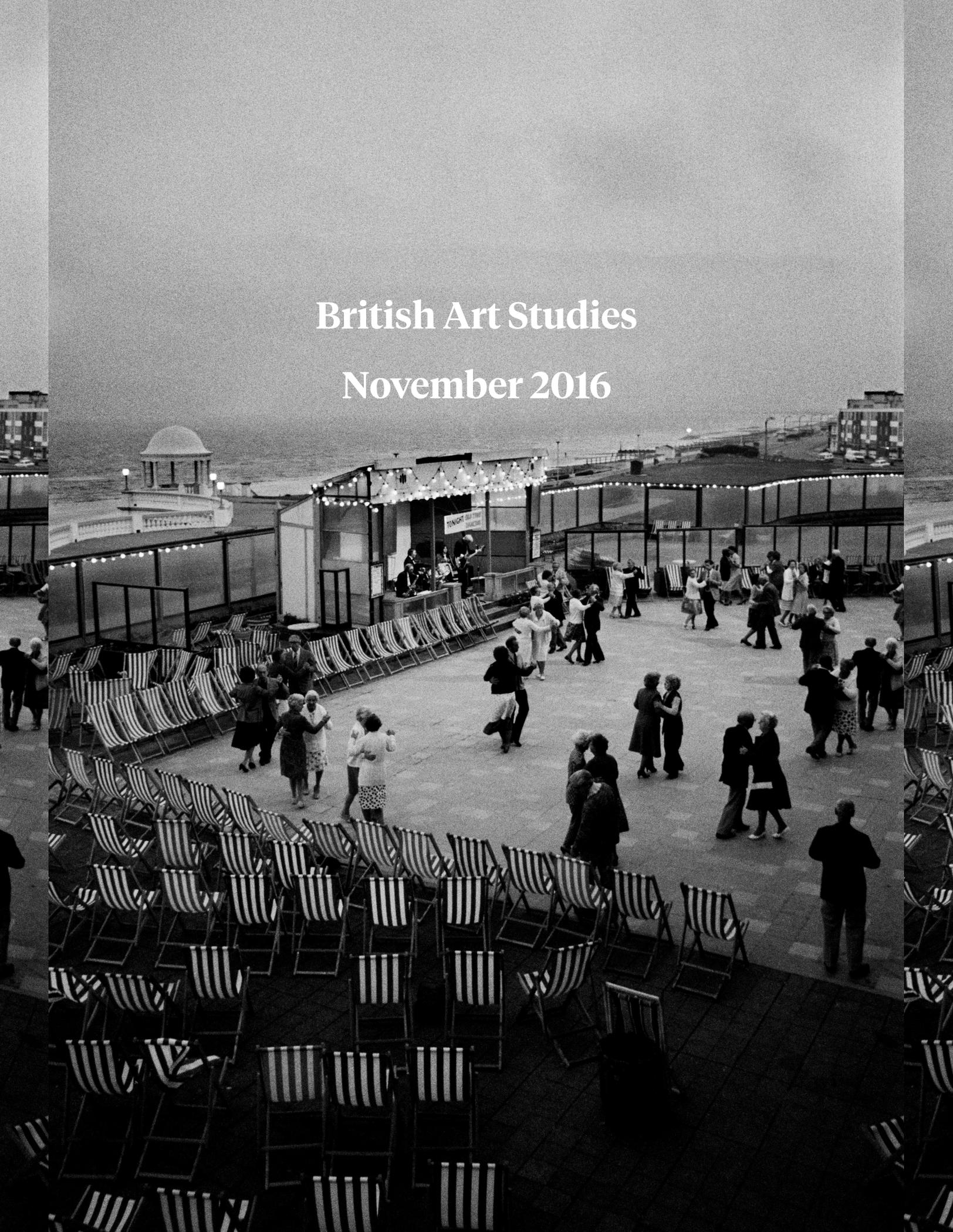


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Rehanging Reynolds at the British Institution: Methods for Reconstructing Ephemeral Displays

Catherine Roach

Abstract

Reconstructions of historic exhibitions made with current technologies can present beguiling illusions, but they also put us in danger of recreating the past in our own image. This article and the accompanying reconstruction explore methods for representing lost displays, with an emphasis on visualizing uncertainty, illuminating process, and understanding the mediated nature of period images. These issues are highlighted in a partial recreation of a loan show held at the British Institution, London, in 1823, which featured the works of Sir Joshua Reynolds alongside continental old masters. This recreation demonstrates how speculative reconstructions can nonetheless shed light on ephemeral displays, revealing powerful visual and conceptual dialogues that took place on the crowded walls of nineteenth-century exhibitions.

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The study of exhibitions is of necessity the study of lost spaces. Even the best-preserved ensembles undergo change over time, and many more have left only scant material traces. Today, digital technologies offer a new avenue to a long-held desire, the reconstruction of ephemeral displays. Such reconstructions bring together images of works that are now scattered, but were once viewed and understood in concert. They thus raise the possibility of rediscovering not only the appearance of historic displays, but also some of their multiple, shifting, and contingent meanings. Beguiling as this prospect may be, it also presents methodological challenges. Today's digital reconstructions contain great potential, but they also contain great potential for distortion. We are now creating our own objects of study. Like a scientist designing an experiment, we must be careful that in building our research tools we do not simply confirm our own preconceptions.

The temptation to recreate the past in our own image was not born with digital technologies. Translating existing sources into a reconstruction of a lost display has always required conjecture, which is inevitably coloured by the translator's worldview.¹ But as new technologies make possible projects of greater complexity and ambition, they also exacerbate these concerns. After all, as Johanna Drucker has observed, "digitization is not representation but interpretation."² As a result, it is essential that authors of reconstructions identify the choices they have made in the process of creation. Particularly pressing is the issue of how best to represent uncertainty—moments when a gap in the historical record has been supplemented by informed conjecture or a sheer leap of faith.³ Without acknowledgment of such decisions, "a single, highly polished reconstruction of a building or site can, in fact, be too convincing. While such a reconstruction records one plausible interpretation of incomplete and usually contested data, it risks being received as wholly authoritative and above dispute."⁴ Visualizing uncertainty is thus a vital concern.

Equally important is the relationship between these new projects and traditional sources of knowledge about images and their production, including the catalogue raisonné. The printed catalogue raisonné is in many ways a utopian project. It imagines the possibility of certainty and completion, presupposing that an entire life's artistic production can be located, correctly attributed, and codified. In the process, it privileges the idea of the unique creator in ways that the discipline of art history still struggles to shrug off. Just as we have come to be sceptical of some aspects of the catalogue raisonné project, we should also have a healthy scepticism of utopian attitudes towards digital projects. All historical inquiries are shaped by the concerns of the present moment. But if in forging our new reconstructions we ignore the work of previous generations, including the carefully collated information of catalogues raisonnés, we risk distorting our understanding of past displays more than is necessary. So much is absent in

current reconstructions: the shifting presence of viewers; the smells of fabric, bodies, perfumes, and dirt; and, most of all, the conversations and perceptions of those visitors who left no written trace. But art-historical knowledge need not be absent. Indeed, if we are to create compelling and useful reconstructions, it must not be.

This essay offers some thoughts on best practices for exhibition reconstructions by considering recent attempts, undertaken by myself and others, to visualize a series of ground-breaking exhibitions of the works of Sir Joshua Reynolds, first President of the Royal Academy, staged by the British Institution, London, in the early nineteenth century. First, I will offer a critique of *What Jane Saw*, a recent project that reconstructs the founding event in this series, a monographic display of works by Reynolds mounted in 1813. Second, I will provide a step-by-step exploration of the process of exhibition recreation, taking as my subject a subsequent (and less studied) Reynolds exhibition held in the same space in 1823. The reconstruction that accompanies this article demonstrates techniques for visualizing uncertainty. Finally, I will analyse the contents of this reconstruction, illustrating the kinds of lessons we can hope to learn from an evocative, speculative reconstruction. In addition to illuminating the process of their creation, such reconstructions can also provide a valuable tool for studying the significance of historic displays. Nineteenth-century exhibitions often appear overcrowded or jumbled to today's viewers. But carefully crafted reconstructions can help us understand these richly patterned arrangements. By reviving some of the visual relationships among the objects displayed, reconstructions demonstrate that exhibitions, like the individual works of art contained within them, conveyed meanings to their audiences. These meanings were sometimes intended by their organizers and other times invented by their viewers.

In 1813 the British Institution for Promoting the Fine Arts in the United Kingdom, a collector-run philanthropic arts society, staged what has been called "the first true monographic exhibition" surveying the career of Sir Joshua Reynolds.⁵ Its popular and critical success convinced the Institution's administrators to make loan shows of historic art an annual event. In addition, the exhibition of 1813 has rightly been identified as a major landmark in the development of the British canon. It sparked debates over the nature of Reynolds's practice, his right to the title of founder of the British school of painting, and the physical conditions of his paintings.⁶ Scholars have been slower to recognize that this important event was in fact the first in a series of related exhibitions. The British Institution staged Reynolds retrospectives once a decade for forty years, making Reynolds a fixture of the cultural landscape of London. Although the first of these exhibitions concentrated on Reynolds alone, the subsequent displays presented his works alongside those of the continental old masters and more

recent British artists. These displays constituted a repeated visual argument for Reynolds's significance for the history of art, and as such represent an important moment in the formation of the discipline. The British Institution has often been characterized as a conservative organization, because it was run by a coalition of collectors who promoted the old masters as models for British art. But their efforts to advance this agenda were highly innovative, including experiments with different exhibition models, such as the retrospective and the thematic exhibition. Today, with the development of new digital technologies, we are in a similarly experimental moment, as we seek to find the best way to visualize these influential historic displays.

What Jane Saw? Rehanging Reynolds at the British Institution in 1813

Period images of the installation of the Reynolds exhibition in 1813 have yet to be discovered. But almost two centuries after the event, a leading figure in collection studies, Francis Haskell, noted that with the help of the catalogue, "it would be just possible to reconstruct the hanging in our minds with reasonable accuracy."⁷ In 2013, Haskell's suggestion was taken up; the result was not a mental image, but an impressive website providing a navigable scale recreation of the exhibition. Titled *What Jane Saw* by its creator, English literature scholar Janine Barchas, this important project takes its inspiration from the fact that Jane Austen attended this event. It invites users to "time travel" to the exhibition that Austen visited.⁸ As a pioneering example in the field, this project illustrates both the potentials and the pitfalls of digital exhibition reconstructions.⁹ There is much to admire in this site. It provides a three-dimensional, easily navigable model of the British Institution galleries that offers interested users additional information about each of the works exhibited: clicking on an image on a reconstructed wall brings up an entry on each work including dimension, current location, and information on the subject and its relationship to Austen. Barchas and her team sought, successfully, to reach a broader audience with this project. It has been widely and positively reviewed, not only in academic journals, but also in major newspapers.¹⁰ Interviews in these outlets, as well as the text of the website and accompanying scholarly articles, make bold claims for the project.¹¹ Barchas told the *New York Times*: "I feel pretty sure this is the way the exhibit was actually hung."¹² But does the site measure up to this claim?



[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 1.

John Scarlett Davis, *Interior of the British Institution*, 1829, oil on canvas, 113 x 142.2 cm. Collection of the Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection (B1981.25.212) Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art

One area of concern regarding *What Jane Saw* is the way period images were used as sources of information. Barchas notes the risk of an “anachronistic wall aesthetic”, which she sought to combat by consulting “surviving contemporary images”.¹³ While no images survive of the Reynolds exhibition, other displays at the British Institution galleries were depicted in oil, watercolour, and engraving (fig. 1). Period images can provide a wealth of visual information, but should be consulted advisedly. As Christopher Whitehead has noted, the authors of these images “worked within pictorial conventions and agendas which may have conflicted with current ideas of accurate recording”.¹⁴ Like their close cousin, the exhibition catalogue, these images provide an idealized, synthesized version of a display, what Victor Stoichita has called “the dream of any collection”.¹⁵ Even diagrams that were intended to guide a viewer may have simplified or distorted the contents in order to facilitate use, conform to contemporary taste, or convey a more favourable impression of the installation depicted.¹⁶ And, as I have argued elsewhere, the conventions of the genre of gallery painting encourage artistic licence, as artists rearranged the contents of the actual display in order to create programmatic statements.¹⁷ As sources for exhibition reconstructions, historic images are best used in concert with one

another and with textual sources: features that appear in multiple images are less likely to be the fancy of an individual artist. For instance, the pink wall colour used in *What Jane Saw* was based on a hand-coloured aquatint published in *The Microcosm of London* in 1808. Yet most images of the Institution show red walls, a fact confirmed by textual sources, including a critic who complained in 1806 that the gallery was furnished with “a paper of the brightest and most vivid scarlet, which fatigues and distresses the eye”.¹⁸ By neglecting such evidence and instead relying on a single image, *What Jane Saw* creates a problematic representation of what Austen and her fellow visitors would have seen. Such inaccuracies have troubling consequences: in this case, the incorrect wall colour is also a stereotypical sign of femininity. The decision to use pink heightens the association with the famous female author. It also occludes the gender politics of this space: although this display could be entered and interpreted by women, it was an exhibition of paintings by men, designed and controlled by men.¹⁹

Similar issues arise concerning the arrangement of artworks on the virtual walls. Although the exhibition catalogue numbers provide some indication of the relative location of the pictures, considerable guesswork is still required in placing works, especially on the longer walls, which could contain as many as nineteen canvases. In an article about the development of the site, Barchas illustrated how she and her team considered various hanging orders, and noted that “we curated the virtual show by making educated guesses about relative placement, balance, and alignment.”²⁰ But these guesses do not always take advantage of the lessons of existing scholarship on period hanging practices, leading to a recreation that reflects present-day aesthetic preferences, rather than those of the early nineteenth century.²¹ Many nineteenth-century galleries, including that of the British Institution, were hung in what Giles Waterfield has termed the “decorative” style: “One major picture was arranged as the centre of a composition or, more usually, of a wall. It was flanked by one, two or more pairs of paintings, arranged symmetrically on either side, and the pattern might be repeated again left and right of the central group.”²² As Waterfield observes, this style was familiar to the patrons of the Institution, many of whom employed it in their personal collections.²³ As I will discuss in more detail below, these patrons played a central role in arranging the Institution’s exhibitions. The decorative style was also employed by the Hanging Committee of the Royal Academy, whose displays reflected a “commitment to lateral symmetry, or at least to a fairly close approximation thereof”.²⁴ This mode of display was widely used over a long period of time. Its currency can be judged by its appearance in two images of exhibitions, created over a century apart: a watercolour of the Royal Academy summer exhibition of 1784 (fig. 2) and a photograph of the

Victoria Gallery in Dundee in 1889 (fig. 3). As such images suggest, the desire for symmetry led to the creation of temporary pendants out of works of similar scale and orientation.



Figure 2.

Edward Francis Burney, West Wall, The Great Room, Royal Academy,, 784, pen, grey ink, grey wash, and watercolour, 33.5 x 42.9 cm. Collection of the British Museum, London (1904,0101.1) Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 3.

Unknown photographer, Victoria Gallery, Dundee, 1889, photograph, dimensions unknown Digital image courtesy of Libraries, Leisure and Culture Dundee

The application of these principles would have led to very different arrangements than those seen on *What Jane Saw*. Consider, for example, the north wall of the North Room. At the Institution, this room was generally acknowledged to be the main gallery; its north wall, where the catalogue numbers started, was frequently the site of a major visual statement.²⁵ In 1813 this wall contained two full-length portraits depicting the monarch, George III, and the great tragic actress Sarah Siddons, as well as three “fancy” pictures, small-scale and expressive images of children.²⁶ The designers of *What Jane Saw* have chosen to place the portrait of George III in the centre, on the assumption that it should face a portrait of George’s wife, Queen Charlotte, which hung at the opposite end of the space.²⁷ In terms of relative social rank, this order makes sense: the monarch takes pride of place. But this arrangement ignores the strong preference for symmetry in this period; the cluster of three small fancy pictures at right does a poor job of balancing the image of Siddons at left. This reconstruction also ignores the prevailing custom of arranging previously unrelated pictures as pendants. In private collections, the desire for pendants was so great that works were often trimmed or expanded to create matching pairs.²⁸ To my mind, the prevalence of this practice suggests that the portraits of king and actress were most likely displayed side by side. The fancy pictures might then have been hung in a row above or, more likely, below, so that they could be

examined closely.²⁹ These decisions matter, because the placement of these objects conveys meaning: if the monarch was placed in the central position, it was a more conservative installation that visually affirmed social hierarchy. But if, as I have speculated, the images of George III and Mrs Siddons were presented as pendants, it was a more daring installation that juxtaposed actress and king. Parallel placement would have emphasized the striking formal similarity between these two enthroned figures, both monarchs of their respective realms.³⁰ The wide divergence between my proposed arrangement and that presented on *What Jane Saw* illuminates the degree of speculation involved in such endeavours. Authors of reconstructions should strive to highlight such uncertainties.

Some images of individual works presented on the site also pose problems. Locating images is a major challenge for any reconstruction project. In the case of the Reynolds exhibition of 1813, many of the canvases shown have changed hands, changed titles, exist in multiple variants, or are known only through prints. In sourcing images for *What Jane Saw*, overall visual appearance was prioritized over obtaining images of the objects displayed in 1813. As a statement in the “About” section explains:

Where more than one copy of the same painting is known to exist (Mannings records how Reynolds’ studio occasionally made multiples for different clients) we selected the best available image, regardless of which Reynolds copy hung in the gallery in the 1813 show. Perhaps these visual approximations can, in time, be substituted for with good color scans of the precise material objects.³¹

In the meantime, however, these images are misleadingly presented. Individual instances where an image of an alternate object has been used are not clearly marked.³² Nor are the substitutes necessarily copies from Reynolds’s studio. For example, consider the full-length portrait of Admiral Rodney painted in 1788 and shown on the south wall of the South Room in 1813. On the site, the entry for this portrait is labelled “Mannings #1545 . . . Location: The Royal Collection”. But the image provided is not of the painting from the Royal Collection (fig. 4). Instead, it represents a replica painted by Matthew Shepperson in 1824, now in the collection of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich (fig. 5).³³ This substitution of a copy by another artist is nowhere indicated. The vast majority of visitors to the site will mistakenly believe they are looking at an image of a work that was painted by Reynolds and present in 1813, neither of which is true; indeed, the Shepperson replica was created eleven years after the exhibition took place.

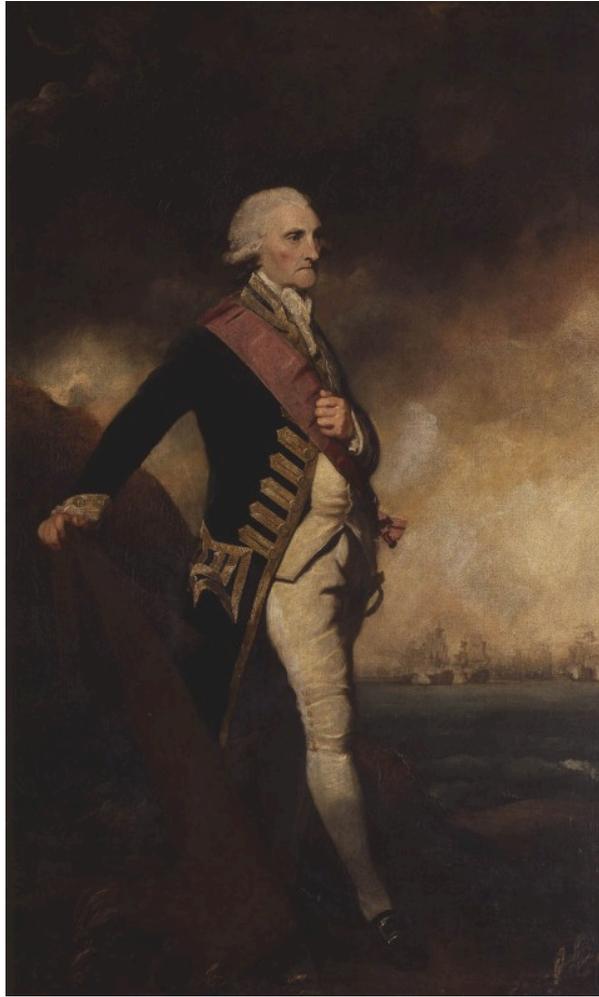


Figure 4.

Sir Joshua Reynolds, George Brydges, First Lord Rodney (1719?-92), 1788-89, oil paint on lined canvas, 238.7 × 148.2 cm. The Royal Collection (RCIN 405899) Digital image courtesy of Royal Collection Trust / Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2016



Figure 5.

Matthew Shepperson, after Sir Joshua Reynolds, Admiral Lord George Brydges Rodney (1719–1792), 1st Baron Rodney, 1824, oil on canvas, 238.8 x 146 cm. Collection of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, Greenwich Hospital Collection (BHC2971) Digital image courtesy of Royal Museums Greenwich

The Shepperson replica is, at least, a decent copy. The same cannot be said for an image substituted for a related object that hung on the adjoining east wall, an earlier half-length portrait of the same sitter, Admiral Rodney. Here, an attempt is made to acknowledge the use of an alternate image: the accompanying text notes that the image shown “is a later version—as even Mannings cannot locate the original”. This statement, combined with the label “Unlocated; version at Petworth House, Sussex”, might lead one to believe that the image on the site depicts the Petworth version.³⁴ This would have been a good choice: the Petworth painting is an autograph Reynolds dated around 1761; a colour photograph of it has recently been published; and Mannings speculates that it may even have been the object shown in

1813 (fig. 6).³⁵ But instead, the image provided is of a copy by an unknown artist now in the collection of the National Portrait Gallery (NPG), although it is not labelled as such (fig. 7).



Figure 6.

Sir Joshua Reynolds, Admiral Lord George Brydges Rodney, 1761, oil on canvas, 127 × 101.6 cm. Petworth House collection Digital image courtesy of Lord Egremont / Petworth House



Figure 7.

Unknown artist, after Sir Joshua Reynolds, George Brydges Rodney, 1st Baron Rodney, n.d., oil on canvas, 239 x 146 cm. Collection of the National Portrait Gallery, London (NPG 1398) Digital image courtesy of National Portrait Gallery, London

These unmarked substitutions may initially seem to be of interest only to experts in the field. Indeed, one of the most laudable aspects of *What Jane Saw* is that it is designed to appeal to a wide audience, attracting users who might not be familiar with art history, much less the details of Reynolds's career. But the very fact that this site is aimed at the general public as well as scholars makes it all the more important that it be transparent about the nature of the experience and the information it is offering. In addition to being misleading, the decision to substitute images of copies by artists other than Reynolds has serious visual consequences for the exhibition reconstruction. For instance, the NPG painting is not a good replica: the Gallery's own cataloguer describes it as "a crude copy" in which "the uniform is skimped and the features misleadingly and incompetently softened".³⁶ In the Petworth canvas, Rodney's shadowed features and firmly pressed lips

suggest a forceful personality tempered by genteel restraint; the copyist transforms the admiral into a slightly louche figure with a cupid's bow mouth and a superciliously raised eyebrow. The scale of this replica also presents problems. The NPG copy measures only 99 by 79.4 centimetres.³⁷ But in the *What Jane Saw* reconstruction, the digital image has been expanded to fill the space occupied by the object shown in 1813, which was roughly three times that size.³⁸ As a consequence, the figure looms larger in the frame than those in the surrounding compositions, although this would not have been the case in the actual installation.

The precise visual and material qualities of individual canvases matter: as the site notes, the two portraits of Admiral Rodney discussed here were part of a fascinating moment in the installation. Hung near each other on adjoining walls, the juxtaposition of two works “painted 30 years apart . . . allows the viewer to see Rodney age before their eyes”.³⁹ This important insight into the complex temporal effects created by this display is undercut by the problematic approach to sourcing images: viewers of the site are not actually comparing images of two paintings created by Reynolds thirty years apart, but of two later replicas created by different artists. In 1813, the juxtaposition of the two portraits not only allowed viewers to assess how Rodney had aged over thirty years, but also allowed them to evaluate how Reynolds's style might have evolved over that same period. But one cannot do the same with the *What Jane Saw* site, as the images provided do not depict works by Reynolds.

The designers of *What Jane Saw* have exhibited an admirable commitment to bringing their project to a wider audience. But such projects do that audience a disservice if the information presented is inaccurate or misleading. Too often *What Jane Saw* becomes not even what Jane might have seen, but rather what Jane did *not* see. Recently, a second exhibition reconstruction has been added to the site. It represents the British Institution's predecessor at 52 Pall Mall, John Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery, in 1796, although no historical evidence exists that Austen attended this exhibition. The Shakespeare Gallery presents even more daunting methodological challenges than the Reynolds exhibition, as only a third of the pictures displayed in 1796 can be traced today. The sizes of the missing works are unknown. For the *What Jane Saw* reconstruction they have been estimated using “averaging of typical dimensions” of works (the precise calculations used to determine the scale of individual canvases are not provided).⁴⁰ Uncertainty is a necessary element of any digital reconstruction. But one cannot employ as many elisions, speculations, and unmarked substitutions as *What Jane Saw* does, and at the same time assert “we believe that we

have ‘frozen’ the gallery precisely as it looked in 1796.”⁴¹ To do so abuses the trust of the audience and discredits the practice of exhibition reconstructions.

Accuracy of the type claimed by its creators for *What Jane Saw* may not even be possible. But if we proceed with an awareness of the historiography of exhibitions and of the limitations of our sources, we can provide something equally exciting: an exhibition reconstruction that illuminates the process of making both nineteenth-century exhibitions and their twenty-first-century representations. Instead of certainty, we can offer exploration. Heeding recent calls for a “process-oriented research and publication approach”, the following section seeks to demonstrate the many stages and decisions involved in reconstructing an exhibition.⁴² In other words, I will show development as well as final product. I am deeply aware that in crafting this reconstruction, my collaborators and I may have introduced fresh errors or raised unanticipated methodological issues. But the goal of this project is not to create a definitive visualization. Instead, this article and its accompanying reconstruction are intended to begin a conversation about the nature of exhibition reconstructions and about the significance of the British Institution Reynolds exhibitions. As I hope to demonstrate, speculative and transparent reconstructions can increase our understanding of historic exhibitions. In particular, they can revive visual dialogues created among works hanging on the crowded walls of nineteenth-century exhibition halls.

Rehanging Reynolds at the British Institution in 1823

The exhibition of 1813 was the first in a series of Institution-sponsored Reynolds exhibitions, held once every ten years for forty years. By returning repeatedly to the subject of Reynolds, the administrators of the Institution kept his works before the eyes of the public and continued to fuel debates about the status of Reynolds and of the national school of art. Here, I will focus on the second of these events, held in 1823. The first exhibition presented Reynolds in splendid isolation; the second put him in conversation with the continental old masters, making an even bolder claim for his art-historical significance.

In order to understand how this installation might have appeared, we must first understand who organized it, and why.⁴³ The British Institution was a collectively funded philanthropic organization established in 1805.⁴⁴ Its founders sought to increase the quality of British art, so that it might compete internationally. Controversially, they advocated study and emulation of continental art; the idea was to beat the old masters at their own game, as it were. By the 1820s, the mission had expanded; the administrators also sought “to extend to a wider circle the love and

admiration, and patronage of the arts".⁴⁵ Exhibitions promoted both of these aims. By showing historic British art alongside continental precedents, these displays argued visually for the inclusion of the British school of painting in the international canon. They also allowed viewers to compare and contrast examples of different artists, styles, and periods. The Institution thus made an essential component of connoisseurship, direct observation, available to a wider public. In 1824, an early historian of the British Institution advocated comparative viewing as the best route to expertise in the arts: "that knowledge which has been called *Vertù*, is best acquired by conversation, and a constant examination of the best works of the best masters; and is formed by comparison of one of them with another, each predominant example having been stored in the memory."⁴⁶ The arrangement of Institution exhibitions encouraged this kind of viewing. Period aesthetics valued juxtaposition over strict categorization, and the arrangement of the works into symmetrical patterns invited visual comparisons, for example among works of like size but unlike subject or style.⁴⁷ Reviewers took up this suggestion, routinely assessing artists and works in relation to each other. "Comparison is the great test of excellence", wrote Robert Hunt in the *Examiner*.⁴⁸

The displays that elicited such responses were developed and installed by a group of administrators. The patrons of the Institution are often described as "aristocratic" or "patrician".⁴⁹ But, in fact, its membership was diverse, including representatives of most political persuasions and religious tendencies.⁵⁰ Peers headed its membership lists, but the rosters also included brewers and Bristol merchants; the one thing the leaders of the Institution had in common was money, be it old or new. Although an annual membership (which included free admission to the gallery) could be had for as little as one guinea a year, the real power in the Institution lay in its Committee of Directors, elected from among the members who had donated one hundred guineas or more.⁵¹ This small circle of collectors and connoisseurs administered a diverse programme of activities, including exhibitions. In 1823, many of the founding Directors were still in charge: Sir George Beaumont, who had been a patron and personal friend of Reynolds's; Richard Payne Knight, an aesthetic theorist, collector of antiquities, and provocateur; and Charles Long, later Lord Farnborough, a conservative politician who advised George IV on artistic matters. The Directors developed their exhibitions with the extensive assistance of an employee, the picture restorer and dealer William Seguer. Initially, it was the Directors who drew up the list of loan requests, but by 1823 Seguer had taken over this function, as well as visiting collections to assess possible loans, making transport arrangements, and overseeing the installation of the exhibition.⁵² Although Seguer is sometimes described as a curator in all but name, he was not the sole author of these displays: the Directors also participated in hanging days.

⁵³ In 1821, Joseph Farington visited the Institution in company with Charles Long. He found that “the arranging pictures the works of the Old Masters was going on”, attended by Directors Samuel Rogers, Lord Carlisle, Lord Mulgrave, and Beaumont. ⁵⁴

The Reynolds exhibition that Seguier and the Directors developed in 1823 differed significantly from the event held a decade earlier. Unlike the monographic show of 1813, the new display showed works by Reynolds in the same space as examples by continental old masters. The North Room was devoted to Reynolds, the Middle Room to the Northern European schools, and the South Room to Southern European art, including that of Italy. In addition, while roughly two-thirds of the Reynolds works exhibited in 1813 had been portraits, in 1823, subject pictures were in the majority. As the catalogue preface made clear, one goal of this event was to demonstrate Reynolds’s range as a painter. The preface praised his ability to evoke a variety of emotions, claiming that although Reynolds was naturally inclined to “select subjects which belong to the gentler feelings . . . the examples here presented to us fully show, that the most forcible expression of the strongest passions was not above his reach.” ⁵⁵ By evoking Reynolds’s ability to convey “the strongest passions”, the author insists on his importance not simply as a portrait painter, but also as a painter in genres considered more elevated at the time, including history. The predominance of subject pictures also created a thematic link to many of the old masters on view, against whom observers were invited to judge the English artist. At the same time, the exhibition invited comparison among different types of Reynolds’s artistic production, by hanging portraits of actresses and royalty alongside subjects from Dante and images of destitute waifs.

To reconstruct these visual narratives, we must first reconstruct the contents of the exhibition. The development of the video presented here was a collective endeavour, made possible by the support of *British Art Studies* and its partners. The designer, George Voicke, created the video from notes, source images, and mock-ups that I provided; this process was overseen by Tom Scutt, Digital Manager at the Paul Mellon Centre, who also worked on production of the final video and provided crucial editorial suggestions. The result is a visualization of the British Institution galleries in 1823 that is meant to be evocative instead of precise. It seeks to highlight uncertainty, rather than to provide an illusion of direct access. For the purposes of this exercise, we focused on how to present the various possible arrangements of a single wall. The reconstruction thus considers only one element of a complex installation; in the video, the rest of the display is invoked by shadowy picture frames that indicate the presence of other works without precisely rendering them. No attempt was made to represent the audience, although the two annual displays at the Institution in 1823, the winter sale exhibition and the summer loan exhibition, attracted over 38,000 visitors. ⁵⁶

In addition, as the text in video strives to make clear, many elements of the depiction are conjecture rather than fact. Text panels interspersed throughout the video provide additional historical information; they also puncture the illusion of exactitude by explaining, within the reconstruction itself, the many decisions and guesses that went into its creation (fig. 8).



[Watch Video](#)

Figure 8.

Duck Duck Zeus, Digital Reconstruction, *Pictures by Sir Joshua Reynolds, with a Selection from the Italian, Spanish, Flemish, and Dutch Schools*, exhibition held at the British Institution, London, 1823

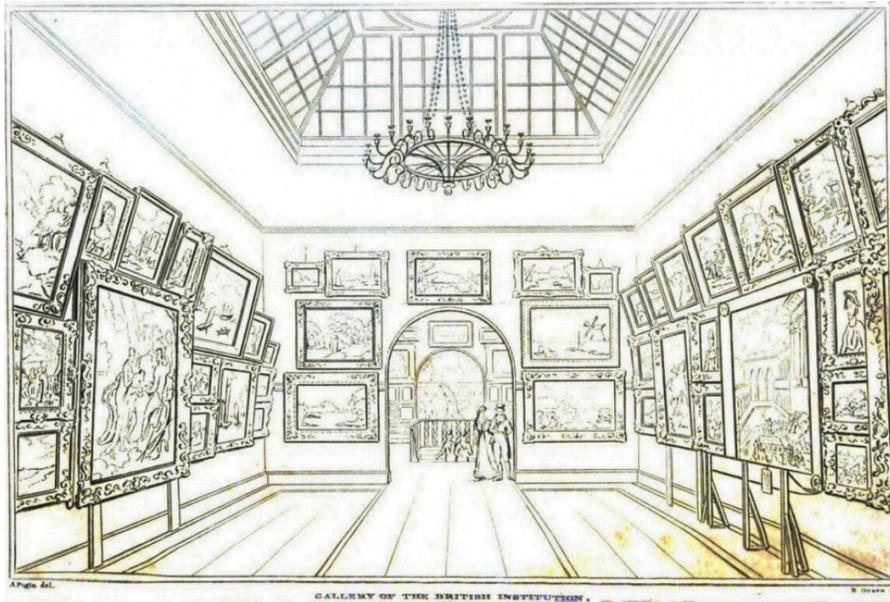


Figure 9.

R. Grave, after A. Pugin, Gallery of the British Institution, published in *Magazine of Fine Arts*, 1821, illustration following page 240. Digital image courtesy of University of Michigan Library, Ann Arbor, MI

Information about the architecture and dimensions of the room was taken from Thomas Smith's *Recollections of the British Institution*, published in 1860.⁵⁷ Smith's book is the only source discovered so far that provides precise measurements of the space, so if Smith's measurements were off, so too is our reconstruction. Period images also played a major role, although they were consulted with caution, always keeping in mind that these images are creative statements in their own right. Available images of British Institution exhibitions include a watercolour by James and Francis Stephanoff, oil paintings by John Scarlett Davis and Alfred Joseph Woolmer, and engravings published in the *Microcosm of London* and the *Magazine of Fine Arts* (fig. 9).⁵⁸ These images provide only a starting point for analysis of the space's possible appearance: as I have shown elsewhere, John Scarlett Davis, in particular, often invented more than he transcribed when representing a display space.⁵⁹ Even in images, such as the Stephanoff watercolour, where the hang depicted closely tracks the number order in the catalogue, its appearance might have been tidied up to enhance the aesthetic appeal of the overall image (fig. 10).⁶⁰ These images were therefore consulted in concert; an individual architectural or decorative feature was considered likely to have actually been in the space only if it appeared in multiple images, preferably confirmed by a textual source.



Figure 10.

James Stephanoff and Francis Philip Stephanoff, *The Interior of the British Institution*, 1817, watercolour on paper, 20 × 29.4 cm. Collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum, London Digital image courtesy of Victoria & Albert Museum, London

Nonetheless, a major takeaway lesson of the design process was that creating a reconstruction can put pressure on the authors to visualize features about which little or nothing is known. A guiding principle of our project was to make the rendering evocative, rather than illusory. In some places, as in the surrounding walls, I believe this tactic was effective. But some aspects remain more definitive than I would like, such as the lighting; the skylights cast visually compelling patterns of light and shadow, but do not reflect potentially confounding issues like the possible height of surrounding buildings. A decision late in the process to trade blue skies for overcast (as more appropriate for coal-burning, industrialized London of the 1820s) resulted in a dim interior, again a matter of conjecture. Building the reconstruction also revealed the variations (and varying level of reliability) among our visual sources. In some cases, the period images were in consensus. For example, all but one of the images consulted depict broad floorboards whose long sides run along an east-west axis. The outlier is John Scarlett Davis's *Interior of the British Institution*, which instead shows a geometric pattern (see [fig. 1](#)). Examination of other works by this artist, including his representations of the Louvre, the Uffizi, and the National Gallery of Naval Art in Greenwich Hospital, reveal that Davis habitually represented floors with this pattern, perhaps to reinforce a sense of perspectival recession.⁶¹ Once this idiosyncrasy was identified, we could feel confident in showing floorboards in the arrangement seen in the other images. In other instances, disparities among the images were explained by

textual sources. Early depictions of the Institution show a box-shaped skylight. Images from the 1820s, however, show an inward-slanting structure. Institution records confirm that the ceiling and skylights were rebuilt between 1819 and 1820, and therefore the slanting structure was included in the video.⁶² Repeatedly, however, the design process revealed the extent to which images are unreliable witnesses; for example, the available representations variously depict the skirting boards as tan, red, dark brown, and, in one case, non-existent. Once again, the outlier was Davis; his propensity for invention led us to believe there had indeed been skirting boards, but the colour remained a mystery. Given that a close-up view of one wall was a central focus of the project, a choice had to be made. Dark red was selected. In this instance, the impulse to create a visually complete rendering of the space overran concerns about a dearth of evidence. In other instances, we chose to omit features due to a lack of information: for example, our reconstruction does not visualize the possible presence of a fireplace in the middle room, visible only in Woolmer's painting.⁶³ The result of all these choices, however, is still potentially deceptive in its precision, an effect we sought to combat with the inclusion of the source images and of explanatory text in the reconstruction itself.

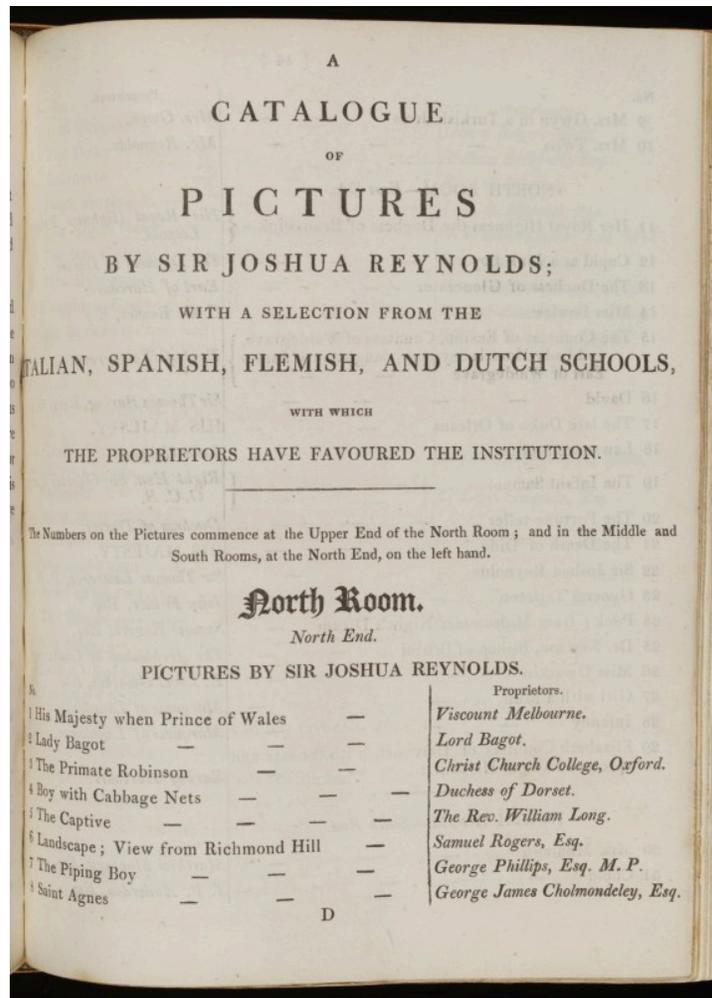


Figure 11.

British Institution, *A Catalogue of Pictures by Sir Joshua Reynolds, with a Selection from the Italian, Spanish, Flemish, and Dutch Schools, with which the Proprietors Have Favoured the Institution* (London: W. Nicol, 1823), page 13 Digital image courtesy of National Art Library, Victoria & Albert Museum, London

The centrepiece of the reconstruction is the depiction of the north wall of the North Room, which visualizes several different kinds of uncertainty. According to the catalogue (which might not reflect last-minute alterations or later additions), ten paintings hung on this wall (fig. 11).⁶⁴ Arranging these works presented fresh methodological challenges: translating a catalogue numbering order into a historically appropriate hang is not a straightforward task, even when the dimensions of both works and wall are known (figs. 12–21). The largest work hanging on the north wall was the monumental equestrian portrait of George IV when Prince of Wales; in a nod to social hierarchy, this painting is listed as number one in the exhibition catalogue. Given hanging practices of the time, it is reasonable to assume that the work was also accorded the primary, central position on the wall, as no work of

similar size was present to serve as a pendant. It was the practice of the Royal Academy hanging committees at this time to start by centring on the walls the most esteemed of the large works to be exhibited.⁶⁵ These large works then formed anchors around which symmetrical patterns could be formed. This approach has obvious benefits, as it avoids the headache of finding space for a massive canvas on an already crowded wall.



Figure 12.

Sir Joshua Reynolds, *George IV*, 1784, oil on canvas, 238.7 × 266.7 cm. Private Collection, UK. Mannings no. 719. This image represents the exact object shown at the British Institution loan exhibition of 1823 as cat. no. 1, *His Majesty when Prince of Wales* Digital image courtesy of Private Collection



Figure 13.

Sir Joshua Reynolds, Lady Barbara Bagot, 1762, oil on canvas, 76 x 63.5 cm. Private Collection. Mannings no. 92. This image represents the exact object shown at the British Institution loan exhibition of 1823 as cat. no. 2, *Lady Bagot* Digital image courtesy of Private Collection



Figure 14.

Sir Joshua Reynolds, Richard Robinson, 1763, oil on canvas, 124 × 99 cm. Collection of Christ Church, Oxford (LP 190). Mannings no. 1535. This image represents the exact object shown at the British Institution loan exhibition of 1823 as cat. no. 3, *The Primate Robinson* Digital image courtesy of Governors of Christ Church, Oxford



Figure 15.

Sir Joshua Reynolds, *A Beggar Boy and His Sister*, 1775, oil on canvas, 76.2 × 63.5 cm. The Faringdon Collection Trust, Buscot Park. Mannings no. 2016. This image represents the exact object shown at the British Institution loan exhibition of 1823 as cat. no. 4, *Boy with Cabbage Nets* Digital image courtesy of The Faringdon Collection Trust, Buscot Park

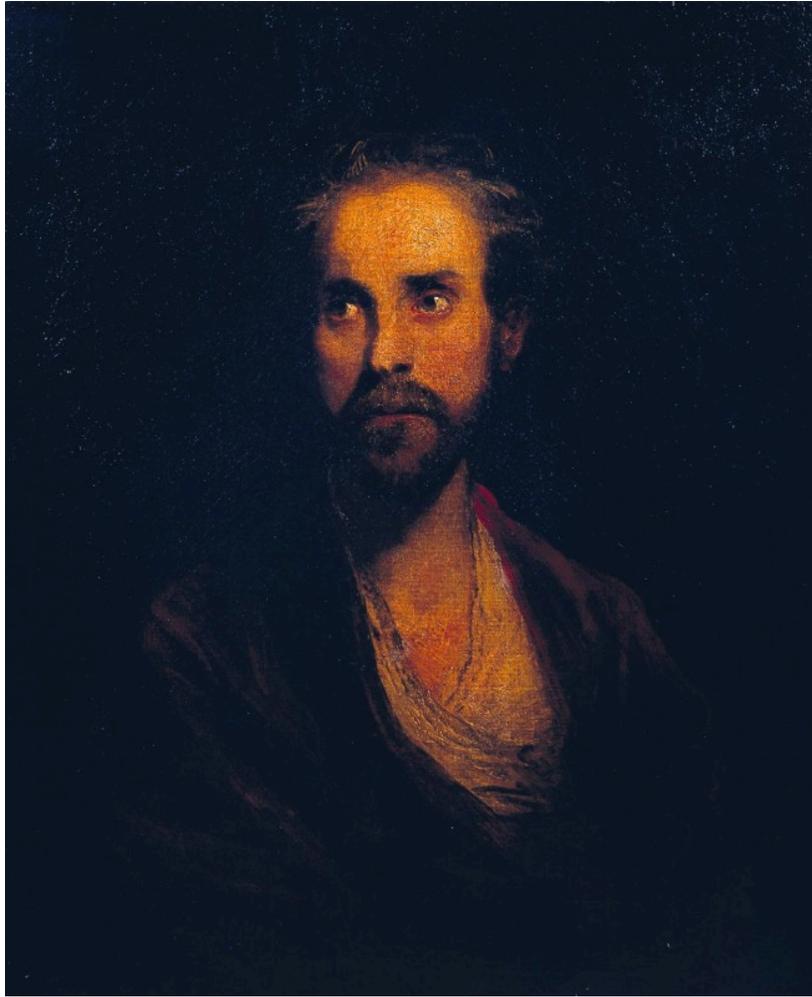


Figure 16.

Sir Joshua Reynolds, *The Banished Lord*, circa 1777, oil on canvas, 76.2 × 63.5 cm. Collection of Tate, London (N00107). Mannings no. 2013. This image represents the exact object shown at the British Institution loan exhibition of 1823 as cat. no. 5, *The Captive* Digital image courtesy of Tate Images



Figure 17.

Sir Joshua Reynolds, *View from Sir Joshua Reynolds's House, Richmond Hill*, 1788, oil on canvas, 69.8 × 90.8 cm. Tate, London (N05635). Mannings no. 2189. This image represents the exact object shown at the British Institution loan exhibition of 1823 as cat. no 6, *Landscape: View from Richmond Hill* Digital image courtesy of Tate Images

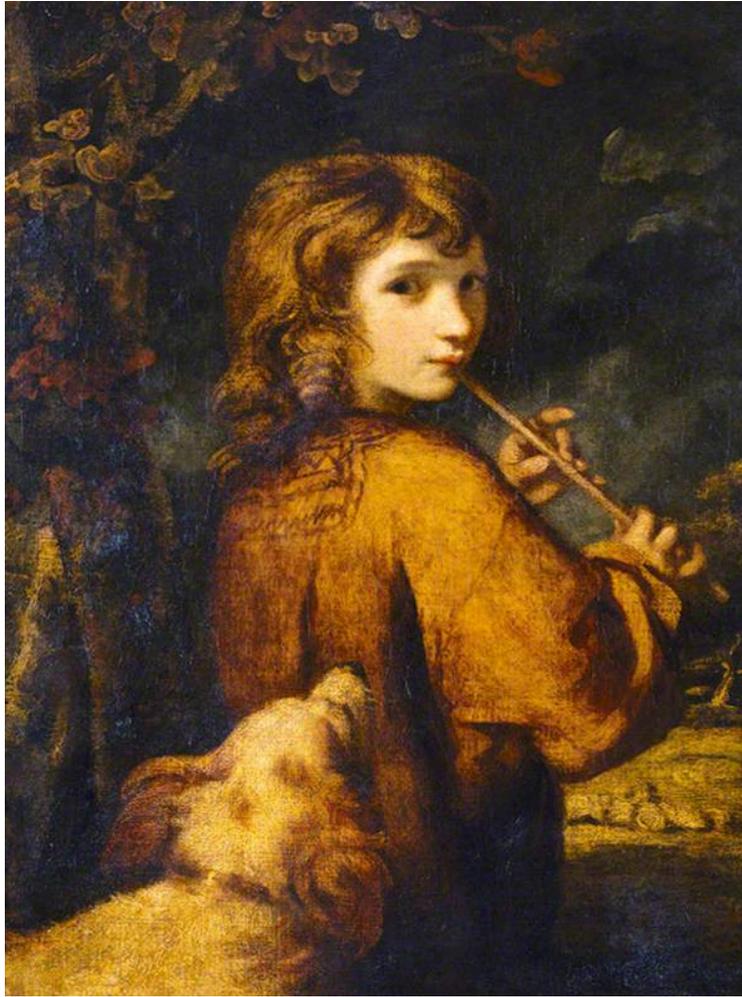


Figure 18.

Sir Joshua Reynolds, Shepherd Boy, circa 1773, oil on canvas, 94 × 63.5 cm. Antony House, National Trust. Mannings no. 2156. This image represents the exact object shown at the British Institution loan exhibition of 1823 as no. 7, *The Piping Boy* Digital image courtesy of National Trust Images / Photo: John Hammond



Figure 19.

Thomas Chambers, after Sir Joshua Reynolds, Mrs Quarrington as St Agnes, 1787, engraving and etching, 39.8 × 27.4 cm. Collection of the British Museum, London (1833,0715.62). The exact object shown in the British Institution loan exhibition of 1823 as no. 8, *Saint Agnes*, was Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Mrs. Quarrington*, 1772. Oil on canvas, 76 × 63 in. Private Collection. Mannings no. 1504. An image of this work could not be located; it is here represented by an engraving after it Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 20.

Sir Joshua Reynolds, Mary Horneck, circa 1775, oil on canvas, 127 x 100 cm. Cliveden Estate. Mannings no. 936. This image represents the exact object shown at the British Institution loan exhibition of 1823 as cat. no. 9, *Mrs. Gwyn in a Turkish dress*
Digital image courtesy of National Trust Images



Figure 21.

John Jones, after Sir Joshua Reynolds, Miss Kemble, 1784, mezzotint, 37.7 × 27.5 cm. Collection of the British Museum, London (Q,3.164). The precise object shown in the British Institution loan exhibition of 1823, cat. no. 10, as *Mrs. Twiss*, has yet to be identified. Mannings noted that it could be as yet unlocated, or it could be identical with the version in Louvre or with the version in the National Museum, Havana, Cuba (Mannings nos. 1027, 1028, 1028c). Here the object is represented by an image of an engraving by John Jones after the canvas now in Havana Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum.

Once the central anchor is in place, the question becomes how to arrange the nine smaller pictures around it. After paintings were hung at the Institution they were labelled with small numbered pieces of tin that were reused every year.⁶⁶ The catalogue helpfully specifies that the numbers began “on the left hand”; in other words, pictures were numbered from left to right on the wall.⁶⁷ But this direction provides only a starting place for a speculative rehang, leaving many other factors in doubt. Did the numbers proceed from top to bottom? Clockwise or counter-clockwise? How many

rows of pictures were formed? Was there a row of smaller pictures above or below the central work? The reconstruction presents three options, created with an eye to both number order and period hanging practices. Option A follows the most straightforward approach for translating the catalogue numbers into a historically appropriate hang (fig. 22). The works are arranged so that the numbers proceed clockwise, starting with *George IV* at the centre, then moving to the work numbered two in the catalogue, *Lady Barbara Bagot*, at lower left, and so on. Option B instead places *Lady Bagot* at the upper left and proceeds counter-clockwise, an arrangement that lofts *George IV* above a row of smaller works, including one of Reynolds's rare landscapes, that are thus made available for close perusal (fig. 23). Option C presents a broad, vertical hang, inspired by the arrangement of pictures shown in Stephanoff's watercolour (fig. 24). These are certainly not the only options that might be considered, and none of these rehangs can be declared to be definitive.



Figure 22.

Catherine Roach, Option A, a possible hanging arrangement of works by Joshua Reynolds displayed on the North Wall of the British Institution's exhibition *Pictures by Sir Joshua Reynolds, with a Selection from the Italian, Spanish, Flemish, and Dutch Schools*, 1823



Figure 23.

Catherine Roach, Option B, a possible hanging arrangement of works by Joshua Reynolds displayed on the North Wall of the British Institution's exhibition *Pictures by Sir Joshua Reynolds, with a Selection from the Italian, Spanish, Flemish, and Dutch Schools*, 1823



Figure 24.

Catherine Roach, Option C, a possible hanging arrangement of works by Joshua Reynolds displayed on the North Wall of the British Institution's exhibition *Pictures by Sir Joshua Reynolds, with a Selection from the Italian, Spanish, Flemish, and Dutch Schools*, 1823

Even less can reasonably be asserted about another element crucial to the appearance of the display: picture frames. As the paintings were lent from a number of private collections, we can assume that a variety of frames were on view. The frames used in the reconstruction are in three eighteenth-century styles, Carlo Maratta, Rococo, and Neoclassical, known to have been used by Reynolds or by his patrons.⁶⁸ These objects are currently used to display works by Reynolds at the Yale Center for British Art, and all date from

the eighteenth century; however, it is also possible that some lenders had reframed their pictures in more up-to-date, early nineteenth-century styles.⁶⁹ To highlight the high level of uncertainty about the frames, they rotate with each hanging option.

Sourcing images for the reconstruction also raised significant methodological issues and provided further opportunities to visualize uncertainty. Simply obtaining images requires a considerable commitment of resources. This project was made possible by the willingness of the editors of *British Art Studies* to commission new photography, and their policy of negotiating permissions on behalf of authors. But, even with this significant institutional support, it was not possible to obtain colour images of all the works exhibited on the north wall in 1823. Several works remain unlocated or in inaccessible private collections. In the absence of high-resolution digital images of these objects, what substitutes are acceptable? Complicating this question is the fact that many of Reynolds's works exist in multiple versions, to which art-historical discourse traditionally accords different degrees of authenticity: "originals", autograph repetitions, studio replicas, and later copies.⁷⁰ Many of these paintings were also engraved. In the case where the actual object exhibited cannot be located, which is the preferable stand-in, an engraving of the precise object, or an oil variant or copy? All are imperfect substitutes that alter even as they reiterate. Artists of this period were well aware of the specific visual qualities of these various media.⁷¹ As engravers argued in defence of their own profession, the creation of an engraving is an act of translation, one that not only transfers a colour image to black and white (and may reverse the composition), but also reflects the judgment of the highly skilled artist who produced the engraving.⁷² Images of oil variants created by Reynolds might seem preferable, since they provide colour and were produced by the artist himself. Yet, as the exhibition *Experiments in Paint* recently demonstrated, Reynolds used variants as an opportunity for exploration, creating subtly but potently different versions of the same composition.⁷³ Making the existence of these various options clear to viewers helps convey the complex nature of replication in this period.



Figure 25.

Thomas Chambers, after Sir Joshua Reynolds, Mrs Quarrington as St Agnes, 1787, engraving and etching, 39.8 × 27.4 cm. Collection of the British Museum, London (1833,0715.62) Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum.

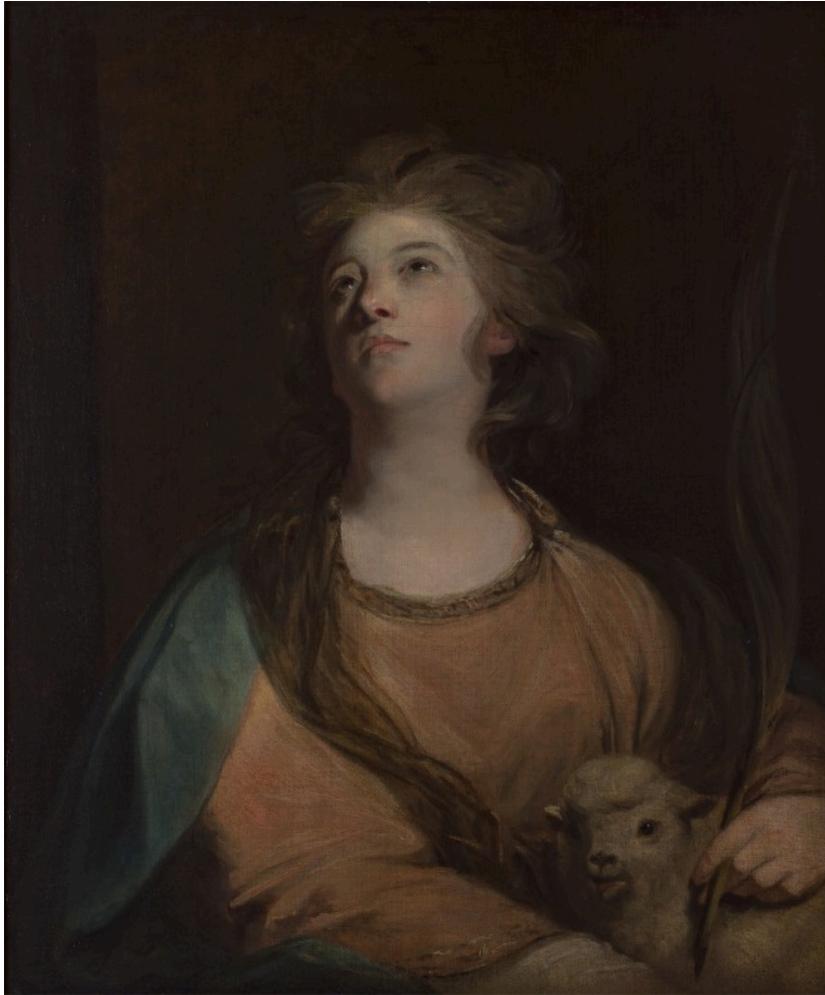


Figure 26.

Sir Joshua Reynolds, Mrs Quarrington as St Agnes, n.d., oil on canvas, 76.2 × 60.9 cm. The Wernher Foundation, UK Digital image courtesy of The Wernher Foundation, UK

The first step for tracing the works shown on the north wall is David Mannings and Martin Postle's *Sir Joshua Reynolds: A Complete Catalogue of his Paintings*, which provides provenance and exhibition histories. Sourcing images for seven of the pictures was relatively straightforward: their provenance matched the lenders identified in the 1823 catalogue, their current location was known, and a colour image could be obtained. The three remaining works presented more of a challenge, however. The portrait of Lady Bagot painted in 1762 was last sold at auction in 1945 and remains in a private collection today.⁷⁴ It is represented in the reconstruction by a scan of the black-and-white photograph reproduced in the catalogue raisonné. This image conveys composition but not colour. More daunting issues are presented by the remaining two paintings on the wall, for which no image of the actual object exhibited in 1823 can be located. For the portrait of the actress Mrs Quarrington as St Agnes, the options are an image of an

engraving from 1787 by Thomas Chambers made after the canvas shown in 1823 (fig. 25), or a colour photograph of an oil variant now held by the Wernher Foundation (fig. 26).⁷⁵ For the purposes of this exercise, I cropped the image of Chambers's print to more closely approximate to the appearance of an oil painting, a decision that robs the print of fundamental aspects of its material existence, including the inscription that attributes joint authorship to Chambers and Reynolds. Both the engraving and the oil variant are at some remove from the object we seek. Both exhibit bold lighting, a dramatic upward eye roll, and a chipper lamb companion. But the woman seen in the engraving is more sweetly pretty, with pronounced lips and deliciously tousled hair. These features are more subtly rendered in the oil variant, which also gives more emphasis to a dark swathe of drapery across the chest. The reconstruction presents both options, allowing viewers to assess for themselves their visual qualities and their impact on the overall hang. Even murkier is the matter of the portrait of Frances Kemble; it is not clear which version of this portrait was present in 1823.⁷⁶ Here it is represented by a 1784 mezzotint by John Jones.

The result of all of these choices is an amalgam of different types of images, each with its limitations and advantages. With the varied tones of mezzotints, line engravings, black-and-white and colour photographs, this assemblage lacks visual unity. But it does allow us to begin to analyse visual relationships among the works. By shifting between various hanging options, viewers can assess the proposed arrangements for themselves. Hopefully, they will also begin to notice visual affinities among the works that remain constant across the various hanging options. Although deliberately, transparently speculative, this reconstruction is also revealing, as the next section seeks to demonstrate.

Analysing the Reconstruction of the North Wall

While we cannot definitively state that any of the options presented in the reconstruction captures the hang exactly as it appeared in 1823, we can still derive great benefit from this exercise. Vivid affinities and contrasts among the works become apparent when their images are seen together and in scale. The preface to the exhibition catalogue stressed Reynolds's ability to depict both "gentler feelings" and "the strongest passions", and that range is certainly on view here.⁷⁷ Multiple genres are represented in these works, which include one of Reynolds's very rare landscapes, two fancy pieces featuring young children, and six portraits of different sizes and subjects. The remaining work, *The Banished Lord*, is generically ambiguous; it is painted on a scale similar to the surrounding fancy pieces, but it presents the kind of emotionally fraught situation most often associated with history painting. Also on view is the development of Reynolds's style over time: the works

span over twenty years of the artist's career, from 1762 to 1784, emphasizing the longevity and development of his practice. Matching this generic and temporal range is the social diversity of the subjects, who range from the king to working-class children. Also represented are an Anglican clergyman, three actresses, a peer's daughter, and a courtier. The centrality of the monarch's portrait maps the existing social hierarchy. It is also fitting given his active patronage of the British Institution; he held the honorary title of Patron and frequently contributed loans to its exhibitions. But in the other portraits, the suggestion of social hierarchy breaks down: for example, the portrait of Lady Bagot, daughter of an earl and wife of a baronet, is smaller than that of the untitled Mary Horneck (later Mrs Gwyn).

This sense of social heterogeneity is enhanced by the formal patterns of the hang. In all of the options proposed here, each of the portraits forms a temporary pendant with a companion of like size. These pairings exhibit vivid visual and social contrasts (see [fig. 22](#)). For instance, *The Banished Lord* forms a temporary pendant with a fancy piece of a similar size, *Shepherd Boy*, opposing the fierce gaze of an adult male in duress with the pert sidelong glance of an Arcadian shepherd boy. A similar contrast of youth and age can be found in the pairing of the portrait of Lady Bagot with that of the actress Frances Kemble, sister of Sarah Siddons. Here, a member of the English aristocracy is paired with a representative of a different kind of lineage, the theatrical Kemble family. The subtle play of equivalence and difference seen here is similar to that created by the exhibition of Reynolds's portraits of Sarah Siddons and the king on the same wall a decade earlier. This juxtaposition of members of aristocratic dynasties with members of theatrical dynasties exemplifies the phenomenon identified by Joseph Roach, in which eighteenth-century "performers, whose celebrity was achieved . . . claimed their place in the public eye beside aristocrats, whose celebrity was ascribed."⁷⁸ Equally intriguing is the pairing of the portrait of Mary Horneck with that of Richard Robinson. Both sitters were personal friends of Reynolds. He was the Archbishop of Armagh in the Church of Ireland, famed for his generous hospitality.⁷⁹ She was the daughter of an army officer, well known for her beauty and charm in London's artistic circles. (Reynolds is alleged to have been so moved by her attractions that he proposed to her during a sitting.⁸⁰) She later married the courtier Colonel Francis Gwyn and served as Woman of the Bedchamber to Queen Charlotte.⁸¹ A formal rhyme links these elite sitters: the billowing white skirt of Horneck's fancy dress outfit echoes the snowy fabric of Robinson's voluminous sleeve. But these temporary pendants are also held in tension by a series of contrasts: male and female, age and youth, sideward glance and frontal gaze, "Turkish" dress and Anglican vestments.

Similar resonances can be found among the groups of three pictures that fall to the left and the right of the central canvas in each hanging option. On the left is an unlikely triumvirate, providing maximum social contrast: the earl's daughter, the bishop, and *A Beggar Boy and His Sister*, which depicts two urchins eking out a marginal living hawking street wares. On the right is a more homogeneous group, which we might label the "line of beauties": Mary Horneck and the actresses Mrs Quarrington and Frances Kemble. In a nod to propriety (or is it a splendid visual joke?), in all three reconstructions presented here, the Prince of Wales, a notorious womanizer, turns his head resolutely away from the actresses and the professional beauty (see figs. 22-24). His gaze falls instead on the clergyman, while his horse's rear end is pointed towards the ladies. These arrangements forestall rude insinuations about the royal image ogling portraits of women, which had been made by critics reviewing eighteenth-century exhibitions.⁸² Yet these likenesses still share a wall. This assemblage of images generates many potential narratives, ranging from a patriotic celebration of Reynolds's versatility to a humorous commentary on the monarch's predilections.

"Dangerous Juxtaposition": Reynolds Among the Old Masters



Figure 27.

Studio of Peter Paul Rubens, Philip II, King of Spain (1527-1598), circa 1635, oil on canvas, 255.9 × 220.3 cm. The Royal Collection (RCIN 404392) Digital image courtesy of Royal Collection Trust / Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2016

Of course, this reconstruction considers only ten works in an installation that contained 175 paintings, roughly two-thirds of which were continental old masters. The visual resonances among the works on the north wall would have been amplified and complicated by the presence of works on the surrounding walls and adjacent galleries. For instance, *George IV* was not the only monumental equestrian portrait on view. On the east side of the adjoining middle room hung a work attributed to Rubens, then titled *Philip the Fourth of Spain on Horseback* (now identified as a portrait of Philip II from Rubens's studio; [fig. 27](#)).⁸³ Mark Hallett has argued that when Reynolds's martial equestrian portrait of George was first exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1784, viewers would have compared it with their memories of

previously exhibited entries in the genre by Reynolds and his rivals.⁸⁴ In 1823, a different, more direct visual comparison was offered, one that asserted that Reynolds could compete with the continental old masters.

By standing near the archway in the middle room, a viewer could have glanced from Rubens's equestrian portrait to Reynolds's. Both of these large-scale works depict a richly adorned ruler in full control of a powerful horse, although in Rubens's composition the Spanish monarch is also accompanied by a bare-bosomed allegory of Victory. Such distinctions are key: Reynolds both inhabits the conventions of continental portraiture and adapts them for the purposes of an eighteenth-century Anglican prince. Philip's image was doubly linked to George through both iconography and possession: it was lent to the exhibition from the British royal collection, or, as the catalogue put it, by "HIS MAJESTY".⁸⁵ This conspicuous royal support of the Institution earned George some much-needed good press in the aftermath of his highly unpopular efforts to rid himself of his despised wife, Caroline. One reviewer noted, "His MAJESTY is, as usual, a liberal and valuable contributor."⁸⁶ In addition to positing the Hanoverian monarch as part of a grand tradition of royal patronage, the simultaneous exhibition of these two works also asserted a place for Reynolds in the grand tradition of artists like Rubens who painted for kings. By displaying these works in the same space, the administrators of the British Institution offered proof, in physical form, of the claim made for Reynolds in the catalogue preface: "we rank him among the most eminent Painters the art has produced."⁸⁷ One critic declared victory: "This exhibition furnished to an Englishman abundant matter for pride and exultation. The power and the grasp of the mind of Reynolds are here seen and felt; seen too in the most dangerous juxtaposition with works that have stood the test of centuries."⁸⁸ As this comment suggests, Institution exhibitions were engines for comparative viewing, encouraging their audience to assess works in concert.

Responses to the exhibition were not universally celebratory, however. Much like the temporary pendants it contained, the overall display in 1823 exhibited a compelling tension between opposites, offering both an argument for Reynolds's enduring reputation and a measure of the deleterious effects of time. The same journalist who hailed the force of Reynolds's works in the face of "dangerous juxtaposition" also mourned their deterioration due to the artist's technical experiments: "the means to which he resorted to rival the effects of ancient pictures, while they produced that effect for a season, contained within them the principle of destruction, beneath which his pictures are fast withering away."⁸⁹ Indeed, an important (and as yet under-studied) function of the Reynolds exhibitions was to mark the passage of time for their viewers. The exhibitions of 1813 and 1823 offered an elegy not only for the artist but also for the generation he had

painted: many of those pictured had passed away, and those still living were no longer young. At the same time that these exhibitions mourned the fading of a generation, however, they also celebrated the endurance of Reynolds's memory. Ironically, given the physical condition of his canvases, they could not celebrate the endurance of his images themselves. Yet the monographic project held out the hope of the resistance of time, what one reviewer in 1823 called "the immortality of fame".⁹⁰ The repeated act of assembling Reynolds's works together affirmed the abilities of the work of art to carry the memory of an artist, and his subjects, beyond a human lifetime.

Exhibition reconstructions are not, in fact, time travel. Reconstructions should be crafted with an awareness of their limitations and presented in a way that makes those limitations transparent to the viewer. But while we cannot revisit the galleries of the past, we can rediscover information about them. In particular, we can revive the ephemeral, powerful, and shifting meanings generated through the temporary combination of individual artworks. The works presented in 1823 emphasized Reynolds's range as a painter and his worthiness to hang alongside the continental old masters. The organizers of the Reynolds exhibitions aspired to a different type of time travel: they sought to send Reynolds forward through time, to claim a place for him in posterity. The fact that we are still talking about him today, and arguing about the best way to reconstruct exhibitions of his work, suggests that they were successful.

Footnotes

- 1 See, for example, Norman Bryson's critique of Karl Lehmann-Harleben's mid-twentieth-century diagrams based on an ancient ekphrastic text. "Philostratus and the Imaginary Museum", in *Vision and Textuality*, ed. Stephen Melville and Bill Readings (London: Macmillan, 1995), 174-94.
- 2 Johanna Drucker, "Is There a 'Digital' Art History?", *Visual Resources* 29, no. 1-2 (2013): 12.
- 3 Karen M. Kensek, "A Survey of Methods for Showing Missing Data, Multiple Alternatives, and Uncertainty in Reconstructions", *CSA Newsletter* 19, no. 3 (Winter 2007), <http://www.csanet.org/newsletter/winter07/nlw0702.html>. Representing uncertainty was also the subject of a recent session at the College Art Association. <http://caa2014.thaticamp.org/2014/02/11/representing-uncertainty/>.
- 4 Sheila Bonde, Clarke Maines, Elli Mylonas, and Julia Flanders, "The Virtual Monastery: Re-Presenting Time, Human Movement, and Uncertainty at Saint-Jean-des-Vignes, Soissons", *Visual Resources* 25, no. 4 (2009): 363.
- 5 Nicholas Penny, *The Sixteenth-Century Italian Paintings*, Vol. II: *Venice, 1540-1600* (London: National Gallery, 2008), xviii; for an alternate candidate, see Konstantinos Stefanis, "Nathaniel Hone's 1775 Exhibition: The First Single-Artist Retrospective", *Visual Culture in Britain* 14, no. 2 (2013): 131-53.
- 6 Martin Postle, "In Search of the 'True Briton': Reynolds, Hogarth, and the British School", in *Towards a Modern Art World*, ed. Brian Allen, Studies in British Art 1 (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1995), 121-43.
- 7 Francis Haskell, *The Ephemeral Museum: Old Master Paintings and the Rise of the Art Exhibition* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2000), 54.
- 8 <http://www.whatjanesaw.org/index.php>.
- 9 On the site's lack of engagement with "visualizing uncertainty", see also Jodi Cranston, "What Jane Saw", 18 June 2015, doi:10.3202/caa.reviews.2015.74.
- 10 Jennifer Schuessler, "Seeing Art Through Austen's Eyes", *New York Times*, 24 May 2013, C1; John Mullen, "New Website Displays Celebrities of Jane Austen's Youth", *Guardian*, 24 May 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/may/24/website-celebrities-jane-austen-youth>; Richard De Ritter, "What Jane Saw", *British Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 20 June 2013, <https://www.bsecs.org.uk/criticks-reviews/what-jane-saw>; Susan Spencer, "What Jane Saw", *Eighteenth-Century Life* 38, no. 1 (Winter 2014), doi:10.1215/00982601-2390034; Cranston, "What Jane Saw".

- 11 Janine Barchas, "Digitally Reconstructing the Reynolds Retrospective Attended by Jane Austen in 1813: A Report on E-Work-in-Progress", *ABO: Interactive Journal for Women in the Arts, 1640-1830* 2, no. 1, doi:10.5038/2157-7129.2.1.12.
- 12 Schuessler, "Seeing Art Through Austen's Eyes", C1.
- 13 Barchas, "Digitally Reconstructing the Reynolds Retrospective".
- 14 Christopher Whitehead, "Architectures of Display at the National Gallery: The Barry Rooms as Art Historiography and the Problems of Reconstructing Historical Gallery Space", *Journal of the History of Collections* 17, no. 2 (2005): 204; see also C. S. Matheson, "'A Shilling Well Laid Out': The Royal Academy's Early Public", in *Art on the Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House, 1780-1836*, ed. David Solkin (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2001), 39-53.
- 15 Victor I. Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Early Modern Meta-Painting*, trans. Anne-Marie Glasheen (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997), 105.
- 16 Catherine Roach, "Domestic Display and Imperial Identity: A Visual Record of the Art Collections of Edward Hawke Locker", *Huntington Library Quarterly* 75, no. 3 (Autumn 2012): 411-28.
- 17 Catherine Roach, "Images as Evidence? Morse and the Genre of Gallery Painting", in *Samuel F. B. Morse's Gallery of the Louvre and the Art of Invention*, ed. Peter John Brownlee (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2014), 46-59.
- 18 "Monthly Retrospect of the Fine Arts", *Monthly Magazine*, March 1806, 157; on the "much-hated red wallpaper" see also Peter Fullerton, "Patronage and Pedagogy: The British Institution in the Early Nineteenth Century", *Art History* 5 (March 1982): 63.
- 19 Women (and professional artists of both genders) were excluded from the Institution's seat of power, the Committee of Directors; the Governors, who met once a year to hear a report from the Directors and vote on major issues, included a few women, who were invited to vote by proxy rather than attending in person. However, unlike the Royal Academy, the Institution did allow women to enroll in its school. See *An Account of the British Institution for Promoting the Fine Arts in the United Kingdom* (London: John Hatchard, 1805), 6.
- 20 Barchas, "Digitally Reconstructing the Reynolds Retrospective".
- 21 Barchas cites, without fully taking on board, both Haskell's *Ephemeral Museum* and Solkin's *Art on Line*. Prominent studies of period hanging conventions that do not appear in Barchas's bibliography include: Francis Russell, "The Hanging and Display of Pictures, 1700-1850", in *The Fashioning and Functioning of the British Country House*, ed. Gervase Jackson-Stops, Studies in the History of Art 25 (Hanover, NH: Univ. Press of New England, 1989), 133-53; Giles Waterfield, "Picture Hanging and Gallery Decoration", in *Palaces of Art: Art Galleries in Britain, 1790-1990*, ed. Giles Waterfield (London: Dulwich Picture Gallery, 1991), 49-65; and Whitehead, "Architectures of Display at the National Gallery". Barchas, "Digitally Reconstructing the Reynolds Retrospective".
- 22 Waterfield, "Picture Hanging", 51.
- 23 Waterfield, "Picture Hanging", 51.
- 24 David Solkin, "Staging the Spectacle", in *Art on the Line*, 24.
- 25 On the North Room as the principal gallery, see "Fine Arts Exhibition", *Belle Assemblée*, March 1828, 133.
- 26 As listed in the *Catalogue of Pictures by the Late Sir Joshua Reynolds, Exhibited by Permission of the Proprietors, in Honour of the Memory of that Distinguished Artist, and for the Improvement of British Art* (London: W. Bulmer, 1813): no. 1, *Portrait of His Majesty* (Mannings no. 717, *George III, 1779*, Royal Academy, London); no. 2, *Portrait of Mrs. Siddons as the Tragic Muse* (Mannings no. 1619, *Sarah Siddons as the Tragic Muse, 1784*, Huntington Library, San Marino, CA); no. 3, *Piping Boy* (Mannings no. 2156, *Shepherd Boy*, about 1773, Antony House, National Trust, Swindon, UK); no. 4, *Sleeping Girl* (Mannings no. 2077, *Girl Sleeping*, untraced, 1788); no. 5 *Boy with Cabbage Nets* (Mannings no. 2016, *A Beggar Boy and His Sister, 1775*, The Faringdon Collection Trust, Buscot Park, Oxfordshire, UK). David Mannings, ed., with Martin Postle, *Sir Joshua Reynolds: A Complete Catalogue of his Paintings* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2000).
- 27 Barchas, "Digitally Reconstructing the Reynolds Retrospective".
- 28 Russell, "Hanging and Display of Pictures, 1700-1850", 144.
- 29 Waterfield, "Picture Hanging", 50.
- 30 For the interrelationship of royal celebrity and theatrical celebrity in this period, see Joseph Roach, *It* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2007).
- 31 <http://www.whatjanesaw.org/1813/about.php>.
- 32 The potential for confusion here is high: one reviewer noted the use of images of prints as stand-ins for some objects, but also praised the site's creators for their "considerable success" in locating "images of all but three of the works originally displayed". De Ritter, "What Jane Saw". Engravings or photographs of variants by Reynolds or of later copies are not, in fact, images of the works originally displayed.
- 33 <http://collections.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/14444.html>.
- 34 [http://www.whatjanesaw.org/1813/rooms.php?location=SRES#wjs\[painting\]/14/](http://www.whatjanesaw.org/1813/rooms.php?location=SRES#wjs[painting]/14/).
- 35 Mannings, ed., *Sir Joshua Reynolds: A Complete Catalogue of his Paintings*, 397. The Petworth canvas was included in Martin Postle, ed., *Joshua Reynolds: The Creation of Celebrity* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), 98-99.
- 36 John Ingamells, *National Portrait Gallery: Mid-Georgian Portraits, 1760-1790* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2004), 406.

- 37 Ingamells, *National Portrait Gallery*, 406.
- 38 <http://www.whatjanesaw.org/1813/rooms.php?location=SRES>.
- 39 [http://www.whatjanesaw.org/1813/rooms.php?location=SRES#wjs\[painting\]/14/](http://www.whatjanesaw.org/1813/rooms.php?location=SRES#wjs[painting]/14/).
- 40 <http://www.whatjanesaw.org/1796/about.php>.
- 41 Janine Barchas, "Reporting on What Jane Saw 2.0: Female Celebrity and Sensationalism in Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery", *ABO: Interactive Journal for Women in the Arts, 1640-1830* 5, no. 1, doi:10.5038/2157-7129.5.1.2. This claim is repeated in Janine Barchas and Kristina Straub, "Curating *Will & Jane*", *Eighteenth-Century Life* 40, no. 2 (April 2016), doi:10.1215/00982601-348864.
- 42 Christopher Johanson, "Visualizing History: Modeling in the Eternal City", *Visual Resources* 25, no. 4 (2009): 407; see also Pamela Fletcher, "Reflections on Digital Art History", doi:10.3202/caa.reviews.2015.73, 18 June 2015.
- 43 This section draws on research for my current book project, "The British Institution: A History".
- 44 On the Institution, see Fullerton, "Patronage and Pedagogy", 59-72; Ann Pullan, "Public Goods or Private Interests? The British Institution in the Early Nineteenth Century", in *Art in Bourgeois Society, 1790-1850*, ed. Andrew Hemingway and William Vaughan (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), 27-44; Nicholas Tromans, "Museum or Market? The British Institution", in *Governing Cultures: Art Institutions in Victorian London*, ed. Paul Barlow and Colin Trodd (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 44-55; and Catherine Roach, *Pictures-within-Pictures in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Routledge, 2016), 24-63.
- 45 *An Historical Catalogue of Portraits, Representing Distinguished Persons of the History and Literature of the United Kingdom* (London: W. Bulmer, 1820), 14. The author of the preface was Charles Long. British Institution Minutes, National Art Library, Victoria & Albert Museum (hereafter Minutes), 21 March 1820; Joseph Farington, *Diary of Joseph Farington*, 17 vols., ed. Kenneth Garlick, Angus Macintyre, and Kathryn Cave (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1978-98), 16: 5515.
- 46 Rev. J. Dalloway, *An 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* (London: Priestley and Weale, 1824), ix.
- 47 Mark Hallett, "Reading the Walls: Pictorial Dialogue at the British Royal Academy", *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 37, no. 4 (Summer 2004): 586.
- 48 Robert Hunt, "Fine Arts", *The Examiner*, 17 June 1821, 380.
- 49 Waterfield, "Picture Hanging", 51; Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (London: Pimlico, 2003), 176.
- 50 Peter Funnell, "The London Art World and its Institutions", in *London: World City, 1800-1840*, ed. Celina Fox (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1992), 158.
- 51 In 1822 the minimum subscription was raised from one guinea to three. Minutes, 11 June 1822.
- 52 The Directors drafted the initial checklists for their first two loan exhibitions, but starting in 1815 this task was delegated to Seguier. Minutes, 15 February 1813; 16 June 1814; and 9 June 1815.
- 53 On Seguier as curator, see Tromans, "Museum or Market?", 50.
- 54 Farington, *Diary*, 16: 5664.
- 55 *A Catalogue of Pictures by Sir Joshua Reynolds, with a Selection from the Italian, Spanish, Flemish, and Dutch Schools, with which the Proprietors Have Favoured the Institution* (London: W. Nicol, 1823), 12.
- 56 The actual number of visitors was even larger, as the admission receipts do not include visits by members and their guests, who did not pay at the door. Minutes, 1 June 1824.
- 57 Thomas Smith, *Recollections of the British Institution* (London: Simpkin and Marshall, 1860), 19. On this publication, see Pullan, "Public Goods or Private Interests?", 27-44.
- 58 John Scarlett Davis, *Interior of the British Institution* (1829, Yale Center for British Art); Alfred Joseph Woolmer, *Interior of the British Institution (Old Master Exhibition, Summer 1832)* (1833, Yale Center for British Art); James Stephanoff and Francis Philip Stephanoff, *The Interior of the British Institution* (1817, Victoria & Albert Museum); Thomas Rowlandson and Augustus Pugin, *The British Institution, from The Microcosm of London* (London: R. Ackerman, 1808-10); R. Grave after A. Pugin, *Gallery of the British Institution, from Magazine of Fine Arts* (London: John Warren and G. and W. B. Whittaker, 1821).
- 59 Roach, *Pictures-Within-Pictures*, 24-63; Roach, "Images as Evidence?", 46-59.
- 60 On this work as a "prescriptive rather than descriptive image", see Philippa Simpson, "Titian in post-Orléans London", in *The Reception of Titian in Britain: From Reynolds to Rubens*, ed. Peter Humfrey (Turnhout: Brepolis, 2013), 106.
- 61 For these works, see Tony Hobbs, *John Scarlett Davis: A Biography* (Almeley, Herefordshire: Logaston Press, 2004); Roach, "Images as Evidence?"; and Catherine Roach, "'My Hero': Women and the Domestic Display of Marine Paintings", in *Spreading Canvas: Eighteenth-Century British Marine Painting*, ed. Eleanor Hughes (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2016), 112-33.
- 62 Minutes, 19 July 1819; 17 March 17 1820; 8 June 1820.
- 63 For discussion of this feature, see <http://www.whatjanesaw.org/1813/about.php>.

- 64 They were, as listed in the *Catalogue of Pictures by Sir Joshua Reynolds* (1823): no. 1, *His Majesty when Prince of Wales* (Mannings no. 719, *George IV*, 1784, Lord Lloyd-Webber); no. 2, *Lady Bagot* (Mannings no. 92, *Lady Barbara Bagot*, 1762, private collection); no. 3, *The Primate Robinson* (Mannings no. 1535, *Richard Robinson*, 1763, Christ Church, Oxford); no. 4, *Boy with Cabbage Nets* (Mannings no. 2016, *A Beggar Boy and His Sister*, 1775, The Faringdon Collection Trust, Buscot Park); no. 5, *The Captive* (Mannings no. 2013, *The Banished Lord*, about 1777, Tate Britain); no. 6, *Landscape: View from Richmond Hill* (Mannings no. 2189, *View from Sir Joshua Reynolds's House, Richmond Hill*, 1784, Tate Britain); no. 7, *The Piping Boy* (Mannings no. 2156, *Shepherd Boy*, about 1773, Antony House, National Trust); no. 8, *Saint Agnes* (Mannings no. 1504, *Mrs. Quarrington*, 1772, private collection); no. 9, *Mrs. Gwyn in a Turkish dress* (Mannings no. 936, *Mary Horneck*, about 1775, Cliveden Estate, National Trust); no. 10, *Mrs. Twiss* (Mannings no. 1028c, *Frances Kemble*, unlocated. Mannings notes this object could be identical with nos. 1027 or 1028 in his catalogue). Mannings, *Sir Joshua Reynolds: A Complete Catalogue*.
- 65 George Dunlop Leslie, *The Inner Life of the Royal Academy, with An Account of its Schools and Exhibitions Principally in the Reign of Queen Victoria* (London: J. Murray, 1914), 77.
- 66 Minutes, 8 June 1821.
- 67 *Catalogue of Pictures by Sir Joshua Reynolds* (1823), 13.
- 68 Nicholas Penny, "Frame Studies: I. Reynolds and Picture Frames", *Burlington Magazine* 128, no. 1004 (Nov. 1986): 810–25; Jacob Simon, *Art of the Picture Frame: Artist, Patrons, and the Framing of Portraits in Britain* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 1996), 64–66, 94–95. Thank you to Jacob Simon for sharing his thoughts on the matter; any errors in frame selection are, of course, my own.
- 69 Penny notes that there was an enthusiasm for reframing works in the rococo style after 1815. Penny, "Frame Studies", 824.
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- 71 Anne Higonnet, "Manet and the Multiple", *Grey Room* 48 (Summer 2012): 102–16.
- 72 Celina Fox, "The Engravers' Battle for Professional Recognition in Early Nineteenth-Century London", *London Journal* 2 (1976): 3–31.
- 73 Lucy Davis and Mark Hallett, eds., *Joshua Reynolds: Experiments in Paint* (London: The Wallace Collection, 2015).
- 74 Mannings, *Sir Joshua Reynolds: A Complete Catalogue*, no. 92.
- 75 Mannings, *Sir Joshua Reynolds: A Complete Catalogue*, no. 1504, no. 1505.
- 76 Mannings, *Sir Joshua Reynolds: A Complete Catalogue*, no. 1028c.
- 77 *Catalogue of Pictures by Sir Joshua Reynolds* (1823), 12.
- 78 Roach, *It*, 38.
- 79 G. Le G. Norgate, "Robinson, Richard, first Baron Rokeby (bap. 1708, d. 1794)", rev. Eoin Magennis, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004); online ed., ed. David Cannadine, Sept. 2010, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23867>.
- 80 Richard Wendorf, *Sir Joshua Reynolds: The Painter in Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1996), 65.
- 81 Ian McIntyre, *Joshua Reynolds: The Life and Times of the First President of the Royal Academy* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 168–69; Maurice Brockwell, *A Catalogue of Paintings in the Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Charles P. Taft* (New York: Privately printed, 1920), 97–99.
- 82 Hallett, "Reading the Walls", 581.
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- 84 Hallett, "Reading the Walls", 597–601.
- 85 *Catalogue of Pictures by Sir Joshua Reynolds* (1823), 12.
- 86 "Fine Arts: The British Institution", *Morning Post*, 19 May 1823, 3.
- 87 *Catalogue of Pictures by Sir Joshua Reynolds* (1823), 12.
- 88 "British Institution", *La Belle Assemblée*, June 1823, 277.
- 89 "British Institution", *La Belle Assemblée*, June 1823, 277.
- 90 "British Gallery", *Times*, 19 May 1823, 3.

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