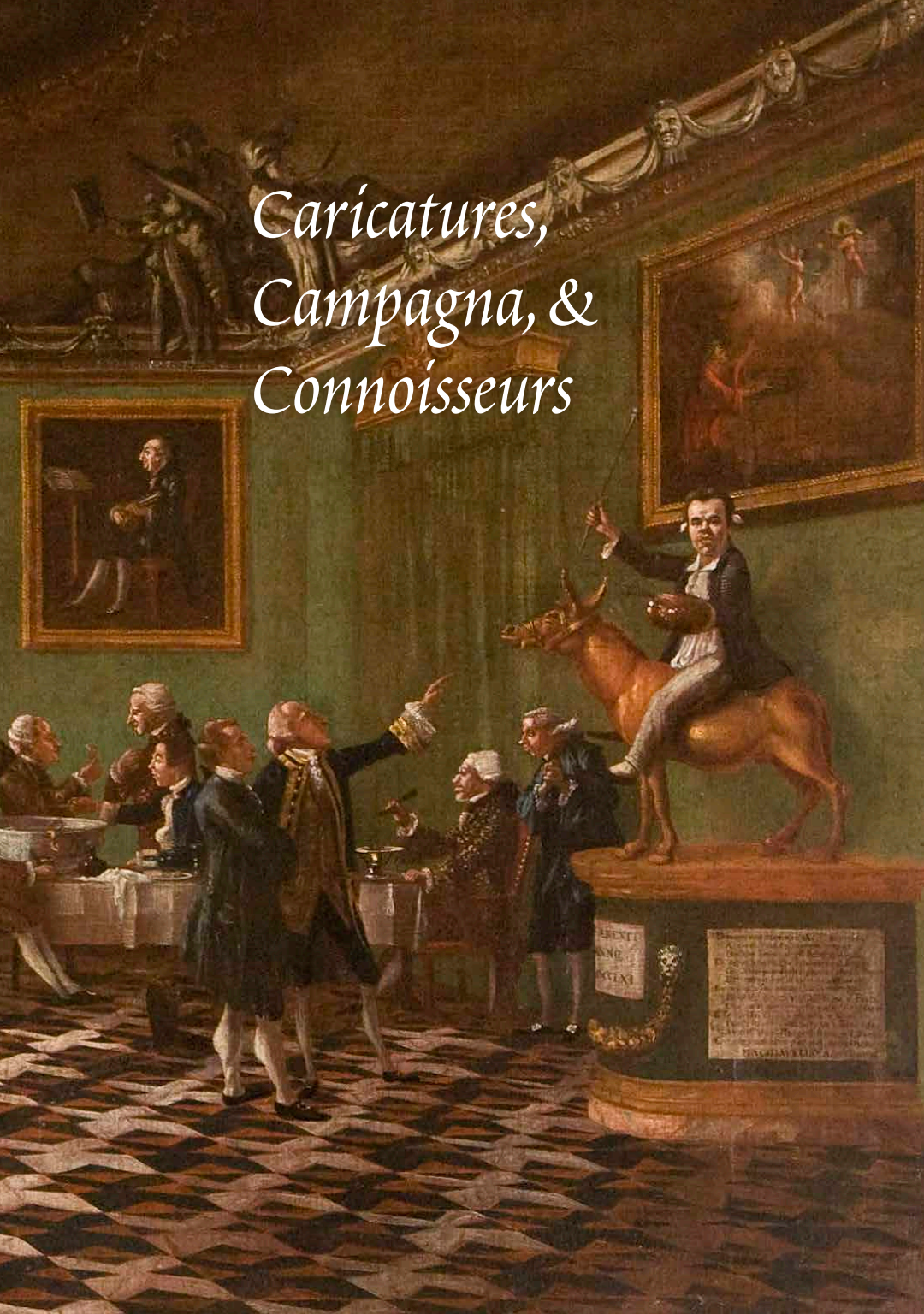
Caricatures, Campagna, & Connoisseurs



Caricatures, Campagna, & Connoisseurs

Thomas Patch and the British Grand Tour in Eighteenth-Century Italy

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Produced in conjunction with the exhibition
at the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University,
on view from September 10 to December 15, 2025

1. Thomas Patch (1725–82)
A Gathering at the Casa Manetti, Florence, 1765–68
Oil on canvas
The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University,
LWL Ptg. 125

Thomas Patch

was an intimate friend of Sir Horace Mann, the British Resident in Florence, who hosted many British visitors to the city, including at an assembly every Saturday evening. Patch repeatedly painted caricature groups of these gatherings, and he is often mentioned in Mann's letters to Horace Walpole. Indeed, on behalf of Walpole, Mann commissioned Patch to paint two views of the River Arno, which remain at Houghton Hall, and he ensured that Walpole received copies of the prints Patch published in the 1770s.

More than a caricaturist, Patch also painted fine topographical and decorative landscapes. He was amongst the first of the Anglo-Florentine community to take an interest in quattrocento art and published books of prints illustrating the work of Giotto (works that are now given to Spinello Aretino), Masaccio, Fra Bartolommeo, and Lorenzo Ghiberti. To supplement his income, he painted copies of old masters, and he also dealt in works of art. He provides much detail about aspects of the Grand Tour as well. Even so, this is the first monographic exhibition of his work that shows his variety, his industry, and his intellect. Thomas Patch is an artist worthy of closer scrutiny.

Sir Horace Mann considered his friend Thomas Patch "really a genius … all his productions have merit."[1] Patch was clearly intelligent, possessing a wide-ranging curiosity coupled with a need to earn an income to support himself during the nearly thirty years he lived in Italy. His curiosity in physiognomy lead to an interest in caricature; like Canaletto in Venice and myriad artists in Rome, Patch provided topographical views of Florence for consumption by Grand Tourists. In 1939 Wilmarth S. Lewis bought his first painting by Patch (fig. 1), then attributed to William Hogarth. Given his interest in caricature, Lewis was encouraged to purchase more such groups by the artist. The Lewis Walpole Library now holds one of the most significant collections of Patch's work in the world.

Thomas Patch was born into a medical family.[2] His father, John, had Jacobite connections and attended the exiled court at Saint-Germain-en-Laye

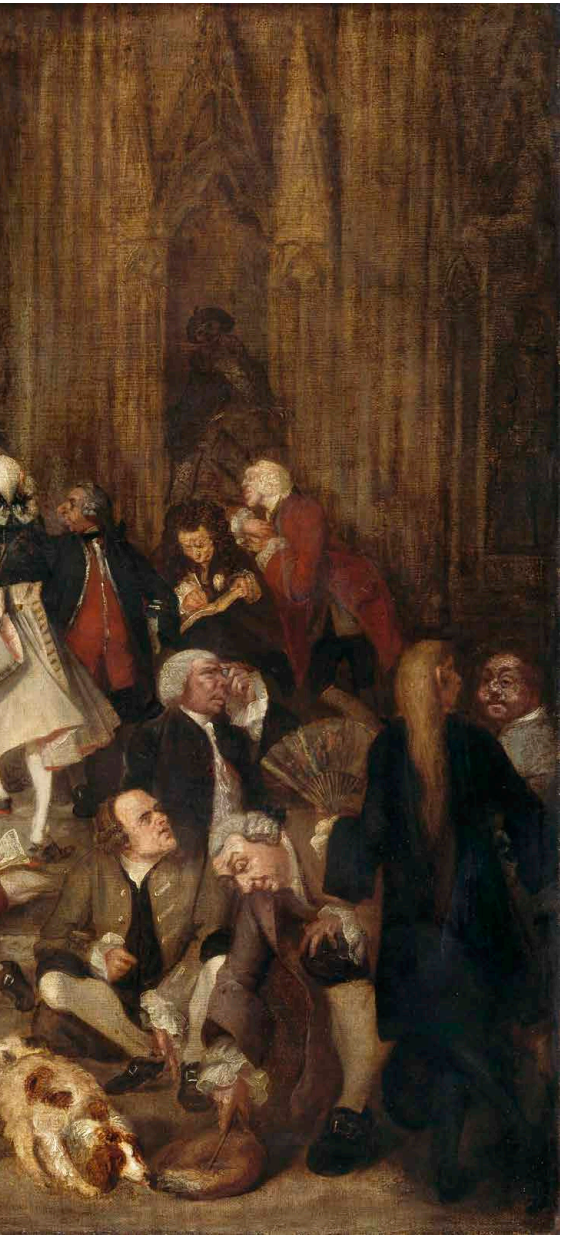
2. William Gandy (c. 1655–1729)
Portrait of John Patch (1691–1746), Surgeon, c. 1720
Oil on canvas
Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter, UK

near Versailles. Later John became a surgeon at the Devon and Exeter Hospital, and his eldest and youngest sons followed him into the medical profession (fig. 2). Thomas, his second son, started his pharmaceutical studies with his uncle James in London, where he also trained with the esteemed physician, Dr Richard Mead. There he met Richard Dalton, ten years his senior, who had already visited Italy, and the two friends are reported to have walked together to Rome. There, between 1749 and 1755, Patch lodged at the Palazzo Zucarri and at the English Coffee House, both situated in the Piazza di Spagna. He shared accommodations with Sir Joshua Reynolds, and he appears as the pug-faced caricature on the extreme right of Reynolds's *Parody of the School of Athens*, dated 1751 (fig. 3). In that canvas he is surrounded by Grand Tourists, many of whom were Irish, shown mimicking poses of the figures in Raphael's Vatican fresco.[3]

From 1750 until 1753 Patch worked in the studio of Joseph Vernet, a French landscapist who specialised in atmospheric harbor scenes, but this association was cut short when his master was summoned to Paris to paint a group of views of French ports. Vernet taught Patch to imitate

3. Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–92)
Parody of Raphael's School of Athens, 1751
Oil on canvas
National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin

his compositions and create imaginary landscapes with waterfalls, Italianate towers, and groups of figures in the foreground that directed the beholder's eye. While working in Vernet's studio, Patch was commissioned to paint views of Tivoli and Rome for James Caulfield, Earl of Charlemont. In 1752, another Irishman, Ralph Howard, through the agency of the "bear-leader," James Russell, commissioned him to paint copies of old masters and, in addition, he copied at least one coastal scene by Vernet. In addition to Patch's



landscapes, one canvas of Roman peasants must also date from this time (fig. 4).

In the summer of 1751, while he was still painting views of Tivoli (fig. 5), the bishop of Tivoli banished Patch from his diocese without giving a reason and, despite the intervention of Lord Charlemont, Sir Horace Mann — whose concerns included British subjects in the Papal States as well as in Florence — and Cardinals Piccolomini and Albani, he did not revoke his decision. On May 12, 1755, Charlemont, with the support of many of the sitters in Reynolds's *Parody*, outlined plans for an academy in Rome for the advancement of British artists, under the direction of John Parker. Patch, who did not see eye to eye with Parker, opposed this idea, and the nascent academy ended before it started. In June 1755, however, Patch's time in Rome was ended abruptly when Pope

[left] Detail of figure 3

4. [opposite top] Thomas Patch (1725–82)
Interior of a Roman Coffee House, c. 1750
Oil on canvas
Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, UK

5. [opposite bottom] Thomas Patch (1725–82)
A View of Tivoli, 1750–54
Oil on canvas
Yale Center for British Art (Paul Mellon Collection), B1973.1.46

6. John Astley (1720–87)
Portrait of Sir Horace Mann (1706–86), 1751
Oil on panel
Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University, LWL Ptg. 118

Clement XIII banished him from the city "in 24 hours for Crime well known to the Holy Office, tis said to have proceed'd from some Confession his poor boy Girolamo made at his Death for ye Ease of his Conscience," and this created rumor and considerable consternation amongst his circle of patrons and colleagues. It is generally assumed that the crime was sodomy.[4] In 1772, however, Patch disregarded the ban and briefly returned to Rome.

Patch asked his friend, the sculptor Simon Vierpyl, to settle his affairs in Rome, and he fled to Florence with an introduction to Sir Horace Mann, and they became firm friends (fig. 6). There he continued to paint decorative imaginary landscapes, often in pairs, and Lord Huntingdon commissioned him to paint the four bridges over the River Arno. These views owed much to a set of engravings of the city by Giuseppe Zocchi first published in 1744, and a second edition followed in 1754. Patch's views of the city show a sensitivity to light and shadow and a richly colored palette as well as a propensity to illustrate the diverse and joyous life of the city (fig. 7). They, too, were frequently painted in pairs revealing the city at different times of the day and, although the views were often repeated, to add variety, their staffage varies.

7. [opposite] Thomas Patch (1725–82)
A View of the River Arno Looking West toward the Ponte alla Carraia, c. 1765
Oil on canvas
Museum Purchase, Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, 1955.0085

Patch's numerous landscape paintings, both topographical and imaginary, must have been his most lucrative activity; however, because of their novelty, today Patch is best known for his caricatures. This genre had developed in Italy as early as the sixteenth century, and Patch is reputed to have drawn caricatures that had caused some offence before he left England. He continued to make similar drawings in Rome, where he must have been encouraged by the elderly Pier Leone Ghezzi. Patch probably already knew Ghezzi's caricatures through Arthur Pond's engravings of them.[5] Patch's appearance in Reynolds's *Parody of the School of Athens* must have led to discussions about the merits of caricature with his fellow Devonian artist. Patch's caricatures appear in drawings, engravings, soft-ground etchings, and painted figure groups. The prints may well have been intended as illustrations for a serious study of physiognomy Patch was writing and, in the last dated caricature group, now at Floors Castle, he is shown holding a large tome entitled *Le Regole del Fisonomizare*. The project ended when the manuscript was borrowed by a French aristocrat and,

apparently, was later thrown into a fire. A set of twenty-eight caricature heads appears to have been printed hurriedly as the order of the prints is, at best, random (fig. 8). Patch must have made many more pen and ink drawings, although today relatively few survive, and those that do were clearly made with etchings in mind. The sensitive chalk studies of English visitors to Florence that survived in a sketchbook have nothing to do with caricature (fig. 9), and in their informality they are closer to the full-length pastel portraits by Jean-Étienne Liotard. All the painted caricature groups include likenesses of Patch, sometimes as a portrait, but often in the act of going about his business—painting at an easel; carrying a bundle of books on his back, which requires herculean strength; or appearing with a satyr. Patch's sexuality must have encouraged him to remove himself from the jollity of his countrymen, and he remains an observer with a critical eye (fig. 10). Indeed, as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu observed in a letter from Padua addressed to the Countess of Bute, dated July 14, 1758, the young men "now living here, (however dignified and distinguished,) by herding together, and throwing away their

8. [opposite] Thomas Patch (1725–82)
Il Carlo, Mr. Piters, Mr. D., and an Unidentified Man, plates 1–4 from *Twenty-Eight Caricatures*
Yale Center for British Art, Yale University, B1977.14.1307

9. [above] Thomas Patch (1725–82)
Portrait of Lord Seaforth
In *Sketchbook of Portrait Studies,* 1760s
Red chalk
Yale Center for British Art, Yale University, B1977.14.309 (18)

10. Thomas Patch (1725–82)
A Party at Sir Horace Mann's in Florence, early 1760s
Oil on canvas
Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University, LWL Ptg. 128

11. [opposite] Thomas Patch (1725–82)
The Golden Asses, 1761
Oil on canvas
Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University, LWL Ptg. 133

money on worthless objects, have only acquired the glorious title of Golden Asses" (fig. 11).[6]

Perhaps Patch's most revealing self-portrait is an engraving of his own likeness with the body of a contented bull resting in the fields near Florence with a protective bell hanging around his neck (fig. 12). The subject is explained in part by the accompanying biblical quotation in Greek, Latin, and Italian: "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 14:11). No doubt the Papal Bull that banished Patch from Rome enabled him to find the rich intellectual pastures of Florence. By depicting himself as a bull (long-associated with sexual potency) and including the silhouetted phallic trunk in the top right corner, Patch provides insights into the circumstances of his exile.

Social norms in Florence were less restrictive than those of Rome and, indeed, word had reached the court of George III, who confided to Sir William Beechey that Johan Zoffany's *Tribuna*, 1772–77 (Royal Collection Trust, London) included "portraits of Sir Horace Man[n]; Patch, & others, who were considered as men addicted to improper practices."[7] In Zoffany's painting Patch helps Pietro Basianelli, one of the custodians of the Galleria, support the unframed *Venus of Urbino* by Titian and, in contrast to the group admiring the Roman statue on the right of *Venus de' Medici*, he points with his left hand toward the sculpture of the *Wrestlers*, which showed a figure subject more to his taste.

Like many other painters working in Italy he was asked to paint copies. While still in Rome, he copied works

12. Thomas Patch (1725–82)
Self-Portrait as a Bull, late 1760s
Etching
National Portrait Gallery, London

13. [opposite] Thomas Patch (1725–82)
Thomaso Patch, Autore, 1768
Soft-ground etching
In album of *Caricatures by Tommaso Patch*, 1765–70
Yale Center for British Art, B1977.14.1325

by his master Vernet, and he was engaged by an Englishman in Naples to paint reproductions of two canvases by Claude Lorraine in the Doria collection. According to a letter dated April 1755, he had "nearly finished them after five months fateague [*sic*]," though his patron had died before they were completed.[8] After he moved to Florence in 1764 he made copies of the two huge paintings by Salvador Rosa that Lord Spencer had purchased from the Florentine Acciajoli family, and which are still at Althorp House. He also made, without a patron's commission, copies of the *Venus of Urbino* and works by Rubens in the Palazzo Pitti. During his last months in Rome he negotiated the sale to Sir William Lowther of two paintings by Claude Lorraine, which are now in the Cleveland Museum of Art and the National Gallery of Scotland.[9]

The painter James Barry took an interest in the works of Ghiberti and Masaccio during his brief visits to Florence between 1766 and 1770, which suggests he was guided around the city by Patch, whose interest in quattrocento art blossomed in the 1770s.[10] He embarked on an ambitious publishing project to produce folios of large-scale engravings after works by early Florentine painters. Each edition was limited to forty copies. The first volume, dedicated to Horace Mann, reproduced frescoes then attributed to Masaccio in the Brancacci Chapel in Sta Maria del Carmine. Masaccio worked on the chapel with his assistant Masolino until his death in 1428 and, unknown to Patch, the cycle was completed by Filippino Lippi in the mid 1480s. In addition to twenty-four heads from the frescoes by Masaccio (fig. 13) and Lippi, the book ends with

14. Thomas Patch (1725–82)
The Presentation of Our Savior to the Temple
from *The Life of Fra' Bartolommeo della Porta*, 1772
Private collection

two figure groups reproducing Lippi's frescoes of *St Peter Disputing with Simon Magus* and *St Paul Visiting St Peter in Prison*.

A second book, published in 1772, contains prints dated 1771 after the work of Fra Bartolommeo. The first plate shows the Presentation in the Temple, dated 1516, which was then in the Convent di S. Marco in Florence (fig. 14). In 1792 the panel was acquired by Joseph II, Holy Roman Emperor, whose younger brother was the Grand Duke of Tuscany, and the painting is now in the collection of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. This print is of particular interest as an example of Patch experimenting with printmaking techniques. Here he uses an intaglio method known as *lavis* to produce tone by applying acid directly to the copper plate. In addition to this print, six details of the heads of each of the figures are also included. Other images are taken from the panel paintings of *S. Vincenzo Ferrari, Christ Appearing on the Road to Emmaus*, a *Pietà*, and a *Portrait of Savonarola*, now all in Museo di S. Marco dell' Angelico, together with two paintings of the Madonna and Child and details of many of the heads. Patch intended "to publish the whole in five numbers each number to contain 24 prints, with a description and measure of each picture"; a further group of prints, unfinished proofs, which appeared dated 1773, are in a private collection in London.

That same year Patch published his *Pictures of Giotto in the Church of the Carmelites* illustrated with prints from the frescoes in the Manetti Chapel in Sta Maria del Carmine (fig. 15). Patch's book was dedicated to Bernardo Manetti, a descendent of the patron of the chapel and the owner of Horace Mann's residence. In the introduction Patch writes:

Those pictures of Giotto in the Church of the Carmelites, are no more to be seen accepting in the following prints, as they have been destroy'd since the fire, which happened the 28th of January last year.... I only have saved some pieces with the permission of the owners of the chapel, which I have taken of[f] the wall, and since the whole was to have been destroyed, I was desirous of preserving at least the memory, which may give some pleasure to those, who are willing to reflect on the different ages of painting.

The frescos are now attributed to Spinello Aretino, and the fragments salvaged by Patch are distributed

15. Thomas Patch (1725–82)
Salome Dancing before Herod from *Pictures of Giotto in the Church of the Carmelites*, 1772
Etching and engraving
Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University, Folio 75 P27 770

among museums in Liverpool, London, Pisa, Pavia, and Rotterdam, with another fragment appearing on the New York art market in 1963.[11] Patch notes in his preface that the task of producing similar books reproducing work by early Florentine artists was handed over to Giovanni Bottari, who had published the 1757–1760 edition of Vasari's *Vite*.

Patch's final book, published in 1774, is a comprehensive group of engravings after Lorenzo Ghiberti's doors to the Florentine Baptistry. Anton Raphael Mengs had been unsuccessful in gaining permission to make engravings showing the doors; however, he had been able to make moulds from Ghiberti's reliefs, which provided Patch and his collaborator, Ferdinando Gregori, with the means to make the engravings. Consequently, the volume has a frontispiece engraving of a sculpted bust of Grand Duke Leopoldo I, and the illustration is inscribed with a dedication to him. Gregori is one of the sitters in Patch's book of twenty-five caricatures dated from 1765 to 1770. The first two illustrations in the book reproduce the doors in full, and they are signed by both Patch and Gregori. The subsequent plates, all by Gregori, are variously dated 1772, 1773, or 1774. The book is designed for the purchaser to cut out the prints and glue them together to produce a half life-size image of the doors. The introductory text supplies information about the fee Ghiberti charged for his work taken from documents that have since been lost.

The self-portrait as a bull is not the only evidence of Patch's contentment in Florence. He was an intimate friend of Sir Horace Mann's, who wrote shortly after Patch's exile in Florence, "I took much to him, and though he does not live in my house, he is never out of it a whole day."[12] In January 1778 Patch had a stroke, from which he recovered, although he appears to have given up painting afterward. On April 30, 1782, he had a second stroke, which he did not survive. Mann wrote to Walpole the same day, "I have been employed in a very melancholy scene, that of assisting a very worthy man who was most friendly attached to me.... He was attacked yesterday morning with an apoplexy in my house... and expired this morning."[13]

Notes

1 Letter from Horace Mann to Horace Walpole, Pisa, February 22, 1771, in *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, ed. W. S. Lewis, 48 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937–83), vol. 23, p. 275.

2 The most through biography of the artist remains F. J. B. Watson, "Thomas Patch (1725–1782): Notes on His Life, Together with a Catalogue of His Known Works." *The Walpole Society* 28 (1939–40): 15–50; and Watson's "Thomas Patch: Some New Light on His Work." *Apollo* 85 (May 1967): 348–53. Patch is also the subject of articles by the present author in John Ingamells, comp., *A Dictionary of British and Irish Travellers in Italy, 1701–1800; Compiled from the Brinsley Ford Archive* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 745–46; and the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004–), vol. 42, 997–98.

3 David Mannings, *Sir Joshua Reynolds: A Complete Catalogue of His Paintings,* 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 491–92, cat no. 1962, pl. 61; Cynthia O'Connor, "*The Parody of the School of Athens*: The Irish Connection." *Bulletin of the Irish Georgian Society* 26 (1983): 4–22.

4 Lindsay Stainton, "Hayward's List: British Visitors to Rome 1753–1775." *The Walpole Society* 49 (1983): 10–11. Cynthia O'Connor, *The Pleasing Hours: The Grand Tour of James Caulfeild, First Earl of Charlemont (1728–1799); Traveller, Connoisseur, and Patron of the Arts in Ireland* (Doughcloyne, Wilton, Cork: Collins Press, 1999), 124, 157–59.

5 Watson, "Thomas Patch (1725–1782): Notes on His Life," 15; O'Connor, "*The Parody of the School of Athens*," 18.

6 *[The Letters and Works of] Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, ed. Lord Wharncliffe, 3 vols. (London: Richard Bentley, 1837), vol. 3, 166.

7 *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, ed. Kenneth Garlick and Angus Macintyre (vols. 1–6); Kathryn Cave (vols. 7–16), 16 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978–98), vol. 6, 2471.

8 Detailed in a letter from Patch to Sir William Lowther, Rome, April 19, 1755, in Francis Russell, "Thomas Patch, Sir William Lowther and the Holker Claudes." *Apollo* 102 (August 1975): 118.

9 Ibid., 115–19.

10 *The Works of James Barry, Esq.*, 2 vols. (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1809), vol. 1, 180–82, 421–22; vol. 2, 36–38.

11 Frederico Zeri, "Italian Primitives at Messrs Wildenstein." *Burlington Magazine* 107 (May 1965): 253, 255, no. 55.

12 *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, vol. 23, 275.

13 Ibid., vol. 25, 272.

Checklist

Unless otherwise stated, all the works in the exhibition are by Thomas Patch.

The Golden Asses, 1761 **[p. 13]**
Oil on canvas
The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University, LWL Ptg. 133
[On view in the Reading Room. Access by request.]

Thomaso Patch, Autore, 1768 **[p. 15]**
Soft-ground etching
In album of *Caricatures by Tommaso Patch*, 1765–1770
Yale Center for British Art, B1977.14.1325

A Panoramic View of Florence from Bellosguardo, 1775
Oil on canvas
Yale Center for British Art (Paul Mellon Collection), B1973.1.45FR

A View of Tivoli, 1750–54 **[p. 7]**
Oil on canvas
Signed lower left "Patch"
Yale Center for British Art (Paul Mellon Collection), B1973.1.46

A View of the Ponte Lucano and Mausoleum of the Plautius Family, 1750–55 **[opposite]**
Oil on canvas
The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University, LWL Ptg. 102

British Gentlemen at Sir Horace Mann's Home in Florence, 1763–65
Oil on canvas
Yale Center for British Art (Paul Mellon Collection), B1976.7.187

A Group in the Artist's Studio in Florence, 1769–70
Oil on canvas
The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University, LWL Ptg. 141

Valentino, Servitore de Piazza, 1769 **[above]**
Pen and black ink on cream laid paper
Yale Center for British Art (Paul Mellon Collection), B1977.14.5321

Henry William Bunbury, 1769
Pen and black ink on cream laid paper
The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University, Drawings P294 no. 2

A Party at Sir Horace Mann's in Florence, early 1760s **[p. 12]**
Oil on canvas
The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University, LWL Ptg. 128

A Gathering at the Casa Manetti, Florence, 1765–68 **[p. 2]**
Oil on canvas
The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University, LWL Ptg. 125
[On view in the Corridor]

The Portrait of Masaccio
No. 1 from *Life of the Celebrated Painter Masaccio*, 1770
The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University, Folio 75 P27 770 (bound with other titles)

Salome Dancing before Herod
From *Pictures of Giotto in the Church of the Camelites*, 1772 **[p. 18]**
Yale Center for British Art (Paul Mellon Collection), L210.128 (Folio A)

The Presentation of Our Saviour to the Temple
No. 1 from *The Life of Fra' Bartolommeo della Porta*, Florence 1772 **[p. 16]**
Private Collection

Arthur Pond (1701–58) after Pier Leone Ghezzi (1674–1755)
Dr Thomas Bentley, Nephew of Dr. Richard Bentley, 1743 **[above left]**
Etching
The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University, 743.00.00.50+

Spencer Draper, 1768
No.9 from *Twenty-five Caricatures* **[above right]**
Etching
Private Collection

Sterne and Death, 1768
Etching
The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University, 768.00.00.04+

View of the Piazza del Gran Duca, early 1760s
Black chalk, pen and brown ink, wash and colored inks, and pencil on four joined sheets of paper
The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University, Drawings P294 no. 1 Box D205

Portrait of Lord Seaforth
In *Sketchbook of Portrait Studies,* 1760s
Red chalk
Yale Center for British Art, B1977.14.309 (18)

Thomas Patch after Paolo Uccello
Sir John Hawkwood, 1771
Engraving
Private Collection

Thomas Patch after Nicolas Poussin
Self-portrait, 1769 **[above left]**
Engraving
Private Collection

E'morto il babbo
Etching
Private Collection

Non sa risolvere **[above right]**
Etching
Private Collection

Acknowledgments

Nicole Bouché, Tom Charette, Sarah Davis, Brian Hotchkiss, Jay Lomnicky, John Loughman, Rebecca Martz, Kristen McDonald, Laura O'Brien Miller, David O'Shaughnessy, John Plunkett, Scott Poglitsch, Michelle Privée, Cynthia Roman, Kerri Sancomb, Sue Walker

Cover: *The Golden Asses*, 1761. Oil on canvas. The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University, LWL Ptg. 133

Organizing curator: Cynthia Roman

Designed and set in Yale and Poetica typefaces by Rebecca Martz, Office of the Yale University Printer, and edited by Brian Hotchkiss, Wordesign Services

Printed by GHP in West Haven, Connecticut

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