

Director's Cut

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Charles was requested to select 10 images from the Royal Academy of Arts collection and write a short paragraph for a slide show presentation on the YourPaintings.com website. First published online June 2014.

1. The Antique Room of the Royal Academy at New Somerset House

By Johann Zoffany

Date Painted: 1780–1783

From: Royal Academy of Arts

To coincide with the Royal Academy of Art's Summer Exhibition, Charles Saumarez Smith, secretary and chief executive, shares his thoughts on ten of the organisation's rarely seen works.

The RA was established in 1768 by a group of artists led by the famed portraitist Joshua Reynolds. It's a privately funded institution led by artists and architects, and houses an art school.

The collection focuses on British art and artists from the 18th Century onwards. It contains almost 1000 paintings including works by Gainsborough and Constable.



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2. The Royal Academy Selection and Hanging Committee, 1938

By Frederick William Elwell

Date Painted: 1938

From: Royal Academy of Arts

This scene is of Academicians having lunch during the build up to the Summer Exhibition.

It was painted by Frederick Elwell - he's standing up at the front on the left.

A lot of old men sit round the table with their cigarettes and cigars. It's a dim period in the Academy's history when it had turned itself into a private club.

Nowadays lunch is quicker and much less formal. It concentrates on the problems of the exhibition's layout, but also includes a bit of RA gossip, which is why I always like this time of year.



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3. Humphrey Brooke (1914–1988)

By Olwyn Bowey

Date Painted: c.1961

From: Royal Academy of Arts

Humphrey Brooke was one of my predecessors.

He suffered from manic depression which he believed could only be cured by sex and smoking. This portrait shows a man of the establishment, contentedly enjoying a fag.

He came from a grand Yorkshire family, and was a so-called 'monuments man' during World War Two, finding and saving works of art across Europe.

After the war, he worked in Austria where he met his wife, Nathalie. Brooke later joined the Tate Gallery, and then became secretary of the RA in 1952.



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4. The Council of the Royal Academy Selecting Pictures for the Exhibition, 1875

By Charles West Cope

Date Painted: 1876

From: Royal Academy of Arts

This picture reveals much about the RA during the high Victorian period.

The president, in the group on the left, leans back in his chair, top-hatted, whiskered, supercilious and wrapped in a rug.

At the front, artist John Everett Millais, one of the brightest stars of the period, has placed his top hat on the floor.

Academicians at this time were wealthy and sold their works to industrialists and the nouveau-riche. The whole scene exudes a sense of authority.



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5. Sir Hugh Casson Lecturing

By Bernard Dunstan

Date Painted: 1987

From: Royal Academy of Arts

We had an exhibition about Hugh Casson last year but I don't remember seeing this portrait.

The portrait shows him little and neat, eyes glinting behind his glasses.

I regret never having met him as his memory still lives so strongly at the RA.

He was the president who revived its fortunes in the late 1970s, not least by founding the Friends of the Royal Academy in 1977.

Bernard Dunstan, who painted this portrait, became a member of the Academy in 1968, and is still one in 2014.



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6. Self Portrait (Aqua)

By Michael Craig-Martin

Date Painted: 2007

From: Royal Academy of Arts

I remember one of the Academicians once saying how delighted he was that portraits had been eradicated from the Summer Exhibition.

Michael Craig-Martin gave a self-portrait as his diploma work when he was elected to the RA in 2007.

I like the fact that it's a self-portrait. Craig-Martin is characteristically going against the trend.

I admire his intellectual rigour and independence of mind, so this inclusion is an unashamed tribute.



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7. Banquet of the Gods

By William Kent

Date Painted: 1719/1720

From: Royal Academy of Arts

I've chosen this work in honour of the Victoria and Albert Museum's William Kent exhibition.

It should be on the ceiling of the RA saloon, but it's currently in storage as we don't currently have the funds to reinstate it.

Kent was an affable and genial man who lived for a while in Burlington House (now home to the RA).

However, I don't think anyone would pretend he was a great painter. It's a curiously unsatisfactory piece - rather awkward and trying too hard.

But it deserves to be reinstated as part of a historically important, decorative ensemble.



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8. The Meeting of Bacchus and Ariadne

By Sebastiano Ricci

Date Painted: 1713–1715

From: Royal Academy of Arts

Almost every day I sit in meetings underneath this often-missed great work of art by Ricci.

He was one of a number of decorative painters who came to England from the continent in search of lucrative country house commissions.

Ricci was hired by Richard Boyle, third Earl of Burlington, to undertake a series of paintings for a house on Piccadilly, in London.

If one looks at it carefully, one can see why Ricci was popular. It's got a certain swish and swagger which is extremely attractive.



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9. A Life Class at St Martin's Lane Academy

By Johann Zoffany

Date Painted: 1761/1762

From: Royal Academy of Arts

The St. Martin's Lane Academy was the most important in London before the RA was founded.

It was based in a courtyard off St Martin's Lane, near Covent Garden, and ran drop-in evening classes in drawing. It was more accessible and cheaper to join than the RA.

The person at the front looking out is George Michael Moser, who later became the first Keeper of the RA.

John Malin, the first member of staff of the RA, is in the background putting equipment in a cupboard.



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10. Et jamais je ne pleure et jamais je ne ris

By Jean Cooke

Date Painted: c.1972

From: Royal Academy of Arts

When I first arrived at the Royal Academy, Jean Cooke dominated the general assembly's meetings.

Extremely small, she had a squeaky voice and whatever she said was treated with awe.

She lived in a cold cottage in Birling Gap, East Sussex, once drove a Morgan and had been married to artist John Bratby.

The title is taken from *Fleurs du Mal*, Baudelaire's collection of poems, and translates as 'and never do I cry and never do I laugh'.

Find out more about this year's RA Summer Exhibition: <http://bit.ly/1vRcl9D>



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