



Académie Royale: A History in Portraits

Hannah Williams

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From its establishment in 1648 until its disbanding in 1793 after the French Revolution, the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture was the centre of the Parisian art world. Taking the reader behind the scenes of this elite bastion of French art theory, education, and practice, this engaging study uncovers the fascinating histories - official and unofficial - of that artistic community. Through an innovative approach to portraits - their values, functions, and lives as objects - this book explores two faces of the Académie. Official portraits grant us insider access to institutional hierarchies, ideologies, rituals, customs, and everyday experiences in the Académie's Louvre apartments. Unofficial portraits in turn reveal hidden histories of artists' personal relationships: family networks, intimate friendships, and bitter rivalries. Drawing on both art-historical and anthropological frames of analysis, this book offers insightful interpretations of portraits read through and against documentary evidence from the archives to create a rich story of people, places, and objects. Theoretically informed, rigorously researched, and historically grounded, this book sheds new light on the inner workings of the Académie. Its discoveries and compelling narrative make an invaluable and accessible contribution to our understanding of this pre-eminent European institution and the social lives of artists in early modern Paris.

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