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978-1-108-06896-3 - Nollekens and His Times: Comprehending a Life of that Celebrated Sculptor, and Memoirs of Several Contemporary Artists: Volume 1

John Thomas Smith

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Nollekens and His Times

The sculptor Joseph Nollekens (1737–1823) was famed for his portrait busts of leading figures of his day. While working in Italy in the 1760s, he established contacts among a group of aristocratic British patrons, going on to become London's most fashionable sculptor upon his return to England in 1771. The draughtsman and antiquary John Thomas Smith (1766–1833) had been at one time a pupil of Nollekens. It is believed that this anecdotal two-volume biography, first published in 1828, was written as an act of revenge. Having been promised a considerable legacy in the sculptor's will, Smith was disappointed to receive only an executor's fee. The work contains little analysis concerning the sculptor's art, relating instead much gossip and anecdotes of a personal nature. Nonetheless, it presents a vivid picture of the London art world at that time. Volume 1 concentrates on aspects of Nollekens' character, habits and opinions.

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VOLUME 1

JOHN THOMAS SMITH



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JOSEPH NOLLEKENS, ESQ^R. R.A.

Engraved by William Bond from a Drawing by John Jackson, Esq. R.A.

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AND MEMOIRS OF SEVERAL
CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS,
FROM THE TIME OF
ROUBILIAC, HOGARTH, AND REYNOLDS,
TO THAT OF
FUSELI, FLAXMAN, AND BLAKE.
BY
JOHN THOMAS SMITH,
KEEPER OF THE PRINTS AND DRAWINGS IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM.
IN TWO VOLUMES.
VOL. I.
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P R E F A C E.

MR. ROSCOE, who wrote the anonymous Preface to Daulby's Catalogue of Rembrandt's Etchings, says, "The history of a man of genius is, in general, that of his productions." In the following memoir, I trust to do more than this; and to delineate the life, not only of a "man of genius," but of a most eccentric character.

To dispense with the old custom of presenting a letter of introduction, or sending in my card to those to whom I am unknown, would be irregular; the reader, therefore, is informed, that I believe there can be no one better acquainted with the very extraordinary compound habits of the man of whom the following anecdotes are related, than myself; having been his pupil for the space of three years, and intimately known to him for nearly sixty. When I was an infant, he frequently danced me upon his knee.

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PREFACE.

With regard to pecuniary and domestic habits, I am convinced that England has not produced such a character since the death of Elwes.

The biographer will find, in the second volume of the following work, numerous original anecdotes, and also several valuable letters of contemporary Painters, Sculptors, and Architects of talent, particularly of Fuseli, Flaxman, and Blake, three of the greatest geniuses modern times have produced in this or any other country. Interspersed through the work, are likewise several others not less interesting, but not generally known, of personages of rank and notoriety, who have flourished from the birth of Mr. Nollekens down to the date of this preface.

In the course of these pages, I have acknowledged my obligations to several friends for their kind communications, and here hope for their pardon, for having reserved this place for my best thanks to my friend Mr. Richard Thomson, the well-known author and editor of numerous most interesting works, for his kindness in many instances.

JOHN THOMAS SMITH,
Keeper of the Prints and Drawings
in the British Museum.

October, 1828.

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