

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07454-4 - *Recollections of the British Institution for Promoting the Fine Arts in the United Kingdom: With some Account of the Means Employed for that Purpose; and Biographical Notices of Artists Who have Received Premiums, 1805–1859*

Thomas Smith

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Recollections of the British Institution for Promoting the Fine Arts in the United Kingdom

The British Institution for Promoting the Fine Arts in the United Kingdom was founded as a private art gallery in 1805, and took over the lease of publisher John Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery in Pall Mall, London. Its rich and noble subscribers (including the Prince of Wales, later George IV) patronised exhibitions of contemporary works, and also lent items for shows of Old Masters. The Institution also took in art students, and was a very popular public attraction in London: Jane Austen was among the many visitors from around the country. This 1860 book by Thomas Smith, a London historian, describes the founding and development of the Institution, with notices of its regular exhibitions and of special events such as the memorial dinner for Sir Joshua Reynolds. This is a fascinating account of a popular gallery in the first half of the nineteenth century, and of the tastes of its patrons and visitors.

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Recollections
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The Rise and Progress
of
The British Institution.

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RECOLLECTIONS

OF

THE BRITISH INSTITUTION,

FOR PROMOTING

The Fine Arts in The United Kingdom :

WITH SOME

ACCOUNT OF THE MEANS EMPLOYED FOR THAT PURPOSE;

AND

Biographical Notices of the Artists who have received Premiums,
&c.

1805—1859.

BY THOMAS SMITH,

AUTHOR OF AN HISTORICAL AND TOPOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNT OF THE PARISH OF ST.-MARY-LE-BONE;
HAND-BOOK TO HARROW-ON-THE-HILL; ETC." HIC PATET INGENIIS CAMPUS."—*Claudian.*

London :

SIMPKIN & MARSHALL, STATIONERS' HALL COURT;

AND

EDWARD STANFORD, 6, CHARING CROSS.

MDCCCLX.

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WESTMINSTER:

PRINTED BY THOMAS BRETTELL, RUPERT STREET, HAYMARKET.

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TO

BERIAH BOTFIELD, ESQ. M.P.

A DIRECTOR OF THE BRITISH INSTITUTION,

AND A PROMOTER OF

LITERATURE AND THE FINE ARTS:

This Work

IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED,

BY HIS FAITHFUL SERVANT,

THOMAS SMITH.

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BOOKS OF REFERENCE CONSULTED DURING THE COMPILATION OF
THIS WORK, AND FROM WHICH BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICES HAVE
BEEN CONDENSED.

Account of all the Pictures exhibited in the Rooms of the British Institution from 1813 to 1823, belonging to the Nobility and Gentry of England; with Remarks, Critical and Explanatory.—By the Rev. James Dallaway. Priestley and Weale, 1824.

Allan Cunningham's Lives of the Painters.

Allan Cunningham's Life of Sir David Wilkie, R.A.

The Annual Register.

The Art-Journal.

The Athenæum.

Bryan's Dictionary of Painters. Edited and much enlarged by C. Stanley.

Catalogues of the British Institution—Modern Exhibitions.

Catalogues of the British Institution—Exhibitions of the Ancient Masters.

Cotton's Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds, P.R.A.

Descriptive and Historical Catalogue of the Pictures in the National Gallery, 1859. By R. N. Wornum, Esq. revised by Sir Charles Eastlake, P.R.A.

Elmes's Art and Artists.

Fulcher's Life of Gainsborough.

The Gentleman's Magazine.

Gilchrist's Life of William Etty, R.A. 1855.

Life of Flaxman, by Sir Richard Westmacott.

The Literary Gazette.

Lives of the Ancient Masters, Manuscript Compilation by Miss Boydell.

Men of the Time, or Biographical Sketches of Eminent Living Characters.—D. Bogue, 1856.

Mrs. Bray's Life of Stothard.

Our Living Painters, their Lives and Works.—Blackwood, 1859.

Pilkington's Dictionary of Painters, New Edition, 1824.

Recollections of the Life of Sir Francis Chantrey, &c. by G. Jones, R.A.

Waagen's Art Treasures of Great Britain.

Williams's Life of Sir Thomas Lawrence.

&c. &c. &c.

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PRELIMINARY REMARKS.

THE following account of the Rise and Progress of the British Institution is the result of a personal acquaintance with the Establishment for a long series of years; a recent examination of documents of indisputable authenticity connected therewith; and a synoptical analysis of a perfect set of the Catalogues. From these sources, the Compiler has been enabled to lay a plain statement of facts before the Reader, which he trusts will be found interesting to lovers of the Fine Arts; to the Nobility and Gentry of England who have devoted themselves to their promotion and encouragement; and to the Public, who have felt the benefit of such devotion, by the humanising influence it must have had upon society at large.

In the course of his researches the writer has ascertained that the Directors of the British Institution (from its foundation to the present time), have received and exhibited in the Winter, WORKS OF BRITISH ARTISTS, to the number of *Twenty-three Thousand One Hundred and Fifty*.

That Sales of those Works have been effected, *without any expense to the Artists*, to the amount of more than *One Hundred and Fifty Thousand Pounds*.

The WORKS of ANCIENT MASTERS of the FOREIGN SCHOOLS, and of DECEASED BRITISH ARTISTS, borrowed from the Royal Collection, and from those of the Nobility and Gentry, from the year 1813 to 1859 inclusive, and exhibited in the Summer, for

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the gratification of the Public, have amounted in number to *Seven Thousand Six Hundred and Eighty-three*, very few having been exhibited more than once, and then only at distant intervals.

Of those Works, from twenty to thirty have been retained with consent of the Proprietors, at the close of each Exhibition, to be used as Studies for the School of Painting, making in the aggregate *One Thousand and Forty*; which arrangement has proved of incalculable advantage to junior aspirants as well as to Students of maturer years.

Lastly, The Directors have expended in Premiums and Complimentary Donations, in the purchase of Pictures, &c. and in Charitable Contributions, the sum of *Twenty-eight Thousand Five Hundred and Fifteen Pounds*.

The object of the Compiler of this Volume is, to place upon Record the wonderful energy, indefatigable activity, and patriotic zeal, brought to bear in forming and carrying out the plan of the Institution, and that by a class of persons whose very elevated position necessitates so many other calls upon their time and attention.

The Prefaces to the Catalogues of the Summer Exhibitions, written by Richard Payne Knight, Esq. and Sir Thomas Bernard, Bart. here reprinted, were not only valuable Essays on the Fine Arts at the time they were written, but are equally so at the present day.

The Biographical Notices are selected and condensed from the most worthy and reputable authorities, of which a List is given.

It will not be denied, that the Governors and Directors of the British Institution have been successful, for a period of more than half a century, not only in offering considerable advantages to

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the Artists themselves, and in calling forth a display of eminent native talent which might have otherwise remained in obscurity, but, by the facility afforded for the Study of the finest Works of the Old Masters, liberally lent from their noble Galleries and Collections for that purpose, they have created a taste for a deeper and more profound knowledge of Art among the general population, and have thus rendered good service to the State.

“Esto perpetua.”

T. S.

53, WESTBOURNE STREET,
PIMLICO.

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THE MOST HONOURABLE THE MARQUIS OF
WESTMINSTER, K.G.

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*** While this Work was in the Press, two vacancies have occurred in the Direction, by the Decease of the EARL OF WESTMORELAND and W. R. HAMILTON, Esq.