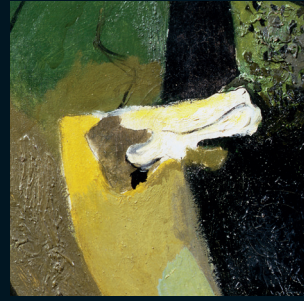
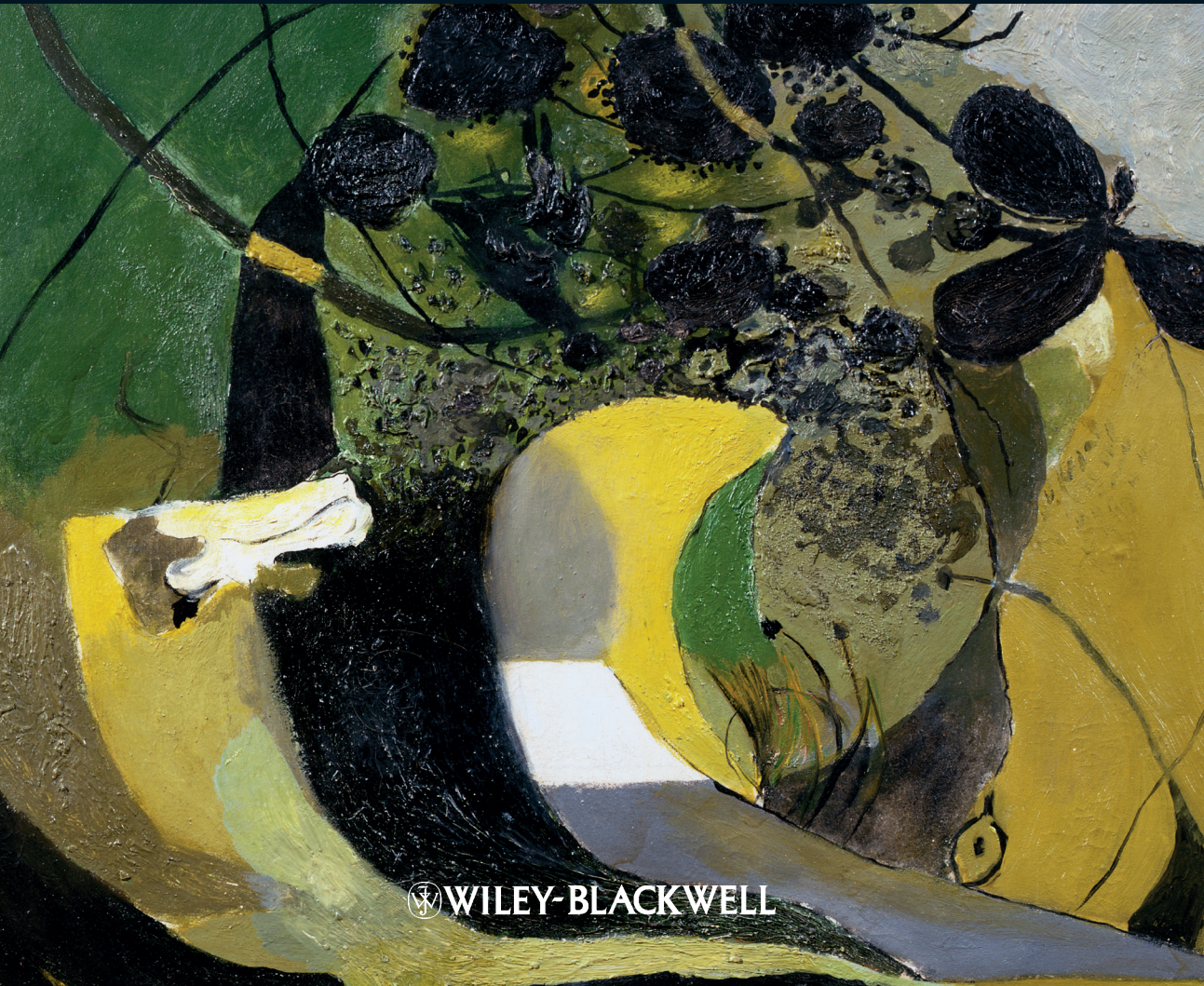


WILEY-BLACKWELL COMPANIONS TO ART HISTORY



A Companion to British Art 1600 to the Present

Edited by Dana Arnold and David Peters Corbett



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British Art
1600 to the Present

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Editorial Offices

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The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

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Acknowledgements

This volume springs from our interest in developing the field of British art studies. It began as a remapping of the established lines of inquiry and developed into an exploration of the principal themes in the ongoing scholarship and historiography of British art. The interest in the retelling of the story of British art has grown over the past decade as witnessed by the appearance of several new publications including a three-volume *History of British Art*.¹ This volume brings a complementary dimension to this body of literature as well as the canonical surveys that have endured for more than half a century.²

It has been a long road from inception to publication. And there are many to thank who have helped the volume on its way. Jayne Fagnoli, our editor at Wiley-Blackwell, and her production team on both sides of the Atlantic have all made a contribution to the development of this book. In its final stages our copy-editor Camille Bramall worked enthusiastically and effectively on each of the essays.

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Dana Arnold and David Peters Corbett
October 2012

Notes

- 1 Bindman, D., Ayers, T. and Stephens, C. (eds) (2008) *The History of British Art*, 3 vols, London: Tate Publishing.
- 2 See for instance, Waterhouse, E. (1994) *Painting in Britain 1530–1790*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Notes on Contributors

Editors

Dana Arnold is professor of architectural history and theory at Middlesex University, UK. Her current research focuses on architecture as visual culture and how aesthetic ideas are exchanged. She is currently completing a book on *Architectural Aesthetics: Interpreting Classical Antiquity in the 18th Century* to be published by IB Tauris. Her interest in how architecture, space, and cities combine is the subject of a number of monographs: *The Spaces of the Hospital* (2012); *Rural Urbanism: London Landscapes in the Early Nineteenth Century* (2006); and *Re-presenting the Metropolis: Architecture, Urban Experience and Social Life in London 1800–1840* (2000). Her bestselling survey *Art History: A Very Short Introduction* (2004) has been translated into many languages.

David Peters Corbett is professor of history of art and American studies at the University of East Anglia. He has written widely on British and American art between the years 1850 and 1950, including *The Modernity of British Art, 1914–1930* (1997), and *The World in Paint: Modern Art and Visuality in England 1848–1914* (2004), and, as co-editor, *The Geographies of Englishness: Landscape and National Identity in English Art, 1880–1940* (2002), *Anglo-American: Artistic Relations between Britain and the US from Colonial Times to the Present* (2012), and *British Art and the Cultural Field, 1939–1969* (2012).

Contributors

Jo Applin is a lecturer in modern and contemporary art at the University of York. In recent years she has been a visiting scholar in the School of Visual Arts at the University of Texas (2007) and a research associate at the Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal (2009). She has recently completed a book *Eccentric Objects: Rethinking Sculpture in 1960s America* (2012), and is currently writing a book on Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama's

1965 *Infinity Mirror Room-Phalli's Field* (2013). In addition, she has begun a new book project on women artists in the 1950s and 1960s titled *Not Working*.

Andrew Ballantyne is professor of architecture at Newcastle University, UK. He is author and editor of several books, including the bestseller *Architecture: a Very Short Introduction* (2002) and *Deleuze and Guattari for Architects* (2007). He recently worked on a major study of mock-Tudor architecture that led to the publication, as co-editor, of *Tudoresque: in Pursuit of the Ideal Home* (2011). His continuing interest in the way we identify with and find form in complex things, including ourselves and our surroundings, resulted in his recent co-edited *Architecture in the Space of Flows* (2011).

Dympna Callaghan is dean's professor of humanities at the College of Arts and Sciences, Syracuse University, New York, where she works on early modern English literature. Her publications include a Norton edition of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* (2009), *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (2006), and *The Impact of Feminism in English Renaissance Studies* (2007).

Michael Charlesworth is professor of art history at the University of Texas, Austin. He is an authority on landscape and the history of gardens, on photography until 1918, and on landscape drawing and painting. His publications include *Derek Jarman* (2011), *Landscape and Vision in Nineteenth Century Britain and France* (2008), *The Gothic Revival 1720–1870* (3 vols, 2002), and *The English Garden* (3 vols, 1993). He has also written articles about early cartography, book illustration, the late-twentieth-century artists Derek Jarman and Ian Hamilton Finlay, panoramic representation of landscape, and photographic history.

Mark A. Cheetham writes on art theory, art, and visual culture from c. 1700 to the present and is active as a curator of contemporary art. His co-curated exhibit *Jack Chambers: the Light From the Darkness/Silver Paintings and Film* received the OAAG "best exhibition" award in 2011. In 2006, he received the Art Journal Award from the College Art Association of America for "Matting the Monochrome: Malevich, Klein, & Now." His book *Artwriting, Nation, and Cosmopolitanism in Britain: the "Englishness" of English Art Theory* was published in 2012 by Ashgate. Cheetham teaches art history at the University of Toronto. http://web.me.com/greydog50/Mark_A._Cheetham/Welcome.html

Julie F. Codell is professor, art history, Arizona State University, and affiliate in English, gender studies, Asian studies, and film and media studies. She has published many books, chapters, articles, reviews, and encyclopedia entries. She wrote *The Victorian Artist* (2003) and *Images of an Idyllic Past: Edward Curtis's Photographs* (1988); edited *Transculturation in British Art* (2012), *Power and Resistance: The Delhi Coronation Durbars* (2012), *The Political Economy of Art* (2008), *Genre, Gender, Race, World Cinema* (2007), and *Imperial Co-Histories* (2003); and co-edited *Encounters in the Victorian Press* (2004) and *Orientalism Transposed* (1998), now being translated into Japanese by Hosei University (2014).

Whitney Davis is George C. and Helen N. Pardee professor of history & theory of ancient & modern art at UC Berkeley. He is the author most recently of *Queer Beauty: Sexuality and Aesthetics from Winckelmann to Freud and Beyond* (2010) and *A General*

Theory of Visual Culture (2011). He is currently completing two books: *Visuality and Virtuality: Images and Pictures from Ancient Egypt to New Media* and *Space, Time, and Depiction*.

Simon Faulkner teaches the history of art and visual culture at Manchester Metropolitan University. He is the editor (with Anandi Ramamurthy) of *Visual Culture and Decolonisation in Britain* (2006) and (with James Aulich and Lucy Burke) of *The Politics of Cultural Memory* (forthcoming, 2010). He has published various essays on mid-twentieth-century British art, including work on R. B. Kitaj and John Minton. He is currently engaged in research on visual culture and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

Pamela M. Fletcher is associate professor of art history at Bowdoin College. Her research and teaching center on Victorian and Edwardian painting, with a focus on questions of narrative, sentiment, and play in the context of exhibition culture. She is the author of *Narrating Modernity: the British Problem Picture 1895–1914* (Ashgate, 2004) and co-editor (with Anne Helmreich) of *The Rise of the Modern Art Market in London 1850–1939* (Manchester University Press, 2011). She is currently writing a book on the mid-Victorian painting of modern life, portions of which have appeared in the *Oxford Art Journal*, *Victorian Studies*, and *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*.

Anne Helmreich is an associate professor in the Department of Art History and Art at the Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio. She is a specialist in nineteenth-century European art with an emphasis on the art, architecture, and landscape design of Britain. Her publications include *The English Garden and National Identity: the Competing Styles of Garden Design, 1870–1914* (2002) as well as many book chapters, articles, reviews, and encyclopedia entries.

Ben Highmore is reader in media and cultural studies at the University of Sussex. His particular interests are concerned with cultural feelings, domestic life, and post-war British art, craft, and architecture (specifically the cultural movement New Brutalism). His most recent books are *A Passion for Cultural Studies* (2009), the edited collection *The Design Culture Reader* (2009), and *Ordinary Lives: Studies in the Everyday* (2011). His previous books have been on everyday life theory; the cultural theorist Michel de Certeau; and the city.

Richard Johns is a curator of art at the National Maritime Museum, London. His curatorial and academic research encompasses various aspects of the art and visual culture of Britain from the mid-seventeenth through to the mid-nineteenth century, with a particular focus on the work of the decorative history painter James Thornhill and his contemporaries.

Tom Normand is senior lecturer in the History of Art at the University of St Andrews. He is author of *Scottish Photography: a History* (2007), *Ken Currie: Details of a Journey* (2002), *Calum Colvin: Ossian, Fragments of Ancient Poetry* (2002), *The Modern Scot: Modernism and Nationalism in Scottish Art 1928–1955* (2000), and *Wyndham Lewis the Artist; Holding the Mirror up to Politics* (1992). He is currently working on aspects of academic art in the Scottish context.

Kate Retford is senior lecturer in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century art history at Birkbeck College, University of London. Her book, *The Art of Domestic Life: Family*

Portraiture in Eighteenth-Century England, was published by Yale University Press in 2006. In addition, she has written a number of articles on topics relating to eighteenth-century portraiture, gender, and the country house art collection. She was awarded a Leverhulme Fellowship in the History of Portraiture at the National Portrait Gallery in order to begin her current book project on the conversation piece in eighteenth-century Britain.

Cynthia Roman is curator of prints, drawings and paintings at the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University. She was co-curator of the exhibition *Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill* (Yale Center for British Art and the Victoria and Albert Museum) and assistant editor of the catalogue, which received the 2012 Philip Johnson Exhibition Catalogue Award from the Society of Architectural Historians. Her research interests include history painting and print culture in eighteenth-century Britain.

Dorothy Rowe is senior lecturer in history of art at the University of Bristol and research lead for the Transnational Modernisms Research Cluster. She is author of *Representing Berlin: Sexuality and the City in Imperial and Weimar Germany* (Ashgate, 2003), *After Dada: Magic Realism in Weimar Germany* (Manchester University Press, 2013), and co-editor (with Abigail Harrison Moore) of *Architecture and Design in Europe and America 1750–2000* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2006) and (with Marsha Meskimmon) of *Women, the Arts and Globalization: Eccentric Experience* (Manchester University Press, 2013), as well as a number of articles and chapters on German modernism and contemporary diasporic art in Britain.

Sam Smiles is emeritus professor of art history at the University of Plymouth and programme director, Art History and Visual Culture, University of Exeter. His publications include *J. M. W. Turner: The Making of a Modern Artist* (2007), *The Turner Book* (2006), *Eye Witness: Artists and Visual Documentation in Britain 1770–1830* (2000) and *The Image of Antiquity: Ancient Britain and the Romantic Imagination* (1994). He is currently completing a study of Turner's last paintings (c. 1835–50) and preparing an exhibition on the same theme for Tate Britain.

Colin Trodd is senior lecturer in art history at the University of Manchester. He is the author of *Visions of Blake: William Blake in the Art World 1830–1930* (Liverpool University Press, 2012), and co-editor of several volumes on Victorian art. He is currently co-editing a special issue of *Visual Culture in Britain* on Ford Madox Brown and Victorian culture.

Tom Williamson is professor of history at the University of East Anglia, where he heads up the Landscape Group, a collection of academics, researchers, and research students studying all aspects of the English landscape. He has published extensively on many aspects of landscape archaeology, agricultural history, and the history of landscape design. His publications include *Champion: the Making and Unmaking of the English Midland Landscape* (2012) as co-author, *The Countryside of East Anglia: Changing Landscapes, 1870–1950* (2008) also as co-author, and *Polite Landscapes: Gardens and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (1995).

Janet Wolff is professor emerita of cultural sociology at the University of Manchester, where she directed the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research in the Arts from 2008 to 2010. She returned to Manchester, her home town, in 2006. Before that, she taught at the

University of Leeds; the University of Rochester (New York), where she was Director of the Program in Visual and Cultural Studies; and Columbia University, where she was associate dean for academic affairs in the School of the Arts. Her books include *The Social Production of Art*, *Aesthetics and the Sociology of Art*, *Feminine Sentences*, *Resident Alien*, *AngloModern*, and *The Aesthetics of Uncertainty*.

Part 1



Editors' Introduction

Editors' Introduction

Dana Arnold and David Peters Corbett

A Companion to British Art: 1600 to the Present is a collection of new essays written by leading scholars in the field. Over the past two decades, British art of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries has been one of the most lively and innovative areas of art-historical study. A series of important monographs, essay collections, exhibitions, and articles has expanded and deepened our understanding of British art of these centuries, raising it from an undertaught and understudied aspect of the history of art to one that is increasingly on syllabuses for undergraduate and MA students. This growth in scholarly depth and interest has made it important to provide a working collection for teachers and their students as an introduction to the field. This book is therefore offered as a text that can be used in multiple ways to approach the rich and varied material of British art.

A word about the nature of the book and how it is organized. The volume concentrates on painting for reasons of space. The reader will find there is some reference to architecture but little to sculpture or graphic art. It is emphatically not a survey and does not attempt to review or cover the whole history of art in Britain. Even if that were possible, we do not think it would be desirable to provide some information about everything at the expense of detailed study of nothing. Instead, the volume is designed for a different task, one that seems to us to be much more important and timely. The book is a selection of substantial essays – partly reporting on existing scholarship and the state of the field, partly original research – which have been designed and written specifically for an undergraduate audience. It is organized and imagined thematically and does not attempt to cover either the full chronological range or some notional list of high points. Instead it is intended to provide teachers of the subject who need to introduce undergraduates to British art with material that they will find

substantial and stimulating in a classroom situation. Our hope is that teachers of the subject will find here a rich and diverse set of approaches to some of the important themes and areas that have emerged in the study of the subject, and that they will find it easy to tailor and adapt the groups of essays we have organized in order to answer particular needs. We do not wish to promote any particular reading of the material here, and the collection has been envisaged primarily as a stimulating way into what, for many students, will be an unfamiliar subject.

In commissioning essays for the book we have selected four themes, together with a broader “general” section at the start, each of which provides the center of gravity for one of the main sections of the volume. “Institutions,” “Nationhood,” “Landscape,” and “Men and Women” are ways of identifying and organizing some of the major preoccupations that have emerged from recent scholarship. They are not meant to seem exclusive, compulsory, or constraining, and the essays in each of the sections have been written and conceived to be diverse and to pursue similar material in distinct ways over the chronological range of the book. Tutors reading through the volume in order to consider how they wish to use the material will see that each thematic section can be used as a whole, can be dismantled and recombined with essays from other sections, or can be reduced to one or two of the contributions in order to pursue specific interests. It is this openness and malleability that we have worked to achieve in designing the volume, and that we hope tutors and students will find in the organization. It is, however, worth offering here some thoughts about the constitution of the individual sections and their themes, continuities, and divergences. The essays are meant to delve in stimulating and useable ways into aspects of their material; they are not conceived as surveys or as exhaustive accounts of all the significant dimensions of their subject matter. For instance, the very extensive work that has recently appeared on the Royal Academy means that the reader will not find, in the section called “Institutions,” any separate detailed discussion of the founding and constitution of the Royal Academy after 1768 (although she or he will find it discussed in Colin Trodd’s essay in the section and in Cynthia Roman’s in the “Nationhood” section). They will, however, find the nature of the art world between the 1760s and 1820s defined, since this is a subject which has had little presence in the literature to date. The reverse of this medal is the decision to provide a constellation of essays – by Sam Smiles, Tom Williamson, and Michael Charlesworth – in the “Landscape” section that consider the work of Constable as part of wider studies of landscape art as it evolved over the period between about 1760 and the mid-nineteenth century. Taken together, this group of essays provides a multiple and multi-directional set of perspectives on one of the central subjects to any study of British art in this key period of its history. Our hope is that tutors and students will find this multiplicity a stimulating way into the issues and meanings of the subject and that “Landscape” in this way can serve as a case study for classroom use that will allow students to use the book to deepen their knowledge of an important aspect of British art and work with it across a range of opinions and approaches.

The volume opens with the “General” section. It contains a trio of essays that deal, in distinct ways, with three of the most important questions which seem to us to be of wide relevance to the field. Mark Cheetham begins the volume with a detailed and scholarly discussion of the ways in which nationhood – “Englishness” – and ideas of and about art have intersected between the early eighteenth century and the present day. In a muscular and comprehensive argument that ranges widely – from Hogarth to the early twentieth century vorticists, to the contemporary artist, Yinka Shonibare, MBE – Cheetham explores how far we might legitimately think of “English” art as a unity, and what it implies to do so. The question of nationhood and nationality in art – the subject of one of the later thematic sections – is lucidly broached and analysed here. In the second essay of the “General” section, Andrew Ballantyne takes up the question of the British and modernity, an attribute they have often been accused of lacking, or at least adopting a skeptical and probably evasive view toward. British art seemed to many commentators in the twentieth century to opt out of the most exciting art of the moment, modernism, an art that claimed for itself a direct relationship with the expression of modern life. Ballantyne traces the idea of modernity from antiquity to the late twentieth century and concentrates on the ways in which architecture in Britain has, at certain key moments from the eighteenth century onwards, become the focus of debate and concern about the modernity of the times and their expression. He reveals that the British attitude to these vital but contested issues has been more complex and more pervasive than has often been acknowledged. Finally, British culture has been a modern, even a modernist, one, but quietly and without fanfare, however saturated in these qualities it might now seem. In the final essay of the “General” section, Janet Wolff considers with a precise, analytic, probe, another key question: how far is “English” or British art to be valued in aesthetic terms. As with modernism and modernity, earlier commentators often considered British art aesthetically inferior to what were seen as the more central national schools, France and Italy above all. Wolff takes on this question directly. Beginning with a discussion of a significant intervention by the important historian of British art, Charles Harrison, she considers the recent “re-evaluation” of the worth and importance of the art produced in Britain, especially in the early twentieth century when France and America have seemed to lead the field. Wolff not only provides a lucid guide to the debates, she also ranges widely across recent political and social theory in seeking to provide the reader with a firm place to stand and make a judgement about both the issues at stake in seeking to value and the value we might attribute to British art. Focusing on the work of Gwen John and the Bloomsbury artists of the early twentieth century, she argues for a “principled aesthetics” that will allow us both to assess the value of British art on its own terms, and to place it in wider art-historical and social contexts.

“Institutions” contains five essays. In “‘Those Wilder Sorts of Painting’: The painted interior in the age of Antonio Verrio,” Richard Johns considers the ways in which the emergent art world of the 50 years or so between the 1670s and the 1720s – a period that has still been little researched – came together through the

decorative history painting practiced by James Thornhill and others. Considering both the architectural settings of such paintings and the ways in which the period and its art can be conceptualized, Johns offers a reading of this art that allows us to understand both its place in a complex network of politics and patronage, and to see it as exemplary of the ways in which we can newly read neglected periods of British art in new and illuminating ways. Johns' discussions of the concept of the Baroque, of the relationship between architecture and painting, and of the historiography of his period all provide a way into the period for the classroom. In the second essay, Colin Trodd offers a detailed and meticulous account of the art institutions of nineteenth-century Britain. Beginning with some comments on the Royal Academy, Trodd traces the way in which art institutions in the period, including the National Gallery, the Royal Academy, and the Victoria and Albert Museum, fought to make space for themselves in a changing society and "battled to make themselves into durable, distinctive and original places of knowledge and venues of value." He concludes that these were fluid and mobile ways of organizing artistic activity, and that we must pay attention not only to the way in which they organized themselves, but to the pressures to which they were obliged to respond. David Peters Corbett takes up another aspect of the institutional construction of art history in the section's third essay, "Crossing the Boundary: British Art across Victorianism and Modernism." Corbett looks at the conventional division in studies of early twentieth-century British art between the Victorian and modernist eras and, drawing on detailed examples, argues that it is misleading to make such a division. The fourth essay in the section, "British Pop Art and the High/Low Divide," sees Simon Faulkner discussing the ways in which Pop Art in Britain found a role within the institutions of British culture by resisting rather than celebrating the popular cultural forms of its subject matter, as the most common critical opinion has it. Discussing artists including Richard Hamilton, Peter Phillips, Peter Blake, Derek Boshier, and Richard Smith, Faulkner marks out the ways in which the specific imagery of British Pop plays a role within the institutions of its culture. The "Institutions" section concludes with an essay by Jo Applin that looks at the ways in which British art "became subject to a range of formal and conceptual pressures in London during the 1960s." Focusing on the London art schools of the sixties and the reception of American modernism in which they were at the forefront, St Martin's and the Royal College of Art are examined as institutions where the understanding and usability of new artistic and conceptual forms was received, debated, and given a British cast during a crucial decade of reformulation and expansion in the British art world. One of Applin's central concepts in her discussion is "antagonism," and it is clear from all the essays collected in this section of the volume, that institutions are more than mere repositories for conventional wisdom and attitudes. Instead, the institutions of British art are mobile, changeable sets of cultural practice in which key changes in the constitution of both the art world and the wider culture are aired and decided upon, not by individuals as much as by and through the fluidity and capacity to change and morph of the institutions themselves. Art schools, museums, national

institutions like the Royal Academy or the National Gallery, the structures in which imagery is described and recirculated, all these crucial aspects of the way in which art works and takes part in the wider culture are examined and opened for consideration in this section.

The second thematic section of the book is concerned with "Nationhood." Five essays consider how this central question can be understood within selected moments of the history of British art. The first essay, by Cynthia Roman, deals with "Art and Nation in Eighteenth-Century Britain." Building on a vivid tradition of scholarship in this area, Roman demonstrates that in this period "narratives about fine art and those about national identity were inextricably intertwined as the visual arts both reflected and mediated constructions of nationhood." Discussing artists including James Barry, Benjamin West, and John Singleton Copley, as well as the print-seller John Boydell, Roman traces this intertwining through the Royal Academy and shows how it is manifested in portraiture as well as history painting, and in the accessible medium of prints as well as in grand manner painting on the Academy's walls. "International Exhibitions: Linking Culture, Commerce, and Nation" by Julie Codell takes up a nineteenth-century subject, looking at international exhibitions around 1851. Drawing on ideas from the study of cultural geography, Codell considers the Great Exhibition of 1851 and other international exhibitions as maps that point to the imperial and colonial substructure of the societies of which they are a part. Analyzing the visual and material culture of these exhibitions, Codell traces the complication of national identities that emerged from the breaking of established boundaries between nations through the operations of art and commerce in this period. She shows that as art came to take up the role of expressing national pride at such events, it forced an increasingly permeable and open character on the nation and its rivals. In the following essay, Ben Highmore considers the nature of an international art form – Surrealism – once it crosses the Channel and takes root in a characteristically British soil. "Itinerant Surrealism: British Surrealism Either Side of the Second World War" allows him to evaluate the nature of nationality in art movements and the ways in which transformations and adaptations occur in a particular context. In "55° North 3° West: a Panorama from Scotland," Tom Normand looks at some of the consequences for identity of the fact that four nations inhabit Britain. "The fascinating geography of British art" stems in part from this foundational political and social reality. By focusing on the period after the Second World War, Normand is able to follow the fortunes of "Scottishness" in its complex relationship both to "Britishness" and to other nations and nationalisms. The 1987 Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art's exhibition "The Vigorous Imagination – New Scottish Art" is seen as an exemplary and telling moment in this history, prompting Normand to look back into the nineteenth century to the career of the artist David Wilkie for the formation of modern Scottish artistic identity, before returning to the contemporary in order to trace the working out of that identity in the context of a new internationalism. Normand finds in the Scottish example a way that internationalism and national

tropes continue to mix and refer in the twenty-first century. The final essay in the “Nationhood” section, Dorothy Rowe’s “Retrieving, Remapping, and Rewriting Histories of British Art: Lubaina Himid’s *Revenge*,” considers the way contemporary black British artists have been involved in “the re-visualization of the borders of nationalism, identity and nationhood in British art.” Rowe’s analysis of Himid’s work allows her to make a strong and politically conscious case for attention to “the visual and aesthetic legacies of artworks produced by black and Asian women artists who have been active in Britain since the 1980s but whose contributions to the re-mapping of British art’s histories during the last 30 years are still being realized,” so that the structures and institutions of “British art,” its meanings and range, are questioned and reformulated as they are, from other perspectives, in the essays by Cheetham, Wolff, and others in the collection. Nationhood, identity, and meaning are all raised and explored in this section of the book’s essays.

One of the most influential and important artistic genres to have flourished in the art of the British Isles is landscape, and this forms the subject that the five essays in the third section of the volume all, from diverse positions, address. The section opens with a wide-ranging survey and consideration of definitions by Anne Helmreich, which orientates the reader and touches on several of the topics raised in subsequent essays. Michael Charlesworth in “Theories of the Picturesque” considers one of the most important moments in the formation of the genre. Dealing with the eighteenth-century theorists William Gilpin and Richard Payne Knight, Charlesworth sets out the character of the picturesque and relates it to those of the beautiful and the sublime. Charlesworth traces the popularity of the concept through its literary and theoretical manifestations and into the visual, including architecture and landscape gardening. An extended analysis of the work of John Constable takes the story into painting and then to Ruskin’s use of the idea. Concluding with a look at the twenty-first century relevance of the term, Charlesworth is able to assess the importance of the picturesque for any understanding of British visual and literary culture since the eighteenth century. Two very different and complementary considerations of landscape art across the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries follow. Tom Williamson offers a precise, historical, and social study of the conditions in which landscape imagery of the period was nurtured and in which it served its function in the culture as a whole. Williamson places a salutary emphasis on the need to understand these aspects of artistic production and on the value and importance of studies of the physical realities of the “real” landscape and of how its meanings are worked into and upon in the realm of visual representation. Sam Smiles, meanwhile, offers a definition of landscape and a consideration of it in the period based on scrupulous and precise attention to four examples. Intended to be exemplary and telling, rather than to exhaust the subject, Smiles’ choices – Stubbs, Turner, Constable, and Palmer – are revealed as significant engagements with British culture at a time of exceptionally intense social and economic transformation. Taken together, these three essays, together with that by Helmreich, all of which consider aspects

of the work of Constable among other elements in the period, allow a faceted and informative set of perspectives on a central moment for the study of British art and its meanings. To close the section, Dana Arnold's fifth essay extends the study of landscape in this period by considering the relationship between the Phoenix Park in Dublin and building and landscape design in London. Drawing on a number of theoretical perspectives, and presenting some detailed historical material about the making of the park, Arnold's essay acts as a bridge as well to the section on nationhood and the making of national visual cultures.

The final section is called "Men and Women" and deals in four essays about gender from the Elizabethan Miniature to Edwardian genre painting. Dympna Callaghan considers questions of representation, identity, and ideology in the Elizabethan genre of portrait miniatures, concluding that it "epitomizes both the ideological and technical problems" posed at the time. Two essays deal with the eighteenth century. Kate Retford provides a focus and revealing analyses of the representation of female chastity in eighteenth-century portraiture, while, in a matching pair to Retford's essay, Whitney Davis considers the painting of men and offers a sophisticated and nuanced reading of the epistemological issues at stake in this moment. Finally, Pamela Fletcher examines Victorian and Edwardian painting in order to show how gender could provide narratives that organized and structured knowledge for the audience, and how the investigation of such visual practices can lead us into an understanding of both the pleasures and oppositional character of representations of this sort.

