



Thomas Gainsborough

John Hayes

CIVICO MUSEO
EtnoGrafico Musicale
BOLOGNA

THE TATE GALLERY

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Back: River Scene with Cattle Watering and Ferry Boat (Cat.no.86)

Foreword

This exhibition of Gainsborough's work is one in our continuing series devoted to major figures in British painting of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. After Hogarth, Turner, Constable and Blake we turn to the most assured and delightful of all British painters.

We are fortunate in having persuaded John Hayes, Director of the National Portrait Gallery, to make the selection and write the catalogue. Dr Hayes is an authority on Gainsborough, well known for his books and articles on the artist, including catalogues raisonné of his drawings and his landscape paintings, the latter of which is due to be published next year. Dr Hayes describes the contents of the exhibition in his own prefatory note.

Our request for loans from public and private collections, both in this country and abroad, has met with a marvellous response, and we are most grateful to all lenders for their generosity. Some of their names can be found at the end of the catalogue, but many have preferred to remain anonymous. To all, however, we extend our sincere thanks, with a particular acknowledgement of the gracious loans from Her Majesty The Queen.

When the exhibition closes at the Tate a major part, with additions from other sources, will be shown in Paris at the Grand Palais from 7 February until 26 April, under the auspices of the Réunion des Musées Nationaux and the British Council. We look forward with anticipation to the reaction of our French friends to this great master of eighteenth-century art.

ALAN BOWNESS, Director

Preface

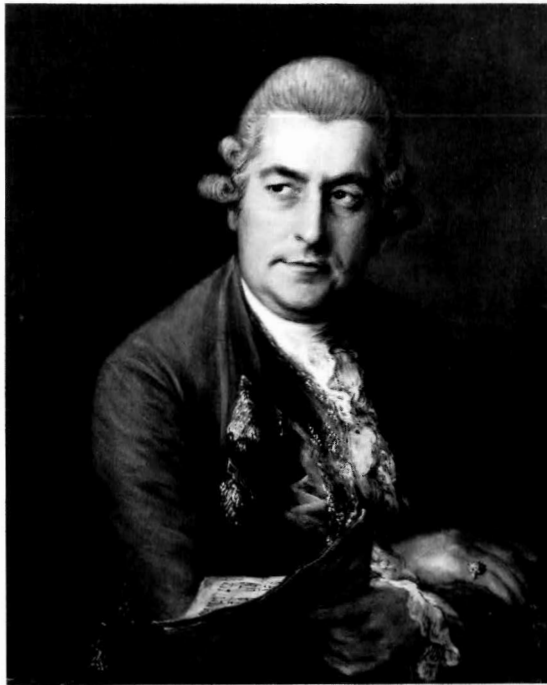
I am greatly indebted to Sir Norman Reid, lately Director of the Tate Gallery, for the invitation to select and catalogue this exhibition. To Alan Bowness and his colleagues, notably Ruth Rattenbury, upon whose organising energy and co-ordination so much has depended, I am equally grateful. Joe Pradera has designed a sympathetic setting for the exhibition, within the financial constraints imposed, with his customary flair and attention to detail. The text of this catalogue has been typed, impeccably, by Mollie Luther.

This is the first comprehensive exhibition of Gainsborough's work for nearly a hundred years. Since the retrospective at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1885 there have been several smaller scale exhibitions, notably those organised by Sir Philip Sassoon in 1936 and at the Tate Gallery in Coronation Year, 1953. But none of these has included loans from both sides of the Atlantic. Her Majesty The Queen has graciously lent three masterpieces from the Royal Collection and owners and curators in this country and abroad have responded with an exceptional enthusiasm and generosity deeply appreciated by me. Museums in the United States and Canada have been outstandingly generous in their loans.

I have assembled an especially large group of pictures to show the development of Gainsborough's early landscape style, hitherto imperfectly understood, and placed as much emphasis as possible on works which will be unfamiliar to the public. Hardly any paintings – except portraits of the artist, his family and friends – have been requested from London public collections. Visitors should also see the masterpieces at the National Gallery and at the Iveagh Bequest, Kenwood, and the Tate's own fine collection (a special display of prints and drawings has been arranged in Room 18), which should be regarded as an indispensable part of the exhibition. The showing to take place from 7 February until 26 April at the Grand Palais, Paris – the first retrospective of a non-contemporary British artist ever to be held there – has deliberately been planned on different lines.

The introduction to the catalogue has been cast in the form of a short biography, rather than a critical or art-historical appreciation, since I have attempted the latter elsewhere. I am most grateful to Lord Normanton for kindly allowing me to quote from the unpublished Gainsborough letters in his possession.

JOHN HAYES
National Portrait Gallery
July 1980



118 **Johann Christian Bach** (1735–82)

Canvas, 74.3 × 61.6 (29¼ × 24¼)

Painted in 1776

Lit: Waterhouse, No.31; Frederick Cummings, *Romantic Art in Britain*, catalogue of an exhibition at Detroit and Philadelphia, 1968 (No.19); Lindsay Stainton, *Gainsborough and his Musical Friends*, catalogue of an exhibition at Kenwood, 1977 (under No.9) *Bologna Civico Museo, Bibliografico Musicale*

J. C. Bach was the eleventh son of Johann Sebastian Bach. Organist at Milan Cathedral 1760–2, he was invited to London in May 1762 and remained in England for the rest of his life. With C. F. Abel, another close friend of Gainsborough, with whom he shared a house, he organised many successful series of subscription concerts, culminating in those given at the celebrated Hanover Square Rooms, opened in 1775, which they part owned. Bach's teacher, Giovanni Battista Martini, did his pupil the signal honour of asking for a portrait of him for display in the Liceo Musicale in Bologna; completed by May 1776, it was not actually dispatched until 1778, 'an excellent portrait of myself by one of our best painters'. It forms one of a group of simple but deeply sympathetic portraits Gainsborough did

of close personal friends such as Garrick and de Louthembourg. The strength of the sitter's personality is conveyed partly through the kindly but assured and firm expression, and partly through the weight of the arms resting on the table. The uneasy transitions of the right forearm (Gainsborough often scamped anatomical precision) are hidden by the music-paper. Gainsborough painted a fine replica for Bach himself, an unusual example, after Dupont became his assistant in the studio, of his executing two versions of the same portrait with his own hand.



119 **Willoughby, 4th Earl of Abingdon**

(1740–99)

Canvas, 208.3 × 144.8 (82 × 57)

Unfinished

Mid 1770s

Lit: Waterhouse, No.5; Lindsay Stainton, *Gainsborough and his Musical Friends*, catalogue of an exhibition at Kenwood, 1977, No.8

Private collection

Lord Abingdon, an outspoken radical peer, supporter of Wilkes, the American colonists and the French Revolution, was a keen race-horse owner and a musical amateur, friend of both Abel and J. C. Bach (his sister married the Italian dancer and impresario, Giovanni Gallini, who acquired the Hanover Square concert rooms where Bach and Abel performed). This unfinished, informal full-length, painted at just about the time Capability Brown was altering his

gardens and park at Rycote, in Oxfordshire, amply demonstrates Gainsborough's normal procedure in his approach to a portrait. The composition, pose and arrangement of the accessories would all be blocked out before serious work was started on the head itself, which was then carried to a high degree of finish. No more sittings would be needed after this, and in the press of business many canvases would fail to reach completion. The half-length of Lord Cathcart, the handsome brother of the beautiful Mrs Graham, another surviving unfinished canvas, was, rather surprisingly, actually exhibited in its unfinished state at Gainsborough's first exhibition of his pictures at Schomberg House in July 1784. It is not known why Gainsborough left Abingdon's portrait unfinished, but the sitter was evidently sufficiently pleased with it to buy it after the artist's death.



120 **John Wilkinson** (1728–1808)

Canvas, 232.4 × 145.4 (91½ × 57¼)

Mid 1770s

Lit: Waterhouse, No.722

Gemäldegalerie der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, D.D.R.

Though neatly framed by the dense foliage and the overhanging branch, the sitter is depicted informally, as though he was resting on a bank for a moment in the course of taking a walk. Wilkinson was in fact a wealthy iron-master, whose foundries were later to provide most of the cannon used in the Peninsular War. Something of the toughness, and indeed unscrupulousness, of his character is revealed in Gainsborough's portrayal. The panoramic landscape, closed by mountains, on the left, which acts as a foil to the mass of foliage, is a paraphrase of Claude.



121 **James Christie** (1730–1803)

Canvas, 125.7 × 100.3 (49½ × 39½)

Exhibited R.A. 1778 (117)

Lit: Waterhouse, No.147

J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu, California

Very little is known about the first James Christie, who resigned his commission in the Navy to start a business as an auctioneer in Pall Mall in 1762. Auction sales were a place of fashionable social gathering in the eighteenth century. Christie was reputed to have been tall, dignified and eloquent, and some impression of his confidence and distinction is

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