

DISCOURSES ON ART

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He who would have you believe that he is waiting for the inspiration of Genius, is in reality at a loss how to begin, and is at last delivered of his monsters, with difficulty and pain.

A Stroke at Mortimer!

Pages 36, 37

He regards all Nature with a view to his profession; and combines her beauties, or corrects her defects. . . .

The well-grounded painter . . . is contented that all shall be as great as himself, who have undergone the same fatigue . . .

The Man who asserts that there is no Such Thing as Softness in Art, & that every thing in Art is Definite & Determinate, has not been told this by Practise, but by Inspiration & Vision, because Vision is Determinate & Perfect, & he Copies That without Fatigue, Every thing being Definite & determinate. Softness is Produced alone by Comparative Strength & Weakness in the Marking out of the Forms. I say These Principles could never be found out by the Study of Nature without Con- or Innate Science.

DISCOURSE III

Page 40 [facing Discourse III]

A work of Genius is a Work "Not to be obtain'd by the Invocation of Memory & her Syren Daughters, but by Devout prayer to that Eternal Spirit, who can enrich with all utterance & knowledge & sends out his Seraphim with the hallowed fire of his Altar to touch & purify the lips of whom he pleases." MILTON. The following [Lecture *del.*] Discourse is particularly Interesting to Block heads, as it Endeavours to prove That there is No such thing as Inspiration & that any Man of a plain Understanding may by Thieving from Others become a Mich. Angelo.

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The wish of the genuine painter must be more extensive: instead of endeavouring to amuse mankind with the minute neatness of his imitations, he must endeavour to improve them by the grandeur of his ideas.

Without Minute Neatness of Execution The Sublime cannot Exist! Grandeur of Ideas is founded on Precision of Ideas.

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The Moderns are not less convinced than the Ancients of this superior power existing in the art; nor less sensible of its effects.

I wish that this was True.

Such is the warmth with which both the Ancients and Moderns speak of this divine principle of the art;

And such is the Coldness with which Reynolds speaks! And such is his Enmity.

but, as I have formerly observed

Enthusiastic Admiration is begins to Degrade, to Deny

Though a student by such pra mind, and perceives there noth others have been favoured.

The Man who on Examine not to dare to be an Artist; of Evil Demons.

He never travelled to heaven r qualifications than what mere c

The Man who never in his Artists who are above a p President of Fools.

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It is Evident that Reynolds to this, he calls all others to do with the Art of Pair

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. . . most people err, not so r knowing what object to pursue

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This great ideal perfection a earth.

A Lie!

They are about us, and upon e

A Lie!

But the power of discovering and uncommon, can be acquit

A Lie!

and the whole beauty of tl singular forms, local customs

A Folly! Singular & Par

APPENDIX I

but, as I have formerly observed, enthusiastick admiration seldom promotes knowledge.

Enthusiastic Admiration is the first Principle of Knowledge & its last. Now he begins to Degrade, to Deny & to Mock.

Though a student by such praise may have his attention roused . . . *He examines* his own mind, and perceives there nothing of that divine inspiration, with which, he is told, so many others have been favoured.

The Man who on Examining his own Mind finds nothing of Inspiration ought not to dare to be an Artist; he is a Fool & a Cunning Knaves suited to the Purposes of Evil Demons.

He never travelled to heaven to gather new ideas; and he finds himself possessed of no other qualifications than what mere common observation and a plain understanding can confer.

The Man who never in his Mind & Thoughts travel'd to Heaven Is No Artist. Artists who are above a plain Understanding are Mock'd & Destroy'd by this President of Fools.

But on this, as upon many other occasions, we ought to distinguish how much is to be given to enthusiasm, and how much to reason . . . taking care . . . not to lose in terms of vague admiration, that solidity and truth of principle, upon which alone we can reason, and may be enabled to practise.

It is Evident that Reynolds Wish'd none but Fools to be in the Arts & in order to this, he calls all others Vague Enthusiasts or Madmen. What has Reasoning to do with the Art of Painting?

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. . . most people err, not so much from want of capacity to find their object, as from not knowing what object to pursue.

The Man who does not know what Object to Pursue is an Idiot.

This great ideal perfection and beauty are not to be sought in the heavens, but upon the earth.

A Lie!

They are about us, and upon every side of us.

A Lie!

But the power of discovering what is deformed in nature, or in other words, what is particular and uncommon, can be acquired only by experience;

A Lie!

and the whole beauty of the art consists, in my opinion, in being able to get above all singular forms, local customs, particularities, and details of every kind.

A Folly! Singular & Particular Detail is the Foundation of the Sublime.

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All the objects which are exhibited to our view by nature, upon close examination will be found to have their blemishes and defects. The most beautiful forms have something about them like weakness, minuteness, or imperfection.

Minuteness is their whole Beauty.

Pages 44-45

This long laborious comparison should be the first study of the painter, who aims at the greatest style . . . he corrects nature by herself . . . This idea of the perfect state of nature, which the Artist calls the Ideal Beauty, is the great leading principle by which works of genius are conducted

Knowledge of Ideal Beauty is Not to be Acquired. It is Born with us. Innate Ideas are in Every Man, Born with him; they are truly Himself. The Man who says that we have No Innate Ideas must be a Fool & Knave, Having No Conscience or Innate Science.

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Thus it is from a reiterated experience and a close comparison of the objects in nature, that an artist becomes possessed of the idea of that central form . . . from which every deviation is deformity.

One Central Form composed of all other Forms being Granted, it does not therefore follow that all other Forms are Deformity.

All Forms are Perfect in the Poet's Mind, but these are not Abstracted nor Compounded from Nature, but are from Imagination.

Page 46

Even the great Bacon treats with ridicule the idea of confining proportion to rules, or of producing beauty by selection.

The Great Bacon—he is Call'd: I call him the Little Bacon—says that Every thing must be done by Experiment; his first principle is Unbelief, and yet here he says that Art must be produc'd Without such Method. He is Like Sr Joshua, full of Self-Contradiction & Knavery.

There is a rule, obtained out of general nature, to contradict which is to fall into deformity.

What is General Nature? is there Such a Thing? what is General Knowledge? is there such a Thing? Strictly Speaking All Knowledge is Particular.

To the principle I have laid down, that the idea of beauty in each species of beings is an invariable one, it may be objected, that in every particular species there are various central forms, which are separate and distinct from each other, and yet are each undeniably beautiful.

Here he loses sight of A Central Form & Gets into Many Central Forms.

Page 47

It is true, indeed, that these figures are each perfect in their kind, though of different characters and proportions; but still none of them is the representation of an individual, but of a class.

Every Class is Individual.

Thus, though the forms of child-
hood, and a common form
all peculiarities.

There is no End to the F
belonging to Every Class.

. . . though the most perfect fo
ideal . . . yet the highest perfecti
It is not in the Hercules, nor in

Here he comes again to his t

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What Folly!

Pages 48-49

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Generalizing in Every thi
Fool.

Page 51

Albert Durer, as Vasari has j
painters of his age . . . had he l
so well understood and practis

What does this mean, "If
Albert Durer Is, Not wou
& Gothic Buildings & no
But Genius is Always Ab

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I should be sorry, if what is l
a careless or indetermin'd n
accidental discriminations of
forms of things.

Here he is for Determinat
Distinct General Form C

APPENDIX I

Thus, though the forms of childhood and age differ exceedingly, there is a common form in childhood, and a common form in age, which is the more perfect, as it is more remote from all peculiarities.

There is no End to the Follies of this Man. Childhood & Age are Equally belonging to Every Class.

... though the most perfect forms of each of the general divisions of the human figure are ideal ... yet the highest perfection of the human figure is not to be found in any one of them. It is not in the Hercules, nor in the Gladiator, nor in the Apollo.

Here he comes again to his Central Form.

There is, likewise, a kind of symmetry, or proportion, which may properly be said to belong to deformity. A figure lean or corpulent, tall or short, though deviating from beauty, may still have a certain union of the various parts.

The Symmetry of Deformity is a Pretty Foolery. Can any Man who Thinks Talk so? Leanness or Fatness is not Deformity, but Reynolds thought Character Itself Extravagance & Deformity. Age & Youth are not Classes, but [Situations *del.*] Properties of Each Class; so are Leanness & Fatness.

When the Artist has by diligent attention acquired a clear and distinct idea of beauty and symmetry; when he has reduced the variety of nature to the abstract idea ...

What Folly!

Pages 48-49

... the painter ... must divest himself of all prejudices in favour of his age or country; he must disregard all local and temporary ornaments, and look only on those general habits, which are every where and always the same ...

Generalizing in Every thing, the Man would soon be a Fool, but a Cunning Fool.

Page 51

Albert Durer, as Vasari has justly remarked, would, probably, have been one of the first painters of his age ... had he been initiated into those great principles of the art, which were so well understood and practised by his contemporaries in Italy.

What does this mean, "*Would have been*" one of the first Painters of his Age? Albert Durer *Is*, Not would have been. Besides, let them look at Gothic Figures & Gothic Buildings & not talk of Dark Ages or of any Age. Ages are all Equal. But Genius is Always Above The Age.

Page 52

I should be sorry, if what is here recommended, should be at all understood to countenance a careless or indetermined manner of painting. For though the painter is to overlook the accidental discriminations of nature, he is to exhibit distinctly, and with precision, the general forms of things.

Here he is for Determinate & yet for Indeterminate.
Distinct General Form Cannot Exist. Distinctness is Particular, Not General.

DISCOURSES ON ART

A firm and determined outline is one of the characteristics of the great style in painting; and let me add, that he who possesses the knowledge of the exact form which every part of nature ought to have, will be fond of expressing that knowledge with correctness and precision in all his works.

A Noble Sentence!

Here is a Sentence, Which overthrows all his Book.

Page 53

To conclude; I have endeavoured to reduce the idea of beauty to general principles.

[Sir Joshua proves *del.*] that Bacon's Philosophy makes both Statesmen & Artists Fools & Knaves.

DISCOURSE IV

Page 56 [*facing Discourse IV*]

The Two Following Discourses are Particularly Calculated for the Setting Ignorant & Vulgar Artists as Models of Execution in Art. Let him who will, follow such advice. I will not. I know that The Man's Execution is as his Conception & No Better.

Page 57

The value and rank of every art is in proportion to the mental labour employed in it, or the mental pleasure produced by it.

Why does he not always allow This?

I have formerly observed that perfect form is produced by leaving out particularities, and retaining only general ideas...

General Ideas again!

Invention in Painting does not imply the invention of the Subject; for that is commonly supplied by the Poet or Historian.

All but Names of Persons & Places is Invention both in Poetry & Painting.

Page 58

However, the usual and most dangerous error is on the side of minuteness, and therefore I think caution most necessary where most have failed.

Here is Nonsense!

The general idea constitutes real excellence. All smaller things, however perfect in their way, are to be sacrificed without mercy to the greater.

Sacrifice the Parts, What becomes of the Whole?

Page 59

Even in portraits, the grace, general air, than in observing t

How ignorant!

Page 60

A painter of portraits retains t shewing his actions.

If he does not shew the Me

He cannot make his hero talk reason he ought to be well st dignity of appearance in real lif

Here he allows an Analysis

Pages 61-62

Certainly, nothing can be more colours which are seen in the effect of grandeur which was i forcibly, from there not being effect from the sudden and stro

These are Fine & Just Noti

Page 62

In the same manner as the histo does he debase his conceptions t

Excellent Remarks!

Carlo Maratti was of opinion, t even that of drawing the human

I do not believe that Carlo the Drapery is formed alone

Page 63

Though I can by no means all schools of painting, they acco elegance is their principal objec tice is useful only to its proper er

They accomplish'd Nothing

Pages 63-64

[To a question] on the conduct of art . . . represented the prin ornament of Painter, there would I