CHAPTER 2

Maria Hadfield Cosway's 'Genius' for Print
A Didactic, Commercial, and Professional Path

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In April of 1830, performing a service to future historians, Sir William Cosway asked his ageing relative, the artist and educator Maria Cosway, née Hadfield (1760–1838), for 'some memoirs' of her life. He had made this request before, and now – finally – his persistence prevailed. The following month, Maria Cosway responded with a richly narrative letter, taking pride in the details of her artistic training in Florence, her marriage to the English portraitist Richard Cosway in 1781, her ensuing entry onto London's artistic scene, her quick successes as an exhibiting painter, and one of her most hard-won achievements in print – a publication she had initiated and executed herself. She also reflected on the hurdles she faced as a woman. For as Cosway knew all too well, she lived in a time and place in which women's political and legal rights were formally, if not always in practice, subsumed under those of their fathers and then their husbands. 'Had Mr. C. permited [sic] me to paint professionally', she lamented, 'I should have made a better painter[,] but left to myself by degrees instead of improving I lost what I had brought from Italy of my early studies.'[1] This clause has long been taken as evidence that Cosway did not pursue or, for the most part, even entertain professional aspirations in any artistic medium.

However, Maria Cosway's repeated engagement with an expressly commercial form of print at the end of her exhibiting career strongly challenges her retrospective account. From 1800 to 1803, she worked on five artistic, didactic publications. Her contributions to these ever-more ambitious series – all but one glossed over in her autobiographical letter – did, in fact, fit the definition of professionalism at the time as it applied to painting, print, and other artistic enterprises: a pursuit undertaken for remuneration. Her final project, moreover, allows us to see how three

[1] M. Cosway to Sir W. Cosway, 24 May 1830, f. 2r, MSL/1953/961, National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

women used art to probe the roles, expectations, and constraints that members of their sex automatically faced in the Revolutionary world. This chapter will provide a brief overview of Cosway's public artistic trajectory and then consider each of her printed publications in turn; along the way, it will introduce the activity of other female artists and writers with whom Cosway's work regularly intersected and engaged.

Maria Cosway was born in Florence, Italy, where her parents ran a popular series of inns for British travellers. She practised art from a young age.[2] As she described at length in her letter to Sir William,

> At eight years I began drawing . . . [and] took a passion for it . . . I was . . . put under the care of an old celebrated lady [Violante Beatrice Siries, later Cerotti], whos [sic] portrait is in the [Uffizi] Gallery . . . This Lady soon found I could go farther than she could instruct me, & Mr. [Johan] Zofani being at florence my father ask'd him to give me some instructions. I went to study in the gallery of the Palazzo Pitti, & Copied many of the finest pictures. Wright of darby [Joseph Wright of Derby] passed only few days at florence & noticing my assiduity & turn for the Art, sprung me to the higher branch of it. My father had a great taste & knowledge of the arts and . . . in every way contrived to furnish my mind.[3]

In 1777 she began to visit Rome, where, she recalled, 'I had an opportunity at knowing all the first living artists intimately; [Pompeo] Battoni, [Anton Raphael] Mengs, [Anton von] Maron, and many English artist[s]. [Henry] Fusely with his extraordinary Visions struck my fancy. I made no regular study, but for one year & half only went to see all that was high in painting & sculpture, made sketches'.[4] Cosway was raised Catholic, and claims to have wanted to become a nun upon her father's death in 1776. Instead, three years later, the family moved to London. Cosway arrived in the British capital with letters in hand for 'all the first people of fashion': i.e., the artists 'Sir J[oshua]. Reynolds, [Giovanni Battista] Cirpiani [sic], [Francesco] Bartolozzi, Angelica Kauffman'.[5] With her mother worried

[2] Her father was from a family of wealthy Manchester merchants. For more on Cosway, see work by S. Lloyd, especially *Richard and Maria Cosway: Regency Artists of Taste and Fashion* (Edinburgh: The Trustees of the National Galleries of Scotland, 1995) and 'The Accomplished Maria Cosway: Anglo-Italian Artist, Musician, Salon Hostess and Educationalist (1759–1838)', *Journal of Anglo-Italian Studies*, 2 (1992): 108–139. See also G. C. Williamson, *Richard Cosway, R.A., and His Wife and Pupils: Miniaturists of the Eighteenth Century* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1897). For Cosway's parents and the inns, see Lloyd, *Richard and Maria Cosway*, 41–42.

[3] M. Cosway to Sir W. Cosway, f. 1v. [4] Ibid.

[5] The letters were from Lady Penelope Rivers, who was married to the diplomat George Pitt, Lord Rivers.

about finances, Maria Cosway (Hadfield at the time) made a quick, profitable match with the fashionable portrait painter Richard Cosway, a Royal Academician of London's recently founded Royal Academy of Arts; they married in 1781. She made her own exhibiting debut at the Academy later that year and, through 1801, displayed forty-two works in its annual show: eight portraits and thirty-four narrative scenes, frequently from literary sources.[6] All but three of these pieces hung in the Great Room, the Academy's most prestigious space. Surviving images suggest that Cosway's canvases were often hung quite centrally.[7]

In line with this pride of place, Cosway found herself well received from the start as an exhibiting painter. For her induction in 1781, she submitted three narrative scenes – one classical, one from Tasso, and one from Shakespeare – all of which appeared in the Great Room. In 1782, she sent in four narrative paintings, again all placed in the Great Room, including her celebrated *The Duchess of Devonshire as Cynthia*.[8] Although it was only her second year exhibiting, this showing led a critic for the *Morning Chronicle* to conclude, 'she is the first of female painters, and inferior only among the male sex to her husband, and to Sir J. Reynolds'.[9]

Also from the beginning, and mirroring Angelika Kauffmann (1741–1807, one of the Academy's two female founders), Cosway's reputation rapidly extended beyond Academy walls through the medium of print.[10] Signalling her quick and lasting popularity, two of Cosway's three debut works were published as mezzotint engravings; ultimately, more than a dozen of her exhibited works were reproduced and sold in print.[11] Some of these were executed by London's leading male printmakers, including Francesco Bartolozzi and Valentine Green. Others came from

[6] She would exhibit a final scene from Hesiod at Paris's Louvre Salon in 1802.

[7] See: Edward Francis Burney, *The Royal Academy Exhibition of 1784, The Great Room, East Wall*, 1784, pen, grey ink, grey wash, and watercolour, 34.3 × 49 cm, British Museum (hereafter BM) 1904,0101.1; and Pierre Antoine [Pietro Antonio] Martini after Johann Heinrich Ramberg, *Exhibition of the Royal Academy, 1787*, 1787, hand-coloured etching, 37.8 × 53.2 cm, BM 1871,1209.591.

[8] This painting remains in the collection at Chatsworth House, Derbyshire, and was also quickly reproduced by Valentine Green; see Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Fund, B1970.3.496.

[9] 'To the Printer of the Morning Chronicle', *The Morning Chronicle, and London Advertiser* (9 May 1782).

[10] D. Alexander, 'Kauffman and the Print Market in Eighteenth-Century England', in W. Wassyng Roworth, ed., *Angelica Kauffman: A Continental Artist in Georgian England* (London: Reaktion, 1992): 141–178.

[11] See, for example, Valentine Green after Maria Cosway, *Creusa Appearing to Aeneas*, 1781, mezzotint, 55.3 × 43 cm, BM 1877,0609.1713, Royal Academy, 1781; Valentine Green after Maria Cosway, *Like Patience on a Monument, Smiling at Grief*, 1783, mezzotint, 51.1 × 40.5 cm, BM 1877,0512.539, Royal Academy, 1781.

the hands of women such as Emma Smith, later Pauncefote (1783–1853), who was both an exhibiting painter and a printmaker.[12] In 1801, Smith engraved in mezzotint two of Cosway's exhibited paintings — nearly two decades after they had appeared on display.[13] Smith had debuted at the Academy herself in 1799, and would exhibit a mélange of twenty-seven portrait, narrative, and landscape works through 1808 as she simultaneously established a growing reputation as an engraver. In 1805, the poet and novelist Charlotte Smith wrote to her publisher, hoping to hire Emma Smith to provide additional illustrations for one of her works; she had been 'struck' by Smith's talent when they met while visiting a mutual friend:

> If any new plates are intended, I think that, *if* the drawings I saw a few days ago *are* done by the young Lady who shew'd them to me of the name of Smith, the daughter of an artist, she is capable of seizing my idea's & would make beautiful designs ... I was extremely struck with two little designs from the Vicar of Wakefield & think them almost too masterly for so young an artist.[14]

Cosway and Emma Smith were in good company – in these same years, hundreds of women were becoming increasingly active in London's public art world, a phenomenon that was both commended *and* critiqued. Satirical prints began to ridicule female portraitists as early as 1772, and continued through (and past) the early nineteenth century. Some of these lampoons extended their ambit to Cosway herself.[15] For instance, in *A Smuggling Machine or a Convenient Cos(au)way for a Man in Miniature*, issued by the prominent publisher Hannah Humphrey (1745–c. 1818) in 1782, we see Richard Cosway, standing, immersed in his wife's petticoat.[16] Beyond mocking Richard Cosway's size (he was known to be physically short), the image literally pictures the idea – and anxiety – that through their public achievements, women could upstage

[12] Smith came from a family in which many women and men were artists.

[13] These were *A Persian Lady Worshipping the Rising Sun*, exhibited in 1784, and *Clytie*, exhibited in 1784; see BM 1869,0213.63 and 1873,0809.231.

[14] N. Jeffares, 'Smith, Emma, Mrs Robert Pauncefote', *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*, online ed. quoting J. Phillips Stanton, ed., *The Collected Letters of Charlotte Smith* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), 696.

[15] See, for example, *The Paintress*, 1772, mezzotint, 42 × 27 cm, published by William Humphrey, Lewis Walpole Library, Farmington, 772.05.15.01+; *The Paintress of Maccaroni's*, 1772, hand-coloured mezzotint, 41 × 30 cm, published by Carington Bowles, LWL 772.04.13.01.1+; and Thomas Rowlandson, *The Mutual Attempt to Catch a Likeness*, c. 1800–1805, pen, ink, and watercolour over pencil on paper, 23.8 × 23 cm, Cincinnati Art Museum, Cincinnati 1992.56.

[16] BM 1851,0901.60.

professionally prosperous men.[17] Four years later, another printed satire placed Maria Cosway in a Bedlam cell, parodying her predilection for the Fuselian sublime.[18] This image, too, was published by a woman, the lesser-known Elizabeth Jackson (fl. 1785–1787), and echoed some journalists' growing disapproval of Cosway's pursuit of the 'grand', 'horrible', and 'extravagant' in her exhibited art – all, by implication, visual categories that they deemed should be gendered male.[19]

Perhaps such frictions influenced Cosway's own view of her career. Her letter to her nephew was not the first time that she described feeling restricted in her professional aspirations by her sex and, relatedly, her marriage. In November 1797, Cosway shared with the Academician and diarist Joseph Farington that 'she begins many pictures but soon grows tired – having no obligation to finish them she requires a necessary stimulus; had [Richard] Cosway allowed Her to sell her works it would have been otherways [sic], finishing would have been a habit'.[20] In the lexicon of the time, for Cosway to have sold her works would have meant that she painted professionally, or at least aspired to do so; to practise art (or other cultural pursuits including music, writing, and even embroidery) as a professional was to do so with the goal of earning money.[21] This concept of professionalism was not new, and had long included women

[17] S. Lloyd, *Richard and Maria Cosway*, 47; and A. Rosenthal, *Angelica Kauffman: Art and Sensibility* (New Haven, CT: Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art by Yale University Press, 2006), 225.

[18] *Maria Costive at her Studies* 1786, etching, partly hand-coloured, 24 × 15.4 cm, published by Elizabeth Jackson, BM 1868,0808.12463. For more on both images, see P. A. Spies-Gans, *A Revolution on Canvas: The Rise of Women Artists in Britain and France, 1760-1830* (London: Paul Mellon Centre for British Art in association with Yale University Press, 2022).

[19] 'Account *of the* Exhibition *of* Paintings, &*c. at the* Royal-Academy. (*Continued.*)' clipping from 1783, bound in Royal Academy Critiques 1768–1842, vol. 1, 125; and 'Exhibition *of* Paintings, Sculptures, &c. *at the* Royal-Academy, Somerset-Place, *for the Year* 1787', The St. James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post, 4087 (10–12 May 1787), BCN. On Elizabeth Jackson, see Chapter 14 by Nicholas JS Knowles in this volume.

[20] K. Garlick, A. Macintyre, and K. Cave, eds., *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, 16 vols. (New Haven, CT: Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art by Yale University Press, 1978–1984), vol. 111, p. 928 (25 November 1797). For her reflections on the limitations of her sex, see 'To Thomas Jefferson from Maria Cosway, 15 February 1787', in Julian P. Boyd, ed., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, vol. 11, 1 January–6 August 1787* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1955), 148–151. On this visit, Cosway showed Farington her painting of *The Birth of the Thames*, which she would exhibit in 1800 and would be reproduced as an elaborate stipple print with etching; she had just returned from several years in Italy, soon after which the Cosways had lost their first and only child.

[21] There was a specific set of customs with which women artists could express professional intent – most basically, by exhibiting or publishing while advertising one's name and address – and a specific set of customs with which women could practise and even exhibit art while signalling that they had no commercial goals, most often by remaining anonymous or not including their address. On the omission of publication details, see Chapter 9 by Cynthia Roman in this volume.

artists under its ambit.[22] It was, however, evolving and gaining appeal in these exact years; in 1792, in her foundational *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, the philosopher Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797) had written that 'to earn their own subsistence' was, for women, 'the true definition of independence'.[23] The conservative backlash to Wollstonecraft's ideas was immediate and fierce. Still, as the 1790s progressed, growing numbers of women attempted to earn money in new ways, including through their art – particularly by exhibiting their paintings and drawings, and by working in print with an eye towards publication.[24]

It was at the end of this same decade, soon after her conversation with Farington, that Maria Cosway too turned to print. Unlike her paintings, with which she faced pecuniary restrictions, here she focused on works that were meant to be serial, published, and sold.[25] It is not clear why this distinction seems to have been one of media; perhaps it helped that she first entered the print market through a joint project with her husband. Yet no matter the impetus, in 1800 Cosway contributed to three publications, followed by even more elaborate schemes in 1802 and 1803. First came the *Imitations in Chalk from Drawings by R. Cosway, R.A.*, thirty-six plates of soft-ground etchings by Cosway after sketches by Richard. Published by Rudolf Ackermann in 1800, the *Imitations* were issued in six parts of six prints each and meant to function as a drawing book, providing a range of models, subjects, and compositional formats for study — from sketchy

[22] The Oxford English Dictionary has examples of this use of 'professional' dating back to the sixteenth century. See, also, M. S. Larson, *The Rise of Professionalism: A Sociological Analysis* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1977); P. J. Corfield, *Power and the Professions in Britain, 1700–1850* (London: Routledge, 1995); R. O'Day, *The Professions in Early Modern England, 1450–1800: Servants of the Commonweal* (London: Longman, 2000); D. Rohr, *The Careers of British Musicians, 1750–1850: A Profession of Artisans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); G. Smith, *The Emergence of the Professional Watercolourist: Contentions and Alliances in the Artistic Domain, 1760–1824* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002); B. Schellenberg, *The Professionalization of Women Writers in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); D. Kennerley, 'Debating Female Musical Professionalism and Artistry in the British Press, c. 1820–1850', *The Historical Journal*, 58(4) (2015); and R. Golding, ed., *The Music Profession in Britain, 1780–1920* (London: Routledge, 2018).

[23] M. Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1792), ch. 5, section 1.

[24] From the mid-1790s, women began exhibiting at the Academy in unprecedented numbers; these numbers remained heightened through to at least 1830. P. A. Spies-Gans, 'Exceptional, but not Exceptions: Public Exhibitions and the Rise of the Woman Artist in London and Paris, 1760–1830', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 51(4) (2018): 393–416.

[25] Many of her peers did not face these restrictions with paintings, and participated in the Academy's shows with the explicit goal of selling their art.

figural outlines to full narrative scenes.[26] The German-born Ackermann had come to London in the late 1780s and quickly became a leading seller and publisher of decorative prints, colour-plate books, and popular periodicals. By 1795, his business establishment on the Strand (soon called *The Repository of Arts*) hosted a drawing school, library, and gallery, and also sold art-making materials.[27]

The *Imitations* fit this commercial drive. Richard Cosway had long been a leading society portraitist: he had exhibited in London's shows since their inception in 1760, became official painter to the Prince of Wales in 1785, and, over the course of his career, saw more than 160 individual prints made after his paintings. An instruction book after his compositions presumably would have had considerable appeal and, of the three printed series reproducing his works (one appeared in 1785, another in 1826), the *Imitations* were by far the largest and most complex. Their didactic framework, moreover, mirrored the language with which other artists, such as the botanical painter Mary Lawrance, later Kearse (fl. 1794–1830), were commencing projects in print at the time – from 1799 to 1802, Kearse published three collections of floral etchings while promoting herself as an employable instructor.[28] Although it is not clear why Maria Cosway, rather than one of Ackermann's printmakers, executed the etchings, the Cosways' partnership in print was not new; one of her earliest prints seems to be an etching of cherubs after Richard, made in 1784.[29]

Whether Maria Cosway found a new passion for print, or Ackermann recognised unexploited commercial potential, this first project seems to have been pivotal. Cosway contributed to four more publications in the next three years, at least one of which she initiated herself. First, a few months later in 1800, Ackermann released a two-part series after *her* compositions: *A Progress of Female Dissipation* and *A Progress of Female Virtue*. This time, the Flemish Anthony Cardon provided the engravings after, as the title page advertised, 'Original Drawings by Mrs. Cosway'. The series presented two parallel lessons: a cautionary tale about the perils

[26] Maria Cosway after Richard Cosway, *Imitations in Chalk from Drawings by R. Cosway, RA* (London: Ackermann's Repository of Arts, 1800), soft-ground etchings, BM 1868,0612.636-665.

[27] J. Ford, 'Ackermann, Rudolf (1764–1834)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (ODNB)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online ed.

[28] M. Lawrance, *A Collection of Roses from Nature* (London: Miss Lawrance, 1799); *Sketches of Flowers from Nature* (London: Lawrance, 1801); and *A Collection of Passion Flowers Coloured from Nature* (London: M. Lawrance, 1802).

[29] Maria Cosway after Richard Cosway, *Four Cherubs Dancing under Trees*, 1784, etching, 11.1 × 18.1 cm, BM 1931,0413.497.

of being a woman, from childhood to old age, and a model of a virtuous path a woman could aspire to take through life. At least one contemporary noted the homage to William Hogarth.[30]

Both *Progresses* unfolded over eight plates with descriptive, proscriptive verses beneath each image. In *A Progress of Female Dissipation*, the protagonist is mocked for vanity and immodesty from her youth, distracted by her own image in a mirror as a child and then, again, while practising music. These traits later lead her to neglect her own crying children and, in old age, dress inappropriately (it is implied) while taking snuff and playing cards. In *A Progress of Female Virtue*, the opposite story unfolds. As a child, the heroine appears at prayer, reading a book, and then displaying an impulse for charity by giving money to a blind girl on the street; as a young woman, she draws attentively from nature, leaning forward into her craft; she then marries, and tenderly breastfeeds her child; and, finally, as a grandmother, she watches her granddaughter learn to read while her grandson scans news of 'Lord Nelson's victory'. Ackermann used Cosway's designs to experiment with paper colour and white heightening, exactly as he was continuing to publish large-scale reproductions of her painted and drawn works executed by an emerging group of soon-to-be prominent engravers: Samuel Philips, Peltro William Tomkins, and Samuel William Reynolds.[31]

Cosway's autobiographical letter did not mention these first three publications, nor Ackermann's large-scale prints after her compositions. It seems, though, that in the process, she was motivated to instigate her only independent project, one that interwove these didactic and visual facets: the *Gallery of the Louvre* (*Galerie du Louvre*). This was Cosway's most ambitious publication and the only printed work she described in her letter. As an object, it is massive: each page measures 56 × 68 cm.[32] It also reflected a huge personal shift. In 1801, after exhibiting at Somerset House for the last time, Cosway left London for Paris – tales of the Louvre's newly enhanced collection had recently riveted the British art world – and began

[30] A. Stephens, 'Mrs. Cosway', in *Public Characters* (London: Richard Phillips, 1805), vol. 7, 301. See Hogarth's *A Rake's Progress* (published in print 1735) and *A Harlot's Progress* (published in print 1732).

[31] Cosway had exhibited some of these pieces in her final showings at the Academy; others she produced privately, or designed directly for print. See, for example, BM 1877.0512.535, 1873,0809.232, 1869,0213.64, and 1902,1011.3809.

[32] J. Griffiths and M. Cosway, *Gallery of the Louvre, represented by etchings executed solely by Mrs. Maria Cosway, with an historical and critical description of all the pictures which compose this superb collection, and a biographical sketch of the life of each* (Paris: Printed for the author, 1802), Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, Rare Books 427499 (among other locations).

to establish a new life for herself, alone. She would return to London only sporadically over the next two decades, as her husband's health began to fail.

Invigorated and inspired, Cosway worked quickly in the French capital. By February 1802, she had published at least one of the two advertisements she would circulate courting subscriptions for the *Gallery*, which she described as 'Correct Etchings of *the Whole Collection* of the Pictures in the Gallery of the Louvre at Paris'.[33] At the time, the military hero Napoleon Bonaparte had established firm command of France as First Consul (he would declare himself Emperor in 1804) and, over the course of his campaigns, had pillaged and amassed an extraordinary body of Old Master paintings that now greeted visitors to the Louvre. As Cosway explained in her prospectus, she planned to illustrate the 'most remarkable works' in this growing collection by etching their new organization in the Grand Gallery, with 'An Historical Account of Each Picture' accompanying every depicted piece.[34] She itemized the prices per plate for subscribers and nonsubscribers, as well as several of the anticipated etchings. Earlier in her Parisian stay, she had met the entrepreneur Julius Griffiths, who Farington would soon characterize as 'a Speculator, a Man of much adventure', and 'a Man of abilities, but irregular'.[35] They became business partners, and ultimately published eleven folio-sized plates available in monochrome or hand-coloured, each rendering a full Louvre wall and its hanging; while the etchings of the individual framed works are a bit rough, Cosway's prints nevertheless show minute attention to composition and detail. These visuals were accompanied by sixty pages of text by Griffiths describing each canvas, the artists involved, extant copies and prints, and relevant anecdotes. By the project's end (it never reached the full number of intended plates), Cosway had initiated and produced a history of art – an artist's reading, in essence, of the Louvre's novel historical hanging, and a didactic project that echoed and extended her own early experiences learning to draw and paint in the Uffizi's galleries, thirty years prior.[36]

[33] M. Cosway, *Prospectus. Gallery of the Louvre at Paris...* (London: printed by J. Bell, Weekly Messenger Office, Beaufort Buildings, Strand, 1802), Sir John Soane's Museum, ref. no. 1979 and ref. no. 1980.

[34] Prospectus Ref. No. 1979. See also S. Lloyd, 'Cosway [née Hadfield], Maria Louisa Catherine Cecilia, Baroness Cosway (1760–1838)', *ODNB*. She corresponded with and received help from the engraver Francesco Rosaspina; the original volume with the names of her subscribers survives at the Fondazione Cosway, Lodi.

[35] *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, vol. v, p. 1825 (3 September 1802).

[36] Cosway had successfully petitioned for permission to copy four portraits at the Uffizi from 1773 to 1775; S. Barker, 'The Female Artist in the Public Eye: Women Copyists at the Uffizi, 1770–1859',

Cosway's project was prescient, and her timing was apt. In March 1802, the Treaty of Amiens inaugurated the first break in hostilities between Britain and France since 1793. During the following fourteen-month Peace, Britons rushed across the Channel, eager to view the vast changes that had taken place in Paris during a decade of relative impenetrability – changes that included the Louvre's immensely augmented collection. As British visitors perused the Napoleonic hang, many found Cosway diligently copying works from the walls. By developing a valuable relationship with the Bonaparte family – especially Napoleon's uncle, the art collector Cardinal Joseph Fesch – she seems to have gained access to much of the building; in October 1802, Farington found her in a 'back room . . . Colouring a print from [a] picture by Titian'.[37]

Proud of the developing venture, Cosway advertised it widely, even sending a prospectus to Thomas Jefferson while he was President of the United States. Cosway and Jefferson had maintained a correspondence since 1786, when they had met in Paris.[38] In February 1802, she briefly reminisced about their time together before directly pitching her project, describing it in detail:

> I am now in the place which brings me to mind every day our first interview, the pleasing days we pass'd together. I send you the prospectus of a work which is the most interesting ever published as every body will have in their possession the exact distribution of this wonderfull [sic] gallery. The history of every picture will also be very curious as we have collected in one spot the finest works of art which were spread all over Italy. – I hope you will make it known among your friends who may like to know of such a work. This will keep me here two years at least & every body seem very Much delighted with this interprise [sic].[39]

in T. Balducci and H. Belnap Jensen, eds., *Women, Femininity and Public Space in European Visual Culture, 1789–1914* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 66–67. The records are in the Archivio Storico degli Uffizi.

[37] *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, vol. v, p. 1909 (8 October 1802). See also A. N. Richter, 'Taking the Museum Home: Maria Cosway's *Gallery of the Louvre* and the Domestic Interior', in A. I. Lasc, *Visualizing the Nineteenth-Century Home: Modern Art and the Decorative Impulse* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2016): 87–103.

[38] Jefferson frequently referenced Cosway's 'pencil' and artistic talents in his letters to her. The letters between Jefferson and Cosway are scattered throughout Thomas Jefferson's correspondence, which has been published in numerous volumes under different editors. For an overview and digital access, see the National Archives' Founders Online, esp. https://founders.archives.gov/about/Jefferson.

[39] 'To Thomas Jefferson from Maria Cosway, 25 February 1802', *Founders Online*, National Archives. [Original source: Barbara B. Oberg, ed., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, vol. 36, 1 December 1801–3 March 1802* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 636–637.] While many have speculated on the nature of Cosway and Jefferson's relationship, it remains unclear if it was more than platonic. Much of this conjecture has been fuelled by Jefferson's famous 'my head and my heart' letter to Cosway.

Jefferson responded the following January, apologising for the delay and subscribing to the work; he kept the prospectus, which remains among his surviving papers.[40] As this exchange alone attests, with the *Gallery* Cosway conceptualized, marketed, and executed works for commercial sale in a way that she repeatedly expressed she could not with oil on canvas. Perhaps as a result, she became quite invested in the project. When financial strains arose with Griffiths, she chose not to abandon the prints, telling Farington that 'it was like advising a person to part with her favorite Child'.[41]

Cosway had stopped etching the Louvre plates by 1803, when hostilities resumed between Britain and France. From 1803 to 1809, she worked to establish a school for 'young Ladies' in Lyon under Fesch's patronage.[42] She would increasingly devote her life to education, soon establishing another girls' school in Lodi, Italy, where she predominantly worked and lived until her death. However, she also contributed to a final print series with Ackermann, a publication that incorporated three women's advanced reputations in the arts: *The Winter's Day Delineated* (1803).

The Winter's Day Delineated comprised sixteen pages: a four-page introduction by Ackermann and twelve engraved plates after drawings by Cosway, arranged in didactic pairs and each, again, with a descriptive verse underneath. This time, the verses were by a known female author, Mary 'Perdita' Robinson (1757–1800), a former actress and mistress to the Prince of Wales who had worked as a poet, editor, novelist, and essayist to sustain an income since 1783.[43] The illustrations were etched with aquatint by another female artist, Caroline Watson (1761–1814), the official engraver to Queen Charlotte since 1785.[44] Robinson was an advocate of women's education, literary abilities, and right to leave their husbands, and had vocally supported the French Revolution's democratising ideals; her many publications included, in 1799, the *Thoughts on the Condition of Women and on the Injustice of Mental Subordination*, which engaged with many of the arguments for female education put forth in

[40] 'From Thomas Jefferson to Maria Cosway, 31 January 1803', *Founders Online*, National Archives. [Original source: Barbara B. Oberg, ed., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, vol. 39, 13 November 1802–3 March 1803* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 418–419.]]

[41] *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, vol. v, p. 1909 (8 October 1802).

[42] M. Cosway to Sir W. Cosway, f. 2v.

[43] D. Boucher, 'Maria Cosway (1760–1838): A Commentator on Modern Life', *The British Art Journal*, 18(3) (Winter 2017/2018), 85.

[44] This title was created for Watson. For more on Watson, see D. Alexander, *Caroline Watson & Female Printmaking in Late Georgian England* (Cambridge: Fitzwilliam Museum, 2014), and Chapter 3 by Heather McPherson in this volume.

Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* seven years prior. In fact, Robinson and the late Wollstonecraft had jointly incurred the wrath of Richard Polwhele in his *Unsex'd Females, a Poem* (1798), alongside Angelika Kauffmann, for their alleged boldness in matters public and private.

Work on *The Winter's Day Delineated* began as early as January 1800, when Robinson published an initial four-stanza version of the eventual twelve-stanza poem in *The Morning Post*, a popular London periodical for which she was the poetry editor.[45] It is likely that she and Cosway had long been acquaintances, if not friends. They had moved in similar social circles for nearly two decades, and Richard Cosway painted Robinson's portrait at least nine times.[46] Whatever their relationship, their collaboration advanced swiftly. By May of that year, *The Morning Post* updated its readers that 'the charming pencil of Mrs. Cosway' was undertaking 'a flattering tribute' to Robinson's poem.[47] By September, Cosway had nearly finished her designs; as Robinson happily wrote to a friend, 'I have this morning received a most flattering letter from Mrs. Cosway. She is finishing a series of drawings from some poetical trifles of mine, and they are to be splendidly engraved next winter.'[48]

That winter did not go as planned. Robinson passed away in December 1800 after enduring years of poor health, and as we know Cosway soon crossed the English Channel. Still, when Ackermann finally released the publication three years later, Robinson's moralizing and protofeminist message remained forceful and clear. As Ackermann explained in his lengthy preface, 'The intention of the designs is to contrast the accumulated evils of poverty with the ostentatious enjoyments of opulence, thus exhibiting a picture of the state of society as it is'; he guided readers, 'The series must be considered as combined in pairs, each print forming a striking antithesis to its companion'.[49] The twelve elaborate engravings by Watson do just that, vivifying Cosway's drawings and Robinson's verse by imagining two contrasting visions of a woman's life based on the social situation into which she was born – one to privilege ('mansions rich and gay', in Robinson's words) and inclined to increasing excess, another to poverty ('the bleak and barren health, / Where Misery feels the shaft of

[45] Boucher, 'Maria Cosway', 85.
[46] Ibid., citing Williamson, *Richard Cosway*, n.p.
[47] Boucher, 'Maria Cosway', 85.
[48] Ibid., citing M. Robinson to J. Porter, 11 September 1800.
[49] R. Ackermann, Introduction in M. Robinson, *The Winter's Day Delineated, engravings by Caroline Watson after original drawings by Maria Cosway* (London: Ackermann's Repository of Arts, 1804), 1.

death').[50] As has been noted, this contrasting subject matter led Cosway, quite unusually for an artist of the time, to include depictions of rural poverty as well as the interior of a prison.[51]

Cosway's compositions throughout the series are rife with social commentary, alternately vibrant and melancholic as they illuminate the implicit and explicit confines that delimited women's lives across social strata. We see an upper-class woman beginning her day in luxury, a poor family at work in a dilapidating cottage, a ballroom, a jail cell, a dinner party, and a starving mother, unable to feed her infant child. Yet after eight such figurative scenes, Cosway ends on an allegorical note. The penultimate pairing contrasts a group of fashionable women at a milliner's shop (Plate 9) with a lone figure of genius (Plate 10). In the final pairing, Cosway takes this discrepancy further. On Plate 11, a privileged group of women and men crowd around two gaming tables, gambling and playing chess. On Plate 12, a drained and wearied female figure of Hope drapes herself across a broken anchor, sprawling beside a sinuous, winged male Virtue (Figure 2.1). This Virtue, with his head bowed, is (the text tells us) 'oppress'd' by Pride – represented here by a massive, regnant peacock. In Cosway's striking image, we see her sublime style in its full force, the visual penchant that had earned notice for decades and which Ackermann directly discussed in his prelude:

> Mrs. Cosway's designs, it must be admitted, are sometimes eccentric, but it is the eccentricity of *genius*, and we have seen instances where she has '*snatch'd a grace beyond the reach of art*'.[52]

He also noted the late Robinson's 'genius', as attested by the popularity of her works.[53] While scholars have found that the concept of 'genius' was increasingly being gendered male at this time – as in the figure by Cosway herself – Cosway and Robinson were two of many female artists and writers to earn its appellation in manuscript and print.[54] Both of their names feature beneath this final image alongside Watson's, as they do on

[50] Robinson, *The Winter's Day Delineated*, Plates 1 and 2.
[51] A. K. Mellor, 'British Romanticism, Gender, and Three Women Artists', in A. Bermingham and J. Brewer, eds., *The Consumption of Culture 1600–1800: Image, Object, Text* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 136, and Boucher, 'Maria Cosway', 85. Ackermann used these motifs to continue his experimentations with paper, pigment, and white heightening.
[52] Ackermann in Robinson, *The Winter's Day Delineated*, 1. [53] Ibid.
[54] D. M. McMahon, *Divine Fury: A History of Genius* (New York: Basic Books, 2013), 5–6, 144; C. Battersby, *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics* (London: Women's Press, 1989); and C. Korsmeyer, *Gender and Aesthetics: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

Figure 2.1 Caroline Watson, after Maria Cosway, Plate 12, from Mary Robinson, *The Winter's Day Delineated*, 1803.
Etching and aquatint, approximately 28 × 35 cm. Author's collection.

every plate in the series, reading from left to right: 'M. Cosway delt.', 'the Poetry by Mrs. Robinson', 'Miss C. Watson sculpt.'. Here echoing the arresting figures of Hope, Virtue, and Pride, the three women are likewise united in artistry and cultural contemplation.

Maria Cosway's engagement with print remains an overlooked element of a highly public career, of women's engagement with the arts in the Revolutionary era, and of the enterprising paths they paved to professionalisation. After decades of exhibiting widely recognised and celebrated narrative and portrait works, when she felt she was not 'permitted to paint professionally', Cosway actively turned to a didactic, commercial form of print. From an art instruction manual with her husband, she went on to visualize three works commenting on women's obstacles and opportunities at the time, as well as an arguable history of art. In the process, Cosway encouraged her readers to question the practices and constrictions of the very society in which she had forged her own career. These published series

allow us – indeed, impel us – to begin to reevaluate the depths of the social and artistic roles Cosway herself explored, and the ways in which she perhaps did pursue art as a 'profession'. Cosway certainly knew that her life had been both lengthy and sweeping. 'Short as Mr. C. memoirs may be', she mused to her nephew, 'mine would be perhaps too long, but very full of interesting Matters'.[55]

[55] M. Cosway to Sir W. Cosway, f. 2v.