



## The Modern History of England in Art

**Qiang Hao\***

Culture and Tourism Bureau of Wuchang District, Wuhan, Hubei, 430060, China

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### ABSTRACT

Images are the key for us to sort out modern British history and study the development of early industrial civilization. This paper takes the most classic representative works of those immortal artists in the long river of British art to create a section of immortal history, and review the historical fragments of modern Britain from the painting brush of art masters, and intuitively feel the historical customs, dress etiquette and natural scenery of Britain at that time.

From the efforts of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I of Tudor Dynasty in the 16th century to the establishment of British capitalist system in the early 20th century, as the leader of modern industrial civilization, Britain's status in the early modern art history is not commensurate with its economic and political achievements. Generally speaking, the development of British art is relatively slow. British Art in the Middle Ages was relatively prosperous, but the art heritage of the Middle Ages was seriously damaged twice. Once, Henry VIII, who was a Protestant, urged Congress to pass the supreme act in 1534, persecuting Catholicism and destroying some works of art left over from the middle ages. The first was that after the establishment of the Republic in 1649, Cromwell also regarded himself as a Puritan, advocating the destruction of the idols of the church, thus causing serious damage to the medieval art heritage. In Renaissance England, its literary achievements were mainly reflected

in art and literature. However, it is a pity that there was not a native artist with international influence in Britain at that time. For a long time before Hogarth, the art of England stagnated in the stage of enlightenment. British painters follow the art style of imitating Italy and Flanders in Europe. During this period, German painter Hans Holbein's portraits and woodcuts had a great influence on British painting, leading the art trend of the time in England. Henry VIII saw that portraits were very beneficial to the protection of the king's image and rights, and he paid a lot of money to Hans Holbein, Jr. The portrait of little Hans holy naturally became Henry VIII's weapon to capture beautiful women from all over the world. The painting "Duchess of Milan" is an example of this historical fact. It is also the most outstanding and excellent work of little Hans Holbein in this period. What is good in the top, there must be much in the bottom. During the Tudor Dynasty, both the king's wife and his ministers

*\*Corresponding Author:*

*Qiang Hao,*

*Culture and Tourism Bureau of Wuchang District, Wuhan, Hubei, 430060, China;*

*E-mail: 5162089@163.com.*

scrambled to ask famous painters to paint their own portraits, which not only showed their status, but also was convenient for future generations to worship. This trend and huge demand stimulated the prosperity of British portrait painting, which made the skills of early portrait and genre painting in modern England far better than other painting subjects. This has also been verified in the later art description. Because Western painting always pays attention to and pursues the modeling problems of perspective, anatomy, color, light and shade, the academic circle has a far better grasp of the real appearance and life details of the British royal family than in ancient China. This is also the weakness of Chinese painting techniques. It was during this period that a large number of foreign painters flocked to Britain in an endless stream, which objectively promoted the great development of British art. Although the development of art was slow compared with the vigorous industrial revolution in Britain, after all, the "sun never sets" empire's art spring finally came. Peter Paul Rubens, the highest peak of European Baroque, is not willing to be lonely. His convenience as a diplomat won the favor of the British royal family. In 1629, he had personally created many murals for a series of buildings such as the Whitehall. His assistant, Van Dyke, is skilled in skills, natural and unrestrained in style, gentle and elegant, and lacks passion, which is quite popular with the upper class in Britain. The representative work "Charles I in hunting clothes" is obviously created according to the requirements of the king, but this does not affect our understanding of the once mighty Charlemagne through this image. Some researchers believe that the historical significance and cultural value of this work is no less than any palace record. The painter portrayed Charles I standing on the outskirts of London in a pretentious manner, without much exaggeration. He showed the infamous monarch's mental state seriously and seriously. Even the dull and flattering attitude of the horse's attendants should be recorded. It profoundly reveals the spirit and character of Charles I. his cowardly and incompetent appearance makes the viewer have a premonition: sooner or later, the people in the painting will arouse the people's revolution and die under Cromwell. Charles I, with his cane in his right hand, could not conceal his weakness, though he put on a proud pose. In my opinion, among the many works of art depicting Charles I, the artist brings us not simply a frail and headstrong man, but also an easygoing, loyal husband and lovely father, a devout Christian and a connoisseur of art<sup>[1-5]</sup>.

After the glorious revolution in 1688, Britain maintained a relatively long period of peace, and the national economy developed steadily. It not only defeated France,

but also consolidated its maritime hegemony and took the lead in industrialized society. The British revolution in the 17th century is the prototype of modern bourgeois revolution, and the political system formed after the revolution has become a model for all countries to follow. Britain is the birthplace of the industrial revolution. Since then, human beings have begun a historical leap from agricultural civilization to industrial civilization. In the 18th century, the British ushered in the real local art master - William Hogarth, a world-famous painter, was later called the father of British painting. Hogarth is a well-deserved pioneer of British fine arts. He has replaced foreign artists in the position of being the only one in the British painting world. In the early English portraits before Hogarth, we often see some stereotyped British images, which is an inherent formula. There is always a magic power in Hogarth's paintings, especially his genre paintings, which vividly depict the social life in England at that time. His representative work "fashionable marriage" is like a mirror, reflecting the laughing life of the British upper class at that time. Hogarth has never been a charming painter. His stubborn realism fails to appreciate the beauty of women and innocent children. On the contrary, Hogarth is a revolutionary figure in English painting.

In Hogarth's paintings, we can clearly read it to reflect the social life of England at that time, profoundly expose the various disadvantages of the society at that time, and satirize the evils of the British upper class at that time. They attest to the historical facts of the wanton aristocracy in the increasingly powerful Britain under the great economic prosperity, and the fashion of money worship. The feudal habits mixed with the copper stink of the bourgeoisie were moved into the picture. It is more intuitive and enlightening than the data and words in history books. Hogarth's works also have some real portraits of the lives of the lower-class people. For example, "shrimp girl", "prostitute's career" and so on, these works are of great significance for later generations to study the living conditions of the lower class people and the capitalist society in that period<sup>[6-10]</sup>.

Hogarth was the first sign of the prosperity of British art, and then Reynolds and Gainsborough rose rapidly. As the first president of the Royal Academy of fine arts, Reynolds' achievements and status in the history of modern English art education are second to none. Reynolds respected the fine arts of ancient Greece and Rome and Renaissance Italy, and always held high the classical banner of "pure" interest and "grand style". His solemn painting style and serious historical painting were not only his artistic dream in his life, but also a miniature of the grand modern history of England. He was the helmsman of carrying forward

the “main melody” in modern British history. His “Baroness and daughter” is not only of aesthetic and artistic research value, but also a precious image material for the study of modern British history, clothing history and arts and crafts history.

Gengsboro’s figure and landscape paintings are considered by critics to be the breeze from the wilderness. Many artists, represented by him, have begun to depict the beautiful poetic lakeside and idyllic scenery of Britain, which are far away from the noise and the industrialized civilization. They also unfold the life style and beautiful customs of another stratum in modern British society this came into being and flourished. Then came Turner’s tragic epic landscape paintings, Constable’s rural pastoral landscape paintings, and fresh green fields’ pre-Raphaelite landscape paintings. After hundreds of years of continuous efforts by landscape artists, this theme has gradually become a dominant tradition of British painting<sup>[11]</sup>.

At the beginning of the 19th century, Britain rapidly became the most developed industrial country in the world. The rural landscape attached to agricultural development also changed greatly in the process of industrialization. However, Constable was not moved. The rural landscape of Suffolk County in southern England absorbed by his “real” eyes became the representative of the natural and cultural identity of Britain. In particular, his hay cart, which was created in 1821, truly reproduces the rural landscape of modern England. Constable set a perfect standard for British landscape painting, and was called “the most faithful British landscape painter” by later generations. As a result, the famous Barbizon painters in France, such as Rousseau, Corot and so on, were all his supporters<sup>[12-16]</sup>.

Turner is a rare master of landscape painting in the history of modern British art. Most of his works depict sea scenes. It always seeks a grand historical and mythical atmosphere advocated by the Royal Academy of fine arts. It expresses the changes of nature with colorful colors and galloping strokes, making nature into a thrilling drama. However, this often leads us to the illusion that he interprets nature with his own personality, because the power shown in his paintings has already gone beyond the scope of human nature, in other words, this natural drama is absolutely beyond the imagination of ordinary people. If there is no such transcendence, we can think of it as exaggeration, but we can not evaluate Turner in this way. Turner is good at expressing the illusion in the vast space. In his storm paintings, the middle and long-range are the most beautiful. It seems that Turner himself can only find the purest and most unrestrained poetic flavor in the free air. In Turner’s works, the dots of color that he is looking

at magically turn into flames. The structure of light and shadow and perspective are unscientific. But the beauty is extraordinary. The huge and hazy color ideas, the broken and shining beauty are higher than all fantasy styles<sup>[17]</sup>.

Portrait painting and landscape painting are the epitome of British visual art, and they are also the mirrors that faithfully feedback the history of modern England in several centuries. In our paintings, we witness the ups and downs of the illustrious dynasties. At the same time, we can catch a glimpse of ordinary people’s joy, anger and smile, and appreciate the tranquil scenery of modern England in painting. However obscure and abstract picture works are the reflection of history, economy, culture and thought at that time. In the era of nationwide picture reading, it is more convenient to directly search for paintings, charts and photos of relevant historical materials than to look through the voluminous classics. Compared with the text history which is often taken out of context, the image data is more direct, more reliable and fairer. With the immortal masterpieces handed down by the great artists of all ages as the weapon of historical testimony, the work of historical research will be more perfect, more scientific and more easily accepted by the public. Just as the British historian Peter Burke mentioned in his famous work “image to prove history”, images are not only the legacy of history, but also record the history, which is an important evidence to interpret history. From the images, we can not only see the past images, but also explore the information hidden behind them through the interpretation of these images. Political, economic, military and cultural. “What a painting says is more than a thousand words.” In the face of the inexhaustible number of images, historians are faced with amazing treasure, but there are hidden traps hidden under the treasure. “

Compared with the obscurity of British Art in the middle ages and the decline of pure art development in the modern British art field, the modern England under the brush can be regarded as a glorious era in which fine works and famous masters emerge in large numbers. A series of deafening names, like the bright starry sky, make people look up and admire. Cambridge, as an important research area of art history in the world, is located in the ancient England. People are looking forward to the rise of Britain, an old industrial power, but they are also looking forward to this beloved of British literature and art with fine artistic pedigree to try again<sup>[18-20]</sup>.

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