

In the seventh in his series of *Discourses*, Sir Joshua Reynolds advises the students of the Royal Academy that their success depends on their own industry. Reynolds then qualifies his recommendation by saying “but the industry which I principally recommended, is not the industry of the *hands*, but of the *mind*” (*Discourse VII*, cp 95). As president of the Royal Academy and a practicing artist, Reynolds is motivated to elevate the status of artists in the eyes of the emerging middle class, and this objective is a chief consideration driving his guidance. Deliberate attention to the rules and rationality of art distinguish the profession from simple craft and mechanical execution. By focusing on industry of the mind, Reynolds is emphasizing the principles of science and practice so important to art as he sees it while simultaneously proposing that art is closer to pure invention, a vehicle of the intellect. To that end, Reynolds stresses throughout the *Discourses*, the importance of intellectual pursuits and attention to principles, as well as the synthesis of observations and experiences of others, to the creation of art. Correspondingly, both his desire to elevate the social status of artists and his subsequent attention to their foundation in science and practice are driven by Reynolds’ estimation of the value and purpose of art.

In order to be successful in the industry of the arts, Reynolds recommends gaining experience in intellectual pursuits and imitating the works of genius. As Greek and Roman fables and the Scripture are frequently subjects of art, and the artist is concerned with not the creation of the subject but the presentation of the subject, Reynolds advises acquiring a working knowledge of these areas, which can be attained through both reading and interaction with poets and writers (*Discourse IV*, cp 74). Here Reynolds is purposefully encouraging communication with masters of a sister art who enjoy a higher status. While he recognizes the benefits to be reaped by the artist from studying his predecessors, Reynolds emphasizes the intellectual

proWess necessary to choose models worthy of emulation. He proposes that a model's appropriateness is in proportion to the artist's attention, skill and care in selecting, observing and digesting the information (*Discourse III*, cp 68) and such a selection is "an art of long deduction and great experience" (*Discourse VI*, cp 88). However, the aspiring artist's work is not complete upon the selection of a model, for he must then employ his intellectual skills to abstract a general idea of all forms (*Discourse III*, cp 69). Reynolds believes that the imitation of great artists teaches one how to think, but this tool is to be used only until one is capable of thinking for himself. It is through being conversant with the inventions of previous geniuses that one learns to invent, according to Reynolds (*Discourse VI*, cp 86).

While he recognizes the importance of consulting the works of predecessors, Reynolds admonishes any desire to simply copy various aspects of those works. Doing so would not serve to raise public opinion of the arts, and he illustrates the impracticality of copying. Reynolds believes a mere copier cannot produce greatness, and so the virtual plagiarist unavoidably fails to accomplish the ultimate purpose of art, thus relegating exact imitation to futility (*Discourse III*, cp 67). Instead, the value of interaction with the works of genius comes from the synthesized knowledge each artist attains through that contact. Although the art of previous geniuses is a readily available resource, the principles driving their greatness are not. Reynolds emphasizes the intellectual capabilities necessary in the young artist to apprehend the works' value: these principles "do not swim on the superficies, and consequently are not open to superficial observers" (*Discourse VI*, cp 88). Rather, a young artist must amalgamate the valuable information taken from the works of numerous others. Thus, instead of the capability to duplicate, Reynolds praises a painter with the capacity to invent, which cannot be obtained through common observation (*Discourse III*, cp 68).

These beliefs Reynolds holds regarding the utility of acquiring knowledge and synthesizing genius stem from his opinion, which he seeks to transplant into society as the accepted view, concerning the purpose of art. In the opening remarks of his fourth *Discourse*, Reynolds declares:

“the value and rank of every art is in proportion to the mental labour employed in it, or the mental pleasure produced by it. As this principle is observed or neglected, our profession becomes either a liberal art, or a mechanical trade. In the hands one man makes it the highest pretensions, as it is addressed to the noblest faculties: in those of another it is reduced to a mere matter of ornament; and the painter has but the humble province of furnishing our apartments with elegance” (cp 74).

Reynolds hopes to raise the status of artists above mere superstition by arguing that their productivity lies not in entertainment but rather in the captivation and enlightenment of their audience. After all, “it is not the eye, it is the mind, which the painter of genius desires to address,” and such is the vehicle for this enlightenment. Moreover, an artist aspiring to greatness should not waste a moment on those projects that seek only to visually entertain (*Discourse III*, cp 72). To do so would feed misconceptions and further impede the social elevation of artists, as Reynolds believes. Reynolds goes on to say, “the great end of the art is to strike the imagination ... the painter therefore is to make no ostentation of the means by which this is done; the spectator is only to feel the result in his bosom” (*Discourse IV*, cp 75). In this statement, Reynolds alludes to a sort of power possessed by the artist over his audience. They are not privy to the method by which they are captivated; only the artist, through the exercise of his intellect and loyalty to the principles of art, wields this knowledge.

This approach to art further explains Reynolds’ contention with the Venetian artists. In opposition to the Florentine and Roman artists, who executed the principles of linear precision and attention to form, the Venetian style was recognized by a distinctive combination of

brushwork and color dominating form. While Reynolds is sophisticated enough to acknowledge the Venetians' success in their chosen form, he describes their work as sexy and lacking discipline and restraint: "Their colouring is not only too brilliant, but, I will venture to say, too harmonious, to produce that solidity, steadiness, and simplicity of effect, which heroic subjects require..." (*Discourse IV*, cp 79). In addition, Reynolds hypothesizes that the Venetians "seem to be engrossed by the study of colours, to the neglect of the *ideal beauty of form*, or propriety of expression" (*Discourse IV*, cp 79). Thus, not only do the Venetians divulge the secret by which their effect on the audience is produced (color), but they lack the command and order to create in accordance with the intellectual conception of art that Reynolds believes is necessary to elevate the social status of the artist.

The driving force behind Reynolds' recommendation of industry of the mind, not of the hands, is his desire to elevate the status of artists in the eyes of his society. Practically speaking, this goal makes perfect sense. Not only is he president of the Royal Academy, but Reynolds is an artist, so both he and his students stand to benefit from this positive shift. In an effort to elevate the perception of artists, Reynolds emphasizes throughout the *Discourses* the intellectual capacities and identifies the principles indispensable to a successful artist. Mere dexterity of the hands cannot achieve the far-reaching goal of art, to inspire and captivate the imagination. For, as Reynolds says, "without the least attempt to interest the passions, their boasted art will appear a mere struggle without effect; *a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing*" (*Discourse IV*, cp 78).