

The Ecosystem of Exhibitions: Venues, Artists, and Audiences in Early Nineteenth-Century London

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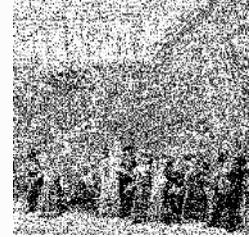
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The Ecosystem of Exhibitions: Venues, Artists, and Audiences in Early Nineteenth-Century London

Article by Catherine Roach

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Abstract

Early nineteenth-century London boasted a robust selection of displays, of art and otherwise, which made up a larger *ecosystem of exhibitions*. Participants in this ecosystem, including exhibition organizers, practitioners, and viewers, were at once mutually supporting and fiercely competitive. Artists banded together in group exhibitions, where many of them hoped to steal the show. Exhibition societies clustered together, benefiting from proximity even as they contended for visitors. Exhibitions and their objects were not consumed in isolation; rather, both the crowded walls of these displays and the busy itineraries of their viewers encouraged comparative viewing. Considering the display history of works by Benjamin Robert Haydon, John Constable, William Hilton, William Etty, John Martin, and Margaret Carpenter, this essay demonstrates how exhibition histories can shed fresh light on nineteenth-century art: first, by providing a new model for interactions among elements of the art world; and second, by uncovering works and artists who are rarely studied today but were vital participants in the ecosystem of exhibitions in their own day.

Introduction

When Jacques-Louis David charged Parisian audiences for a view of his painting *The Intervention of the Sabine Women* in 1799, a contemporary noted that it was an exhibition in the style of “les Anglais”.¹ Over five decades later, a one-man show by Gustave Courbet was similarly described as an exhibition “in the English manner”.² As these comments indicate, London was the epicentre of innovative exhibition models in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Many modes of display developed there subsequently became common practice, including the one-artist exhibition and the one-work exhibition.³ These ground-breaking British exhibitions have often been figured as precursors to later French displays, notably the Impressionist shows of the 1870s.⁴ But not every exhibition fits Impressionism’s glass slipper. This article examines early nineteenth-century displays in London from a new perspective. In doing so, I build on an important body of scholarship that emphasizes the diversity and interconnectedness of urban displays, of “fine art” or otherwise.⁵ Despite important interventions, discussion of such displays is still shaped by the discourse of the avant-garde, in

which the academy faces off with outsiders, rivals, or independents.⁶ But this approach captures only one part of a much larger story.

I propose instead that we consider displays of all types as parts of an *ecosystem of exhibitions*. The term *ecosystem* was coined in the early twentieth century by a scientist who sought a single term that could refer to living creatures and “the whole complex of physical factors forming what we call [their] environment”.⁷ Since then, this suggestive word has been widely applied, and “its uses continue to proliferate”.⁸ In applying the concept of the ecosystem to exhibitions, however, I am invoking in some ways its original intent, which was to create a framework in which interactions among individuals, groups, and resources could be assessed collectively.⁹ Thinking of exhibitions as an ecosystem allows for consideration of both the broader conditions of display and the actions of individual figures who navigated these conditions. As in a biological ecosystem, nineteenth-century exhibits and exhibitors both relied upon and competed with other actors in their environment.

Here, a word of caution is in order: ideas about the natural world, when applied to human societies, have been used to reinforce existing cultural hierarchies, including those of race, sex, and class. It is emphatically not my intent here to invoke the later nineteenth-century theories of liberal political economy or social Darwinism, in which some types of people were seen as “naturally” fitted to succeed. This project has the opposite intent: to destabilize the hierarchies of art history, by emphasizing London’s central role in generating exhibition practices, by rethinking the relationship between the Royal Academy and other exhibition venues, and by using the study of exhibitions as a means to uncover the careers of non-canonical artists.

In his foundational survey of urban entertainments, *The Shows of London*, Richard Altick described that city’s varied attractions as enjoying a “healthy symbiotic relationship”.¹⁰ But while they were deeply intertwined, exhibitions during this period were not always mutually supporting. Herein lies the usefulness of the concept of the ecosystem, which conveys both intimacy and conflict. By suggesting both fierce competition and mutual dependence, the term *ecosystem* both encompasses and moves beyond the model of conflict embodied by the prevalent Academy/outsider binary. The modernist narrative—which, despite the revisions of postmodernism, still saturates art history—posits a contest among individuals and assumes, in the words of Linda Nochlin, that “Genius or Talent ... like murder, must always out”.¹¹ This narrative has also structured our approach to institutions, positing exhibition venues as rivals duelling for primacy. As far as it goes, this narrative is not wrong: competition was essential to the early nineteenth-century art world—but so were coexistence and collaboration. In other words, these competitors could not do without one another.

Perhaps the clearest example of this dynamic in ecosystem models of nature is the interdependent yet violent relationship between predator and prey. Both are necessary to the ecosystem. Remove prey and the predators will perish. Remove predators and the prey will first proliferate and then starve. On the individual level, these interactions can be harsh indeed. For the entities destroyed in these processes—for the mouse eaten by a fox, or the artist whose work is upstaged by another exhibit—the fact that these events are part of a larger, mutually sustaining system is cold comfort. But in the broader view, the system enables the development of distinct, specialized types that thrive in connection with each other. Such was the case with nineteenth-century exhibitions, academic and non-academic alike. Of course, except in the most extreme cases, the stakes in the ecosystem of exhibitions were not life or death. For one set of participants, artists, what was at stake was professional success in the moment and enduring reputation in the future.

The ecosystem model has several advantages over previous ways of understanding nineteenth-century exhibitions. Tony Bennett's influential account of the "exhibitionary complex", identifies the solidification around 1850 of display as a form of social control, "a set of cultural technologies concerned to organize a voluntarily self-regulating citizenry", in which the exhibition serves as an alluring environment of visual knowledge and power, "a site of sight accessible to all".¹² One crucial insight of this approach is that art exhibitions are but one part of a larger phenomenon of display; another is the insistence on the central role of the audience. But, as will be explored in more detail below, display spaces in early nineteenth-century London were not "accessible to all": they reinforced social hierarchy not through the seductive inclusion of all citizens, but through the emphatic exclusion of the working classes. Moreover, these spaces of display and their audiences were not as orderly or self-regulated as Bennett's account suggests.¹³ As subsequent scholarship has shown, both before 1850 and after, exhibition-goers often declined to conform to official scripts, instead using spaces of display to their own ends.¹⁴ Unlike the "exhibitionary complex", the ecosystem is not a top-down model; in an ecosystem, important contributions are made by participants at every level, from the fungi to the charismatic megafauna. Exhibition-goers (and their admission fees) were both a resource for which artists and venues competed and active agents who moved among displays and chose how to interact with them. Recently, it has been suggested that "the concept of an 'exhibitionary complex' should be replaced with that of 'exhibitionary networks'".¹⁵ The term *network* evokes connections among displays, but it does not suggest the nature of those connections, which could be at once harmful and nurturing.

The ecosystem model allows for a new understanding of art world dynamics, one that encompasses both the interactions of multiple venues and the specifics of individual installations. Art exhibitions were but one element of a well-established round of urban entertainments that were seen and evaluated comparatively, including theatrical performances, concerts, and social events. Within that round, each display venue provided a dynamic environment in which objects interacted with each other. The first part of this article provides a broad overview of the ecosystem of exhibitions in 1820s London. This period saw the culmination of a distinctive phase in the ecosystem of exhibitions in the British capital: the urban display culture initiated during the Seven Years' War had by this time produced a flourishing and diverse set of attractions, with established customs and procedures; later in the century, these conditions would be altered by the rise of both regular international expositions and powerful art dealers. This first section charts interactions among three sets of actors: organizers of exhibition venues, artists, and audiences.¹⁶ It examines how exhibition administrators both rivalled and supported one another, learning from each other's tactics and poaching each other's contributors; how artists utilized these multiple venues, deploying works among them strategically; and how viewers chose to consume these diverse offerings.

The next section considers how a single object fared within this ecosystem, tracing the transit of a well-known work, John Constable's *The Hay Wain*, through several galleries in both London and Paris, starting with its public debut at the Royal Academy in 1821, under its original title of *Landscape: Noon* (fig. 1). The display history of this picture illuminates the conditions that affected the reception of individual works within the ecosystem of exhibitions. It also reveals the diversity of the art exhibited at this moment. At each stop in its journey, *The Hay Wain* hung alongside compelling objects that are little studied today, although they attracted more audience attention at the time. Many of these works by non-canonical figures such as John Martin and

Margaret Carpenter prove equally vivid and worthy of study as the better-known works with which they once shared a gallery.¹⁷



Figure 1

John Constable, *The Hay Wain*, 1821, oil on canvas, 130 × 185 cm. Collection of The National Gallery, London (NG1207). Digital image courtesy of National Gallery, London.

In examining works displayed together, this article takes its cue from period viewing practices. Early nineteenth-century exhibitions promoted a distinctive mode of vision that took in a range of objects now classified separately. The proximity of multiple attractions and the brisk pace of their consumption encouraged comparative viewing.¹⁸ Moving from venue to venue and from exhibit to exhibit, viewers in nineteenth-century London practised a voracious and emphatically cross-referential approach to the consumption of art. “Comparison is the great test of excellence”, proclaimed the critic Robert Hunt in 1821, voicing a widely held belief.¹⁹ Both within a single show and moving among several shows, viewers assessed displays against one another, relying on their memories of sights just seen as well as of previous years’ exhibitions.²⁰ These comparisons might take place across a room, across town, or across the great span of history. Most broadly, commentators frequently assessed the productions of the current day against exemplars of the past, asking if individual artists or the national school as a whole could measure up to their illustrious predecessors.²¹ Attractions were also judged in tandem, with journalists frequently comparing the charms of one venue’s offerings to those of another.²² This approach offers lessons for our own practice of art history today. The ecosystem of exhibitions in early nineteenth-century London had room for—and need for—many different kinds of actors. Considering it as a system with multiple, diverse participants provides a way of thinking beyond the canon, beyond established metrics of quality and assumptions of importance, to reveal a richer, stranger world of early nineteenth-century art.

The Ecosystem of a City: 1820s London

London in the 1820s boasted a robust selection of displays, the product of more than half a century of steady proliferation and specialization. “London, at present, teems with shows of art”, wrote a critic for the *New Monthly Magazine* in 1821, citing as evidence group exhibitions at the Royal Academy, the British Institution, and the Society of Painters in Water Colours; the single-artist exhibitions of Benjamin Robert Haydon, John Glover, Thomas Christopher Hofland,

Benjamin West, and James Ward; and the domestic galleries of John Leicester, the Marquess of Stafford, Thomas Hope, and the Earl Grosvenor.²³ This list is by no means comprehensive, as it leaves out many displays of historic art and archaeology, such as models of a newly discovered pharaonic tomb.²⁴ Some of these forms of display were of more recent vintage than others. While artists' exhibitions had been around since the 1770s, the opening of domestic galleries to a limited public was a more novel phenomenon, dating from 1806.²⁵ In addition, the first two decades of the nineteenth century saw the foundation of multiple exhibition societies.²⁶ While the Academy remained the premiere venue, it was by the 1820s the first among many. Governance of these display venues varied widely. Later in the century, dealers would take a leading role in staging exhibitions, but this was not yet the case in the 1820s.²⁷ Most organizations were administered by artist-members; the British Institution was unusual in that it was run by a group of wealthy patrons.²⁸ Some artists handled the arrangements for displays of their own work or mounted their own thematic shows. In other cases, artists collaborated with businessmen such as William Bullock, who staged the exhibition of Théodore Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa* at the Egyptian Hall in 1821.²⁹ Whether undertaken by the artist or a representative, stand-alone displays and their associated publicity efforts could prove crucial in shaping both the initial reception and the lasting reputation of an object.³⁰

All of these venues competed with each other for admissions fees and critical notice. At the same time, they also contributed to a mutually sustaining environment. Exhibitions were frequently located in close proximity, creating constantly evolving artistic districts, just as they do today.³¹ Exhibitions held concurrently with that of the Academy, during the months of London's political and social season, benefited from a wider audience. The Academy, in turn, benefited from the existence of other displays. The British Institution has been described as "not so much a rival to the Academy as a supplement"; this statement applies to many exhibition societies of the day.³² Non-academic organizations could provide "a stepping-stone" to the Royal Academy;³³ for example, the marine painter Clarkson Stanfield was elected as an Associate of the Royal Academy soon after resigning his membership in the Society of British Artists, where he had formerly served as President.³⁴ In addition to co-opting the most successful exhibitors from other venues, Academy administrators also adopted their innovations if they proved popular: in 1811, they experimented with the provision of a price list, after this was introduced at the British Institution and the Society of Painters in Water Colours; in 1816, they followed the example of the British Institution by opening a school of painting.³⁵

On occasion, the leaders of these organizations also shared resources and information. In 1813, Royal Academy administrators overcame the initial reluctance of some members and lent to the pioneering loan show of works by Sir Joshua Reynolds held at the British Institution.³⁶ When the Society of British Artists decided, two decades later, to stage their own loan exhibition, they consulted the Directors of the British Institution on the matter of insurance.³⁷ Of course, relations were not always so harmonious. Royal Academicians often viewed the advent of new contemporary art exhibitions with suspicion; for example, in 1824, Thomas Phillips expressed disdain for the artists who chose to participate in the inaugural show of the Society of British Artists rather than send to the Academy. At the same time—and perhaps protesting too much—he also claimed that "their departure [from] our corner" benefited the Academicians, as it "enabled us to put into execution a long desired object, viz to have no pictures above the whole lengths & it is a great improvement".³⁸ But competition could clearly also be destructive. As Greg Smith has shown, competition from the newly formed Associated Artists in Watercolour led to an immediate downturn in sales at the Society of Painters in Water Colours, and the Society

eventually foundered and split into factions.³⁹ As this example demonstrates, the proliferation of exhibition societies could also stunt the growth of individual organizations.



Figure 2

George Scharf, *The Royal Academy Exhibition of 1828*, 1828, watercolour, 18.4 × 26 cm. Collection of the Museum of London, London. Digital image courtesy of Museum of London.

Yet another important set of actors in the ecosystem—artists—benefited enormously from the diversity of exhibition venues. Practitioners did not need to limit themselves to one type of exhibition; indeed, a chief advantage of this system was the ability to exhibit simultaneously at several venues within a single season. Each of these sites had its own character, which came with certain advantages and drawbacks. For example, the Academy exhibitions were prestigious but also increasingly voluminous, making it more challenging for an object to attract attention in a crowded field. Non-Academic venues helped artists, particularly younger artists or those recently arrived in the capital, to build a reputation and find buyers, while preparing for a run at the Academy and its honours. After noting the difficulties of viewing art in the “crowded rooms of Somerset-house”, one journalist claimed that “many a painting, whose merits have escaped notice [at the Academy], has a chance at the British [Institution] of being duly appreciated”.⁴⁰ Smaller than the Academy and with no places reserved ahead of time for Academicians (who were automatically entitled to show up to eight works at the Academy), the British Institution was an ideal venue for works by emerging artists, as well as for works that had not found a buyer at the previous season’s Academy exhibition (figs 2 and 3).⁴¹ As explored in the next section, Constable was one of the many artists who took advantage of this opportunity. Matching work to venue and employing multiple venues were both vital to success in the nineteenth-century ecosystem of exhibitions.



Figure 3

Alfred Joseph Woolmer, *Interior of the British Institution (Old Master Exhibition, Summer 1832)*, 1833, oil on canvas, 71.8 x 92.1 cm. Collection of the Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection (B1981.25.694). Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art.

Nor were group shows the only option. In the eighteenth century, artists such as John Singleton Copley had pioneered new display models, including the one-artist and the one-work show. These shows were not necessarily oppositional in nature. Certainly, an exhibition that has been identified as the first retrospective, Nathaniel Hone's show of 1775, was explicitly anti-Academic.⁴² But once established, the retrospective was immediately seized upon as an effective new form of display that could be deployed for a variety of ideological purposes. At both the Salon de Correspondence in Paris and at the British Institution in London, retrospectives served nationalist agendas.⁴³ These exhibitions did not critique their respective academies but rather lionized members of those academies in explicitly patriotic celebrations of their national schools. Similarly, for individual artists, exhibiting outside of the Academy did not necessarily mean exhibiting against it. For example, in 1781, Copley angered his fellow Academicians by staging the first one-work exhibition, featuring the *Death of the Earl of Chatham* (figs 4 and 5). The issue was not clashing artistic philosophies or academic gatekeeping. Instead, Copley's offense was withholding an object of acknowledged merit from the Royal Academy in order to exhibit it in his own name, for his own profit.⁴⁴ The decision to go it alone offered both more risk and more reward than submitting works to an exhibition society. Renting a venue, printing a catalogue, and advertising a show required an artist to assume the costs personally or to take on a partner. But such exhibitions also offered more individual attention from viewers and the press, as well as the chance to reap financial rewards, should the exhibition prove popular.



Figure 4

John Singleton Copley, *The Death of the Earl of Chatham*, 1779–1781, oil on canvas, 230 × 300 cm. Collection of Tate (N00100). Digital image courtesy of Tate.



Figure 5

W. Angus after Daniel Dodd, *The Death of Lord Chatham in the House of Peers*, 1781, engraving, 12 × 17.7 cm. Collection of the British Museum (1882,0311.1100). Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum.

By the early nineteenth century, artists' entrepreneurial exhibitions had become standard practice in London. In contrast, in Paris the regulations of the Académie royale put in place before the French Revolution expressly forbade outside exhibitions due to their commercial associations, and this suspicion of non-academic shows persisted well into the nineteenth century.⁴⁵ In the British capital, however, being an Academician was no bar to exhibiting outside the Academy. In 1812, the year after he had been elected a full Royal Academician, David Wilkie staged a one-artist show, while also sending a work to the Academy; two years later, another Academician, Richard Westall, complemented his monographic display with an exhibit at the British Institution.⁴⁶ In 1815, the President of the Royal Academy, Benjamin West, promoted his most recent work through two simultaneous exhibitions. He showed his massive Biblical scene *Christ Rejected* in a one-artist exhibition, while sending a sketch of this composition to the Academy.⁴⁷ One journalist helpfully advertised West's show by noting that his Academy contribution was "the original sketch from which the great picture was painted now exhibiting in Pall Mall".⁴⁸ By the 1810s, exhibiting outside the Academy was a tactic employed even by its President. The possibilities and perils of this system are illustrated by the career of Benjamin Robert Haydon. Famously, Haydon committed suicide in 1846 after an exhibition of his history paintings at the Egyptian Hall was upstaged by a rival attraction, the little person Charles Stratton, better known as General Tom Thumb.⁴⁹ Yet for many decades prior, London's ecosystem of exhibitions had sustained Haydon's career. Although scholars tend to emphasize his one-man shows, Haydon, like most artists of the period, exhibited at a variety of venues.⁵⁰ True, due to grievances with both the Royal Academy and the British Institution, he ceased to exhibit with these organizations for much of the 1810s and 1820s.⁵¹ But the ecosystem provided other opportunities. Haydon enjoyed a mutually beneficial relationship with several venues: they gave him access to potential buyers and critical attention, while his participation added to their attractions and their reputations. For instance, Haydon's first major critical triumph occurred in 1814 with the exhibition of his *The Judgement of Solomon* at the recently founded Society of Painters in Oil and Water Colours.⁵² When the Society of British Artists was established a

decade later, Haydon was quick to take advantage of this new venue, as well.⁵³ He also continued to stage his own one-artist exhibitions, which were no bar to patronage at the highest levels: his *Mock Election* went directly from the Egyptian Hall to the Royal Collection.⁵⁴

The chronically indebted Haydon, however, was not able to hold onto the profits of such triumphs, and the end of his career illustrates the vicious side of the ecosystem of exhibitions. In this extreme case, success or failure within this ecosystem was literally a matter of life or death. As financial pressures grew in the 1820s, Haydon took advantage of every possible venue, returning to exhibiting at the Institution and, with less frequency, at the Academy. His exploitation of multiple venues (along with the generosity of his friends and the patience of his creditors) kept him afloat for two full decades. But he also continued to take the entrepreneurial risk of staging his own exhibitions, and the failure of his display in 1846 undoubtedly contributed to his decision to take his own life. Here one can see the more destructive workings of an ecosystem, with two side-by-side attractions competing to the detriment of one. In the struggle to attract a limited resource—audience members—the human performer had prevailed over history paintings. The ecosystem could nurture and sustain artistic careers, but it could also destroy them.

As Haydon's example demonstrates, both exhibition organizers and artists relied on another, equally vital, set of participants in the ecosystem of exhibitions: viewers. The nature of nineteenth-century art audiences represents one of the most exciting and most opaque topics in the study of past exhibitions. Audience numbers can be gauged from the stream of anonymous coins that viewers paid for admission to many nineteenth-century exhibitions. But these numbers say little about the respective social identities or the complex individual experiences of those viewers. Recent scholarship has moved beyond examining the hopes or preconceptions of exhibition planners about their audiences to studying how those audiences actually exploited a space, ignoring or refashioning the dictates of catalogue and exhibition layout.⁵⁵ But much more remains to be done in this area.

Despite important work on the topic, the social make-up of early nineteenth-century audiences is frequently mischaracterized, in part because of scholars' tendency to impose present-day cultural hierarchies onto the displays of the past. For example, one author recently advocated for the importance of an early nineteenth-century display by asserting that it was “not a plebeian exhibition or commercial show”, but rather one with “a clear educational focus”.⁵⁶ But displays in this period habitually combined commerce and education; it was, in fact, a key to their success. Similarly, in his discussion of the impetus behind the foundation of the National Gallery, London, in 1824, Brandon Taylor draws a firm line between displays of art and other attractions such as panoramas, asserting:

*It was precisely the gap between the two available forms of public pleasure—the traditional aristocratic pleasure of beholding valuable paintings, and the delights of marvelling at the painted commercial illusions and street exotica—that must have been striking in late Hanoverian and early Victorian London.*⁵⁷

But this is a false binary: at the time, no strict distinction between “forms of public pleasure” existed. Rather, these cultural hierarchies were still emerging, and their boundaries had not yet hardened.⁵⁸ Nor were the audiences for paintings and panoramas substantially different.⁵⁹ The very fact that some commentators urged the organizers of art exhibitions to distinguish their events from other fashionable entertainments eloquently confirms that they were, in fact, entertainments.⁶⁰

More recently, scholars have begun to study in concert “categories of representation traditionally separated into spectacle and art”.⁶¹ As Jonathan Crary has shown, “paintings were produced and assumed meaning not in terms of some cloistered aesthetic and institutional domain, but as one of the many consumable and fleeting elements within the expanded field of images, commodities, and attractions.”⁶² The audience for these attractions was certainly stratified, but not by elite consumption of so-called fine art and lower-class consumption of other visual entertainments. Instead, participation in all of London’s public entertainments was strictly limited by their cost. In Paris, admission to the Salon was free, but at English exhibitions, a standard one-shilling fee excluded most members of the working classes, as it had originally been designed to do.⁶³ Although the one-shilling charge has been described as “rather inconsequential”,⁶⁴ it was in fact deeply consequential to those whose weekly wages were measured in shillings. In the first decades of the nineteenth century, even the best-paid members of the working classes, including skilled artisans such as carpenters working in London, made an estimated 25–40 shillings a week.⁶⁵ In this period, radical publishers seeking a broad working-class audience priced their publications at one or two pence; a single admission to an exhibition cost six to twelve times that amount.⁶⁶ Nonetheless, some journalists in the first decades of the nineteenth century continued to voice anxiety that the financial barriers to entry were not high enough.⁶⁷ Some commentators also complained about less tutored (if relatively affluent) visitors to the regular exhibition days, accusing them of appreciating art for the wrong reasons, such as a simple-minded love of realistic detail.⁶⁸

Exhibition audiences were therefore limited by purchasing power, creating a restricted but still heterogeneous audience.⁶⁹ Among those who could afford entry, a wide range of ranks were represented, from canal-owning dukes to prosperous cloth merchants. Nor should audience members be viewed in terms of their class status alone; also at work were affiliations of religion, gender, politics, economic interests, and aesthetic preferences.⁷⁰ In 1845, John Scandrett Harford, an untitled but wealthy member of a Bristol banking family, wrote a letter to his wife about a Royal Academy dinner that reveals the subtle interplay of multiple social factors.⁷¹ The invitation-only event marked the opening of the Annual Exhibition and included a chance to view the display before dining.⁷² According to Harford, close examination of artworks was interspersed with socializing with people of various ranks and persuasions:

I gave up between two and three hours to a view of the pictures, and was much assisted in discovering the *gems* among them, by Lord M[*illeg*] who had been I believe to the Private View the day before ... The Bishop of London came up to me very cordially ... he showed, while disavowing all pretences to Connoisseurship that he was a discriminating judge. Baily took me to look at a statue of his, a nymph from the Bath, the subject very delicately treated, and the figure on all its parts so beautiful, elegant, and finely finished that I should class it, without hesitation, among the most successful works of modern art ... then dear Acland joined me, introduced me to the Turner, a reddish-faced, rather short, [*illeg*]-looking man, with whom I had a long chat, and whom I treated with the deference due to highest genius—though some wld. say he has gone mad. [emphasis in the original].⁷³

Harford’s account reveals the exhibition audience as diverse and subtly socially differentiated, even at this exclusive viewing. He encountered several acquaintances who outranked him on the social scale, including his close friend the baronet Sir Thomas Dyke Acland and an unidentified peer.⁷⁴ A devoted Evangelical, Harford nonetheless found common interest in art with a High Church clergyman, the Bishop of London.⁷⁵ Harford was also approached by an artist whom his family had patronized, Edward Hodges Baily, who successfully used the occasion to promote his

sculpture. But for Harford, the most interesting social event was his introduction to J.M.W. Turner, by then an elder Academician known for his controversial formal innovations. Here the social calculations are complex indeed: Harford registers the artist's working-class origins in his description of his rubicund complexion, only to claim to have inverted the usual social order by according Turner "the deference due to highest genius".⁷⁶ Yet Harford's tone also suggests that he felt himself to be both acting with gracious condescension and demonstrating his own aesthetic acuity. Although hardly diverse by today's standards, early nineteenth-century exhibitions were nonetheless complex social experiences in which visitors of different ranks, religious views, and professions could both encounter each other and distinguish themselves from each other.⁷⁷

Much more research remains to be done about the specific character of the audiences at each of London's exhibition venues. But what is clear at this point is that those who could afford such entertainments visited many of them, moving among the various displays that made up the ecosystem of exhibitions. Artists did not limit themselves to one venue, nor did their audiences. Exhibitions were not consumed in isolation. Rather, they were part of a round of seasonal urban entertainments. Sometimes several displays were seen in the same day, interspersed with social calls, shopping, and performances. On a visit to London in 1811, in a single day, Jane Austen saw both an exhibition of contemporary art at the British Institution and a display of "curiosities", including a taxidermy giraffe, at the Liverpool Museum.⁷⁸ The contents of these two displays were more similar than might appear at first glance: the British Institution show included monumental works by artists such as West, but also numerous landscapes, genre scenes, and animal subjects, including Thomas Christopher Hofland's *Portrait of a Trout*.⁷⁹ Austen's exhibition-going habits were typical for the time. In one month in summer 1812, the journalist Henry Crabb Robinson visited the Royal Academy, where he found Turner's *Hannibal Crossing the Alps* "the most marvellous landscape I have ever seen"; he attended a lecture by Samuel Taylor Coleridge and a dramatic performance by Sarah Siddons; and went to see the radical publisher Daniel Isaac Eaton placed in the pillory. Tellingly, Robinson used the term *exhibition* to describe both the offerings at the Academy and public corporeal punishment.⁸⁰

This, then, was the ecosystem of exhibitions in 1820s London: a city filled with art exhibitions and other visual entertainments, whose organizers competed for attention, scrambled for places in desirable neighbourhoods, and synchronized their calendars in order to maximize their audience. Viewers from a range of social backgrounds, all of whom could afford the entry fees, chose among these offerings, often taking in multiple attractions within a day or within a season. Meanwhile, artists sought to find the best outlet for their works, tailoring their submissions to the available venues, mounting their own exhibitions, and manoeuvring for the best places within a show. Successfully navigating this ecosystem required talent, connections, training, wit, and no small amount of luck. Turning from a broad overview to a specific example, the next section examines the transit of a now-iconic work, John Constable's *The Hay Wain*, through the ecosystem of exhibitions.

The Ecosystem of the Gallery: John Constable, John Martin, and Margaret Carpenter

In the context of a city, groups of exhibitions attracted viewers to certain districts through their collective presence, only then to compete for those viewers' attention and resources. In the context of a single gallery, a similar dynamic took place among the objects exhibited. Each exhibition space functioned as an ecosystem within an ecosystem, like tidal pools within a larger

coastal zone. The specific display conditions at each of these smaller, structurally distinct units of the ecosystem had important consequences for the reception of individual works. The perils of juxtaposition for artists of this period are well known. A brightly coloured or dramatically composed work could overshadow, or “kill”, its neighbours, and many commentators worried that the visually competitive settings of group exhibitions were driving artists to ever more extreme effects.⁸¹ But in addition to fuelling competition, the tightly packed walls could also have a generative effect. The dense hanging aesthetic of exhibitions in this period encouraged viewers to read the contents of displays in concert, savouring visual harmonies and contrasts, perceiving meaningful juxtapositions created by exhibition organizers, and generating vivid new narratives of their own.⁸² But for some artworks, it took several years and several different venues to find a favourable display environment.

From today’s art-historical perspective, the most important event in London in 1821 was the exhibition at the Royal Academy of John Constable’s *Landscape: Noon*, now known as *The Hay Wain* (see fig. 1). This bucolic scene is today considered a quintessential work of the artist and of Romantic art. But at its public debut in 1821, *The Hay Wain* was overshadowed twice over: first, by a painting that captured the public imagination before the Academy even opened; and second, by other exhibits at the Academy. Identifying the works that shared the walls with this canonical painting sheds new light on nineteenth-century art, revealing works that competed for audience attention with Constable’s painting, and won. These include John Martin’s *Belshazzar’s Feast*, whose significance has recently been reassessed by scholars, and several works by Margaret Carpenter, whose paintings have yet to be seriously studied.⁸³

The failure of *The Hay Wain* to immediately capture the British public’s attention in 1821 has been used as evidence of that public’s lack of taste. For Andrew Hemingway, a survey of published criticism revealed a deficiency in nineteenth-century viewers. The public’s preference for works by John Martin and David Wilkie over *The Hay Wain* confirmed for this author that:

*the impact of paintings on the cognitive faculties of the original exhibition audiences was in most instances a small one—that the aesthetic judgement of that audience was not sophisticated and that it did not look for subtle or difficult meanings in works.*⁸⁴

In this reading, the relative unpopularity of *The Hay Wain* indicates its original audience’s lack of sophistication; by contrast, the popularity of works by Martin and Wilkie suggests that they are straightforward and easily consumed. The terms of judgement being imposed here are those of a mid-twentieth-century art theory, that of avant-garde and kitsch.⁸⁵ Recently, however, scholars have reassessed the work of both of these artists, exploring the nuanced social valences of Wilkie’s genre paintings and of Martin’s historical landscapes.⁸⁶ I argue that the popularity of these works suggests not that their audiences were incapable of discernment, but that they valued a particular kind of looking, one fostered by the nineteenth-century ecosystem of exhibitions. This system encouraged modes of engagement that were different than, but not inherently inferior to, the modernist ideal of isolated aesthetic contemplation; instead, they were richly comparative, viewing works in concert with their companions.

Such was the case with Martin’s *Belshazzar’s Feast*, exhibited at the British Institution’s annual sale exhibition of 1821, which opened in early spring (fig. 6). By the time *The Hay Wain* went on view at the Royal Academy later that season, *Belshazzar’s Feast* had already been declared the picture of the year.⁸⁷ To understand why this painting was so popular, when Constable’s was not, we need to look both at its display context and at its visual qualities, according it the detailed formal analysis more usually reserved for canonical works.



Figure 6

John Martin, *Belshazzar's Feast*, 1821, oil on canvas, 160 × 249 cm. Private Collection. Digital image courtesy of Christie's Images and Bridgeman Images.

Martin's painting shows a party gone horribly wrong. In a vast outdoor courtyard, the Babylonian monarch Belshazzar and his court have been enjoying an impious feast served in sacred vessels looted from Jerusalem. Now all is consternation. A divine proclamation of doom, written in light, has appeared on the wall at left. The prophet Daniel, the man in black who presides at the centre of the picture, has just interpreted this portent: the king will die and his kingdom will fall. The myriad figures who respond to these events present an intricate catalogue of terror, pleading, and denial. Beyond them rise the legendary splendours of Babylon, including its hanging gardens. Throughout, the painting glistens, burns, and shimmers. The sharp yellow rays of the divine warning contrast with both the cool moonlight and the smouldering red glare of bonfires and torches. These variegated hues play across a richly ornamented scene, highlighting spiky diadems, sinuous silver vessels, and an outstretched serpent's tongue. Martin's composition invites the viewer both to savour this plenitude and to imagine its erasure: Babylon is resurrected only to fall once more.

Demand to see Martin's work was so high that the British Institution sale exhibition was held open for several extra weeks. More than 33,000 visitors are known to have paid a shilling to see it, and the press of crowds necessitated a protective barrier.⁸⁸ Why did this work capture the public imagination, while *The Hay Wain* did not? Recent attempts to rehabilitate Martin's reputation have been grounded in his cultural significance, rather than in the aesthetic quality of his works.⁸⁹ But it is worth asking what visual qualities in Martin's compositions so appealed to London audiences. Part of the answer lies in the way in which this image was consumed. Its visual density and complexity reward sustained examination, carried out in conversation with the catalogue and with companions. Like earlier displays pioneered by Copley, this installation relied on "the interactions between image, text, and viewer", with each viewer supplying his or her own cultural knowledge, in this case of the Biblical text and its possible interpretations in light of current events.⁹⁰ The Biblical narrative, which would have been familiar to a large portion of the audience, is spread out over the surface of the composition, so that the viewer must survey the many figures in order to pick out the interpreting prophet and the disbelieving king.⁹¹ This painting rewards extended looking, and viewers spent considerable time in front of the painting, leading to complaints by reviewers that they could not even see the work they were meant to evaluate.⁹² One critic also claimed to have developed a personalized route through the exhibition, "first sitting before Mr. Martin's 'Belshazzar's Feast' whenever we visit the Gallery"

and then proceeding to a nearby animal painting.⁹³ In other words, viewing Martin’s canvas in its first exhibition setting could be a complex, interactive experience.

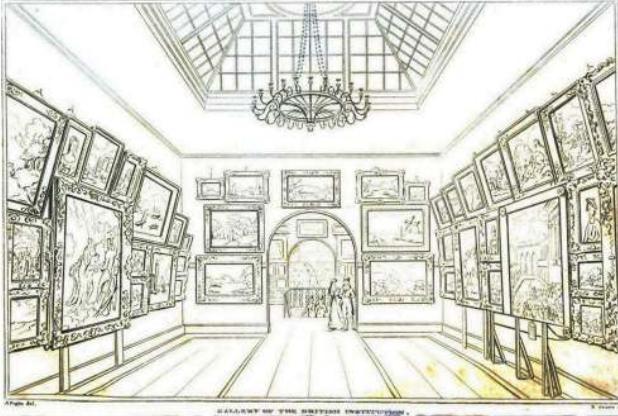


Figure 7
R. Grave, after A. Pugin, *Gallery of the British Institution*, published in *Magazine of Fine Arts*, 1821, illustration following page 240. Digital image courtesy of University of Michigan Library, Ann Arbor, MI.

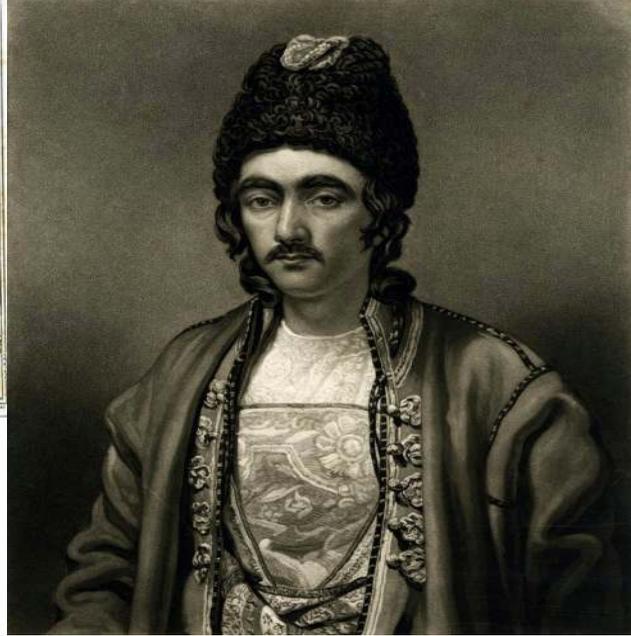


Figure 8
John James Halls after Charles Turner, *Meerza Jiâfer Tabeeb*, 1820, mezzotint, 35.5 × 25.2 cm. Collection of the British Museum (11950,0520.255). Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum.

Information about this hang can be gleaned from the engraving published by the *Magazine of the Fine Arts* (fig. 7). Many images of exhibitions from this period adjust or even rearrange their contents, but the hang depicted here accords closely with the catalogue number order.⁹⁴ *Belshazzar’s Feast* hung in the centre of a wall in the North Room, which was considered the principal gallery of the Institution.⁹⁵ Martin’s painting served as the centrepiece of an intricately symmetrical hang—a type of installation commonly used in this era.⁹⁶ This placement visually identified Martin’s painting as an important work. As the central object on the wall, it formed the anchor for a dense matrix of exhibits that contained numerous landscapes, including scenes of Italy, Spain, and the English countryside, as well as animal paintings, such as Thomas Christmas’s *A Hunted Lion*, which hung directly above it.⁹⁷ This image would have complemented the exoticism of Martin’s canvas, as would a highly charged set of pendants that flanked it. On the left hung John J. Halls’ *Meerza Jiâfer Tabeeb*, a portrait of a Persian medical student (fig. 8); on the right, Margaret Carpenter’s *A Native of Calcutta*.⁹⁸ Although little known today, Carpenter was a frequent exhibitor in London. Her *Native of Calcutta* has yet to be located, but its visual symmetry with its temporary pendant can be seen in the engraving: both present tightly framed three-quarter views of single figures wearing elaborate headgear. It seems unlikely that these two images of foreigners ended up to either side of Martin’s canvas by chance, especially given how few such images there were in the exhibition as a whole. One of the sites invoked through these temporary pendants, Calcutta, was a long-established nexus of imperial expansion. The other, Persia, was a country in which the British had only recently

established a diplomatic presence, in the hope of countering Russian influence in the region. By juxtaposing these likenesses with Martin's image of ancient Babylon, the British Institution administrators performed a classic Orientalist manoeuvre, conflating distance in space with distance in time. The presence of these two additional foreign faces would have highlighted Martin's emphasis on the exotic setting, which the writer for the *Literary Chronicle* described as an "appalling and super-human amplitude of Eastern gorgeousness".⁹⁹ Combined with images of men from colonial territories, both actual and desired, Martin's painting may also have invoked a sense of imperial destiny.



Figure 9

William Hilton, *Nature Blowing Bubbles for Her Children*, 1821, oil on canvas, 172.7 × 232.4 cm. Collection of Tate (N01499). Digital image courtesy of Tate.

Prominent placement within a group show helped Martin's canvas thrive within the ecosystem of exhibitions. Display circumstances in this year were less beneficial for Constable's *The Hay Wain*, which faced stiff competition from both within and without the Academy Exhibition. Even after the sale exhibition at the British Institution had closed, *Belshazzar's Feast* continued to compete with the Academy's exhibits, because the picture's new owner put it on display as a paying attraction, first on the Strand and later on Pall Mall.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, *The Hay Wain* was not among the most favourably reviewed works at the Academy, although it did attract positive notice in both the *Observer* and the *Examiner*.¹⁰¹ The critical favourites in 1821 tended to be figure paintings, such as William Hilton's *Nature Blowing Bubbles*, which garnered considerable praise (fig. 9). A rare dissenting voice in the *London Magazine* complained: "I don't see why a fine plump young woman, lying under the shade of ardent sunflowers ... and idly busied in bubbling water through a reed, should be dignified with the abstract title of Nature".¹⁰² But the vast majority of critics agreed with Robert Hunt, who declared in the *Examiner* that "this noble picture unites the simplicity of Nature with Allegory, the seriousness of moral instruction and satire with the charms of female and infantine beauty ... It will equally delight the mother, the artist, and the philosopher".¹⁰³ Hilton's picture no doubt benefited from its location within the exhibition, hung above the fireplace in the Great Room.¹⁰⁴ Location may likewise have contributed to the lacklustre reception of *The Hay Wain*: it was placed in the much smaller, adjoining School Room.¹⁰⁵ But a spot in the School Room did not necessarily spell doom: another work hanging there, William Etty's *Cleopatra's Arrival in Cilicia*, managed to attract

considerable critical attention (fig. 10). This brightly toned, action-packed composition made Etty's reputation; "I awoke famous", he later recalled.¹⁰⁶ Among the critics, Etty's *Cleopatra* was received as an elevated work of art, due to its attention to the body, classical subject matter, and visual references to continental masters such as Veronese and Rubens. One reviewer described Etty's painting as a "splendid achievement" in "the highest class", while simply noting in passing that in the same room "there are many good landscapes".¹⁰⁷ At the British Institution earlier that season, the installation had promoted the importance of Martin's painting, awarding it a central place and surrounding it with companions that encouraged an imperialist reading of the work. For *The Hay Wain* at the Academy, however, the presentation was not as advantageous, nor were the companions as congenial.



Figure 10

William Etty, *Cleopatra's Arrival in Cilicia*, 1821, oil on canvas, 106.5 × 132.5 cm. Collection of Lady Lever Art Gallery (LL 3589). Digital image courtesy of Lady Lever Art Gallery.

At the end of the Academy Exhibition of 1821, Constable was left without a purchaser for *The Hay Wain*. Fortunately for the artist, the early nineteenth-century ecosystem of exhibitions provided a multiplicity of venues. In 1822, when he sent it to the British Institution sale exhibition, the critical reception was much the same: reviewers devoted more column space to landscapes by artists little known today, such as Thomas Christopher Hofland and William Linton. The circumstances of its display may once again partially explain this neglect. *The Hay Wain* was shown on the west side of the Middle Room, where viewers entered through a central stair.¹⁰⁸ Although it was one of the larger paintings hanging on this wall, it was in boisterous company. Remarkably, its companion from the School Room at the Academy in the previous year, Etty's *Cleopatra*, appeared aside it once more.¹⁰⁹ Etty's *Cleopatra* hung to the right of a large work that must have dominated the wall, Mary Anne Ansley's 7 × 9.5 foot Miltonic subject, *Satan Bourne Back to His Chariot after Having Been Wounded by the Arch Angel Michael* (currently unlocated).¹¹⁰ *The Hay Wain* was hung to the left of this massive work, physically and likely visually dwarfed by it. At roughly 4 × 6 feet, Constable's canvas was large for a landscape of this period, but Ansley's history painting was even larger.



Figure 11

Sarah Margaret Carpenter, *Devotion*, 1821, oil on canvas, 76.2 × 63.5 cm. Collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (FA.17[O]). Digital image courtesy of Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

On the same wall, also to the left of Ansley's monumental canvas, hung a smaller work, *Devotion*, painted by Margaret Carpenter, whose portrait of an Indian man had hung next to Martin's *Belshazzar's Feast* in the same space the year before (fig. 11). Carpenter's career is emblematic of the myriad artists who operated in the ecosystem of exhibitions without the benefit of academic training, but with the help of multiple exhibition venues.¹¹¹ The daughter of an army officer, she grew up in Salisbury, where her interest in art was encouraged by the second Earl of Radnor, who gave her access to his important collection of Old Master paintings at Longford Castle.¹¹² Once established in London, she built a substantial career as a painter of portraits and subject pictures. She showed regularly at the British Institution and the Royal Academy, as well as contributing to the Paris Salon of 1827, where her exhibit won praise from Delacroix.¹¹³ As the prevalence of her work in exhibitions of the 1820s suggests, she was a fixture of the early nineteenth-century

art world, and it was said that she “would certainly have been a Royal Academician but for her sex.”¹¹⁴ Although well known to critics and to her fellow artists at the time, Margaret Carpenter remains almost invisible to art history today, in part because she was neither a member of the Academy nor one of its vocal opponents.



Figure 12

Sarah Margaret Carpenter, *Devotion* (detail), 1821, oil on canvas, 76.2 × 63.5 cm. Collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (FA.17[O]). Digital image courtesy of Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

Her exhibit at the British Institution in 1822, *Devotion*, is at first glance an inexplicable and untimely work, one that defies the standard developmental models of art history. It is an intense study of a single figure looking heavenward, in the mode of Counter-Reformation depictions of saints.¹¹⁵ The lush, varied brushwork attests to Carpenter's technical mastery: the contours of the saint's face are firmly handled, while his collar is merely indicated by two emphatic white streaks of paint (fig. 12). Carpenter's picture is striking both as a frankly admiring image of an attractive man by a female artist and as an example of traditionally Catholic iconography produced in a Protestant nation. Just a year earlier a Catholic relief bill, which would have eased restrictions on Catholic male citizens' participation in government, had passed the House of Commons only to be rejected by the Lords.

Within the context of the British Institution, however, Carpenter's apparently anachronistic subject matter made perfect sense: many of the patrons of the British Institution believed that study of continental models was essential for the improvement of British art. Reviewers of the exhibition remained silent about the religious implications of Carpenter's *Devotion*, while praising its formal qualities; one critic went so far as to declare that it "wants nothing but the touch of time to rank it with some of the best specimens of the Italian Masters".¹¹⁶ This accolade exemplifies the comparative mode of viewing enabled by the ecosystem of exhibitions, whose simultaneous displays had the effect, in the words of one critic, of "bringing the works of the ancient and modern Artists into immediate comparison".¹¹⁷ Seen in this light, Carpenter's picture represents not an object out of step with its art-historical moment, but one successfully matched with its original exhibition venue by an artist skilled at navigating the ecosystem of exhibitions.

Carpenter's *Devotion* soon found a buyer and eventually entered the collection of John Sheepshanks, who, in 1857, included it in his important gift of British paintings to the nation.¹¹⁸ Its companion, *The Hay Wain*, had also attracted some critical notice, but at the end of the exhibition, Constable had yet to find a buyer who would meet his asking price. But the display of the work at the British Institution nonetheless enabled its future fame, because it had been seen there by a French art dealer of English extraction, John Arrowsmith, who wanted the picture "to form part of an exhibition in Paris—to show them the nature of the English art".¹¹⁹ Although Constable found his initial offer insultingly low, negotiations continued, as the artist was also sensible of the possibilities: "I hardly know what to do—it may promote my fame & procure commissions but it may not."¹²⁰ He also had to overcome his jingoistic prejudices, less than a decade after Waterloo, declaring at one point that "It is too bad to allow myself to be knocked down by a French man." Eventually, however, a deal was reached, and Arrowsmith arranged for three of Constable's works to be shown at the Paris Salon of 1824. This time, they were not overlooked, thanks in no small part to the efforts of their new owner. Arrowsmith drummed up enthusiasm for Constable's works prior to the opening of the Salon by making them available in his rooms. There, they could be studied up close, at length, and with fewer competitors—an opportunity taken by Delacroix, among others.¹²¹ This promotion in a smaller display venue set the stage for the works' acknowledgement at the official exhibition. Although Constable's canvases were not originally well placed at the Salon, interest was such that *The Hay Wain* and one other work were moved, after the exhibition opened, to what Constable described as "a post of honour ... two prime places near the line in the principal room".¹²² Clearly, Arrowsmith's advocacy had a beneficial effect. The result is well known: fame and influence for Constable in France and an elevated reputation at home.¹²³ *The Hay Wain* was sought for the French national collections, but sold elsewhere, and eventually was accessioned by the National Gallery, London, where it has become an icon of national identity.

In 1848, a young woman from Manchester named Mary Joanna Hutchinson wrote to her brother, a cotton mill owner, describing a visit to London. Her itinerary was typically crowded: she walked on Hampstead Heath with her uncle on one day and on another, she wrote, "I went with him to the British Institution, there are some very fine pictures in it this year. Then Mary & I went to see a Panorama of Vienna, that too is very beautiful. ... I have also been gratified by a sight of the Duke of Wellington".¹²⁴ At the end of the period under consideration here, art exhibitions, panoramas, and celebrities could still be treated as comparable urban attractions. For Hutchinson, both a gathering of hundreds of contemporary artworks and a single massive, illusionistic painting of foreign city were urban display experiences to be judged in concert—and she found both to be "very beautiful". This type of viewing is typical of the ecosystem of exhibitions in nineteenth-century London. As this article has sought to demonstrate, our approach to writing the history of this period should be similarly expansive.

The ecosystem of exhibitions challenges scholars to consider many participants at a particular moment of visual production, not just the traditionally prestigious or immediately charismatic. Starting with an installation rather than with a particular artist or set of artists provides a fresh perspective on nineteenth-century art. This model does not dispense with hierarchy altogether—as in a biological ecosystem, there are more and less successful actors. But it encourages a broader scope for research. Constable's importance to the history of art is unquestioned. But, as the objects discussed above demonstrate, his was not the only work of significant interest or

merit to be shown in London in these years. Nineteenth-century exhibitions and exhibits should be studied as they were consumed, in combination with one another. It is insights such as this that the history of exhibitions has to offer the history of art.

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Footnotes

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23. "Fine Arts", *New Monthly Magazine*, 1 June 1821, 282.
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25. Altick, *The Shows of London*, 99–116, 408–415; Oskar Bätschmann, *The Artist in the Modern World: The Conflict Between Market and Self-Expression* (Cologne: DuMont Buchverlag, 1997), 29–52; Giles Waterfield, "The Town House as Gallery of Art", *London Journal* 20, no. 1 (1995): 47–66; Anne Nellis Richter, "Improving Public Taste in the Private Interior: Gentlemen's Galleries in Post-Napoleonic London", in Denise Amy Baxter and Meredith Martin (eds.), *Architectural Space in Eighteenth-Century Europe: Constructing Identities and Interiors* (London: Routledge, 2010), 169–186.
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 37. Hubbard, *An Outline History of the Royal Society of British Artists*, Vol. 1, 31.
 38. Thomas Philips to Dawson Turner, 2 May 1824, Dawson Turner Papers, 0.13.27, Trinity College, Cambridge.
 39. Greg Smith, *The Emergence of the Professional Watercolourist: Contentions and Alliances in the Artistic Domain, 1760–1824* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 159; Wilcox, *The Triumph of Watercolour*, 64.
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 41. William T. Whitley, *Art In England* (New York: Hacker Books, 1973), Vol. 1, 289; Fullerton, "Patronage and Pedagogy", 67.
 42. Stefanis, "Nathaniel Hone's 1775 Exhibition".
 43. Laura Auricchio, "Pahin de la Blancherie's Commercial Cabinet of Curiosity (1779–87)", *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 36, no. 1 (2002): 47–61; Francis Haskell, *The Ephemeral Museum: Old Master Paintings and the Rise of the Art Exhibition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 16–19, 46–63; Catherine Roach, "Rehanging Reynolds at the British Institution: Methods for Reconstructing Ephemeral Displays", *British Art Studies*, Issue 4 (Autumn 2016): DOI:10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-04/croach.
 44. Neff, "The History Theatre".
 45. Paul Mattick, "Art and Money", in Paul Mattick (ed.), *Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics and the Reconstruction of Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 167.
 46. Algernon Graves, *The Royal Academy of Arts: A Complete Dictionary of Contributors and their Work from its Foundation in 1769 to 1904* (London: Graves & Co., 1906), Vol. 8, 267; Algernon Graves, *The British Institution, 1806–1867: A Complete Dictionary of Contributors and Their Work from the Foundation of the Institution* (Bath: Kingsmead Reprints, 1969), 579. See, also Michael Clark and Nicholas Penny (eds.), *The Arrogant Connoisseur: Richard Payne Knight, 1751–1824* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), 107; Nicholas Tromans (ed.), *David Wilkie, 1785–1841: Painter of Everyday Life* (London: Dulwich Picture Gallery, 2002), 62.
 47. For these works, see Helmut von Effra and Allen Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), 358–360. West may have been emulating David Wilkie, who in 1812 showed the sketch of the *Village Holiday* at the Academy, and the full-scale oil in his own exhibition. Tromans, *David Wilkie, 1785–1841*, 19.
 48. "Fine Arts: Royal Exhibition, Somerset House", *Belle Assemblée*, August 1815, 39.
 49. On the complex factors that contributed to Haydon's suicide, see John Barrell, "Benjamin Robert Haydon: The Curtius of the Khyber Pass", in John Barrell (ed.), *Paintings and the Politics of Culture: New Essays on British Art, 1700–1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 270.

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52. Brown, “‘Fire and Clay’”, 10.
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58. Martin Myrone (ed.), *John Martin: Apocalypse* (London: Tate Publishing, 2011), 12.
59. Riding, “Staging *The Raft of the Medusa*”, 3–5.
60. Hemingway, *Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain*, 5.
61. Hughes, “Sanguinary Engagements”, 93.
62. Crary, “Géricault, the Panorama, and Sites of Reality in the Early Nineteenth Century”, 13.
63. Giles Waterfield (ed.), *Palaces of Art: Art Galleries in Britain, 1790–1990* (London: Dulwich Picture Gallery, 1991), 131; C.S. Matheson, “‘A Shilling Well Laid Out’: The Royal Academy’s Early Public”, in David H. Solkin (ed.), *Art on The Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House, 1780–1836* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 40; for a provocative theory of how publicity efforts enabled “consumption without attendance”, see Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade*, 47.
64. Holger Hoock, *The King’s Artists: The Royal Academy of Art and the Politics of British Culture, 1760–1840* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 207.
65. Peter Mathias, *The First Industrial Nation: An Economic History of Britain, 1700–1914* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1969), 219.
66. Richard Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800–1900* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 266; in the 1830s, the Mechanics’ Institute exhibitions charged a lower admission fee of half a shilling, which made them accessible to “artisans and mechanics”, but not to most “ordinary factory workers or labourers”, see Toshio Kusamitsu, “Great Exhibitions Before 1851”, *History Workshop* 9 (Spring 1980), 74.
67. Neff, “The History Theatre”, 74.
68. Hemingway, *Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain*, 5; David H. Solkin, “Crowds and Connoisseurs: Looking at Genre Painting at Somerset House”,

- in David H. Solkin (ed.), *Art on The Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House, 1780–1836* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 169–171.
69. Hemingway, *Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain*, 4.
 70. Marjorie Morgan, *Manners, Morals and Class in England, 1774–1858* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 5–6.
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 72. Hooch, *The King's Artists*, 216.
 73. John Scandrett Harford to Louisa Harford, 3 May [1845], Harford Family Papers, 28048, C80/11, Bristol Record Office. The year can be identified as 1845 from the description of Edward Hodges Baily's *Statue, Nymph Preparing for the Bath*, no. 1372. Graves, *The Royal Academy of Arts*, Vol. 1, 95.
 74. Alice Harford, *Annals of the Harford Family* (London: Westminster Press, 1909), 67.
 75. Arthur Burns, "Blomfield, Charles James (1786–1857)", in H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (eds.), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), DOI:10.1093/ref:odnb/2668.
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 77. This characterization of the audiences at art exhibitions is indebted to Hannah Greig's insights about the social function of eighteenth-century gardens, see "'All Together and All Distinct': Public Sociability and Social Exclusivity in London's Pleasure Gardens, ca. 1740–1800", *Journal of British Studies* 51, no. 1 (January 2012): 50–75.
 78. Jane Austen, *Jane Austen's Letters*, edited by Deirdre le Faye (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 179; on the Liverpool Museum, see Altick, *The Shows of London*, 235. For similar itineraries, see Gillespie, "Richard Du Bourg's 'Classical Exhibition', 1775–1819", 265.
 79. British Institution, *Catalogue of the Works of British Artists Placed in the Gallery of the British Institution, Pall Mall, for Exhibition and Sale* (London: W. Bulmer, 1811), 15, 26.
 80. Henry Crabb Robinson, *Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson*, edited by Thomas Sadler (Boston: Fields, Osgood, 1869), Vol. 1, 245–248. On the connections between art and the criminal body during this period, see Meredith Gamer, "Criminal and Martyr: The Case of James Legg's Anatomical Crucifixion", in Sally Promey (ed.), *Sensational Religion: Sensory Cultures in Material Practice* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 495–513.
 81. Kay Dian Kriz, *The Idea of the English Landscape Painter: Genius as Alibi in the Early Nineteenth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 38–39.
 82. Hallett, "Reading the Walls"; Hughes, "Ships of the 'line'"; Roach, "Rehanging Reynolds at the British Institution".
 83. Myrone, *John Martin*, 13–20, 99–112.
 84. Andrew Hemingway, "Art Exhibitions as Leisure-Class Rituals in Early Nineteenth-Century London", in Brian Allen (ed.), *Towards a Modern Art World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 105.
 85. Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch", *Partisan Review* 6, no. 5 (1939): 34–49.

86. Nicholas Tromans, *David Wilkie: The People's Painter* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007); David H. Solkin, *Painting Out of the Ordinary: Modernity and the Art of Everyday Life in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2008); and Myrone, *John Martin*.
87. See, for example, "British Gallery: Mr. Martin's Picture", *Observer*, 18 February 1821, 3; "Fine Arts: British Institution Gallery", *New Monthly Magazine*, March 1821, 108–109.
88. Robin Hamlyn, *Belshazzar's Feast, 1820* (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1989), 6. The actual attendance numbers were even higher: the exhibition was also visited by an unrecorded number of British Institution members and their guests, who were not charged for individual entry.
89. Myrone, *John Martin*, 12.
90. John Bonehill, "Exhibiting War: John Singleton Copley's 'The Siege of Gibraltar' and the Staging of History", in John Bonehill and Geoff Quilley (eds.), *Conflicting Visions: War and Visual Culture in Britain and France, c. 1700–1830* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 151.
91. As Martin Myrone observes, this quality would have been emphasized at the work's next venue, where a numbered diagram designed by the artist encouraged a complex circuit of viewing. See Myrone, *John Martin*, 100.
92. W.H. Parry, "Fine Arts: British Gallery.—No. II", *Literary Chronicle*, 24 February 1821, 125; "The British Institution", *London Magazine*, April 1821, 437.
93. Robert Hunt, "Fine Arts: British Institution", *Examiner*, 4 March 1821, 141.
94. Catherine Roach, "Images as Evidence? Morse and the Genre of Gallery Painting", in Peter John Brownlee (ed.), *Samuel F.B. Morse's Gallery of the Louvre and the Art of Invention* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 46–59.
95. "Monthly View", *Belle Assemblée*, March 1828, 133.
96. Waterfield, *Palaces of Art*, 51; John Sunderland and David H. Solkin, "Staging the Spectacle", in David H. Solkin (ed.), *Art on The Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House, 1780–1836* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 24.
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98. On his London career, see Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and Historiography* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 43.
99. Parry, "Fine Arts: British Gallery", 126. See, also Andrew Hemingway, "The Politics of Style: Allston's and Martin's Belshazzars Compared", in Andrew Hemingway and Alan Wallach (eds.), *Transatlantic Romanticism: British and American Art and Literature, 1790–1860* (Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015), 122.
100. Myrone, *John Martin*, 101.
101. Graham Reynolds, *The Later Paintings and Drawings of John Constable* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), Vol. 1, 69.
102. Cornelius Van Vinkbooms, "Exhibition of the Royal Academy", *London Magazine*, July 1821, 73.
103. Robert Hunt, "Fine Arts: Royal Academy Exhibition", *Examiner*, 13 May 1821, 301.
104. "Fine Arts: Royal Academy", *Literary Gazette*, 12 May 1821, 296.
105. Anne Lyles, "Soliciting Attention: Constable, the Royal Academy and the Critics", in Anne Lyles (ed.) *Constable: The Great Landscapes* (London: Tate, 2006), 37.
106. Sarah Burnage, Mark Hallett, and Laura Turner, (eds.), *William Etty: Art and Controversy* (York: York Museums Trust, 2011), 22, 31.

107. “Fine Arts: Royal Academy”, *Literary Gazette*, 12 May 1821, 296.
108. British Institution, *Catalogue of the Works of British Artists Placed in the Gallery of the British Institution for Exhibition and Sale* (London: William Nicol, 1822), 21.
109. Exhibited under the title *Cleopatra, in the Character of Venus, Sailing Down the River Cydnus*. *Catalogue of the Works of British Artists*, 21.
110. On Ansley, see Ellen C. Clayton, *English Female Artists* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1876), 410.
111. On the crucial role of exhibitions in the careers of women artists, see Paris Amanda Spies-Gans, “Exceptional, but not Exceptions: Public Exhibitions and the Rise of the Woman Artist in London and Paris, 1760–1830”, *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 51, no. 4 (2018): 393–416.
112. Richard J. Smith, *Margaret Sarah Carpenter (1793–1872): A Brief Biography* (Salisbury: Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum, 1991), 2.
113. Smith, *Margaret Sarah Carpenter*, 2; Eugène Delacroix, *Correspondance générale d’Eugène Delacroix*, edited by André Joubin (Paris: Plon, 1935), 1:205–6.
114. “Wm. Hookham Carpenter, Esq., F.S.A.”, *Gentleman’s Magazine*, September 1866, 410.
115. Ronald Parkinson, *Catalogue of British Oil Paintings, 1820–1860* (London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 1990), 22.
116. “Fine Arts”, *Literary Gazette*, 16 February 1822, 104. See, also, “British Institution”, *Morning Chronicle*, 29 January 1822, 3; Robert Hunt, “Fine Arts: British Institution Gallery”, *Examiner*, 17 February 1822, 108.
117. A Connoisseur, “The British Gallery”, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, June 1821, 340–341.
118. Parkinson, *Catalogue of British Oil Paintings, 1820–1860*, 22.
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123. Patrick Noon, “Colour and Effect: Anglo-French Painting in London and Paris”, in Patrick Noon (ed.), *Constable to Delacroix: British Art and the French Romantics* (London: Tate Publishing, 2003), 21–25.
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