

X

NATIONAL GALLERY, LONDON: FOR “ALL RANKS AND DEGREES OF MEN”

BRANDON TAYLOR

The idea of a public national gallery of fine art had been voiced often enough in London at least since the 1770s, but the pattern of throwing open noble or royal collections that was becoming increasingly familiar in continental Europe was slow to be adopted in Britain.¹ During the country's long war with France, and for some years after its conclusion in 1815, the heavy burden of war debt, economic depression, and a rising tide of popular dissent in the towns and countryside had made public expenditure on the arts a low, if not vanished, priority. Meanwhile, fine paintings of the Italian and Flemish schools had come onto the international market in the years since the French Revolution and had been eagerly purchased by aristocratic collectors at home, several of them in London, who allowed the occasional admittance of visitors. A socially mixed audience had been able to see the collection of the Marquess of Stafford at Cleveland House, near the royal residence at Buckingham House, from 1806, as well as that of the Earl of Grosvenor, who opened his Park Lane house a day a week during the “season” (May to July), from 1808. Stafford's collection was available on Wednesdays during the season, from noon to five o'clock. However, his gesture had been greeted with more enthusiasm than he liked, and he restricted access to those known to himself or his family, and their friends.² The British collection of Sir John Leicester (1762–1827) in Hill Street, Mayfair, was made available to visitors in 1818, by admission card obtainable by those known to the owner or his friends, on certain Thursdays during the season.³ Its opening was described by Leicester's cataloguer John Carey as marking a “memorable epoch in the British school,” as “the crowd of beauty and fashion, the chief nobility and gentry, the distinguished members of the legislature and of the learned professions, the taste and educated mind of England, assembled to share in the triumph of their countryman.”⁴

Another good British collection, that of Sir Walter Fawkes (1769–1825), was opened to selected visitors for evening visits in 1819. Leicester was keen to make his collection of British pictures the origin of a National Gallery of British Art, and offered them for sale to the nation in 1823, only to be turned down on the principle that a mixture of modern and older works was needed, as well as “larger pictures which are not adapted to Private Collections.”⁵ It was not

FIGURE 10-1.
Frederick Mackenzie
(English, 1787–1854),
*Interior of the National
Gallery, Pall Mall,*
prior to 1834, 1824–34.
Watercolor, 47 × 62.5 cm
(18½ × 24⅝ in.).
London, Victoria and
Albert Museum

until well after the parliamentary election of 1820, and the prime minister Lord Liverpool's generally adroit management of the tensions between the older landed Tories and the liberals in his party, that the foundations for a major new institution could be laid. Most of the British artists, politicians, and gentry who had swarmed to Paris in the temporary peace following the Treaty of Amiens of 1802 had been startled at the extent of the French collections then being opened in the public's name. They were now aware of how many other public art museums had evolved from European princely collections during the last third of the eighteenth century, and where a widened public franchise was enjoyed; among these were the picture gallery in Dresden, the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, and the Belvedere Museum in Vienna, which was open to anyone "with clean shoes." By the early 1820s the British economy was showing signs of revival, and opinion among liberal Tories and sympathetic Whigs in Parliament was that the moment was probably ripe. In 1823 a war loan to Austria was in the process of being repaid—against all expectations—and not one but two private collections of valuable paintings were being made available to the British government with the express intention of forming the nation's first truly public, and in this sense "national," gallery of art.

The fate of the art collection of Sir George Beaumont (1753–1827), himself an amateur painter and a friend of William Wordsworth and the Lake Poets, was by that time already a matter of discussion in the capital. Beaumont had been on the Grand Tour on the Continent and had purchased works by Claude, Rembrandt, Canaletto, and Rubens, as well as works by the contemporary English painter Sir David Wilkie (1785–1841). Beaumont's personal taste was for idealized classical landscape; he chose to cultivate a reputation as a dogmatic conservative in matters of art, a position mocked in the satirical *Catalogues Raisonnés* published against him and his friends at the patriotically inclined British Institution, in 1815 and 1816, that referred to him as "capricious, cowardly and treacherous" in matters of taste.⁶ Since Beaumont's only heir was an unappreciative cousin, in the middle of 1823 he formally offered sixteen paintings from his collection as a gift to the nation, provided that two important conditions could be met: first, that a suitable building be found to house them, and second, announced some months later, that the government purchase another collection, also newly available, that of the City businessman John Julius Angerstein (1735–1823), larger and by that measure more significant than Beaumont's own.⁷ Neither of those conditions proved easy to satisfy. Angerstein had died in January 1823 and his son was inclined to sell his father's collection on the open market, while Beaumont's collection on its own would be considered too small and too heavily weighted toward pictures of a domestic scale to form a significant national gift. Accommodation for Beaumont's pictures was to prove difficult, too. The recently crowned George IV (r. 1820–30) had promised a gift of his father's library to the nation, and the government

had referred the matter to the trustees of the British Museum, since its inception in 1753 a freely accessible public institution widely regarded as the nation's general repository for collections of every kind. And yet Montagu House in Bloomsbury, where the museum was then housed, was a dilapidated firetrap, ill equipped to house pictures, and far too small. A government select committee appointed in March 1823 to find a solution reported the following month with a proposal to rebuild the museum as a "large edifice . . . adequate to all the purposes of a national repository," including the King's Library together with other object collections and possible donations of pictures—very likely with Beaumont's or Angerstein's collection in mind.

The ensuing debate shows how novel the concept of a separate public gallery for works of art—separate from museum holdings of books and antiquarian objects—still was in Britain. In 1823 some of those debating the forty thousand pounds needed for a new building for the British Museum felt that the sum was trifling in comparison with the million pounds voted in 1818 to build (or rebuild) churches in the hope of ameliorating national unrest—and that it compared well with the thirty-five thousand pounds spent to acquire the Elgin Marbles in 1816, at the very height of the nation's economic woes. Nor did opinion divide along party lines, not least because party loyalty revealed no clear policy on the public arts, nor a consensus on the correct treatment of a royal gift. John Hobhouse, MP for Westminster, lifelong friend of Lord Byron and a leader of a group of so-called Radicals in Parliament, came out in favor of leaving the rare books in one of the king's palaces and not mixing them up with the British Museum's existing library, implying that the Beaumont and Angerstein pictures would be exhibited elsewhere. The Whig liberal Sir James Mackintosh, one of Parliament's most cultured and eloquent members—philosophically interested in the French Revolution, though finally a critic of its excesses—took an attitude of principled endorsement for universal access to the arts in preference to the exercise of purely private taste, urging that "public patronage alone could secure the triumph of art. . . . That which was calculated to excite universal attention," he claimed, "must spring from enlarged patronage, and must consist of works interesting, not alone to individual taste, but the general feeling of mankind."⁸ The Tory financier and MP for Taunton, Alexander Baring, said that he thought that "the works of art should be in a gallery by themselves."⁹ The member for Bodmin and secretary to the Admiralty, John Croker, felt that the unfinished wing of the Royal Academy of Arts' premises at Somerset House in the Strand should be completed as a picture gallery, even though such a policy would have associated a nascent public collection with the teaching functions of a very different and by no means public body.

Above all, the debate gave a platform to the young Whig politician George Agar-Ellis (1797–1833), the member of parliament at that time for Seaford and an ally of Beaumont's, who praised what was then public knowledge—"the

noble and patriotic gift” of his friend—and who announced that he intended to move “for a grant in the next session, to be applied, under commissioners, to the purchase of this and other collections, for the formation of a national gallery.”¹⁰ Agar-Ellis’s view reflected the sentiments of the banker Baring, who had already reminded the House of Commons that “there were vast collections now purchasable, which would never again be come at by the public, that vast quantities of valuable works had been thrown into the hands of individuals by the French Revolution . . . and really, for a country of such inordinate wealth and power as this to be without a gallery of art, was a national reproach.”¹¹ By the end of 1823 the government had concluded an agreement with Angerstein’s son, and in the House of Commons on February 23, 1824, Chancellor Frederick Robinson announced that fifty-seven thousand pounds had been agreed on to buy his father’s collection, with the possibility that “a valuable collection at present in the possession of a high-spirited individual, of acknowledged taste and judgement [that is, Beaumont] . . . would through his liberality be likely to find its way to a National Gallery.”¹² A lease was soon signed on Angerstein’s house at 100 Pall Mall, and on May 10, 1824, its doors were thrown open to the public, in what were obviously temporary premises, as Britain’s first national gallery of art. Beaumont’s collection would be moved to Pall Mall in stages between 1826 and 1828.

A number of rhetorical claims immediately surrounded the temporary National Gallery in Pall Mall, and they nicely illuminate the several conflicting standards of taste involved. Angerstein had made a fortune in the City during the period of the Napoleonic Wars and had spent part of his riches on Italian, French, and British pictures of high quality at a time when there was a plentiful market supply: they included Rubens’s *Rape of the Sabine Women* (probably 1635–40), Claude’s *Seaport with the Embarkation of the Queen of Sheba* (1648) and *Seaport with the Embarkation of Saint Ursula* (1641), a *Venus and Adonis* (ca. 1554) thought to be by Titian (but today assigned to his workshop), Poussin’s *Bacchanalian Revel before a Herm* (1632–33), Raphael’s *Portrait of Pope Julius II* (1511), Sebastiano del Piombo’s *Raising of Lazarus* (ca. 1517–19), Rembrandt’s *Woman Taken in Adultery* (1644), the six paintings in William Hogarth’s series *Marriage à la Mode* (ca. 1743), and Sir Joshua Reynolds’s *Lord Heathfield of Gibraltar* (1787). The majority had been obtained with the advice and friendship of the artist Sir Thomas Lawrence (1769–1830) and were of high artistic quality.

Angerstein’s taste was not in question. But he represented a new breed: he was a Russian-born Jew, whose commercial success in the shipping-insurance business at Lloyd’s had prompted him to establish a Patriotic Fund at Lloyd’s in 1802 that contributed no less than £361,000 toward British financial and military security in the war against France.¹³ Generally perceived as vulgar by a patrician class that contributed virtually nothing of its own to the fund,

Angerstein was referred to in one *Times* article as a member of “an injurious separate class . . . a commercial aristocracy.”¹⁴ Such a patrician attitude can be put alongside the reverence paid to the king, trustee of a vast royal collection, who had his own self-aggrandizing ambitions to fulfill. The government’s paymaster general, Sir Charles Long (later Lord Farnborough), who served as art adviser to the king, told Parliament that the Angerstein collection “appeared, on inspection, so exquisite to His Majesty, that it was he who had first suggested the propriety of purchasing [the paintings] for the nation.”¹⁵ In fact, nothing could be further from the dispositions of a monarch who offered not a single picture from the royal collection to the nation and who, three days after Long’s testimony, petitioned Parliament for the sum of £300,000 to carry out improvements at Windsor Castle, including the purchase of substantial surrounding buildings and land.¹⁶

As to the definition of the gallery’s public, the hero of the hour was undoubtedly Agar-Ellis, who in a published statement that must have been written in stages throughout 1824 pointed out that “the great body of the people in the middling classes, as well as very many of the higher orders, could not, from their various avocations, have [studied in Italy]; and therefore, their only chance of becoming acquainted with what is really fine in art, was in the establishment of a National Gallery.” “Frequent viewing” and “attentive studying” of fine pictures would improve “the general taste of the public,” he suggested; the paintings’ aesthetic and moral qualities—the “grandeur of design of the Piombo,” the “beautiful delineations of nature” in the Claudes, the “brilliant colouring” of the Titians, the “astonishing chiaroscuro” of the Rembrandts, the “noble simplicity” of the Carracci, even the “truth and humour of Hogarth”—would have “an immediate effect upon the mind.” And the effort needed to visit Pall Mall would surely be minimal. The pictures could be seen by visitors “without trouble or difficulty to themselves,” given that, “as we are a nation of much business and with whom, therefore, time is most precious, it is our opinion that we shall not go much out of our way to see a picture, even it were painted by Saint Luke.”¹⁷ As to visiting arrangements,

there must be no sending for tickets—no asking permission—no shutting it up half the days in the week; its doors must be always open, without fee or reward, to every decently dressed person. . . . [The National Gallery] must be situated in the very gangway of London, where it is alike accessible, and conveniently accessible, to all ranks and degrees of men—to the merchant, as he goes to his counting house—to the peers and commons, in their way to their respective houses of parliament—to the men of literature and science, in their way to their respective *societies*—to the King and the court, for it should always at least be supposed that the sovereign is fond of art—to the stranger and the foreigner who lodges in some of

the numerous hotels with which St James's Street, and the neighbouring streets (the *quartier* which may fairly be called the centre of London) abound—to the frequenters of clubs of all denominations—to the hunters of exhibitions (a numerous class in the metropolis)—to the indolent as well as the busy—to the idle as well as the industrious. In short, we consider the present abode of the National Gallery to be the very perfection of situation.¹⁸

The curatorial arrangements at Pall Mall involved far less surveillance of the public than those at the much larger Continental museums, particularly those in France. The duties of the first keeper of the gallery, the painter and restorer William Seguer (1771–1843), and his assistant were defined as hanging and occasionally cleaning the pictures, but little more. There were three attendants (“to be in constant attendance in the gallery, to give information to the public, and to see that no injury occurs to the pictures”), a housemaid (“to sweep and clean the Galleries, the stairs and furniture”), a porter (“to take charge of umbrellas and sticks”), and a policeman at the door (“to see that no improper persons find their way into the galleries”).¹⁹ The gallery was open from ten o'clock to five o'clock Mondays to Thursdays, with the same hours for artists and students on Fridays and Saturdays. At first an appointment ticket was required, but the practice was soon abandoned, and for the last half of the 1820s entry was both ticketless and free. Information about the pictures was minimal in today's terms. An official sixpenny catalogue was printed from 1824, listing the pictures in order of acquisition and giving the artist's name as well as the subject, the materials used, and the dimensions of each work. There were no wall labels—not until the 1850s.

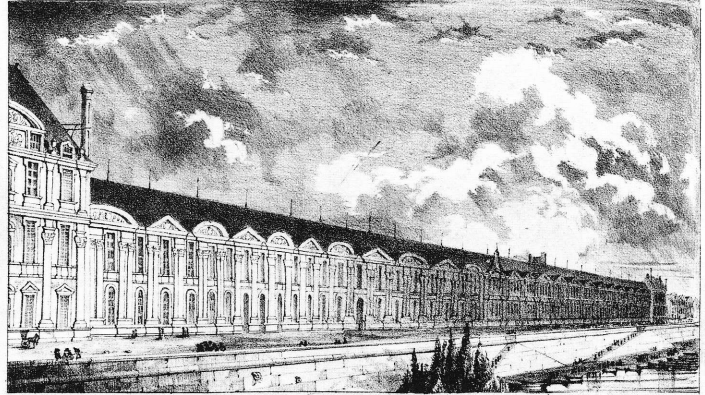
Nearly a decade later, William Young Ottley's commercially produced *Descriptive Catalogue of the Pictures in the National Gallery, with Critical Remarks on Their Merits* (1832), costing a shilling, still listed the paintings according to their donor, roughly chronologically within each group, and with brief explanations of the subject matter. Not until the second edition of Ottley's catalogue two years later were the paintings listed chronologically, hence giving a basic sense of historical sequence but without reference to “schools,” “influence,” or “progress”—the three mantras of later art-historical guides to works of art. The exception to this early pattern was the *Descriptive, Explanatory and Critical, Catalogue of Fifty of the Earliest Pictures Contained in the National Gallery of Great Britain* (1834) by the painter John Landseer (1769–1852), which claimed in its prefatory text to be designed to help the viewer distinguish between good and indifferent paintings and to question doubtful attributions, aided by extended texts on each work explaining the actions of the figures in the paintings and the artist's intentions in thus composing them.²⁰

Although we can never be sure of what the public sees or does in front of works of art, it can be confidently stated that the optimistic rhetoric at Pall Mall during the 1820s concealed a nagging disquiet. Agar-Ellis had himself referred to the “dark and cavern-like rooms” of 100 Pall Mall, and it is therefore difficult to credit the impression given in Frederick Mackenzie’s watercolor of between 1824 and 1834, which evidently shows the gallery on a Friday or a Saturday, when it was open only to artists and students and hence quiet by comparison with the rest of the week (fig. 10-1). By artificially widening the perspective, Mackenzie has enlarged the scale of the rooms to suggest a spacious and well-lit arena of display. We see studious persons attending to Sebastiano’s *Raising of Lazarus*, Titian’s *Bacchus and Ariadne* (1520–23; newly purchased with Treasury funds in 1826), Claude’s *Embarkation of Saint Ursula*, Annibale Carracci’s *Bacchus and Silenus* (ca. 1599), and other works including pictures bequeathed by the Reverend William Holwell Carr (1758–1830) in 1825 and on display in the gallery by 1831, as well as parts of the collection of Sir George Beaumont.²¹ True, the upper Pall Mall rooms would have skylights added in 1826, but before and after that date the galleries must have been crowded and often dark. Visitor figures available to Agar-Ellis were on average as high as fifty per hour in the first year of the gallery’s opening, with a maximum of two hundred persons present at any one time. The number of visitors would oscillate between two hundred thousand and four hundred thousand per annum for the rest of the decade.²²

No less unreliable is the account by the writer William Hazlitt (1778–1830) of his visit in 1824, which must have been on a Friday or a Saturday, too. “For the number of pictures,” Hazlitt wrote, “Mr Angerstein’s is the finest gallery, perhaps, in the world. We feel no sense of littleness; the attention is never distracted for a moment, but concentrated on a few pictures of first-rate excellence. . . . We know of no greater treat than to be admitted freely to a Collection of this sort, where the mind reposes with full confidence in its feelings of admiration.”²³ And yet as early as 1828 the trustees were complaining publicly as well as privately about the cramped accommodations in the gallery, and making negative comparisons with the magnificent spaces of the Musée du Louvre, a comparison strikingly captured in Charles Joseph Hullmandel’s lithograph of about 1830, with its well-known lines from *Hamlet*, “Look here upon this picture, and on this, / The counterfeit presentment of two brothers!” (fig. 10-2).²⁴ By that date the search for improved accommodations had begun.

By 1830, with a Whig majority in Parliament after the election of that year and with the crisis surrounding the eventual passage of the 1832 Reform Bill now unfolding, the tone of discussion on the National Gallery was changing very fast. England was a young nation, her population having nearly doubled in the fifty years since 1780. Some 60 percent were still below the age of twenty-four, of which three-quarters—that is, 45 percent of the whole population—

THE LOUVRE,
or the National Gallery of France.



*"Look here upon this picture, and on this,
The counterpart presentment of two brothers!"*



NO. 100, PALL MALL,
or the National Gallery of England.

*In the
Right Hon^{ble} Charles Earl Grey,
FIRST LORD OF THE TREASURY &c. &c. &c.
This edifice most respectfully dedicated by
his Student-Servant
THE PUBLISHER.*

*Published by J. Rogers & Sons, Booksellers, St. Martin's Church,
Printed by C. Hullmandel.*

FIGURE 10-2.
Charles Joseph
Hullmandel (English,
1789–1850), *The Louvre,
or the National Gallery
of France; No. 100,
Pall Mall, or the National
Gallery of England,*
ca. 1830. Lithograph.
London Metropolitan
Archives

were still between fifteen and twenty-five years of age.²⁵ Whether such a nation was capable of being united by common access to education, to the means of production, to transport and communication, and to culture, or whether it was to remain an amalgam of warring interests and classes smothered by a rhetoric of common purpose—these were the questions addressed by reforming politicians of the day. The essential innovation of the Reform Bill was to abolish many of the titular parliamentary seats, eradicate the remaining rotten boroughs (depopulated election districts maintained so as to control seats in the House of Commons), and establish new constituencies in the larger towns and cities, whose working classes were the engine of the country's wealth, yet still largely unrepresented at Westminster.

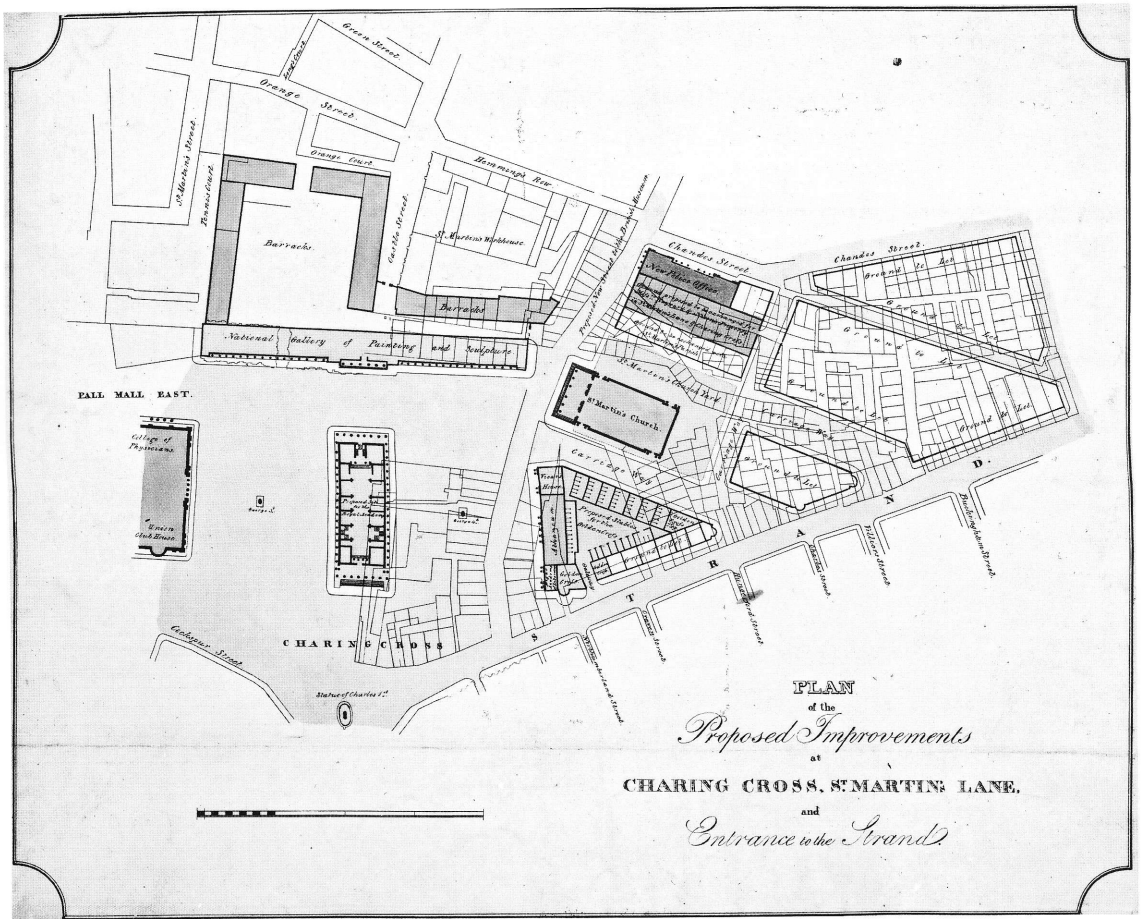
A pragmatic advantage of an extended and relocated National Gallery was pressed by the leader of the Tory opposition, Sir Robert Peel (1788–1850), who supported the erection of a new building in view of an expected hundred thousand visitors a year (it would prove to be many more)—“not an expensive building, the architectural magnificence of which would be attended with great expense, but merely a plain and suitable gallery, with a proper light to view the paintings with advantage.” To Peel, a second advantage was that although “it was well known that our manufacturers were, in all matters connected with machinery, superior to all their foreign competitors... in the *pictorial designs*, which were so important in recommending the productions of industry to the taste of the consumer, they were, unfortunately, not equally successful”—and hence a sum of thirty thousand pounds for a new building would be amply repaid.²⁶ A third advantage, pressed by the young aristocratic MP for Woodstock, Lord Ashley, a Tory by birth and instinct who had recently come over to the cause of the working man, was that the gallery would be “extremely beneficial for artists and mechanics... [H]e had reasons for believing that it would be frequented by the industrious classes, instead of resorting to ale-houses, as at present.”²⁷

Anger aroused by George IV’s profligate expenditure at Buckingham Palace (he had recently asked for, and received, half a million pounds) was voiced by other parts of the political spectrum. Sir Frederick Trench (1775–1859), best known for his town-planning reforms, felt “it would have been better to have converted [Buckingham Palace] into a national museum or gallery.” With a potential of five hundred feet of hanging space down either side of the palace’s new gallery, “both in extent and beauty it would excel that of the Louvre.” The Scottish Radical Joseph Hume (1777–1855) argued that the money for a gallery “could be had without putting the public to any expense” by pulling down Hampton Court Palace and saving the nineteen thousand pounds per year it cost in upkeep, as well as sacking the forty-four persons who lingered there—the same principle to be applied to the supernumerary personnel at Kensington Palace and at Windsor Castle and Great Park. This impassioned short speech was opposed only by a certain Mr. Gally Knight, who amusingly wondered whether Hume wished to be so illiberal as to “sweep away all the historical recollections with our ancient buildings, [thereby] reducing this country to the condition of the United States.”²⁸

In the meantime, the pressure to vacate the Pall Mall premises remained intense. In March 1834 the collection would be moved to a slightly larger building at 105 Pall Mall, but even this, to the novelist Anthony Trollope (1815–1882), was “a dingy, dull, narrow house, ill-adapted for the exhibition of the treasures it held,” while the energetic and influential Gustav Friedrich Waagen (1794–1868), the first director of the Altes Museum in Berlin, now regularly consulted on matters of art in London, would roundly complain of number 105 that it

had a “dirty appearance . . . [with] so little light that most of the pictures are but imperfectly seen.”²⁹ And yet Whigs and liberal Tories could once more agree. Peel regarded a new National Gallery as a palliative to social division. “In the present times of political excitement,” he said in July 1832, “the exacerbation of angry and unsocial feelings might be much softened by the effects which the fine arts had ever produced on the minds of men.” A National Gallery “was the most adequate to confer advantage on those classes which had but little leisure to enjoy the most refined species of pleasure. The rich might have their own pictures, but those who had to obtain their bread by their labour, could not hope for such enjoyment.” A new and centrally placed institution would contribute “not only . . . to the cultivation of the arts, but to the cementing of the bonds of union between the richest and poorer orders of state . . . joined in mutual intercourse and understanding.”³⁰

Beneath the high-flown rhetoric of Parliament, of course, lay the messy realities of the gallery’s planning, construction, and interior design. The decision to locate the new building in what was already known as Trafalgar Square was part of a remodeling of central London that was to give visible expression to the nation by at least appearing to combine its different and still unreconciled parts. What was still missing in 1830 was a center that was an ordered and functioning whole, one that could express the identity of what was regularly claimed as “the largest and most powerful nation on earth.”³¹ The most lavish scheme for the redesign of this part of London was that of John Nash (1752–1835), already a favorite of the king, and architect of the controversial new Buckingham Palace. Nash’s plan of 1826 for a majestic street extending from the north (what is now Regent’s Park and Portland Place) to Charing Cross promised to produce “a grand and striking effect” with shopping colonnades and a “facade of beautiful architecture at the termination of every street.” And yet the same plan promised to fix the relationship between classes and solidify the social divisions of the city by effecting, in Nash’s own words, “a boundary and complete separation” between the squares of the nobility and gentry to the west and the “meaner streets occupied by mechanics and the trading part of the community” to the east.³² For better or worse, Nash’s scheme had patriotic significance, too. Until about 1820, Charing Cross had been the northernmost entrance to Whitehall and the Royal Park of St. James. Nash’s design showed the beginnings of a substantially open square, with a colonnaded National Gallery on the north side and a so-called Parthenon to house the Royal Academy of Arts in the center.³³ The gallery’s position would complete Nash’s other scheme, for a continuation of Pall Mall to St. Martin’s Lane, such that it and the new Regent Street would terminate at the portico of St. Martin’s Church in the manner of two processional routes from the west. The new building would also summarize the passageway northward from Whitehall, thus completing the redesign of an area that was destined to become, once a monument to the vic-

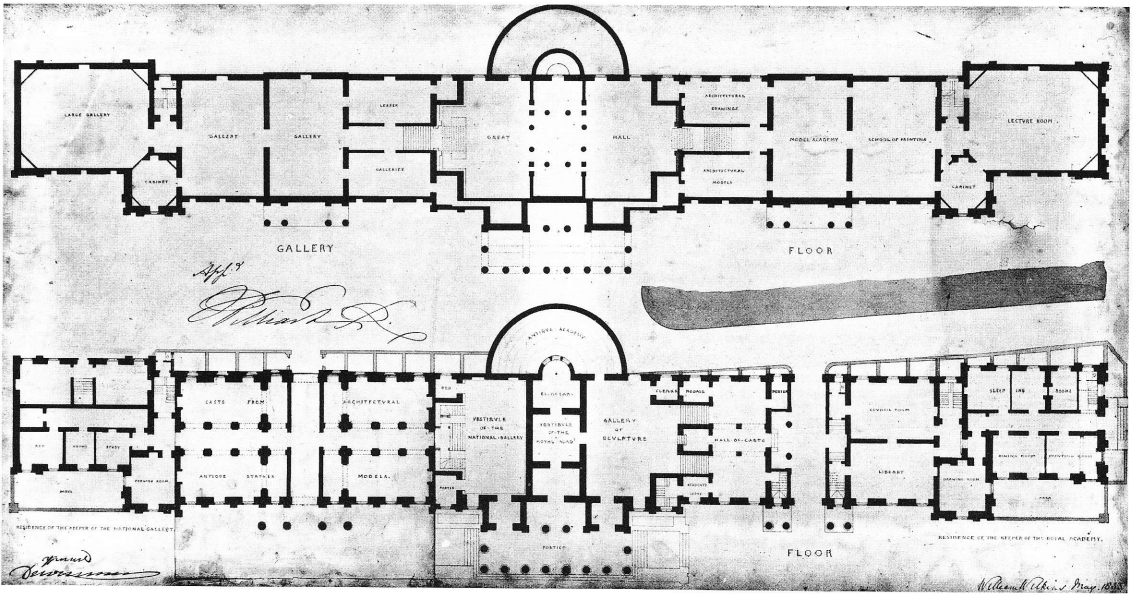


tory at Trafalgar had been added, both a crossroads and a public meeting place, and one of the great urban open spaces of the world (fig. 10-3).

The gallery itself was designed by William Wilkins (1778–1839) in a scheme that compressed the National Gallery and the Royal Academy of Arts into a single building (his first idea had included the Public Records Office, too). Wilkins, a Neoclassical architect with a series of imposing classical facades to his credit, including the recent University College building in Gower Street, lobbied hard to win the commission with a lengthy pamphlet on arts patronage addressed to the chancellor, Lord Goderich, in which he urged that the proper rehousing of the National Gallery and the Royal Academy would lead to a “balancing of the claims of the several orders of society... [such that] intellect may constantly operate against the encroachments of rank and riches, and vice-versa.” If the government did not act fast, Wilkins argued in 1832, the “instructed classes” would gain superiority over “a government of prerogative and privilege” in an eruption comparable to the French Revolution.³⁴ Wilkins won the commission, against competition from Sydney Smirke (1798–1877) and C. R. Cockerell (1788–1863). His final design was a symmetrical building around a central facade, with three large interconnecting exhibition rooms

FIGURE 10-3.

John Nash (English, 1752–1835), *Plan of the Proposed Improvements at Charing Cross, St. Martin's Lane, and Entrance to the Strand*. From *Fifth Report of the Commissioners of Woods, Forests and Land Revenues* (London, 1826). London, National Archives

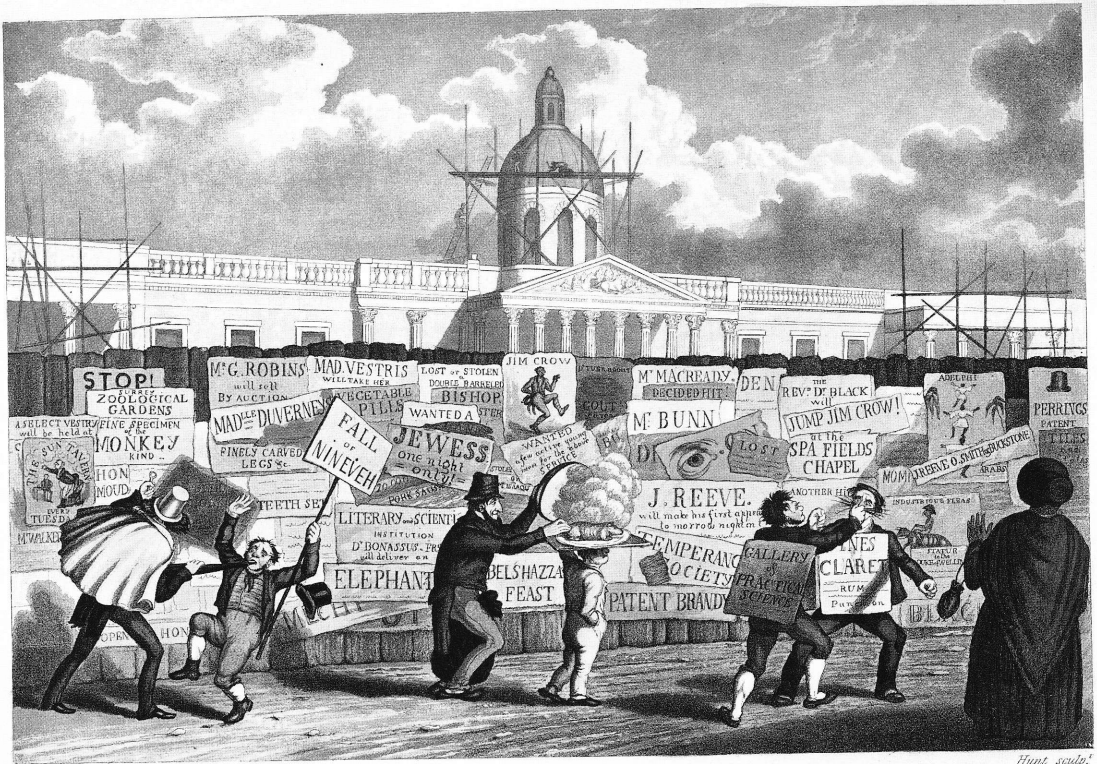


above, with spaces for casts and architectural models below, on the western side, and the Royal Academy’s teaching spaces, council room, library, and separate rooms for architectural models and drawings occupying the eastern wing (fig. 10-4).

As to the social dynamics of the new institution, the redesign of Trafalgar Square can be viewed as an act of social cleansing as well as one of democratic and nation-building opportunity. To the north and east were housed some of the poorest and most destitute families in London: Charles Dickens would write in his *Sketches by Boz* (1836–37) of the “filth everywhere, gutters before the houses and a drain behind... men and women in every variety of scanty and dirty apparel, lounging, scolding, drinking, smoking, squabbling, fighting and swearing”; of the “wretched houses” behind whose broken windows one would find “sweet-stuff manufacturers in the cellars, barbers and red-herring vendors in the front parlours, cobblers in the back; a bird-fancier in the first floor, three families on the second, starvation in the attics, Irishmen in the passage, a ‘musician’ in the front kitchen, and a char-woman and five hungry children in the back.”³⁵

An 1836 print entitled *Cross-Readings at Charing-Cross (With a View of the New National Gallery)* gives a vivid impression of the contrast between the street life of the period and the grandiose Neoclassical building being erected behind (fig. 10-5). In any case, plans were already in train at government level to remove the poor in the vicinity of St. Martin’s Church and open up a more pleasant passageway toward the British Museum; to cleanse the routes opened up from Charing Cross to the north and east; to “take down, take away, remove, alter or regulate... all Signs or other Emblems, used to denote Trade, occupation or Calling of any Person or Persons, and all... Sheds,

FIGURE 10-4.
 William Wilkins
 (English, 1778–1839),
*Floor Plans of the
 National Gallery and
 Royal Academy of Arts,*
 London, 1833. London,
 Royal Academy of Arts



I.P. del.

Hunt, sculp.

CROSS-READINGS AT CHARING-CROSS .

(With a View of the New National Gallery.)

Published by W. SOFFE, 350 Strand. 1835.

Penthouses, Spouts, Buffers, Steps, Stairs, Bows and other projecting Windows, Window shutters, Palisades and other Encroachments, Projections and Annoyances... which do and shall... obstruct the commodious Passage along the Carriage or Footways."³⁶ The roads leading to and from Trafalgar Square would hence facilitate communication to and from the center while paradoxically maintaining the division of London's districts from each other, in effect perpetuating a social geography of difference within the metropolitan fabric at the same time as providing a visual unification of its still very disparate parts.³⁷

The opening of the new National Gallery on April 9, 1838, passed without much fanfare in the London press. By that date, older patterns of leisure-time activity were already under attack by parliamentary reformers bent on eradicating drinking, gambling, Sabbath breaking, and traditional forms of working-class sociability. Parliamentary reform measures now contributed to the redefinition of a whole society, beginning with the 1834 report of the Select Committee on Drunkenness, which recommended parks and open spaces for athletics, combined with a network of "district and parish libraries, museums and reading rooms, accessible at the lowest rate of charge, so as to admit of one or the other being visited in any weather and at any time."³⁸ From now on, so-called rational recreation in the form of museum going and gallery visiting

FIGURE 10-5.

Charles Hunt (?)
(English, 1803–1877),
after James Pollard (?)
(English, 1792–1867),
*Cross-Readings at
Charing-Cross (With
a View of the New
National Gallery)*, 1836.
Hand-colored etching
and aquatint, 26.6 ×
35.7 cm (10³/₈ × 14 in.)
trimmed. Published
by W. Soffe. London,
British Museum

would be legitimated to the extent that it assisted, rather than interrupted, the nation's manufacturing as the basis of its increasing wealth. Both before and in the first years of the gallery's move to Trafalgar Square, the management and regulation of visitors, and the arrangement and custody of the pictures, became questions of major concern to the government.

Even in advance of the move, the *Report of the House of Commons Select Committee on Arts and Their Connexion with Manufactures* of 1835–36, chaired by the merchant and MP for Liverpool, the Radical reformer William Ewart (1798–1869), had urged the view that the central justification for the new gallery was the improvement of design and manufacture in the face of foreign competition. And yet the “great object of a national gallery,” Ewart had said, “is the enlightenment and instruction in art of the public.”³⁹ Echoing his own social and occupational background, he had called on factory inspectors, gallery curators, architects, and others to provide evidence that the working population was eager for instruction in art; that consumers all over the country wanted good design; and that instruction in the fine arts through a rationally organized system of galleries was the surest means to those ends. In England, “a peculiarly manufacturing nation, the connexion between art and manufactures is most important.” “The opening of public galleries for the people should, as much as possible, be encouraged. . . . [C]asts and paintings, copies of the Arabesques of Raphael, the designs at Pompeii . . . everything, in short, which exhibits in combination the efforts of the artist and the workman, should be sought for such institutions. They should contain the most approved modern specimens, foreign as well as domestic, which our extensive commerce would readily convey to us from the most distant quarters of the globe.”⁴⁰ To this end the *Report* had been adamant that “the Gallery be opened, in summer, after the usual hours of labour. It is far better for the nation to pay a few additional attendants in the rooms, than to close the doors on the laborious classes, to whose recreation and refinement a national collection ought principally to be devoted.”⁴¹

Official concern in the *Report* of 1835–36 for the improvement of the nation's manufactures had dovetailed with concern for the historical distinctness and visibility of fine pictures. Witnesses questioned by Ewart's committee had mostly agreed that a newly organized gallery should show a division into schools (including an English school hitherto scarcely visible) in well-lit galleries full of information and conspicuously historical, geographical, and biographical in their physical arrangement. They should provide “information in the Arts” for “the enterprising and laborious classes.” Both Leo von Klenze (1784–1864), architect of the Munich Alte Pinakothek, and Waagen of the Altes Museum in Berlin had testified that an informative catalogue was necessary, as well as wall labels for each picture. “It appears to the committee,” the *Report* had concluded, “that the most ready and compendious information should be given to the public by fixing its name over every separate school, and, under

every picture, the name, with the time of the birth and death, of the painter. The name also of the master, or the most celebrated pupil, of the artist, might in certain cases be added.⁴² In reality, the keeper, William Seguer, had not seen fit to provide labels, and the official catalogue issued in 1838, though expanded in size, continued to follow the format of the 1824 edition in providing brief descriptions of paintings, their subject matter and provenance, and still listed them numerically rather than by school, as Waagen and the committee had advised. Until the late 1840s the National Gallery's public would therefore continue to be guided by its own enthusiasms, aided perhaps by commercial publications such as the *Handbook to the Public Galleries of Art in and near London, with Catalogues of the Pictures, Accompanied by Critical, Historical, and Biographical Notices, and Copious Indexes to Facilitate Reference* (1842), by Anna Jameson (1794–1860), which listed pictures in the order in which they were hung and discussed their compositions and techniques in an overtly sentimental way. The purpose of painting, for Jameson, was “to raise and improve nature, and to communicate ideas . . . such as without art could not possibly be communicated, whereby mankind is advanced higher in the rational state, and made better, and that in a way easy, expeditious, and delightful.”⁴³

As to the actual experience of visitors in the social mix, the evidence is inevitably contradictory. Henry Gritten's painted view of Trafalgar Square in 1838 suggests it to be a peaceable location with an easy traffic of persons and carriages, even though he has had to adjust the perspective of the southernmost part of the facade of St. Martin's Church to make it function as an ecclesiastical frame for the gallery and hence confirm the visual logic of Nash's urban plan (fig. 10-6). To judge from a drawing of 1840, made inside the gallery by the artist Richard Doyle (1824–1883), the crowd was enthusiastic and

FIGURE 10-6.

Henry C. Gritten
(Australian, 1818–1873),
*View of the National
Gallery and the Royal
Academy*, 1838. Oil on
canvas, 52.1 × 87.6 cm
(20½ × 34½ in.).
London, Williams
and Son



diverse.⁴⁴ It is an impression supported by George Mogridge (1787–1854), who under the pseudonym Old Humphrey noted in a written recollection of 1843, “Nobility came in their coroneted carriages; gentry in their several vehicles; and tradespeople, country folk, young persons, and well-dressed domestics in their holiday clothes, on foot” to inspect the new displays.⁴⁵ A witness before the 1841 Select Committee on National Monuments and Works of Art, John Britton (1771–1857), who had worked for the Marquess of Stafford’s gallery decades before, attested that the “conduct of the public generally in public places [was] . . . considerably improved” in comparison with what it had been fifty years earlier. Questioned specifically about “the mob,” he agreed that they behaved, in the British Museum at least, with “perfect decorum. . . . I have seen them conduct themselves with strict propriety and with laudable curiosity.”⁴⁶ Asked about the class of persons usually seen in the new National Gallery, a friend of the sculptor Francis Chantrey (1781–1841), Allan Cunningham, said that they were “men who are usually called ‘mob’; but they cease to become mob when they get a taste. . . . I saw a great deal of wonder and pleasure. . . . [among] what appeared to me to be shoemakers, masons and joiners.” The assistant keeper, the painter George Saunders Thwaites (1778–1866), affirmed that conduct in the gallery had generally been “quite unexceptionable. . . . quite as satisfactory as we could have wished and expected.”⁴⁷ A certain John Wildsmith was more positive. The working classes not only behaved extremely well; some of them also took “very great interest in the pictures. . . . I have heard remarks. . . . that three fourths of our pictures are not good enough. . . . I think some of our worst pictures are the most liked.” Overall he believed that “interest in the pictures was increasing every day; I notice mechanics come, and they appear to come in order to see the pictures, and not to see the company.” Particularly at holiday times, the crowds appeared to self-regulate, inasmuch as “when the people were tired they went away.”⁴⁸

And yet this social contract seemed to change as the 1840s wore on. Far more attention was paid than previously to the ambience of the gallery and to the information provided therein. Curatorial experiments with green and red wall coverings, by the painter Sir Charles Lock Eastlake (1793–1865), as keeper between 1843 and 1847 and as director from 1855, were among the early initiatives intended to lend vividness to the works of art and assert their individual qualities before the viewer.⁴⁹ A fully reorganized catalogue was published in 1847 by Eastlake’s successor as keeper, the painter Ralph Nicholson Wornum (1812–1877), with extensive entries on the Italian paintings by Eastlake; for the first time the gallery’s paintings were listed by school and period, alongside artists’ biographies and descriptions of their specializations and their relationships with other artists. Clearly indebted to the 1841 edition of Waagen’s *Verzeichniss der Gemälde-Sammlung des königlichen Museums zu Berlin* (Catalogue of the picture collection of the Royal Museum [Altes Museum] in

Berlin), it was the first museum catalogue in England to begin to suggest not only that art had a history but that “progress” and “decline” could be judged, with the Greeks at the start of a tradition, followed by a decline until the Italian Renaissance, a deterioration of painting in the later sixteenth century, the mixed accomplishments of the Northern European schools thereafter, and a further decline in the work of Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792), the Royal Academicians, and Wornum’s own contemporaries.

It is plain to see that this new and often prescriptive managerialism coincided with renewed anxiety about the propriety of the visiting crowd. While Wornum and Eastlake were urging considerations of taste and historical discernment on the viewer, that same viewer seemed to become subject to ever-greater scrutiny and control. “A certain degree of historical knowledge, as regards both the art itself and its criticism, is perhaps indispensable for the due appreciation of some works,” Wornum and Eastlake had said in the preface to their catalogue, “the merit of which, depending on the time and circumstances of their production, is relative. The information thus offered... may sometimes assist in the formation of a correct judgement, which is the basis of a correct taste.”⁵⁰ Meanwhile, the *Report of the Select Committee on the National Gallery* of 1850 gave the first of several anxious accounts of the gallery’s visitors. “The gallery is frequently crowded by large masses of people,” it said, “consisting not merely of those who come for the purpose of seeing the pictures, but of persons having obviously for their object the use of the rooms for wholly different purposes; either for shelter in case of bad weather, or as a place in which children of all ages may recreate and play, and not infrequently as one where food and refreshments may conveniently be taken.”⁵¹ “According to my experience,” Waagen had testified defeatedly, “the lower classes are not capable of appreciating them [works of art], but [only] of enjoying them.”⁵² Mondays were a nadir, explained the painter Thomas Uwins (1782–1857), who had succeeded Eastlake as keeper in 1847, for these were days “when a large number of the lower class of people assemble there, and men and women bring their families of children in arms, and a train of children around them and following them, and they are subject to all the little accidents that happen with children, and which are constantly visible upon the floors of the place.”⁵³ Uwins’s misgivings were considerable:

I have observed a great many things which show that many persons who came, do not come really to see the pictures. On one occasion, I saw a school of boys, I imagine 20, taking their satchels from their backs with their bread and cheese, sitting down and making themselves very comfortable, and eating their luncheon... On another occasion... I saw some people, who seemed to be country people, who had a basket of provisions, and who drew their chairs round and sat down, and seemed to

make themselves very comfortable; they had meat and drink; and when I suggested to them the impropriety of such a proceeding in such a place, they were very good-humoured, and a lady offered me a glass of gin, and wished me to partake of what they had provided. . . . On another occasion, I witnessed what appeared to me to be evidence of anything but a desire to see the pictures: a man and a woman had got their child, teaching its first steps; they were making it run from one place to another, backwards and forwards; on receiving it on one side, they made it run to the other side; it seemed to be just the place that was sought for such an amusement.⁵⁴

Increasingly, the crowd itself could be seen as a danger to the pictures' cleanliness and visibility. The concern of a succession of official reports from 1847 through 1853 was that in order to maximize the ameliorative effects of art, pictures should be properly seen, for which they needed light. But light presupposed the absence of a crowd, or at least of those who were not seriously attending. A second syllogism followed the first. The crowd required ventilation, and ventilation admitted air, but the external atmosphere was too dirty for the pictures, hence the windows would need to be kept closed; in that case, however, the crowd would sweat and exhale foul air, damaging the fine pictures they had come to see.⁵⁵ But if the external atmosphere could not be regulated, the visitors could. As the May 1850 *Report* put it: crowds "add largely to those results which may be supposed to affect the atmosphere of the rooms and the surface of the pictures."⁵⁶ Moreover, visitor-induced dirt was subject to compound increase: "[T]he greater the number of visitors, the greater also will be the quantity of impurity produced within the building from the respiration and perspiration of great numbers of persons."⁵⁷ No less an authority than the chemist Michael Faraday (1791–1867) was called upon to give evidence: "There is a substance which we call ammonia which gains access into the London atmosphere in many ways, arising considerably from some manufacturers, which would help very much either the sulphurous vapour or the miasma from the body, to injure the pictures. . . . The atmosphere [in a crowded gallery] is so charged with miasma and vapour from the crowds as to be liable to injure the pictures."⁵⁸ The question was put to him: "Exactly in proportion as human beings congregate in any one gallery, will be the evil arising from the presence of such human beings?" Faraday replied: "No doubt of it."⁵⁹ Either the galleries were clean, and empty; or they were occupied, in which case the paintings would be defiled.

Something had changed in the contract between reformist ambition, curatorial professionalism, and popular or public experience. A generation before the opening of the National Gallery's new building, two very different forms of pleasure had been taken in displays of paintings—the traditional aristocratic pleasure of beholding valuable paintings in private, and the delights of painted

commercial illusions and street exotica that could be seen in the public space—but with little between the two extremes. Such entertainments as Bullock's Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly or the nearby dioramas, cycloramas, waxworks, and tableaux vivants demonstrated the extent of popular appetite for exhibitions, but by 1838 such things were defunct, or else widely perceived to be commercial rather than fine art.⁶⁰ An Act for Encouraging the Establishment of Museums in Large Towns was passed in 1845, licensing any town of a population of more than ten thousand to use local property taxes to establish an art or science museum, while in other reforms of the recreation and education facilities in Britain are to be found not only opportunities but a new attitude toward the governance of work patterns, leisure, and the use of urban space. The planning, erection, and organization of London's National Gallery between 1824 and the 1850s is inseparable from that larger process, one in which the regulation of urban profusion and the guidance of its moral order were increasingly seen as one.

NOTES

- 1 In 1777 the Radical MP John Wilkes had proposed that Parliament purchase the Houghton collection once owned by Horace Walpole (1717–1797) and then in the possession of his heirs; but the government had turned the opportunity down, and the collection had been purchased by Catherine the Great of Russia (r. 1762–96). In 1799 the art collector Noel Desenfans (1745–1807) had offered the government an old-master collection ready-made for King Stanislaw II Augustus Poniatowski of Poland (r. 1764–95) shortly before his abdication; his condition was that the government provide a proper building for it, but again the offer was rejected, and the pictures went to Dulwich College (Dulwich admitted the public from 1814). The Royal Academy of Arts had turned away a chance to acquire the collection of Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792) and had declined to purchase that of Robert Udney (1722–1802) in 1802. In the same year the government had refused the chance to acquire the collection of the dealer William Buchanan, and the next year, that of Joseph Count Truchsess; both collections had been intended by their owners to contribute to a future national collection of art.
- 2 In a printed catalogue of Stafford's collection, John Britton comments on the marquess's dilemma, brought about by "the ignorance, vulgarity or something worse" of the lower order, and by the "frivolity, affectation and insolence... in a class of lounging persons, who haunt most public places." John Britton, *Marquess of Stafford Collection* (London, 1808), preface, p. v, cited in *Palaces of Art: Art Galleries in Britain, 1790–1990*, edited by Giles Waterfield, exh. cat. (London: Dulwich Picture Gallery, 1991), p. 75.
- 3 See Giles Waterfield, "The Town House as a Gallery of Art," *London Journal* 20, no. 1 (1995), pp. 58–59.
- 4 John Carey, *A Descriptive Catalogue of a Collection of Paintings by British Artists in the Possession of Sir John Fleming Leicester, Bart* (London, 1819), p. x.
- 5 Lord Liverpool, Letter of rejection to Sir John Leicester, cited in Gregory Martin, "The Founding of the National Gallery in London," pt. 1, *The Connoisseur*, April 1974, p. 285; pt. 2, *The Connoisseur*, May 1974, p. 26.
- 6 *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Pictures Now Exhibiting at the British Institution* (London, 1815); a second *Catalogue Raisonné* was published in 1816. See also Felicity Owen and David Blayney Brown, *Collector of Genius: A Life of Sir George Beaumont* (New Haven, 1988), p. 186. The British Institution for Promoting the Fine Arts in the United Kingdom was established from private subscription in 1805 and staged regular exhibitions from 1806 at 52 Pall Mall; its stated mission was "to raise the standard of morality and patriotism; to attract the homage and respect of foreign nations, and to produce those intellectual and virtuous feelings, which are perpetually alive to the welfare and glory of the country." Privately organized and socially elitist, it acted as a showcase for old-master paintings from country-house collections; in the words of the *Times*, it was the "favourite lounge of the nobility and gentry." See Paul Fullerton, "Patronage and Pedagogy: The British Institution in the Early Nineteenth Century," *Art History* 5, no. 1 (March 1982), pp. 59–72.
- 7 Beaumont's second condition was expressed in an artful bribe: "Buy Mr Angerstein's collection and I will give you mine." George Beaumont, Letter to George Agar-Ellis, dated January 27, 1824, cited in Owen and Brown, *Collector of Genius* (note 6), p. 211.
- 8 Sir James Mackintosh, House of Commons debate, June 29, 1823, *Parliamentary Debates*, n.s., vol. 9, col. 1122.
- 9 Alexander Baring, House of Commons debate, July 1, 1823, *Parliamentary Debates*, n.s., vol. 9, col. 1360.
- 10 George Agar-Ellis, House of Commons debate, July 1, 1823, *Parliamentary Debates*, n.s., vol. 9, col. 1359.
- 11 Baring, House of Commons debate, July 1, 1823 (note 9).
- 12 Frederick Robinson, House of Commons debate, February 23, 1824, *Parliamentary Debates*, n.s., vol. 10, col. 316.
- 13 The Patriotic Fund had been established at Lloyd's in 1802 to raise donations "for the Encouragement and Relief of those who may be engaged in the Defense of the Country and who may suffer in the Common Cause... so that the Mite of the Labourer, combining with the Munificent Donations of the Noble and Wealthy shall be the best pledge of our Unanimity... and shall impress on the minds of our Enemies the appalling conviction—THAT THE ENERGIES OF THIS GREAT EMPIRE ARE IRRESISTABLE, AS ITS RESOURCES ARE INCALCULABLE." See Christopher Lloyd, "John Julius Angerstein, 1732–1823," *History Today* 16, no. 6 (June 1966), p. 375.
- 14 *Times* (London), October 3, 1803.
- 15 Committee of Supply, House of Commons, April 2, 1824, *Parliamentary Debates*, 2nd ser., vol. 9, cols. 101–2.
- 16 The failure of the British monarchy to endow the developing National Gallery throughout the rest of the nineteenth century—not to mention the twentieth—is given an apologetic gloss by Jonathan Conlin, who traces it to "the shadow of Charles I and 1649"—Charles I had been executed in 1649 and had his goods sold by act of Parliament. See Conlin, *The Nation's Mantelpiece: A History of the National Gallery* (London, 2006), p. 5. At the end of the 1820s Liverpool's successor, George Canning, tried to rename the Pall Mall institution the Royal Gallery of Pictures in order to flatter the king, but the gimmick failed. Despite an attempt to impose a compromise title—the Royal National Gallery—it was a relief to many that the name National Gallery was brought back into service after George IV's death in 1830. See Gregory Martin, "The Founding of the National Gallery in London," pt. 4, *The Connoisseur*, July 1974, p. 201.
- 17 Committee of Supply, House of Commons, April 2, 1824 (note 15). There were also advantages to tourism and trade. Agar-Ellis said that one consisted "in the increased

- affluence of foreigners of all nations to our metropolis, some of whom will become patrons of British art, and all of whom must contribute to the prosperity and riches of the country, by spending a portion of their revenues in it. That this will be the case, we may venture to predict from our experiences of the numbers of travelers who visit the various continental towns which are so fortunate as to possess public collections of pictures. The gallery at Dresden must have repaid to the country many times over what its formation cost Augustus the Third." For Agar-Ellis's full statement, see the unsigned "Catalogue of the Celebrated Collection of Pictures of the Late John Julius Angerstein, Esq," *Quarterly Review* 31, no. 61 (December 1824), pp. 210–15; the quotations here are from p. 210 and p. 213.
- 18 "Catalogue of the Celebrated Collection" (note 17), p. 213.
- 19 Treasury Minute, March 23, 1824.
- 20 The National Gallery's early catalogues are discussed in Giles Waterfield, "The Origins of the Early Picture Gallery Catalogue in Europe, and Its Manifestation in Victorian Britain," in *Art in Museums*, edited by Susan Pearce (London, 1995), pp. 42–73.
- 21 From the original title of the Mackenzie watercolor, according to *The Royal Watercolour Society: The First Fifty Years, 1805–1855* (Woodbridge, 1992), p. 183. Also purchased by the Treasury by that date were Correggio's *Madonna of the Basket* (ca. 1524) and Annibale Carracci's *Christ Appearing to Saint Peter on the Appian Way* (1601–2).
- 22 Agar-Ellis claimed that "[i]n the five months during which the Angerstein collection of pictures has been the property of the public, it has been visited by twenty-four thousand individuals." "Catalogue of the Celebrated Collection" (note 17), p. 214.
- 23 Hazlitt continues: "We enter into the minds of Raphael, of Titian, of Poussin, of the Carracci, and look at nature with their eyes; we live in time past, and seem identified with the permanent form of things. . . . [W]hat signify the hubbub, the shifting scenery, the *fantoccini* figures, the folly, the idle fashions without, when compared with the solitude, the silence, the speaking looks, the unfading forms within?" William Hazlitt, "Mr Angerstein's Gallery," in *Sketches of the Principal Picture-Galleries in England* . . . (London, 1824), reprinted in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, edited by P. P. Howe (London, 1830), vol. 10, pp. 1–82; the quotations here are from p. 7.
- 24 *Hamlet*, act 3, scene 4, in which the despairing prince eulogizes the dead king, comparing him to his treacherous successor.
- 25 These figures are from E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541–1871: A Reconstruction* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), p. 103, and Michalina Vaughan and Margaret Scotford Archer, *Social Conflict and Educational Change in England and France, 1789–1848* (Cambridge, 1971), p. 105.
- 26 The moderate MP for Horsham, Nicholas Ridley-Colbourne, proposed that the pictures be moved into the king's property at Dysart House, at that time still the home of the royal collection, shortly to be rehoused at Buckingham Palace, by now being extravagantly refurbished at public expense. Ridley-Colbourne and Robert Peel, House of Commons debate, April 13, 1832, *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd ser., vol. 12, cols. 467, 468.
- 27 Lord Ashley, April 13, 1832, debate on Supply: Miscellaneous Estimates, *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd ser., vol. 12, col. 469.
- 28 Frederick Trench, Joseph Hume, Gally Knight, April 13, 1832, House of Commons, *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd ser., vol. 12, cols. 468–71.
- 29 Anthony Trollope, cited in Gregory Martin, "The Founding of the National Gallery in London," pt. 7, *The Connoisseur*, October 1974, p. 113; Gustav Friedrich Waagen, *Works of Art and Artists in England* (London, 1838), vol. 1, p. 183.
- 30 Sir Robert Peel, July 23, 1832, debate on Supply: National Gallery, *Hansard* 14, col. 645; see also Martin, "Founding of the National Gallery," pt. 7 (note 29), p. 113.
- 31 A guidebook of 1820 had divided the metropolis into three sections: the City, "the great centre of trade and commerce occupied by the superb establishments of the East-India, Bank and other trading companies, and the warehouses, shops and dwellings of merchants and tradesmen"; the West, or "Court end of the Town . . . the most splendid and fashionable district," comprising Parliament, the Law Courts, the Royal Palaces, and ". . . the town-residencies of the principal Nobility and Gentry" around Charing Cross, extending to Hyde Park Corner, Paddington, and Regent's Park and including "the most fashionable shops" in Piccadilly, Old and New Bond Streets, and Oxford Street; and "the East end of the Town," which was devoted "to commerce, to ship-building, and to every collateral branch connected with merchandise." See *London and Its Environs; or, The General Ambulator, and the Pocket Companion for the Tour of the Metropolis and Its Vicinity, within the Circuit of Twenty-Five Miles*, 12th ed. (London, 1820), p. 35.
- 32 John Nash, in *First Report to His Majesty's Commissioner for Woods, Forests and Land Revenues* (London, 1812), p. 90, cited in Rodney Mace, *Trafalgar Square: Emblem of Empire* (London, 1976), p. 32.
- 33 The King's Stable, which faced down Whitehall, would be stripped of its contents and pressed into service as a National Repository—a short-lived collection of instructional objects inspired by the new Mechanics' Institute movement; it was demolished in 1831 and finally closed, as a commercial failure, in 1835. The building was inscribed *Giorgio Secundo Rego MDCCXXXII National Repository for the Exhibition of Specimens of a New And Improved Production of the Artisans and Manufacturers of the United Kingdom [Pidcocks] Menagerie now Exeter Change*. The space was briefly given over to the ninety-three-foot skeleton of a whale brought ashore at Ostend, erected as an entertainment in the center of what was soon to become Trafalgar Square: the public could climb

- up to a platform inside the rib cage and listen to a twenty-four-piece orchestra while reading copies of Lacépède's *Natural History* and contribute puns or witticisms to the guest book. See Richard D. Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), p. 305.
- 34 Pall Mall had in any case to be vacated, since "the principal room is above the offices of the keeper, where the accidental ignition of the chimney flue would subject the whole to irremediable perdition." See William Wilkins, *A Letter to Lord Viscount Goderich, on the Patronage of the Arts by the English Government* (London, 1832), pp. 14–15, 18, 42.
- 35 Charles Dickens, *Sketches by Boz* (1836–37; repr., Oxford, 1957), p. 184. For the character of poverty in central London, see Colin Trodd, "Formations of Cultural Identity: Art Criticism, the National Gallery and the Royal Academy, 1820–1863" (DPhil, University of Sussex, 1992), chaps. 3 and 4.
- 36 7 Geo. 4, c. 77; Mace, *Trafalgar Square* (note 32), p. 42.
- 37 Other public discussion concerned itself with the design details of Wilkins's facade, the sight lines from the west toward the portico of St. Martin's, and the exact line of the gallery facade when viewed from Whitehall, as well as the new gallery's proximity to the workhouse building just behind. These matters are well summarized in R. W. Liscombe, *William Wilkins, 1778–1839* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 180–209.
- 38 *Report from the Select Committee on Drunkenness* (London, 1834), p. viii. In many parts of the country, progress in implementing these measures was slow. Peter Bailey goes so far as to suggest that "recreational reforms failed to command any real priority with the legislators"; Parliament frequently took the view that education and morality "diffused downwards from the upper class(es)," to cite the words of one parliamentary speaker. Peter Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England: Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control, 1830–1885* (London, 1978), p. 39; *Hansard* 27, May 2, 1835.
- 39 *Report of the House of Commons Select Committee on Arts and Their Connexion with Manufactures, 1835–6* (London, 1836), *Minutes of Evidence*, 1835 session, p. 133, para. 1615.
- 40 1835–36 *Report* (note 39), p. v.
- 41 1835–36 *Report* (note 39), pp. iii, v, x.
- 42 1835–36 *Report* (note 39), p. x.
- 43 Anna Jameson, *Handbook to the Public Galleries of Art in and near London, with Catalogues of the Pictures, Accompanied by Critical, Historical, and Biographical Notices, and Copious Indexes to Facilitate Reference* (London, 1842), p. xxxiv. This and alternative historiographical approaches in the early catalogues are discussed in Christopher Whitehead, *The Public Art Museum in Nineteenth Century Britain: The Development of the National Gallery* (Aldershot, 2005), pp. 21–37.
- 44 Doyle's drawing is reproduced in Brandon Taylor, *Art for the Nation: Exhibitions and the London Public, 1747–2001* (Manchester, 1999), p. 54, fig. 21.
- 45 [George Mogridge], *Old Humphrey's Walks in London and Its Neighbourhood* (London, 1843), p. 70.
- 46 Evidence of John Britton, *Report of the Select Committee on National Monuments and Works of Art* (London, 1841), p. vii.
- 47 Evidence of Lt. Col. George Thwaites, *Minutes of Evidence*, 1841, p. 133, para. 2583.
- 48 Evidence of John Wildsmith, *Minutes of Evidence*, 1841, p. 138, para. 2672; p. 136, paras. 2642 and 2645.
- 49 For extensive reflection on the relation between hanging styles and curatorial ambition, see Charlotte Klonk, *Spaces of Experience: Art Gallery Interiors from 1800 to 2000* (New Haven, 2009), and Brandon Taylor, "Here, Too, Confusion Reigns," review of *Spaces of Experience: Art Gallery Interiors from 1800 to 2000*, by Charlotte Klonk, *Oxford Art Journal* 33, no. 2 (2010), pp. 249–52.
- 50 [Ralph Nicholson] Wornum, *Descriptive and Historical Catalogue of the Pictures in the National Gallery, with Biographical Notices of the Painters*, revised by C. L. Eastlake (London, 1847), pp. 3–4.
- 51 *Report of the Select Committee on the National Gallery* (London, 1850), p. iv.
- 52 Evidence of Dr. Waagen, *Minutes of Evidence*, 1850, p. 40, para. 607.
- 53 Evidence of Thomas Uwins, *Minutes of Evidence*, 1850, p. 6, para. 83.
- 54 Evidence of Uwins (note 53), pp. 5–6, para. 82.
- 55 As the appendix to the May 1850 *Report* (note 51) stated despairingly, ventilation "cannot be effected without the introduction of smoke and dust produced externally" (p. 68).
- 56 May 1850 *Report* (note 51), p. 68.
- 57 The *Report's* terminology did not need to be chemically exact: "This impure mass of animal and ammoniacal vapour, of which it is difficult and perhaps unnecessary to distinguish and define the component parts, is peculiarly liable to be condensed on the surface of pictures," leading to dullness and a loss of "brilliancy." May 1850 *Report* (note 51), p. 68.
- 58 Evidence of Michael Faraday, *Minutes of Evidence*, 1850, p. 46, para. 681; p. 44, para. 657. "The sulphurous vapours are in abundance in the atmosphere of London," Faraday continued hopefully, "they are everywhere present, and I have no doubt that even in this room they could be proved to be present. . . . [T]here are also miasmata, or matters which arise in perspiration, etc, which, when they are decomposed by heat or otherwise, at all events give ammonia and sulphurous productions, and which, therefore, must exist in some form of sulphuretted vapour in their transit or in their ordinary state; we know not always, perhaps, what the actual condition of the organic miasma which arises is." *Minutes of Evidence*, 1850, p. 45, para. 666.
- 59 Evidence of Faraday (note 58), p. 47, para. 690. Faraday's solution, which had major consequences for the way pictures were seen and by whom, was that glass should

be placed over the front of the picture, and tinfoil over the back. The selective glazing of pictures at the National Gallery after 1850 did not meet with unanimous approval, and further discussion on cleaning and varnishing techniques ran into similar difficulties: all posed dangers to the ideal visibility of the pictures, either through removing the artist's original work or through adding something he never did. Additional correspondences between the new curatorial arrangements at Trafalgar Square and contemporary programs of educational and sanitary reform are to be found in Taylor, *Art for the Nation* (note 44), pp. 46–66.

60 For a survey, see Altick, *Shows of London* (note 33).