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## ‘Directions to Know a Good Picture’: Marketing National School Categories to the British Public in the “Long” Eighteenth Century

*Bénédicte Miyamoto*

The artistic hierarchy of national “schools” in the eighteenth century operated on multiple levels—the adoration of favourite masters, the selection of paramount aesthetic qualities and the ranking of periods and genres. As a vogue for Netherlandish painting spread throughout eighteenth-century Europe and collecting became more democratic, the academic hierarchy of artistic schools became the subject of renewed discussions and increased scrutiny. Traditional Mediterranean superiority was pitted anew against northern aesthetic sensibility, in increasingly varied art criticism and increasingly complex art theories. In Britain, however, the audience experienced specific challenges in shaping and reshaping the highbrow European canon due to the marginality of the British art world, which had been cut off from academic debates and absent as a school from most discussions.<sup>1</sup> When touring English collectors’ houses in search of ‘some of the best pictures in Europe’ for his guide *English Connoisseur* (1766), Thomas Martyn criticised the French for how they questioned the hierarchy of schools and registered his disgust at the idea that taste could fluctuate. He bristled when witnessing ‘the tawdry production’ of France’s ‘own artists set upon a level, nay sometimes, with true French vanity, thrusting aside the divine production of the Italian Pencils,’ and set out on the contrary to ‘felicitate his own countrymen, upon their not having produced artists of sufficient eminence, to give a pretence of burying a taste for real merit and greatness

1 John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1997); *Id.*, “Cultural Production, Consumption, and the Place of the Artist in Eighteenth-Century England,” in *Towards a Modern Art World*, ed. Brian Allen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 7–25; Stephen Copley, “The Fine Arts in Eighteenth-Century Polite Culture,” in *Painting and the Politics of Culture: New Essays on British Art 1700–1850*, ed. John Barrell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 13–27; Iain Pears, *The Discovery of Painting: The Growth of Interest in the Arts in England, 1680–1768* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

under national prejudice.<sup>2</sup> Martyn was more diffident a voice than most British connoisseurs, who increasingly set out to become advocates of a British art school and reappraise European academic art theories.<sup>3</sup> But the traditional categories of schools that Martyn revered do seem to have held great sway in Britain. While the British public progressively mastered modern standards of connoisseurship, which heightened the importance of purely aesthetic values, school labels held fast in sales documents. This paper proposes to explore the curtailed descriptions of continental schools in British picture catalogues from the 1680s to the 1800s. It will also study how these descriptions affected the organisation of catalogues, in order to determine what their presence and role can tell us about the development of art-historical knowledge in Britain. It would be inaccurate to deduce that the vocabulary and strategies of the British art market lagged behind the connoisseurship of British writers and collectors. This paper posits that the hierarchy of schools was used as a marketing tool, which operated under a standardised and trusted format to successfully attract a larger audience.

### School Categories as a Foreign Concept

As a category, schools described a foreign reality for British buyers at the beginning of this period. They were umbrella terms used to describe an artwork's highly regarded *locus originis* and therefore its reputable national characteristics, its recognisable stylistic affinities with masters or a set of followers, and the affiliation with academic institutions—all of which were circumstances most painters benefited from much later in Britain than the rest of Europe. In his *Réflexions critiques* (1719; translated in English in 1748), the abbé Du Bos gave a scathing appraisal of the artistic professions in England. He used the traditional hierarchy between manual ability and liberal faculties to show that the British arts were still in their infancy and performed by workmen who were not yet artists:

If ever [works] are worth admiring, it is for the hand and execution of the workman, and not for the design of the artist. [...] But [the English] have not been able as yet to attain to that taste in designs which some foreign

2 Thomas Martyn, *The English Connoisseur: Containing an Account of Whatever is Curious in Painting, Sculpture, &c.* (London: L. Davis, 1766), Preface, iv.

3 Ronald Paulson, *Breaking and Remaking: Aesthetic Practice in England, 1700–1820* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989).

artists carried over with them to London; where it has never stirred out of their shops.<sup>4</sup>

According to the abbé Du Bos, while the Continent had schools of art, England had only painters' shops, the owners of which were for the most part not natives of Britain. The profession of painter did indeed experience hardship during the years preceding the foundation of the Royal Academy in 1768.<sup>5</sup> Britain was faced with a double lacuna—not only was there a dearth of institutions to train the profession into maturity, but there was also no recognised school of art. The artists of the British court, such as Holbein, Rubens and Van Dyck, had mostly been foreigners, and royal patronage remained patchy, subsequent to the foundation of the Royal Academy, although it has been reappraised convincingly.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, royal patronage was not seconded by the Church of England, which largely disapproved of the use of images in churches and therefore largely disqualified itself from the role of patron for most of the century.<sup>7</sup>

British artists assembled early on—in painting academies, drawing schools, and in related coffeehouses—to dream up a rival to the Continent's academies. But they were aware that the term "school" encompassed not only the academic institution that could train budding artists but also, and most importantly, a body of masters, both ancient and modern, who defined a particular tradition of painting and who were seen as illustrative of a national character and manner in the art of painting. The absence of such a body of British artists was a common lament in the lines of British writers on art, who strove to explain the lack of a national school of painting when the sister art of poetry

4 Jean-Baptiste Du Bos, *Critical Reflections*, 3 vols. (London: printed for John Nourse, 1748), 114.

5 Sarah Monks, John Barrell, and Mark Hallett, eds., *Living with the Royal Academy: Artistic Ideals and Experiences in England, 1768–1848* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013); Matthew Hargraves, *'Candidates for Fames': The Society of Artists of Great Britain, 1760–1791* (New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 2005); Richard Johns, "Framing Robert Aggas: The Painter-Stainers' Company and the 'English School for Painters,'" *Art History* 31, no. 3 (2008): 322–41; Ilaria Bignamini, "Art Institutions in London 1689–1768: A Study of Clubs and Academies," *Walpole Society* 54 (1988): 19–148.

6 Holger Hoock, *The King's Artists: The Royal Academy of Arts and the Politics of British Culture, 1760–1840* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003); Ralph Edwards, "George III as Collector," *Apollo* 100 (1974): 117–25.

7 Clare Haynes, *Pictures and Popery: Art and Religion in England, 1660–1760* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006); Nigel Aston, "St Paul's Cathedral and the Public Culture of Eighteenth-Century Britain," in *St Paul's: The Cathedral Church of London 604–2004*, eds. Derek Keene, Arthur Burns, and Andrew Saint (New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 2004), 363–72.

was faring so well on the British soil.<sup>8</sup> Contemporary calls for a British school of art to rival the Continent and redress what was perceived as cultural backwardness became more insistent as the eighteenth century unfolded.<sup>9</sup>

It was with a perceivable sigh of relief that Sir Joshua Reynolds introduced his first discourse at the Royal Academy by congratulating the nation on this institutional addition:

An academy in which the polite arts may be regularly cultivated is at last opened among us by royal munificence. This must appear an event in the highest degree interesting, not only to the artist, but to the whole nation. It is, indeed, difficult to give any other reason why an empire like that of Britain should so long have wanted an ornament so suitable to its greatness, than that slow progression of things which naturally makes elegance and refinement the last effect of opulence and power.<sup>10</sup>

The reason given for this tardy foundation was a long-winded one and was not altogether convincing. But the discourses of the president circumvented the difficulties of not having a national artistic tradition by referring the academicians to the study of the great masters, both ancient and modern. The established hierarchy of European art schools was not envisaged anymore as an art history that disqualified British painters or that shamed British collectors of old masters for being unpatriotic. The Italian, French, Flemish and Dutch masters were appropriated as the founding fathers of a British school of art and absorbed in a neoclassical theorisation.<sup>11</sup>

This reconciliation between modern production and collecting practices was not solely brought about by British art writings. Deliberation, selection and comparison of old and modern masters from different schools were practices constantly influenced by market forces, especially as experienced and honed

8 See for example: *An Essay on Perfecting the Fine Arts in Great Britain and in Ireland* (Dublin: William Sleater, 1767), 13 and 20; Lodovico Dolce, *Aretein: A Dialogue on Painting* (London: P. Elmsley, 1770), VIII–IX.

9 Holger Hoock, "Struggling against a Vulgar Prejudice': Patriotism and the Collecting of British Art at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of British Studies* 49, no. 3 (2010): 566–91; Morris Eaves, "Inquiry into the Real and Imaginary Obstructions to the Acquisition of the Arts in England: The Comedy of the English School of Painting," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 52 (1989): 125–38.

10 Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, ed. Robert R. Wark (New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 1997), 3.

11 Robert R. Wark, "Introduction," in *Id.*, XIII–XXXIII.

by auction bidders.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the marketing strategies deployed early on by British auctioneers and dealers to woo and attract a large audience of art lovers had a lasting impact on the reception of school categories in Britain. The growing taste of British collectors for European pictures and the corresponding rise in imports has been well documented.<sup>13</sup> Research has also evidenced that this appetite for European paintings, and for Italian and Dutch pieces in particular, produced better standards of British connoisseurship. It spurred the market for shipped pictures by foreign old masters and spread a learned esteem for these paintings to a larger public, which in turn stimulated the consumption of native art.<sup>14</sup> The dealers in the British market, who largely controlled the sales, adopted and then consistently used synthetic marketing strategies in British auction catalogues, and this lastingly influenced the discourse on art. By delivering a broad and clear picture of their offer, the dealers provided an entry into their market to a larger public and were instrumental in familiarising what was at first a decidedly foreign concept.

### 1680s–1720s: Title Pages as Aspirational Advertisements

The early resale market for painting manifested a strong vitality in England around the end of the seventeenth century and gained momentum again in the

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- 12 On market forces' influence on the public's preferences and cultural history, see: Michael North and David Ormrod, eds., *Art Markets in Europe, 1400–1800* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998); Victor Ginsburgh, ed., *Economics of Art and Culture* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2004); Neil de Marchi and Hans Van Miegroet, eds., *Mapping Markets for Paintings in Europe, 1450–1750* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006); Anna Tummers and Koenraad Jonckheere, eds., *Art Market and Connoisseurship: A Closer Look at Paintings by Rembrandt, Rubens and their Contemporaries* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008). On the specific influence of market forces on the canon, see: Dries Lyna, "Name Hunting, Visual Characteristics, and 'New Old Masters': Tracking the Taste for Paintings at Eighteenth-Century Auctions," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 46, no. 1 (2012): 57–84.
- 13 Pears, *The Discovery of Painting*, 51–105; David Ormrod, "The Origins of the London Art Market, 1660–1730," in *Art Markets in Europe, 1400–1800*, 173–6; David Ormrod, "The Art Trade and its Urban Context: England and the Netherlands Compared, 1550–1750," in *Auctions, Agents and Dealers: The Mechanisms of the Art Market, 1660–1830*, eds. Jeremy Warren and Adriana Turpin (Oxford: Archeopress, 2008), 11–20.
- 14 Brian Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee* (New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 2005); David Solkin, *Painting for Money: The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 1993); Louise Lippincott, *Selling Art in Georgian London: The Rise of Arthur Pond* (New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 1983).

1720s after twenty years of relatively quiet activity.<sup>15</sup> By then, most of the procedures of the picture auction (conditions of sales, catalogue circulation and the ordering of the lots from cheapest to most highly valued) had become fixed and would change very little during the remainder of the century.<sup>16</sup> However, what had not yet become a conventional practice was the precise classification by national school. On their title pages, British auction catalogues boasted of a bulk designation—that of ‘ancient and modern Masters of Europe.’ Far from being informed or organised by the notion of schools of art, the lot descriptions inside the auction catalogue were rarely more than dry lists of painters.<sup>17</sup> The loose European designation should not necessarily be translated as a lack of information or connoisseurship, however. In a modern market of cultural artefacts oriented towards a virtuoso audience, the label promised both the completeness of the repository, the invaluable geographical reach of the gentleman’s Grand Tour and the credit of a prestigious attribution.

Auctioneers at the end of the seventeenth century mostly advertised their pictures for sale as the production of both ‘ancient and modern masters.’<sup>18</sup> The term “ancient” in British writings on art loosely encompassed the painters from antiquity to the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century masters. The broad-ranging term calls to mind how art history writers of the Enlightenment strove to present complete histories to their readers. They put a premium on offering a perspective that was as exhaustive as possible. The English architect and writer on art Henry Bell, for example, dutifully took his readers on the owner’s tour of his subject in his *Historical Essay on the Original of Painting*

15 Brian Learmount, *A History of the Auction* (London: Barnard & Learmount, 1985), 15–7; Ormrod, “The Origins of the London Art Market,” 167–8.

16 Neil de Marchi and Hans J. Van Miegroet, “Rules versus Play in Early Modern Markets,” *Recherches Économiques de Louvain—Louvain Economic Review* 66, no. 2 (2000): 145–65; Neil de Marchi, “Rules for an Emergent Market: Selling Paintings in Late Seventeenth-Century London,” *Duke University Online Papers* (5 August 2002), <http://public.econ.duke.edu/Papers/Other/DeMarchi/Rules.pdf>.

17 Carol Gibson-Wood, “Picture Consumption in London at the End of the Seventeenth Century,” *The Art Bulletin* 84, no. 3 (2002): 491–500. Gibson-Wood studied auction catalogues from 1689 to 1692 and probate inventories from 1695 to 1745 in London and Westminster. See also: Brian Cowan, “Arenas of Connoisseurship: Auctioning Art in Later Stuart England,” in *Art Markets in Europe, 1400–1800*, 153–66.

18 The studied corpus comprises the period’s auction catalogues available electronically through *Scipio: Art and Rare Books Sales/Auction Catalogs*; *Eebo: Early English Books Online*; *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*; *Getty Provenance Index Sales Catalogs database*.

(1728).<sup>19</sup> Its first chapter starts with an antediluvian chronicle, retracing the ‘probabilities and pretensions to [painting’s] invention before the flood,’ in accordance with the eighteenth-century encyclopaedic turn of mind.<sup>20</sup> Such writings endeavoured to document the historical origins of painting and to link them through an explicit causal narrative to the more recent past.<sup>21</sup> A virtuoso audience was therefore receptive to vocabulary that promoted the collection as comprehensive.

The dealers’ and auctioneers’ claims were bolstered by another recurring expression—the guarantee that the lots were from ‘the most Eminent Masters of Europe.’ This label presented the entire continent beyond the Channel as having long been a treasure trove for paintings, in keeping with Britain’s lack of confidence in its own artistic production in comparison. Buying art reiterated the difficult negotiation between admiration for the Continent’s culture and patriotic pride often experienced by British gentlemen abroad.<sup>22</sup> When countries of origin were mentioned, these often indicated that the collection was made ‘by a gentleman for his own curiosity in his travels beyond sea’ or ‘by a person of quality in his travels through Italy, France and Germany.’<sup>23</sup> Such labels emphasised that the pictures were the output of a learned and aristocratic Grand Tour, rather than the production of a specific school of art. The expression ‘masters of Europe’ was used, for example, by the London

19 The term ‘tour du propriétaire’ was coined by Bernard Groethuysen and theorised further by Jean Starobinski to characterise eighteenth-century attempts at making a full register of available knowledge. See: Jean Starobinski, *L’Invention de la Liberté, 1700–1789* (Geneva: Éditions d’art Albert Skira, 1964), 116.

20 Henry Bell, *Historical Essay on the Original of Painting* (London: J. Worral, 1728), 1.

21 On the slow emergence of historical writing alongside the more traditional Vasarian chronicles of art, of a “history of art (rather than artists),” see: Anne-Marie Link, “Art, History and Discipline in the Eighteenth-Century German University,” *RACAR: Revue d’art canadienne—Canadian Art Review* 28 (2001): 19–28.

22 On Britain’s increasing sense of separation from Europe despite its cultural interactions, see: Jennifer Mori, *The Culture of Diplomacy: Britain in Europe, ca. 1750–1830* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010). On the culture shock between patriotism and admiration for the Continent, see: Martin Postle, “In Search of the ‘True Briton’: Reynolds, Hogarth, and the British School,” in *Towards a Modern Art World*, ed. Brian Allen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 121–43; Jeremy Black, “Tourism and Cultural Challenge, Travel Literature and Xenophobia: The Changing Scene in the Eighteenth Century,” in *All Before Them: English Literature and the Wider World 1660–1780*, ed. John McVeagh (London: Ashfield Press, 1990), 185–202.

23 See: *A Large Collection of Excellent Prints and Drawings of the Most Eminent Masters of Europe, Made by a Person of Quality in his Travels through Italy, France and Germany* (London: s.n., 1689); Walford Benjamin, *A Catalogue of Prints and Drawings, by the Most Eminent Masters of Europe: Collected by a Gentleman for his Own Curiosity in his Travels beyond Sea* (London: s.n., 1691).



bibliophile Benjamin Walford when, spurred on by the success of the 1682 auction of Sir Peter Lely's collections, he included Richard Maitland, Earl of Lauderdale's prints and drawings in the auction of his library in 1688. 'In his travels beyond the sea [he] made himself very well acquainted with the most Eminent Authors of all Sciences [...] the most considerable Historians of all Ages and Nations, both Ancient and Modern,' the bookseller advertised. To the collection was joined 'a most admirable collection of Drawings, by the Most Eminent masters of Europe' (Fig. 2.1).<sup>24</sup> This rhetorical strategy was used as the main sales pitch and underlined the encyclopaedic quality of the collection for sale. It was closely linked to the already well-established practice of book auctions, which were oriented towards a virtuoso audience of antiquarians and book collectors.<sup>25</sup> The choice of words here again emphasised the completeness of the selection for sale—both chronologically and geographically. Such designations endured well into the 1710s, from collections of 'eminent masters of Europe, made by a person of quality in his travels through Italy, France and Germany' as early as 1689 to collections advertised expressly as brought over by foreign dealers, such as the 1718 collection of 'the best masters in Europe [...] Brought over by Mr. Ferdinand Cortvrindt.'<sup>26</sup> These sales strategies identified that buyers accorded a greater importance to the term "master" than to the notion of schools in their selection and buying decisions.

The emphasis on the pictures' attributions also mirrored what was extolled as precious connoisseurship in art writings of the period. The general knowledge of artists' names had increased greatly in Europe in the seventeenth century, and art-historical narratives were mostly organised in strings of biographies, following the authoritative example of Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* (1550).<sup>27</sup> The lists of names on the title pages of catalogues were predominantly foreign, impressing the British buying public with the Continent's full-fledged tradition of pictorial excellence. The emphasis on the European provenance of pictures was also a byword for original pictures, as opposed to

24 Richard Maitland, *Catalogus librorum instructissimae bibliothecae nobilis cujusdam Scoto-Britanni in quavis lingua & facultate insignium* [...] *Per Benj. Walford, bibliop. Lond.* (London: s.n., [1688]).

25 Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee*; *Id.*, "Arenas of Connoisseurship," 153–66.

26 *A Large Collection of Excellent Prints*; Luffingham, *A Collection of Curious Prints and Drawings, by the Best Masters in Europe* [...] *Brought over by Mr. Ferdinand Cortvrindt* (London: s.n., 1718).

27 Anna Tummers, "By his Hand': The Paradox of Seventeenth-Century Connoisseurship," in *Art Market and Connoisseurship*, 37–40, esp. 31 and corresponding footnotes for British skills in attribution.

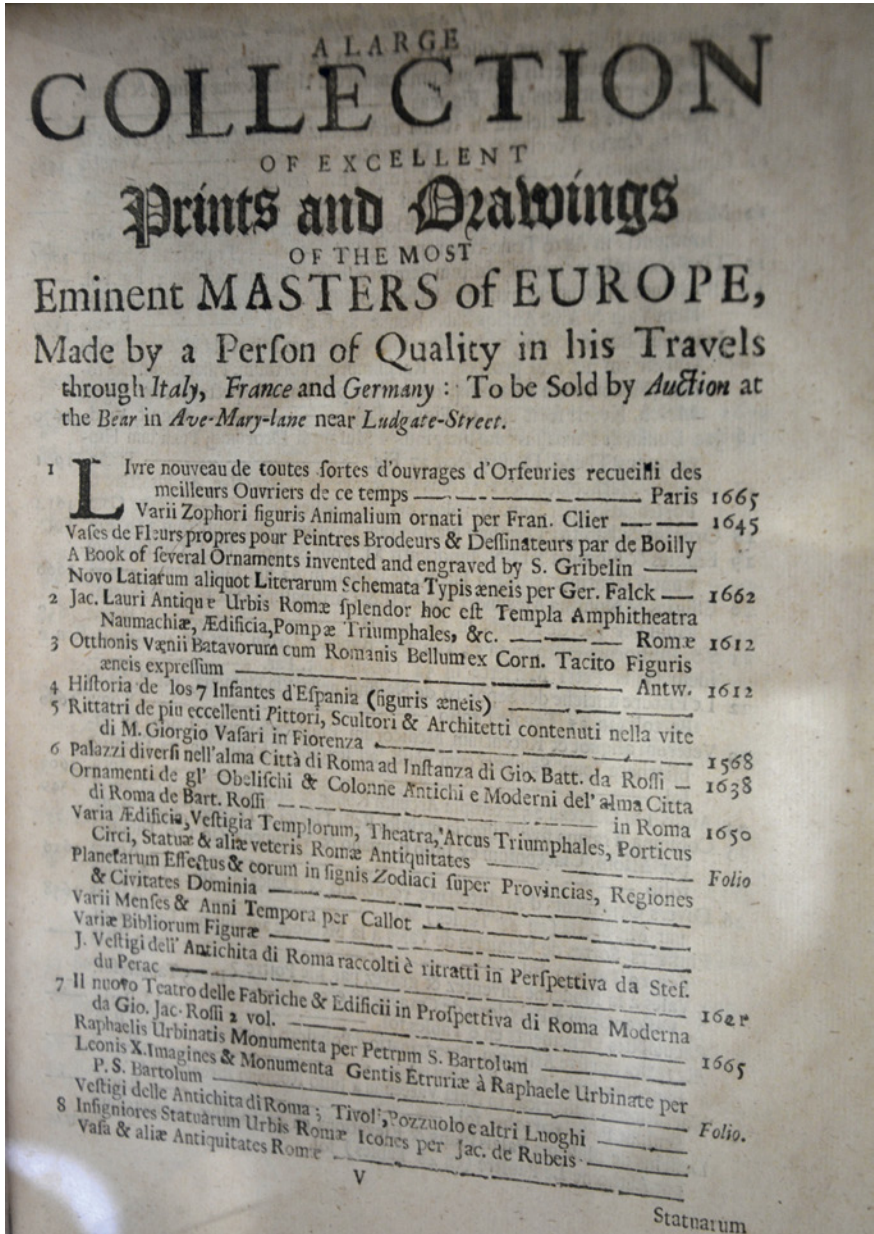


FIGURE 2.1 Richard Maitland, *Catalogus librorum instructissimæ bibliothecæ nobilis cujusdam Scoto-Britanni in quavis lingua & facultate insignium* (London: s.n. [1688]), 145. Washington (DC), Folger Shakespeare Library, L608 Bd.w. S4151 copy 1

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copies.<sup>28</sup> The fact that they came from abroad enabled the 'Proprietor [to] assure the Public, That none of the Capital Pictures of this Sale has ever been exposed to public View in this Kingdom.'<sup>29</sup> The advertisers could thus assert that the pictures had been recently brought to London from the Continent, but also that they were a welcome addition to the small stock of original pictures already in circulation on British soil. By insisting that this was the first time that the pictures were viewed, the professionals in the British art market provided reassurance to the public, by intimating that no copies of these unique designs were to be found in circulation in Britain. This was an important claim indeed, since much of the quality that made a picture an "original" in the early modern art market was its compositional originality rather than its being entirely and strictly autograph.<sup>30</sup> In the same guise, many British catalogues atoned for selling copies by reassuring the public that these were 'fine copies by very good hands'—if the pictures were not original designs, they at least had the quality of prestigious attributions.

The listing of names in auction catalogues was not of course direct proof that the auctioneer drawing up the catalogue *was* a connoisseur, nor that the sales were indeed stocked with autographed and quality pictures. Firstly, the painters' names could be gleaned from the signature of the art pieces themselves in some cases, or more frequently from the collection's list of names attributed at the time of their first purchase and handed in by the seller or executor.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, the lot descriptions inside the catalogues used the terms "copies" or "after" for one-twelfth of the paintings sold in Britain from

28 See: Ferdinando Verryck, *At the West End of Exeter Change, a Curious Collection of Three Hundred and Odd Paintings, being Most Originals by the Best Masters in Europe* (London: s.n., 1690); *At the Green Dragon next to Northumberland-House at Charing-Cross, will be exposed to Sale (by Auction) a Curious Collection of Original Paintings of the Best Masters of Europe* (London: s.n., 1691). For discussions on the precise meaning of copies and originals on the Continent in the seventeenth century, see: Tummers, "By his Hand," 33–7; Jaap van der Veen, "By his Own Hand: The Valuation of Autograph Paintings in the Seventeenth Century," in *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings, Vol. IV—The Self-Portraits*, ed. Ernst van de Wetering (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005), 3–44.

29 *A Catalogue [...] collected by the Proprietor during his Travels through Italy from Some of the Most Esteemed Cabinets Abroad* (London: s.n., 1765); *A Curious Collection of Three Hundred and Odd Paintings. Being Most Originals* (London: s.n., 1690).

30 Tummers, "By his Hand," 36.

31 Koenraad Jonckheere reminds us that to judge a catalogue's attribution, one needs to know whether the input came from art dealers and auctioneers or from *amateur* connoisseurs. See: Koenraad Jonckheere, "Supply and Demand: Some Notes on the Economy of Seventeenth-Century Connoisseurship," in *Art Market and Connoisseurship*, 69–96. However, the sources of the information given in British sales catalogues from the 1680s to the 1730s remain difficult to locate.

1680 to 1730.<sup>32</sup> Ultimately, these sales were often stocked with a large quantity of paintings by London-based artists, while a large number of the pictures sold remained unattributed.<sup>33</sup>

There was, therefore, a disconnect between what could be bought and what the catalogue boasted on its title page.<sup>34</sup> The catalogue's title page worked as an aspirational advertisement, rather than as descriptive information. The audience at the sale was one step closer to possessing the ideal collection. The organisation by schools does not appear to have resonated with the audience's expectations and knowledge and was therefore rarely mentioned on the title pages. When the country of origin appeared next to a lot in the sales catalogue, it was not a marker of quality prior to the 1720s. Indeed, "Italian" and "Dutch" were used in lot descriptions as loose geographical labels for pictures that remained unattributed and that could not be traced to a "hand." Furthermore, the reference to the Italian or French school before the 1720s sat uneasily with the Anglican distaste for images, which was still diffuse in British society. These two specific schools were specialised in subjects and styles that often directly contravened Anglican theological discourse against idolatry and were politically suspicious for having been commissioned by an absolutist court in France or by the Pope in Rome.<sup>35</sup> While the use of "masters" was immediately laudatory for the British public, terms such as "Italian" remained negatively charged. Eliminating the umbilical attachment painting had to Rome was indeed one of the challenges faced by history painting in particular and, by proxy, by the theory of art in general in Britain.

It was therefore still necessary to expunge from the enjoyment of art, from the practice of art, and from the discourse on art any intimation that the public was endorsing Italian or French Catholic ideas or approving of these nations' religious representations. Pictures labelled "Italian" or "French" were

32 The calculation relies on the 302 extant British catalogues recorded in the Getty Provenance Index from 1680 to 1730, putting 49,958 paintings for sale. See also: Gibson-Wood, "Picture Consumption," 495.

33 Eric Jan Sluijter, "Determining Value on the Art Market in the Golden Age: An Introduction," in *Art Market and Connoisseurship*, 24.

34 Carol Gibson-Wood refutes the idea that average buyers were practising conspicuous consumption in the early period of picture sales in Britain, by underlining that most pictures were not sold as collection-worthy, and were not bought 'in the belief that they were amassing valuable collections.' For all the puff attempted on the title page, the catalogues were quite transparent as to the quality of the pictures, according to her study: Gibson-Wood, "Picture Consumption," 495.

35 Haynes, *Pictures and Popery*, 12–35; Bénédicte Miyamoto, "A Pretty General Taste for Pictures: The Construction of Artistic Value in Eighteenth-Century London, 1685–1805" (PhD diss., Université Paris Diderot, 2011), 31–149.

therefore still difficult to enjoy without feeling some unease towards the unpatriotic message these labels called to mind.<sup>36</sup> A fearful climate, bolstered by the Clarendon Code, had rendered suspect all objects that could signify some level of Jacobite allegiance.<sup>37</sup> In his 1695 political satire *The Auction, or the Poet Turn'd Painter*, Edward Ward's mock-auctioneer Wheedle thus addressed the British public ready to buy imported Italian art:

Gentlemen, I now have a choice Collection of curious Pieces, done to the Life, all originals, and performed by the ablest pencils of the ingenious-est [*sic*] Masters of the Age, who have travelled to Rome, to be instructed in this noble art, nay, have paid their devotions to the infallible Chair, and obtained a Bull from his Holiness, to denounce Excommunication against all those [...] that shall here after pretend to the Italian Stroke.<sup>38</sup>

The joke that the satirist shared with his audience articulated a common apprehension. If art history enshrined Italian art, then art lovers were at risk of recognising the productions of the Counter-Reformation as the apex of painting. School labels referring to the French and Italian schools were therefore still largely unhelpful in catalogues from the 1680s to the 1720s because they risked delivering unflattering associations with Catholicism and could point to a lack of attribution.

In parallel, the framing of the art-historical discourse into schools had not yet taken root in English translations of continental writings. At that time, the two French academic writings that had the most influence in Britain were not organised by school labels. The first, Roland Fréart de Chambray's *An Idea of*

36 On the encroachment of patriotism on cultural appraisal, see: Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); Roy Porter, ed., *Myths of the English* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992); Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715–1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Tony Claydon and Ian McBride, eds., *Protestantism and National Identity: Britain and Ireland, c. 1650–c. 1850* (Cambridge – New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

37 The Clarendon Code was a set of four acts (1661–5) that limited the political rights and religious freedom of those who strayed from the Anglican Church, such as Dissenters and Non-Conformists. On the Jacobites and art consumption, see: Lori Ann Ferrel, "Kneeling and the Body Politic," in *Religion, Literature and Politics in Post-Reformation England, 1540–1688*, eds. Donna B. Hamilton and Richard Strier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 70–92; Paul Kléber Monod, *Jacobitism and the English People, 1688–1788* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Richard Sharp, *The Engraved Record of the Jacobite Movement* (Aldershot: Scholar, 1996).

38 Edward Ward, *The Auction, or the Poet Turn'd Painter. By the Author of The Step to the Bath* (London: printed by G.C. and sold by E. Mallet, [1703?]), preface, s.p.

*the Perfection of Painting* (1688), was an evidence-based discussion that often relied on the ekphrasis of famous pictures. The second, Charles-Alphonse Du Fresnoy's *De Arte Graphica* (1662), when translated into English in 1688 and 1695, was complemented by 'a short account of the most Eminent Painters both Ancient and Moderns, continu'd down to the present time according to their order of succession,' complete with an alphabetical index of painters, which reproduced a Vasarian narrative centred on the connoisseurship of "hands" and individual masters.<sup>39</sup> These narratives prominently advertised in their titles that they favoured a biographical approach to art history, through a detailed account of the lives of painters.

By 1700 the writer John Elsum had written his *Epigrams upon the Paintings of the Most Eminent Masters, Antient and Modern*, which did present some verses about the different schools of paintings in its last few pages. Due to its relative novelty for British readers, the term "school" needed an explanatory definition. Elsum explained that schools owed much to the 'heat of Fancy hard to be confined' which inclined painters to 'various Ways and Methods' and that they 'have Scholars bred whose Works pronounce the same.'<sup>40</sup> Schools were therefore clearly identified as commonalities of style reproducing national characteristics and inclinations. However, no classification by school can be found in John Elsum's work—apart from the verses mentioned above, most of his work focuses on individual paintings, with the epigrams following each other according to a chronological order from ancient to modern. In his second art-historical production, *The Art of Painting after the Italian Manner*, published in 1703, the Italian school is identified as the prime example to follow on the title page, but once again, school categories go largely unmentioned in the body of the work, hardly informing the organisation of the book's content, in a manner similar to later auction catalogues.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, Elsum's chapters run the reader through all of the stages of practice, from the types of portraiture to the most suitable hanging places for each genre of picture. His last section promised to teach 'the directions to know a good picture,' in which he explains that the

39 Roland Fréart de Chambray, *An Idea of the Perfection of Painting [...] Parallel'd with some Works of the most Famous Modern Painters, Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, Julio Romano, and N. Poussin* (London: H. Herringham, 1688 [1662]); Charles-Alphonse Du Fresnoy, *De Arte Graphica [...] As also a Short Account of the Most Eminent Painters, both Ancient and Modern, by another Hand* (London: J. Heptinstall, 1695).

40 John Elsum, *Epigrams Upon the Paintings of the Most Eminent Masters, Antient and Modern* (London, 1700), 131 and 133. The term 'Schools of Paintings' was later switched on the title page to the 'Foreign-Schools of Painting' in the 1704 re-edition.

41 Here again, such art history is ekphrastic in its method. See: Taylor Corse, "The Ekphrastic Tradition: Literary and Pictorial Narrative in the Epigrams of John Elsum, an Eighteenth-Century Connoisseur," *Word and Image* 9, no. 4 (1993): 383–400.

hardest task of connoisseurship was 'not attainable but by long observation, and comparison of the hands of the most eminent Masters,' since it resides not only in the differentiation between an original and a copy, but in the discovery of the name of the author.<sup>42</sup>

From the 1690s onwards, picture sellers adopted the title page layout in columns developed by booksellers. As early as in the 1687 sale of Robert Scott's library, auction catalogues of books listed the language of the publications for sale in columns, which appeared in the middle of the title page in a different typeface. The language was hereafter a category used to arrange the lots in the body of the catalogue, along with subject and size—a properly antiquarian achievement that made these book catalogues tools for further reference even after the sales.<sup>43</sup> However, although the picture auctioneers adopted the same title page layout in columns, these were used simply to advertise the names of the painters rather than their nation of origin. As in contemporaneous art-historical documents, the attributions were seen as the most crucial piece of information for art lovers. These columns of painters' names were neither classified by school nor ordered alphabetically or by any other perceivable order, such as the lot appearance in the catalogue or their ranking by fame.<sup>44</sup> The layout nevertheless became a fixture of both the auction title page and its newspaper advertisement, lasting well into the nineteenth century, with sales catalogues often fronting some forty names per title page and featuring the frequent disclaimer of 'with many more famous masters not inserted.'<sup>45</sup>

This avalanche of names appealed to British buyers. The country largely despised religious paintings in its churches and did not have a royal collection open to connoisseurs or practitioners. British lovers of art had few occasions to compare the hands of so many masters in one room, although this was one of the recommended practice to educate the eye. The 1706 English translation of Roger de Piles's *Abrégé de la vie des peintres* (1688) contained a chapter on

42 John Elsum, *The Art of Painting after the Italian Manner* (London: printed for D. Brown, 1719), 129.

43 Richard Landon, "The Antiquarian Book Trade in Britain 1695–1830: The Use of Auction and Booksellers' Catalogues," *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 89, no. 4 (1995): 409–17, esp. 416. Giles Mandelbrote, "The Organization of Book Auctions in Late Seventeenth-Century London," in *Under the Hammer: Book Auctions since the Seventeenth Century*, eds. Robin Myers, Michael Harris, and Giles Mandelbrote (Newcastle: Oak Knoll Press and the British Library, 2001), 15–50.

44 See for the earliest examples the catalogues by Smith, Lugt 64; John Bullord, Lugt 67; at Smyther's Coffee-House, Lugt 92; or Will's Coffee-House, Lugt 119.

45 *A curious Colletion [sic] of Paintings and Limnings, of the most Famous, Ancient and Modern Masters in Europe, viz. Mich. Angelo. Van Hock [...]. Offliqar* (London: s.n., 1691).

the use of prints that encouraged lovers of art to assemble a choice collection of the best masters reproduced in print, since ‘by means of Prints, one may easily see the Works of several Masters on a Table, [...] judge by comparing them with one another, know which to chuse, and by practising it often, contract a Habit of a good Taste.’<sup>46</sup> The only place where a large number of prints or paintings could be seen together and compared in a relatively accessible way was during auction viewing days, and this probably reinforced the vocabulary used by auctioneers. A roll of names advertised first and foremost that the collection exhibited was unique and original—a winning marketing tactic compared with the use of schools, which in its late Stuart acceptance, downplayed variety and uniqueness.

### 1730s–1740s: Schools as Brand Names

A growing public market for pictures ‘provided a convenient and public *entrée* for many people into the previously circumscribed culture of the virtuoso connoisseurship,’<sup>47</sup> and a learned esteem for paintings—thanks to repeated comparison in the auction room—spread to a larger public. Increasingly, as in the rest of Europe, British *amateurs* sought to devise frames of reference to evaluate the merits of paintings and to ‘move away from acquisitions based on famous names.’<sup>48</sup> To adequately use the classification by schools, the public needed some understanding of the various art theories that informed the different styles developed by the Italian, French, Flemish and Dutch schools, and ‘amateur connoisseurs scroung[ed] through the academic canon (and aesthetic treatises) so as to forge their own art-historical hierarchy.’<sup>49</sup> In Britain, this much-needed introduction to foreign art theories was provided in part by the virtuosi circles, as they started to take a serious and scientific interest in painting.<sup>50</sup>

46 Roger de Piles, *The Art of Painting, and the Lives of the Painters: Containing, a Compleat Treatise of Painting, Designing, and the Use of Prints* (London: J. Nutt, 1706), 60.

47 Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee*, 138. See also: Pears, *The Discovery of Painting*.

48 Vivian Lee Atwater, “The Netherlandish Vogue and Print Culture in Paris, 1730–50,” *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 34, no. 3 (2009): 245.

49 Gerrit Verhoeven, “Mastering the Connoisseur’s Eye: Paintings, Criticism, and the Canon in Dutch and Flemish Travel Culture, 1600–1750,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 46, no. 1 (2012): 31.

50 Susan Jenkins, *Portrait of a Patron: The Patronage and Collecting of James Brydges, 1st Duke of Chandos (1674–1744)* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2007), 111–124.



Prior to the joint efforts of the Richardsons—father and son—the British discourse on painting seems to have been living on borrowed lines. Painting was a foreign specialty, and any connoisseurship was obtained through translation. British translators, furthermore, had often shied away from the theoretically fine disquisitions on art and had instead preferred to acquaint the public with the practical side of painting. This rings true especially when one compares the buoyancy of the Italian and French theoretical production during this period, and the difficulties encountered by British publications translating them for the British public. Henry Peacham's blended translation of continental manuals referencing Lomazzo, Fialetti and Dürer is a case in point.<sup>51</sup> Early on, British translators wrote of their irritation at English sentences 'for the most part in tearmes of Art and Erudition, retaining their original povertie, and rather growing rich in complemental phrases and such froth [*sic*].'<sup>52</sup> They complained of not being 'able to find out words which were purely capable to express those Barbarismes, which Custome has as it were naturaliz'd amongst our Painters' as they sought to educate the native public in their love of art.<sup>53</sup> At the beginning of the nineteenth century, British translators were still recommending their writings as attempts to 'divest of difficulty and obscurity' these decidedly foreign theories of art.<sup>54</sup> In their translations the British writers were therefore confronted with two choices: either simplify their vocabulary or give up attempts at making the translated author 'speak English,' the latter of which was made by the painter John Frederick Fritsch when he translated Gerard de Lairese's *Groot Schilderboek* (1707) as *The Art of Painting* in 1738.<sup>55</sup> Due to the internal weaknesses of a British professional field under continental dominance, the world of painters was explained well into the eighteenth century

51 Henry Peacham, *The Art of Drawing* (London: Richard Braddock, 1606). On the influence of this manual 'built upon Italian theory and northern European practice' on later British production, see: Liam E. Semler "Breaking the Ice to Invention: Henry Peacham's 'The Art of Drawing' (1606)," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 35, no. 3 (2004): 735–50. On the genre of drawing manuals, see: Chittima Amornpichetkul, "Seventeenth-Century Italian Drawing Books: Their Origin and Development," in *Children of Mercury: The Education of Artists in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, ed. Jeffrey Muller (Providence: Brown University, 1984), 109–18; Jaap Bolten, *Method and Practice: Dutch and Flemish Drawing Books 1600–1750* (Landau: PVA, 1985).

52 Henry Wotton, *The Elements of Architecture* (London: John Bill, 1624), 6.

53 John Evelyn's "To the Reader" in Fréart de Chambray, *An Idea of the Perfection of Painting*, s.p.

54 Thomas Towne, *The Art of Painting on Velvet Without the Use of Spirit Colours* (London: for the author, 1811), title page.

55 Gérard de Lairese, *The Art of Painting, in all its Branches, Methodically demonstrated by Discourses and Plates [...] Translated by John Frederick Fritsch, Painter* (London: J. Brotherton, 1738 [1707]), translator's preface to the reader.

through a language replete with adopted words, as abbé Le Blanc, a frequent translator of French and English, observed in 1747:

The English cannot treat of these subjects without borrowing from their neighbours not only single words, but sometimes whole phrases. When they would express a lover of painting, music, etc. they use the term *virtuoso*, taken from the Italians: but as loving and knowing them are two very different things, and which either here or elsewhere do not always go together, they are obliged to employ the French word *connoisseur* to characterise a judge in them. The same may be said of the word *curieux* and several others.<sup>56</sup>

The language used to talk about art, in failing to conform with the programmatic simplicity and clarity defined by the Royal Society, was suspicious for its opacity.<sup>57</sup> It fuelled the feeling that somehow the vocabulary that surrounded the art of painting was unpatriotic.<sup>58</sup> Even those in Britain who held a recognised position as art lovers—men of letters and collectors, such as Horace Walpole—wrote of their impatience with the use of foreign specialised terms. Walpole was not isolated when he lamented, ‘no science has had so much jargon introduced into it as painting: the bombast expression of the Italians, and the prejudices of the French, joined to the vanity of the Possessors, and the interested mysteriousness of the Picture-Merchants have together compiled a new language.’<sup>59</sup> Bereft of institutional education or of a well-defined professional field, British artists and art writers had difficulties naturalising these foreign terms, which were still being laboriously copied and borrowed, and which remained strange to the reading and viewing public. There is evidence from satirical prints, comedies and some annotated catalogues that auctioneers

56 Jean Bernard Le Blanc, *Letters on the English and French Nations*, vol. 2 (London: J. Brindley, 1747), 91. The letters were translated in English by Le Blanc himself.

57 From 1660 onwards, the Royal Society advocated a ‘close, naked, natural way of speaking positive expressions, clear sense, a native easiness, bringing as near the mathematical plainness as they can, and preferring the language of artisans, countrymen and merchants before that of wits and scholars,’ cited in: Thomas Sprat, *The History of the Royal Society of London* (London: s.n., 1667), 113.

58 On the translation of part technical and part theoretical continental treaties, resulting in ‘prose bristling with neologisms supported by glossaries,’ see: Ben Thomas, “John Evelyn’s Project of Translation,” *Art in Print* 2, no. 4 (2012): 28; Felicity Henderson, “Faithful Interpreters? Translation Theory and Practice at the Early Royal Society,” *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London* 67, no. 2 (2013): 101–22.

59 Horace Walpole, *Aedes Walpolianae: Or, A Description of the Collection of Pictures at Houghton-Hall* (London: s.n., 1747), x.

did indeed wax lyrical at the rostrum in the heat of the auction. But the commercial documents that were circulated and which were supposed to bolster the credit of the auction houses remained sober to the point of dryness.<sup>60</sup> The British public held a diffuse reluctance for the elaborate continental education in the art of painting and its vocabulary, as Jonathan Richardson underlined in his *Essay on the Whole Art of Criticism as it Relates to Painting* (1725). A British lover of art was indeed in an awkward situation, since he 'may neither have Leisure, or inclination to become a Connoisseur himself, and yet may delight in these things and desire to have [these pictures]' while he 'has no way then but to take up his Opinions upon Trust, and implicitly depend upon Another's Judgement,'<sup>61</sup> thereby sending the prospective buyers back not solely to foreign theories, but also to the art market, its mechanisms and middlemen who seemingly had made little use of these foreign theories in their written commercial documents prior to the 1720s.

In this respect, the publication of Richardson's *Discourse on the Dignity, Certainty, Pleasure and Advantage, of the Science of a Connoisseur* in 1719 proved a landmark, not only because it was the first British writing on art that was entirely original, but also because it was the first to make an extensive and didactic use of school categories. This reassessment of the period's artistic classifications participated in the British conversation on the arts that increasingly tried to elaborate a canon of reference, from 'something of a habit of investigation to hesitant but compelling *ponere totum*.'<sup>62</sup> The art world in eighteenth-century Britain underwent a singular transformation when painting increasingly vied to be on the same footing as the more acclaimed, decidedly liberal and more finely theorised art of poetry.<sup>63</sup>

In this respect the use of national school labels in the art market was a sign that connoisseurship was increasingly seen as a science, and this was symptomatic of the growing insistence in Britain for a British school to rival the

60 Bénédicte Miyamoto, "Making Pictures Marketable": Expertise and the Georgian Art Market," in *Marketing Art in the British Isles, 1700 to the Present: A Cultural History*, eds. Charlotte Gould and Sophie Mesplède (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 119–34.

61 Jonathan Richardson, *An Essay on the Whole Art of Criticism as it Relates to Painting*, in *Id., Two Discourses* (London: A.C., 1725), 15.

62 Lawrence Lipking, *The Ordering of the Arts in Eighteenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 3.

63 Jonathan Kramnick, *Making the English Canon: Print Capitalism and the Cultural Past, 1700–1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Joseph M. Levine, *Between the Ancients and the Moderns: Baroque Culture in Restoration England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

Continent.<sup>64</sup> Indeed, Richardson purposefully tracked the rise and decline of different European schools in his chapter on the ‘Whole Art of Painting.’ By comparing the Venetian and the Florentine schools, he built a narrative in which the British school could look forward to its own episode of greatness. The opposition was therefore not limited to a polarised Europe/Britain vision of the past, in which a love of art was framed as a taste for all things foreign on the part of customers and in which success in painting was seen as uncharacteristic of British painters. Richardson’s discourse on art developed standards that were entirely aesthetic and that evacuated the religious or political content of the pictures. The attention of the spectator was directed towards the pictorial quality of the picture, and schools were defined clearly for their preferences and commonalities in terms of style. This helped to redefine national origins purely as art-historical labels of aesthetic classifications. Paintings, examined for their pictorial qualities only, were therefore self-referential rather than the bearers of a religious or political message. The foundation for this had already been laid in Richardson’s earlier work, *An Essay on the Theory of Painting* in 1715: ‘And this is a Language that is Universal; Men of all Nations hear [...] the Painter speak to them in their own Mother Tongue.’<sup>65</sup> Less suspiciously foreign, and surrounded by a growing apparatus of aesthetical references, the worth of continental paintings became easier to evaluate for the British public. The labels of national origin were now more clearly identified as manners of invention, expression, composition, design, colouring, handling, or any of the other titles of Richardson’s chapters in his 1715 *Essay*. This mastery of aesthetic standards became even more detailed in the lavish 1738 translation into English of Gerard de Lairesse’s *Art of Painting*. It was organised along the same lines as Jonathan Richardson’s chapters, but with a table of content that held an even more detailed list of sub-chapters the lover of art could refer to when judging of a picture—and very little of these chapters made use of foreign terms.<sup>66</sup> This didactic introduction of the British public to the notion of the national school very rapidly simplified their use as “brand names” in sales catalogues.<sup>67</sup>

The formulation ‘A collection of Italian, French, Flemish and Dutch Pictures’ in the advertising titles of catalogues and in newspapers’ advertisements was

64 Jonathan Richardson, *A Discourse on the Dignity, Certainty, Pleasure and Advantage, of the Science of a Connoisseur* (London: W. Churchill, 1719), 50–1.

65 Jonathan Richardson, *An Essay on the Theory of Painting. By Mr. Richardson* (London: W. Bowyer, 1715), 6.

66 De Lairesse, *The Art of Painting*, 13.

67 The term is put forward to describe a similar use of vocabulary in the European seventeenth-century art market by Koenraad Jonckheere, “Supply and Demand,” 69–96.

quickly adopted and rarely varied for the next century. Once introduced, schools proved attractive labels in their simplicity and their promise of a standardised quality, which seemed to have acted as guides for new buyers.

### 1740s–1800: The Commoditisation of Picture Sales

By the 1740s school denominations were a familiar system in the organisation of British art writings. In parallel the mention of national schools had crept into the title pages of auction catalogues and replaced the bulk designation of 'Europe.' In such a forefront position, and to an audience that now mastered auction codes and benefited from better access to art writings in English, these categories now clearly referred to schools and not to a lack of attribution. They functioned as standardised categories, in an attempt to appeal to a large and undifferentiated market of prospective customers, in what was essentially the awareness stage in the art sales funnel. The mention of schools was a marketing lead that turned the casual reader into an interested potential customer, be it while scanning newspaper advertisements or chancing upon free auction catalogues at a coffee house or a bookseller's shop.

By the 1750s the mention of schools increasingly conformed to the hierarchised set text of 'Italian, French, Flemish and Dutch,' which lasted until well after the turn of the century (Fig. 2.2). Newspaper advertisements, although constrained by a restricted amount of printed text, adopted the same label. This standardisation was not the mark of an entrenched and principled disdain for any other school apart from the four mentioned, but rather the appeased and practical acceptance of the art-historical categories coming from the Continent. As European commentaries on English cultural backwardness decreased, so too did English defensiveness towards European cultural influence.<sup>68</sup> The growing interconnectedness of the cultural markets meant that there was an increasing convergence in catalogue layouts across Europe. The appearance of school categories on the title pages of picture catalogues in France dates from the very same period. Gersaint's learned and discursive *Catalogue raisonné des diverses curiosités du cabinet de feu M. Quentin de Lorangère* (1744) thus divided its prints in four *Écoles*: Italian (with the added

68 Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England, 1727–1783* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 289–330; Linda Colley, "Britishness and Otherness: An Argument," *Journal of British Studies* 31, no. 4 (1992): 309–29; Laurence Brockliss and David Eastwood, eds., *A Union of Multiple Identities: The British Isles, c. 1750–c. 1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997).

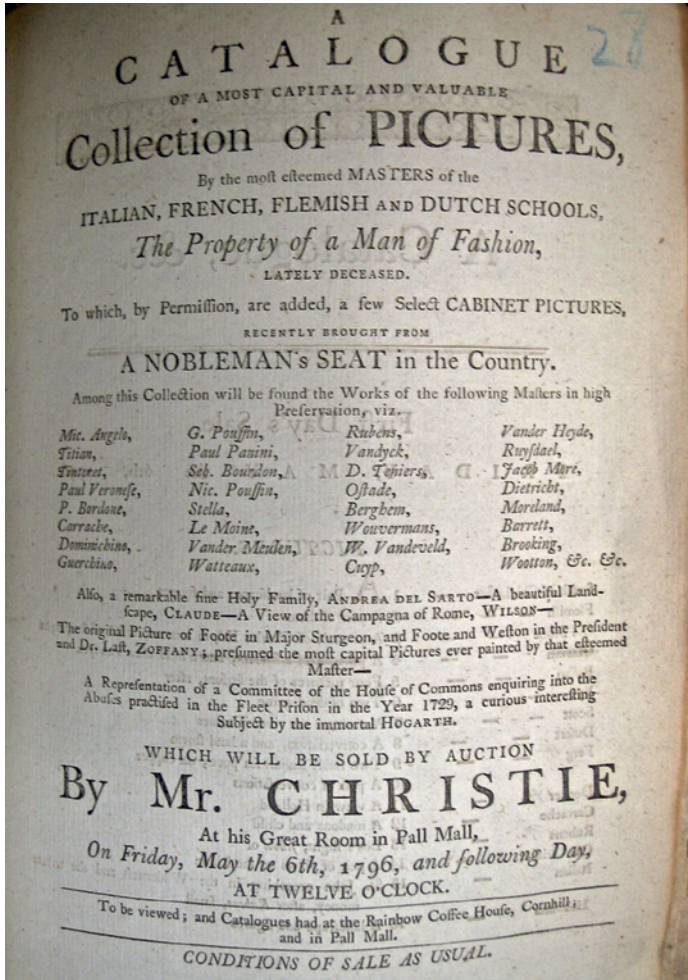


FIGURE 2.2 *A Catalogue of a Most Capital and Valuable Collection of Pictures, by the Most Esteemed Masters of the Italian, French, Flemish and Dutch Schools, the Property of a Man of Fashion [...] Sold by Auction, by Mr. Christie* (London: s.n., 1796), Lugt 5447, title page. London, Christie's Archives  
© CHRISTIE'S

categories of Florentine, Venetian, etc. informing the inside organisation of the lots), Flemish, German and French. The British added the Dutch school to the three schools, or 'trois sortes de goût' accepted by the French connoisseur Antoine-Joseph Dézallier d'Argenville in his "Discours sur la Connaissance des Desseins et des Tableaux" and they also clearly differentiated the Flemish

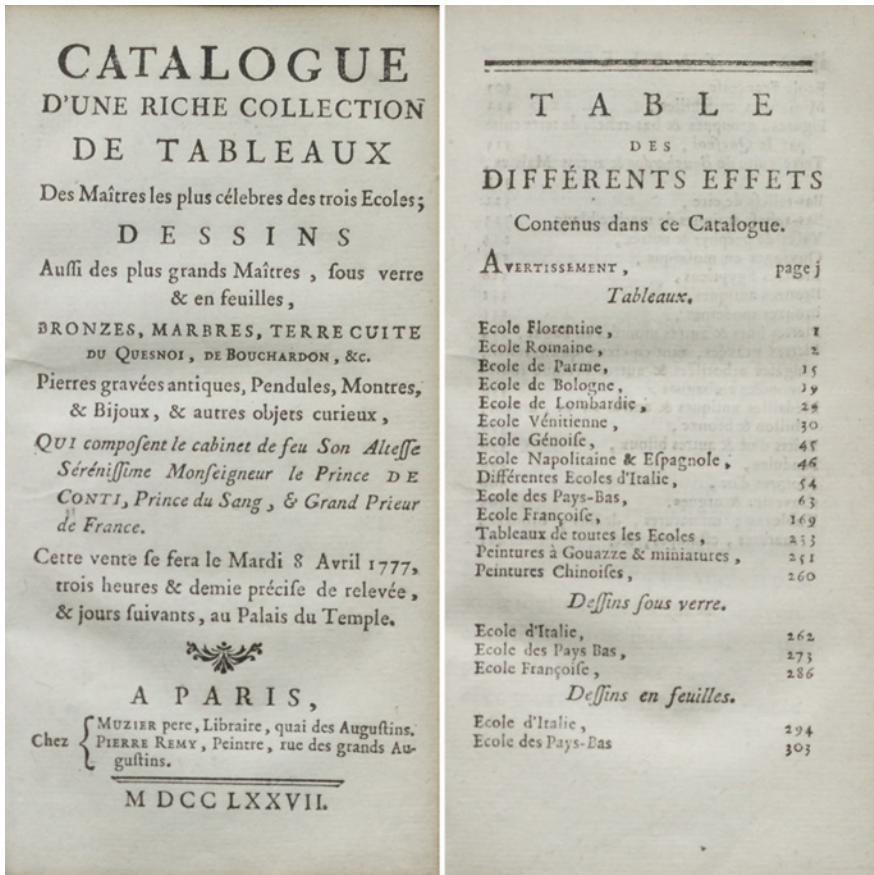


FIGURE 2.3 Prince de Conti, *Catalogue d'une riche collection de tableaux des maîtres les plus célèbres des trois écoles, Dessins aussi des plus grands maîtres [...]* 8 avril 1777 au Palais du Temple (Paris: s. n., 1777), title page and table of contents. Washington (DC), National Gallery of Art Library, David K.E. Bruce Fund

and Dutch in their approach to the Northern schools.<sup>69</sup> However, no further specialisation was sought in British catalogues, and the use of local schools or the organisation of the lot descriptions by schools, as was routine in France, was rarely adopted (Fig. 2.3).

Like most marketing tools deployed to raise the customer's awareness, this set text on the title page signalled quality by using vocabulary that provided

69 Antoine Joseph Dézallier d'Argenville, "Discours sur la Connaissance des Desseins et des Tableaux," in *Abrégé de la vie des plus fameux peintres*, vol. 1 (Paris: Debure, 1745–1752), xxiv.

educational content, but of a sort that the customer had already partially mastered. It worked like a repetitive and recognisable branding, mainly designed to generate trust and support the connoisseurship credentials of those who organised the sales. The British advertisement of 'Italian, French, Flemish and Dutch' pictures in auction catalogues lasted well into the nineteenth century. The use of set expressions offered simple guidelines, resting on didactic and accessible art writings—which especially helped to engage first time buyers by breaking down artistic judgement into more accessible categories than the specialised and intimidating attribution by name. This obeyed the exchange function, or the 'built-in force that drives the exchange system toward the greatest degree of commoditization [...] against the utter singularization of things as they are in nature.'<sup>70</sup> This went hand in hand with the growing frequency of auctions and can be seen as a sign of their commercial success. The auctioneers now presented their sales as part of a regular flow of quality art to Britain, which consistently shaped and tested buyers' preferences. Auctions had become an established fixture of the London social season—as elsewhere in Europe, they proved to be more influential than a simple recycling market that merely reverberated the changes happening in collectors' salons or artists' studios.<sup>71</sup> In the lists of buyers in the auctioneers' catalogues, the titles of Lord and Sir rub shoulders with Esquire, Doctor, Dean, Colonel, Captain and the simple Mister (Fig. 2.4). The standardisation of auctions attracted a larger audience of middle-class art lovers who were at the heart of the growth of interest in the arts, from clergymen, surgeons, solicitors and merchants to higher civil servants.<sup>72</sup>

By becoming a repetitive brand name, 'Italian, French, Flemish and Dutch' did not pretend to specifically represent the sale at hand. It did not, for example, provide information on the proportional make-up of the sale—and indeed the auction rooms were filled with many more native British paintings than

70 Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Apparudai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 64–91.

71 Charlotte Guichard, "From Social Event to Urban Spectacle: Auctions in Late Eighteenth-Century Paris," in *Fashioning Old and New: Changing Consumer Patterns in Western Europe (1650–1900)*, eds. Bruno Blondé and Ilja Van Damme (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 203–18; Dries Lyna and Filip Vermeyleen, "Rubens for Sale: Art Auctions in Antwerp during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," in *Art Auctions and Dealers: The Dissemination of Netherlandish Art During the Ancien Régime*, eds. Dries Lyna, Filip Vermeyleen, and Hans Vlieghe (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 139–53; Thomas Ketelsen, "Art Auctions in Germany during the Eighteenth Century," in *Art Markets in Europe, 1400–1800*, 143–52.

72 See Jeffrey G. Williamson, "The Structure of Pay in Britain, 1710–1911," *Research in Economic History* 7 (1982): 1–54.



N <sup>o</sup> 1	21.	Mr Landolus	
2	19.	Fitzgerald	
3	11.	Schofield	1/4
4	11.	G. King	1/4
5	15.	Croft	1/4
6	0.	Johnson	1/4
7	15.	Dr. Byson	1/4
8	12.	Milly	1/4
9	19.	Fitzgerald	1/4
10	11 6	Do	1/4
11	18.	Evans J	1/4
12	17.	Mr Birch	1/4
13	3 18.	Brown	1/4
14	2 7.	Harding	1/4
15	2 5.	Nixon	1/4
16	1 -	Dean of Peterborough	1/4
17	3 13 6	Buchwell	1/4
18	2 10.	Patch	1/4
19	5 -	Hart	1/4
20	1 5.	Johnson	1/4
21	2 5.	Croft	1/4
22	7 10.	Nixon	1/4
23	1 9.	more	1/4
24	3 8.	Buchwell	1/4
25	5 5	Do	1/4
26	6.	Dr. Stour	1/4
27	4 10.	B. Rochester	1/4
28	2 2.	Patch	1/4
29	1.	Price	1/4
30	3 9.	Do	1/4
31	3 3.	Nixon	1/4
* 31	6 10.	Moreland	1/4
£ 78.17.			

FIGURE 2.4 William Anne Holles Capell, 4th Earl of Essex, *A Catalogue of the Genuine and Capital Collection of Italian, French, Flemish and Dutch Pictures, of the Earl of Essex [...] Sold by Mess. Christie and Ansell* (London: s.n., 1777), Lugt 2634, Auctioneer's copy, Folio 1. London, Christie's Archives  
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these title pages seem to warrant. Krzysztof Pomian notes that in France in the second half of the eighteenth century, the use of schools likewise quickly became a set expression rather than the exact description of what could be found in the sale catalogues.<sup>73</sup> However, the adoption of school categories did have a lasting impact on the sales content as the second half of the eighteenth century unfolded—it accompanied a slow rebalancing of national schools present at the sales. Italian and Dutch paintings, present in comparable quantities on the resale market, made up nearly thirty percent of the lots respectively in London auction rooms from the 1760s to the 1800s. This formed an impressive portion of the sales, but it was actually a decreased presence compared to the 1720–40 sales, where Dutch and especially Italian artists had formed an overwhelming majority of the lots for sale.<sup>74</sup> The Flemish pictures increased slightly in quantity after the upheaval of the French Revolution and settled at the same level (fifteen percent) as the British paintings. The French pictures, meanwhile, remained few, but increased from six to eight percent of the total amount of lots for sale.<sup>75</sup> The standardised continental categories that appeared systematically on the title pages therefore might have functioned as vouchers of traditional connoisseurship on the part of the auctioneer, but they also triggered the audience's curiosity and induced a diversification of schools displayed for sale.

The title page hence functioned as a first-contact marketing device. To lead the casual readers into becoming interested customers, the next step in this sales funnel could be found inside the catalogue. By the 1760s, evolving beyond dry lists of attributions and short subject titles, some British catalogues began to display connoisseurship in their lot descriptions. These included information on the provenance of the picture, the state of preservation or the illustrative value, with distinctions made between an original and a good copy. The lot

73 Krzysztof Pomian, *Collectors and Curiosities: Paris and Venice 1500–1800* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 125.

74 Data for this period are woefully scarce. This is based on less than fifteen extant catalogues for the period, mainly housed at the British Library, the Courtauld Book Library, and the National Art Library. Most do not contain the price, some prices have been lost in cut and binding, and the Houlditch Manuscript housed at the National Library is an eighteenth-century manuscript transcription of printed sales catalogues, largely devoid of price annotation. Advertisements in the press of the period however warrant that sales were more frequent than this number of extant catalogues suggests.

75 The dataset was elaborated by the compilation of 185 auction catalogues of James Christie, comprising 96,000 paintings, from 1786 to 1800. For more information on these data, see: Bénédicte Miyamoto, "British Buying Patterns at Auction Sales, 1780–1800," in *London and the Emergence of a European Art Market, 1780–1820*, eds. Susannah Avery-Quash and Christian Huemer (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2019), 35–51.

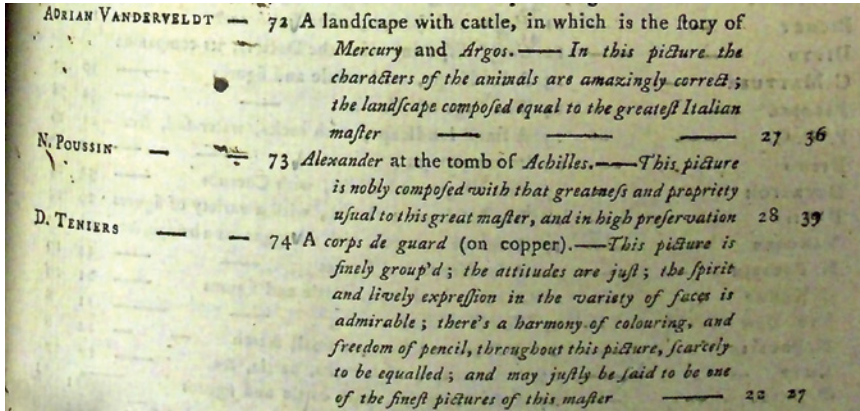


FIGURE 2.5 Robert Ansell, *A Catalogue of a Superb and Valuable Collection of Italian, French, Flemish and Dutch Pictures, Collected Abroad [...]* Sold by Auction, by Mr. Christie (London: s. n., 1771), Lugt 1892, 5. London, Christie's Archives

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description could also include ekphrastic discourse and an aesthetic appraisal of style, composition or colour to further refine the classification by school (Fig. 2.5). Such extended descriptions were still generally reserved for the best lots for sale and were presented at the end of the catalogue. Contrary to French catalogues, the British catalogues stopped short of being an elaborate discursive tool that reproduced the one-to-one exchange between the collectors and their agents, and they rarely included extensive information such as artists' biographies or debates on attribution. The auctioneers, therefore, do not seem to have perceived in their audience a need to replicate the behaviour of aristocratic collecting. Similarly, by giving little information about the received and disputed valuation of the piece for sale, or its former bidding results, auctioneers catered little to consumption behaviour intended to be conspicuous. But these catalogues still achieved what the use of "brand names" promised on the title page—they familiarised prospective buyers with recognisable characteristics, told the customer what to expect when purchasing products, and inculcated to the audience that the pleasure triggered by an Italian master, for example, could be reproduced by a picture from the same school.

Therefore, the adoption of the notion of schools by the bidders enabled them to enter into a more learned consumption of pictures, as these labels became familiar categories that were repetitively linked to specific pleasures of reception. What the set text 'Italian, French, Flemish and Dutch' does not, however, seem to have produced is a strict hierarchy of schools that would

have seen the Italian picture appear more desirable than the Dutch. The listing of pictures remained similar to late seventeenth-century catalogues, with a numbering of lots that was irrespective of schools. The organisation depended on increasing quality and saw the best lots sold last.<sup>76</sup> Notions of schools educated the public, reminding them to recognise which characteristics to look for in a Dutch genre picture destined for a cabinet or in an Italian biblical scene which displayed a larger composition. This was again very much in keeping with the art appreciation initiated by Richardson's watershed second discourse published in 1719. The *Two Discourses* had gained an impressive readership in Britain and abroad, helping to '(re)shape the highbrow canon.'<sup>77</sup> It urged the public to become 'discursive citizens' as the influence of foreign academic theoretical discourses waned.<sup>78</sup> In particular Richardson reminded the reader that 'to judge of the Goodness of a Picture, Drawing, or Print, 'tis necessary to establish to our Selves a System of Rules to be apply'd to that we intend to give a Judgement of.'<sup>79</sup> The fixed hierarchy of schools from Italian, French, Flemish to Dutch was a helpful first step to acquaint oneself with the world of art but was not the founding basis of this system of rules when it came to ranking pictures by quality—and neither was bowing to the renown of the hand. Richardson recommended judging 'the Intrinsic quality of the thing itself'

That a Picture or Drawing has been, or is much esteemed by those who are believed to be good Judges; Or is, or was Part of a famous Collection, cost so much, has a rich Frame [...] That 'tis Old, *Italian*, Rough, Smooth, &c. These are circumstances hardly worth mentioning, and which belong to Good and Bad. [...] about Two Hundred Years ago, there were wretched Painters, as well as Before, and Since, and in *Italy* as well as Elsewhere.<sup>80</sup>

With this new system of rules, Richardson deployed the first truly British theoretical discourse that blended categories of schools with British empiricism.<sup>81</sup>

76 Miyamoto, "Making Pictures Marketable."

77 Verhoeven, "Mastering the Connoisseur's Eye."

78 William Ray, "Talking about Art: The French Royal Academy Salons and the Formation of the Discursive Citizen," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 37, no. 4 (2004): 527–52.

79 Richardson, *Two Discourses*, 26.

80 *Id.*, 20–23.

81 Carol Gibson-Wood, "Jonathan Richardson, Lord Somers's Collection of Drawings, and Early Art-Historical Writing in England," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 52 (1989): 167–87. See the introduction to: Jonathan Richardson, *Traité de la peinture et de la sculpture*, eds. Isabelle Baudino and Frédéric Ogée (Paris: Ensba, 2008).

The idea of the superiority of one nation above another in matters of painting was increasingly questioned, and the use of schools as a category became closely related to aesthetic qualities. Gerard de Lairese's treatise, when it appeared in English in 1738, underlined a similar pleasurable variety, which came from placing side by side two pictures from different schools. A British and an Italian picture were, for example, compared in this manner:

Most Men chime in with those simple Judges who approve no Histories, no Landskips [*sic*], or Portraits, that are not painted in the *Italian* Manner. [...] But let an *Englishman's* Picture hang near an *Italian's*, both handled with equal Skill [...] the sweetening Softness of the *Englishman* will charm as much on one hand, as the strong and glowing Colour of the Italian on the other: Are not both praiseworthy, as having each expressed the *Character* natural to his Figure?<sup>82</sup>

The chapter in which this comparison appeared was dedicated to portraiture. This was a genre that the British knew they had acquired a reputation for beyond their borders and that, more particularly, enabled British painters to compete with the continental masters. The goal of the above comparative exercise was to underline that schools were matters not strictly of hierarchy, but rather of varied manners, in which different nationalities could display 'equal Skill.'

When Jonathan Richardson published his *Discourse on the Dignity, Certainty, Pleasure and Advantage, of the Science of a Connoisseur* in 1719, it was therefore with the explicit intention of equipping British buyers and sellers in the art market with discrimination and clear standards so that 'a thing unheard of, and whose Name (to our Dishonour) has at present an Uncouth Sound may come to be Eminent in the World, I mean the British School of Painting.' By the end of the century, a British school of art was decidedly in the making with both a buoyant resale market and institutions like the Royal Academy. Most importantly, the public had by now developed sophisticated skills of connoisseurship, and not only were they able to use the general terms of schools, but they could also recognise both the cultural and economic implications of these labels.

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82 De Lairese, *The Art of Painting*, 354.

## Conclusion

In the 1781 *Earwig* review of the Royal Academy's exhibition, an old woman deplored the public's ability to 'coolly make an eulogium on the abilities and turn of the Artists. This, he says, is in the manner of such a master: this is the taste of such a School;—Feeble Praise!'<sup>83</sup> The condemnation was levelled at superficial artistic knowledge, but the understanding of schools, manners and genres had in fact proved an invaluable introduction for British spectators who were now better equipped with a value system to deal with and talk about art. By the middle of the century, auction bidders could decipher the self-referential reflexes at work in continental pictures, and thus they found it easier to re-brand suspicious pictures (deemed, for example, too Catholic or too foreign) into masterpieces. National labels, which had been burdened by political and religious references, lost their problematic connotations and became increasingly understood and used as aesthetic categories, both by sellers and buyers. These school categories therefore proved useful as credentials of connoisseurship, indicating an increasingly interconnected and democratic market. Contrary to the criticism of the *Earwig*, school categories were not 'feeble praise,' but initial appraisal. They were the vital first step for pictures to be judged according to their intrinsic aesthetic qualities.

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