Art and the American Revolution in the Newberry Collection

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John Singleton Copley and His Art

Amory, Martha Babcock. *Domestic and artistic life of John Singleton Copley, R.A. With notices of his works, and reminiscences of his son, Lord Lyndhurst, Lord High Chancellor of Great Britain. By his granddaughter, Martha Babcock Amory.* Boston, New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1882. Written by Copley’s granddaughter, this work includes a life of Copley and also of his son Lord Lyndhurst, Lord High Chancellor of Great Britain, as well as copies of letters. Call #: W 045 .2 (Vol 5).


Cunningham, Allan. *The lives of the most eminent British painters, sculptors, and architects.* London : J. Murray, 1829-33. The 13-page biography included among those of other painters such as Hogarth, Reynolds, Gainsborough, West, and Blake, and architects Indigo Jones and Sir Christopher Wren is purportedly the first published biography of Copley. Includes an engraved portrait, noted “from the original in the possession of Lord Lyndhurst,” Copley’s son (163). Call #: W 045 .2 (Vol 5).

Metropolitan Museum of Art. *Exhibition of paintings by John Singleton Copley, in commemoration of the two-hundredth anniversary of his birth, held in the Metropolitan museum of art, New York, December 22, 1936 to February 14, 1937.* [New York, c. 1936]. With black and white plates, this catalog of an exhibition held at the Met in 1936/1937 included both portraits, such as *The Boy with a Squirrel* (1765), and history paintings, such as *The Death of Major Pierson* (1783). Call #: W 01 .C8097


Primary Sources from Copley’s World

*Letters & papers of John Singleton Copley and Henry Pelham, 1739-1776 in Massachusetts Historical Society ... Collections, v. 71.* [Boston]: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1914. With transcriptions of letters, as well as images of paintings, drawings, and letters. The table of contents includes a summary of each letter’s subject. The original letters and documents are held in London. Call #: F 844 .553 v. 71
Du Fresnay, Charles Alphonse. The art of painting. Translated into English verse by William Mason, M.A., with annotations by Sir Joshua Reynolds. Dublin, 1793. A later edition of Du Fresnoy’s 1668 De Arte Graphica. Copley may have had access to treatises of this sort of in the early years of his career (Kamensky, 47). This edition includes printed annotations by the painter Sir Joshua Reynolds. Call #: W 6. 24

Royal Academy of the Arts. Exhibition of the Royal Academy. [London : The Academy], 1st-192nd; 1769-1960. Copley’s name appears among those of other exhibitors in these printed catalogs; entries include brief descriptions of the content of each painting. The 10th exhibition, 1778, describes Watson and the Shark, “65. A boy attacked by a shark, and rescued by some seamen in a boat; founded on a fact which happened in the harbour of the Havannah.” (p.7). Call #: W1145.76; Newberry holds v.1 (1769) to v.76 (1844)


Vesalius, Andreas. De humani corporis fabrica libri septem. : Cum indice rerum & verborum memorabilium locupletissimo. Venetiis : Apud Franciscum Franciscium Senensem & Ioannem Crieger Germanum, 1568. This anatomical work provided inspiration for the young Copley as he learned to render the human form (Kamensky, 45). The Newberry holds this reprint of the original 1543 text, as well as a 2014 annotated translation of the 1543 and 1555 editions. Call #: Case folio QM21 .V48 1568; Wing Oversize ZPP 2038 .M45

Prints and Paintings

While not explicitly related to Copley, these are examples of prints and paintings from this period

Collection of eighteenth and nineteenth century English caricatures. This is a collection of some 2000 prints of political satire published between the 1720s and the 1840s. It includes work by artists such as James Gillray, Thomas Rowlandson, and George Cruikshank. Many of the prints can also be found in the collection of the British Museum. Call #: Case Oversize W 778 .186

Des Barres, Joseph F. W. (Joseph Frederick Wallet), The harbour and part of the town of Havannah [graphic]. [London: J.F.W. Des Barres, between 1774 and 1781]. This is a print (aquatint and etching) of the harbor at Havanna where Watson was attacked by the shark as depicted in Copley’s painting. This was engraved by Des Barres and appeared in The Atlantic Neptune, published for the use of the Royal Navy of Great Britain. Call #: map 4F G3320 no. 176

To find visual materials in the online catalog, use keywords “Pictorial Works,” engraving, drawing, print, cartoon, broadside, (chromo)lithograph. Also “set more limits” to search for format “Artwork/Chart” (omits images in books).

To find many more items about related topics, search for the following subjects:

- American Revolution (1775-1783)
- Copley, John
- Art, American
- Boston (Mass.)—History—Colonial period, ca. 1600-1775
- Boston (Mass.)—History—Revolution, 1775-1873
- Color in art
- Copley, John Singleton, 1738-1815
- United States—History—Revolution, 1775-1873

This Quick Guide was created for a Colonial History Lecture by Jane Kamensky, A Revolution in Color: The World of John Singleton Copley, held at the Newberry on June 3, 2017.