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The Life and Studies of Benjamin West, Esq., President of the Royal Academy of London

Originally published in two volumes in 1816 and 1820, this collection of biographical information and anecdotes tracing the career of the artist Benjamin West (1738–1820) is reissued here in one volume. Prepared by the Scottish novelist John Galt (1779–1839), it is based on the personal recollections of West himself, yet it is acknowledged to include some embellishment. Born in Pennsylvania and largely self-taught, West was the first American artist to travel through Italy to improve his skill by studying antique sculptures and old master paintings. After he came to London in 1763, his strength as a history painter was recognised, not least by George III, and he became a leader of the neoclassical movement. Instrumental in establishing the Royal Academy of Arts, West became its second president in 1792. Galt's narrative emphasises the importance of West in the history of art in Britain.

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Frontmatter

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THE
LIFE AND STUDIES
OF
BENJAMIN WEST, ESQ.

PRESIDENT

OF THE

ROYAL ACADEMY OF LONDON,

Prior to his Arrival in England;

COMPILED FROM MATERIALS FURNISHED BY HIMSELF,

By JOHN GALT.

LONDON:

PRINTED BY NICHOLS, SON, AND BENTLEY,
RED LION PASSAGE, FLEET STREET;

FOR T. CADELL AND W. DAVIES, STRAND.

1816.

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[More information](#)

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President of the Royal Academy of London
John Galt
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

iii

PREFACE.

THE professional life of Mr. West constitutes an important part of an historical work, in which the matter of this volume could only have been introduced as an episode, and, perhaps, not with much propriety even in that form. It was my intention, at one time, to have prepared the whole of his memoirs, separately, for publication; but a careful review of the manuscript convinced me, that the transactions in which he has been engaged, subsequently to his arrival in England, are so much of a public nature, and belong so immediately to the history of the Arts, that such a separation could not be effected without essentially impairing the interest and unity of the main design; and that the particular nature of this portion of his memoirs admitted of being easily detached and arranged into a whole complete within itself.

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John Galt

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

iv

I do not think that there can be two opinions with respect to the utility of a work of this kind. Mr. West, in relating the circumstances by which he was led to approximate, without the aid of an instructor, to those principles and rules of art, which it is the object of schools and academies to disseminate, has conferred a greater benefit on young Artists than he could possibly have done by the most ingenious and eloquent lectures on the theories of his profession ; and it was necessary that the narrative should appear in his own time, in order that the authenticity of the incidents might not rest on the authority of any biographer.

April 25, 1816.

JOHN GALT.



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President of the Royal Academy of London

John Galt

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS.

CHAP. I.

- I. *The Birth and Paternal Ancestry of Mr. West.* II. *His Maternal Family.* III. *His Father.* IV. *The Origin of the Abolition of Slavery by the Quakers.* V. *The Progress of the Abolition.* VI. *The Education of the Negroes.* VII. *The Preaching of Edmund Peckover.* VIII. *His Admonitory Prediction to the Father of West.* IX. *The first Indication of Benjamin's Genius.* X. *State of Society in Pennsylvania.* XI. *The Indians give West the Primary Colours.* XII. *The Artist's first Pencils.* XIII. *The Present of a Box of Colours and Engravings.* XIV. *His first Painting 5*

CHAP. II.

- I. *The Artist visits Philadelphia.* II. *His second Picture.* III. *Williams the Painter gives him the works of Fresnoy and Richardson.* IV. *Anecdote of the Taylor's Apprentice.* V. *The Drawings of the Schoolboys.* VI. *Anecdote relative to Wayne.* VII. *Anecdote relative to Mr. Flower.* VIII. *Anecdote relative to Mr. Ross.* IX. *Anecdote of Mr. Henry.* X. *The Artist's first Historical Picture.* XI. *Origin of his Acquaintance with Dr. Smith of Philadelphia.* XII. *The friendship of Dr. Smith, and the character of the early companions of West.* XIII. *Anecdote of General Washington. 25*

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-108-06894-9 - The Life and Studies of Benjamin West, Esq.,:
 President of the Royal Academy of London
 John Galt
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

2

CONTENTS.

CHAP. III.

- I. *The course of instruction adopted by Provost Smith.* II. *The Artist led to the discovery of the Camera.* III. *His Father becomes anxious to place him in business.* IV. *Extraordinary proceedings of the Quakers in consequence.* V. *The Speech of Williamson the Preacher in defence of the Fine Arts.* VI. *Magnanimous Resolution of the Quakers.* VII. *Reflections on this singular transaction 44*

CHAP. IV.

- I. *Reflections on the Eccentricities of Young Men of Genius with respect to pecuniary matters.* II. *The Death of the Artist's Mother.* III. *The Embodying of the Pennsylvanian Militia; an Anecdote of General Wayne.* IV. *The Artist elected Commandant of a corps of Volunteer boys.* V. *The circumstances which occasioned the Search for the Bones of Bradock's army.* VI. *The Search.* VII. *The Discovery of the Bones of the Father and Brother of Sir Peter Halket.* VIII. *The Artist proposed afterwards to paint a Picture of the Discovery of the Bones of the Halkets.* IX. *He commences regularly as a Painter.* X. *He copies a St. Ignatius.* XI. *He is induced to attempt Historical Portraiture.* XII. *His Picture of the Trial of Susannah.* XIII. *Of the merits of that Picture. 58*

CHAP. V.

- I. *Motives which induced him to visit New York.* II. *State of Society in New York.* III. *Reflections on the sterility of*

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06894-9 - The Life and Studies of Benjamin West, Esq.,:

President of the Royal Academy of London

John Galt

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS.

3

American talent. IV. *Considerations on the circumstances which tend to produce Poetical feelings.* V. *The causes which produced the peculiarities in the state of Society in New York.* VI. *The Accident which led the Artist to discover the method of colouring Candle-light and Fire effects after Nature.* VII. *He copies Strunge's engraving of Belisarius, by Salvator Rosa.* VIII. *The occurrence which hastened his Voyage to Italy, with the Anecdote of his obligations to Mr. Kelly.* IX. *Reflections on Plutarch, occasioned by reference to the effect which his works had on the mind of West.* X. *The Artist embarks; occurrence at Gibraltar.* XI. *He arrives at Leghorn.* XII. *Journey to Rome.* 75

CHAP. VI.

I. *State of the stationary Society of Rome.* II. *Causes which rendered the City a delightful temporary residence.* III. *Defects of the Academical methods of study.* IV. *His introduction to Mr. Robinson.* V. *Anecdote of Cardinal Albani.* VI. *The Cardinal's method of finding Resemblances, and curious mistake of the Italians.* VII. *The Artist's first visit to the Works of Art.* 95

CHAP. VII.

I. *Anecdote of a famous Improvisatore.* II. *West the subject of one of his finest effusions.* III. *Anecdote of Cardinal Albani.* IV. *West introduced to Mengs.* V. *Satisfactory result of West's first essay in Rome.* VI. *Consequence of the continual excitement which the Artist's feelings endured.* VII. *He goes*

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06894-9 - The Life and Studies of Benjamin West, Esq.,:

President of the Royal Academy of London

John Galt

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

4

CONTENTS.

to Florence for advice. VIII. He accompanies Mr. Matthews in a tour. IX. Singular instance of liberality towards the Artist from several Gentlemen of Philadelphia 113

CHAP. VIII.

*I. The result of the Artist's experiment to discover the methods by which Titian produced his splendid colouring. II. He returns to Rome. III. Reflections suggested by inspecting the Egyptian Obelisk. IV. Considerations of the Author on the same subject; and anecdote of a Mohawk Indian who became an Actor at New York. V. Anecdote of a Scottish Fanatic who arrived in Rome to convert the Pope. VI. Sequel of the Adventure. VII. The Artist prepares to visit England. VIII. Having completed his *St. Jerome*, after Correggio's famous picture, he is elected an Honorary Member of the Academy of Parma, and invited to Court. IX. He proceeds by the way of Genoa towards France. X. Reflections on the state of Italy. XI. Adventure on reaching the French frontiers. XII. State of Taste in France 129*

