

INTRODUCTION

I. BRITISH DRAUGHTSMEN

It is, perhaps important to insist that this is an exhibition of British graphic art, and not of British painting. The collection illustrates the qualities and the defects conditioned by these restriction. Though notable omissions may be detected, it represents in great diversity and with approximate completeness most of the eminent British artists from 1750 to the present day who have distinguished themselves as draughtsmen or engravers. Some of our most illustrious painters, like Sir Joshua Reynolds, George Morland or Sir Henry Raeburn, may be compared in this one respect, though hardly in any other, with Velazquez and Frans Hals, that drawings by their hands hardly exist. In private possession, at any rate, authentic drawings by Reynolds, or by his famous successor in the presidential chair of the Royal Academy, Sir Thomas Lawrence, are difficult to find. The same is true of their unacademic predecessor, William Hogarth: as a painter, one of the great names of British art; as a draughtsman and etcher, esteemed but rare; as an engraver, out of fashion, and consequently as hard to find in satisfactory specimens as a breed of dogs that is no longer the mode. For drawings by Hogarth, Reynolds and Lawrence the student must go to the British Museum, which is debarred by law from lending to another country.

The period, about 1730—1760, of which Hogarth is the typical artist and to which Thornhill, his father-in-law, alone among the draughtsmen represented in this collection belongs, is the earliest in which British art, till then slow and backward in its growth, can be said to have emancipated itself from foreign influences. The great portrait painters in England of the two preceding centuries, Holbein, Van Dyck, Lely, Kneller, had been foreigners; the most famous decorative painters had been Verrio and Laguerre; only in miniature painting had Englishmen, in the seventeenth century, achieved conspicuous success. The most eminent English engraver, Faithorne, had been trained in the school, and imported into