

Patrick Bade - Reynolds and Gainsborough

- [Judi] Welcome, Patrick, and welcome everybody. Patrick, over to you.

*Visuals are displayed throughout the presentation.*

- [Patrick] Thank you, Judi. Yes, welcome, everybody. You can see on the screen the two great late 18th century English portrait painters, Thomas Gainsborough on the left. And Sir Joshua Reynolds on the right. Gainsborough presents himself very straightforwardly. It's very unpretentious. He's respectably and neatly dressed, but just showing himself really as an ordinary guy. Whereas, Sir Joshua looks very grand indeed. He presents himself as Sir Joshua, the president of the recently founded Royal Academy. He shows himself contemplating a bust of Michelangelo. And for those in the know, of course, the portrait also makes references to portraits by Rafael and to Rembrandt. So he's telling you that he's in that tradition. That he's the inheritor of the great European tradition. Now, these two men were both very prolific. There are hundreds and hundreds of portraits by both of them, and pretty well everybody in England between 1760 and 1790 was painted by one or other.

But what is really interesting is how few people were painted by both. I believe there are only six examples of the same person being painted by both Reynolds and Gainsborough. And they're both people involved with the theatre. They're all, all six of them were involved with the theatre. So I have a kind of fantasy, and now don't take this too literally, that Reynolds and Gainsborough got together one night at the pub and they sat down and they divided up English society. Who was going to have what? England in the 18th century, as I mentioned last week, was already a two-party system. So Gainsborough took the Tories and Reynolds took the Whigs. Reynolds took the intelligencia. Well, that in a way is a kind of a given since, with a striking exception of Benjamin Disraeli, who had his own reasons, intelligent people have rarely been drawn to the Torie party in England. Reynolds painted the writers, the philosophers. He was generally thought to be better at painting men, but there are exceptions to that that I'll come to later. And Gainsborough was thought to be better at painting women.

Gainsborough painted the fashionable people, the beautiful people, the kind of "Hello Magazine" people of the 18th century. Gainsborough loved music. So he painted lots of musicians. And, of course, Reynolds, throughout his life, was increasingly deaf, so not particularly interested in music. And so it goes on. Now, Reynolds, I think, is sometimes underrated because he came to be resented by many younger artists because they saw him as this kind of self-satisfied old git and Mr. Establishment. He wasn't always that way. He was young once, as you can see from this very early self-portrait where he presents himself in really quite a bold and unconventional way. And when he was young, I think he had his naughty and rebellious streak. Later, as we shall hear, he recommended that everybody should go on the Grand Tour. But at the time he himself went on the Grand Tour, this painting on the left doesn't seem to suggest that he took it that seriously.

You can see "The School of Athens" top right by Raphael, that for Reynolds later on, was the ultimate in perfection, the work that every younger artist needed to study. But the picture on the left is rather in the manner of Hogarth, actually. It's quite a cruel caricature of the English classes on the Grand Tour. And you can see that the sublime classical architecture of "The School of Athens" has been substituted with this Strawberry Hill Gothic in the background of Reynolds's parody. Reynolds was born in 1723 into the minor gentry without much money. And he once said he would rather have been an apothecary than an ordinary painter. If you remember last week, I showed you that self-portrait of Francis Hayman talking to his patron and practically grovelling towards him in a very subservient role.

And so Reynolds didn't want that kind of role for himself. In fact, throughout his career, he made a point of distancing himself from other painters and cultivating people of influence. He was a brilliant, brilliant networker. And one of his early and useful connections was Admiral Augustus Keppel, who you see on the right hand side. And he was sailing for Italy and Reynolds caught a lift with him and he went to Italy on Keppel's ship for his own Grand Tour. And of course, the number one thing you had to see when you went to Italy was, well, you wanted to see the great works of antiquity and the work which was considered to be the most beautiful and perfect work of art in the world was the Apollo Belvedere. It hasn't really dated well. It hasn't kept its reputation. I mean, most modern artists, historians now think it's a rather mediocre Roman copy of a rather mediocre Hellenistic original.

So nobody today, I think, would say it was amongst the greatest works of art in the world. But that was standard opinion in Reynolds' time, certainly his opinion. And so you could see the portrait that he painted of Commodore Keppel in gratitude for the lift to Italy. He's put him into the pose of the Apollo Belvedere. To my mind, there's something slightly comic about it because seeing him in this pose, I'm afraid I can't help envisaging him with no clothes like the Apollo Belvedere. And I suspect that that in reality would not have been a very pretty sight. But it becomes a standard pose. This is of course one of the challenges for somebody who makes a career out of painting fashionable portraits is you have to come up with poses. And the Apollo Belvedere pose is probably the one that Reynolds used most frequently. It's the Earl of Carlisle on the left. And I'm not sure who it is on the right-hand side.

Once again, striding gracefully in the manner of the Apollo Belvedere. And for comparison, this is probably the most common male pose that Gainsborough chose for full length male portraits. And he's not the only one. This was a pose that was very frequently used by other artists like Arthur Davis and Zoffany, and so on. And it's supposed that's meant to suggest elegant nonchalance. It's quite a tricky pose. You could try it, try it and see. It's quite a hard pose to hold unless you're leaning on something. Very delightful portrait on the left-hand side. Notice the adoring dog. I'm going to come back to adoring dogs later. So Reynolds came back to England 1760s and immediately establishes himself as the number one fashionable portraitist. His early paintings from the 1760s, relatively tightly painted. His later paintings can be really quite paintily and quite loose and forcefully painted.

And the other thing that marks amount is the power of his subjects. They all look very anaemic. And the reason for this was that he used a carmine pink in the flesh tones that was fugitive, that means it's light sensitive. And it disappeared very quickly, actually already in his lifetime. And Horace Walpole, the novelist critic, son of Prime Minister Walpole, he said rather habitually about Reynolds that he thought he should be paid in annuities for as long as the colour lasted. So he established himself in a studio in Leicester Square. And if you wanted a portrait by him, there were set rates. You could commission a bust length, a half length, or a full length. And there were a particular fees for all three.

And also he said there were two ways you could pose for your portrait. You would go to his studio and if you had a lot of stamina, and believe me, it takes a lot of stamina to pose for a portrait that's painted from life, you could pose for a whole day. And at the end of the day, you would have something like the unfinished picture you see on the right-hand side. So he would paint the face and possibly the hands and everything else would be blank. On the other hand, if you were not up to posing for a whole day, you could have three separate sessions of one and a half hours each. And you would arrive at something like the same result. Now, for some reason or other, the one on the right-hand side was an attempt at painting Countess Spencer with her daughter. And presumably she didn't like it or it wasn't quite the right format, anyway, that was abandoned at this stage. So he started again and you see the finished version on the left-hand side. So the sitter was not troubled with all the finicky business of painting in the clothes and the background and so on. What is slightly worrying is that sometimes Reynolds himself was not much troubled by that either, 'cause he's known to have employed drapery painters, something that Gainsborough never did.

I think Gainsborough often enjoyed painting the clothes more than he enjoyed painting the people. But my assumption is that, like Rubens before him, Reynolds very carefully quality controlled the final picture. And I think probably the drapery painters, they would've painted in all the underlayers of paint. And I hope anyway, it was Reynolds who painted the top layer of paint that we mainly see because sometimes these are the best bits of the painting. And it'd be sad to think that they were by some unknown hack. Now, as I said, Reynolds is particularly good, he's particularly inspired when he has male subjects of strong character and he really knows how to bring out the character. There's the novelist, Laurence Sterne, who looks to me slightly mad actually. But it's a very striking likeness of an individual that's in the National Portrait Gallery, as is the painting on the right-hand side of a very formidable character, Dr. Johnson, compiler of the first dictionary of the English language. When I was a child, I had a dictionary of quotations and I think there were more pages devoted to quotations from Dr. Johnson than anybody else. He said all sorts of funny and not so funny things like, "The road to England is the best road for a Scotsman." Ha ha ha.

This is a friend of Dr. Johnson's, an Italian scholar who, as you can see, was extremely myopic. His name is Giuseppe Borgese. And again, I think it's a wonderfully characterful portrait. You really feel you know him from this portrait. A very handsome young man. This is Sir Joseph Banks, who was a horticulturalist who went off on one of Captain Cook's voyages. And he kept

a diary, which is a very lively document, especially when they arrived in Tahiti. And they were greeted by gorgeous, bare-breasted girls wading into the sea with baskets of fruit and the kind of ensuing orgies of these poor sailors who'd been cooped up for months eating weevily biscuits and starved of sex, and they'd thought that they'd arrived in heaven. But he comes across, I think, as a very sympathetic and intelligent young man. I imagine some of you probably have the garden plant Banksia in your gardens, which is named after him. Now Reynolds was a great pioneer. He wasn't the inventor, but he was certainly one of the first people to use the reproductive method of the mezzotint.

Of course, he didn't, these would've been craftsman who would've made the prints, in fact, after his paintings. The mezzotint, you have a sheet of metal and you have a kind of roller which is like a hedgehog. It's got spikes on it. And you roll over the whole sheet and the whole sheet is covered with little tiny dots. And then you rub away in certain areas. And through this you can get tonal effects that convey far better than any earlier method of printing, the effect of an oil painting. And I said Reynolds was absolutely brilliant at self-promotion rather, like I mentioned sometime ago, I think, was also somebody who became famous through her genius for using new technology and promoting herself. And so Reynolds was very keen to have mezzotints made of his paintings 'cause they helped to spread his reputation. They also, of course, spread the reputation of the subjects of his pictures.

There was a very fascinating exhibition, must have been 10, 15 years ago at the Tate about Reynolds and the birth of the concept of celebrity. That these mezzotints were a way for people to become celebrated. And what we have here, these are after two big paintings by Reynolds of members of the Society of Dilettanti. These were a group of nobleman. You had to have been on the Grand Tour to be a member of the Society of Dilettanti. And these were aristocrats, very entitled, you could say, who really enjoyed the best of good things in life. Good wine, as you can see, I'm sure plenty of good food. And they appreciated art. And, of course, they also did get up to all sorts of very naughty things when they were on the Grand Tour in Italy, away from home, as English tourists still do, I'm afraid. So if you look on the left-hand side, you can see, oh, I think I've got a detail to show you. Oh, here are the actual paintings which are in a club on the St. James's at the top there. I can't remember what the name of the club is. Somebody will remind me at the end. But if you look on the right-hand side, you can see the man giving us a really saucy look.

And he's holding up a piece of female underwear, which also suggests, I suppose, the female sex. So that tells you what these young men were doing when they weren't practising archaeology or admiring great works of art. In the centre of the picture, seated, is Sir William Hamilton. Of course, I'm sure he's all known to you as the cuckolded husband of Emma Hamilton, who is the lover of Lord Nelson. And again, it's like it's good to be reminded that he wasn't always a dodderly old cuckold. That he was actually a very handsome young man when this was painted. And he was already a great collector. And he put together the first great collection, probably the greatest collection still, of Greek vases, which is now in the British Museum. And he brought out a double volume folio, illustrative folio, of his collection of Greek

vases And I will be talking about that in a couple of weeks when I get to Neoclassicism. 'Cause that volume had a tremendous influence on later painters.

So, men of action, again, this is definitely Reynolds' field, not Gainsborough. Gainsborough does paint men, but he doesn't paint these kind of men. Lord Heathfield, who is the victor of the Siege of Gibraltar in the Seven Years War, and Colonel Sir Banastre Tarleton. And this is in the National Gallery. And I've always enjoyed taking groups of students and so on to look at this painting. And I'm not sure if I can get away with it today, but it would probably be thought to be not very PC. But I used to say to my young female students, "Would you go out on a date with this man?" And if they said yes, I used to tell them I was very worried about them. 'Cause he was the ultimate cad. He was actually a very nasty piece of work all round. He fought on the British side in the American War of Independence. And as far as the Americans concerned, 'cause this is so true to this day, isn't it?

One person's patriot is another person's war criminal. And some of you may have seen an American film called "The Patriot", which he figures very largely as the anti-hero. He committed terrible atrocities in the War of American Independence. Burning down villages and rape and pillage, and all that stuff. So he was one of the few people, well, as you know, we didn't do terribly well in that war. It wasn't one of the great British successes. But when he came back, he was treated universally as a war hero because he was one of the few people who'd had any successes against the American rebels. So here he's presented... This is James Bond is not a new phenomenon. This is James Bond, 18th century style. Absolutely cool. You know, he's standing there in the middle of a battle, completely oblivious of the fact there's a great big cannon pointing right up his backside. He's adjusting his clothing in a rather foppish way. And he looks like he might be about to order a dry martini shaken rather than stirred. He's completely oblivious to the danger of the situation. So this is actually quite a good reproduction as far as you can get on a complete computer screen.

But do go and look at this painting when you're next in the National Gallery. It's very interesting from the point of view of technique and paint surface. What you can't see here, but you can see when you are standing in front of it, is the painting of the cravat is absolutely amazing. You know, great thick slabs of impasto, of thick, freely applied paint. If you cut that out, you could convince somebody it was by Monet or some 19th century French painter. The other thing you can't see in this picture, you can see it actually better, even though it's not a very good reproduction. 'Cause these are both later paintings. These are what, about late 1770s, 1780. Well, by this time, Reynolds had got wise to the carmine pink. So there's no trouble with the flesh tones. But in the later paintings of Reynolds, he tried to enrich the colour and the tone by mixing bitumen, a kind of tyre substance, which apparently gave the paintings a lovely warm glow. But gradually the bitumen self destructs.

And even then there's not very good reproduction on the right-hand side. You can see the damage that's been done to the paint surface around the head of the subject on the right-hand side. Now yes, Reynolds' paintings of aristocratic women. I think he didn't like them. I think he

found upper class women, upper class English women, completely boring. And that comes across in these paintings. There's absolutely no sense whatsoever of engagement between the subject, between the sitter and the painter. So I don't think it was that he just didn't like women. If he could get, ooh, this is not as good as I would hoped it would be, this reproduction. Nevermind. I think you get a sense of how charming this painting is. This woman is an actress, Mrs. Abingdon. Of course, in the 18th century, an actress, it was a given that a woman who appeared on stage for money would also sell her body for money.

So, she's an actress stroke courtesan. And he would never have dared paint a respectable, upper class English woman in this way. We were brought very close to her in sense of intimacy. She's in this rather unconventional, casual pose, looking over the back of the chair with her little pet dog peeking through, and with her thumb touching her lip. Another absolutely enchanting painting is this. This is Nelly O'Brien, she was a courtesan. This is in the Wallace Collection. And again, it has a kind of intimacy, a kind of tenderness. I suppose she's sexy, but I think he really likes her too. It's very different from the aristocratic portraits. Now, the only aristocratic portraits really, where Reynolds relaxes a bit and shows sympathy with the female sitters, are what tabloid newspapers in Britain today, probably my American listeners will be completely baffled by this term, yummy mummies. I dunno if it means anything to you.

Yeah, that's sexy, young mothers. And I think the sight of a woman who's still young and beautiful and desirable with a child is clearly something that turns Reynolds on in a big way. Now there's a whole generation between these two portraits. Countess Spencer with her daughter, little girl. Little girl on the left is the mother on the right. She's the Duchess of Devonshire on the right-hand side. So as I said, there's a big gap of a couple of decades between these two pictures. But both of them I think show again, a kind of warmth and tenderness absent from a lot of his female portraits. So if he wasn't good on the whole at aristocratic women, he's pretty good at dealing with inverted commerce, the other. I think he's interested in people outside of European normal society. The painting on the left was a Tahitian called Omai, who Captain Cook brought back. And he was sort of exhibited around almost as a kind of a freak. He was presented at Court and in aristocratic circles. And everybody admired him because he was so beautiful and he had nice manners. And of course, this is the time of the theory of the noble savage. And he was the perfect example of the noble savage.

But, of course, Tahitians didn't, well, they didn't need clothes in that climate or barely any, so how to dress him? And so Reynolds has come up with this extraordinary get up, which is sort of half Arab and half Roman toga. And he puts him into his standard Apollo Belvedere pose. A little bit more real and convincing perhaps is the Chinese page. If you remember, you want to have an exotic page, either Black or from somewhere else in the world, as a kind of fashion accessory. And the Italian ballet dancer, Giovanna Baccelli, who was the mistress of the Duke of Dorset, owned this young Chinese boy. Very sympathetically painted. We don't know who this man is. And it's presumably not finished because it was never paid for. It's very highly unlikely that a black man in Britain would've been able to pay the enormous sums of money that Reynolds commanded for his portraits. So Reynolds, I would think, painted this portrait because

he wanted to, because he was interested in this man.

And he paints him as a man. He doesn't paint him as some horrible kind of blackface golliwog, that in the way that Hogarth painted Black people, as you see here on the right-hand side. And Gainsborough too. Now, this is historically a very, very interesting portrait on the right-hand side by Thomas Gainsborough of a man called Ignacio Sancho. There's been a lot of interest in him recently. He was brought to England as a slave, but he escaped and he won his freedom. And he became an important early activist, we would say today, campaigner against slavery. And one of it was partly his success that in fact, Lord Mansfield, who many of you know, owned Kenwood House, pronounced slavery, he didn't make the slave trade illegal. He made slavery illegal in Britain. Now, so when the Royal Academy was set up in 1768, Reynolds, I mean, he made himself so important that he was the inevitable choice to be president, which was, I think probably à contrecœur for George III who didn't like Reynolds. One of the things I didn't mention at the beginning when I was talking about the division of labour between Reynolds and Gainsborough was that at this time, George III supported the Torie Party, not the Whigs.

So the Queen has about 40 paintings by Gainsborough and only a very small number by Reynolds 'cause Reynolds was not patronised by the royal family. But, as I said, he was the inevitable choice. And in order to give dignity to the institution of the Royal Academy, he was knighted. Wasn't the absolute first British artist to be knighted, that was Hogarth's father-in-law, Sir James Thornhill. But it was nevertheless a very big deal. So, from 1768, until his death is 1792, every year he would give speeches at the Royal Academy, which were published after his death as Sir Joshua Reynold's discourses. You can see that here. And art historians studied them very carefully because they encapsulate conventional thinking about art of the 18th century. In fact, his ideas were very shortly to be swept away by the onset of romanticism, great revolution, at the end of the 18th, beginning of the 19th century.

This particular copy of Reynolds's discourses belonged to William Blake. And you can see he's angrily scrawled across the title page. "This man was hired to depress art, in this, the opinion of Will Blake." And Reynolds was extremely prescriptive, you know? He was telling artists what they should do. There's only one way to do it and it's his way. But I've mentioned before, several times, a wonderful book called "The Englishness of English Art" by Nikolaus Pevsner, who of course was a German Jew who came to Britain. And he became the great historian of English architecture and a great writer about, a great expert. It's funny how many of the great experts on British art come from a continental Jewish background. And I think it's because they came to England as outsiders and looked at England and English art in a very objective way. In a way that perhaps somebody born here couldn't do. And there there is a chapter in "The Englishness of English Art" where Pevsner talks about compromise and hypocrisy.

I mean, there's something, God, the conversations I have with my friends here over lunch often revolve around this. That the English are generally perceived to be two-faced. That they say one thing and do another. And according to Pevsner, Sir Joshua Reynolds is an extreme example of this because he's telling artists that there is this hierarchy of genres, that what they should be

doing is history painting, that great art is based on drawing. That's the very first thing you need to do is to get a thorough grounding in drawing from the nude before you can do anything else. And so on and so on. And, in fact, Reynolds, or this is the only really important history painting that Reynolds ever painted of the infancy of Hercules. It's probably good for his reputation that it was bought by Catherine the Great and it's now in Russia 'cause it's actually a terrible painting. And it was brought to London for a Reynolds exhibition, I didn't know, about 20 years ago. And everybody was aghast about how bad it was.

You can see the bitumen damage. I think the trouble is Reynolds knew that he simply couldn't draw the human figure. And he's pulled every possible stunt in this picture to cover up that fact that he cannot draw the human figure. So you only get bits of figures. You don't get, there's no single nude figure or figure where you can see the whole body apart from little baby Hercules in the foreground. And he's also put great dollops of bitumen all over it to, you know, to give it a nice old master golden glow, which have done terrible damage to it. So, as he believed in the hierarchy of genres, he thought a portraiture comes some way down. And he thought he could elevate the genre of portraiture by marrying it to history painting. So, you've got Lady Sarah Bunbury, not as just as Lady Sarah Bunbury, she's as some kind of antique classical priestess offering, making some kind of ritual offering to the graces. And the other thing was, I mean, in his speeches, in his discourses, Reynolds said you must actually avoid painting women in very fashionable clothing because fashionable clothing dates.

And you know, I'm sure you, you know that because I'm sure you've all of you got photographs of yourselves taken what, 20, 30, 40 years ago. And you look at you and you think, "Oh my God, how could I have worn that? That was a terrible fashion era." And you might tear up the photograph and throw it away 'cause you don't want people to see it. So what Reynolds didn't really take into account was that yes, fashion dates, but after a while things go around in cycles. And things that once look dated and old fashioned take on a charm after a certain while. So, one of the reasons we love Gainsborough's paintings is the women's clothes, and I'll come to that in a minute. But, so Reynolds devises this strange compromise costume, and at the time, people mocked them. They talked about Mr. Reynolds's night dresses. I think the one on the right-hand side is particularly weird because she has actually got a very fashionable hairstyle of the 1780s with the hair piled up. But no women walked around in the 1880s with a sort of night dress, especially not, you know, out in the open air.

This is in the Tate Gallery, it's the three Montgomery sisters. And it was commissioned by the fiance of the middle sister. And the three Montgomery sisters are shown adorning a Term of Hyman, that's the god of marriage, with a garland. And the one who's already married is on the right-hand side. The one who's engaged is the little one. She's approaching the Term of Hyman. And the younger sister who's unmarried and unengaged is shown still gathering flowers in the meadow. So these three very respectable English girls, upper class girls, are shown gallivanting in their night dresses in a meadow, adorning a pagan statue. And even at the time people thought that that was perhaps not for the best. And the other thing was that he, as I mentioned, portrait painters have a problem varying poses. And he wanted to avoid a sense of



repetitiveness. And the way he did this was to borrow poses and compositions from old master paintings. And this also was quite controversial.

Some people regarded it as plagiarism. Now this is a painting by an Irish artist called Nathaniel Hone, who was a bitter critic of Reynolds. And in 1776, he submitted this picture to the Royal Academy. And not surprisingly, it was actually rejected 'cause it's really quite a scandalous picture. It's called "The Conjuror". And it shows Reynolds as the conjurer, and he's waving a wand and all prints are flying through the air. And these are all prints of paintings that Reynolds has plagiarised for his portraits. And you can see the Pietro da Cortona print, it's halfway up on the left-hand side that is actually the source of the composition for the Montgomery sisters. Even more scandalous was an orgy that's going on in the background in front of St. Paul's Cathedral. And this was a very unkind reference to a scurrilous rumour that Reynolds was having an affair with the Swiss lady artist, Angelica Kauffman. Here you can see how the composition of the Reynolds is borrowed from the Pietro da Cortona.

Now one reason, I think the reason that this feud between Reynolds and Nathaniel Hone became so bitter was that they were both very interested in this attractive young lady who was an actress stroke courtesan, and her name was Kitty Fisher. So Reynolds has done his usual thing. He's not shown her as he's shown her in a role. She's as Cleopatra, this famous story of Cleopatra dissolving a pearl in a cup of vinegar and drinking it. Whereas Nathaniel Hone, very wittily, he shows Kitty Fisher with a kitty fishing for goldfish in the foreground. Get it? Get it? It's a little joke there. And Sir Reynolds, he dies in 1792 and he's accorded a very splendid funeral. I mean, one would say a state funeral today. And he has his monument in St. Paul's Cathedral. And you could say his greatest achievement 'cause he was such an ambitious man. He wanted to raise the status of artists.

And certainly when he was born, nobody could have imagined that a British born artist would have his coffin carried into St. Paul's Cathedral by three Dukes, two Marquises, three Earls, a Viscount, and a Barron. When you think that Reynolds died in February, 1792, two months, less than two months after Mozart died in Vienna. Mozart, obviously incomparably greater genius, was thrown into a pauper's grave on a rainy day. And that's a great loss to the Austrian tourist industry. Nobody knows where his body is. So, Gainsborough. Again, a straightforward, no nonsense, "This is how I am", "This is my likeness," portrait. He's a young man here, but it's not the first portrait. That seems to be this. And he would've been 13 years old when he painted this. This was discovered. This painting was discovered by the Scottish actress, Adrienne Corri. And she saw it and she immediately said, "I think this is Gainsborough." And everybody said, "Oh, you're nuts." You know, "What does she know? She's just a silly actress."

And she devoted really a big chunk of her career to proving that this picture was by Gainsborough. Initially, all the experts said, "No, you are wrong. There's no way this is by Gainsborough. It's far too early. He can't have been active at the age of 13." And she actually pioneered new methods of art historical research going through bank accounts, Coutts Bank in London had kept his accounts, and discovered that Gainsborough was in London and active

and being paid when he was 13. And she gradually accumulated enough proof that all the experts had to change their minds and accept this painting as an original by Gainsborough. After this early period in London. We assume that he was in some way connected or trained at the so-called St. Martin's Lane Academy, where Hogarth was in charge. And the style promoted was a kind of rather frothy Frenchified Rococo. And this is a portrait that Gainsborough made after he went back to Suffolk, where he came from, and he set up in Ipswich. And this is a portrait of himself and his wife at the time of their wedding.

It's a delicious little picture and it's actually very appropriate that it's, I think, the only Gainsborough in the Louvre. 'Cause I think it competes very easily with the most delightful paintings of the French Rococo. Up until 1759 Gainsborough is successful and active in Ipswich. And he's painting the local gentry in pictures like these. This is the most famous one from this period. It's Mr. And Mrs. Andrews. It's in the National Gallery in London. So these are people, they're landowners, they're comfortably off, they're provincial gentry. The pictures are on a small scale. The figures have a slightly naive doll-like quality. It's again, very, very Rococo. The sweet pastel, powdery colours, everything curving and curling. You've got Rococo clouds, you've got Rococo trees. She's sitting on a very Rococo bench, which is all swirls and curls. He's standing in that Rococo pose of nonchalance and all the drapery is crinkly and curling and curving as you typically get in Rococo style.

Here is a better view of Mrs. Andrews. Of course, there is the mystery of what is in her lap. What's missing? I think you can see that there is the tail feather. It's a bird that he has shot. Why it was never finished is your guess is as good as mine. And my guess is that they ate it for dinner. Seeing paintings that are unfinished, of course, is very revelatory. This is a picture of Gainsborough's two daughters done in Ipswich. It's in the National Gallery. And because it's unfinished, you can really see how he works. That he's working on a dull, pinkish earth colour ground. And that he then sweeps in the contours in a burnt earth colour, if you look at the arm and the fingers and so on, and gradually builds up the paint surface. This is actually a technique which is quite similar to that of Rubens, an artist that he admired very much.

Here's another unfinished picture. Again, as it's painted for himself, for his pleasure, I suppose there was no compulsion to finish it. And I've talked before about the 18th century interest in childhood, that it's often said, it's the era that really discovers the whole concept of childhood and celebrates it. And this again, is a painting rather like the Hogarth with the grandchildren. So it's celebrating childhood, but it's also telling you that it's something fleeting and brief. And that is conveyed by the idea of the children chasing the butterfly. So here we are at the end of the 1750s, 1759, a very fine male portrait of a gentleman who was clearly also a musician. And that would've been a connection with Gainsborough, who was himself a fine amateur musician. This is William Williston. You can see through the 1750s, Gainsborough becoming more ambitious, beginning to work on a larger scale. The paintings beginning to have a slightly more monumental quality to them.

But this painting still has a very Rococo quality to it that comes through in this twisting pose.

And Gainsborough would've been familiar, of course, with Roubiliac's famous sculpture of Handel, which you see on the left-hand side. And we see the same twisting pose in a portrait he painted soon afterwards, after he'd moved to Bath, of a woman called Mrs. Thickness. Now she came from the aristocracy, but she was an extremely gifted musician, and that's really what she wanted to do. She wanted to perform music. Of course, this was an absolute no-no for an aristocratic woman to perform in public in the 18th century. So every time she had a gig, and she would be due to appear somewhere performing, her family would send round the police to arrest her. And Fanny, Fanny, Fanny, oh, famous diarist and novelist of the 18th century, daughter of the musicologist Charles... Oh dear, it's so awful getting old. I'm sure people at the end will tell me who it is. Anyway, in her diary, she talked about seeing this picture and saying how wonderful the picture was. But she'd be very upset to see anybody she loved depicted in such a bold and shameless way. Burney, Fanny Burney, Charles Bernie.

Ah, now lots of you know and love this picture because this is one of the pearls of the collection of Kenwood House. And if I had to say what is the most perfect painting, most beautiful painting ever painted by Gainsborough, maybe the most beautiful portrait ever painted by a British artists is "Countess Howe". You see that he's just moved on to a new level after going to Bath. And I think there, well, part is he's just maturing as an artist. But there are two big factors here. One is that Bath was very different from Ipswich. Ipswich was provincial. Bath, although it's not London, it was where the creme de creme went for a large part of the year. He was now mixing with a far more sophisticated clientele. And he responds to this. The other thing was that near Bath is Wilton House. Wilton House as a great collection of Van Dycks.

And Gainsborough discovered van Dyck for himself. And he fell in love. He completely fell in love with van Dyck. In fact, his last recorded words on his deathbed were, "We are all going to heaven and van Dyck shall be of the company." So he was looking forward to meeting van Dyck on the other side. This is van Dyck's portrait of Henrietta Maria. And I think you can see how the suavity, the sophistication, this fabulous, amazing rendering of the silks and satins. This Daffonist quality is something that he's taken from van Dyck. What's different is the colour sense that, you know, Gainsborough is very much a man of the Rococo period, of his time, in his liking for these pale and sweet colours. To me, Gainsborough, he's always a interesting artist, one of the top art British artists from the point of view of technical facility and brilliance. But I think his peak is in these early years in Bath, the Bath in the 1760s. Again, you can see the obvious debt to van Dyck, famous "Blue Boy", which is now in the Huntington Collection in America, which is practically a pastiche of the van Dyck portrait of the sons of the Duke of Buckingham, which you see on the right-hand side. So, he moves to London.

He's in Bath at 1759 till 1774. And then he's in London, in Schomberg House in Pall Mall from 1774 until his death at the end of the 1780s. And if you want a superb example of his late style, this is it. This is the so-called "Morning Walk" in the National Gallery. The technique is an extraordinary one. Reynolds actually summed it up perfectly After Gainsborough died, Reynolds made a tribute to Gainsborough in one of his discordances. And they had a very tense relationship, you know? Really quite a bit of rivalry for a while, but admired each other's work.

And Reynolds warned he said, "Don't try and imitate Gainsborough. He's an impossible artist to imitate. And you'll only do bad Gainsborough if you try and imitate him." But one of the things he says is, I want you to go and I want you to do this next time you go to a museum. Go up close to a late painting by Gainsborough. And as Reynolds puts it, "All you can see are odd marks and scratches." And then you retreat the other side of the room, you look at it from the proper distance. And he said, "By magic, by a kind of magic, those odd marks and scratches assume form." Dogs. I can't resist saying something about dogs. 'Cause he's obviously a very doggy person. He loves dogs, but he particularly likes white, fluffy dogs.

Whenever I see a white fluffy dog, I think of Gainsborough. And he's also, I think, does some of his most sympathetic portraits of male aristocrats when he's actually really interested in the relationship between the man and the dog. We know that, in fact, Gainsborough became very bored with portrait painting. There are references in his letters to this. Wonderful letter writer, by the way. Not grammatically correct or lots of spelling mistakes, but very lively. And he often says how bored he is with face painting. And he also often expresses his dislike of the English aristocracy. One of the letters, he says, "The only good thing about an English aristocrat is his pocket book." But this is the Duke of Buccleuch. And you think, "Ah, lovely dog, must be a nice man." I know this worked because I had a boss at Christie's, she used to go away for the weekend and leave me her dog. And if I travelled around London with her dog, everybody smiled at me and thought I must be a nice man because it was such a lovely dog.

And there are many of these portraits by Gainsborough, where it's really a double portrait of the man and his dog. Ah, this is Giovanna Baccelli. This is in the Tate Gallery. She was an Italian dancer who is the mistress of the Duke of Dorset. If you want to see more of her, there's a nude statue of her at the foot of the staircase in Knole House, the coldest, gloomiest house in England. I always think, "Oh, this poor Italian girl, stark naked in this freezing, gloomy house." But Reynolds obviously found her charming and responded to her. There are lots of, oh sorry, Gainsborough. Gainsborough, mustn't muddle you. But I think also Gainsborough in the late part of his career was bored with quite a lot of his sitters, whether male or female. And the paint work is always fabulous, but you just feel that he wasn't often engaged or wasn't always engaged with his subject. Now this is a great painting for doing what I just said.

Go up close to look at the technique, the odd marks and scratches, and retreat to see how they become form. There are some sympathetic male portraits of the later years where he obviously liked the person. This is James Christie, the auctioneer, founder of Christie's Auction House, who was, by all accounts, a very flamboyant and charming man. And a wonderful portrait of John Christian Bach, the London Bach, probably the most gifted of the composer sons of Johann Sebastian Bach. And oh, I have to mention, yes, again, the rivalry. This is Reynolds and Gainsborough. Reynolds painting the most famous actress, Mrs. Siddons in 1784, that's at the Royal Academy. He shows her as the tragic muse. One of the things that Reynolds said, like I've already told you, he said that women shouldn't be painted in fashionable clothing. He also said, "Don't use the colour blue in the centre of a portrait. It's vulgar and it's tasteless."

So I think there's no doubt that the Gainsborough painting on the right-hand side was a fingers up to Reynolds, you know, shown the year after he's showing Mrs. Siddons dressed to kill in the latest fashionable clothes and dressed in blue. Mind you, he did upset her because usually a very charming man. And, of course, if you're a fashionable portraitist, you have to make your people feel good. You have to know how to talk to them as well as how to paint them. And she was very upset to hear him murmuring, "Damn the nose, there's no end to it." Drawings. Again, Reynolds is an enigma 'cause he's all the time he's saying, "Drawing, drawing, drawing. This is what you need to do to be a great artist." But he didn't do it himself. There are very few drawings by Reynolds and they're not very good drawings. Whereas there are the most ravishing drawings by Gainsborough. What you could say is though that they're painter's drawings. These are not linear drawings.

They're not drawings with a firm contour or outline. But I love this dainty gesture of the lady. And because you would've had muddy streets in the 18th century, no paving stones. And she doesn't want her skirts to be soiled with mud. So she's delicately lifting the back of her skirts and ooh, how exciting. We get a glimpse of her ankle. And I'm going to finish with this drawing. No, I'm going to finish with this drawing. This was made by Gainsborough. He was out sketching at the Richmond Park. And a very sexy, he was a good looking man, I'm sure women liked him. And a very beautiful woman walked past and he wrote a letter about this. He said, "She fixed me with a lascivious stare and walked past slowly five times." And that enabled him to make this wonderful drawing. And this is where I'm going to finish. I come out of my share and I see there is some questions. Questions.

Q&A and Comments:

Q: Yeah, they did. "Did they know each other?"

A: They know each other. Very well, they knew each other. In fact, not only that, when Gainsborough was dying, Reynolds was one of the last people who went to see him. And he talks about this and says that they had, he said, "Despite all the misunderstandings we'd had..."

Q: "What are the criteria for calling the Apollo Belvedere mediocre?"

A: Well first of all, in the 18th century it was thought to be a Greek original. Now we know it's a Roman copy. Well, it's up to you. You can think it's wonderful but, you know, it's a matter of taste. But I can tell you that very few modern art historians give it the time of day.

Q: "What were Reynold's fees in current terms?"

A: I really can't tell you off the top of my head. I know he was paid very handsomely, that that it is known exactly what fees at the time he charged. And if I were back in London, I'd have them in my notes. But I can't remember off the top of my... Brooks Club, thank you very much.

At the top of... No, Boodles is on the other side, isn't it? I think it's Brooks, yes. It wasn't the Athenaeum. "What are the name of this rogue?" I wonder who that was? I don't who that was. "Who are the two officers we see in the National?" There is the painting of the general who was victor of Gibraltar. Sorry, I can't remember off the top of my head. "Mrs. Abington is similar..." Yes, how interesting. Thank you. Do you know I wish I'd thought of that beforehand. I would've put it in the lecture. The famous photograph of Christine Keeler. But she's nude, of course. I'm going to use that next time I do this lecture.

Yes, so Amanda Foreman wrote a wonderful biography of the Duchess of Devonshire. "Is the portrait on the left thought to be Francis Barber, servant of Samuel Johnson?" I'm not sure which one you are referring to. "What about the pendant with the Star of David the Reynolds character is wearing?" Oh, you know, that's interesting. I hadn't spotted that the Reynolds characters wearing... That's interesting. I need to follow that one up. "Was there any loss of confidence in British artists or in England for that matter, due to the loss of the American colonies?" I don't think there was any.

I don't think there was any loss in confidence of British artists. What's interesting is that Benjamin West and John Singleton Copley were American, came over after the American Revolution and had very good careers in Britain, had royal patronage. And there were plenty of English in the Whig Party who actually had every sympathy with the American Revolution.

Q: "Who was your favourite artist you spoke about to today?"

A: I mean, in a way, I feel Reynolds needs a bit of defending 'cause I think he's sort of seen as such an old duffer and he can be very, very good. But Gainsborough when he's really good. Fanny Burney, somebody spotted that, yes. Oh, lots of people. Lots of Fanny Burney. Thank you very much.

"I read that Gainsborough were learned about cloth, how it drapes, how the light changes the colour and texture of cloth since his family owned a weaving business." Oh, that's possible that he could... I mean, there are lots of examples, you know, like Grier, whose mother was a dress maker, being fascinated with fabrics. "Did Schomberg House, it is, belong to Gainsborough?" He lived there. I don't if he owned it. "Why so many show dogs?" Hey, the English, what can I say? We love dogs. "This is actually Pall Mall." I hope I said that. Sorry, we're looping. I can't, it's going without my... I need to go back 'cause it's sort of leaping. "Did the Dilettante portraits of all the subjects had to be the same prominence?" Probably yes. I mean, that's always a problem to this day with group portraits that people get very uppity if they're not given the same prominence.

"Am I correct in saying that Gainsborough is on record of having said he preferred to..." Yes, and I just, there wasn't really, I should have included. I mean, it's another lecture really. I mean, when Gainsborough died, his apartment in Schomberg House was apparently absolutely full of

unsold landscapes. There just wasn't a market for landscapes by British artists during his lifetime. I think he would've much preferred to paint landscapes. And of course, in the late pictures, landscape played a very prominent role in the background. Yes, well, the thing about do you really think, Gainsborough was wonderful at painting shimmering materials, but do you really think that they're strongly differentiated? Sometimes I feel it's like in the late paintings it's like they're all made of the same substance You'll find that any artist who wants to flatter the sitter. "Gainsborough's heads look very small and proportionate to their bodies. Am I right?" Yes, you are right. But you'll find that in most fashionable portraiture.

Q: "Gainsborough's "Lady Howe" and Reynolds' courtesan looking over the back of the chair, both have black leather bands around their wrists. Can you comment or elaborate?"

A: Yes, having black bands around your wrist makes your skin look whiter. It's the same idea as having those black beauty marks on your face. It's to offer contrast with the white skin.

Where are we going from here? "I spent much of my childhood at Kenwood and my dad took me into the Kenwood House many times and taught me about the amazing artist whose work on show there. My favourite is "Miss Murray" painted by Sir Thomas Lawrence." Yeah, it's Kenwood House. Well, I know so many people who, especially over the last year, have been so grateful for Kenwood House. It is a fantastic resource for North London. Yeah.

"Someone told me that either Gainsborough or Reynolds would include a dog if he didn't like a female sitter." I think that's untrue. That's very, very unlikely, I think. "Gainsborough wanted to be a landscape artist and chose portraiture because it was more in demand." Yes, you're right. And Reynolds, of course, you know, it's kind neither of them really wanted to be portrait painters, but that was the only way you could earn a good living for a British artist in the 18th century. "Any chance of a talk on Aubrey Beardsley?" Absolutely. I wrote a little book on Aubrey Beardsley, but it wouldn't be for some time 'cause he's entered the 19th century. I could very happily do a talk on Beardsley. "

Q: Which one of them became more successful?

A: They were both very successful. And if I could remember, I was asked that question about the fees. Reynolds was able to charge slightly more than Gainsborough. And where'd we...

The rogue of the American War of Independence. Yes, Colonel Sir Banastre Tarleton, I didn't tell you the whole story. Read up about him. He was such a shit, really. A really unpleasant man. He stole a girlfriend of the Prince of Wales and dumped her. And oh, it's a dreadful, dreadful. He was really a nasty piece of work. But I'll leave you to look that up on the internet. Oh, the Black man painted by Reynolds, which is, yes. I don't know the answer to that. I don't think anybody knows for sure the identity of that man. "The Star of David was used by the Freemasons."

That's a very good, it's a very likely explanation. Somebody's asked me where, yeah, I'm in

Paris, to answer that question, "White is on the other side." It's not the club that I was talking about. "Francis Dashwood Society Dilettanti Brooks Club." Thank you. "Or Delise looking straight at you." I'm not sure what that means. "Historic jewel pass through Natural Branch..." I don't the answer to that one. "Was Gainsborough his real name?" Yes, I think it was. "Somebody's seen a Star of David in the Langton Church." That's quite likely. "Somebody said that Reynolds charged 80 Guineas for a full length portrait." 80 Guineas, an enormous sum of money in the 18th century. Am I going to talk about Sir Thomas Lawrence? I certainly could do that. Yeah, I think I will. I'll probably do a talk about Regency portraiture, but that will be in about a month's time or bit more, two months time, maybe.

"Has anybody tried to copy these two artists?" Yes, lots of people have tried to copy them. They were a big influence. They were very, very fashionable in the Belle Epoque. So lots of artists of the late 19th, early 20th century imitated Reynolds and Gainsborough, including to a certain extent, even Sergeant. "I'd be happy to give you a tour of the artwork in my home. I'm one of those lucky people with two homes. So there's my Paris flat and there's my London house." "Ramsey? Raben?" Ramsey, I suppose he's fallen by the wayside. He's a wonderful artist. I'm sorry, I could have talked about him, but it would, you know, dilute the lecture.

Raben, I certainly will talk about. If I talk about Lawrence, I'll talk about Raben in the same talk. I will do a lecture on Renoir. I've written two books on Renoir, actually, but that won't be till for some time, till we get to the Impressionist period. "So Gainesville also pale?" No, I don't think it's for the same reason. I mean, as I said, you wanted to be pale. I think Gainsborough's women don't look like they're ill in the way that some of Reynolds' do. And is that it? You said that.. Yeah, I think that's it. I seem to run after.

- [Judi] Yes, Patrick. Yep.

- [Patrick] Good.

- [Judi] Wonderful. Thank you so much, Patrick.

- [Patrick] Thank you.

- [Judi] And thank you to everybody and we'll see you all tomorrow. Take care.