Frederick Lewis, Prince of Wales, print published by John Faber, Jr., after a painting by Jeremiah Davison, 1739 or before (1730), mezzotint, National Portrait Gallery, London (NPG D33031). © National Portrait Gallery, London.

For more on this image and related paintings, see Roberto C. Ferrari’s contribution to our ongoing series British Art in American Collections, “The Prince and Princess of Wales: Two Eighteenth-Century Portraits at Columbia University,” page 5.

Ideas for new entries in this series or for additional features for the newsletter, as well as items of member news, are always welcome.
Dear HBA Members,

Three months on, I still find myself startled by Darren Waterston’s revelatory installation Filthy Lucre: Peacock Room Remix. During this year’s College Art Association conference, HBA members, together with the Association of Historians of Nineteenth-Century Art (AHNCA), were treated to a particularly gracious and stimulating evening at the Smithsonian Institution’s Sackler Gallery in connection with the exhibition. With the artist on hand to discuss the project and answer questions, insightful commentary came from a panel of experts including Lee Glazer (associate curator of American art at the Freer and Sackler), Linda Merrill (Whistler scholar and lecturer at Emory University), and Robyn Asleson (assistant curator of prints, drawings and media arts at the Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery). The event was illuminating for me in multiple ways, but I’m especially intrigued by the way Waterston’s ‘recreation’ serves as both an engaging twenty-first-century work of art and as a historical interpretation of Whistler’s iconic room. All disruptive things that come to be canonical run the risk of losing the edge that made them significant in the first place. Waterston’s Filthy Lucre brilliantly reasserts the unsettling sharpness of Whistler’s challenge to staid conceptions of a Victorian interior. In its own way, the Peacock Room now seems to me as revolutionary—and in some ways even more important—than Manet’s synthetic engagements between past standards and modern agendas in the 1860s. Peter Trippi surpassed even his usual good-humored efficiency in organizing and implementing the event—including opening remarks with Waterston regarding the role of contemporary art for museums’ rethinking their historical holdings. Warm thanks also goes to Lee Glazer and the extraordinary staff of the Sackler. As if all of the artistic and intellectual offerings weren’t enough, the event included a lush reception with fantastic hors d’oeuvres and drinks!

The Sackler reception exemplifies the sorts of relationships and opportunities HBA can facilitate for its members. In the coming months, I’ll be working on two initiatives aimed at further developing our impact and reach. The first, a short-term project, in collaboration with Choice Magazine, aims to establish a list of the top 100 most important books for understanding British art produced between 1600 and 1850 (see p. 3). Crowd-sourcing the initial phase will, I hope, be a productive way to spark larger conversations about titles—old and new—that have been particularly significant. The second project will be slower in coming, though its impact could be far-reaching: in the coming months HBA will begin exploring ways the organization might become a central network for North American museums, archives, and historical sites with British holdings. I would be thrilled to hear from anyone interested in such an endeavor—‘interested’ either in terms of finding it useful or in helping us develop supports for such a network. Please feel free to email me with ideas, suggestions, and comments.

--Craig Hanson

Associate Professor of Art History, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI
Dear HBA Members,

The Historians of British Art events are always a highlight of my CAA experience. This year, HBA’s panel was organized by Susan P. Casteras and included papers by Robyn Asleson, Madeleine Pearce, Alison Syme, and Elisa Korb on the topic of “Reforming Pre-Raphaelitism in the Late Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries: New Contexts, Paradigms, and Visions.” In addition, as has become our custom, our business meeting featured papers by early career scholars: Courtney Long of the University of Pittsburgh, “Classifying Architecture: Intersections of Architectural and Natural History in Nineteenth-Century Great Britain”; and Ariel Kline of Williams College, “‘A Dog’s Eye’: Perception and Instinct in Briton Riviere’s Animal Paintings.”

One of the participants, Courtney Long, responded to our call at the business meeting for a volunteer to take over the post of newsletter editor. It has been a great pleasure to edit this newsletter for the past three years. I owe special thanks to Emily Talbot, who is our Treasurer and Membership Chair as well as our queen of social media; working with Emily has been a delight.

In future issues, Courtney will continue to develop our newsletter to meet the needs and interests of our members. Please join me in welcoming her to HBA.

--Catherine Roach  
Assistant Professor of Art History,  
Virginia Commonwealth University

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS:  
The 100 Most Important Books for Understanding British Art, 1600–1850

As a cooperative initiative with Choice Magazine, the Historians of British Art is working to assemble a list of the most important books for understanding British art produced between 1600 and 1850. The project, which will result in a bibliographic review essay for Choice, is particularly aimed at strengthening library holdings, and so nominations of studies broad in scope or significance are especially welcome.

In addition to studies of paintings, sculpture, and print culture, scholarship addressing country houses, gardens, decorative arts, patronage, and the history of exhibitions and collections for the period are also welcome.

Exhibition catalogues, historiographical studies, and works that situate British art within international contexts are also welcome.

Books published within the past 10–20 years will anchor the final list, but nominations of titles from any period are welcome.

Self-nominations are entirely appropriate. Don’t be shy. Nominate early and often!

Nominations may be submitted through the HBA website or emailed directly to HBA president, Craig Hanson, Top100BritishArtBooks@gmail.com.

Nominations are due by June 1.

Keren Rosa Hammerschlag published *Frederic Leighton: Death, Mortality, Resurrection* with Ashgate in 2015. Tim Barringer writes: “Keren Hammerschlag’s enterprising and sympathetic new interpretation of the work of Frederic Leighton reveals the full complexity and resonance of many compositions that have been little discussed. By drawing attention to the ever-present themes of death and mortality, and by placing those concerns in the wider context of Victorian culture, she reveals a hitherto overlooked and significant aspect of his oeuvre. Leighton’s religious paintings, too, finally receive the attention they deserve.”

Sarah James’s *Art in England, from the Saxons to the Tudors, 600-1600* is forthcoming from Oxbow Press in August, 2016.

John Wilson, an assessor for the Berger Book Prize, reports: On December 7th of last year, William L. Pressly was awarded the 2015 William M.B. Berger Prize for British art history for his book *James Barry’s Murals at the Royal Society of Arts: Envisioning a New Public Art* (Cork University Press). The book demonstrates that Barry’s RSA paintings contain a hidden meaning that has gone undetected for 230 years. The pictures offer a glorification of the Roman Catholic Church in the heart of London’s establishment. The artist’s creation of a complex, mythic narrative establishes him as the mentor of William Blake, whose approach to art owes a profound debt to the Irishman’s example.

Catherine Roach’s *Pictures-within-Pictures in Nineteenth-Century Britain* is forthcoming from Routledge in June, 2016. Pamela Fletcher writes: “Pictures-within-Pictures is a smart, impressively-researched, and rich series of readings of individual paintings that opens up into a thought-provoking discussion of how visual citation and recognition functioned for Victorian artists and viewers, and how such references forged new identities for viewers and audiences in specific exhibition venues.”
The Prince and Princess of Wales: Two Eighteenth-Century Portraits at Columbia University

Those who have visited or studied in the main reading room of Butler Library at Columbia University likely have noticed the two large portraits in ornate frames hanging 25 feet up on the south wall. These two paintings, measuring approximately 72 x 40 in. (182.3 x 101.2 cm), were donated to Columbia by alumnus Edmund Astley Prentis and have hung in that library for more than 60 years. The donor presented these portraits to the University as images of King George II (1683–1760), the eponymous founder of King’s College (Columbia’s original name), and his wife, Caroline of Ansbach (1683–1737). In a letter dated December 8, 1948, to the Provost, Prentis noted that the artist was unknown, but that they likely were painted around 1727 when George II had acceded to the throne. This information was accepted by all involved in the acquisition of these paintings, and there is no evidence in the curatorial files to suggest anyone since that time has investigated this matter further. Stylistically the paintings appear to be early eighteenth-century British, and iconographically the inclusion of the crown with three feathers at the top of the frames suggests an association with the Prince of Wales. Only now, however, through research conducted on both sides of the Atlantic and after a closer examination of the paintings, can we say for certain who the individuals are, as well as who painted these pictures and when.
Contrary to Prentis’s claim, these portraits do not depict George II and Caroline but their son Frederick Louis (1707–1751) and daughter-in-law Augusta (1719–1772), the Prince and Princess of Wales and parents of King George III (1738–1820). When George II became king, his twenty-one-year-old son Frederick was named heir to the throne and subsequently was crowned Prince of Wales in 1729. Because the Prince died unexpectedly in 1751, it was his son who came to the throne next as George III. Frederick was born and raised in the German state of Hanover and arrived in London in 1727 soon after his father’s reign began. The Prince was popular with the court and arguably became the most active patron of the arts among the Hanoverians (Rorschach). He sat to many artists for his portrait, such as Jacopo Amigoni and Philip Mercier. Another was Jeremiah Davison (ca. 1695–after 1750), a London-born artist of Scottish parentage who may have trained at the Kneller Academy. Although Davison is less well-known today, his ca. 1730 portrait of Prince Frederick was used by John Faber, Jr., to publish a mezzotint engraving (see page 1). Davison’s painting has remained untraced to this day.

Although Frederick’s pose in the print matches other contemporaneous state portraits, the peculiar, dramatic gesture of the Prince’s right hand, with his long fingers resting on his chest, the two middle fingers touching one another and separate from the others, is distinctive and unique (see page 8). This visual clue seemed to be the strongest connection between Columbia’s portrait and the Faber print, making a closer examination of the painting necessary. In August 2015, the staff of Art Properties used a Genie lift to go up more than 25 feet high to examine the painting, an adventure which proved successful. In the lower left corner of the painting, hidden under years of grime, was a signature and date that had never before been noted: *J. Davison Anno 1731*. The discovery of this inscription thus makes a compelling argument that Columbia’s portrait of Frederick is the heretofore missing Davison painting from which Faber’s print was made.

The whole-length portrait depicts the Prince standing nearly in profile but with his right foot and head turned toward the viewer. He wears robes adorned with ermine and the chains of state, and his left hand rests on his sword. On the table is his crown with its emblems of the fleur-de-lys and cross. This crown was made specifically for Frederick and was used by future Princes of Wales until 1901. However, Frederick rarely if ever wore it; instead, it was carried before him when he attended the openings of Parliament (Royal Collection Trust). In 1736 Frederick married Augusta, the daughter of the Duke of Saxe-Gotha. As the new Princess of Wales, she too was painted by a number of artists in London, most notably Charles Philips (1708–1747), a London-based artist who was among the Prince’s favored painters.
Columbia’s portrait of Augusta is a replica of an original, larger portrait signed by Philips and dated 1737, now in the Royal Collection (Millar, 1:177). A similar version of Augusta’s portrait in three-quarter-length is in the National Portrait Gallery, London (Kerslake, 1:7–9). Because no signature is visible in Columbia’s portrait, this version is likely one of the replicas produced by Philips’s studio. The painting shows Augusta in a coronet and wearing a silver-gray gown and ermine-lined red cloak. She stands before a throne with a carved ornamentation of the badge of the Prince of Wales, three feathers in a coronet, which as noted also appears at the top of both frames. Augusta points toward her left, suggesting her portrait was part of a pair, and indeed in the 1730s Philips painted portraits of Frederick, one of which also is in the Royal Collection. (This pair of portraits by Philips was purchased by Queen Mary at Christie’s London on December 4, 1931.) However, women traditionally were depicted to their husband’s left (i.e., the right side when seen on a wall), so the implication here is that Augusta is pointing not to her husband but to the throne or something outside the frame.

The Columbia portraits, then, were not painted as a pair, but brought together by an owner who likely had them framed identically to reinforce the unity of the subjects. When or why the identity for the subjects was altered to George II and Caroline, as well as full provenance, warrants further investigation. In his 1948 letter to the Provost, Prentis wrote that he had just purchased these paintings a few days beforehand and that they were temporarily at the Durand-Ruel Gallery on 12 E. 57th St. in New York. A requested search from the Durand-Ruel Archives in Paris has shown that they were not involved in the sale of these paintings, so Prentis presumably purchased them elsewhere and had them temporarily stored at Durand-Ruel. It is not surprising that we know little about where these paintings were from, for in an oral history interview Prentis admitted that he frequently threw out receipts and forgot where he had purchased many works of art. Prentis graduated from the College of Mines in 1906 and had a lucrative career in engineering. This donation was among the first of many works of art to come from Prentis for nearly twenty years until he died in 1967.

Although this new information about these two royal portraits helps us better appreciate and understand their significance in the history of eighteenth-century British portraiture and their association with Columbia, sadly both paintings are in poor condition. The frames were cleaned and conserved twenty years ago, but the paintings themselves have suffered from many years of natural wear and tear. The canvases are slack and brittle, there is evidence of paint loss, and an accumulation of grime has altered their appearance dramatically. It is hoped that through the generosity of donors, Art Properties will one day be able to clean and conserve these important paintings so that students and scholars can study and learn from them for years to come.
Acknowledgements:

My thanks to A. Cassandra Albinson for her feedback on and encouragement of this research project.

Resources:

Curatorial files: C00.495 and C00.496. Art Properties, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.


In his ambitious book *Disillusioned: Victorian Photography and the Discerning Subject*, Jordan Bear offers a new interpretation of photography in Britain in the 1850s and 60s, arguing that the medium’s relationship to representational “objectivity” was far more tenuous than formalist accounts have allowed. Bear’s approach is historical and contextual; he considers the production and reception of photographs in relation to systemic pressures on visual discernment resulting from the political and economic engines of capitalism. The book’s central argument arises out of the liberalization of private enterprise at mid-century, which positioned the “individual” and his or her freedom of choice as the best means for social progress. Photography was co-opted in this project, Bear contends, to provide the modern viewer with an opportunity to demonstrate agency—a dynamic that required photographs to be anything but objective. In keeping with a Marxist framework, *Disillusioned* seeks to associate photography’s ambiguities with conceptions of “reality” as a process of social construction.

The text is divided into seven case studies, each of which considers themes of visual discernment, objectivity, and individual agency in a range of photographic contexts. In the first section Bear provides a valuable overview of the visual landscape into which photography was introduced in the 1830s. The author’s analysis of optical toys like the thaumatrope, a spinning disk that relied on retinal retention to produce the illusion that two images had become one, suggests that Victorian viewers were accustomed to questioning the reliability of what they could see. Photography enters this arena in provocative ways, as in a description of the Royal Polytechnic Institution of London, where industrial workers received observation-based training in matters of manufacturing and economics alongside exclusive demonstrations of William Henry Fox Talbot’s newly announced calotype process.

The second and third chapters focus on the form of photography that most literally undermines photographic objectivity: composite photography or “combination” printing, the process of producing a photograph from more than one negative. In chapter two, Bear proposes a rich new reading of the most famous composite print, Oscar Rejlander’s *The Two Ways of Life* (1857), an elaborate undertaking depicting two men choosing between the paths of virtue or vice constructed from no less than 32 separate negatives. On the basis of its subject and technique, Bear aligns *The Two Ways of Life* with labor conflicts in the 1850s, particularly in terms of the part-to-whole relationship embodied by the print’s piecemeal construction and the dynamic between worker and industry. Bear’s elucidation of the term “combination” is especially
informative, as he explores connections to trade unionism and fears that workers were “colluding” in secret, which legislation like the Combination Acts sought to control. Given Bear’s concern with the public resonance of The Two Ways of Life, one wishes he had addressed the vociferous debates that swirled around the print when it was exhibited in the late 1850s. Critics were particularly disturbed by Rejlander’s inclusion of nude women as allegories of “vanity” and “idleness,” details that were deemed so inappropriate for the medium of photography that the Scottish Photographic Society withdrew the print from view, only agreeing to exhibit it once the offensive left side of the image had been draped. These responses hinged on photography’s relationship to reality, a matter at the heart of Bear’s study. Dismissing such responses as “apolitical” (33) feels like a missed opportunity to test the limits of the book’s argument, and points to a broader tendency on Bear’s part to generalize about the opinions of “Victorian viewers” without grounding them in concrete examples.

The issue of authorial agency comes to the fore in chapters three and four, most strikingly in a section dedicated to a little known collaboration between Oscar Rejlander and Julia Margaret Cameron. In this jointly produced photograph, now in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, Cameron contributed a photogram frame of ferns that encircles Rejlander’s portrait photograph of Kate Dore. Although Cameron’s camera-less technique might seem to downplay her personal intervention, Bear maintains this was an intentional move that negotiated competing expectations for women artists and for photographers. Considering Cameron’s contribution in relation to the history of flower painting, the author argues that the female photographer mobilized a dialectic between presence/absence and originality/derivation that characterizes her collaborative role with Rejlander and the “fluid demands of authorial agency in the medium at large” (85).

The chapter devoted to Francis Frith and his firm extends these questions of authorship beyond the realm of art photography. Here Bear addresses what he perceives to be a stylistic shift in the production of travel photographs, from an overt acknowledgment of authorship towards a “house style” that subsumed individual photographers into a single corporate identity. Bear’s concise argument is supported by persuasive visual evidence, such as the presence of a signature etched in a glass plate negative or cropping and framing choices that eliminated particularizing details. Bear is a bit hasty in his conclusions, however, and the assertion that a “corporate” look held more authority for viewers seems speculative rather than substantiated. The final chapter turns to microphotography and other scientific formats that required interpretation by an “expert.” According to Bear, these modes effectively close the phase of visual discernment that characterized the 1850s and 60s by dissolving the affiliation between a photograph and the human eye. This material satisfyingly brackets Bear’s study, but may not offer a large enough sample from which to extrapolate and make claims about a comprehensive shift in viewing practices.

Bear’s conclusion returns to composite photography, underscoring that the stakes of his project reside in overturning the privileging of “straight photography” in museum collections and academic discourse. Drawing a link between combination printing and postmodern conceptions of the instability of knowledge, Bear makes a compelling case for a new history of photography that situates Rejlander and fellow composite photographers closer to the center. In this account, recent concerns about the ease with which digital photographs may be manipulated are the logical extension of the historical narrative Bear has been tracing. While some readers may be left wishing for more demonstrable evidence to support the author’s theories, Disillusioned offers an inspiring model for recovering photography’s contingent meanings, both in the nineteenth century and now.
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Cornelius Jabez Hughes, daguerreotypist (British, 1819-1884)
Portrait of a Yeoman, about 1853, Daguerreotype, hand-colored ¼ plate
Image: 9.1 x 5.6 cm (3 9/16 x 2 3/16 in.) Mat: 10.6 x 8.3 cm (4 3/16 x 3 ¼ in.)
The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

membership

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