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Introduction

Sir Joshua Reynolds was an English painter, specialising in portraits. He was one of the main pioneers in British art and helped to define different concepts, not only for British painting, but across the Western world. Reynolds was a renowned intellectual who socialized in the elite social circles of London and received most recognition for his portraits. John Russell said he was one of the major European painters of the 18th century. He promoted the "Grand Style" in painting which depended on idealization of the imperfect. He was a founder and first president of the Royal Academy of Arts, and was knighted by George III in 1769. In 2018, the 250th anniversary of the founding of the Royal Academy of Arts in London, UK was celebrated, of which Sir Joshua Reynolds was the first president.

Joshua Reynolds

Reynolds was born in Plympton, Devon, on 16 July 1723 the third son of the Rev. Samuel Reynolds, master of the Plympton Free Grammar School in the town. His father had been a fellow of Balliol College, Oxford, but did not send any of his sons to the university. One of his sisters was Mary Palmer (1716–1794), seven years his senior, author of Devonshire Dialogue, whose fondness for drawing is said to have had much influence on him when a boy. In 1740 she provided £60, half of the premium paid to Thomas Hudson the portrait-painter, for Joshua's pupilage, and nine years later advanced money for his expenses in Italy. His other siblings included Frances Reynolds and Elizabeth Johnson.

As a boy, he came under the influence of Zachariah Mudge, whose Platonistic philosophy stayed with him all his life. Reynolds made extracts in his commonplace book from Theophrastus, Plutarch, Seneca, Marcus Antonius, Ovid, William Shakespeare, John Milton, Alexander Pope, John Dryden, Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, Aphra Behn, and passages on art theory by Leonardo da Vinci, Charles Alphonse Du Fresnoy, and André Félibien. The work that came to have the most influential impact on Reynolds was Jonathan Richardson's *An Essay on the Theory of Painting* (1715). Reynolds' annotated copy was lost for nearly two hundred years until it appeared in a Cambridge bookshop,

inscribed with the signature 'J. Reynolds Pictor', and is now in the collection of the Royal Academy of Arts, London.

Early career

Having shown an early interest in art, Reynolds was apprenticed in 1740 to the fashionable London portrait painter Thomas Hudson, who had been born in Devon. Hudson had a collection of Old Master drawings, including some by Guercino, of which Reynolds made copies. Although apprenticed to Hudson for four years, Reynolds remained with him only until summer 1743. Having left Hudson, Reynolds worked for some time as a portrait-painter in Plymouth Dock (now Devonport). He returned to London before the end of 1744, but following his father's death in late 1745 he shared a house in Plymouth Dock with his sisters.

In 1749, Reynolds met Commodore Augustus Keppel, who invited him to join HMS *Centurion*, of which he had command, on a voyage to the Mediterranean. While with the ship he visited Lisbon, Cadiz, Algiers, and Minorca. From Minorca he travelled to Livorno in Italy, and then to Rome, where he spent two years, studying the Old Masters and acquiring a taste for the "Grand Style".^[citation needed] Lord Edgcumbe, who had known Reynolds as a boy and introduced him to Keppel, suggested he should study with Pompeo Batoni, the leading painter in Rome, but Reynolds replied that he had nothing to learn from him. While in Rome he suffered a severe cold, which left him partially deaf, and, as a result, he began to carry a small ear trumpet with which he is often pictured.

Reynolds travelled homeward overland via Florence, Bologna, Venice, and Paris. He was accompanied by Giuseppe Marchi, then aged about 17. Apart from a brief interlude in 1770, Marchi remained in Reynolds' employment as a studio assistant for the rest of the artist's career. Following his arrival in England in October 1752, Reynolds spent three months in Devon, before establishing himself in London, where he remained for the rest of his life. He took rooms in St Martin's Lane, before moving to Great Newport Street, his sister Frances acted as his housekeeper. He achieved success rapidly, and was extremely prolific. Lord Edgcumbe recommended the Duke of Devonshire and Duke of Grafton to sit for him, and other peers followed, including the Duke of Cumberland, third son of George II, in whose portrait, according to Nicholas Penny "bulk is brilliantly converted into power". In 1760 Reynolds moved into a large house, with space to show his works and accommodate his assistants, on the west side of Leicester Fields (now Leicester Square).

Later life

In 1789, Reynolds lost the sight of his left eye, which forced him into retirement. In 1791 James Boswell dedicated his *Life of Samuel Johnson* to Reynolds. Reynolds agreed with Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* and, writing in early 1791, expressed his belief that the ancien régime of France had fallen due to spending too much time tending, as he puts it;

to the splendor of the foliage, to the neglect of the stirring the earth about the roots. They cultivated only those arts which could add splendor to the nation, to the neglect of those which supported it - They neglected Trade & substantial Manufacture...but does it follow that a total revolution is necessary that because we have given ourselves up too much to the ornaments of life, we will now have none at all.

When attending a dinner at Holland House, Fox's niece Caroline was sat next to Reynolds and "burst out into glorification of the Revolution - and was grievously chilled and checked by her neighbour's cautious and unsympathetic tone".

On 4 June 1791 at a dinner at the Freemasons' Tavern to mark the king's birthday, Reynolds drank to the toasts "GOD save the KING!" and "May our glorious Constitution under which the arts flourish, be immortal!", in what was reported by the *Public Advertiser* as "a fervour truly patriotick". Reynolds "filled the chair with a most convivial glee". He returned to town from Burke's house in Beaconsfield and Edmond Malone wrote that "we left his carriage at the Inn at Hayes, and walked five miles on the road, in a warm day, without his complaining of any fatigue".

Later that month Reynolds suffered from a swelling over his left eye and had to be purged by a surgeon. In October he was too ill to take the president's chair and in November Fanny Burney recorded that

I had long languished to see that kindly zealous friend, but his ill health had intimidated me from making the attempt": "He had a bandage over one eye, and the other shaded with a green half-bonnet. He seemed serious even to sadness, though extremely kind. 'I am very glad,' he said, in a meek voice and dejected accent, 'to see you again, and I wish I could see you better! but I have only one eye now, and hardly that.' I was really quite touched.

On 5 November Reynolds, fearing he might not have an opportunity to write a will, wrote a memorandum intended to be his last will and testament, with Edmund Burke, Edmond

Malone, and Philip Metcalfe named as executors. On 10 November Reynolds wrote to Benjamin West to resign the presidency, but the General Assembly agreed he should be re-elected, with Sir William Chambers and West to deputise for him.

Doctors Richard Warren and Sir George Baker believed Reynolds' illness to be psychological and they bled his neck "with a view of drawing the humour from his eyes" but the effect, in the view of his niece, was that it seemed "as if the 'principle of life' were gone" from Reynolds. On New Year's Day 1792 Reynolds became "seized with sickness" and from that point could not keep down food. Reynolds died on 23 February 1792 at his house in Leicester Fields in London between eight and nine in the evening.

Burke was present on the night Reynolds died, and was moved within hours to write a eulogy of Reynolds starting with the following sentiments: "Sir Joshua Reynolds was on very many accounts one of the most memorable men of his Time. He was the first Englishman who added the praise of the elegant Arts to the other Glories of his Country. In Taste, in grace, in facility, in happy invention, and in the richness and Harmony of colouring, he was equal to the great masters of the renowned Ages." Burke's tribute was well received and one journalist called it "the eulogium of Apelles pronounced by Pericles".

Reynolds was buried at St Paul's Cathedral. In 1903, a statue, by Alfred Drury, was erected in his honour in Annenberg Courtyard of Burlington House, home of the Royal Academy. Around the statue are fountains and lights, installed in 2000, arranged in the pattern of a star chart at midnight on the night of Reynolds' birth. The planets are marked by granite discs, and the Moon by a water recess.

Art

Primary Themes: Reynolds specialized in historical works denoting the modern-day gentry as Classical subjects. This new approach of depicting the elite subject as Gods and Goddess of mythical origin proved beneficial for Reynolds as he became immensely popular while many orders came streaming in from patrons.

High society wanted nothing more than to be painted as mythical characters, which elevated their personality and the values or virtues they stood for in real life.

Color Palette: For flesh tones, Reynolds used black, blue-black, lake, carmine, white, orpiment, yellow ochre, ultramarine, and varnish.

Brush Work: Reynolds's brush work is smooth and not heavily applied to the canvas. His strokes are long, hard, and broad in nature. He does not completely blend his brush work in his paintings, which makes them very clear and bold.

Reynolds's works were huge; most were done on an extremely large scale. This allowed him to be free with his brush work as he brought the strokes across the canvas, highlighting and darkening where he felt appropriate.

Reynolds used different types of brushes in various widths and lengths to help him create the finer detail, particularly in his portraits. Yet, Reynolds also tended to use very loose and free lines, which he made in dark and bold colors.

The artist painted various colors upon one another so the paint could mix as naturally as possible. However, his paint application never became excessively thick.

Composition, Tone and Lighting: Reynolds ensured that the positioning of the core lighting was always upon the main figure and his background landscapes were also accentuated. He created stark shadows where necessary and bold highlighting to emphasize the primary color, so the eye could follow a harmony in the works that created a natural, three-dimensional effect.

Reynolds also used varying degrees of chiaroscuro with his color schemes by darkening and highlighting the tone where appropriate to create depth. This worked to accentuate the sitter's space in the image and render a realistic view of the sitter on the flat canvas.

Reynolds paid great attention to the background draperies, props and clothes. Their numerous folds and textures helped define the light source and the depth of the picture. Thus, accentuating the folds of fabric added realism to his works.

The artist felt that the breadth of the light provided was very important. The amount of light given to the work had to fit with the rest of the picture to create harmony and maintain the elegance of the portrait.

Colors: To achieve the desired color, Reynolds would first lay the carmine and the various white tones, depending on the tone he wanted. The second layer would be the orpiment with more white, and finally he would apply the blue-black and white.

It was most important to get the mixture on the palette as close to the sitter's real complexion as possible. It was one of the first things Reynolds did concerning the color scheme after the initial sketch.

His mixing techniques have become legendary. Unlike the previous century when paints and pigments were limited and expensive to obtain, the 18th century afforded far more availability of paints to artists.

Reynolds felt that blatantly mixing the colors would affect the natural blending so he opted to layer the colors while still fresh and wet. If the color needed to be lighter or darker, he would then apply additional layers.

By layering the wet, soluble colors, the paints were allowed to have a fresh, clean appearance. Reynolds believed the eye had to feel the colors, not merely see them.

Reynolds used a primary color such a red as the main force in his work. He then would include reds all over the work to help redirect the eye to the primary color to emphasize the sitter's flesh tones. He always used bold colors to create unity in his works instead of softer tones.

Position: Reynolds also felt that the artist should decide how to position and place his sitter in action or with an object that would best accentuate their personality. He looked to depict the sitter in such a way that viewers could relate to them as a person.

Attention to detail: Reynolds was a man of organization, not only in his daily life, but in his painting techniques as well. He would note and write down his various techniques for the different stages as he worked on a portrait.

Every aspect was separated and well noted so he could go back to see what other aspects he could redefine and mix to bring new methods to his portrait painting.

Conclusion

I like his paintings. His paintings seem to be alive. And generally, art develops person's inner world, allows us to open ourselves up to new and gives us a place for creativity and imagination. I think that art and culture are an part of our existence.

Sources

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