s, when advocates of political “liberty” (e.g. supporters of the French Revolution) objected to the Academy’s apparent submission to royal propagandist agendas (Hoock, 2003, 9–12, 20–22, 25–26, 50–51, 130–135); while loyalty to the monarchy was welcomed by some as an alternative to dissent (Hargraves, 2005, 146–147). There were ongoing ideological conflicts between its patriotism and its commitment to a more cosmopolitan cultural agenda, as it sought to establish a British School of painting (Hoock, 2003, 52, 67–70, 109–123, 222). Commissions, financial security and cultural prestige were to be gained from royal patronage. George III (reigned 1760–1820) lent the royal apartments at Somerset House to the Academy. He was a keen practitioner of architectural drawings and an important patron to the architect William Chambers (1723–1796); he collected Italian paintings and drawings and commissioned paintings from Nathaniel Dance-Holland (1735–1811), Benjamin West (1738–1820) and Thomas Gainsborough (1727–1788). A royal yet artist-led academy such as that in Britain, hosting its own exhibitions, also meant potentially that artists could extend their skills, promote their work and establish their status with less dependence on individual aristocratic patrons, although in practice many struggled to achieve this.
In those academies where state control or intervention occurred, such as that in St Petersburg, this was often for reasons of improving national skills, prospects and reputations in design, trade and manufacture. Precise motivations varied. In Spain, for example, the establishment of the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando (the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando) in Madrid allowed artists to avoid taxes and military service. There were also local variations in the precise instruction on offer. The French Académie royale’s curriculum did not include architecture, which was taught in a separate school, whereas the British Academy’s did.

**Academic Hierarchies: Institutions, Theory and Gender**

Academies of art established and perpetuated hierarchies of many kinds; these were “discursive formations” (see Introduction; Duro, 1997, 117) disseminating a particular set of cultural values and terminologies from a position of power and influence. In those aspiring to fine art status (such as those in Paris, London and Madrid), this was seen as part of their attempt to restore dignity and order to the less stable values of craft guilds (often known in the eighteenth century as “corporations”), whose outputs were related much more closely to the values of technical skill, commerce and fashion. Chapter 2 will look closely at the hierarchies of subject matter or kinds of art (genres) practiced by members of elite academies, the chief categories being (in descending order) those of history, portraiture, genre, landscape and still life. The focus here is on institutional hierarchies, the status attached to different artistic skills and the importance of theory in establishing the status of those forms of art considered the very highest or “grand.”

As academies formed, and in spite of their anti-guild prejudices, they often assumed a hierarchy for artist members that mirrored that of the guild. The latter’s categories of apprentice, journeyman and master became in academies those of student, provisional or associate member and academian. The submission and approval of a suitable piece of work or “reception piece” (the guild equivalent being a journeyman’s masterpiece) ensured progression from provisional or associate membership to the rank of fully fledged academian. In the French Académie royale, membership was linked with a particular genre, history painting (large-scale, complex compositions representing religious, historical, antique or mythological subjects) being considered the most severe test for a liberal artist. Acceptance as a
history painter was a prerequisite for access to the higher salaried ranks of Professor and then, in ascending order of importance, Rector, Assistant Rector, Treasurer, Secretary, Counsellor, Director or Chancellor. Such hierarchies were underpinned by bureaucratic systems of governance devised to distinguish academies from the more informal proceedings of gatherings of amateurs, society artists, connoisseurs (scholarly experts in art) and craft guilds (Hoock, 2003, 27–32). The career prospects of artists were related to the institutional frameworks in which they trained and developed.

It was often relatively easy for artists to gain admission to academy schools; for example, on the basis of the presentation of a piece of recent work such as a drawing of a sculptural cast or through the sponsorship of an existing academician who could confirm the student had already received some basic training. However, financial support for students varied considerably. Students at the Royal Academy in London complained that their peers in France did much better in terms of grants, as well as having easier access to apprenticeships in the workshops of eminent artists. This meant that, even though their education at the Academy was free, artists in Britain had to find independent means of supporting themselves; for example, as teachers and illustrators, and often resorted to self-taught access to the profession (Hoock, 2003, 54, 59–61). Travel abroad was often possible only through aristocratic patronage, but the Academy did offer some three-year Rome scholarships (Hoock, 2003, 59, 111–113). For artists enrolled at prestigious academies, tests, competitions and prizes on a range of topics from figure drawing to expression, perspective, osteology, anatomy, head and hand studies, were used to distinguish those who might succeed as fine artists in the highest genres.

The Académie royale supported its best students by preparing them to enter its Prix de Rome (Rome Prize) competition, which involved submitting oil sketches (done in the presence of a Professor) and, if successful, full-scale works. Winners received a medal and were granted three years advanced study (in drawing, history, literature, geography, costume, geography, geometry, perspective, anatomy and life classes) in the École des Élèves Protégés (School for Sponsored Students) founded in 1748, and, following the closure in 1775 of this School, royal pensions in preparation for studies in Rome (Crow, 1985, 178; Schoneveld-Van Stoltz, 1989, 221). They then proceeded to funded study (normally for three years but it could be as many as five) in individual studios in the French Academy in Rome, the city still regarded as the home of canonical art. There was in fact, from 1676, a close amalgamation of the French and San Luca academies that united and strengthened two of the most powerful artistic institutions in the city, even though they retained their separate titles.
Students who went to Rome found themselves at the heart of lively international networks, both artistic and diplomatic (Hallett, 2014, 73–81). They studied the works of antique and more recent (especially seventeenth-century) masters and were frequently asked to send any work they completed back to France, for the benefit of the monarch or of the Academy. If they continued to produce good work on their return to France, they attained associate and then (on successful completion of a reception piece) full academician status. Some artists, for example, François Boucher, Hubert Robert (1733–1808) and Claude-Joseph Vernet (1714–89), went to Rome at their own expense: they no doubt felt that the experiences and networks gained there would ultimately benefit their commercial fortunes. Other academies such as that in Madrid followed the French example by offering bursaries for study in Rome to its best students. It was common for German artists to serve their apprenticeships with artists based in Rome.

The main way in which academies of art attempted to assert their power and influence was through the use of theoretical debate to facilitate the formulation or application of rules governing artistic practice. The French Académie royale had established this way of working in the seventeenth century, through the Conférences ("Lectures") inaugurated in 1667 by its Director, the history painter Charles Le Brun (1619–1690). Le Brun's lecture notes were edited and published from 1680 onwards by colleagues at the Academy including Henri Testelin, Secretary to the Academy. The lectures focused on the works of revered masters such as Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio da Urbino) (1483–1520) and Nicolas Poussin (1594–1665) in order to highlight the ways in which artists might emulate the best work of Renaissance and classically inspired art. Le Brun was also keen to offer instruction in general pictorial issues such as the representation in painting of the facial expression of emotions. Paul Duro has suggested (1997, 122) that, although the ambition was to generate in this way the "rules" of art (especially history painting) that would serve contemporary artists, in fact there were practical difficulties in applying to one artist’s work the principles deduced from another’s. As the French Academy moved into the later seventeenth, then eighteenth centuries, the emphasis was much more on trying to emulate the general approach taken by earlier, esteemed artists rather than on any prescriptive following of rules. By this time the concept of the formal lecture series had also degenerated into the repetition or the delivery of eulogies of deceased artists, with little critical content. There were some exceptions: at the end of the seventeenth century, the writer Roger de Piles (1635–1709), appointed as “honorary amateur” in the Academy, stimulated fresh critical debate there (Crow, 1985, 36).
commentary was offered increasingly in France and throughout the rest of
the eighteenth century by a growing number of journalists, amateurs and
critics working outside the Academy (see Chapter 4).

In England the *Discourses on Art* written and delivered every one or two
years between 1769 and 1790 to academicians and students in London by
the President of the Royal Academy, Joshua Reynolds, covered many top-
ics: the need for a disciplined approach to art; the essence of the grand
style; the nature of beauty, invention, expression, color, drapery; consist-
cy of style, taste, imitation, ideal beauty, novelty, contrast, variety and
simplicity; sculpture and modern dress; genius and the need to study old
masters; poetry, painting and nature; and the significance of Gainsborough’s
looser style of applying paint. Though infrequent by comparison with the
lectures and seminars offered to twenty-first-century fine art students,
Reynolds’ lectures offered, like their French antecedents, important
judgments on issues that permeated all aspects of the academic curricu-

lum, from drawing classes to the choice of masterpieces for copying. They
assumed great authority in critical and aesthetic debates across Europe.
The Academy in London also offered public lectures. Reynolds expresses
a perceptibly looser mid-eighteenth-century approach to the “rules” of art
than that expressed by the French Académie royale, especially in the lat-
er’s earlier days of establishing power and authority over artistic produc-
tion. Even at that time, those who recorded or articulated academic
doctrine, such as Henri Testelin and the writer on art, André Félibien
(1619–1695), knew that it would be applied to practice with a pragmatic
moderation.

For Reynolds imitation and originality were not incompatible. He felt it
was indispensable to study old masters in order to gain understanding of
the principles guiding their work, the general workings of taste, but also as
a means to achieving individual creativity:

> Invention, strictly speaking, is little more than a new combination of those
images which have been previously gathered and deposited in memory:
nothing can come of nothing: he who has laid up no materials, can produce
no combinations. (Reynolds, 1975 [1797], 27)

To Reynolds, the artist of “genius” was well educated in the liberal arts of
poetry and history, conversant with the formal techniques and aesthetic
principles derived from close study of masters such as Raphael and Tiziano
Vecellio, known as Titian (c.1485/90–1576) and able to create a general
effect (rather than a minute imitation) likely to please the informed viewer
(Reynolds, 1959, 198–199). Reynolds himself drew generously on the
compositional formats and details of past masters such as Anthony Van Dyck (1599–1641), in the creation of his own works (Hallett, 2014, 4–6, 38–39, 59–60, 81–88, 105–108). He introduced professorships in ancient literature, history and antiquarianism alongside those already established in painting, sculpture, anatomy, perspective and geometry. Kauffman’s portrait of him reveals his attachment to learning, including books and a bust of Homer (Figure 1.2, see color plate section). Reynolds considered that the cultivation of genius, with its judicious yet creative use of erudition, was an essentially male pursuit of which female artists could offer at most a pale imitation: they were perceived as having little capacity for independent thought or creativity (Perry, 2007, 50–51).

For women artists, training outside the academies was often a necessity, since decorum barred them from attendance at life-drawing classes and observation of the male nude model. From 1770 the display of “women’s art” such as embroidery was banished from Royal Academy exhibitions. Angelica Kauffman (1741–1807) was one of only two women founder members of the Royal Academy in London, but could not attend life classes (Wassyng Roworth, 1992, 23). This was a disadvantage with regard to history painting, which made extensive reference to the heroic male body. However, as with many women artists, this did not prevent her from securing important commissions. She traveled to study in Rome and Florence. She studied literature, history and languages, and this allowed her to produce work in the “masculine” genre of history in spite of the later charge that her work was that of a “sentimental woman” (William Shaw Sparrow, 1905, cited in Wassyng Roworth, 1992, 12; Hyde and Milam, 2003, 9). This may have been due to the fact that she often feminized male bodies in her history paintings. Kauffman also took advantage of exhibiting opportunities at the Society of Artists (Chapter 3) and the Royal Academy. In her decorative roundels for the ceiling at Burlington House, site of the present-day Royal Academy, she emphasized both the intellectual skills (invention, composition) and practical skills (color and drawing) valued by contemporary male artists, and represented these attributes through a series of allegorical female figures (Wassyng Roworth, 1992, 68–72).

Mary Moser (1744–1819) was the other woman founder of the Royal Academy, her work being less controversial in that it focused on the traditionally feminine skill of flower painting. Anne Seymour Damer (1749–1828) tackled the more traditionally masculine medium of sculpture. She worked in a neoclassical style and was an honorary exhibitor at Royal Academy exhibitions. Like Kauffman she was often taunted on the basis of her forays into masculine artistic concerns. It was not until the 1860s that women students were fully admitted to the Royal Academy’s schools and
the first female academician was appointed in the early twentieth century (Hoock, 2003, 32, 55).

The Venetian artist, Rosalba Carriera (1675–1757), a miniaturist and painter of pastel portraits, was admitted in 1705 as a member of the Roman Accademia di San Luca. Her celebrity, the popularity of the works she produced and her willingness to include more “elevated” allegorical references in her work contributed to her success in acquiring full, rather than honorary membership (Johns, 2003, 20–45).

In France in 1770 a resolution was passed limiting the number of women members of the Academy there to four. The portrait painter, Élisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun (1755–1842), one of the fortunate few, was admitted in 1783, but not as a history painter (Goodden, 1997, 49). She was among those women artists who learned their trade mainly in the studios of relatives or local artists. She was taught a great deal by her fellow artists Gabriel-François Doyen (1726–1806), Claude-Joseph Vernet and Jean-Baptiste Greuze (1725–1805), and was a favorite of the royal family prior to the Revolution. The latter brought little advantage to women artists, as the Institut de France, a temporary replacement for the Académie royale established by revolutionaries critical of the Académie, banned all female members.

A Hierarchy of Skills

What then were the “rules” or values fine art academies identified, if only as rough guides to practice? A hierarchy of skills persisted in eighteenth-century academic theory, although it was at times subject to challenge. From the seventeenth century, the most important skill was that of composition, often known as “design” (or the Italian disegno, which could also mean simply ‘drawing’). This involved the total intellectual, narrative and formal conception of a painting: decisions about which figures, accessories, backgrounds, areas of light and shade to include in a work, and how to place them in relation to one another. The term “invention” was also used in relation to this nexus of conceptual skills. Next came expression – the codified configurations of facial features, gestures and bodily poses that expressed the emotions of figures in a way that would be legible to the viewer. This skill was seen as equal to that of the epic poet, legitimized by the dictum *ut pictura poesis*, “as is poetry, so is painting,” formulated by the ancient Roman poet Horace (65–8 BCE), which suggested an equivalence of the arts of poetry and painting. Then came skill in perspectival effects (founded on the liberal art of geometry), considered important for
general pictorial organization, which would help viewers to orientate themselves imaginatively and spatially in a scene.

Very close to the former skills in importance were drawing and proportion, both of which involved a close understanding of anatomy, mathematics and antique conventions in the representation of the human form. Illustrated drawing books helped to disseminate these skills in those countries that had not yet formed their own national academies, and these were often composed of copies of engravings from (mostly) French, Italian and Dutch seventeenth-century art. By the middle of the eighteenth century, such manuals made reference to formal academy studies and expressions; that is, those derived from poses and expressions prescribed for models in the life class (Hsieh, 2013, 395–397). Color was often demoted, as it was felt to offer a trivial, sensuous or decorative distraction from these more intellectual aspects of art. There was also an understanding that the texture of brushwork should not draw attention to itself. A smooth finish, in which brushstrokes merged seamlessly into one another, was necessary in order to prevent the pleasure of the eye taking precedence over that of the mind, the latter provided by a painting’s intellectual and philosophical meanings.

There was a hierarchy of media regulated by major academies. Oil paintings enjoyed a higher status than watercolors, which were for much of the century considered unsuitable for public exhibition, as their practitioners battled against an association with amateurism, “feminine pursuits” and quick landscape sketches (see Chapter 2). However, the medium of gouache (an opaque form of watercolor), was chosen increasingly as the century progressed, as some artists used it to suggest the gravity and surface textures of oils. Portraits in the “quick” medium of pastel were often derided by academic or professional artists until the technique matched the weightiness and sophistication of oil painting (Jeffares, 2015). Painting was generally viewed as more important than sculpture, the production of which was more closely associated with dirt and physical labor. At the same time, sculpture was often associated closely with the material remains of antiquity (see Chapter 2). Sculptures in bronze and marble enjoyed a much higher status than wood; plaster and terracotta were reserved for preliminary models. Prints were often considered inferior to paintings due to their mass production and their status as copies. Engravers were sometimes excluded from or marginalized by academies with a liberal arts focus, though some were so skillful and original in their methods that they enjoyed a healthy reputation (see Chapter 3). Drawings were not generally appreciated as works of art in their own right, or worthy of exhibition, but rather as stages in the evolution of finished works. Handicrafts, “curiosities” and needlework were favored by institutions specializing in
the applied arts rather than by liberal arts academies (Hargraves, 2005, 28–8, 56). Architecture inhabited an ambiguous space between the “practical arts” and the cultivation of knowledge of antiquity.

Drawing was often taught by encouraging students to progress from the copying of drawings or engravings of antique sculptures (a stage omitted in the Royal Academy in London; Hoock, 2003, 55), to drawing from casts of these: students often copied specific body parts such as hands and feet before progressing to whole figures. Life drawing followed; nude models (normally male) sometimes posing in pairs (Figure 1.3). The Royal Academy in London used female models, however, and paid them more than the males it employed. The study of plaster casts of antique sculptures allowed students to form a storehouse of “memories” of bodily form that they might then apply selectively to drawings done from observation of the live model, so that they were seeing through the eyes of past masters or what Reynolds would describe as “material” (Macsotay, 2010, 183–191). Live models held poses taken from a repertory of antique sculptures, and managed to maintain them for the required length of time only with the help of blocks, pulleys and ropes. The provision of life classes was a feature that often distinguished fine art academies from other forms of art

Figure 1.3  Martin Ferdinand Quadal (1736–1811): The Life Class of the Vienna Academy in the St Anne Building, oil on canvas, 144 × 207 cm, 1787. Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna. Source: Gemäldegalerie der Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien.
education. The French Académie royale won at its inception exclusive rights (that lasted until 1705) to run a life-drawing class. Most academic life drawings were done in red and black chalk with white highlights, on white or tinted paper. The emphasis was on the contour or outline of a figure, but some cross-hatching and parallel strokes were used to suggest muscle masses. Lessons in anatomy involved close study of wax, plaster or bronze flayed figures: écorchés or bodies stripped of their skin to reveal the muscles beneath. These ensured that students produced plausible representations of the human form. Competitions such as the half figure drawing competition introduced at the Académie royale in 1784 reinforced the standard to which they should aspire.

By proceeding from the study of antique sculptures to that of live models inspired by these sculptures, eighteenth-century artists did not necessarily think of themselves as deserting the “natural” in art. They believed that ancient Greek and Roman sculptors had developed their representations of the human form as a result of frequent observation of real bodies in action. From these frequent observations the ancients had developed a mental image based on those elements of the human form most consonant with their conception of beauty. The resulting intellectual constructions, “ideal beauty” or, more broadly, “ideal nature” (the essence of a particular human type or natural phenomenon), existed in no single model but derived from many models observed at first hand. They allowed artists to create a vision of the human form that transcended that of any individual mortal. In 1755, in his widely translated Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture (Gedanken über die nachahmung der Griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst), the scholar and art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768), who placed developments in art in their historical contexts, popularized the view that for the ancient Greeks the process of deriving beauty from natural forms was much easier than for his own contemporaries: the Greeks had enjoyed a climate, a conception of physical beauty and an exercise regime that brought them much closer to the transcendent ideal to which all art should aspire. Faith in the existence of such an ideal derived from the notion expressed by Plato (428/427–348/347 BCE) that all individual earthly forms were but imperfect copies of perfect originals:

In the masterpieces of Greek art, connoisseurs and imitators find not only nature at its most beautiful, but also something beyond nature, namely certain ideal forms of its beauty, which, as an ancient interpreter of Plato [Proclus] teaches us, come from images created by the mind alone. (Winckelmann, 1987 [1755], 7)
In practice, for the students of eighteenth-century academies, this meant that any drawings from life they did were subject to correction by their masters, who might suggest that a profile be made more graceful or the configurations of facial features altered to give greater nobility. The canonical antique sculptures or prototypes on which such advice was based included the Apollo Belvedere, the Antinous, the Medici Venus, the Gladiator and the Farnese Hercules. The antique models used were normally available to academies in the form of plaster casts taken from ancient Roman copies of Greek originals.

Over-reliance on such models carried the risk that artists would prioritize a conventional representation of the human form over naturalism or authenticity. As the eighteenth century progressed, more radical critics such as Diderot and Hogarth pointed out the potentially detrimental effects, in figure studies for paintings, caused by insufficient direct observation of the real human body. Diderot wrote in his Salon of 1765:

> Anyone who scorns nature in favour of the antique risks never producing anything that’s not trivial, weak, and paltry in its drawing, character, drapery, and expression. Anyone who’s neglected nature in favour of the antique will risk being cold, lifeless, devoid of the hidden, secret truths which can only be perceived in nature itself. It seems to me one must study the antique to learn how to look at nature. (Diderot, 1995a, 157)

In other words, those too much in thrall to the antique had forgotten that the ancients themselves learned from nature. In his 1792 address to the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando in Madrid, Goya exclaimed:

> What a scandal to hear nature deprecated in comparison to Greek statues by one who knows neither the one, nor the other, without acknowledging that the smallest part of Nature confounds and amazes those who know most! What statue, or cast of it might there be, that is not copied from Divine Nature? As excellent as the artist may be who copied it, can he not but proclaim that placed at its side, one is the work of God, the other of our miserable hands? (Goya, “Address to the Royal Academy of San Fernando regarding the Method of Teaching the Visual Arts,” cited in Tomlinson, 1994, 306)

The fact that such protests were still necessary so late in the century testifies to the enduring influence of academic idealism; that is, the search for a form of ideal beauty sanctioned by antique precedent. This dominant aesthetic value was reinforced by the existence, in most academies, of a collection of sculpture casts (often plaster) of antique sculptures, engravings and drawings of works by old masters. It was difficult for students to
travel to see the originals unless they secured a travel scholarship or patronage of some kind. In terms of more recent exemplars, works by Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) and the seventeenth-century masters Nicolas Poussin and Charles Le Brun were often at the center of the canon of art respected by academies, although this canon could vary with time and place: in Britain, for example, Reynolds was less keen than his continental counterparts on Poussin. There was a certain irony in the selection of Poussin and Raphael as exemplars of an academic style, since neither had been members of academies or subject to their rules. Italian art was often privileged over northern European models because it promoted an idealized nature over the more direct copying from nature thought to characterize Dutch or “northern” art. Furthermore, Raphael (as archetypal “Roman” artist) and Poussin were often singled out as appropriate examples since their art was felt to focus on drawing and clearly ordered design rather than on more sensuous or spectacular effects. However, academies and their artists remained open in practice to a wide range of classical styles in painting inherited from the Renaissance and seventeenth century (see Chapter 2).

Academies varied considerably in the size and richness of the teaching collections used to supply students with material for copying. At the Royal Academy in London a number of artists, such as the sculptors John Flaxman, Thomas Banks (1735–1805), Jean-Baptiste Pigalle (1714–1785) and Jean-Antoine Houdon (1741–1828), and collectors such as Charles Townley (1737–1805; see Figure 4.1) contributed copies and casts (Fenton, 2006, 23). There was also a rich collection of books and prints (Hoock, 2003, 55–56). The Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando in Madrid fared less well and did not acquire a substantial collection until the Spanish seized as a prize of war the cargo of the merchant ship the Westmorland, which was carrying home the Italian purchases of a number of British Grand Tourists, from books of prints to architectural plans, drawings and copies of canonical sculptures (Sánchez-Jáuregui Alpáñes and Wilcox, 2012). Teaching collections were often a vital part of students’ education, especially where there were few local opportunities to see the originals of works of art they were expected to study. At the Danish Royal Academy a library of books and prints of canonical works and a collection of casts from antique sculptures provided a vital supplement to the Royal collection of paintings at the Christiansborg Palace (Saabye, 1989, 520; Thygesen, 1989, 516). Teaching collections could also enable one nation’s artists to influence another’s. As the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts in Saint Petersburg was establishing itself, it benefited in 1769 from Greuze’s gift of over 200 expressive head sketches and figure studies (Bailey, 2003, 10).
Such collections promoted visual styles derived from antiquity and the Renaissance, and provided students with a repertory of compositional arrangements, figure groupings, poses, gestures and expressions that constituted the vocabulary of academic classicism. Representations of facial expression could be particularly formulaic. Illustrative prints from pattern books such as Charles Le Brun’s _Lecture on Expression_ (Conférence sur l’expression, first published in 1698) and the expressive types in _Various faces for use by the young and others_ (Diversae Facies in usum iuvenum et aliorum delineatae, 1656) by the artist Michael Sweerts (1618–1664) continued to be influential throughout the eighteenth century, particularly in its early decades (Percival, 2012, 60). Both Le Brun and Sweerts drew their facial prototypes for the expression of emotions such as fear and astonishment from the old masters they had studied. Academic tradition thus ensured the transmission of a legible code of expressive types, and the measure of a great artist within this system derived in part from his ability to deploy this code while adjusting it to observation of the live model. Because academies attached the greatest status to narrative art, it was very important that the viewer of a work of art should be able to understand clearly the emotions being represented, as these were among the primary means of revealing a figure’s role and character in the particular story being told. So great was the importance attached to expression that the Académie royale in Paris launched in 1760 a competition dedicated to it. This was the only context in which it employed female models. In their finished works, however, artists often softened or modified the rigidity of expressive prototypes, following the principle of honoring the spirit, rather than the letter, of their mentors in this aspect of art (Walsh, 1999, 117).

Although color was often regarded in the seventeenth century as inferior to drawing, it became more highly valued later in that century and into the eighteenth. From the 1680s, younger French artists such as Charles de la Fosse (1636–1716), Jean Jouvenet (1644–1717) and Antoine Coypel (1661–1722) produced art that celebrated color effects. This development had been facilitated by what has come to be known as the “quarrel” between line and color, captured in lectures offered at the Académie royale from the 1670s. Whereas line (or drawing) was closely associated with the intellectual interpretation of a painting, clarity of line or form being seen as essential to the successful communication of meaning or ideas, color was regarded as a more purely pictorial element, appealing to the eye and the senses in general in much the same way as superficial decoration. For some the battle-lines were drawn around the duality of mind and body, which had recently been postulated by the philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650). Factional politics were also involved, not
only between artists within the Académie royale, but also in opposition to guild members, often described as mere “color grinders,” the physical process of grinding pigments being associated with the material aspects of painting. Those who championed line were characterized as supporters of Poussin; that is, of disciplined composition and intellectual appeal; those who championed color as supporters of Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640), whose art was regarded as an exemplar of high-colored, baroque drama. This was of course a huge over-simplification of the facts, Poussin himself being an accomplished colorist in many of his works. Poussin’s biographer, André Félibien, acknowledged this in his remarks on the artist’s talent in the handling of light and color:

So noting that the difference between sounds causes the soul to be moved in different ways, according to whether it is moved by low or high sounds, he [Poussin] was confident that the way in which objects are displayed in a particular sequence or arrangement, expressions of varying degrees of vehemence are represented, and in colors placed next to one another in different combinations, could offer the eye diverse sensations which could make the soul susceptible to as many different passions. (Félibien, 1967 [1725], 323; my translation)

Félibien was not alone, in seventeenth-century academic circles, in offering such a defence of color.

At the turn of the century, Roger de Piles gradually persuaded academicians of the value of color through his lectures. He argued in his 1708 work *Lessons in the Principles of Painting* (*Cours de peinture par principes*) that color was just as intellectual a part of art as line, as it was just as important in the process of imitating nature. Furthermore, color was the distinctive quality of painting – that which helped it stand apart from other arts such as poetry that were addressed principally to the mind. Both line and color were essential components of great art. As de Piles’s message was assimilated by subsequent generations of artists, there was greater respect for colorists such as Rubens, Titian and other artists of the Venetian school renowned for its skill in color. By 1765 the writer on art Michel-François Dandré-Bardon (1700–1783) identified color as an important element of artistic creativity:

It is only with the aid of delicate sentiment that one can capture, following Nature, the diverse nuances of the warmth or paleness of color; of the lightness or vigor in light and shade; and of the delicacy or assertiveness in brushstrokes inspired by passion. (Dandré-Bardon, 1972 [1765], 66; my translation)
The role of color, chiaroscuro and brushwork grew in importance as eighteenth-century artistic culture and criticism acknowledged more openly, particularly from the 1760s, the importance of emotion in both the creation and the viewing of art. In the context of the “grand style,” Reynolds advised, however, an appropriate restraint with regard to color and light, consonant with the classical principles of simplicity, unity in variety and harmony:

With respect to Colouring, though it may appear at first a part of painting merely mechanical, yet it still has its rules.... To give a general air of grandeur at first view, all trifling or artful play of little lights, or an attention to a variety of tints is to be avoided; a quietness and simplicity must reign over the whole work; to which a breadth of uniform, and simple colour, will very much contribute. (Reynolds, 1975 [1797], 61)

For Reynolds, the use of color, light and shade was welcomed as long as they were contained within a framework of unity and grandeur. The popularity in the early part of the century of the rococo style, with its use of strong color effects, could, however, test the limits of critical tolerance. Harmonizing color effects involved a careful consideration of the tonal values (degrees of light and darkness) in each color used, and of the ways adjacent colors reflected one another. The still life and genre artist Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin’s (1699–1779) expertise in this was much praised by Diderot (Bukdahl, 1980, 409). The art critic Étienne La Font de Saint Yenne (1688–1771) was among those who called for restful, unifying effects on the eye rather than the butterfly-like dazzle that some artists produced in their use of light and color (La Font de Saint Yenne, 1747, 47–48, 59).

Art schools and academies in Paris did not teach the practical skills of painting until 1863. Artists studied at the Académie royale in order to extend their learning in the humanities and their drawing skills, following or during their studio training in practical painting techniques. Most eighteenth-century academies similarly avoided teaching the physical aspects of sculpture such as cutting and carving marble or making bronze casts, although some encouraged the production of clay models, regarded as the equivalent of a painter’s preliminary sketches (Lock, 2010, 256). Sculptors were educated at the academies in a very similar way to painters, with an emphasis on drawing, especially expressive heads and compositional sketches for reliefs. For the practical skills of their trade they had to access workshops or foundries, where they might be taken on as apprentices or assistants.
For painters brushwork was an important practical skill learned in the studio. The academic ideal was associated with a smooth finish. To wary academicians, visible or “loose” brushstrokes might, like intrusive attention to color and light, enhance the surface effects and visual appeal of a painting at the expense of its intellectual content. While preparatory, rough sketches were an acceptable part of the evolution of a work, and indeed were felt increasingly to express the workings of “genius,” sketchiness in a finished work implied a kind of “libertine” approach incompatible with the moral aspirations of those working in the higher genres (Wrigley, 1993, 276–277). “Painterly” surface-textural effects might also undermine the emphasis on a well-ordered composition or clearly defined lines central to the ethos of disegno, thus undermining any desired clarity of meaning or interpretation. A painterly style became more acceptable in practice, however, if not in theory, as the eighteenth century progressed. Artists such as Watteau, Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732–1806) and Gainsborough became well known for their looser, expressive brushwork. When Reynolds spoke of Gainsborough he expressed somewhat begrudgingly his admiration of the latter’s painterly approach:

…it is certain, that all those odd scratches and marks, which, on close examination, are so observable in Gainsborough’s pictures, and which even to experienced painters appear rather the effect of accident than design; this chaos, this uncouth and shapeless appearance, by a kind of magick, at a certain distance assumes form, and all parts seem to drop into their proper places; so that we can hardly refuse acknowledging the full effect of diligence, under the appearance of chance and hasty negligence. (Reynolds, 1975 [1797], 257–258)

The Art–Craft Divide: Unifying and Divisive Developments

There was a growing realization that in order to meet the needs of industry and trade, there should be some interaction between academic training and craft skills. In 1767 the Royal Free School of Drawing (École royale gratuite de dessin, later the National School of Decorative Arts or École nationale supérieure des arts décoratifs) was set up in Paris to improve the drawing skills of craftsmen, thus extending to the “lower” sphere of artistic practice the teaching of a skill highly valued in academies. Led initially by the flower painter Jean-Jacques Bachelier (1724–1806), pupils copied drawings and prints of figures, animals, flowers and
ornaments as well as learning geometry and architecture. Many academi-
cians set up or ran free drawing schools for artisans, or taught at these
(Schoneveld-Van Stoltz, 1989, 223). Drawing schools opened across
Europe (Guillomet, 1989, 255; Schoneveld-Van Stoltz, 1989, 223;
School (established c.1750) attached to the Society for the Encouragement
of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (Brewer, 1997, 296); in Vienna,
the Craft School (Manufakturschule) (1758); and, in Edinburgh, the
Trustees’ Academy of Design (1760). Drawing manuals were widely
available. By the middle of the century they covered not just figure draw-
ing but also landscape and still life, and were useful to those engaged in
Academy sculptors such as Claude Michel (also known as Clodion;
1738–1814) and Étienne-Maurice Falconet (1716–1791), shared their
skills in drawing and modeling by helping to train those who designed
ceramic objects at the established royal Sèvres porcelain factory. In
Britain, Flaxman contributed designs for Wedgwood pottery. The state-
sponsored Nymphenburg Porcelain Manufactory in Munich employed
the sculptor Franz Anton Bustelli (1723–1763) as model master. He spe-
cialized in rococo designs for ornamental figurines; for example, of stock
Commedia dell’Arte (Italian travelling theatre) characters, made familiar
early in the century through Watteau’s paintings, validated by the
Académie royale (Figure 1.4, see color plate section) and generally at the
Venice Carnival.

This crossing of art and craft followed the tradition established by the
seventeenth-century history painter Charles Le Brun, who, in addition to
serving as Director of the Académie royale, had overseen the decoration of
Louis XIV’s Hall of Mirrors at Versailles. He had also run the royal Gobelins
tapestry factory in Paris, thus establishing an enduring collaboration of
academic and “mechanical” artists. This factory continued to offer into the
eighteenth century court-sponsored accommodation for artists invited and
willing to train the Gobelins’ craftsmen. The eighteenth-century manufac-
turer and aspiring artist Jean de Jullienne (1686–1766) received such
training and subsequently used his expertise as an art collector and related
artistic networks to attain in 1739 the status of “honorary academician and
amateur” at the Académie royale in Paris (Plax, 2007, 51). A ministerial
statement of 1795 stressed that the Gobelins factory (closely associated
with the “craft” of weaving) was still supported by the government because
it produced art “beautiful in itself,” independently of any profit motive
with the fine or liberal arts. Jean-Baptiste Oudry (1686–1755), painter of
still lifes and hunting scenes, was among those academicians who assumed leading roles at the Beauvais and Gobelins tapestry works, his “royal” patronage also extending to carriage door and over-door decoration (Bailey, 2007, 2, 5). The medium of tapestry occupied an ambiguous space in the art–craft spectrum. Its subjects could be light-hearted (like those produced by Goya earlier in his career) or serious, but its high cost and the amount of wall space it required meant that it was associated with elite royal or noble buyers. Tapestries had been included in the 1699 Salon in Paris, though were not in later ones (Crow, 1985, 36).

Giovanni Antonio Canal (known as Canaletto; 1697–1768), whose landscapes and urban views later became so popular and who was received into the Academy in Venice in 1763, had designed theatre sets in his early career. Such cross-influences between the high and decorative arts were easier to achieve when decorative styles such as the rococo, with its sinuous curves and bright colors, were in play: the style thrived naturally inside and outside academic institutions. It was also quite common to reproduce high-art portrait busts of well-known sitters and religious subjects in a broad range of styles for domestic display, and academic artists could assist with this process. Many of the founder members of the Royal Academy in London were “jobbing” artists, such as drapery painters, scene painters and coach painters (Saumarez Smith, 2012, 86) and their counterparts in France regularly carried out commissions for decorative work such as over-door, fire-screen and wall panel paintings (Scott, 1995, 27–28). Some interior wall paintings were quite elaborate and provided in Paris a good income for Italian artists and their assistants (Scott, 1995, 24). Some painters of the signboards so prevalent in Parisian streets also painted “high art” (Plax, 2000, 167).

Similar synergies between the fine and applied arts were evident elsewhere. In Scotland Alexander Runciman (1736–1785), who was master at the college set up by the Trustees for the Board of Commerce that encouraged Scottish industry) trained as an ornamental painter specializing in house decoration that incorporated both landscapes and subject paintings. His work included increasingly references to historical and literary subjects that aligned his interests with those of history painters at the Royal Academy in London, on whom he exerted a growing influence (Macmillan, 1986, 44–58). The Scottish portrait and landscape artist Alexander Naysmith (1758–1840) followed a similar trajectory to that of Canaletto and Runciman, progressing from decorative to “heroic” or poetic painting, following a trip to Rome in 1782–1785 (Macmillan, 1986, 140–146). The successful portrait artist Henry Raeburn (1756–1823) had trained initially in gold-smithing and miniatures (Macmillan, 1986, 74).
Angelica Kauffman practiced through to the later part of the century the “noble” and “heroic” pursuit of history painting while adapting her designs to fashionable domestic items such as porcelain, tea trays, fans, ceiling and wall decoration, and watch cases (Forbes Adam, Malise and Mauchline, 1992, 113–140).

In spite of the discourses of high art, the fact that London was a hub of artists’ associations made isolationist policies difficult to achieve in practice. Hierarchical divisions between, on the one hand, the “mechanical” and “decorative” and, on the other, the “liberal,” were highly problematic. The advent of more formal fine arts academies created divisions where previously a creative fluidity had existed. Saint Martin’s Lane Academy had provided until the mid-century forms of training and tuition that were useful to furniture designers, illustrators, engravers and painters of theatre scenery, as well as to those producing portraits and other genres of painting and sculpture later recognized by the Royal Academy. Once the latter had been established, Saint Martin’s lost many of its formal membership to the new institution, as members of the Royal Academy were allowed simultaneous membership only of general literary or cultural societies. Saint Martin’s became less active as an institution, but its members continued to influence fine art practitioners and did not necessarily see these interests as contradictory.

The painter and illustrator Francis Hayman (1708–1776), one of the Directors of Saint Martin’s Lane, later became one of the founding members of the Royal Academy. Hayman also belonged, like Hogarth, to the Society of Artists, the first formal exhibiting society in England. This society collaborated with and grew out of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufacture and Commerce, an institution that awarded prizes encouraging designers for industry as well as novice artists (see Chapter 3; Bindman, 2008, 198; Saumarez Smith, 2012, 173–176). Gainsborough, who is thought to have frequented Saint Martin’s, did not travel abroad but later exhibited with the Society of Artists before becoming a founder member of the Royal Academy. The latter institution was built on the shoulders of artists whose work had previously, and necessarily, evolved in associations and institutions that had treated craftwork seriously. On the other hand, members of Saint Martin’s had included, in spite of Hogarth’s misgivings, those interested in developments in continental high art.

George Knapton (1698–1778), a painter, draughtsman and connoisseur at Saint Martin’s, went on the Grand Tour and was keen to study art in Rome. Knapton was a member of the Roman Club (for artists and literary men aspiring to connoisseurship) founded in 1723; he was also a member of the aristocratic Society of Dilettanti. Also at Saint Martin’s, the designer,
engraver and illustrator Hubert-François Gravelot (1699–1773) and the “high art” sculptor Louis-François Roubiliac (1702–1762) taught students there. They helped to establish in Britain the French rococo style, even influencing Hogarth, demonstrating that first-hand interaction with continental high-art traditions could be productive in manufacture, publishing, trade and commerce (Colley, 1984, 10–17).

Some academies tried to accommodate in significant ways the needs of industry and design. The Academy of Fine Arts in St Petersburg, founded in 1757 and directed initially by French masters, trained craftsmen alongside fine artists. The two groups shared the early stages of their training; those who failed tests in classical drawing at the end of the first year either returning home or transferring to workshops inside the Academy. The Academy trained craftsmen in ornamental engraving, gilding, mosaic, lacquer work and ironwork. Students studying these skills boarded at the Academy alongside their fine arts colleagues and could compete for similar (if slightly less prestigious) prizes. Their masters had fewer privileges than their fine arts peers and no pensions. This institution formed part of Russia’s ambition to share in the modernity and high culture of academies further west, while developing the skills necessary for industry. There were at this stage no commercial workshops in Russia for applied arts such as textiles, tapestry or porcelain, although there were some state-run enterprises. Craft students at the Academy were often ex-soldiers or slaves, their education seen as a sign of the country’s potential for progress. Many artists however had “serf” status, in spite of the social pretensions of the Academy (Craske, 1997, 77). The higher cultural ambitions of the Academy became clearer when there were enough fine arts students to fill its places, at which point it became exclusively dedicated to these. Other academies such as those at Berlin, Dresden, Stockholm and Vienna also made efforts to educate craftsmen alongside fine artists, during the early stages of their training, with a particular focus on improving the drawing skills of the former. All of these academies were reorganized during the eighteenth century in a way that made them more relevant to the interests of crafts and industry.

The Decline of the Guilds: Defining the “Artist”

Craft guilds in many parts of Europe, with their regulated structures of advancement and trade, survived for much of the eighteenth century but weakened toward the end of it, as liberal or free trade economics and industrialization took hold. Germany was among those nations where
such a shift was produced by mass consumerism (McGregor, 2014, 344–345). James Farr (2000, 276–282) has drawn attention to the fact that the guilds had created for both journeymen and their masters an accessible means of establishing social identity and rank, and this had no doubt allowed them to persist for a while as institutions parallel to those of high culture. With the French Revolution came a distrust of trade organizations, which were perceived as holding ideals of solidarity that competed with those of the state, as well as with notions of individual rights. The guilds were officially abolished in France in 1791, following the Terror. Revolutionaries were suspicious of the vested interests and power structures they represented. Similar developments unfolded throughout the nineteenth century in other European countries. In Britain, Livery Companies emerged to replace guilds and their apprenticeship system. These were charitable associations very loosely connected with particular trades. Reynolds bought himself out of his own apprenticeship early in his career and in 1784 was “made free” of the Painters and Trainers Company, which acquired honorary rather than regulatory status. The Company had in any case been unable to sustain its monopoly over art as more and more artists moved beyond London (Simon, 1987, 131–132; Hargraves, 2005, 6).

In France relationships between the fine and mechanical arts came to a head in the period 1766–1776. After the failure of the Maîtrise or craft guild to consolidate an amalgamation in 1676 with the Académie royale, the guild continued into the eighteenth century as the Paris Corporation of Master Painters and Sculptors. Prior to the Revolution artists were still expected to be guild members unless excused from this requirement by their royal employment. In 1705 the Corporation obtained permission to establish a life-drawing class for the benefit of apprentices and journeymen and this class, along with others in architecture, anatomy, perspective and geometry, formed the basis of the later-named Academy of Saint Luke (Académie de Saint Luc), the latest in a long line of academies dating from the fourteenth century dedicated to the patron saint of painting. Those most closely associated with this school included fine artists who had been unsuccessful in gaining admittance to the Académie royale in Paris. They adopted the institutional practices of high art by classifying themselves according to the ranks of professor, assistant professor and a range of officers. Artists contributing to the exhibitions of the Académie de Saint Luc in the early eighteenth century included Oudry and the sculptor Jacques Caffiéri (1678–1755) (Guiffrey, 1872). Both of these artists had been successful in gaining royal and aristocratic patronage and commissions. Oudry became a professor; Caffiéri became famous for designing gilt furniture,
thus demonstrating the practical and decorative applications of the work of artists at the Académie de Saint Luc. The animal painter Jean-Baptiste Huet (1745–1811) was among those who studied there before being accepted as a member of the Académie royale.

In 1766 artists of “higher” status (i.e. who perceived themselves as fine artists) at the Paris Corporation mounted a legal challenge to the Directors in charge of the Académie de Saint Luc, demanding greater representation on its governing body. Katie Scott has related the ensuing legal proceedings (Scott, 1989). Essentially painters and sculptors associating themselves with the liberal arts (often specialists in figurative or representational art) claimed that the practitioners of other, “lesser” trades and crafts such as gilders, carriage decorators, monumental masons, varnishers, house painters and color merchants, were unfit to represent the interests of those whose work required genius and intellectual effort, even though the protesters included in their number practitioners of these very same crafts. They claimed that the influence of craft practitioners through the current Directorate was too great in admissions processes, competitions and exhibitions at the Académie de Saint Luc.

The ensuing power struggle was bound up with ideas on political and cultural liberty and the distinctions between, on the one hand, guild solidarity and, on the other, the notion of the solitary genius; between tradition and progress, the fine artists aligning themselves with the latter. Directors defending their established power argued that “art” could be defined in broad terms as a rational, ordered practice that embraced both mechanical and fine arts, and that any differences (e.g. between the use of the hand and the mind) were of degree rather than kind. Ironically, the legal challenge by “higher” artists at Saint Luc backfired as members of the Académie royale interpreted the protestors’ motives as a challenge to the exclusivity of their own institution and managed to intervene in order to ensure that the Académie de Saint Luc, its school and exhibition venue were closed in 1776, a royal edict of 1777 attributing exclusive liberal arts and “gentleman” status to artists of the Académie royale (Schoneveld-Van Stoltz, 1989, 225). All the protest had achieved was a clearer distinction between the two academies in Paris, and between the fine and mechanical arts, which had for much of the century crossed naturally into each other’s territories through a range of visual arts: the internal decoration of domestic and public buildings, the designs on objects such as snuff boxes, theatrical scene painting, carriage decoration, fire-screens and ceramics. Such cross-fertilizations continued in practice.

The struggle in France demonstrated that it was not just the objects produced by artists and craftsmen, but also their functions, that aroused
the need to draw boundaries of status. A 1720 image of tradesmen in Edinburgh shows a similar segregation of practitioners, the genteel fine artist and his easel standing out from the workmanlike artisans (Figure 1.5). There was in the 1760s, as there had been earlier in eighteenth-century France, a distrust among many fine artists of art produced for decorative purposes. Protesting fine artists at Saint Luc characterized their own work as much more than “ornament,” “gilding and varnish” (Scott, 1989, 65). As we shall see in Chapter 2, rococo interior design, with its ceiling-high mirrors, chandeliers and gilt decorative flourishes (Duro, 1997, 244), was often perceived as a threat to the production of “serious” fine art (Duro, 1997, 244). Cabinet-makers and clock-makers often saw themselves in a class apart from other craftsmen, but in France at least those associated with the creation of luxury items were regarded with suspicion during the Revolution. As the decorative invaded the spaces of high art, critics and scholars worked harder at theoretical distinctions promoting the fine arts.

In 1762 the Dictionary of the French Academy (Nouveau Dictionnaire de l’Académie) pointed out in its formal definition of the term “artist,” which had previously been used to refer also to scientists, that genius, as well as the manual skill associated more closely with crafts and the decorative arts,
were both essential qualifications. It asserted that the term “artist” should be used of “he who works in an art in which genius and a skilled hand must coexist” (my translation) (Académie française, 1762, I, 107). Furthermore, its definition of “genius” (génie) referred to qualities of “Talent, inclination, or natural disposition for something estimable and belonging to the mind” (my translation). It went on to associate this term with “doing something of one’s own invention” (my translation) (Académie française, 1762, I, 814), thus differentiating “art” from more repetitive or functional forms of visual culture. Meanwhile, the term “artisan” was still defined as “A worker in a mechanical art” and was associated with the term métier (“trade” or “craft”) as well as with the running of a shop (Académie française, 1762, I, 107). In Britain, Reynolds reinforced such prejudices through the statement in his 1770 Discourse: “However the mechanic and ornamental arts may sacrifice to fashion, she [fashion] must be entirely excluded from the Art of Painting” (cited in Saumarez Smith, 2012, 160).

Such distinctions continued to cause tensions. French coiffeurs were among those who sought to call themselves “artists,” both for reasons of status and in order to be free of the trade restrictions imposed by the guilds. They wanted to distance themselves from more “mechanical” tradesmen (such as barbers) by stressing their “genius”; and aspiring (ultimately without success) to run academies (Falaky, 2013). It is perhaps ironic that by the end of the eighteenth century the Académie royale in Paris itself came to be regarded as a bastion of the closet favoritism, protectionism and the rule-bound work of “trade” previously associated with the guilds, thus inspiring rebellion among some of its members, including David, whose interventions led to its temporary closure (Crow, 1985, 230–232).

### Questions of Modernity

In many ways the persistence of academic artistic education throughout eighteenth-century Europe suggests powerful continuities with the priorities set by French and Italian academies in the preceding centuries. Life drawing and composition remained the most important skills for artists aspiring to produce the highest forms of art. Italian masters of the High Renaissance and their idealizing style retained their powerful influence as models to be followed by history painters, the realist traditions of northern European art being considered as a form of servile copying more appropriate to the lower genres. Such observations have led in the past to the teleological assertion that more radical (or more truly “modern”) developments in art in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were essentially
a reaction against the conservatism generated by academic culture. Modernity in an eighteenth-century context is more often associated with the responsiveness of artists to trade and to a varied market for art rather than to court- or church-dominated commissions. This subject will be examined further in Chapter 3. It is clear that the eighteenth century witnessed, in the writings of Enlightenment thinkers and in some academies, more progressive attitudes towards manufacturing and the “mechanical arts.” Political, discursive and institutional pressures in more exclusive academies often countered such progress, and “trade” was often respected only if confined to state-sponsored manufacture or to commerce aimed at a social elite. Another potential barrier to change was a marked desire in critical texts to delineate and protect the main values of the “fine arts.”

However, revisionist accounts of even the more “conservative” academic art have placed emphasis on more progressive aspects of these fine art academies. Carl Goldstein’s 1996 work Teaching Art: Academies and Schools from Vasari to Albers addresses the prevailing anti-academicism in our contemporary art education and turns to an earlier (1967) source, Thomas B. Hess (in his “Some Academic Questions.” In The Academy: Five Centuries of Grandeur and Misery, from the Caracci to Mao Tse-tung), in order to challenge any simple polarization of academic and modernizing impulses. Such challenges relate to the academic practice of copying or taking inspiration from the work of canonical “great” artists of the past. Since the Romantic movement of the early nineteenth century many commentators on art have valued imaginative invention or originality above tradition (Barker, 2012a, 299). Goldstein argues (1996, 7), however, that for those working within academies of art “originality” simply meant something different and was judged according to the degree of independent interpretation and discrimination demonstrated by an artist when “copying” or drawing inspiration from a canonical work.

This is to restate in different terms the idea of the philosopher Roland Barthes (1915–1980) that all “texts” (whether written or visual) are in fact intertextual in that they usually incorporate elements of previous texts (in this case paintings) that bring together past influences in a way that “destabilizes” or reinterprets them. The Enlightenment ideal of progress incorporated critical study of classical culture. To influential academic artists such as Reynolds and West, who witnessed at first hand the works of antiquity and of Renaissance masters, and who copied these works as part of their education, copying and looser forms of “imitation” were a formal but necessary prelude to invention (Schiff, 2003, 236–239). Furthermore, the academic practice of critical debate, which had been such a significant feature of the Académie royale in the seventeenth century, persisted in
some eighteenth-century academies (e.g. in London) or was re-embodied in some cases (e.g. in France) in the critical writing of those who saw the works of academicians exhibited (Walsh, 1999, 117). This constant scrutiny of the art created by academicians made conservative or doctrinaire approaches less viable.

Eighteenth-century art practice also had its dissidents and innovators, particularly as the century drew to a close, who helped to reinvigorate and broaden the concerns of academic artists. In Britain, Henry Fuseli (1741–1825) and Benjamin West, both of whom occupied positions of responsibility at the Royal Academy, were innovators in terms of the subjects and styles they used, which included (in the former case) eroticism and fantasy, and (in the latter) the natural, romantic and “exotic.” A portrait thought to represent the artist John Cartwright (Figure 1.6) shows the sitter in an intense mental state often associated with the Fuseli’s own creativity. James Barry (1741–1806) was ferociously independent of the Royal Academy, from which he was expelled in 1799, as well as being critical of the British political establishment (Hoock, 2003, 190–191). His attempts to work in his own manner were very much a part of early trends in Romantic attitudes to art but also came at great expense as his work, like Fuseli’s, secured little financial support. He died in poverty. What this seems to show with regard to London academic artistic culture is that more discreet

Figure 1.6  Henry Fuseli: *Probably John Cartwright*, black chalk, 32.4 × 50.2 cm, c.1779. National Portrait Gallery, London. Source: © National Portrait Gallery, London.
forms of “originality” (e.g. Reynolds’ blending of portraiture and mythological references, see Chapter 2) were more easily achieved within the confines of the Royal Academy than were more radical innovations.

Artistic autonomy is now considered to be one of the markers of modernity. There was certainly scope in the eighteenth century for artists to flourish outside the safety net provided by academies, although there were risks. Artists’ studios provided spaces in which they could create works independently and free from academic strictures of any kind. These spaces could also be used in order to exploit through patronage rather than the shop window the commercial opportunities presented by expanding markets for art. Fragonard had not studied at the Académie royale in Paris when he won the coveted Rome Prize in 1752. Although he subsequently developed a position of respect at the Académie, his relations with the institution later cooled so that his career focused increasingly on works produced in his lodgings at the Louvre, free from the conventions of the Académie itself (Percival, 2012, 3). This allowed him to devote time to subjects and styles such as his “fantasy figures,” half portrait and half imaginative improvisations. His distinctive style, with its loose brushwork, facilitated swift production and a timely response to high public demand, especially in the 1760s, for paintings in this genre. In similar vein, Gainsborough was a member of the Royal Academy in London but fell out with the institution following a row in 1783 over the ways in which his paintings should be hung at the Academy’s 1784 exhibition (Fenton, 2006, 122–123; Solkin, 2001, 16). He then exhibited works at his own home, exploiting, like Fragonard, the market for paintings produced with the looser brushwork that stood against academic preferences for a precise finish. The fashionable nature of his work was demonstrated by the fact that his career also continued to benefit from royal patronage. The careers of both of these artists demonstrate the relatively autonomous creativity possible for artists who had already established a name for themselves: they perpetuated in this respect the relative independence of prestigious masters from the Renaissance onwards working in socially popular genres such as portraiture. Artists’ studios remained the main locations in which eighteenth-century artists and apprentices learned the practical skills of painting, thus allowing some degree of originality or personal style to develop.

Earlier in the century it had been left to exceptional artists working outside the academic fine art tradition, for example, Hogarth, to introduce innovations in British visual culture. Many of the boldest departures from tradition occurred toward the end of the century, as Romantic conceptions of the artist began to take hold. The spirit of rebellion characteristic of many innovators is captured in the famous pronouncement by William Blake (1757–1827) on Reynolds: “This Man was Hired to
Depress Art” (“Annotations to Sir Joshua Reynolds’ Discourses,” 1808). Blake’s visionary works had little connection with the Royal Academy, of which he was not a member. Late-century imaginative innovations in Goya’s art were largely achieved outside the Real Academia in Madrid and, as we have seen, this artist was among those who rebelled against the strictures of academic classicism.

In Germany, Goethe was among those writers who championed the cause of the autonomous genius. He objected to the stifling effects of an over-rational or over-prescriptive approach to art. This kind of objection to the ideology of control underlying much academic discourse was expressed with increasing frequency. While the practice of academic artists themselves had often demonstrated that “rules” were to be interpreted quite loosely, the establishment of professional art criticism kept a vigilant eye on the dangers of conservatism and a doctrinaire approach. The concept of “genius” played a key role in such defenses. In a marked reversal of Reynolds’ prescription of learning the rules in order to attain some inventiveness, later commentators such as Alexander Gerard (1728–1795) in his 1774 Essay on Genius recognized clearly the primary dependence of “genius” on a unique creative personality (Quilley, 2011, 16–18). Here too are the words of the art critic Diderot, in his Salon of 1765, on the oil sketches of Saint Gregory produced by the history painter Carle Van Loo (1705–1765). As Diderot ponders the relationship between Van Loo’s moving art and the artist’s social awkwardness, the critic offers a poetic evocation of the creative genius:

Beware those people whose pockets overflow with intelligence and who scatter it about on the slightest pretext. They don’t have the demon; they’re not sad, melancholy, and taciturn; they’re never awkward or stupid. The finch, the lark, the linnet, and the canary chatter and babble all day long; when the sun sets they poke their heads under their wings and go right to sleep. But this is when the genius takes up his lamp and lights it, when the solitary bird, wild, untameable, his plumage dull and brown, opens his throat, begins his song, making the wood resound, melodiously piercing the silence and gloom of the night. (Diderot, 1995a, 18)

Or note his comments on the most effective way of using color, which he opposes to a well-planned and ordered palette:

Someone with a vivid sense of colour fixes his eyes on the canvas; his mouth hangs open, he pants; his palette is the very image of chaos. It’s into this chaos that he dips his brush, pulling from it the very stuff of creation.... (Diderot, 1995a, 197)
Diderot was in the vanguard of such opinions on the artist as free spirit, but notions of “genius” were beginning to circulate extensively and to legitimate rule-breaking (Crow, 1985, 183; Wrigley, 1993, 317). The Enlightenment “genius” typified by Reynolds, was driven by rational reflection and a wise summation of the “great” qualities of previous artists. But toward the end of the century, the genius was conceived more often as an extraordinary individual who could afford to disregard all norms and canons. Matthew Craske (1997, 35, 42–43, 244) has suggested that such theoretical statements on genius were motivated in part by market conditions: as the number of artists and artworks flooded the market, it became more important to declare one’s originality. Whatever the cause, this was an important step toward what we now consider a “modern” attitude toward creativity.

Further Reading


Milam, Jennifer D. 2011. Historical Dictionary of Rococo Art. Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press. This is pan-European in its coverage and includes a detailed bibliography.

