Portraits of the Artist as a Young Woman

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Published by The Ohio State University Press

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Portraits of the Artist as a Young Woman: Painting and the Novel in France and Britain, 1800-1860.

The Ohio State University Press, 2011.
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As women sought to establish professional artistic status in nineteenth-century France and Britain, they confronted myriad obstacles, both practical and ideological. In nineteenth-century culture, dominant discourses of art and gender figured forth woman as amateur, practicing drawing or painting for personal rather than public ends. Although middle and upper class women were expected to be “accomplished” in the art of drawing, these skills in the arts d’agrément were closely aligned with the marriage market. The “lady amateur” practiced art “to display her taste and skill, to strengthen the domestic bonds of love and duty, to serve the community, and to improve her taste and that of the nation,” Ann Bermingham tells us, reflecting above all “women’s commodity status.” As Jane Austen sardonically illustrates in the conversation between Miss Bingley and Mr Darcy cited above, the “accomplished woman” was a catachresis of
Elizabeth Bennet remarks to Darcy “I am no longer surprised at your knowing only six accomplished women. I rather wonder now at your knowing any” (39). Recognized as a work of art herself, the accomplished woman necessarily remained outside of the circuits of real artistic accomplishment or genius. Trained at home or at boarding school in drawing and painting by governesses or private tutors, women of the gentry practiced their skills within the domestic sphere for personal or familial entertainment or decoration; their subject matter, execution, and consumption marked the drawings and paintings of the accomplished woman as “feminine” and necessarily amateur productions.

Moreover, Deborah Cherry explains, within the languages and institutions of nineteenth-century art, “femininity was positioned as the very antithesis of the professional artist . . . As a category of value amateur is mobilized against women’s art to secure masculine definitions of the artist and the professional.”

Even as Female Design Schools and the École Gratuite de dessin pour les jeunes filles opened in London and Paris in the early decades of the century, these institutes for working-class girls, providing practical training in industrial or commercial design, served only to increase the distance between contemporary constructions of “woman” and “artist,” while at the same time intensifying the resistance of male visual artists to female incursions into the realm of professionalism. As in previous centuries, many female visual artists who achieved professional status from 1800–1860 were the daughters, sisters, or wives of male painters and thus able to acquire the studio training generally inaccessible to women.

Both the French Académie Royale de peinture et de sculpture (established in 1648) and the British Royal Academy (est. 1768) continued to serve as arbiters of professional artistic legitimacy during the period; although a handful of women had been granted conditional membership in the eighteenth century, none were counted among the members of either institution in the nineteenth century. Artistic training at the Academy schools was barred to women in England until 1860 and in France until 1897, thus preventing aspiring female painters from receiving the official artistic formation deemed necessary for a professional career, not the least of which was the life class, in which the students drew from the nude model. History painting, the most elevated of all the genres within the hierarchies of art, was theoretically predicated on an artist’s ability to depict the human form in action, which was in turn dependent on learning to draw from the live model. “To be deprived of this ultimate stage of training,” Linda Nochlin observes, “meant, in effect, to be deprived of the possibility of creating major art works” and women were de facto relegated to the “minor” genres of portraiture, landscape, still life, and genre painting. While women's artistic productions were ultimately included in Salons and RA expositions, they generally constituted a small percentage of the work exhibited.
Despite these and other obstacles, however, professional female artists did emerge in nineteenth-century France and Britain in ever-increasing numbers, gaining access to training and exhibition both within and beyond the traditional structures of power in ways to be discussed in the chapters to follow. Like the male visual artist of the period, the female painter sought to construct her professional identity within the public sphere in direct and implicit dialogue with contemporary discourses of art, gender, and professionalism. Although women were principally associated with amateur art, a handful of female painters in France and England did achieve artistic renown in the course of the centuries, but these predecessors were by and large figured forth as “exceptional women” whose existences were, by definition, inimitable. Eighteenth-century painters Elizabeth Vigée-Lebrun and Angelica Kauffman, the most notable of these “exceptional women,” had fashioned their self-portraits (and public images) in such a way as to emphasize their beauty and uniqueness, while at the same time aligning themselves with their aristocratic subjects in ways that obscured the commercial nature of their enterprise. Exempted from the social laws applied to her sex, the exceptional woman is “a traditional figure of masculinist discourse,” Mary Sheriff tells us, who is “tolerated, even admired in her originality,” for her exceptional status serves to affirm rather than subvert the very laws she transcends. Thus Vigée-Lebrun and Kauffman, whose artistic talents elevated them above the female fray, were constructed as *sui generis* in France and Britain, eschewing pupils and doing little to make the idea of women *artists*, rather than a singular woman artist, conceivable. As Sheriff explains, “exceptional women trouble the public order only to reinforce its rules. Thus defined, the exceptional woman can only be a problematic role model, for aspiring to her position implies collusion with the general subjugation of women. Separation from other women is the price a woman pays for her exceptionalness” (2).

The women painters in this study, interested in collective as well as individual visibility, turned away from the model of exceptionality for a more communal image of women artists while constructing her subject position as one that could be shared by all women. Rejecting the distancing forms of classical myths and allegorical representations embraced by Vigée-Lebrun and Kauffman, these nineteenth-century female visual artists sought to portray themselves in spaces and places that were recognizably real (though ultimately, perhaps, no less mythologized), suggesting their irrefutable presence in the field of cultural production and in the social order, on equal footing with men. One of the most popular settings for scenes of professional self-fashioning was the atelier, and paintings by women of women artists in the studio presented the public with alternative visions of gender and artistic creation. In France, these images were staged in the studio in direct dialogue with contemporary images of male painters in the atelier, while in Britain, where studio culture did not
exist as it did in Paris, women artists transformed domestic and public settings into surrogate studios, self-consciously constructing the image of the female painter as a professional. In all cases, these paintings of women in the atelier, depicting them as working subjects rather than objects of the representing gaze, are political interventions, in Rancière’s sense of the word, as they seek to render visible and intelligible the figure of the professional woman artist.

Portraits of the Artist in the Studio: GENDERED NEGOTIATIONS OF IDENTITIES IN FRANCE

The image of the male artist in the studio had been a popular theme since the Renaissance and served over the centuries as a scene of self-fashioning where the painter could perform a social and aesthetic identity for an audience. From Pliny’s account of Apelles and Alexander in the studio to the various interpretations of Pygmalion, Zeuxis, and St. Luke, the topos has staged the artist’s negotiations for power, status, and cultural capital within the artistic and social spheres, while at the same time offering up new mythologies of art. In “L’Atelier comme autoportrait” (The atelier as self-portrait), Philippe Junod remarks that beginning in the nineteenth century, the studio increasingly functioned as a “social theatre” as well as a “mirror of the artist”; doubling as a social space and a private one, the atelier may be read as an artistic “program or manifesto” while at the same time presenting an “allegorical tenor.” As a working space, the studio represents the locus of artistic creation and production, complete with a vocabulary of standard signifiers: plaster casts and models of ancient sculpture to indicate classical training; musical instruments and tobacco pipes pointing to inspiration; cast-off drapery to suggest the nude model; and palette, brushes, easel, and maulsticks as the tools of professional artistry.

The complement to this solitary site of creativity is the studio as social nexus where students are trained by an artistic master and friends gather to confer. These images reflect a different side of the myth and reality of the nineteenth-century artist, emphasizing the collective identity and shared experience of brotherhoods discussed above. As Thomas Crow, Carol Ockman, and Abigail Solomon-Godeau have shown, the artist's studio in post-revolutionary France was the scene of homosocial bonding and erotics where artistic identity was formulated in response to changing conceptions of masculinity. Constructed as a sphere of masculine production and exchange, the studio was closely tied to the institutional structure of the Academic system that established aesthetic and social hierarchies through inclusion and exclusion. Official training at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris produced the painters and sculptors who dominated the Salons, receiving both commissions and cultural capital. Women and
indeed all painters who were excluded from classes at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts were thus denied access to the theoretical and practical training that came to distinguish artist from artisan, and high art from commercial production.

Boilly’s *Gathering of Artists in Isabey’s Studio* (1798) and Cless’s *L’Atelier de David* (1804) serve as paradigmatic announcements of the ethos of masculinity and homosocial camaraderie of the post-revolutionary atelier in France, as they highlight the collective and collaborative nature of identity formation in the space of the studio. Boilly’s ambitious and successful *Gathering of Artists* (figure 3) announced a new vision of the artist for the new century. The thirty-one artists are elegantly dressed and intellectually engaged, while the atelier is striking in its equally elegant modern décor. History painters, miniaturists, landscape, genre, and still life painters are portrayed together without obvious distinction, as Boilly collapses academic hierarchies of the past to elevate painters, as a unified group, to a higher social and artistic status. Susan Siegfried contends, Boilly “presented the contemporary artist as a new kind of cultural hero.”

Even more radical is his use of the word “artiste” to include architects, engravers, a musical composer, actors, a singer, and “un homme de lettres” in the gathering, and this new collective definition served to expand generic limitations while positing a more generalized image of the artist not as painter, sculptor, etc. but as Artist, a man of the world and member of a prestigious assembly of creators. Boilly’s constructed image of artists in the studio sought to establish the elevated status of the artist as cultivated professional for a new consuming audience, while at the same time emphasizing his individuality.

Cless’s scene from 1804 (figure 4) portrays David’s studio at the Louvre, where students of the master would sketch from live and plaster models as they prepared for careers executing the noble history paintings David’s studio was famous for. By 1804 the first generation of Davidian students—Girodet, Gérard, Gros—had become the leading painters of the Napoleonic regime, but they, like the *rapins* (art students) depicted here, were actively engaged in negotiating artistic identity in post-revolutionary France. Once again, the homosocial dynamic of the all-male studio is evident in this energetic depiction, where students observe the nude model, drawings of the model, and one another, while the naked male form is echoed in the classical statues and oil paintings hanging above the scene. The repetition of virtually the same image on multiple easels attests to a shared or common vision; as David, still in his top hat, corrects a student’s sketch at the front of the room, his engagement in the formation of this generation of painters is evident. The conflation of artistic training and masculine intimacy is illustrated on the left side of the scene, where one student, pointing to his fellow student’s canvas and to the model, wraps his friend from behind in a suggestive embrace. The painter’s right foot is placed between those of his friend, his brush is held over his gesturing
Figure 3
Louis-Léopold Boilly,
Réunion d’artistes
dans l’atelier
d’Isabey, 1798.
Oil on canvas. 71 x 111 cm. Photo:
Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY.
Figure 4
Jean-Henri Cless, L’Atelier de David, 1804. Pencil and ink wash drawing. 46.2 x 58.5 cm. Musée Carnavalet, Paris. Photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY.
colleague’s midsection, and his maulstick juts out behind him to rest on his fellow student’s shoulder. On the surface level, this crowded and chaotic drawing illustrates the working life of the atelier with busy students sketching and painting among canvases, easels, models, and stretchers, giving a slice of life of the exotic milieu of the studio. As a “self-portrait,” the scene reveals Cless’s own identification with the homosocial group, his own sense of being an artist tied in to his place within this larger configuration of men.

Yet this image and others like it elide the fact that during this period women were in fact included in David’s studio. Indeed, although they continued to be excluded from institutional training, some women in France did gain access to professional instruction post-1789. In the wake of the Revolution and the destabilization of the art market, many academically trained painters, including Greuze, Regnault, Vien, and Girodet, as well as David, began to take on female students outside of the Academy to support themselves. David, whose influence on male painters of the period is legend, also trained at least thirteen women, including Constance Charpentier, Marie-Guillelmine Laville de Benoist, Césairie Mirvaut Davin, Angélique Mongez, and Aimée Duvivier. Regnault and his wife taught Sophie Guillemand, Pauline Auzou, Claire Robineau, and Adèle Romany, while Greuze’s pupils included Constance Mayer, Jeanne Philiberte Ledoux, and Mme Elie. Like the myriad paintings, contemporary memoirs of life in the studio by Delécluze and Coupin also rendered the women there invisible by excluding them from their accounts; as Solomon-Godeau notes, the women in David’s studio are “effectively conjured away, banished from historical memory, and for the most part banished from modern art as well.” Although admitted to some lessons, women were, in general, excluded from the life class, and the fact that Cless (and Cochereau, Massé, Delécluze, Coupin, etc.) chose to focus on precisely the scenes where women could not participate in the life of the atelier highlights both their marginalization and perhaps even more significantly, the male artists’ investment in asserting the masculinity of their vocation.

Training in a male studio was not the only option for French women in the post-revolutionary period: a number of female painters also opened studios for women in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Marie Guillelmine Benoist, who studied with David, opened an atelier for women in 1804 and Mme Regnault, wife of the Academician, also trained students alongside her husband. The history painter, Pauline Auzou, ran a studio for women for more than twenty years and was known to have studied from the male and female nude. Although categorically excluded from the Commune des Arts and the Institut National, in an important reversal of Ancien Régime policies women were allowed to exhibit in unlimited numbers at the open Salons, beginning in 1791. In 1800, critic Bruun Neergaard lamented the fact that so many unskilled
artists “who barely know how to hold a pencil” had taken up portraiture, but when lauding those whose portraits he admired, Neergaard included Adélaïde Labille-Guiard, Jeanne-Elisabeth Chaudet, and Madame Laville Leroulx (Marie-Guillemine Benoist) alongside Girodet and Gérard. By 1801, the press was commenting on the “swarms” of femmes artistes included in the Salons, and while hyperbolic, the comment reflects dramatic shifts in exhibition demographics. Margaret Oppenheimer documents the increase of women artists at the Salon from three in 1789 to “22 in 1791, 32 in 1801, 50 in 1806, 76 in 1810, and 84 in 1819.” Moreover, she adds, women “became eligible to receive grace-and-favor lodgings at the Louvre or other residences for artists, encouragements (monetary prizes given to works of particular merit exhibited at the Salons), and government commissions for paintings and sculptures” (7). Undeniably, many critics remained skeptical, but some supported the influx of female painters at the Salons and in 1812, R. J. Durdent remarked “there is no country, in any previous period, which could boast of having witnessed the birth at a single time of so many women cultivating painting with such decided success.”

As women gained access, however unequal, to artistic training and exhibition in France, they began actively to construct their own artistic identity in both discursive and counter-discursive ways, while the hyper-masculinity of contemporary male images of the atelier reflects a response not only to cultural constructions of gender during the period but also to the undeniable presence of women in the artistic field. Adélaïde Labille-Guiard and her student, Gabrielle Capet, who was featured in her mentor’s Salon painting of 1785, represent a pair of early voices in the effort to render the female visual artist visible in nineteenth-century France.

Labille-Guiard, admitted to the Academy on the same day as Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, was a committed teacher, liberal, and proto-feminist whom Laura Auricchio identifies as a “non-conformist” who should be recognized for “her innovations as a portraitist, her prominence as a teacher in the 1780s and her notoriety as a politically active woman in a revolution that, despite claims to liberty and equality, paradoxically silenced female voices.” Until recently, Labille-Guiard has been read almost exclusively in terms of a contrastive relationship to the more successful Vigée-Lebrun, whose affiliation with the French royal family led her into exile during the revolution, while Labille-Guiard remained in Paris and actively supported the Jacobin cause. Mary Sheriff has analyzed the gendered opposition constructed by eighteenth-century critics between Vigée-Lebrun’s “feminine” painting, with its “soft” (molle) touch, brilliant colors, and obvious artifice, and Labille-Guiard’s “virile” and “masculine” painting with its “strong and vigorous” brushwork and fidelity to “nature and truth.” But of particular interest in this study is Labille-Guiard’s role as mentor to the next generation of female artists.
Labille-Guiard opened her studio to young women “sans fortune,” and by teaching painting as a profession to the poor, rather than an *art d’agrément* to the wealthy, played a role in establishing a new collective identity of professional *femmes artistes* that following generations of women would develop. Upon gaining entry into the Academy in 1783, she began to campaign—unsuccessfully—to increase the number of women admitted. Failing to change the status quo, she submitted a portrait to the Salon of 1785 (figure 5) that included her students, Gabrielle Capet and Mlle de Rosemond, thus effectively subverting the Academy’s limit of four female painters at the Salon by including two more. In contrast to the “exceptional” status embraced by Vigée-Lebrun, Labille-Guiard forged a public identity as a woman among women with whom she shared a common talent and presumably a common goal: to succeed as artists.

The title listed in the 1785 *livret*, *Full-Length Painting Representing a Woman Painting and Two Pupils Watching Her*, emphasizes the fact that the two young women are more than mere spectators, and the tension between the unseen canvas before her and the vivid image of the girls behind reveals Labille-Guiard’s desire to foreground the next generation of female artists as her subject matter and creation. The strong vertical line of the easel and stretcher delineates the left side of the composition with a gesture that further highlights the constructed nature of what we are looking at: the ragged edge of the canvas and rough wood create a contrast with the polished surfaces of skin and gowns while implicitly acknowledging their existence as two sides of a single (painted) coin. Borrowing this trope of the back of the painting from Velazquez and Rembrandt, Labille-Guiard enters into a dialogue with her male predecessors, playing with the structures of revelation and refusal while showing her spectators both painting and what Victor Stoichita has called “antipainting,” that is, “an image whose central theme is the inaccessibility of the image.” Through this confident invocation of her skills as a painter and her fluency in the languages of art and its history, Labille-Guiard lays claim to her own place within the field of cultural production. On a more immediate level, she implicates the viewer with her confident, appraising gaze, echoed by the more reserved look of Mlle Rosemond behind her, in a way that requires engagement with the scene. For if Labille-Guiard is at once subject and object of her own painting, a split authorial self, the spectator occupies a similarly unstable position as the painter’s subject or mirror.

Much like the studio portraits of an earlier age, Labille-Guiard’s image seeks not to reflect “reality” but rather to forge an identity in contested terrain. Just as Vasari and his followers strove to elevate their social status as painters by portraying themselves as liberal humanists, Labille-Guiard seeks to establish herself as a “legitimate” female painter, a real, rather than allegorical figure wielding a paintbrush and palette. For if Painting had been iconographically represented by men as a woman, here a woman represents herself as a painter.
Figure 5
Adélaïde Labille-Guiard, Self-Portrait with Two Pupils, 1783. Oil on canvas. 210.8 x 151.1 cm.
Image copyright © The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource, NY.
surrounded by all the accoutrements of the atelier—palette, paintbrushes, maulstick, *porte crayon*, canvas, acolytes—while at the same time engaged in the act of artistic production, thus a concrete rather than symbolic embodiment of art. The elegance of the setting (indicated by the intricate parquet floor and Louis XV furniture) and of her dress partake of a long tradition of artistic self-representation that nonetheless takes on slightly different implications when the painter is a woman. Labille-Guiard’s magnificent gown and elaborate hat, her effort to portray her own beauty and relative youth, celebrate both her skills as an artist and her gender, reinforced by the beautiful and beautifully painted figures of the girls standing over her. Having made her reputation creating delicate pastels of her male contemporaries at the *Académie*, Labille-Guiard answers the modest earlier images with a large-scale Salon painting in oil, thus portraying the female artists in a more elevated medium, form, and setting. Even the scope of the scene, as a group portrait–cum–genre scene, places this painting above the portraits of the *Académiciens* while nonetheless evoking them as important intertexts.

As the three women occupy the center of the canvas in a tightly executed pyramid, the background presents a second level of meaning. Visible in the shadows is a sculpted bust gazing blindly at the warmly lit *femmes artistes*. The image of Labille-Guiard’s own father, Claude-Edme Labille, sculpted by Pajou and also exhibited at the Salon de 1785, may be interpreted as a *clin d’œil* to her friend and fellow artist, announcing her membership in the intimate world of artistic brotherhood, and an offering of filial devotion. But perhaps more complexly, the marble bust evokes a dialogue with Labille-Guiard’s own work and with the mythology of artistic creation. In 1783 Labille-Guiard’s *morceau de réception* for the *Académie* had been her portrait of Pajou modeling the painter LeMoyne: a studio painting of a male artist creating the image of another male artist, painted by an (invisible) female artist. Two years later, a member of the *Académie* in her own right, Labille-Guiard now looks to the future of art in her studio painting, foregrounding the *femmes artistes* in all their glory and temporarily relegating earlier representations of the patriarchy to obscurity. By subordinating the representation of the only male figure in the image to a marble bust, at once fragmentary and frozen, the painter reverses the gendered structures of art where men are the active subjects and women the passive objects of artistic representation. In a reversal of the Pygmalion paradigm, she removes art from the economies of heterosexual desire and fetishization with an image of women as conscious, engaged, and productive. Finally, the vestal virgin behind the sculpted bust and even further in shadow represents both what Labille-Guiard consciously gives up and what she aspires to. As chaste goddess of hearth, home, and family, the vestal virgin invokes the socially constructed female identity that Labille-Guiard eschewed. Separated from her first husband
not long after their marriage, the painter lived with her students and her lover for several decades, devoting herself to her work rather than domesticity. But if the vestal virgins represented home and hearth, they also worked collectively to maintain the flame, passing it from one woman to the next without ever letting it expire, an image far more in keeping with Labille-Guiard’s construction of the identity of the femme artiste.

Gabrielle Capet (1761–1818) was Labille-Guiard’s favorite student and carried the torch for her mentor. Well known in artistic circles and highly praised by the critics, Capet was frequently compared to Isabey, known today as the most important miniaturist of the era. Like her teacher, Capet focused primarily on portraits and frequently pastels, and her reputation was similarly enhanced by her images of contemporary male artists, including Suvée, Meynier, Vandoeuvre, Houdon, and Vincent. At the Salon of 1808, five years after Labille-Guiard’s death, Capet exhibited her most ambitious canvas to widespread acclaim: a large-scale image of a female artist in the studio (figure 6), which earned for her the designation of “peintre d’histoire” in the livret.

Capet’s posthumous portrait represents a scene that took place twenty-five years earlier, as Labille-Guiard campaigned for her place in the Académie, and offers another interpretation of the female artist at work that reflects a post-revolutionary sensibility. In this alternative view of her mentor, the intimate female trio of 1785 has been transformed into a resolutely social scene, where Labille-Guiard and Capet are inserted into a predominantly male world. The tight focus and somber palette of the earlier image have been broadened and brightened, as Capet indicates that women painters belong to the larger sphere of cultural production, on equal footing with men. Labille-Guiard, no longer burdened by her elegant gown and coquettish hat, is portrayed as a serious artist absorbed in her work, while her student has moved from passive observation to the active role of preparing the palette, now an artist in her own right.

In Capet’s composition, Labille-Guiard paints the portrait of Joseph-Marie Vien, while his pupil and her teacher (and later husband), André Vincent, looks on. The elderly Vien is surrounded by his son and daughter-in-law (behind him) and by his student, Vincent’s, students, including Pajou, Jean Alaux, Etienne Pallière, Léon Pallière, Jean-Joseph Ansiaux, Jean-François Mérimée, Charles Thévenin, Charles Meynier, and François Picot. These young men of 1783 (when the scene is set) were, in 1808 (when it was executed and exhibited), some of the leading academic and Troubadour painters of the post-revolutionary period. By including Pajou, Meynier, Picot, et alia in her composition, Capet creates a genealogy of teachers and students, from Vien to Vincent to Labille-Guiard to herself and the other young artists in the room, placing male and female artists side by side in a group portrait and implicitly locating her own work in the same tradition as that of Vien, Vincent, and her male contempo-
Figure 6
Gabrielle Capet, Madame Adélaïde Labille-Guiard peignant le portrait de Joseph-Marie Vien, 1808. Oil on canvas. 69 × 83.5 cm. Neue Pinakothek, Munich. Photo credit: Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz/Art Resource, NY.
raries. By moving the scene into a more public and populated setting, Capet thus opens up the scope and ambitions of the female artist in an image that reflects as much on the politics of art in 1808 as it does on its purported subject of 1783.

In a significant reversal of time-honored roles, it is the men who are the object of the female gaze, as Labille-Guiard paints the Academician and Capet paints the scene. The simple clothes of the pair of female artists attest to their status as artistic producers, while the men are adorned in luxuriously embroidered silks, satins, and lace. Mulvey’s formulation of the gendered gaze is effectively subverted here, as the male becomes the passive object of an active female gaze, while his showy finery emphasizes the very “to-be-looked-at-ness” that has traditionally been coded female. Yet unlike the homoerotic canvases produced in and/or inspired by David’s studio (i.e., Figure 4), this male figure is neither nude nor beautiful: he is old, frail, and fully dressed. With an idle brush hanging in his limp hand, Vien’s representation depends on the power of the active female artists—that is, both Labille-Guiard within the scene and Capet, who has painted the image of female painting and here gazes knowingly at her audience. The chaotic, often sexually charged representations of studio life as presented by Cless and myriad others are replaced here by a calm scene of dignified professionalism.

Boilly’s Réunion d’artistes dans l’atelier d’Isabey also serves as an intertext for Capet’s scene. Borrowing both compositional and narrative elements from this early announcement of the new culture of the post-revolutionary artist’s studio, Capet’s invocation of Boilly’s image recasts the scene in significant ways. Where Isabey’s studio is notable for the absence of artist elders—David, Vien, Regnault and other masters are conspicuously missing—Capet stresses continuity with the immediate past and solidarity between artistic generations. Indeed, where male post-revolutionary painters struggled to establish an identity outside the broad shadow of their fathers, female artists like Capet sought artistic identity by connecting with the legitimating traces of these predecessors. If each delineates an important sense of artistic collectivity, gender is central to both. In Boilly’s, the homosocial dynamic of the all male studio is translated into a broader context (including architects, actors, singers, etc), but remains unquestionably masculine in its orientation. In Capet’s, on the other hand, the collective artistic identity for the new age remains tied to successful painters and sculptors, but expands to include women in the ranks of its past and future. A third woman in the scene (Vien’s daughter-in-law), gesturing to the drawings on the table and listened to attentively by three of the men surrounding her, suggests women’s active presence in society as well. Faced with the possibilities and uncertainties of a new social order and a new century, Boilly and Capet represent two visions of the construction of the nineteenth-century Artist. The
first—Boilly’s—would be embraced and developed in the decades to come, contributing to the construction of the Romantic artist and hero; the second—Capet’s—would also contribute to Romanticism, but in an oppositional sense, as a threatening discourse to be countered, suppressed, and denied.

Under the Restoration women continued to seek professional artistic training, but as they began to establish a foothold in the artistic marketplace of the conservative regime, more determined resistance began to be felt in the escalating insistence on the masculine nature of artistic identity in the works of painters, authors, and critics. The proliferation of male-authored atelier scenes reflected the instabilities of artistic identity in modern France, and like the growing number of artistic brotherhoods, further evidenced the anxieties of gender that accompanied these changes. As Laura Morowitz and William Vaughan explain, “If the very notion of masculinity depended upon negotiation of the marketplace and the earning of income, the financially strapped artist faced a constant challenge to his manhood,” a challenge only exacerbated by the presence of women producing art—and images of themselves producing art.

Restoration scenes of male artists such as Jean Alaux’s L’Atelier d’Ingres à Rome (1818), Horace Vernet’s L’Atelier du peintre (c. 1820), and Auguste-Xavier Leprince’s Artist’s Studio (1826) reasserted the studio as an exclusively male enclave. Vernet’s L’Atelier (figure 7) is emblematic in its self-conscious escalation of the gendered signifiers of artistic masculinity. Like earlier images by Boilly and Cless, Vernet’s scene is crowded with men drawing, painting, and conferring upon art. The atelier itself is full of traditional markers of artistry and inspiration—canvases and easels, palettes and paint boxes; men puff on pipes, while a violin hangs on the wall. Yet the plaster casts and classiced models of old are replaced here by a large white horse, a dog, a deer, and a monkey, and in a significant departure Vernet introduces a new register to the old topos: the atelier as battleground. Nina Athanassoglou-Kallmyer has read the painting in terms of Vernet’s radical militarism as a committed liberal Bonapartist under the conservative Restoration regime, but extending the polyvalent metaphor to the politics of art and identity, L’Atelier may also be understood as an announcement of the painter’s embattled persona and his desire to assert a masculinity more closely tied to the animality of war than the elevated salon culture Boilly proposed for the artist.

Vernet’s artistic manifesto defines art as a battle between generations where the master (Vernet himself) fences with his student at the center of the scene, épée in one hand, palette in the other. Meanwhile, a pair of bare-chested students in boxing gloves looks on, alongside yet another young man leaning against a chair with a rifle by his side, indicating that they too are engaged in a struggle for a place within this artistic combat zone. Saddles, drums, and trumpets, tricorne hats and military attire, coupled with the unexpected animals in
Chapter 1: Women in the Studio

this eclectic interior scene establish an atmosphere that is at once bellicose and bohemian, at odds with bourgeois values and aggressively anti-establishment. If the Bloomian battle with the next generation of artists is foregrounded, Vernet’s own battles are also inscribed here, as he includes at the back of the atelier a bust of his grandfather, the eighteenth-century landscape painter Joseph Vernet, and a painting by his father, Carle Vernet. Simultaneously signaling his artistic provenance and his independence from the patriarchal structures of the past, Vernet’s Romantic artist is at once more certain of his difference from the dominant social order and perhaps, in his overdetermined insistence on his phallic manhood, less certain of his masculinity.

These male group portraits were answered by Adrienne Grandpierre-Deverzy (1798–1865) in her 1822 canvas of *L’Atelier d’Abel de Pujol* (figure 8). In contradistinction to the nonconformist chaos in Vernet’s studio, the artists here are well-dressed and dignified, as women artists took great pains to avoid the associations of bohemianism that would undermine their legitimacy. The studio is clean and well-lit, while bearing the now familiar markers of artistic training and practice (easels, models, canvases, casts), and a general air of camaraderie reigns. This scene of bourgeois propriety and productivity includes a lone man (Pujol, later Grandpierre-Deverzy’s husband) surrounded by more than a dozen
women sketching, painting, and conferring on their art. In a departure from the images produced by Labille-Guaird and Capet, Grandpierre-Deverzy locates her scene in a realistic milieu that reflects more upon what is than upon what might be. Thus, although the studio is devoted to training women, a man remains at its center both literally and symbolically, as indicated in the title of the composition. Pujol (1787–1861), an established academic painter who ran separate studios for both men and women, occupies the dominant position on the canvas and is shown in a slightly larger scale as he critiques a young artist’s sketch, while the three oil paintings hanging on the walls are his own. None of the women’s own works is visible, save the drawing that Pujol holds in his lap and thus under his sway.

Grandpierre-Deverzy displays the full range of training available to women at the time, as her *femmes artistes* are seen painting and drawing after master paintings, plaster casts, and human models. In contrast to Cless’s iconic image of the male studio, the model here is a fully dressed woman rather than a naked man, at once an indication of the gentility of this atelier and a tacit acknowledgment of its limitations as well. On the shelf above the women painters’ heads, the cast of a nude male torso is pointedly, if playfully, turned to the wall. Yet answering the proscription implicit in the positioning of the plaster cast at the far left of the canvas, at the right two young women likewise turn away from the scene, momentarily rejecting the hermetic world of the studio for the “real” world outside. If the principal narrative of the painting highlights a harmonious world of women absorbed in artistic practice, and if that world is kept in check by the signs of limitations on that practice, the group behind Pujol’s back represents an alternative vision of the purview of the female artist. As Pujol addresses the presumed author of the sketch, and her companion looks directly at the viewer of the painting, a third student occupies two positions within the visual narrative. With her arm around the woman whose work is being critiqued, she is physically attached to the group surrounding the master, but she is psychologically removed from the trio, as she joins another young woman in contemplating a different framed scene: the view of the street from the atelier’s window. Turning their backs on the master, this pair of errant pupils pulls back the curtain to the world outside in a move that signals the transfer of the female gaze and its corollary subjecthood to the larger and more threatening realm of the public sphere. Refusing the spatial and intellectual limitations of the studio, these female painters lay claim to seeing and representing forbidden realms and spaces.

The atelier, a liminal space between the domestic interior and the public arena of social labor, here functions as a switching point for the gradual transition of women from the home to the workplace, from amateur to professional status and from the isolation of the *foyer* to a new collective identity with other
Figure 8
women laboring outside of the home. Grandpierre-Deverzy, who would later run Pujol’s atelier for women, exhibited at the Salon for nearly thirty years and was best known for her portraits and genre scenes of female subjects from history and literature, including images from the life of Queen Christina and La Princesse de Clèves. L’Atelier d’Abel de Pujol, much like her own career, stands as testimony to the increased presence of women in the field of artistic production in France during the 1820s and 1830s, in studios, at the Salon, and in the marketplace. While their work would remain secondary in terms of both critical reception and aesthetic influence, the very fact that this painting was purchased by Giovanni Sommariva, the most important patron and collector of the period, indicates that the subject was of interest to connoisseurs and amateurs. Sommariva’s vast collection, including works by David, Girodet, Prud’hon, Guérin, Gérard, and Canova, was displayed in galleries in his homes in Paris and Lake Como, both of which were open to the public and frequented by artists, guaranteeing that Grandpierre-Deverzy’s canvas of women in the atelier continued to be viewed alongside some of the most important artists of the early nineteenth century. In this sense, the female painter in France became visible to both artists and cognoscenti, as both the subject and the object of this confident image by a woman artist of women artists at work.

By the 1830s, the artist’s studio had become a popular theme in French literature and music as well as painting, and Marc Gotlieb contends that “from the imaginary ateliers detailed in fiction and illustration to backdrops prepared for opera and the theatre, the studio served as a public stage in the guise of a private arena.” In a pair of paintings from two women associated with the studio of Léon Cogniet (1794–1880), some of the escalating tensions of gender and artistic identity under the July Monarchy become apparent. Cogniet, a friend of Géricault and Delacroix who remained more academically oriented than his Romantic colleagues, was best known for his portraits and history paintings that celebrated the juste milieu. In 1830 he founded a studio for male students and one for female students, directed by his sister Marie-Amélie Cogniet (1798–1869), and the following year, her portrait of her brother and herself in their shared atelier was exhibited at the Salon de 1831.

Amélie Cogniet’s Intérieur de l’atelier de Léon Cogniet (1831) (figure 9) portrays a polarized artistic arena: Cogniet stands at the far left of the canvas and his sister sits at the far right, with the expanse of the entire studio between them. As he stands back to assess the canvas they appear to be working on together, she looks back at him from her position in front of the painting-in-progress with an expression that seems at once wary and challenging. This iteration of the male and female painter in the atelier shares elements of Grandpierre-Deverzy’s version, while at the same time introducing new aspects that reflect the changing dynamics of the contemporary field of cultural production. Amélie Cogniet
Figure 9
portrays a single female artist in front of the canvas wielding her brush while looking back at her male counterpart who gazes at their shared artwork. The large history painting they are collaborating upon is *L’Expédition d’Egypte sous les orders de Bonaparte*, a *grande machine* commissioned for the ceiling of the Louvre. Despite the discarded clothes strewn upon the chair at center, there is no model evident for this composition, and the only woman present is a painter who is clearly contributing to this canvas. The eroticized structure of male subject/female object central to so many atelier scenes is thus replaced by the male/female dyad of brother and sister painters as Léon and Amélie face one another across the studio. Léon Cogniet’s easy pose upon a platform, with an arm slung over one rung of a ladder and a foot upon another, intimates ambition and confidence as he towers over his sister and the scene. Amélie’s more contorted position, hunched uncomfortably before the canvas, bespeaks the subordination also implied in Grandpierre-Deverzy’s painting while suggesting social and political hierarchies as well. The large canvas looming behind her and the equally substantial gilded frame jutting into the pictorial space from the right seem to contain and oppress her in an almost claustrophobic fashion. As Susan Sidlauskas has shown us, the painted interior in the nineteenth century “became a deeply contested terrain where the very nature and limits of identity were debated rather than resolved.”

She explains, “when spectators viewed painted figures stranded on opposite reaches of a gaping space, pressed into a corner or subsumed into the furniture around them, they were cued to experience a visceral response, a bodily empathy, for the discomfort of the protagonists. The visual provocation to unease and disorientation were thus translated into an imagined experience of another’s psychological state” (3). Cogniet’s composition uses space in precisely this fashion, communicating a psychological as well as a physical discomfort that the audience would recognize and even share. While she is present in the studio and actively working as a painter, the female artist in this composition remains dominated by the male artist and his production.

Yet in reading the space of this atelier in terms of the metaphors proposed by Junod above, we find that Amélie Cogniet does not entirely cede the space of creation to her brother. The studio is divided down the center by a stove and its chimney pipe running up the back wall: on the left of the scene, where Léon holds sway, are another large canvas of a classicized male nude (his own *Caïn et Abel*), numerous plaster casts, and the corner of his epic *Briséis pleurant Patrocle* (1815). On the right, presided over by the Venus de’ Medici and Amélie, the wall is covered with small oil sketches from nature, while another painter is absorbed in a portrait head. A desk behind him is covered with sheets of paper, painted canvases, and a figurine of a white horse, while a full portfolio leans up against it. Falling under the sign of the masculine, the left side of the canvas is associated with the past, stasis, and death (via Abel and Patrocles) in its col-
lection of ancient themes, models, and styles. The right side, associated with the feminine, signifies a more modern, Romantic aesthetic, with its suggestive, sketchy landscapes and portraits speaking to the contemporary mode of painting. Where all is completed and framed on the left, process and productivity are emphasized on the right. The clock in the middle of the wall, surrounded by the small canvases, further implies the theme of contemporaneity. Amélie’s facture in her execution of the figures is equally loose and creamy, in keeping with a Romantic suggestiveness, and even her psychological distress is in a sense a Romantic trope, as she struggles to escape the oppressive forces of tradition. As the naked Hercules looks back at the male painter, who gazes upon his unfinished canvas, Venus looks forward to the future and the female artist who is poised to return to the act of painting. The blank canvases on the floor at her feet further suggest future works for the female artist. Amélie Cogniet, who ran her brother’s atelier for women and exhibited at the Salons in 1831, 1833–36, and 1842–43, articulates an artistic identity in direct, if uncomfortable dialogue with her more successful sibling. No longer merely a student and not quite a full peer, the woman in the atelier was engaged nonetheless in the production of art and ultimately the next generation of artists.

A second painting (figure 10), by Caroline Thévenin (1813–92), represents the distaff side of Cogniet’s atelier some five years later, in 1836. Thévenin, who shares a name with several Parisian painters of the period, was born in Lyon and joined Cogniet’s studio in Paris in the early 1830s, as did her sister Rosalie a few years later. She exhibited regularly at the Salons from 1835 to 1843 and in 1848, 1852, and 1853. In 1865 Caroline married Cogniet at the age of 52; he was 69. From the wedding registry, it appears to be Thévenin’s first marriage, pointing to the likelihood that she continued work as a painter for most of her adult life, perhaps assisting Amélie in Cogniet’s atelier as well. This scene, which shares much with Grandpierre-Deverzy’s 1822 canvas, is notable in the absence of the master, for unlike L’Atelier d’Abel de Pujol, Thévenin’s atelier does not include Léon Cogniet. Although both women would go on to marry their painting teachers, here the position at center is held by a woman helping a younger student prepare her palette. The power differential is shaped by age, rather than gender, and a spirit of mentoring rather than critique prevails. While the woman who has just entered the atelier and is warming her hands on the ceramic stove bears a strong resemblance to several of Cogniet’s portraits of Amélie, it is not clear in this composition that she is indeed the institutrice, but the self-sufficiency of the group of female painters here is indisputable. Where contemporary Romantic portraits of the artist portrayed a melancholy and solitary figure (Géricault, Girodet, Delacroix, etc.), Thévenin’s insistence on the group establishes the professional nature of the training, as well as the solidarity among these well-dressed and serious women. Again, the chaos and
Figure 10
Caroline Thévenin, 
Atelier des jeunes filles, 1836. Oil on canvas. 46.2 x 61 cm. Cliché Musée des Beaux-Arts, Orléans.
promiscuity of bohemia are replaced by an image of gentility and organized study. Vernet’s battling rapins, with their guns, sabres, and boxing gloves, are answered in peaceful pairs of women working harmoniously together.

Unlike Cogniet’s own studio, the women’s space is relatively empty, except for a few plaster casts on a shelf. Without the massive history paintings dominating the room, the focus falls on the women themselves, who nonetheless copy from Cogniet’s oeuvre. The most clearly visible painting, on the easel just to the left of center and opposite the door, appears to be a classical nude female figure and is in fact a copy of Cogniet’s oil sketch of Helen of Troy for his Prix de Rome painting from 1817. Helen, the most beautiful woman in the world, was the subject of Zeuxis’s legendary painting and one of Angelica Kauffman’s self-portraits, and this multilayered intertext is repeated in the portfolio on the right. As the two girls seated on the floor gaze on yet another copy of Helen in the open portfolio, women are at once subjects and objects of art at every level of the scene. On the wall to the far right of the room, the women’s somber cloaks and bonnets hang neatly in a row, while a more fashionable green hat sits atop an easel, a piece of complicated finery suggesting the beauty and desirability of these women as well, temporarily set aside but never entirely absent. The woman painting Helen at center is echoed in a second woman with her back to the viewers on the far right. Where one is absorbed in painting, the other adjusts her turban in the mirror, and the visual parallel implies similarities between canvas and mirror. Indeed, Thévenin seems to tell us, in a highly Romantic vein, that the subject of art is always the artist herself and the framed representation, whether painting or mirrored reflection, reveals its creator. By extension, then, this atelier scene reveals Thévenin’s identity as part of a community of women artists working within the discourses of the artistic tradition but outside of the direct sway of the male painter.

**Surrogate Studios:**
**REPRESENTING PROFESSIONAL SPACES IN BRITAIN**

Studio culture never achieved the same kind of currency or influence in Britain that it did in France, and British painters eager for studio experience routinely trained in Paris, Rome, or Munich well into the final decades of the nineteenth century. Reynolds’s emphasis on “industry,” “restraint,” and “individualism” in his Discourses (delivered from 1769–90 and setting forth the RA’s academic doctrine), was inherently at odds with the group ethos and revolutionary orientation of David’s studio during the period, and the collective, bohemian experience of students and masters so intimately tied to French Romantic art remained at odds with British artistic training. Indeed, as the “British School”
developed in the nineteenth century, it privileged “notions of genius equated with originality and grounded in a Protestant tradition of individuality and freedom of control” \(^{41}\) that were predicated in opposition to conceptions of French, Catholic “conformity,” while the idea of British “liberty” had long been conceived in opposition to French “absolutism,” linking artistic and monarchical principles. Holger Hoock explains that “the constitution of ‘national culture’ was seen to be bound up with the development of a nation’s visual culture” \(^{(109)}\), and the British artist’s solitary nature emblematized national difference from France. Similarly, British artistic culture was more diffuse. While London and the Royal Academy were indeed central, they did not hold the monopoly on artistic training and exhibition that Paris did; numerous provincial art centers—Bristol, Leeds, Manchester, Liverpool—maintained their own viable academies and exhibitions, allowing more decentralized artistic cultures to emerge.

The limited studio training available to French women was nearly non-existent in England, though small groups of young women did band together to work, study, and draw after hired models in studio spaces most frequently within their family homes. The most ambitious female artists (or those with the greatest means) traveled abroad for their professional training, joining studios in Paris, Germany, or Italy. Statistics compiled by Charlotte Yeldham confirm that French women exhibited far more self-portraits and studio scenes from 1800–1860 than British women did, reflecting the differences in female artistic culture at the time. Yeldham documents twenty-seven self-portraits by women at the French Salon from 1800–1830, and thirty over the course of the following three decades, for a total of fifty-seven female self-portraits from 1800–1860. French women exhibited eighteen paintings of women painting, eleven studio scenes, and eleven portraits of women artists from 1800–1860, while in Britain the numbers are substantially lower. From 1800–1869, there were only twenty-two self-portraits of British women artists shown at major exhibitions and a handful of female authored portraits of women artists.\(^{42}\) Yet despite the significant disparity in images of female painters at public exhibitions, British women were also actively engaged in forging artistic identity in the public sphere. Thus, although there are few paintings that correspond precisely to the French atelier scene, British women visual artists portrayed women at work in a variety of settings that sought to shape discourses of professionalism and reflected the politics of art, labor, domesticity, and the public sphere in the first half of the nineteenth century.

The life and works of Rolinda Sharples (1793–1838) emblematize some of the ways in which family and domestic imagery shaped the discourses of professionalism for British women artists in the early nineteenth century. The daughter of professional painters, Sharples was born in Bath and spent much of her youth in America, where her father and mother built a modest fortune
traveling through the new nation executing small-scale pastel portraits. James Sharples trained with Romney, exhibited at the Royal Academy, and produced well-known images of George Washington, John Adams, Jefferson, Hamilton, and Burr; his wife Ellen was also a talented painter (James had been her instructor at an art class in Bath) who produced both original commissioned portraits (exhibited at the RA in 1807) and copies of her husband’s works. As Ellen noted in her diary, her versions of James’s portraits “were thought equal to the originals, price the same” and these reproductions were sold both in the United States and in Britain, allowing the family to live “in good style associating in the first society.”

Raised in a Quaker family, Ellen Wallace Sharples embraced a progressive educational philosophy: all three children (two sons and a daughter) were exposed to music, literature, art, and philosophy from an early age, and Rolinda enjoyed the same artistic training as her brothers. Ellen proudly announced that by her thirteenth birthday, Rolinda had decided on becoming a “professional artist” with the full support and encouragement of her family (Knox 21). For Ellen Sharples, painting represented a means to self-sufficiency: as she began miniature painting in 1803, she mused in her diary, “Should I excel in this style of drawing it will be a great satisfaction to me. I shall then consider myself independent of the smiles or frowns of fortune.” In the same vein, Ellen later reflects in her diary that Rolinda’s artistic training would allow her daughter to enjoy financial independence and “have resources within herself should a diminution, or loss of fortune, ever be experienced. I had frequently thought that every well educated female, particularly those who had only small fortunes, should at least have the power, if they did not exercise it, by the cultivation of some available talent, of obtaining the conveniences, and some of the elegances of life.”

Following James Sharples’s death in 1811, Ellen and Rolinda settled in Bristol, where the focus shifted to Rolinda’s professional practice. Although primarily taught by her parents, Rolinda did study in London on two separate occasions with Philip Reinagle, and supplemented her practical training through constant study at museums, private collections, and exhibitions in London and throughout Britain. During the period, Bristol supported a lively and coherent school of artists (now referred to as the Bristol School), including Francis Danby, Edward Bird, Edward Rippingille, Samuel Jackson, and James Baker Pyne. As a portraitist, Rolinda established her professional ambitions in the size and format of her paintings; shifting from the small scale head and shoulders pastels produced by her parents, she painted larger full-front oils and complex narrative scenes of contemporary events (influenced by Rippingale’s realist canvases) that she exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1820, 1822, and 1824. She was invited to become an honorary member of the Society of British Artists in 1827, and exhibited with them frequently until her death. Rolinda
Sharples’s works were also included in expositions in Liverpool, Bristol, Dublin, Leeds, Birmingham, and Southampton, as well as the Carlisle Academy.\textsuperscript{47}

In \textit{Self-Portrait with her Mother} (c. 1820) (figure 11), Rolinda Sharples announces her status as an artist. This oil on panel portrait shows the artist at work on a genre scene in a gallery/studio in her home surrounded by ornately framed portraits, landscapes, and history paintings. By placing herself in this context, Sharples describes a life in art; like many of her French female predecessors (whose work she would have seen in circulating prints), the British painter makes visible a woman’s artistic formation, portraying herself in the very act of making art. Without the studio training available in France, as portrayed by Grandpierre-Deverzy and Thévenin, British women’s art education was generally limited to private tutors and independent efforts at copying from Old Masters in museums and private collections like the one pictured here. Lacking the supervision of a male teacher/master and the company of other students, the female artist takes her place within the field as a solitary figure, in direct dialogue with the art of the past. Yet as Sharples has composed the scene, there is an intimate link between the artist and the art around her: far from being at odds with her surroundings (as seen in Amélie Cogniet’s menacing image), the space here embraces and reflects the female artist. A large unfinished canvas leans against the wall to the far left, indicating that this is a working space, its size implying a more professional ambition than her dainty dress and domestic setting might otherwise denote. Similarly, her steady and confident gaze, communicating concentration and perfect ease in her performance of painting, is utterly devoid of the coquetry or diffidence of a lady amateur. Directly behind her upper back, the trees in a partially obscured landscape follow the contours of her body, almost pushing her toward her easel. On the other side of her torso, a second landscape illuminates her face from below with an unseen sunrise over distant mountains while a tower points toward her eyes. Above her head, a portrait of a mother and child mirrors the mother/daughter dyad in Sharples’s own composition and in the painting within the painting, the mother leans in toward her child with a tender gesture that is echoed in Ellen Sharples’s own body. The two juxtaposed images figure forth past and present: in the framed image on the wall (which seems to invoke a portrait by Romney, James Sharples’s master), the child appears to be on its mother’s lap, while in Rolinda’s image, the adult child occupies her own seat, yet maintains the physical intimacy with her progenitrix. The fact that each head in the principal pair is now framed by its own gilt \textit{cadre} indicates intellectual independence as well as emotional interdependence. Ellen’s presence behind the easel metaphorically suggests her support of Rolinda’s painting.

Most importantly, this double portrait of mother and daughter portrays two professional artists, as Sharples, like Labille-Guiard and Capet, delineates
Figure 11
Rolinda Sharples, *Self-Portrait with her Mother*, c. 1820. Oil on panel. 36.8 x 29.2 cm. © Bristol’s Museums, Galleries, and Archives.
a female artistic genealogy to the Bristol viewers who knew them. If Labille-Guiard’s magisterial image focused on the three women in the studio, refusing the viewer access to the painting itself (see figure 5), Sharples creates a relationship focused around the canvas with mother, daughter, and artwork in a tight triangulation. As Rolinda looks off for inspiration, her mother gazes upon her daughter’s production, while the audience gazes upon the two women whose relationship is mediated through painting. In this relay of regards, the poised and self-assured younger artist looks outward, her eyes focusing beyond the spectator upon her subject—the canvas she is copying and/or a mirror reflecting the scene that we are beholding, in a painterly mise-en-abyme. Her more diffident mother, whose hands and posture denote her reserve, concentrates on her daughter’s production, the metaphoric offspring of her child. In this intimate double portrait, Ellen Sharples is an active and engaged party, her body leaning in toward Rolinda’s in such a way as to communicate her interest and intelligent evaluation of the image. Rolinda’s fashionable white gown contrasts with her mother’s more conservative black dress, while her dark curls are answered by her mother’s white cap in an image of opposing complements united by the delicate lace decorating both. Similar yet different, the two female painters represent continuity and confidence, a mastery reinforced by the brushes and maulstick jutting forth from Rolinda’s lap to rest upon the canvas.

In comparing Sharples’s double portrait with Rippingille’s Portrait of Edward Bird, RA (1817) (figure 12), painted at virtually the same moment in Bristol, her distinctive perspective on the atelier scene becomes even more apparent. While both reflect on the relationship between two painters, their means and import are decidedly different. The highly Romantic image of Bird at his easel, painted by his friend and pupil Rippingille, shows a solitary artist entirely absorbed in his work in a disordered studio. While the author of the scene remains invisible, his admiration for the master is expressed in the halo of light around Bird’s head and pencil that signals the illumination of genius. Artistic creation is here, as in the majority of British studio scenes in the nineteenth century, denoted as an individual endeavor while inspiration emerges from the artist’s imagination. With the shade covering the window, the interior scene points to the inner world of the painter. The younger, provincial artist gains cultural capital from his relationship to the Academician who would die two years after the portrait was finished, while a lineage is established in the chain of painters implied in Rippingille’s painting of Bird painting. On the other hand, a female painter in early nineteenth-century Britain eager to project professional rather than amateur status needed to establish connection to the world of art rather than isolation, and the visual signifiers of Romantic genius are replaced with more concrete symbols of artistic prowess and production. Sharples, like Bird, is portrayed in front of the canvas with paintbrush in hand, but here the studio
Figure 12
Edward Rippingille, Portrait of Edward Bird, RA, 1817. Oil on panel. 34.1 x 26.2cm. © Bristol’s Museums, Galleries, and Archives.
is a shared space and her mother—at once parent, teacher, and inspiration—embodies and renders visible a collective female artistic identity.

Sharples expanded the purview of the portrait and the female visual artist in a series of narrative paintings begun around 1817. In these complex images of the social spaces of provincial life—*Cloakroom, the Clifton Assembly Rooms* (1817–18), *A Market* (c. 1819), *Rownham Ferry* (1820–22), *St James Fair* (1825), *The Clifton Racecourse* (1830)—Sharples included precise portraits of large numbers of local figures in group scenes that reflected the often unseen position of women (in general) and the female painter (in particular) within the public sphere. The artist worked directly from life, sketching on site and gathering details to give her scenes a documentary verisimilitude that drew crowds of admirers at London's Royal Academy, where she exhibited *A Market* in 1820, *Rownham Ferry* in 1822, and *A Mouse* in 1824. The paintings were favorably reviewed in the London and in the local press and attracted buyers and new commissions.  

Rolinda Sharples's most ambitious composition was *The Trial of Colonel Brereton* (1832–34) (figure 13), a large-scale (40 x 58.5 in.) representation of the aftermath of the Bristol Riots of 1831, triggered by the defeat of the Second Reform Bill. In the autumn of 1831, the House of Lords rejected the bill that would have provided more representation in the House of Commons for rapidly growing industrial towns like Bristol, leading to widespread protests in towns across Britain. The eruption of the angry mob in Bristol raged on for three days, with violence, looting, and arson, until the dragoons quelled the riots with a charge through Queen's Square. The leader of the troops, Colonel Thomas Brereton, was subsequently court-martialed for his leniency; sympathizing with the cause, he initially tried to use persuasion rather than force to disperse the crowds and refused to open fire on the rioters. Accused of neglect of duty, Brereton shot himself only days after the trial began. In Sharples's sympathetic portrait, more than 100 people crowd the courtroom in what has been called a “social almanac of who's who in Bristol at the time” (Metz 9). It has been noted that the painter used considerable artistic license in her portrayal, moving the scene to a different set of rooms, including her mother, Ellen Sharples, who did not attend, and rendering Colonel Brereton significantly younger than his fifty years. These alterations reveal Sharples's identification with the accused, and in her own journal she reflected her sympathy for “the poor and much pitied Col. Brereton: he sat . . . with a countenance of hopeless abstraction . . . In my small book I had taken pencil sketches of poor Brereton, whose earthly tribunal was so dreadfully terminated.” While Rolinda requested sittings with many of the Bristol citizenry included here, most striking of all is her inclusion of a self-portrait with her sketchbook at the trial. By portraying herself at work in the courtroom (seated toward the front on the far left side of the canvas), Rolinda Sharples establishes her role as a chronicler of current events, claim-
Figure 13
Rolinda Sharples, Trial of Colonel Brereton, After the Bristol Riots, 1832. Oil on panel. 148.6 x 101.6 cm. © Bristol’s Museums, Galleries, and Archives.
ing a place within the public realm for the female artist. In choosing to paint herself documenting Brereton’s trial (given that he was only briefly present before his suicide), Sharples aligns her politics with those of the liberal Colonel, thus advocating both clemency and also representation for the disenfranchised. Although Sharples has been accused of “meticulous literalism” in producing work “devoid of social comment or satire,”51 her staging of this scene, which she labored over for nearly two years, reflects implicit comment and even critique of the very society that condemned Brereton and the rioters who sought a political voice. The self-reflexive inclusion of the figure of the female artist at work in this politically charged context hints at Sharples’s own bid for women’s social and political representation within the public sphere.

The work of Mary Ellen Best, a provincial painter from York, reflects another iteration of female professionalism and the domestic scene, while at the same time documenting the integral role of travel and study on the Continent for many female painters of the 1830s and 1840s. While Best’s work does not rise to the level of some of the other artists in this study, she represents an important component of the larger thrust of the aesthetics and politics of nineteenth-century women’s art—the widespread desire to render viable and visible women’s labor in the public sphere. While not every female painter attempting to support herself as a professional fine artist was prodigiously gifted (or even adequately trained), the majority of these women working in France and Britain from 1800–1860 did predicate their representations in terms that sought to reconfigure the partage du sensible in greater or lesser ways.

Mary Ellen Best (1809–91) came from a wealthy and progressive family who supported her ambitions from childhood on. Following her father’s death in 1817, Ellen and her sister Rosamond were raised in Yorkshire in a predominantly female household by their mother, unmarried aunts, and grandmother who lived nearby; bequests from their father gave both daughters a small income that assured them a level of independence throughout their lives. Like most girls of her class, Ellen received her artistic training at boarding school, but unlike most she had an excellent drawing master in the person of George Haugh, a successful painter who exhibited regularly at the RA and was well connected in London.52 Soon after leaving school, Ellen established herself as a “semi-professional” artist in York; although she did not have to paint in order to support herself, Best did sell her work as portrait commissions to private patrons and to London dealers until her marriage in 1840 when she was 31. Eager to distinguish herself from a lady amateur, Best “called herself an artist and strove for recognition” (Davidson 9). Bent on improvement, she painted every day, studied and copied Old Masters in country homes, and sketched outdoors, ever in pursuit of more and better training. In 1834, she set off for the Continent for an extended tour with her mother, spending over a year in
Germany studying art. Although it does not appear that she joined a painter’s studio during her time there (as Anna Mary Howitt and Jane Benham would do a decade later), Best dedicated herself to the study of Old Masters and contemporary German art, while befriending several women painters there. After her mother’s death in 1837, Best returned to Holland and Germany, where the culture was more hospitable to a female visual artist. Although she had happily embraced an unmarried life devoted to art (after 1835, she was independently wealthy and did not need to marry to survive), Best met Anton Sarg, a German schoolteacher and amateur musician, during her sojourn and married him in 1840. The couple had three children and spent the rest of their lives on the Continent.

Working primarily in watercolors, Best executed portraits of friends and of commissioned subjects, as well as still lifes that sold to collectors and to London dealers, including Ackermann’s. Most compelling for this study, however, were her domestic genre scenes of daily life at home (in York) and abroad (in Germany and Holland), in which she reflected on the integration of women’s lives, work, and art. As Lynne Walker has argued, “For many women artists, designers, and architects based in Britain in the nineteenth century, the studio was located in the domestic space of the home. Whether in new or refurbished buildings, creative middle-class women devised, altered, and/or subverted private space, redefining the home to advance social, political, and artistic projects and to promote social change.”

With an exacting eye to detail, Best focused on domestic interiors in compositions that highlight the metaphoric or narrative nature of space, allowing furniture and pottery, carpets and teakettles to recount the quotidian life of British and German women. Her scenes of kitchens and drawing rooms reflect an entire worldview through their clutter or cleanliness and render visible what would generally be hidden from public view. These spaces are occupied by women, children, servants, but in nearly every scene the room and its décor dominate and when human figures are absent, the presence of things (most often paintings) take on a life of their own that runs the gamut from mundane to menacing.

In a series of watercolors from the 1830s, Best portrayed picture galleries in Britain and Germany. These rooms in private country estates and public exhibition spaces were the only real “academies” open to women like Best in search of the advanced artistic training available in a studio. In the absence of any public art galleries in Yorkshire, Best had obtained permission to study and copy the collection at Castle Howard, and in Green Drawing Room at Castle Howard (1832) (figure 14) Best represents one of the rooms where she worked, copying paintings by Reynolds, Caracci, Bellini, Domenichino, Van Dyck, Bassano, and Tintoretto. What is particularly striking in Best’s rendition is the juxtaposition of high art and domesticity, where the furniture in the drawing room with its
baggy slipcovers coexists with the Old Masters to the extent that one framed image is perched on a settee. While this odd positioning probably signals that the image had been taken off the wall to enable a visitor to copy or study it with greater ease, the framed painting of what appears to be a statue occupies a spot on the couch much as a person might, leaning back and surveying the room. To the left of center is a smiling housekeeper, keys in hand. Best thus depicts, as she would repeatedly do, the coexistence of women and art within the private or domestic sphere. Although this chatelaine does not own the paintings that surround her, for she belongs as much to the Castle Howard as they do, the Old Masters nonetheless fall into her domain, as signaled by the keys. Her rose-colored dress complements the green of the walls and echoes the red robes of the painted figures above and behind her. It is she who opens the doors to cede visitors access to images, and like Best herself, the housekeeper is in fact responsible for exposing these hidden treasures to viewers from outside the Castle walls. Here, as in a large number of her interiors, Best composes her image in such a way that the framed view through an open door to a brightly
illuminated window provides a counterpoint to the paintings on the wall and suggests both parallels and departures. Looking beyond the enclosed space of the drawing room with its gold-encased portraits and landscapes lies another world, another framed view, and for Best, the path to this world is traversed through the mastery of the Old Masters.

In Best's most intriguing self-portrait, the artist depicts herself in an 1838 representation of her Painting Room in our House in York (figure 15). Seated at a table by a window at the extreme right of the scene, Best dips a brush into blue pigment as she works on an unseen image on her easel. Pushed to the edges of this interior, the artist and her work are self-contained: a finished watercolor lies drying on the table between the easel and a closed portfolio, while her tools—box of colors, water, and palette—are neatly arrayed on the table. Surrounding the artist, even engulfing her, are all the signs of bourgeois domesticity that occupy the majority of the image. A dog sits obediently at the glowing hearth, the mantel is crowded with pastoral porcelain figurines, and numerous framed images decorate the walls. Portraits of Best's parents and family, silhouettes, a landscape, and a still life that might be by Best herself all struggle to be seen against the busy green wallpaper whose green vines, leaves, and tendrils undulate across the wall in an almost dream-like animation. The matching curtains bulge into the window frame behind the painter, threatening to consume the artist in her solemn black dress. A table at the center of the composition is also covered in a green patterned cloth, adding to the overwhelming, almost menacing feeling that the inanimate objects and materials in this room will bury its occupant in exuberant excess. In this claustrophobic interior, surface ornament encroaches on the artistic subject in such a way as to suggest the oppressive weight of domesticity and its all-consuming busyness.

From her chosen position at the margins, Best looks straight ahead with a steady and serious gaze. Her left hand holding onto the easel and her feet planted firmly on the floor cloth covering up the patterned rug, Best asserts her place within this space while at the same time asserting her difference from her environment. The straight lines of the table, box, and easel stand in stark contrast to the voluptuous curves of the wallpaper and curtains, and the black, brown, and gray of the wood and her gown provide a somber counterpoint to the greens and creams that dominate the rest of the interior. The three empty chairs poised at various angles testify to other occupants of this sitting room, only temporarily displaced and present even in their absence. There is a psychological intensity to this scene that anticipates some of Edouard Vuillard's interiors at the end of the century, as Best uses space and pattern to signal a subjective state of being. The female artist has carved out a place for herself within the bourgeois parlor; her working space, like her existence as an artist, occupies a liminal area at the edges of the arena, yet she is solidly ensconced.
Figure 15
Mary Ellen Best,
*Painting Room in our House in York*, 1838.
Watercolor on paper.
25.7 × 36 cm.
Bridgeman Art Library International, New York, NY.
With her back to the hearth, Best’s illumination comes from the sunny exterior world, and she holds a double position as a woman and an artist, part of both worlds yet at the margins of both as well. Like Amélie Cogniet, Best exploits the dynamics of the working space to portray the challenges facing the female visual artist. As Walker explains, “spatiality participates in the structuring and production of subjectivities and identities; as well as playing a crucial role as the site of contestation of meanings that in part determines ideas and feelings about social relations between genders, sexualities, age groups, and classes” (122).

Mary Ellen Best’s scenes of Germany, Holland, and Belgium include both private and public interiors—homes and hotels, schools, orphanages, and a nunnery—which give her viewers an intimate portrait of domestic and quotidian lives across the Channel. Her focus on kitchens, bedrooms, and parlors, often populated by children and the detritus of family life, is notable in its privileging of a world at once foreign and entirely familiar. Outdoor scenes of marketplaces and street processions similarly highlight daily life and culture, much as Anna Mary Howitt’s narrative, An Art Student in Munich, would do in 1853. In an image painted in the mid-1840s, Best portrays herself as an artist at work in the public sphere in a gesture that recalls Rolinda Sharples’s self-portrait in the courtroom. The Altpörtel, Speyer (c. 1844) (figure 16) depicts, at center, the clock tower, which serves as the main gateway to the city, while in the foreground we see the female visual artist sketching the scene before her. With her back to the viewer, Best is absorbed in her work, but even in Germany the female artist is a source of curiosity for the crowd surrounding her. Melding local color, architecture, and self-portraiture, Best portrays herself in typical English garb, with a heavy dark shawl, lace collar, and straw bonnet, while the children before and around her, in much smaller scale than the British artist, wear the colorful skirts and tunics of the Rhineland region. Even as a pair of boys climbs upon the water pump to see her, Best towers over the group, mirroring perhaps the solidity of the building she paints. Once again at the edges of the scene, the female visual artist nonetheless remains confident and committed to her task, part of the landscape but always other.

A final, representative image of British women in the studio is found not on the canvas but on the page, in Anna Mary Howitt’s An Art Student in Munich. A painter and writer (to be discussed in chapter 3), Howitt was actively committed to a professional career as an artist and like so many female painters of the period (including Best and Margaret Gillies), turned to the Continent to acquire the advanced artistic training not available to women in Britain. Along with friend and fellow painter, Jane Benham, Howitt traveled to Germany in 1850 to study with the history painter Wilhelm von Kaulbach. Anna Mary and Jane lived together (without parents or chaperone) and painted under Kaulbach’s tutelage, pursuing art with a quasi-religious passion while also study-
Figure 16
Mary Ellen Best, Altpörtal, Speyer, c. 1844. Watercolor on paper. 33 x 22.5 cm. Private collection.
ing German language and culture. Before they left Britain, both women were commissioned to send back articles describing their experiences for a variety of periodicals: Benham for the *Literary Gazette* and *Art Journal*, Howitt for *Athenaeum, Household Words*, and Henry Chorley’s *Ladies’ Companion.* In this sense, Anna Mary and Jane were ambassadors for the cause of the female artist abroad, and their widely circulated reflections on artistic life in Germany provided inspirational images for their readers. At the encouragement of her mother and Mrs Gaskell, Anna Mary compiled *An Art Student in Munich* from her letters and articles, publishing it in 1853 (with a second edition in 1880) to much popular acclaim.

From the very first page, Howitt establishes her identity as “a woman studying Art,” and the intimate address of the transcribed letters (presented with dates but without addressee) gives her readers a sense of immediacy and inclusion in the experiences of the “Art Student.” The pursuit of art and artistic training, frequently described as a quasi-divine calling, is inextricably tied to space and place throughout the narrative. Denied admission as women to the Academy in Munich, the painters approach Kaulbach as “acolytes” in the hopes of being able to work in his studio. Addressing the master with “a reverence, a faith in him unspeakable,” Howitt tells Kaulbach “how we longed really to study; how we had long loved and revered his works” (*Munich* 4), and the master’s response—“Come and draw here; this room is entirely at your disposal . . . Every day, and as early as you like, and stay as long as there is daylight” (*Munich* 4)—is related in terms that elevate him to a god-like status. Howitt reflects, “As I left the studio, I could have fallen upon my knees, and returned fervent thanks to God, so mysterious was the fulfillment of my long-cherished poetical dream” (*Munich* 6). Once they have gained admittance on a daily basis, the students refer to the studio as “our art-temple” and Kaulbach becomes “the high priest” (*Munich* 40). If the studio in contemporary fiction took on aspects of a temple or sanctum for the male artist as a Romantic, deified figure, Howitt plays on these associations with the women’s initiation into the consecrated space.

Indeed, access to the studio and the “rooms of their own” at their lodgings in Munich become integral to the narrative construction of the women’s artistic identity. Howitt’s description of the contents and decoration of their rooms transforms the domestic space into one that signifies their professional aspirations: “Last night we busily unpacked all our paintboxes, looked up, with delighted eagerness, porte-crays, chalks, everything; chose out such anatomical drawings, and drawings from the antique, as we thought most worthy; we laid out our twin-copies of Wilson’s *Vade-Mecum*,—even scraped our chalks, and thus had everything ready for starting” (*Munich* 9). Transforming their “pretty little sister bed-rooms” into expressions of their own artistic visions,
the painters remove the prints and paintings hung by the owners and replace them with their own. The narrator “Anna” explains, “I fastened up my Raphael prints and my studies of color from the National Gallery, with one of Justina’s lovely water-color landscapes . . . Clare’s little bed-room presents pretty much the same appearance when the door is open, only that instead of my Raphael she has a clever copy of a Rembrandt, and a Christus Consolator instead of my Highland landscape” (Munich 16). Significantly, Howitt includes her own work and that of her “art-sisters” Justina (a thinly disguised Barbara Leigh Smith, to be discussed in chapter 3) and Clare (Jane Benham) alongside Old Master prints, positing not only their position in the artistic field but also the collective nature of their endeavor. From start to finish, this artistic education and identity is a shared, collaborative experience.

Where painted studio scenes used physical signifiers—canvases, easels, brushes, models—to denote professional identity, written narratives such as Howitt’s focused equally on the inner life of the artist in the atelier. Anna’s and Clare’s experiences in Kaulbach’s studio teach them new ways of seeing, feeling, and understanding the world and its representations; thus the exhaustively detailed descriptions of the studio and ekphrases of the paintings there are filtered through the artist narrator’s developing consciousness and imagination in terms that resonate with Romantic and Ruskinian overtones. Where “your Englishman” would find the untamed landscape surrounding the studio “very untidy” and disparage “Kaulbach’s wild field” and his equally tumultuous canvases (Munich 21), Howitt’s narrator makes manifest her artistic identity by translating the German aesthetic for her non-artist English readers. She explains that Kaulbach’s paintings, too often dismissed in “hasty judgment” by the English and French, must be understood as “poems, and new subjects treated in an original manner,” reflecting and addressing “that dreamy imagination which invests all nature with a tender poetry, which gives an individual life to every bud and leaf,—that imagination which . . . has raised up an immortal band of musicians, philosophers, and artists!” (Munich 22). Her apprenticeship in the master’s studio grants Howitt’s “Anna” membership in this “immortal band,” allowing her to perform the role of Virgil to her unenlightened audience and locating difference not in gender, but in artistic identity. In keeping with Carlyle and Ruskin, Howitt elevates the artist to the position of a “Seer” whose work manifests a power “with such a vividness of truth that your very soul is thrilled” (Munich 22) and the artist is “ennobled through his art, ennobling humanity” (Munich 37). The remainder of the lengthy text is in many ways a verbal transcription of these “ways of seeing,” and if Howitt does not claim the status of a “Seer” for herself, she becomes a conduit for the artist’s vision; an artist herself, she helps others to “see” and joins the ranks of those “ennobling humanity.”
In contrast to painted studio scenes, Howitt’s *Art Student in Munich* rarely depicts the women in the act of painting; instead, the narrative portrays German culture, landscape, and people through the eyes of the British female artist, while transforming the text into a visual experience for her readers as Germany itself becomes an atelier of sorts and the letters her canvas. Nonetheless, when “Justina” (Leigh Smith) comes to visit her “dear art sisters” the most important moment comes when her friends show her their studio in a scene that emphasizes both the journey and the space of artistic creation: “I was obliged to hold Justina’s hand in mine, else nothing could have persuaded me that this was not one of my many dreams. We passed through the bushes; we stood under the vine, we opened the heavy grey door: we were in the little room. The clock ticked as loudly as usual; there stood the two sister easels, and a sister painting-blouse hung on each: the casts, the books, the green jug with flowers, all looked so familiar, that to set to work at once and fancy that I had only dreamed of Justina, seemed the most natural thing” (*Munich* 92). The passage highlights both gender and collectivity through the repetition of “sister easels, and a sister painting-blouse,” affirming that they are women who indeed have a place in the studio, where they both live and, importantly, labor. Like the implied readers of her epistolary text, Howitt’s Justina, “having now seen what we were beginning, and having taken into her memory all the features of the beloved little room” would later be able to “picture our lives when she should have again vanished” (*Munich* 92). Thus, the central (implied) image to be taken away from the art students in Munich is that of the pair of female students in the studio.

Finally, although Howitt confessed in her preface to donning rose-colored glasses in her memoir, a conversation with a male painter hints at the darker side of the experience. When Howitt’s Anna waxes rhapsodic on her love of Munich to a local artist, he immediately responds with a litany of all she cannot experience of artistic life. “There is one feature in Munich life from which you, unfortunately, as a woman, have been cut off,” he explains, “the jovial, poetical, quaint life of the artists among themselves” (*Munich* 241), and goes on to elaborate the many traditions, festivals, and “odd usages,” the “meetings at their Kneips,” and “their masked balls, where all is deliciously artistic and poetic” (*Munich* 241) that were accessible only to the fraternity of male artists. At once part of the master’s atelier and always other, Howitt’s Anna and Clare construct an artistic identity together as “Sisters in Art” that will be fully elaborated in Howitt’s novella of that name upon her return to England (and examined in chapter 3). Acknowledging difference, Howitt concludes *An Art Student in Munich* with a meditation on art, gender, and forms of equality:

I cannot but believe that all in life that is truly noble, truly good, truly desirable, God bestows upon us women in as unsparing measure as upon men. He
only desires us, in His great benevolence, to stretch forth our hands and to gather for ourselves the rich joys of intellect, of nature, of study, of action, of love, and of usefulness, which He has poured forth around us. Let us only cast aside the false, silly veils of prejudice and fashion, which ignorance has bound about our eyes; let us lay bare our souls to God’s sunshine of truth and love; let us exercise the intelligence which He has bestowed on us upon worthy and noble objects, and this intelligence may become keen as that of men; and the paltry high heels and whalebone supports of mere drawing-room conventionality and young ladyhood withering up, we shall stand in humility before God, but proudly and rejoicingly at the side of man! Different always, but not less noble, less richly endowed! (Munich 454)

Howitt’s optimistic vision of women’s ability to transcend social oppression through “earnestness and fixedness of purpose” reflects an idealism shared by many at mid-century, while at the same time proposing a role for the female artist not within the male brotherhood, but parallel to it, equally noble but always different.

For the British female painter—Sharples, Best, Howitt, Benham, and myriad others—aspiring to a career as a professional visual artist presented even more complex challenges than those faced by their French counterparts, most notably in the dearth of academies and studios in which to acquire training and, by extension, professional artistic identity. Notwithstanding these limitations, nineteenth-century British women gradually forged a place for themselves in the field of artistic cultural production: turning to private collections, private and group tutorials, and above all travel and study abroad, they attained artistic education. Exhibiting and selling their work in the public sphere, they claimed a place in the public imagination, and like their contemporaries in France (albeit in more limited numbers), they deliberately crafted an image of female artistic identity through self-portraits of the artist at work. This ideological labor—the political act of rendering visible the incomprehensible or unimaginable figure of the professional woman artist—took a variety of forms in Britain as in France, in novels and narratives as well as in paintings and drawings. Most notably, where French women frequently represented an integrated studio, with male and female painters sharing the working space in varying degrees of harmony, from Capet’s idyllic scene to Cogniet’s anxious one, British women reflected Howitt’s formulation of “separate but equal,” privileging rather than effacing gender difference. Singly and collectively, however, these images by women of women representing the world contributed to incontrovertible shifts in the structures and constructions of art, gender, and professionalism.