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Abstract:

The recognizably modern commercial art gallery first emerged in London in the 1850s and 1860s. This essay uses Ernest Gambart's French Gallery to examine the origins of this new kind of space for the exhibition and sale of art, and the new roles for artists, dealers, objects, and audiences that it signaled.

Creating the French Gallery: Ernest Gambart and the Rise of the Commercial Art Gallery in Mid-Victorian London

by Pamela M. Fletcher

In 1840, Belgian-born Ernest Gambart arrived in London as an agent of the French print publisher Goupil, and quickly struck out on his own as a print publisher and seller.^[1] He soon began purchasing paintings and mounting occasional art exhibitions, and by the mid-1850s he had established the French Gallery at 120/121 Pall Mall as a full-time space devoted to the exhibition and sale of contemporary art.^[2] The Gallery was one of the first and most successful commercial galleries of contemporary art in London, and its emergence paralleled a larger transformation of the art market. While in the 1840s many exhibitions of contemporary art were held in rented premises by a constantly changing roster of associations, print sellers, and auctioneers, by the 1860s, an established gallery culture with dedicated spaces and regular exhibitions increasingly defined the market for contemporary art.^[3] As Gambart and other entrepreneurs moved into full-time picture dealing, they professionalized the role of the dealer and invented a new kind of space for the exhibition and sale of art—the modern commercial art gallery. In other words, they helped to create the institutional structures that brought the work of art fully into the nineteenth-century world of commodities and exchange. But these changes did not go unchallenged; the emerging new identities and spaces occasioned fierce debates about the role of the private dealer and the value of contemporary art. As Victorian artists, dealers, patrons, and critics collaborated in the creation of the gallery system, they were forced to face (and attempt to answer) one overarching question: how should aesthetic value be translated into financial value, and who controlled the exchange rate?

In this essay, I examine the establishment of Ernest Gambart's French Gallery in the 1850s and early 1860s in order to investigate the birth of the commercial contemporary art gallery, and the new roles for artists, dealers, objects, and audiences that it signaled. While the eclipse of the Academy by the gallery system is widely recognized as a defining feature of the nineteenth-century art world, the history of the commercial art gallery is just beginning to be written, and is scattered across studies organized by various geographic, temporal, and institutional parameters.^[4] While many studies of the modern art market have concentrated on late-nineteenth-century France, recent scholarly consideration of both the international art market and the field of British art has focused attention on London as a financial, social and artistic center in the long nineteenth century, and demonstrated that London's commercial art market was widely considered the most advanced in Europe.^[5] Art historians have begun to map the contours of this market in the late nineteenth century, charting how artists and patrons negotiated the new system and how individual galleries and exhibition societies operated within it.^[6]

This essay contributes to that history by looking back to the earlier moment of the emergence of the modern commercial gallery system. The French Gallery was one of the first commercial galleries devoted to the sale of contemporary art in London, and an examination of its early history demonstrates the complex process of adaptation, appropriation, and innovation that shaped the new institution. But it was also one of the most successful such galleries, and many of Gambart's innovations quickly became standard

practice. The history of the French Gallery thus illuminates a critical point of transition between the Academy-dominated art world of the early nineteenth century and the established gallery system that flourished by the end of the century and still defines the art market today.

In what follows, I argue that in establishing the French Gallery, Gambart drew upon the legitimizing authority of the Academy, while laying the groundwork for its displacement. While the Academy was technically a private institution (that is, it was not funded by the state), its authority rested on the claim of economic disinterest and an ideological commitment to art as a public good. The tensions between public and private interest inherent in this identity were the subject of considerable criticism throughout the Academy's history, but the ideal—if not, perhaps, the reality—of the Academy as a disinterested public institution showed tremendous resilience, in part because the expanding art market repeatedly extended the reach of private interest and commercialization.^[7] In the first section of the essay, I explore the pressures of one such moment of change, examining the problems of value and authority the increasingly visible and economically significant role of the modern picture dealer aroused at mid-century. I then turn to the early years of the French Gallery, arguing that Gambart's establishment of a reputable, dedicated space for the exhibition and sale of contemporary art was, in part, a response to such concerns. In his exhibition strategy, publicity, and increasingly public performance of the role of the dealer, Gambart blended discourses of public and private value in order to shape an acceptable public face for the sale of contemporary art, one that would provide a template for other galleries and dealers as the system developed. In conclusion, I look ahead to the limits of this balancing act, finding in Gambart's positioning of the French Gallery as a cosmopolitan and exclusive space the seeds of the niche marketing and fashionable fragmentation of the artistic public that characterize the fully developed gallery system.

The Value of Art: Dealers' and Artists' Exhibitions in the 1840s

To read the *Art-Union* (later the *Art Journal*) from the late 1840s is to witness an art market at overcapacity, as existing institutions struggle to meet a flood of supply and demand. The editor Samuel Carter Hall's crusade against forgeries and his virulent attacks on private speculators in art, the repeated tallies of the astonishing numbers of works of art exhibited (and rejected) during each London art season, and countless references to an expanding new class of mercantile patrons, all tell a story of an infrastructure pushed beyond its limits.^[8]

Great Britain's art market took shape in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with the relaxation of laws restricting the importation of pictures, the development of a system of auction sales, and the emergence of the independent art dealer.^[9] Most of the paintings bought and sold during these years were foreign imports, including many spurious "Old Masters," and, as Iain Pears notes, reputable dealers worked hard to combat the widely voiced belief that the dealer was in most cases "a crook [and] a polluter of the arts."^[10] As the market grew in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, dealers increasingly traded in contemporary British art but, with some notable exceptions, they operated at the low end of the market, selling paintings alongside books, frames, prints, and other assorted objects of home decoration.^[11] In an attempt to gain more visibility in the market and evade the dealer's clutches, artists explored many different strategies for exhibiting their work in

individual exhibitions, in their own studios, or in partnership with print sellers, while entrepreneurial ventures such as John Wilson's European Museum and William Bullock's Egyptian Hall offered new commercial models for the sale of art in the early nineteenth century.[12] Despite the richness and variety of these commercial experiments, however, none of them matched the prestige and popularity of the Academy and the membership-based exhibition societies that were the primary paths by which artists reached the purchasing public. By the late 1840s, the increasing numbers of practicing artists and interested purchasers, as well as the needs of a new class of collectors, were exerting intense pressure on these existing institutions, and there was a flurry of attempts by various artistic constituencies to explore new models for the sale of contemporary art, most based on the system of the temporary exhibition.[13] A brief examination of three such efforts by artists, patrons and dealers suggests some of the pressures and interests shaping the "field of cultural production" at this moment of transformation.[14]

The artists' perspective was represented in the "Institution for the Free Exhibition of Modern Art" (later the National Institution), which began in 1847 and is best known today because Dante Gabriel Rossetti exhibited there in 1849 and 1850.[15] Formed by a group of artists, the society's aims were enumerated in the exhibition catalogue of 1848: "*Freedom for the Artist, certainty of Exhibition for his works, and the Improvement of the Public Taste.*"[16] The Exhibition's other main purpose was to encourage the sale of works of art, as is made clear in the regulations listed in the catalogue in 1849: "Visitors to the Gallery will find in the Catalogue the Prices affixed to each Work of Art,—a plan suggested to the Managing Committee to avoid the inconvenience hitherto so frequently complained of in other exhibitions." [17] Participating artists were given an unusual amount of authority over the display of their work; after paying a fixed sum per foot of exhibition space, the artist was free to arrange the display as he or she liked in a location assigned by lottery, a system that eliminated any institutional role in assigning value or prominence.[18]

At roughly the same time, private dealers, too, began to mount independent art exhibitions, and their early attempts aroused a good deal of suspicion. In a case that provoked particular ire, one Mr. Grundy organized a show of watercolors and oil paintings on the upper floor of his Regent Street print shop in the winter of 1849.[19] Grundy—like other print sellers—regularly exhibited paintings in order to publicize the engraved copies, but the profits from this show were to come from a commission taken on the works sold, rather than from selling prints after the works. Timing was a key component of his strategy: most exhibition societies mounted their shows in the spring, and by staging exhibitions in the off-season, dealers like Grundy hoped to attract artists and patrons who might otherwise prefer more established venues.

The *Athenaeum* at first approved of this expansion of viewing opportunities, but recanted the following year upon learning the details:

The commission of 10 per cent which he requires on the sales effected, and the want of generous communication between the artist and his patron, must ... be fatal to his scheme. There can be no reason why works of art should not form the elements of a separate business ... but the fact of a *middle-man* to act between the painter and the

buyer like a broker or commission agent, cannot stand in the face of an arrangement such as that offered by the Association of Amateurs.[20]

This seems at first a somewhat contradictory stance, accepting the idea of art's commercial potential while deploring those who engage in it, but the critic's vocabulary hints at the source of his unease. The terms "middle-man," "broker," and "commission agent" are drawn from the world of commerce and speculation, and were frequently employed in condemnations of the commercially motivated dealer's role. Two weeks later—apparently responding to an unpublished letter from Grundy—the critic clarified the grounds of his objection to the dealer's role as "middle-man" on both financial and social grounds, as the dealer's commission siphoned profit away from the artist, and his mediating role in the transaction threatened the ideal relationship of "generous communication" between patron and artist.[21] The business of art was acceptable, it would seem, only if conducted by artists or patrons themselves.

The "arrangement" the *Athenaeum* preferred was the "Exhibition of Modern British Artists," a non-profit exhibition held in the rented premises of the Old Water Colour Society in the winter of 1850–51, and organized by art patrons and supporters including Lewis Pocock, a founding member of the Art Union.[22] While the exhibition included works sent in both by artists and by private collectors, the organizers enforced strict limits on who could sell a work of art:

No works which are not *bonâ fide* the property of the artist shall be offered for sale; ... where contributions are the property of other persons than artists, that fact shall be published, and shall incapacitate them for sale; all sales are to be made for the sole benefit of the artist, without any deductions whatever,—and when the sale of a work has been effected, the artist is to be put in immediate connexion with the purchaser.
[23]

Why were the organizers so strict about this aspect of the exhibition? It seems that dealers were speculating in the work of living artists, selling paintings at the major exhibitions at prices higher than those paid to the artists often only a few months earlier. Dealers were, in other words, not just usurping the functions of public and professional institutions, but actually subverting them.

As part of the *Art Journal's* longstanding crusade against dishonest business practices in the art world, the magazine detailed several such instances in the early 1850s, using them as the occasion for fierce anti-dealer rhetoric. Drawing on a morally charged vocabulary of speculation, the editors castigated the "speculative dealer[s]" who engaged in "nefarious trafficking" in pictures, and described the effects of these machinations in the language of the stock market: "The result of this mock elevation of prices will carry off the stock in hand at 200 or 300 per cent. profit." [24] But this was not the worst of it:

The immoral tendencies of this connection between artist and dealer are far more to be deplored than the pecuniary sacrifices which the former of the two suffers; a price is frequently put upon the work far exceeding its intrinsic value, so that little less than a robbery is committed upon the party whose property the work finally becomes. The great injury Art sustains by such practices is too manifest for comment.[25]

"Intrinsic value" is invoked here as the aesthetic worth of a work of art, as opposed to the speculative price put on it by a dealer. This is similar to contemporaneous critiques of stock speculation, which reflect unease with the idea that price is a fluctuating (and probably manipulated) function of desire and calculation, unanchored by tangible value.^[26] The intrusion of the profit-oriented dealer into the supposedly disinterested realm of the public exhibition threatened the link between the work's artistic quality and its price, unmasking the translation from aesthetic to economic value as a mediated and interested conversion. The rules of the Exhibition of Modern British Artists seem designed to thwart such maneuvers, making the artist the sole authorized seller of his or her work.

As these three examples demonstrate, by the mid-Victorian period, the tension between art and commerce was no longer—or at least not primarily—centered on the question of whether or not high art might exist within the commercial realm. Instead, the question was one of value and authority: Who was going to set the value of paintings? Who would profit from them and how? How could artists be assured a fair price for their labors? How could purchasers be assured they were getting value for their money? As individual entrepreneurs took on a more visible role in the upper reaches of the contemporary art market, the distinctions between public and private interests became simultaneously more important and more difficult to discern, as the *Art Journal's* outrage at Grundy's attempt to adapt the model of the annual public exhibition for private gain makes clear. Welcoming the opening of the non-profit "Exhibition of Modern British Artists," the critic contrasts it with Grundy's show and concludes: "We have many exhibitions of Art, it is true, but so long as there may be room for anything like private speculation in the shape of *public* exhibitions, we have not yet enough."^[27] In the criticism of the period, a distrust of the private handling of what should be a public interest is articulated as suspicion of the dealer, who is accused of intruding into the artist-patron relationship and skimming the artist's profits.^[28]

One response to such concerns was the development of a moral language of art purchasing, one that attempted to circumvent the dealer altogether and return to an idealized model of patronage. In 1848, an article in the *Art-Union* encouraged collectors to buy directly from artists rather than from auction houses or picture dealers, offering a triple incentive of morality, social elevation, and profit. By following the "moral laws" governing art purchasing, collectors could simultaneously "carry gladness" into deserving artists' homes, elevate themselves from mere "lovers of pictures" to "patrons of Art," and invest their money "more safely than in landed estates, funded securities, or railway shares."^[29] A slightly later notice points out that such behavior will, at the same time, stifle the contaminating dealer, circumventing "the intervention of parties who are, of course, always trading for profit, and, who are, not unfrequently, labouring to impose."^[30]

Trust also became a subject of great concern, and much ink was spilled over the honesty or dishonesty of dealers. The *Art Journal* repeatedly warned its readers against unscrupulous dealers who traded in forgeries, both Old Master and—as modern pictures became more popular—the work of living painters. As Aviva Briefel has argued, this anti-forgery crusade relied upon a vocabulary of commercial anti-Semitism to characterize the dealer as an immoral speculator.^[31] In addition to using stereotypically Jewish names and features, it identified several characteristics of untrustworthy dealers: they set up shop in constantly moving locations, such as City coffee shops or pawnbrokers' windows, and they took great

care to evade legal responsibility for the authenticity of their wares.[32] Against these crafty dealers the buyer was represented as having no recourse: either the dealer was untraceable once the fraud had been discovered, or carefully planned legal technicalities prevented the purchaser from obtaining restitution. This state of affairs led the *Art Journal* to despair in 1855 that although "undoubtedly there are many upright and honourable men connected with it...there is no trade—not even horse dealing—carried on upon a system so utterly atrocious." [33]

In sum, while it may have been true that as the *Athenaeum* claimed, "There can be no reason why works of art should not form the elements of a separate business," those who tried were subject to conflicting pressures. Establishing a legitimate role for the dealer in modern pictures would require careful handling and a keen sense of the boundaries between art as a public interest and as a private business.

Creating the French Gallery, 1854–1867[34]

It was against this background—a need for exhibition spaces for living artists, rising middle-class demand for art joined with the fear of being swindled, and concern over the implications of the increasing privatization of the art market—that the commercial gallery took shape. The institution of the gallery created a reputable face for dealing in contemporary art, one that promised reliability and accountability both through its adoption of a vocabulary of public value and its adherence to contemporary retail norms. No longer taking place in the back streets of the City or at impromptu auctions, the sale of contemporary art acquired a stable public identity, distinct from the fraudulent practices of those "itinerant traders" who were the object of the *Art Journal's* scorn.[35]

Gambart's French Gallery was particularly successful in this regard. It was one of the first commercial spaces to be regularly included in reviews in both specialized art journals and more widely read newspapers and periodicals, such as the *Illustrated London News* and the *Saturday Review*. Its annual exhibitions of British and French art were regularly included in the *Art Journal's* and the *Athenaeum's* listings of the events of the art season, along with the exhibitions of the Royal Academy, the Society of British Artists, and the British Institution. And in what seems the ultimate seal of approval to modern eyes, at least, John Ruskin included the French Exhibition in *Academy Notes*, his annual review of the art season, between 1856 and 1859.

How did Gambart achieve this success, and avoid the charges of speculation and private interest that had plagued Grundy? Gambart, too, was a print seller and his exhibitions of paintings grew out of that same business model, using the pictures to publicize reproductive engravings.[36] Print selling was thus at the root of the emerging gallery system, and these origins fundamentally shaped mid-century picture dealers' taste and sense of the market, as well as the financial landscape of the art world. But it is the visible separation of these spaces and roles that is the key to the changes of the period. Although still financially intertwined, picture dealing and print selling were beginning to become experientially distinct, a critical step in the development of the picture trade as a high-end business. The new hybrid spaces of the commercial gallery—blending public values with private profit—and a new professional role for the picture dealer were some of the fruits of this division.

The Public Face of the French Gallery: the Winter Exhibition and the French Exhibition

Two annual events—the Winter Exhibition of British Art and the spring French Exhibition—inaugurated Gambart's gallery and became the cornerstones of its public identity. As the earliest shows he mounted in the new space, they served as a dividing line between the identities and practices of print seller and picture dealer, establishing the space, identity and reputation of what would come to be known as the French Gallery.

The Winter Exhibition of British Art would become a staple of the French Gallery, featuring artists such as Ford Madox Brown, Charles Eastlake, William Powell Frith, Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, and William Holman Hunt in the 1850s, and continuing well into the twentieth century. The early history of the exhibition and the timing of Gambart's first involvement with it are somewhat obscure, with even Gambart himself confused in later years about the specific dates of his association with the show.^[37] It originated as the non-profit "Exhibition of Modern British Artists" discussed above. After two years in the rented galleries of the Old Water Colour Society, the exhibition moved in the winter of 1852–53 to 121 Pall Mall (fig. 1), the space with which Gambart was soon to be prominently associated. No Winter Exhibition was held in 1853–54, and the *Art Journal* reported that this was due to the financial impracticality of the scheme, which "left a deficit of some hundreds of pounds, to be paid by the promoter or promoters of this really generous undertaking."^[38] The show resumed at 121 Pall Mall with its "Fourth Season" in the winter of 1854–55, and at the end of a long and positive review of the fifth exhibition in 1855–56, the *Art Journal* noted that "The collection is on the whole good: but it is only just to state that it is the speculation of an eminent dealer."^[39] By this time, the space at 121 Pall Mall was clearly linked to Gambart, and while the exact year of his first involvement with the project cannot be pinpointed, the Winter Exhibition was clearly transformed in the mid-1850s from a non-profit association to a moneymaking enterprise run by Gambart. Despite the difficulties it poses for historians, this confusion is significant, as is the *Art Journal's* need to unmask Gambart as a dealer in 1855. Whether or not Gambart was involved in the earliest shows, he was clearly interested in marketing the later Winter Exhibitions as a continuation of the earlier "generous" and public-spirited exhibition, thus distinguishing the space of the Gallery and his new role from the print selling business.



Fig. 1, G. C. Leighton after R. Sandeman, *Pall Mall No. 120 and 121*, n.d. Engraving. [\[larger image\]](#)

It was, however, in the French Exhibitions that Gambart's public definition of his Gallery reached its fullest expression. The first French Exhibition was held in the spring of 1854, and they continued without interruption until at least 1896. In the 1850s, the exhibitions featured the work of Ary Scheffer, Paul Delaroche, Edouard Frère, and introduced the work of Rosa Bonheur to an enthusiastic British audience. In the French Exhibitions, Gambart simultaneously emulated the model of a "public" institution like the Academy and worked to carve out his own niche, offering something different during the spring art season of modern British shows.

The practices and publications of the French Exhibitions worked hard to establish the Gallery's seriousness of purpose and commitment to the public interest, following the norms of the Royal Academy exhibitions as closely as was practical. Geographically, the Gallery's location on Pall Mall (fig. 2) linked the space to the more established exhibition venues; the British Institution, the Old Water Colour Society, and the New Water Colour Society were all on the fashionable street, with the National Gallery and the Royal Academy in Trafalgar Square just a stone's throw away. Gambart charged admission at roughly the same rates as the Academy (one shilling for entry and another sixpence for the catalogue), a fee that maintained a certain level of middle-class exclusivity.[40] The question of the Academy's admission fees and the resulting exclusion of certain classes of the public from the artistic realm was the subject of considerable debate at mid-century, but for the commercial gallery the perception of elitism that troubled critics of the Academy was a potential benefit, adding an air of social exclusivity to their retail endeavors.[41] While there was little diversity in advertising design in the press of this period, it is also worth noting that his newspaper advertisements closely followed the Academy's standard format.



Fig 2, Thomas Shotter Boys, *The Club House, etc. Pall Mall*, 1842. Hand-colored lithograph. From *Original Views of London as it is. London 1842*. Photo courtesy George J. Mitchell Department of Special Collections & Archives, Bowdoin College Library. [\[larger image\]](#)

Exhibition catalogues were the most substantial public presentations of the Gallery and, again following the Academy's lead, they did not include prices. They did, however, prominently feature the names of a "Visiting Committee" of organizers, which for the first French Exhibition included Clarkson Stanfield; Daniel Maclise; Samuel Carter Hall; George Godwin, the editor of the *Builder*; Lewis Pocock; and Gambart himself.[42] This is a savvy choice of supporters, including two Royal Academicians and three of the most significant interpreters of art to the middle classes, and it suggests that Gambart was quite deliberately

presenting his exhibitions as counterparts in their public purpose to the Academy. It was also an attempt to deflect the kind of criticism Grundy had faced; below this list Gambart identified himself as "manager," emphasizing his role as facilitator and passing aesthetic authority to a disinterested body of acknowledged art experts.

The gallery's name reflects a similar sensitivity to the public perception of the new enterprise. While it was known in the early years simply as "the Gallery, Pall Mall," by 1857, advertisements and Gambart's letterhead referred to it as the French Gallery. This was an inspired marketing decision, neatly balancing the gallery's public and private identities. While Gambart chose not to lend his own name to the enterprise—as was the norm for most print shops, including his own—the gallery's name did reflect the Continental aspects of Gambart's background and business.^[43] The name was thus an ingenious compromise, allowing Gambart to invoke his aesthetic expertise without highlighting his financial interests.

But Gambart did far more than simply mimic the outward forms of the Academy. In his publicity and practice, he worked to replicate the values lodged there, identifying the French Gallery with the attributes of patriotism and education. Fostering a British School of Art had always been central to how the Academy and other national art institutions defined themselves. While such appeals to national sentiment were less obviously accessible to a naturalized citizen whose gallery specialized in Continental art, world events made French art carry a rather different valence than usual in England in 1854; France and Britain declared war on Russia in March, and the French Exhibition opened in late April. Gambart's introduction to the catalogue connected art and international politics: "At a period when the two greatest Nations of the world are united with the most unbounded confidence in the interest of civilization and social order, it belongs to the Fine Arts to extend, if possible, these feelings of mutual friendship," and predicted that the exhibition would "bind more closely the brotherhood of England and France, on which the future fate of the world depends."^[44] This political gloss on the French Exhibition suggests an educational purpose, broadly construed, for his shows. But he also took more concrete steps to promote the Gallery as an educational venue. As the *Athenaeum* noted approvingly in 1855: "with a liberality not yet common in this country, the directors of this very attractive gallery have thrown open their doors, free of charge, to all Artists and Art-students."^[45]

Gambart's annual exhibitions, then, successfully linked commercial sales with larger educational and national goals, marking the space of 120/121 Pall Mall as a serious artistic exhibition venue. This was, of course, in part a strategy aimed at avoiding the charges of bias and dishonesty that the dealer's private status inspired. But identification as a "strategy" can mask its significance as evidence of the continuing importance in the mid-nineteenth century of the ideal of a cohesive public, and the continuity of a persuasive language of national purpose and identity for the arts. While this discourse is often viewed as anti-commercial, what is perhaps most compelling about Gambart's invocation of such values is precisely the ease with which they seem to accommodate themselves to a commercial venture.

And, indeed, the annual extravaganzas of the Winter and French Exhibitions were not the only shows Gambart organized in the space. Judging by the evidence of advertisements and

reviews, he seems to have had a rapidly rotating series of things on view, including individual showings of prominent paintings, such as John Everett Millais's *The Proscribed Royalist* (August 1858); one-person shows, including exhibitions devoted to Jasper Cropsey (August–September 1858); Alexandre Bida (January 1859); David Cox (April–June 1859); Barbara Bodichon (July–August 1859), and Henriette Browne (August–September 1859); and, less commonly, themed exhibitions, like the Crimean Exhibition held in March 1856. These smaller shows sometimes ran concurrently with his large annual exhibitions and did not generally incur separate admission charges.^[46] And while there is no direct evidence, it is likely that his own "collection"—works he owned, but which were for sale—was displayed at the Gallery on an on-going basis, as were the owners' collections at other contemporary galleries, such as Henry Wallis's gallery in the Haymarket and Joseph Morby's gallery in Cornhill.^[47] Capitalizing on the interest and publicity generated by his annual exhibitions, Gambart expanded his roster of artists, assuring patrons and browsers alike that the gallery space was always open and that there would always be new things to see and buy, much like the norms governing a retail shop.

Retail Practices

This development of retail spaces for selling art was in line with a more general move away from the predominance of markets, fairs, and other forms of itinerant trading, toward a recognizably modern system of retailing. Historians of retail trade often use 1850 as a rough starting date for the emergence of modern retailing in Britain, including the dominance of fixed shop premises, fixed prices, and reliance on advertising.^[48] The art market followed this general pattern, and by the 1860s, Gambart's French Gallery, Agnew's in Waterloo Place, and Arthur Tooth and Sons in the Haymarket—to name only a few of the most well known—were all established as full-time spaces for the sale of art. This adherence to emergent retail norms was a critical part of the professionalization of the picture-dealing business, as dealers worked to conform to a set of standard business procedures and, presumably, ethics. In what follows, I will map out the contours of Gambart's retail practices, arguing that these new norms worked to the advantage of purchasers and artists, as well as dealers themselves. As the public face of the French Gallery worked to secure a standard of aesthetic value, these retail practices aimed to uphold art's financial value.

The expansion of the art season beyond the traditional spring and summer exhibitions was a crucial development in the evolution of the gallery system. In the 1860s many galleries adopted the model of the Winter Exhibition of contemporary art, including McLean's Gallery and Tooth's Gallery. In 1866, the *Art Journal* devoted four pages to this new phenomenon, noting that "On a single day, the 5th of November, no fewer than five galleries were opened, containing an aggregate of more than sixteen hundred works," and pointing out the many useful features of this development. Established artists could use the winter exhibitions to sell already exhibited works at "premium" prices and to try out ideas for the next season by exhibiting sketches or studies, while rising artists could exhibit new work in a setting "where merit, and not prescriptive position, has a chance of fair appreciation and reward." Viewers, too, benefited from the expansion of viewing opportunities, finding entertainment during a notoriously "flat season."^[49] As dealers competed with one another for audiences and sales, such exhibitions proliferated and extended the season for contemporary art throughout the entire year.

In such a competitive market, advertising became increasingly important and Gambart was exceptionally talented at generating publicity for the artists and exhibitions he showed. He placed regular ads in the press, including *The Times*, the *Athenaeum*, and the *Illustrated London News*, and used sandwich boards for street publicity such as those advertising exhibitions by Millais and Gustave Doré—shown in Eyre Crowe's painting *Sandwiches* (1881; fig. 3). Artists enjoyed—and were perhaps slightly embarrassed by—the attention and prominence such advertising gave their work; in a congratulatory letter written in 1859, George Eliot teasingly complimented her good friend Barbara Bodichon on the publicity for her exhibition at the French Gallery: "George [Lewes] told me the other day, when he had been in town, that he had seen your name in large letters on a walking 'sandwich,' and we were not without sensations at your having that honourable publicity."^[50] But Gambart's publicity campaigns were not limited to paid advertisements, as the case of Rosa Bonheur makes clear. Beginning in 1854, Gambart introduced her work to Britain in a full-fledged publicity blitz, sending her paintings on heavily advertised tours, introducing her as a "celebrity" to the British press and public, and even publishing her biography.^[51]



Fig 3, Eyre Crowe, *Sandwiches*, 1881. Oil on canvas. [\[larger image\]](#)

This attention to advertising and publicity seems to have paid off in terms of attendance and sales. For example, Gambart's success in publicizing the royal contributions to the charitable "Patriotic Fund" exhibition of 1855 resulted in a surge in attendance. As the *Art Journal* noted, "This is the most popular of the exhibitions of the earlier season; day after day the room is thronged with the *elite* of the rank and fashion of the metropolis."^[52] Such attendance was important, both because it generated income from admission fees and because it translated into sales. Large sums of money changed hands during these exhibitions; the *Art Journal* reported sales of £6,000 at the Winter Exhibition of 1854–55.^[53] This compares to £600 in sales reported from the Free Exhibition in 1848, and £2–3,000 at the New Water Colour Society and £6,000 at the well-established Society of British Artists in 1856.^[54]

The mechanics of these sales are harder to discern, but catalogues for Gambart's major annual shows do give some sense of the process. In 1854, the catalogue for the French Exhibition indicated that a book in the center of the gallery held the prices of the works; by 1856, viewers were promised more attention, as "the secretary will give every information that Visitors may require, as to the prices of the various Pictures, where they are placed, etc."^[55] Another instruction is particularly revealing: "the Secretary is instructed not to

receive applications for purchases at less prices than those given on the list at the table."^[56] This principle was in accordance with the retail norms of the time, as small shops featuring a personal relation with the shopkeeper and flexible prices gave way to larger stores with prominent displays and fixed prices.^[57]

Unfortunately, there is very little evidence available as to the actual appearance and design of the exhibition rooms. The formal exhibition spaces were located on the ground floor, with additional exhibition rooms located above.^[58] The space was considered relatively small and shows generally included one to two hundred works on each level, as opposed to the thousand or more stacked on the walls of the average Academy. Many critics considered this small size an advantage; *The Times* praised these smaller shows as more manageable, easier to see, and more discriminating than the major annual exhibitions.^[59] A sketch by Bessie Parkes in a letter to Barbara Bodichon shows the general layout of the space, with Bodichon's paintings indicated in the corner, surrounded by "admiring crowds" (fig. 4).^[60] The decoration of the rooms was not described in detail but an account of the new painting gallery opened by Leggatt and Hayward in 1858 gives a sense of the conventions. It consisted of a room of sixty by thirty feet, with twenty-foot ceilings, lit by both a low-arched vault of ground glass and "two clusters of sun-light gas-burners," and luxuriously appointed with wallpaper and draperies of "purple-crimson hue."^[61] On the available evidence, then, these early commercial galleries were relatively luxurious spaces, shaping an environment of wealth and leisure.

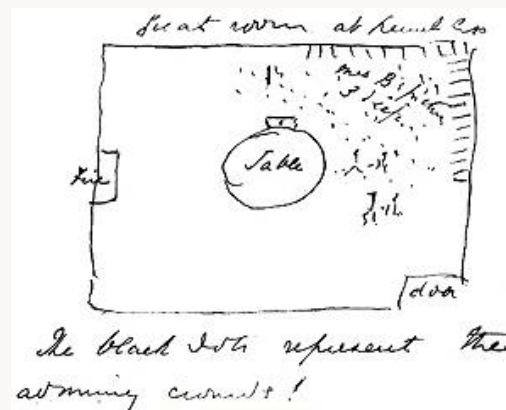


Fig 4, Bessie Rayner Parkes to Barbara Bodichon, 10 April 1861. Girton College Archive, Cambridge. Courtesy of the Mistress and Fellows, Girton College, Cambridge. [\[larger image\]](#)

On the supply side, Gambart generally purchased works at auction or directly from artists, rather than working on the commission model.^[62] This standard retail practice of owning the stock outright necessitated heavy capital investment in fields—such as art—that required a wide selection of relatively high-priced goods to be available for customers. In 1867, an article in *Belgravia* estimated the value of the major dealers' holdings, claiming that "In one it reaches 100,000*l.*; in two others it is about 60,000*l.*; and the less enterprising are content with an outlay of from ten to thirty pounds."^[63] These large investments led to the periodic need to sell off accumulated stock, as in the rash of dealers' sales during the economic

downturn of the late 1850s and early 1860s, when Wallis, Gambart, and Louis Victor Flatou each sold part of his stock of paintings at auction.[64]

This practice also gave dealers significant influence over an artist's production, as their financial commitment to the work gave them a strong interest in directing the artist towards more marketable styles and subjects. A "most candid" letter from Gambart to Ford Madox Brown details the level of influence the dealer expected to exert. Writing in October 1864, Gambart refuses Brown's offer of four drawings, on the grounds that he hasn't been able to "place" the ones already in his possession even though he is willing to sell them at cost. Potential buyers do not find fault with Brown's "workmanship," but they seem to find the prices too high and the subjects uninteresting. Gambart worries that if he takes more drawings of the same type, he might permanently depress the market for Brown's work. However, if Brown is willing to sell him "more attractive drawings, such for instance as the one you showed me of the prophet and the resuscitated boy" (probably a version of the *Elijah and the Widow's Son* done for Dalziel's Bible Gallery in 1863), he thinks he might be able to sell them "at a moderate price," and "the 'article' once established in public favour I would be able to place anything of yours." [65]

Despite its potential irritations, however, this financial model did have significant advantages for favored artists and patrons. As Dianne Sachko Macleod's study of Victorian collecting has shown, the difficulties and misunderstandings that could arise within the artist-patron relationship led many collectors to prefer the more professional transactions that dealers facilitated.[66] Even the dealer-wary *Art Journal* admitted the advantages dealers offered; "Not only the picture-buyers, but the artists themselves, often prefer transacting with dealers to arranging with private individuals; there is then no haggling about price—no waiting for payment." [67] Compared to some patrons and dealers, Gambart had a reputation for timely payment; in 1856, Millais reported to his wife, "All men have different ways of dealing, and his way is to pay me the moment the picture is in his possession," and Rossetti referred to the dealer as "an immediate paymaster." [68] Artists also appreciated the effect that dealers had on their prices and reputations; as the *Saturday Review* explained in 1867, painters "uniformly tell us that, when they have sold works to a dealer, the higher the price he [the dealer] is able to get for them the greater the advantage to the artist, because it raises the prices which he himself can afterwards obtain in dealing directly with the public; and since the public in great measure estimates painters by the money they earn, a painter rises in position whenever the dealer is enabled to get a higher figure for his work." [69]

Viewing the commercial gallery within the framework of developing modern retail practices highlights the utility of the new form. Following the business practices of fixed prices and prompt payment attracted both artists and buyers, particularly the new middle-class patrons who increasingly dominated the market for contemporary art. Similarly, the consistent space of the gallery guaranteed a certain level of accountability and predictability; buyers knew where to find the works of particular artists, and were assured that they could return to the dealer if the picture turned out to be other than advertised. The commercial gallery's conformity to standard business practices was thus an important part of the regularization of the trade. But the dealer's role, too, had to change if the picture trade was to be accorded the status of a reputable business.

The Professionalization of Picture Dealing

There are hints of the dealer's developing new role in a letter from Joseph Noël Paton to Gambart. Writing in June 1858, the artist expressed relief and interest in Gambart's offer to sell his work: "I believe the proposed arrangement will be advantageous to me—even if for no other reason than its saving me from what, perhaps foolishly, I have always felt a painful operation: to wit the personal sale of my pictures."^[70] Paton's reference to the "painful" nature of direct sales indicates that the dealer could function as a screen—both practical and symbolic—between artists and the commercial realm. But Paton goes further. Indeed, he wishes for more guidance in setting the value of his work, continuing, "I wish you had felt warranted in giving me advice touching the prices of my pictures at the R.A.—for on that subject I am absolutely 'at sea.'"^[71] In asking Gambart's advice on pricing pictures from which the dealer will not profit, Paton appeals to Gambart as an art expert and advisor, someone he can trust to offer disinterested advice. Of course, Gambart seems to have refused this service, indicating the limits of his willingness to enact this part and pointing to some of the friction in the dealer's emerging role.

Like the new hybrid form of the commercial gallery, the modern picture dealer's role was a double one. As Bourdieu deftly describes the paradox, the dealer "is at one and the same time the person who exploits the labour of the 'creator' by trading in the 'sacred' and the person who, by putting it on the market, by exhibiting ... it, consecrates a product which he has 'discovered' and which would otherwise remain a mere natural resource; and the more consecrated he personally is, the more strongly he consecrates the work."^[72] Dealers at mid-century needed to defend both positions. On the one hand, widespread distrust of the motivations and business practices of private dealers raised the specter of fraud and exploitation, forcing dealers to find ways to guarantee the economic value of the work of art by establishing themselves as reputable businessmen. On the other hand, the art market's adherence to a logic Bourdieu has described as "the economic world reversed"—a system in which aesthetic value is guaranteed by the disavowal of economic interest—imposed a different, even contradictory, burden.^[73] The emerging language of professionalism offered a solution, linking trustworthiness and disinterestedness together in the figure of the "expert."

Harold Perkin has traced the emergence in the mid-Victorian period of the professional ideal, defined in terms of expertise and specialization. The value of the professional's work lies in "offering a service that is ... esoteric, evanescent, and fiduciary—beyond the layman's knowledge or judgment, impossible to pin down or fault even when it fails, and which must therefore be taken on trust," a trust justified by the professional's disinterestedness and commitment to social service.^[74] This emerging set of values and standards offered dealers an identity that could help guarantee both the economic and the aesthetic value of a work of art.^[75]

As a first step in this process, the 1850s and 1860s saw the beginnings of significant specialization in the art market. Unlike earlier entrepreneurs like Rudolph Ackermann, who sold paintings alongside myriad other items of home decoration, the new breed of picture dealers focused exclusively on the fine arts. Some firms, like Agnew's, continued to sell both Old Masters and contemporary work, but many others, including Gambart, became

specialists in contemporary painting. Indeed, the *Art Journal* heralded such specialization as the mark of the honest dealer:

If dealers be necessities,—and we imagine we must take that for granted,—it is of the highest importance to find one dealing *only in modern Art*, who does not assume to vend either Titians or Raphaels, but whose integrity can be at any time tested by reference to the painter to whom the picture is attributed, and who guarantees the "originality" of every work transferred from his gallery to that of a purchaser.[76]

There was also, to a limited extent, a further degree of specialization in process, as dealers began to concentrate their holdings in certain schools of art or establish long-term relationships with artists, such as the famous partnerships between Flatou and Frith, and Gambart and Lawrence Alma-Tadema, the latter memorialized in Gambart's cameo appearance at the center of *The Picture Gallery* (1874; fig. 5).



Fig 5, Lawrence Alma-Tadema, *The Picture Gallery*, 1874. Oil on canvas. Towneley Hall Art Gallery and Museums, Burnley. [\[larger image\]](#)

As the role of the dealer became increasingly visible, Gambart worked to develop a public identity as a disinterested promoter of art. He served as a director of the Artists' General Benevolent Institution in the 1850s and 1860s, and contributed regularly to the fund.[77] He frequently lent out his gallery for charitable exhibitions, including the Patriotic Exhibition of 1855, held to benefit widows and orphans of officers killed in the Crimea, and the Amateur Exhibition of 1860, in aid of the Home for Day Workers.[78] He also organized international exhibitions featuring the work of British and French artists, including a planned exhibition of British art in Paris, and exhibitions in the United States in 1857–58, 1859, and throughout the 1860s.[79] While such exhibitions were clearly designed to extend the market for European art, they also served a legitimizing function. Press coverage of the exhibitions focused on their larger national purpose, and Gambart was credited with being "a gentleman of intelligence and experience...perhaps the only person in England in whose hands it [the American exhibition] will be comparatively safe." [80]

A critical part of this new professional identity was establishing for themselves an elevated class status, and dealers stepped into the patron's old role of facilitating introductions,

becoming central figures in the social corridors of the art world. Gambart appears to have been particularly tireless; his friend Frederick Goodall's autobiography is literally filled with instances of Gambart's networking, including reminiscences of occasions when the dealer assembled a group of artists, including Goodall, Stanfield, Maclise and the French painter Constant Troyon, to see the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition in 1857; threw a party in Goodall's honor after his election to the Royal Academy; and orchestrated a meeting between Rosa Bonheur and Ruskin.[81] Gambart also acted on various occasions as an intermediary for British artists in Paris, introducing Millais, Frith, and Goodall to artists such as Bonheur, Gérôme, and Ernest Meissonier.[82] And throughout his long career, Gambart's homes in London and, later, in Nice were meeting points for artists and collectors, as he expanded and made increasingly public the social role of the dealer.[83]

In public and in private, then, Gambart worked to establish a role for the dealer distinct from that of the speculator, positioning himself as a disinterested promoter of the arts, not merely as a buyer and seller of objects. This identity was of crucial importance, providing him with a fund of "symbolic capital" he could then invest in his business and in individual artists.[84] In its early years, the gallery system relied heavily upon the symbolic capital conferred by the Academy and other artistic institutions, and Gambart's exhibition catalogues prominently featured artists' official titles and awards (fig. 6). But as the system developed, individual galleries and dealers themselves began to build up the authority to "consecrate" new artists. When Gambart gave Barbara Bodichon her first solo exhibition, her friend Bessie Parkes described it as "a regular *coup* to have struck...when you return you will find that all London has seen your pictures." [85] George Eliot concurred, writing, "It is really a step to have your pictures hung together in a regular gallery where you have an illustrious predecessor." [86] Eliot is referring to the recent show of David Cox's work, and suggesting that the Gallery space offered an imprimatur of quality derived from the work previously shown there. As the dealer assumed a gatekeeper role, his taste became a part of what his gallery offered its audience, promising a discerning eye for new art, and an assurance that the unworthy had been weeded out. Potential buyers appreciated this implicit guarantee of quality; an article in *Belgravia* in 1867 compared the overwhelming experience of the Academy with the more exclusive selection offered at a private gallery, where the dealer's exercise of the "judgment of a lifetime" in selecting his stock meant that "everything around him [the buyer] is genuine; the quality is indisputable; and the largeness of the field of selection is not more obvious than its excellence." [87]

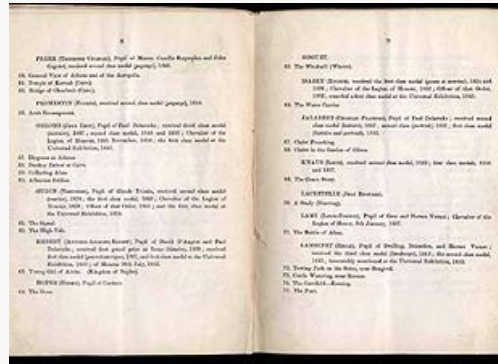


Fig 6, Eighth Annual Exhibition in London of Pictures. The Contributions of Artists of the French and Flemish Schools, The Gallery, 120, Pall Mall. London 1861. [\[larger image\]](#)

Exclusivity and Distinction: The Commercial Gallery and Its Publics

As commercial galleries managed by professional dealers worked to regulate the conversion of aesthetic value into financial value, the translation process was mediated by the invocation of a double set of ideals, one borrowing from the rhetoric and practice of the public realm and one partaking of the private virtues of a commercial morality. By the late 1860s, the commercial gallery system was firmly established along these lines, and distinctions between public and private exhibitions were becoming harder to discern. As *The Times* noted—not entirely approvingly—in 1866:

There has been a complete change of fashion in picture-exhibiting and picture-buying...Any distinction that might once have asserted itself between exhibition and shop is at an end. As the fact has become more and more palpable that all our Societies' exhibitions...are but sale-rooms after all, the sale-rooms of our principal picture-dealers have been gradually assuming more and more the character of exhibitions.^[88]

As the gallery system expanded this balance became ever harder to maintain, as art's public—both real and imagined—became increasingly segmented. Private galleries proliferated at a dizzying speed in the last decades of the nineteenth century, each carving out its own niche in the art market and increasingly relying on a rhetoric of exclusivity and fashion. While an exploration of this development is another chapter in the history of the commercial art gallery, its seeds are present in Gambart's marketing of the French Gallery and I want to conclude my discussion with an exploration of the tension between Gambart's legitimizing adoption of a rhetoric of a national public, and that public's increasing fragmentation.

As we have seen, Gambart's connection to Continental art was a major part of the French Gallery's identity. The gallery's very name emphasized this cosmopolitan character, identifying the gallery with the fashionable and the modern—some of the associations "Frenchness" carried in the world of consumption. Intriguingly, many of the earliest

commercial galleries in London were similarly premised on this cosmopolitan appeal, including the Flemish Gallery, the Continental Gallery, and the Belgian Gallery.

This trend was partly a reflection of a general interest in comparing national schools. While the Great Exhibition of 1851 did not include painting, it did inspire independent attempts to showcase the art of different nations, such as the "Gallery of British Art" opened by Charles Wentworth Wass in Old Bond Street, and the "General Exhibition of Pictures of the Various Schools of Painters" mounted at Lichfield House in St. James's Square.[89] Gambart's French exhibitions capitalized on this interest by creating a discursive space in which the British school could be regularly measured against other national traditions, and reviews of the shows were filled with comparisons of each school's approach to the different genres and their general levels of finish and detail.[90] In this way, the discourse around the French Gallery encouraged those who visited and those who simply read about the space to identify themselves as a national audience for the arts and, as we have seen, Gambart made good use of such associations.

But the importance of the Gallery's cosmopolitan character exceeded such competitive nationalism, becoming an identity that helped distinguish the space from its competitors, and constituted a certain kind of ideal audience. In addition to regularly showcasing French art, Gambart mounted a Flemish Exhibition in the winter of 1856–57, while exhibitions of Orientalist images by Alexandre Bida and Bodichon, and American landscapes by Cropsey demonstrated the Gallery's commitment to "cosmopolitanism" in subject as well as school. By the mid-1860s, even the winter exhibitions of British art had been expanded to include the work of foreign artists, leading the *Art Journal* to note that such exhibitions "do much to render Art cosmopolitan." [91] The imagined audience for this material was clearly not a parochial one, but rather one composed of people interested in the international art world and in subjects beyond the local. This is, of course, a form of specialization, marking off the audience for the gallery as an aesthetically sophisticated group. The smaller spaces and audiences of the gallery thus became a virtue, speaking of exclusivity and discrimination. As R. Folkestone Williams asked in 1867, "Is it not more advantageous, as well as much more agreeable, to go leisurely over these three or four hundred examples, with the quiet companionship of some half-a-dozen spectators who have come on a similar errand, than to hunt fruitlessly through a host of inferior, undesirable or unattainable works, in the midst of a crowd of sight-seeing Cockneys, enjoying a holiday?" [92] Simultaneously, however, such specialization identified its audience with a much larger international community and an emerging cosmopolitan identity. The French Gallery audience may have been only a fraction of the British art public, but it was one in imagined communion with an international group of viewers bound by taste.

The public the French Gallery created for itself, then, was one that simultaneously drew upon a discourse of national identity and the public good, and on one of discrimination and exclusivity. Audience members were positioned both as advocates for the British school, united by patriotism and a commitment to national achievement, and as connoisseurs who appreciated the dealer's selective eye. As Gambart and other dealers located their galleries at the intersection of the ideal of a cohesive public and the reality of its fragmentation, they evoked a national audience for art while maintaining an aura of sophisticated exclusivity. As commercial galleries proliferated across London in the late nineteenth century, this

fragmentation of the artistic public into ever-more exclusive niche markets intensified, becoming a defining feature of the new art market. By 1907, the fashionable magazine *Truth* could embrace this state of affairs:

It is a fortunate circumstance that each picture-dealer ... should have his own especial following, for thus only is it possible to contemplate the annual artistic harvest of Bond-street without weakening of the brain. There must be not one artistic public ... but many of them, each knowing only of the Art which is provided at the particular gallery with which it is indissolubly linked.[93]

The critic's half-joking sketch rings strikingly true, describing a new stage in the history of the commercial gallery as it grew from an experimental form to a powerful institutional force shaping the cultural field of modern art, with its endlessly multiplying rhetoric of originality and distinction.

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Notes

I would like to thank Aviva Briefel, Anne Helmreich, Elizabeth Pergam, Maria Ruvoldt, Birgit Tautz and the anonymous reader for *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* for their insightful comments and helpful suggestions on various drafts of this essay.

[1] Unfortunately, Gambart's business records have not been located. An almost complete set of catalogues from his annual French and Winter Exhibitions are held at the National Art Library at the Victoria and Albert Museum. The richest source of information about his business practices is his correspondence with individual artists and patrons regarding engravings, meetings, payments, exhibition plans, etc., including letters held at the National Art Library, the Getty, and in private collections. Jeremy Maas's invaluable biography of Gambart gives a splendid overview of Gambart's career, and his text is filled with rich anecdotal detail. I am deeply indebted to his work, which laid the crucial groundwork for this essay. Jeremy Maas, *Gambart: Prince of the Victorian Art World* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1975). On Goupil, see *Gérôme and Goupil: Art and Enterprise*, exh. cat. (Bordeaux: Musée Goupil, 2001).

[2] The first exhibition at this address that can be securely identified with Gambart is the French Exhibition in the spring of 1854. Despite some uncertainty over the precise dates, it seems that Gambart began by leasing the space of No. 121 Pall Mall, and purchased the adjoining space at No. 120 in 1858. At this point, the street numbering of the gallery changed in its publicity materials; while it had previously been listed as No. 121, after this date it was identified as No. 120. As the *Art Journal* noted in 1858, a door was cut through the buildings to provide a larger entrance through No. 120. Maas, *Gambart*, 109, 101.

[3] There was a similar trajectory and timeline in Paris for this move from shops selling pictures among many other curios and antiquities to galleries devoted to the sale of paintings. Nicholas Green, "Circuits of Production, Circuits of Consumption: The Case of Mid-Nineteenth-Century French Art Dealing," *Art Journal* 48, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 29–34.

[4] The two classic works on the gallery are Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (San Francisco and Santa Monica: The Lapis Press, 1976); and Harrison C. White and Cynthia A. White, *Canvases and Careers: Institutional Change in the French Painting World* (New York: John Wiley and Son, 1965). O'Doherty's essays interpret and critique the "pristine, placeless white cube" of the modern gallery as a critical participant in modernist aesthetics. White and White take a more historical perspective, charting the emergence of the

"dealer-critic system" in late nineteenth-century France. A growing number of scholars have taken up the questions raised by White and White, including Albert Boime, "Entrepreneurial Patronage in Nineteenth-Century France," in *Enterprise and Entrepreneurs in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century France*, ed. Edward C. Carter, et. al. (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 137–207; Nicholas Green, "Dealing in Temperaments: Economic Transformation of the Artistic Field in France during the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century," *Art History* 10, no. 1 (March 1987): 59–78; Martha Ward, "Impressionist Installations and Private Exhibitions," *Art Bulletin* 73, no. 4 (December 1991): 599–622; and Robert Jensen, *Marketing Modernism in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994). Taken together, the work of Boime, Green, and Jensen traces the rise of the "entrepreneurial dealer" and his successor the "ideological dealer" over the second half of the nineteenth century, and examines the impact of this new system on the writing of art's histories, while Ward examines the installation practices at independent exhibitions in late-nineteenth-century Paris, including a discussion of dealers' exhibitions in the 1880s. On the American art market, see Malcolm Goldstein, *Landscape with Figures: A History of Art Dealing in the United States* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). Recent studies of commercial galleries in London include: Hilarie Faberman, "'The Best Shop in London': The Fine Art Society and the Victorian Art Scene," in *The Grosvenor Gallery: A Palace of Art in Victorian England*, ed. Susan P. Casteras and Colleen Denney (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), 147–58; and Anne Helmreich, "The Art Dealer and Taste: The Case of David Croal Thomson and the Goupil Gallery, 1885–1897," *Visual Culture in Britain* 6, no. 2 (Autumn 2005): 31–49.

[5] On London's dominance in the commercial art market, see Jensen, *Marketing Modernism*, 8; Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, "The Lu(c)re of London: French Artists and Art Dealers in the British Capital, 1859–1914" in *Monet's London: Artists' Reflections on the Thames 1859–1914*, exh. cat. (St. Petersburg, FL: Museum of Fine Arts, 2005), 39–54; Helmreich, "The Art Dealer and Taste," 33–34.

[6] See, for example: Julie Codell, "Artists' Professional Societies: Production, Consumption, and Aesthetics," in *Towards a Modern Art World*, ed. Brian Allen (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 169–87; Christopher Newall, *The Grosvenor Gallery Exhibitions: Change and Continuity in the Victorian Art World* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Dianne Sachko Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Kenneth John Myers, *Mr. Whistler's Gallery: Pictures at an 1884 Exhibition*, exh. cat. (Washington D.C.: Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, 2003); Chu, "The Lu(c)re of London;" and Helmreich, "The Art Dealer and Taste."

[7] The Royal Academy's status was the subject of substantial debate throughout its history, and several official inquiries at mid century. While features such as its exclusive membership and exhibition admission charge seemed to identify it as a private institution, it was housed at public expense and purported to embody a national art. However, if mid-century commentators were divided on the status of the Royal Academy, they were united in seeing the new profit-driven dealers and their galleries as unambiguously private and commercial enterprises. On the instability of the Royal Academy's status as a disinterested public institution, see David H. Solkin, "This Great Mart of Genius: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House, 1780–1836," in *Art on the Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House 1780–1836*, ed. David H. Solkin (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 1–8; Colin Trodd "The Authority of Art: Cultural Criticism and the Idea of the Royal Academy in Mid-Victorian Britain," *Art History* 20, no. 1 (March 1997): 3–22; and Gordon Fyfe, "Auditing the RA: Official Discourse and the Nineteenth-century Royal Academy," in *Art and the Academy in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Rafael Cardoso Denis and Colin Trodd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 117–30. The ideal of the public good also changed over the course of the 18th and early 19th centuries, as it incorporated private virtues and values in both theory and practice. See John Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt: "The Body of the Public"* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986); David H. Solkin, *Painting for Money: The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992).

[8] As a journal originally conceived as the artistic profession's "channel of communication with the public," and the only journal devoted to the fine arts in Britain in the 1840s and 1850s, the *Art Journal's* perspective was not entirely disinterested. But other sources—including artists' memoirs and other periodicals that included coverage of the arts—offer a similar sense that there were not enough reputable venues for the sale of contemporary art. *Art-Union*, February 1, 1839, 1, quoted in Debra Mancoff, "Samuel Carter Hall: Publisher as Promoter of the High Arts," *Victorian Periodical Review* 24, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 12; William Powell Frith, *My Autobiography and Reminiscences* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1888), 1:424.

- [9] Louise Lippincott, *Selling Art in Georgian London: The Rise of Arthur Pond* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983); Iain Pears, *The Discovery of Painting: The Growth of Interest in the Arts in England 1680–1768* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 51–105; and David Ormrod, "The Origins of the London Art Market, 1660–1730," in *Art Markets in Europe, 1400–1800*, ed. Michael North and David Ormrod (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 167–86.
- [10] Pears, *The Discovery of Painting*, 96.
- [11] *Ibid.*, 146–47.
- [12] Richard D. Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1978), 102, 106–08, 408–11; Jon Whiteley, "Exhibitions of Contemporary Painting in London and Paris 1760–1860," in *Saloni, gallerie, musei e loro influenza sullo sviluppo dell'arte dei secoli XIX e XX (Atti del XXIV Congresso Internazionale di Storia dell'Arte, VII)*, ed. Francis Haskell (Comité International d'Histoire de l'Art: Bologna, 1981), 69–87.
- [13] Maas discusses the "exhibition mania" of the late 1840s in his biography of Gambart, and my analysis is indebted to his invaluable work on many of the poorly documented exhibitions mounted during those years. Maas, *Gambart*, 48–53. For a broader view of the changes in patronage and demand during those years, see Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*.
- [14] The work of Pierre Bourdieu elucidates the very useful idea of the "field of cultural production," the set of structures and possibilities that shape the production, definition, and evaluation of a work of art. The cultural field includes works of art and their producers, but also dealers, critics, galleries, museums and other legitimizing institutions. See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, trans. and ed. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).
- [15] On the poorly received Free Exhibition of 1847, see "Minor Topics of the Month," *Art-Union*, April 1847, 142; "Minor Topics of the Month," *Art-Union*, May 1847, 183; "Free Exhibition of Modern Art," *Art-Union*, June 1847, 204. On Rossetti and the Free Exhibition, see Colin Cruise, "Sincerity and Earnestness: D.G. Rossetti's Early Exhibitions 1849–53," *Burlington Magazine* 146, no. 1210 (January 2004): 4–12.
- [16] *Institution for the Free Exhibition of Modern Art. Gallery, Hyde Park Corner (Late Chinese Exhibition) 1848*, exh. cat. (London, 1848), 1.
- [17] *Catalogue of the Association for Promoting the Free Exhibition of Modern Art*, exh. cat. (London, 1849). Prices ranged from £7 7s. to £150, with most works priced between £10 and £60.
- [18] *Institution for the Free Exhibition of Modern Art*, 1; Maas, *Gambart*, 48.
- [19] Maas identifies this man as J.L. Grundy, but I have been unable to locate any additional information about him. Maas, *Gambart*, 52. There was a print seller and picture dealer John Clowes Grundy in Manchester, but it is not clear that there is any relation.
- [20] "Fine Art Gossip," *Athenaeum*, October 26, 1850, 1122; cited in Maas, *Gambart*, 53. The writer is being a little unfair to Grundy in singling out the 10% commission as a dealer's greed; a notice in the *Art-Union* in 1846 suggested that the so-called "Free Exhibition" planned to levy an identical fee on sales. "The British Artists' Own Exhibition," *Art-Union*, May 1846, 139–40; quoted in Cruise, "Sincerity and Earnestness," 6.
- [21] "Winter Art Exhibition," *Athenaeum*, November 9, 1850, 1169.
- [22] The organizers of this exhibition are not easily identifiable. Maas identifies Pocock as one of the founding members, and speculates that Gambart may have been involved as well. Maas, *Gambart*, 53, 54. The *Athenaeum* identified the organizers as the "Association of Amateurs," and indicated it was a "new Association." "Fine Arts Gossip," *Athenaeum*, October 26, 1850, 1122; "Winter Art Exhibition," *Athenaeum*, November 9, 1850, 1169.
- [23] "Minor Topics of the Month," *Art Journal*, November 1850, 362.
- [24] "The British Institution," *Art Journal*, February 1851, 63; "Picture-Dealing," *Art Journal*, August 1852, 246. On the moral difficulties raised by speculation, see David C. Itzkowitz, "Fair Enterprise or Extravagant Speculations: Investment, Speculation, and Gambling in Victorian England," *Victorian Studies* 45, no. 1 (Autumn 2002): 121–48.
- [25] "The British Institution," 63.
- [26] See, for example, the selections on "The National Debt and the Stock Exchange" collected in *The Financial System in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Mary Poovey (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 123–227.
- [27] "The Winter Exhibition of Pictures," *Art Journal*, December 1850, 381.
- [28] Such anti-dealer rhetoric had been present since the emergence of the profession in England in the 18th century, but the terms of the condemnation changed as dealers moved

from trading primarily in foreign art and "Old Masters," to the work of living British artists. Pears, *The Discovery of Painting*, 94–101.

[29] "Exhibitions versus Auction-Rooms," *Art-Union*, March 1848, 95.

[30] "Minor Topics of the Month," *Art Journal*, September 1852, 290. John Ruskin also developed a moral language of art purchasing in *The Political Economy of Art* (1857). Codell argues that Ruskin's configuration of artistic consumption as a philanthropic act works to solidify a hierarchical artist-patron relationship in order to protect the artist (and the art object) from the impure influence of the marketplace. Julie F. Codell, *The Victorian Artist* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 82–92.

[31] Aviva Briefel, *The Deceivers: Art Forgery and Identity in the Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

[32] On the various locations at which unscrupulous dealers tried to sell spurious works of art, see "Picture-Dealing," *Art Journal*, May 1852, 151–52; "Picture Dealing: A 'Sale' at Birmingham," *Art Journal*, October 1854, 313. On dealers' legal maneuvers to avoid responsibility for discovered frauds, see "Minor Topics of the Month: Picture Cheats," *Art-Union*, January 1848, 33.

[33] "Picture Forging," *Art Journal*, April 1855, 126.

[34] In 1867 Gambart sold the lease of the French Gallery to its manager Henry Wallis, who continued to run the business under the same name. Maas, *Gambart*, 200–201.

[35] "Picture Dealing: A 'Sale' at Birmingham," 313.

[36] Gambart apparently gave up his interest in the wholesale print publishing and selling business at Berners Street to Messrs. Moore, MacQueen & Co. in the early 1860s, but continued to publish selected prints under the Gambart name. Maas, *Gambart*, 157n.

[37] Maas, *Gambart*, 63n.

[38] "Minor Topics of the Month," *Art Journal*, March 1854, 89.

[39] *Fourth Season. The Winter Exhibition of Cabinet Pictures, Sketches, and Water-colour Drawings of the British School. At the Gallery, No. 121, Pall Mall, London*, exh. cat. (London, 1854); "The Winter Exhibition," *Art Journal*, December 1855, 316.

[40] The Academy's catalogue was more expensive, being priced at one shilling.

[41] They were also, of course, a critical part of the commercial gallery's business model and a major source of income at a time when the commission structure was neither fully established nor accepted. Paula Gillett discusses the debates over admission charges at the Royal Academy and compares the Academy's practice to the open admission policy of the National Gallery; Paula Gillett, *Worlds of Art: Painters in Victorian Society* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 221–29. The social implications of the National Gallery's lack of admission charges were the subject of much nineteenth-century concern, giving rise to fears of contagion, disease and social unrest. See also Brandon Taylor, *Art for the Nation: Exhibitions and the London Public* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 29–66; and Colin Trodd, "The Paths to the National Gallery," in *Governing Cultures: Art Institutions in Victorian London*, ed. Paul Barlow and Colin Trodd (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2000), 29–43.

[42] *First Annual Exhibition of the French School of the Fine Arts in London, at the Gallery, No. 121, Pall Mall, opposite the Opera Colonnade*, exh. cat. (London, 1854).

[43] Gambart maintained branches of his business in Paris and in Brussels. Maas, *Gambart*, 109–10.

[44] *First Annual Exhibition of the French School*.

[45] "Fine Art Gossip," *Athenaeum*, August 4, 1855, 905–6.

[46] A show of Algerian sketches by Barbara Bodichon was advertised along with the French Exhibition of 1859, with no additional admission charges; and an advertisement for an exhibition of Henriette Browne's sketches did not mention an admission charge. *Illustrated London News*, July 30, 1859, 100; *Illustrated London News*, August 13, 1859, 148.

[47] In 1860, the *Art Journal* began to review "such collections of pictures as dealers submit to the examination of purchasers." "Exhibition of Pictures: Mr. Wallis's, Haymarket," *Art Journal*, May 1860, 149. See also "Mr. Morby's Gallery, Change Alley, Cornhill," *Art Journal*, November 1860, 349.

[48] Of course, no single cut-off point can be determined for this kind of historical change, and recent scholarship has focused on the uneven development of retail practices, geographically and by specialization. See David Alexander, *Retailing in England during the Industrial Revolution* (London: University of London, The Athlone Press, 1970); Michael J.

Winstanley, *The Shopkeeper's World, 1830–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983); Nicholas Alexander and Gary Akehurst, "Introduction: the Emergence of Modern Retailing, 1750–1950," *Business History* 40, no. 4 (October 1998): 1–15; and the essays in *A Nation of Shopkeepers: Five Centuries of British Retailing*, ed. John Benson and Laura Ugolini (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2003).

[49] "Winter Exhibitions," *Art Journal*, December 1866, 373.

[50] Taken out of context, the tone seems ironic but the letter continues in a positive vein: "It is really a step to have your pictures hung together at a regular gallery." George Eliot to Mme Eugène Bodichon, July 27, 1859. *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), 3:124.

[51] Maas, *Gambart*, 70–76; Gabriel P. Weisberg, "Rosa Bonheur's Reception in England and America: The Popularization of a Legend and the Celebration of a Myth," in *Rosa Bonheur: All Nature's Children*, exh. cat. (New York: Dahesh Museum, 1998), 1–22.

[52] "The Exhibition of Amateur Art in Aid of the Patriotic Fund," *Art Journal*, May 1855, 140.

[53] "The Winter Exhibition," *Art Journal*, February 1855, 65.

[54] "Free Exhibition at Hyde Park," *Art Journal*, August 1848, 258; "The Art Season of 1856," *Art Journal*, September 1856, 276–77.

[55] *First Annual Exhibition of the French School; Third Annual Exhibition of the French School of the Fine Arts in London, at the Gallery, No. 121, Pall-Mall, opposite the Opera Colonnade*, exh. cat. (London: 1856).

[56] *Third Annual Exhibition of the French School*.

[57] Bill Lancaster, *The Department Store: A Social History* (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 1995).

[58] "The French Gallery. Exhibition of David Cox's Work," *Times* (London), May 14, 1859, 12.

[59] "Winter Picture Exhibitions," *Times* (London), November 1, 1865, 7.

[60] Bessie Rayner Parkes to Barbara Bodichon, April 10, 1861, GCPP Parkes 5/103, Girton College Archive, Cambridge. Courtesy of the Mistress and Fellows, Girton College, Cambridge.

[61] "City Fine-Art Gallery," *Art Journal*, April 1858, 112.

[62] The annual exhibitions seem to have been an exception to this rule, as Ford Madox Brown's recollection of selling a picture at the Winter Exhibition of 1854–55 indicates. *The Diary of Ford Madox Brown*, ed. Virginia Surtees (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 124. Gambart's financial dealings with artists were marked by considerable creativity, with arrangements ranging from outright purchase, sale on commission, and the assumption of shared risk for individual exhibitions.

[63] R. Folkestone Williams, "English Pictures and Picture-Dealers," *Belgravia* 2 (1867): 292.

[64] There are several variants of the spelling of Louis Victor Flatou's last name. Frith referred to him as "Flatow" in his autobiography, and in the press of the 1850s and 1860s, he was variously called "Flatou," "Flatow," and "Flateau." The auction catalogues for the sale of his art collection use the spelling of "Flatou" and the National Art Library at the Victoria and Albert Museum and the British Library catalogue him accordingly. Christie's London, *Highly Important Collection of Modern Pictures, of Mr. L.V. Flatou, Final Portion, May 26, 1866*.

[65] Ernest Gambart to Ford Madox Brown, October 20, 1864, National Art Library, London, MSL/1995/14/28/3. Reproduced with the kind permission of the Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum. William Rossetti suggested that Gambart had purchased a drawing of *Elijah and the Widow's Son* from Brown earlier that year, but this letter seems to indicate that Gambart did not yet own one; *Rossetti Papers 1862–70*, ed. William Michael Rossetti (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1903), 46–48, cited by Maas, *Gambart*, 168.

[66] Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*.

[67] "The Present State of Commerce in Art," *Art Journal*, October 1854, 312.

[68] Quoted in John Guille Millais, *The Life and Letters of Sir John Everett Millais* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1899), 1:304; Dante Gabriel Rossetti to James Smetham, November 13, 1864, National Art Library, London, 86.NN Box II, no. 3, quoted in Maas, *Gambart*, 175.

[69] "Pictures of the Year," *Saturday Review*, February 2, 1867, 142. Rossetti—despite his sometimes difficult relationship with Gambart—also noted the beneficial effects of the dealer's higher prices. Maas, *Gambart*, 173–75.

- [70] Joseph Noël Paton to Ernest Gambart, June 15, 1858, National Art Library, London, MSL/1979/5116/404. Reproduced with the kind permission of the Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum.
- [71] *Ibid.*
- [72] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Production of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods," *The Field of Cultural Production*, 76–77.
- [73] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed," *The Field of Cultural Production*, 29–73.
- [74] Harold Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England Since 1880* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 117.
- [75] On the contemporaneous professionalization of artists and art critics, see Gillett, *Worlds of Art*, 43–68; and Elizabeth Prettejohn, "Aesthetic Value and the Professionalization of Victorian Art Criticism 1837–1878," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 71–94.
- [76] "Exhibition of Pictures: Mr. Wallis's, Haymarket," *Art Journal*, May 1860, 149.
- [77] Maas, *Gambart*, 199n.
- [78] *The Exhibition of Paintings, Drawings and Sketches by Amateur Artists in Aid of 'The Home for Day Workers'*, London, 1860.
- [79] The Paris exhibition was cancelled because of the Franco-Austrian war; "Minor Topics of the Month," *Art Journal*, June 1859, 194. On the American exhibition of 1857–58, see Maas, *Gambart*, 94–97 and Susan P. Casteras, *English Pre-Raphaelitism and its Reception in America in the Nineteenth Century* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1990), 43–68. On the later American exhibitions see DeCourcy E. McIntosh, "Goupil and the American Triumph of Jean-Léon Gérôme," in *Gérôme and Goupil*, 34–36.
- [80] "Minor Topics of the Month," *Art Journal*, September 1857, 294.
- [81] Frederick Goodall, *The Reminiscences of Frederick Goodall, RA* (London: Walter Scott, 1902), 126, 130, 292.
- [82] Millais, *Life and Letters*, 2:13–14, 102; Goodall, *Reminiscences*, 176.
- [83] Gambart's success in establishing himself as the social equal of patrons and successful artists stands in sharp contrast to the public perception of one of his main rivals, Louis Victor Flatou, who was described by Frith as an illiterate "Israelite...and by no means a favourable type of that great race," whose speech was heavily accented and manner characterized by "rough vulgarity." In 1867, Gambart retired from the French Gallery and Flatou died, and the public commentary on each occasion marked the difference in their status; while Gambart was complimented for his "good service" in educating public taste and advancing the artistic profession, Flatou's large estate led the *Art Journal* to reopen the question of the morality of the dealers' role, reminding readers that he was "a Polish Jew" and casting carefully-worded doubt onto the legitimacy of his trading practices. Frith, *Autobiography*, 1:420, 423, 426; "Minor Topics of the Month," *Art Journal*, April 1867, 114; "Minor Topics of the Month," *Art Journal*, August 1868, 163.
- [84] Bourdieu, "The Production of Belief," *Field of Cultural Production*, 76–77. Artists were very aware of the financial value of such honors; upon his election as an A.R.A. in 1864, Leighton confided to F.G. Stephens, "I can't well...conceive it a *great* honour now—but it has material advantages as you see in the case of Gambart—I immediately inferred what you say from the fact of his buying my pictures so readily—he who never bought *anything* of mine before." Undated letter from Frederic Leighton to Frederic George Stephens, Bodleian Library, MS don.e.69; quoted in Maas, *Gambart*, 172–73.
- [85] Bessie Rayner Parkes to Barbara Bodichon, April 10, 1861, GCPP Parkes 5/103, Girton College Archive, Cambridge; quoted in Jan Marsh, "Art, Ambition and Sisterhood in the 1850s," in *Women in the Victorian Art World*, ed. Clarissa Campbell Orr (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), 41.
- [86] George Eliot to Mme Eugène Bodichon, July 27, 1859. George Eliot Letters, 3:124.
- [87] Williams, "English Pictures and Picture-Dealers," 291.
- [88] "Winter Picture Exhibitions," *Times* (London), November 5, 1866, 10.
- [89] "Minor Topics of the Month," *Art Journal*, May 1851, 150; "General Exhibition of the Pictures of the Various Schools of Painters, Lichfield House, St. James's Square," *Art Journal*, June 1851, 179.
- [90] For example, see "Exhibition of French and Flemish Pictures," *Times* (London), April 18, 1864, 6

[91] "The Winter Exhibition," *Art Journal*, December 1867, 265.

[92] Williams, "English Pictures and Picture-Dealers," 291.

[93] "Art Notes," *Truth*, May 22, 1907, 1290

Illustrations

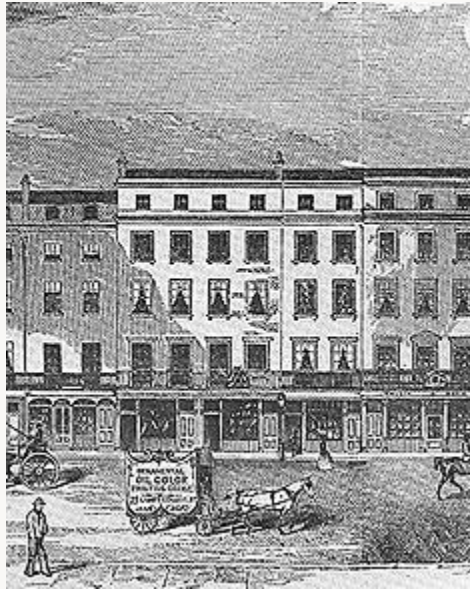


Fig 1, G. C. Leighton after R. Sandeman, *Pall Mall No. 120 and 121*, n.d. Engraving. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig 2, Thomas Shutter Boys, *The Club House, etc. Pall Mall*, 1842. Hand-colored lithograph. From *Original Views of London as it is. London 1842*. Photo courtesy George J. Mitchell Department of Special Collections & Archives, Bowdoin College Library. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig 3, Eyre Crowe, *Sandwiches*, 1881. Oil on canvas. [\[return to text\]](#)

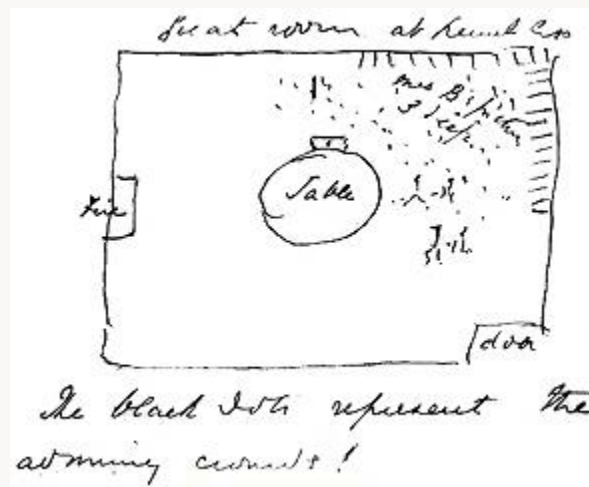


Fig 4, Bessie Rayner Parkes to Barbara Bodichon, 10 April 1861. Girton College Archive, Cambridge.
Courtesy of the Mistress and Fellows, Girton College, Cambridge. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig 5, Lawrence Alma-Tadema, *The Picture Gallery*, 1874. Oil on canvas. Towneley Hall Art Gallery and Museums, Burnley. [\[return to text\]](#)

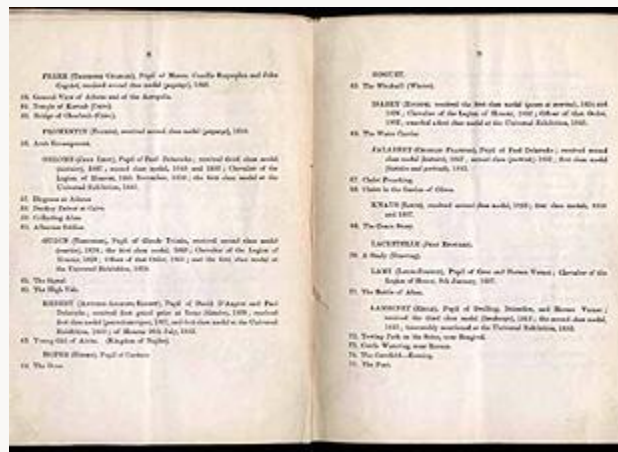


Fig 6, Eighth Annual Exhibition in London of Pictures. The Contributions of Artists of the French and Flemish Schools, The Gallery, 120, Pall Mall, London 1861. [\[return to text\]](#)