



ELEVATION of the **ROYAL HIBERNIAN ACADEMY.**

An academy for living artists and its school in the 1830s and 1840s

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SINCE THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE, AND ESPECIALLY SINCE THE FOUNDATION OF THE French Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in 1648, academies were seen in the art world of the Enlightenment as innovative and modern, one of the official establishments of a modern state and deserving of support by the monarch. They emerged in contrast to the late medieval guilds of St Luke (patron saint of painters). Those guilds, such as the one in Dublin in the eighteenth century, contained painters of portraits, heraldic, shop-sign and coach painters, as well as other decorators. The approval and regulation of skill was their primary aim. Independent of such organisations, wealthy aristocratic patrons in Ireland in the eighteenth century commissioned portraits and landscapes from Dublin artists, but this was a narrow world of individual commissions dependent on carefully cultivated contacts by artists with an elite of patrons. In the early nineteenth century, with the emergence of a modern commercial and professional society came the growth of its corporate institutions, like colleges, hospitals, clubs, religious, professional, commercial and legal bodies. In addition to commissioned portraiture, there was an emerging open market for modern art such as landscape, genre and still life as distinct from history painting as understood in the Renaissance tradition. From the point of view of artists, there was a need to display painted portraits, miniatures and busts to attract future commissions from individuals and corporations, since portraiture was the major source of income for most. In France and Britain in the late eighteenth century, this market for the work of living artists, as distinct from Old Masters, sustained the regular exhibitions of the Salon in the palace of the Louvre and the Royal Academy summer exhibitions in Somerset House.

In the modern state there was a need to educate painters and sculptors as an enlightened cultural aspiration, as well as to facilitate the practical requirements of patrons. The skills of painting, modelling and carving, formerly the province of the guilds, were nor-

1 – Francis Johnston, Elevation of the Royal Hibernian Academy
(courtesy Irish Architectural Archive)

mally acquired in the private studios and workshops of practitioners with established reputations. However, the Renaissance tradition stressed the intellectual content of painting and sculpture as in literature. Artists and connoisseurs began to write biographies and theoretical texts about art, which accompanied the growth of an interest in collecting the Old Masters and antique sculpture. Such texts and collections gave modern artists a sense of the classical tradition going back to antiquity, and they could position themselves in relation to that. There was also the issue of social status. Artists saw themselves increasingly as gentlemen, like men of letters, with their own professional identity, and sought to set up societies to represent this professional identity. Royal patronage and support by the state gave the seal of official approval to the profession of painters and sculptors.

Artists in the eighteenth century wanted freedom from guild restrictions and from control by connoisseurs. They did not wish to be seen as tradesmen or as employees tied to an aristocrat or to a society of connoisseurs that defined what they could do. Artists wanted autonomy to direct their own organisations, to hold exhibitions of their own work and to run their own fine art school. They needed adequate accommodation to provide this. This assertion of independence depended upon either state patronage or a responsive market for their work which would fund their organisation. The role of the state was central in the establishment of academies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹

The Royal Academy (RA), founded in 1768 and inspired by the French Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture, created a self-governing corporation of artists under royal patronage. This royal association gave it the highest social credentials, which was crucial in attracting wealthy and important patrons. The RA gave status to all the artists elected to membership and it endorsed their work publicly through the annual group exhibitions held in a gallery at Somerset House under royal patronage, which attracted fashionable support and became a key date in the social calendar. As an educational institution, the Royal Academy maintained an advanced school of antique drawing as well as a school of life drawing and painting. The Royal Academy was thus a modern professional and commercial organisation, free from outside control, apart from a minimal royal oversight. It provided a market for living art. It aimed to 'elevate public taste' and to diffuse Renaissance ideals of art in its studio teaching programme and lectures. Theoretically this was the position, but in fact the commercial dimension, such as the practice of portraiture for fashionable society, predominated.²

The main appeal of an academy for a young aspirant artist was that it provided a school of drawing, painting and modelling where teaching was by artist members of the academy whose work had already received public recognition. It was not simply a class conducted by independent drawing masters. For members and other artists, its annual exhibitions provided a method of offering a wide range of modern work for sale and establishing a reputation. Many of the exhibits at the Royal Academy exhibitions were commissioned portraits not for sale, but still essential advertisements of what an artist could provide. Press reviews became increasingly important, disseminating the achievements of the exhibitors and inducing the public, and especially art patrons, to attend,

thereby increasing admission ticket money and sales. Large dramatic subjects could appeal to aristocratic taste as embellishments for a mansion in town or country. Smaller landscapes, still life paintings and anecdotal subjects would have a broader appeal to the upper middle class. The diversity of art responded to a diversity of social class and taste. Landscapes and portraits in watercolours were less costly than oils. Underpinning demand was economic prosperity, which existed in Paris and London but was problematic in nineteenth-century Ireland.

Dublin-based artists looked to London for what they wanted to achieve in Dublin. An exhibiting organisation, the Society of Artists of Ireland, was established in 1764 on the model of the Society of Artists of Great Britain of 1761 (with its charter granted in 1765). However, it was the foundation of the Royal Academy in 1768 that set the benchmark for Irish artists. Several of them, such as Nathaniel Hone, James Barry, George Barret, Matthew William Peters, Martin Archer Shee (president of the RA from 1830 to 1850), Daniel Maclise and John Henry Foley, became members. In order to control their own exhibition space, the Society of Artists of Ireland in 1766 built an octagonal, top-lit art gallery in South William Street (which still exists, owned by Dublin City Council, and designated, after renovation, as the home of the Irish Georgian Society). However, as they were unable to cover its building costs, despite a parliamentary grant, they lost control of the gallery and ceased to exhibit there after 1780. Mainly as a result of this collapse, regular exhibitions of modern art did not continue in Dublin in the late eighteenth century. In 1801, 1802 and 1803 the government granted a group of Dublin artists the use of the former House of Lords in the old parliament house. When the Dublin Society built its headquarters in Hawkins Street it allowed the artists to exhibit regularly in its fine large exhibition room in the early years of the nineteenth century. But when the society bought Leinster House as its new headquarters in 1815, and planned to sell its former house in Hawkins Street, the Dublin artists had to look for a permanent gallery and establish an organisation with a royal charter to support their social status and identity. The Dublin Society's former house was subsequently replaced by the Theatre Royal and later by Hawkins House.³

Publicly accessible drawing classes, sometimes referred to as 'academies', were set up in London before the Royal Academy. In Ireland, Robert West's drawing school and the subsequent Dublin Society Drawing Schools from 1750 pioneered visual arts education in the city. There was no formal school of painting in Ireland in the early nineteenth century. The Dublin Society's four drawing schools of figure, landscape and ornament, architecture, and modelling worked at an elementary level with boys in their teens. Students copied Old Master drawings, engravings of canonical paintings and plaster casts of the antique, but there was no life painting or copying of paintings in oil. For these opportunities, budding artists had to travel to the RA schools in London. It is worth noting that several of the masters of the Dublin Society's Drawing Schools – Robert L. West, H.A. Baker and J. Smyth – subsequently became members of the Royal Hibernian Academy (RHA).⁴

In many of the cities of the industrial north of England and Scotland, in the years immediately after the conclusion of the Napoleonic wars, societies were established by artists and connoisseurs to hold exhibitions of living art as well as exhibitions of Old Masters.⁵ The British Institution led the way in 1805, followed in 1813 by the Royal Irish Institution, whose main interest was to hold loan exhibitions of Old Masters. The movement to form public collections of the Old Masters was distinct from the exhibition interests of living artists. The Cork Society for the Promotion of the Fine Arts, which held exhibitions of the work of living artists as well as the Old Masters, was founded in 1816. It was followed in 1818 by the opening of a drawing school based on the collection of plaster casts made in Rome under Antonio Canova's direction and presented by Pope Pius VII to the Prince Regent, and thereafter to Cork. This, however, like the Dublin Society Drawing Schools, was not a school of painting. In Cork, Daniel Maclise, who was one of the first students, moved to the RA schools to study painting, while John Hogan moved to Rome to continue his studies in sculpture.

From 1820, a group of Dublin artists began to agitate for the establishment of an academy of arts with a royal charter. Unlike England, the artists did not have direct access to the King, and had to apply by the orthodox route to the Chief Secretary in Dublin Castle, head of the United Kingdom government in Ireland. It is important to note that, while the initiative came from a group of Irish artists, it was only the monarch and government that could constitute a royal academy. The formal leaders of the group of Irish artists were William Ashford, Thomas Sautelle Roberts, both landscape painters, and William Cuming, portrait painter. The driving force was Thomas Mulvany who had been a fellow student of Martin Archer Shee in the Dublin Society schools. Mulvany prevailed upon Shee, then well established at the RA, to get the support of Sir Thomas Lawrence, president of the RA, for the Irish initiative. Mulvany advised Lawrence of a short list of future members for an Irish academy of arts.⁶

To generate support among the public and from government for the founding of a royal academy of artists in Ireland, the promoters circulated, in 1820, *A Brief Account of the Intended Academy of Fine Arts to be Established in Dublin by Royal Charter*. The academy was to be modelled on the RA. A school was to be established with a course of study to cover 'Drawing from the Antique, from the living figure, together with lectures on Anatomy, Painting, Sculpture, Perspective and Architecture'. However, in this prospectus there was no mention of the need to appoint professors, which indicated a lack of appreciation of how its ambitions were to be realised. This lack of stated theoretical aims sets it apart from the intellectual character of the French Royal Academy, which was the European model for all subsequent academies of art. By this date, even the RA organised lectures by its professors, which were published in book form, thus setting out its own theoretical perspectives.

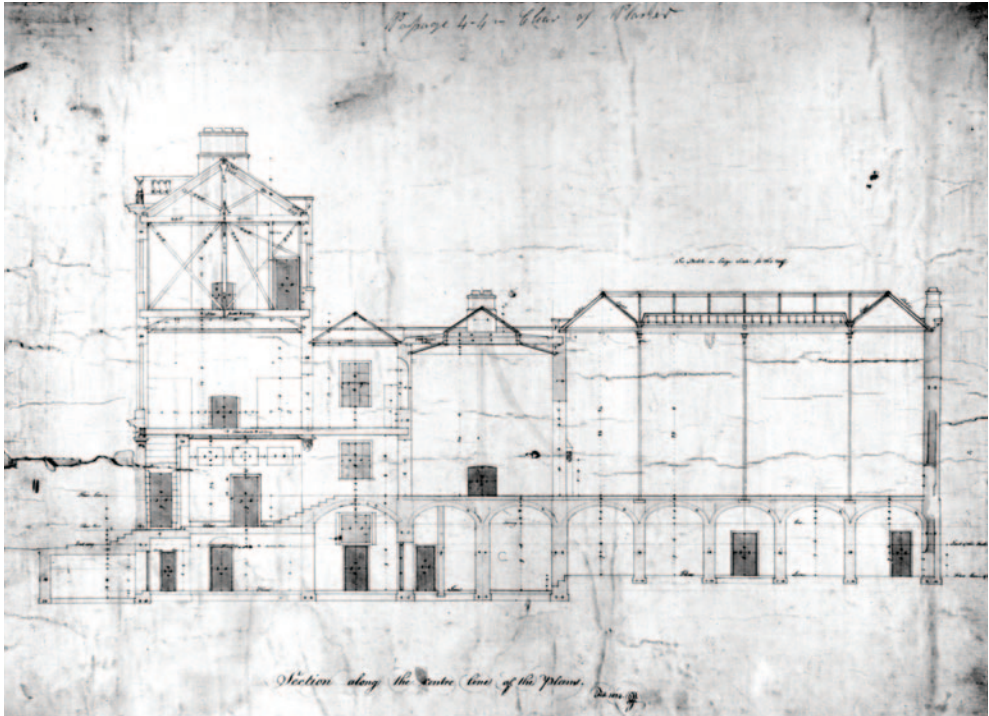
The other aim set out in *A Brief Account of the Intended Academy* – in reality, its principal aim – was 'to establish annual exhibitions of original works, to which every Artist, whether a member of the Academy or not, may send his works for view or sale'.

Like the RA, the Dublin annual exhibition was to be an open one, not restricted to members only. These exhibits were intended to ‘diffuse among the public a taste for the fine arts’ and ‘to excite emulation amongst artists’.⁷ Profits from the exhibition were to cover the expenses of the whole undertaking. The vesting of the academy’s property in a chartered corporation would prevent it being lost, as had happened to the octagonal gallery in South William Street. The whole project was to be educational – to raise public taste and the quality of Irish art, as well as to educate Irish artists, and thus to establish the identity of Irish art. It had an idealistic set of aims.

This proposal to government did not go through without problems. The miniature painter John Comerford opposed the setting up of an academy and tried to persuade the government against it. He argued that ‘those who encouraged young men to become artists were doing a substantial injury to society; they were destroying very excellent carpenters, smiths and house-painters, and creating a class of unfortunates who would never be capable of doing any good for themselves and others.’⁸ Comerford favoured vocational training, but he was also acting out of self-preservation as a miniature painter in keeping the market to himself. The Chief Secretary stalled and contacted Lawrence for advice. He in turn contacted Shee and also Joseph Farrington, Lawrence’s confidant. All supported the Dublin project. So also did the Irish Solicitor General. King George IV, on government advice, granted the charter on 5th April 1823. The nascent academy lacked the funds to register the charter officially, but was rescued financially by the connoisseurs of the Royal Irish Institution. As a consequence, the charter was enrolled in the High Court of Chancery in Dublin on 9th October 1823 and the RHA came into existence.⁹

The promoters had sought twenty members, but only fourteen, including the officers, were allowed, which proved in time to be too small a number to administer the organisation. Ten associates were permitted from whom the academicians were to be elected when vacancies occurred. The crown granted a coat of arms depicting the tools of painting, sculpture and architecture. For detailed procedures the academy was to draw up bye-laws which had to be approved by the General Assembly of all the members.

The first president of the RHA, in 1823, was the painter William Ashford, who was succeeded the following year by Francis Johnston (Plate 4). Johnston was a wealthy and highly distinguished government architect nearing the end of his career, whose buildings in Dublin included the General Post Office (GPO) on Sackville Street, the Chapel Royal in Dublin Castle and St George’s church, Hardwicke Place.¹⁰ At his own expense, Johnston built Academy House (Plates 1-3) on a development plot he owned at No. 20 Lower Abbey Street. The north side of Dublin was then a fashionable and developing area of the city, centred on Sackville Street and Rutland Square. Adjoining these were the residential districts of Gardiner Street and Mountjoy Square, with James Gandon’s three masterpieces, the Custom House, the Four Courts and the King’s Inns, all north of the river. Newspaper offices, the GPO, hotels, the Rotunda Hospital’s assembly rooms, and clubs were all near Abbey Street. The new Catholic Pro-cathedral was on Marlborough Street. The area was indeed the hub of Dublin and of Ireland. The Academy was there-



2 – Francis Johnston

SECTION ALONG THE CENTRE LINE OF THE PLAN

1824, drawing (courtesy of the Irish Architectural Archive)

3 – Academy House, Lower Abbey Street,
drawn by H. Nelson, engraved by W. Jones

(DUBLIN PENNY JOURNAL, IV, no. 173, 24th October 1835)

opposite 4 – Martin Cregan

FRANCIS JOHNSTON, HIS WIFE AND TWO NEPHEWS

c.1827, oil on canvas, 97.7 x 80.3 cm (detail)

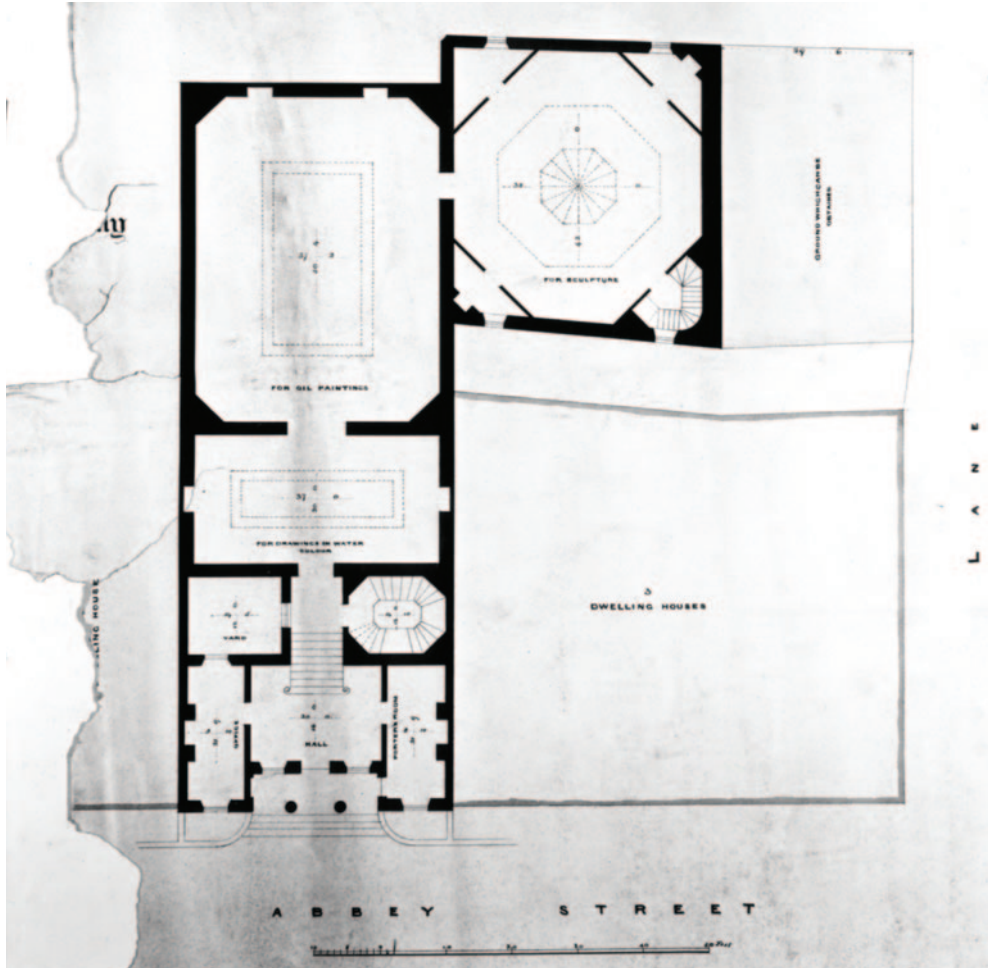
(courtesy Trustees of the National Museums of Northern
Ireland, U731)



fore located in a highly appropriate area of the city for a new institution intended to attract fashionable patronage. This urban context was to change radically as the century progressed.

Academy House was a plain, three-storey-over-basement stone-fronted building. It had carved heads by John Smyth of Raphael, Palladio and Michelangelo, denoting the Renaissance origins of the academic ideals of painting, architecture and sculpture. A central recessed porch with Doric columns led to an entrance hall. From here, up a flight of steps, was a smaller gallery intended for watercolours, and straight ahead, through an arch, was the main top-lit gallery, the position of honour for the most favoured paintings. On the first floor, overlooking Abbey Street, was the council room, intended to carry portraits of presidents, and also the library. On the top floor was a private apartment, the home of the keeper, given free of charge in return for the management of the building and supervision of the school. In the basement was a kitchen and a parlour with a long corridor leading to the back lane where the porter had living accommodation beneath the gallery. A small staircase connected all floors.¹¹

There was no studio for the schools in Academy House as constructed by Johnston, indicating clearly that the exhibition gallery, and not the schools, was their primary concern. However, he hoped to provide a space for the schools, and after his death his widow Anne employed William Murray (Johnston's former partner) to create a statue gallery at the rear of the adjacent property, No. 19, linked to the main gallery by double doors. That



5 – William Murray, *Plan of ground floor of Academy House*
 1847, drawing (courtesy of the Irish Architectural Archive)

statue gallery of 1830 was octagonal in plan (Plate 5), with an internal cast-iron balcony supported by brackets around its perimeter. It could only be entered through the main gallery. In it were placed the various gifts of plaster casts of figures, busts, and fragments of the body. These were the stock-in-trade of all academy antique rooms of the period. Students would be expected to supply their own drawing board, with candle and cone affixed, for work in the evenings. They would use easels, stools and benches that could easily be moved.

With the completion of Johnston's building in 1826, the first exhibition of the RHA was held. In the inaugural catalogue, the Academy stated that its main aim was 'the communication of instruction in painting, sculpture and architecture to those who may be desirous of the same, and whom the Academy may think eligible for that purpose'.¹²

Clearly, the idea of setting up a school of fine art was also high on its agenda, although it was not laid down in the charter and the Academy did not then, in 1826, possess a room suitable for a school. However, the Academy leaders understood that if Irish painting was to develop, and not remain an appendage of British art, a school for the teaching of painting, led by Irish artists, had to be provided in Dublin. This remained their position throughout the century – the building up of the practise and reception of a national school of Irish art by providing fine art teaching and exhibitions of the work of living artists.

The Academy's finances were never strong. It found itself unable to fund a school even when a studio could be provided. It could not afford the costs of models for a life school, which would be open free to those who had the talent. The Academy regarded free instruction as central to its mission. In this it mirrored the open policy of the Dublin Society in admitting students to its four drawing schools. In 1832, following representations of the academy to the Chief Secretary, a government grant was awarded that continued unchanged, despite varying economic circumstances, into the twentieth century. While the academy consistently regarded this state grant as intended for its general operation, including the schools, the government saw it as exclusively intended for the running of the schools, a difference of opinion that was to lead to friction in later years. Receipt of this grant required the academy to make annual financial returns to the Chief Secretary's office, and this gave the state a measure of control over the academy. By contrast, the RA could operate independently of the state because it generated strong revenues through its summer exhibitions that covered all its costs and left a surplus.

In the 1830s there were two schools or classes at the RHA – the school of antique drawing and the school of drawing the living model. These were not operated full-time. The antique school was open more often as there was no cost apart from the time given free by the keeper. The life class, where models had to be paid, was only open for short periods. A collection of plaster casts was central to the antique school. In order to assist the Academy in this regard, Lawrence sent a cast of the *Barberini Faun* in 1826. Other RAs, Sir Richard Westmacott (its Professor of Sculpture), Charles Rossi and John E. Carew (an Irish-born sculptor based in England), sent casts of their own work. In 1829 the Lord Lieutenant, the Marquess of Anglesea, presented six casts of famous canonical antique sculptures – the *Apollo Belvedere*, the *Dying Gladiator*, the *Meleager*, the *Discobolus*, the *Antinous* and the *Venus Anadyomne*. Anna Johnston donated a cast of the *Laocoon* and a selection of casts of the Elgin marbles in 1827. William Cuming donated a number of busts in 1832. The collection continued to grow with ten models for the riverine heads of the Custom House by Edward Smyth in 1837. In the same year, Dr McCarthy, Professor of Anatomy at the Academy, donated casts of *Psyche*, *Flora* and *Venus of the Campidoglio*.¹³ The patronage by the RAs and the Lord Lieutenant indicate that the nascent RHA had strong official support from the British art establishment and from the government's Irish executive.

The purpose of drawing the casts was not just to acquire skill in observational drawing, working from the immobile figure, but also to familiarise the student with the

ideal proportions of classical antique sculpture and its repertoire of gestures. The casts of sculpture by living artists working in the neoclassical style showed how strongly modern sculpture was still related to the antique. Neoclassicism had a long legacy in nineteenth-century sculpture. The exhibition of Samuel Forde's *Fall of the Rebel Angels* at the academy in 1830 prompted the Academy to comment that it gave 'a practical proof of the value which attaches to a school of antique sculpture, and the usefulness of academies where such examples may be enforced', which was presumably a positive reference to Forde's experience in the drawing school in the great cast collection in Cork where he had been a fellow student of Maclise and Hogan, who had both gone abroad to pursue their careers.¹⁴

A collection of Old Master paintings, for study and copying purposes, was regarded as being as important as the collection of casts of the antique for the education of budding painters. The academic idea was that there was continuity of tradition from the Renaissance and antiquity to the present. The example of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century painting, 'Grand Tour taste', exemplified by the collections in Irish country houses, was seen as particularly important in shaping the young painter. In 1830 the Academy received its first donation, a history painting by Cavaliere d'Arpino. In 1834 it purchased five large historical paintings attributed then to Giordano, Jordaens, Caravaggio, Bassano and Spanialetto. (In 1903 the paintings were cleaned and relined in connection with Hugh Lane's exhibition of Old Masters at Academy House; the Bassano attribution remained but the others were reattributed to Luca Giordano, and all disappeared in the fire of 1916.)¹⁵ Clearly the Academy could not provide a substitute for a non-existent Irish national gallery, but it believed there could be some link between the Academy and such a gallery. The Academy was a supporter of the movement to establish a national gallery in Ireland in imitation of Britain, where the building of the National Gallery there had begun in London in 1834; the new building in Trafalgar Square contained space for both the National Gallery and the Royal Academy (which moved from Somerset House). The contemporary view was that a national gallery of Old Masters would provide the necessary range of reference material for students to copy and learn from in order to become competent modern practitioners, building on the traditions of the European Old Masters. There were also donations of modern paintings to the RHA. In 1839 the widow of Thomas Sautelle Roberts gave 'six of the finest landscapes by her late husband in his memory', and others donated portraits. Gradually the Academy accumulated its own permanent collection of paintings.¹⁶ Unlike the RA, it did not require newly elected members to deposit a 'diploma' piece.

This programme of antique and life drawing, and the copying of Old Masters, would provide the ideal preparation for the practice of the 'Grand Style' of history painting, as advocated in the celebrated *Discourses* by Sir Joshua Reynolds, delivered to the members and students of the Royal Academy during the latter part of the eighteenth century. However, the reality of the Irish art world in the early nineteenth century was that most figure painting was portrait painting. Even later, with the growth of the cultural

revival during the second half of the nineteenth century, there was no demand for historical or legendary themes. There was an absence of commissions for such subjects from the new Queen's Colleges, the many religious foundations or from private patrons. By contrast, in Anglo-Irish literature, Thomas Moore, James C. Mangan, Sir Samuel Ferguson and Standish O'Grady made ample use of historical and legendary themes. As the neoclassical style fell out of favour in painting and was replaced by the stylistic diversity of the romantic movement, this classical academic programme no longer accorded with what patrons required. The range of portraits, landscapes, still life paintings and anecdotal genre subjects in the annual exhibitions showed what the Irish market wanted and what Irish and foreign artists wished to provide.

The annual accounts of the 1830s and 1840s make reference to expenditure on the schools. Most models in the eighteenth century were male, but in the following century the majority were female and cost more. From 1834 to 1835 there is a record of the Academy employing both male and female models. Among the items paid for in 1833 was a screen, probably to facilitate the model dressing. There was also evidently a good deal of wear and tear on the school property, and there are a number of references to the repair of the casts. While there was excellent vertical daylight, oil lamps were used to light the model in the evenings. Gaslight arrived in 1845, supplied by the Hibernian Gaslight Company, and evening classes were subsequently on offer at that time. Unsurprisingly, both the lighting and heating of the schoolroom continued to be expenses in the following years. In 1845-46, in order to facilitate anatomy teaching, an A. Alexander was paid for a skeleton, and a Henry Kemmis was paid for lining for its case. To improve the movement of the heavy plaster casts, the pedestals were fitted with castors in 1846. These were all practical necessities for the running of the schools.¹⁷

The keeper was in charge of the physical organisation and running of the schools. He was assisted by the Academy's porter who moved the casts as required. A cleaning woman kept the space presentable. Teaching in the life school was undertaken by four visitors, or tutors. These were elected annually by the General Assembly in October, and received a small fee for their attendance. They took the life classes in turns among themselves. For example, at the General Assembly of 18th October 1832, four visitors were elected – Samuel Lover, Robert L. West, Thomas Kirk and George Petrie, a group of artists with a range of expertise in figure drawing, watercolour and modelling. As he was living upstairs, the keeper was in charge of the antique room, which he could easily look into in order to inspect the students' drawings.¹⁸

The number of students attending was small. In the mid-1840s the antique school was open for about twenty-three weeks a year, with an attendance of around sixteen in the morning and seven in the evening. In the life school in the mid-1840s, on different days to those of the antique school, there were four students in the morning and eight in the evening over a period of about forty weeks. Once evening life classes began in 1845, this facilitated students who were in employment during the day. The Academy was generous in its admission policy. It threw the life school open in 1846-47 to 'all practising artists



6 – *George Mulvany, SELF-PORTRAIT*
1844, drawing, 50 x 35.2 cm
(© National Gallery of Ireland)



7 – *James Petrie, PORTRAIT OF GEORGE PETRIE*
n.d., watercolour on ivory, 6.5 x 5.5 cm
(© National Gallery of Ireland)

whether students or not, on application to the council'.¹⁹ The Famine caused attendance to decline in 1848, with five students in the antique school and nine in the life school. In the late 1840s the antique school was open daily from 10am to 4pm. The antique school and the life school were open on alternate evenings. The picture in the immediate post-Famine period was one of decline and financial difficulty.

Among the students of the schools in the 1830s and 1840s, several made careers in art. Nicholas Crowley, who had begun in the Dublin Society's school, attended the Academy's school in its first intake in 1832 before he moved on to a career in London. George Mulvany (Plate 6), the future first director of the National Gallery of Ireland, was a student in the Academy when his father was keeper. William Osborne became a successful animal painter when he left the Academy school, and is better known as the father of Walter, who himself became a committed teacher in the school. Robert George Kelly went from the Academy school to build a career in Manchester and Birkenhead. Charles Wynne Nicholls went on to attend the RA schools and showed at its exhibitions. James Brenan began in the Royal Dublin Society (RDS) schools – royal since 1821 – before attending the Academy. He progressed to the National Art Training School in London and to a highly successful career in England, before becoming headmaster at the Cork

School of Art and then the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art in 1889. Michael George Brennan of Castlebar was another Academy student of the 1850s, before he went on to the RA schools. A general pattern emerged of students beginning their studies in the Royal Dublin Society schools and then moving to the Academy's schools. They would have shown their portfolio of drawings to the council of the Academy in order to gain admission. In the first half of the nineteenth century, artists who wanted to make a successful career still considered London as the place to go to after study in Dublin.

During the annual exhibitions, the statue gallery (which was the school room) was requisitioned for exhibition purposes, forcing the schools to close. The studio had the required top-lighting, and was a fine open space for exhibiting paintings. It was because of this double use that a permanent amphitheatre for life painters could not be installed, as at the RA. The school year lasted between the close of one exhibition and the preparatory period for the ensuing one. While dates of the summer exhibition varied slightly over the years, it can be said that generally the school was out of action during February, March and April annually, which was quite different to other teaching establishments such as the RDS schools. The lack of dedicated school space, as in the RA in Trafalgar Square, was a serious deficiency and ultimately goes back to flaws in Johnston's original design for Academy House. To function properly the RHA needed two studios – one for antique drawing and one for life painting – both physically accessible independently of the exhibition rooms.

The library was open to students from time to time, such as a half-day per week (apart from vacations) when the librarian was available. The number of students using it was low – an average of five per week in the mid-1840s. It was open to members and associates at all times. Edward Haughton, the Academy's lawyer, was the first librarian who established the collection by making personal donations of 283 books. He was succeeded by George Petrie (Plate 7) from 1829 to 1840, who, as scholar and artist, continued to build up the collection. George Mulvany followed while his father Thomas was still keeper. Hugh Frazer, the northern painter and a writer on art, succeeded him in 1846, combining this post with the professorship of painting. The Academy's library during the nineteenth century became the finest publicly accessible collection of art books in Dublin. The holdings were accumulated by donations mainly by Academy members and by small purchases. The published catalogue of 1842 contained principally eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century publications.²⁰ However, Continental, especially French, modern art since the late eighteenth century was not well covered, indicating a conservatism in collecting policy. Drawings and prints by Old Masters were also part of the library collection, and formed essential reference material for the students in an era before photographic prints. The library was a major resource for Walter Strickland in his researches, which resulted in his famous two-volume *A Dictionary of Irish Artists* in 1913. The library and the Academy's own archives and drawings were destroyed by fire during the Rising of 1916.

The Academy elected honorary professors annually, but, in fact, individuals

remained in position for substantial periods. Up to 1846, the position of Professor of Painting was successively held by William Cuming, Martin Cregan and Hugh Frazer, all of whom painted portraits; that of Professor of Architecture was held by Henry A. Baker (Gandon's assistant) and George Papworth; the Professor of Sculpture was Joseph Kirk; and the Professor of Perspective was Thomas Mulvany (also the keeper), who was succeeded by his son George. The remaining professors were not artists or architects, but were drawn from the honorary members of the Academy. Andrew Johnston, James McCarthy and Michael Stapleton, men with links to the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, variously held the position of Professor of Anatomy. The position of Professor of History (as distinct from art history) was held by Paul Twigge, John McCaul and Revd Edward Johnston, all mainly with links to Trinity College (TCD). The Professor of Antiquities was Revd G.N. Wright, and the Professor of Mathematics was Francis Sadleir of TCD. While this distinguished list linked the Academy to the world of learning and underpinned its intellectual status, it was more apparent than actual. There was no programme of theoretical instruction such as the lectures delivered by the professors at the RA. In 1846 there is a rare reference to Hugh Frazer, Professor of Painting, and Michael Stapleton, Professor of Anatomy, delivering courses of lectures gratuitously.

In the 1840s there was much debate in Britain about the future of state-supported drawing education following the establishment of the government school of design in 1836 and its provincial branch schools in major British cities. In 1847 George Mulvany, presumably having consulted his father Thomas and also Petrie, the Academy's secretary, made a public appeal to government that the Academy should be part of any plan to establish new Irish state institutions of art education. He argued for a comprehensive new Irish art educational institution that combined the teaching of fine and applied art and contained a gallery of antique casts. This would operate by 'diffusing by elementary and practical instruction art knowledge through all grades of society and educating the public eye through the instrumentality of annual exhibitions of modern art'. He pointed to the school of art at Lyons as an example, criticising the regulations of the new government schools of design which excluded, in principle, any students who aimed to be painters or sculptors.

Mulvany outlined the existing art educational work of the academy: 'The painter may learn in an Academy, drawing, chiaroscuro, the powers of colour, and the general theory of application,' including perspective, anatomy, 'and all science bearing upon art.' Having mastered this academic instruction, the artist could then specialise in his own chosen area, 'be it history, portrait, familiar scenes, landscape and still-life'. Finally the artist needed 'an eminent professor in any of these branches'. Mulvany here touched on the master-class or atelier system centred on a prominent artist who gathered a class around him, which had become the model of institutional art education in Germany. The RA and the RHA adhered instead to the traditional programme of antique drawing and life painting taught by a number of changing visitors rather than a class grouped around a practitioner artist on a continuing basis. In Ireland, he argued, 'Common sense, the first

principles of all instruction, and the analogy of all educative institutions, point at once to the Royal Hibernian Academy as the natural custodian [sic] of such an institution.' He stated that other professions, like law and medicine, were managed by professionals and so too should the education of artists. His idea was that the RDS school should be combined with that of the RHA, and that the Academy's professors would control its operation. An art library already existed and the state would benefit from that. He was highly idealistic in his vision of an academy of art: 'If Royal Academies are ever to assume a national importance beyond the honours they confer on their members, it must be from their effectiveness as educational institutes ... in seeking to improve others they cannot fail to improve themselves.' He quoted Anton Raphael Mengs, the German neoclassical artist of the eighteenth century: 'An Academy is an assembly of men most expert in Science and Art, their object being to investigate truth and to find fixed rules, always conducting to progress and perfection.' The aim was to advance the arts and disseminate good taste. These were high-minded sentiments linking science and art in a rational pursuit of knowledge. Clearly, all of this accorded with the ideals of the European Enlightenment, but by the mid-nineteenth century these ideas, and the neoclassical style itself, no longer dominated the world of painting, although they remained influential in architecture and especially in sculpture. Mulvany's ideal was an outdated one for painting. Furthermore, he did not recognise the power of a centralising state bureaucracy in education and the gradual elimination or imposition of controlling supervision on private institutions by the state. However, Mulvany was aware of the prevailing criticism of academies, namely, that they had failed in their educational function because their students' work lapsed into sameness and lacked individuality. But he also believed that the alternative approach of the master class could equally lead to the repetitive imitation of a well-known painter's style. In defence of academies, he argued that they could provide a range of subjects while eminent artists could control its management: 'It is most unwise to be slow in diffusing academical instruction, through fear of cramping or depressing Genius.'²¹ Nevertheless, Mulvany was ready to admit that the studio of the high-art professor formed the completion of a practical course of art education. Effectively, he was admitting that both the class taught by changing tutors, as in the Academy, as well as the master class centred on an established artist, had value.

The government did not follow Mulvany's advice on a comprehensive educational art institution. Instead, the drawing schools of the RDS were adopted by the Board of Trade in 1849 as a government school of design, with Henry McManus, ARHA, as headmaster.²² As a school of design from 1849, the RDS school was to form part of the network of similar institutions in the UK that were supported by the state. In its new policy, the RDS school admitted women and opened evening classes for artisans.²³ The curriculum of the school of design was mainly functional, aiming at design for industry, leaving the Academy in charge of fine art education in Ireland. Life drawing was expressly forbidden in the early years of the school of design, in line with the policy of the Board of Trade. However, by concentrating on the basics of drawing, including the antique, the

school prepared those students who aspired to be artists and who could profit by the advanced teaching at the Academy. A symbiotic relationship developed.

It was clear that future state investment in art education would focus on the RDS school and not the Academy's school. The decisions of the government in 1849 were to bring Dublin design education into uniformity with the rest of the UK. The education of artists remained partially under state supervision through the annual government grant to the Academy, which delivered its annual reports to the Department of Science & Art, South Kensington, which controlled art education in the UK. The issue of the Academy's school on the one hand, and the state-funded art school on the other, was to remain a source of friction into the early twentieth century. However, we may speculate, perhaps, that had the Academy's teaching and exhibiting been absorbed into a large state institution in the 1850s, the Academy would have disappeared into a state bureaucracy with salaried officials responsible to a government department, and it would have lost all independence of action. The Academy was limited by the availability of Irish artists of ability resident in the city who could exhibit and also manage its affairs. Even more, it was limited by the economic condition of Ireland which made it hard to fund its operations. However, by persuading government of the importance of establishing an Irish academy for living artists which would hold annual exhibitions of modern work, and would also run an art school, the Royal Hibernian Academy had taken a major step in establishing the identity of Irish art and artists.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ The author is engaged in writing a history of the Royal Hibernian Academy of Arts. For the general background on fine art academies, see Nikolaus Pevsner, *Academies of Art, Past and Present* (Cambridge, 1940).
- ² David H. Solkin (ed.), *Art on the Line: the Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House 1780-1836* (New Haven and London, 2001) xi, 3-8.
- ³ See Walter Strickland, *A Dictionary of Irish Artists*, 2 vols (Dublin and London, 1913) II, 592-639. See also Catherine de Courcy, 'The History of the Royal Hibernian Academy of Arts', in Ann M. Stewart (ed.), *The Royal Hibernian Academy of Arts: index of exhibitors and their works 1826-1979*, 3 vols (Dublin, 1985) I, xi-xix.
- ⁴ See John Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin since the Eighteenth Century: a history of the National College of Art and Design* (Dublin, 1995) chs 1-9.
- ⁵ Trevor Fawcett, *The Rise of English Provincial Art: artists, patrons and institutions outside London 1800-1830* (Oxford, 1974) 10.
- ⁶ Royal Academy Archives (RA), London, correspondence between M.A. Shee and Sir Thomas Lawrence, and between Thomas Mulvany and Lawrence. See also John Turpin, 'The Foundation of the Royal Hibernian Academy of Arts', in Fergus Mulligan (ed.), *Auguri, to Mary Kelleher* (Dublin, 2009) 104-11.
- ⁷ RA, Lawrence correspondence, LAW/3/218, 'A Brief Account of the Intended Academy of Fine Arts to be established in Dublin by a Royal Charter' (not dated but circulated in 1820).

- ⁸ RA, LAW/3/212, Charles Grant to Lawrence, 27th September 1820.
- ⁹ National Archives of Ireland (NA), MS 5.4296A, Royal Hibernian Academy charter.
- ¹⁰ Edward McParland, 'Francis Johnston, Architect, 1760-1829', in *Quarterly Bulletin of the Irish Georgian Society*, XII, 1969, 62-139.
- ¹¹ For Johnston's drawings of Academy House, see Bernadette Goslin, 'A History and Descriptive Catalogue of the Murray Collection of Architectural Drawings in the Collection of the Royal Institute of Architects of Ireland', MA thesis (University College Dublin, 1999) 126. The drawings are now in the Irish Architectural Archive.
- ¹² Catalogue of the exhibition of the Royal Hibernian Academy, 1826, prefatory matter.
- ¹³ Gifts are listed in the catalogues of the RHA annual exhibitions of 1826, 1829, 1837. See John Turpin, 'The Royal Hibernian Academy Schools, the First Eighty Years 1826-1906', in *Irish Arts Review Yearbook, 1991-92*, 198-209.
- ¹⁴ See catalogue of the RHA annual exhibition for 1830.
- ¹⁵ See catalogues of the RHA annual exhibitions for 1830 and 1834. See also pamphlet in the RHA archives, entitled *Old Masters Found*, with an introduction by Sir Thomas Drew PRHA and dated 20th December 1903.
- ¹⁶ See catalogues of the RHA annual exhibitions for 1838 and 1846.
- ¹⁷ National Archives, Kew, AO 19/57/20, 'The Account of J.G. Mulvany of receipts and disbursements for the RHA, 1 January 1832 – 31 March 1834'. See also AO 17C 316, 'RHA Accounts for 1845-46'.
- ¹⁸ *Dublin University Magazine*, I, 1833, 103.
- ¹⁹ Parliamentary Papers, XL, IV Ireland, Estimates and Miscellaneous Services; for year ending 31st March 1849, Report of the Royal Hibernian Academy 1847, page 369 [manuscript numbering], signed by G. Petrie, 22nd December 1847.
- ²⁰ *Catalogue of Books, Original Drawings and Prints, the Property of the RHA, Dublin* (Dublin, 1842).
- ²¹ George F. Mulvany, *Thoughts and Facts Concerning the Fine Arts in Ireland and Schools of Design* (London, 1847) 29, 33, 39, 46.
- ²² By the mid-1830s, when the Academy's life school was in operation, the RDS had discontinued its own life class to save money on models.
- ²³ At the Academy schools, women were not yet admitted.