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978-1-108-06944-1 - Seven Discourses Delivered in the Royal Academy by the President

Joshua Reynolds

Excerpt

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DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED AT THE OPENING

OF THE

ROYAL ACADEMY,

JANUARY 2, 1769,

BY THE

PRESIDENT.

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TO THE
MEMBERS
OF THE
ROYAL ACADEMY.

GENTLEMEN,

THAT you have ordered the publication of this discourse, is not only very flattering to me, as it implies your approbation of the method of study which I have recommended; but likewise, as this method receives, from that act, such an additional weight and authority,

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as demands from the Students,
that deference and respect, which
can be due only to the united
sense of so considerable a BODY
of ARTISTS.

I am,

With the greatest esteem and respect,

G E N T L E M E N,

Your most humble,

and obedient Servant,

JOSHUA REYNOLDS,

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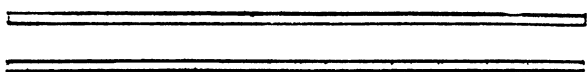
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DISCOURSE, &c:

GENTLEMEN,

AN Academy, in which the Polite Arts may be regularly cultivated, is at last opened among us by ROYAL Munificence. This must appear an event in the highest degree interesting, not only to the Artists, but to the whole nation.

IT is indeed difficult to give any other reason, why an empire like that of BRITAIN, should so long have wanted an

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ornament so suitable to its greatness, than that slow progression of things, which naturally makes elegance and refinement the last effect of opulence and power.

AN Institution like this has often been recommended upon considerations merely mercantile. But an Academy, founded upon such principles, can never effect even its own narrow purposes. If it has an origin no higher, no taste can ever be formed in it, which can be useful even in manufactures; but if the higher Arts of Design flourish, these inferior ends will be answered of course.

WE are happy in having a PRINCE, who has conceived the design of such an Institution, according to its true dignity; and promotes the Arts, as the head of a great, a learned, a polite, and

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a commercial nation; and I can now congratulate you, Gentlemen, on the accomplishment of your long and ardent wishes.

THE numberless and ineffectual consultations that I have had with many in this assembly, to form plans and concert schemes for an Academy, afford a sufficient proof of the impossibility of succeeding but by the influence of MAJESTY. But there have, perhaps, been times, when even the influence of MAJESTY would have been ineffectual; and it is pleasing to reflect, that we are thus embodied, when every circumstance seems to concur from which honour and prosperity can probably arise.

THERE are, at this time, a greater number of excellent Artists than were

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ever known before at one period in this nation; there is a general desire among our Nobility to be distinguished as Lovers and Judges of the Arts; there is a greater superfluity of wealth among the people to reward the professors; and, above all, we are patronized by a MONARCH, who, knowing the value of science and of elegance, thinks every Art worthy of his notice, that tends to soften and humanise the mind.

AFTER so much has been done by HIS MAJESTY, it will be wholly our fault, if our progress is not in some degree correspondent to the wisdom and generosity of the Institution; let us shew our gratitude in our diligence, that, though our merit may not answer his expectations, yet, at least, our industry may deserve his protection.

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BUT whatever may be our proportion of success, of this we may be sure, that the present Institution, will at least contribute to advance our knowledge of the Arts, and bring us nearer to that ideal excellence, which it is the lot of Genius, always to contemplate and never to attain.

THE principal advantage of an Academy is, that, besides furnishing able men to direct the Student, it will be a repository for the great examples of the Art. These are the materials on which Genius is to work, and without which the strongest intellect may be fruitlessly or deviously employed. By studying these authentick models, that idea of excellence which is the result of the accumulated experience of past ages may be at once acquired, and the tardy and obstructed progress

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progress of our predecessors, may teach us a shorter and easier way. The Student receives, at one glance, the principles which many Artists have spent their whole lives in ascertaining; and, satisfied with their effect, is spared the painful investigation by which they come to be known and fixed. How many men of great natural abilities have been lost to this nation, for want of these advantages? They never had an opportunity of seeing those masterly efforts of Genius, which at once kindle the whole soul, and force it into sudden and irresistible approbation.

RAFFAELLE, it is true, had not the advantage of studying in an Academy; but all *Rome*, and the works of MICHAEL ANGELO in particular, were to him an Academy. On the flight of the CAPEL-

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