

In focus: Angelica Kauffmann



A learning resource featuring works from the National Portrait Gallery Collection, one of a series focusing on particular artists whose practice has changed the way we think about the art of portraiture and who have in turn influenced others.

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Introduction

It can be useful to look at developments in portrait painting through the lens of a single, significant artist, appreciating their techniques and innovations, the way that they have been influenced by the advances of others and how in making their contribution they in turn influenced others.

Each resource in the series focuses on a limited number of paintings and details taken from them. It includes questions about the practice and historical context of the artist, with suggested lines of enquiry and links for further research. The aim is to support teachers in encouraging students to investigate the artist and their practice in-depth. The narrow focus on a selection of portraits by Angelica Kauffmann (1741–1807) enables a concentrated view exploring qualities of her style.

The portraits reproduced cover four important areas of portraiture; the self-portrait, the family portrait, a full-length seated portrait (in ‘Van Dyck’ costume) and a portrait drawing of a fellow artist.

This resource seeks to explore the following key questions for teachers:

- How did a woman such as Kauffmann come to prominence in the eighteenth century?
- How did Kauffmann’s family situation influence her work?
- What made Kauffmann’s lifestyle unique?
- What is Kauffmann’s legacy in the UK?

1: The artist and her context

The Swiss-born prodigy Angelica Kauffmann was an artist of international training and reputation. She assisted her artist-father in his work while travelling through Switzerland, Austria, and Italy, learning her practice through him and by studying the Old Masters. From her mother, Cleophea Lutz, she learnt German, Italian, French and English. Kauffmann portrayed famous 'Grand Tourists', the name given to wealthy Europeans who were on educational travels studying the art, architecture, and history of ancient Rome.



Angelica Kauffmann

Self-portrait

Oil on canvas, c. 1770–1775

NPG 430

Angelica Kauffmann's direct gaze meets ours, and she mesmerises us with her dark-eyed stare. Looking at the painting and considering the fact that she painted it in 1770, a time when women artists were in a minority, makes it hard not to be impressed by her confidence. Kauffmann's self-portrait is a canny evocation of a demure solitary female. The focus of our attention is on the unmistakable gesture of her finger pointing to herself and the *porte-crayon* that she holds at the ready,

while balancing her drawing board on her knee. These objects and her gesture tell us that she is the author of the work, an artist in her own right. She is both an artist and beautiful, dressed in light, soft fabric draped in a classical manner that enhances the atmosphere of the piece.

Time spent with the English community in Rome convinced her, aged twenty-five, to come to London in 1766 where she joined [Sir Joshua Reynolds's](#) (1723–92) social circle. Kauffmann's reputation preceded her as her sitters included the illustrious actor David Garrick (1717–79) and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), painted in 1764 and 1787 respectively. This skill in portraiture coupled with her business acumen, all-round talent and intelligence led to her becoming a founder member of the Royal Academy of Art in 1768. Excluded from the life class for reasons of the social mores of the time (women were not permitted to draw from the naked male model), Kauffmann developed her own brand of history painting which focused on female subjects from classical history and mythology.

Kauffmann's second marriage in 1781 to Antonio Zucchi (1726–95) was a success, (unlike her first marriage to a bigamist). Zucchi, a less distinguished painter than Kauffmann, proved to be the ideal husband, assuming the role of male chaperone, studio manager and mediator. Together they returned to Italy with her father, who died in 1782 while they were in Venice. Back in Rome from 1782, she won commissions to paint history paintings for the Holy Roman Emperor and Catherine the Great, Empress of Russia. Kauffmann was awarded the ultimate accolade when she was invited to contribute her self-portrait to the prestigious Medici collection of self-portraits in the Uffizi, Florence. She became rich and her home, a *palazzo* at Via Sistina 72, near the Spanish Steps in Rome, comprised fifteen rooms. She worked hard, had staff, bought artworks, and numbered the great German poet Goethe among her friends.

Rome and the Classical World permeates Angelica Kauffmann's artistic production. A synchronicity between her own art education and the eighteenth-century obsession with the design and history associated with the newly discovered remains of the ancient Roman cities of Herculaneum and Pompeii connected her art with high fashion. Kauffmann produced work that matched the Grand Tour experience; buyers could indulge their travel souvenirs by commissioning her to portray them together with the things that they had seen whilst on tour.

There are an estimated 800 oil paintings on canvas or copper, thirteen frescos, around 400 drawings, including early pastels, and forty-one etchings attributed to her hand. She was so famous during her lifetime that many of her works were copied, reproduced and distributed. Her celebrity also accounts for the etching reproduced on the cover of this resource by Francesco Bartolozzi (1727–1815), noted printmaker, after a painting by her good friend and supporter, Sir Joshua Reynolds. In 1775, the Danish ambassador wrote about her, 'She is incredibly productive. Such an abundance of her works here in England alone. Everything she paints is grabbed up immediately. One local engraver who does practically nothing else but reproduce her paintings once told me that the whole world is Angelicamad' (*Angelica Kauffmann*, edited by Tobias G. Natter, Hatje Cantz, 2007, p.277). The comment perfectly describes the effect that Kauffmann had on society at the time and documents her success and popularity. Kauffmann managed to exemplify the zeitgeist.

2: Kauffmann, her circle, influence and impact

In Rome, Kauffmann frequented artistic and intellectual circles, and these portraits testify to her friendly connections with the thinking elite and those on the Grand Tour. The German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder, whose portrait she painted in 1791, described her as 'A heavenly creature ... perhaps the most cultivated woman in the whole of Europe.'



Johann Joachim Winckelmann

Angelica Kauffmann
Oil on canvas, 1764
Kunsthaus Zürich



David Garrick

Angelica Kauffmann
Oil on canvas, 1764
Burghley House

Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–68), the archaeologist, art historian and author of *The History of Ancient Art*, 1764, is shown by Kauffmann pausing in his work, holding a quill pen and leaning on a *bas relief* depicting the Three Graces suggesting erudition and literary inclination.

David Garrick (1717–79), the English actor, playwright, theatre manager and producer, looks directly at us, as he grasps the chair back with both hands. This fashionable pose suggests drama, immediacy and confidence. Garrick, as a theatrical entrepreneur, was aware of the advertising benefits of being painted and sculpted by the most famous portrait artists of the time. In Naples, Kauffmann painted the 9th Earl of Exeter (1725–93) with a backdrop of Vesuvius. He was on his first Grand Tour 1763–34, visiting again in 1768–69, and later became one of her principal patrons, buying several of her history paintings when back in Britain.

To count these eminent people as part of her network, confirms Kauffmann's social position and makes it easier for us to understand how in 1766, on arrival in London, she quickly won the admiration of Joshua Reynolds (1723–92) (who referred to her as 'Miss Angel' in his diaries). When he founded the Royal Academy two years later, Kauffmann and Mary Moser (1744–1819) were the only women invited to join the ranks of this esteemed organisation. They are depicted in John Saunders' (1750–1825) copy of Johan Zoffany's (1733–1810) oil painting (Royal Collection) as Royal

Academicians, not with their colleagues in the life and cast room, but hung in portrait format on the wall. The reason for their physical exclusion from their peers was that they were not permitted to be in the space at the same time as the unclothed male model. This was a period when women's talents and achievements were beginning to be recognised in public but when there were still anxieties about how women should be allowed to operate within society. Ironically, bearing in mind his promotion of Kauffmann, Samuel Johnson (1709–1784) himself was prejudiced about how women artists should behave.



Above:

The Academicians of the Royal Academy
John Sanders after Johan Joseph Zoffany
Watercolour and ink, 1772
NPG 1437

Far left:

Detail from **The Academicians of the Royal Academy** with Angelica Kauffmann and Mary Moser as portraits on the wall

Near left:

Detail showing Kauffmann (seated) from **Portraits in the Characters of the Muses in the Temple of Apollo**
Richard Samuel
Oil on canvas, 1778
NPG 4905

On Tuesday 18 April 1775, his companion James Boswell recorded an exchange with Samuel Johnson, 'Our conversation turned on a variety of subjects. He thought portrait-painting an improper employment for a woman. "Publick practice of any art, (he observed,) and staring in men's faces, is very indelicate in a female"'. [A. Rosenthal, *She's got the look! Eighteenth-century female portrait painters and the psychology of a potentially 'dangerous employment'* Chapter 7, p.147, *Portraiture: Facing the subject*, edited by J. Woodall]. At that time it would have been deemed improper for a woman to look at a man for a long period of time in the direct fashion required for drawing or painting a portrait. It would seem that with regard to Kauffmann, Reynolds was prepared to make an exception.

Richard Samuel however, must have looked long and hard at the women he gathered together for his unusual group portrait. *The Characters of the Muses in the Temple of Apollo* celebrates Britain's artistic and intellectual women and the painting was publicly exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1779. Nine contemporary creative women are depicted dressed in fashionable classical-style robes beneath a monumental statue of the god, and presented as members of a modern pantheon of arts and letters. This network of writers, scholars, artists and performers, are unusual as all of them – except for Elizabeth Montagu, literary critic and Blue-stocking hostess – earned a living from their work. The singer Elizabeth Ann Sheridan is in the centre, holding a lyre. The artist Angelica Kauffmann sits at an easel painting a work we cannot see, her palette in hand. Other women include the historian Catharine Macaulay, the playwright and anti-slavery campaigner Hannah More and the classicist Elizabeth Carter. These are the feminists of their time and Kauffmann was right in the centre of the 'Bluestocking' movement.

**Portraits in the
Characters of the
Muses in the
Temple of Apollo**
Richard Samuel
Oil on canvas, 1778
NPG 4905



3: Small-scale portrait; large-scale ideas

Relatively small for a double portrait, measuring 1295 × 946 mm, this work is packed with information and actions, punching above its scale. The main figure of Anna Maria Jenkins in white secures the left-hand side of the painting dominating the composition and attracting our attention. The russet bow with trailing flounce of her garment adds energy and dynamism to her static pose. Patches of white form a cascade of brush marks downwards in a diagonal to the right, specifically the



Anna Maria Jenkins; Thomas Jenkins

Angelica Kauffmann

Oil on canvas, 1790

NPG 5044

lining of the hat, the hose worn by her uncle and the fur on the obedient dog. Art dealer and banker Thomas Jenkins was sometimes considered England's unofficial ambassador in Rome. Pictured here together with his niece, who went to live with him in 1788, with a distant view of the Colosseum behind them, they locate themselves within the Roman Campagna. In 1790, when the portrait was commissioned by her uncle, she was looking to get married and one could consider the painting as an advertisement for her charms. The rural setting, including the solid oak that stands behind the pair suggests stability, alongside the loyal dog who sports a collar with the inscription 'Jenkins'. Her white dress and the flowers she holds signify Anna Maria's beauty and purity. Her uncle takes off his hat seeming to welcome potential suitors.



Details from:
Anna Maria Jenkins; Thomas Jenkins
 Angelica Kauffmann
 Oil on canvas, 1790
 NPG 5044



Showing, from left to right:
 Anna Maria Jenkins with Morning Glory
 flowers; the Colosseum; loyal dog stroked
 by Thomas Jenkins

Kauffmann might have been aware of the painting by Jakob Philip Hackert (1737–1807) also painted in 1790, of her friend Johann Wolfgang von Goethe visiting the Colosseum. This work is now held in the Casa Goethe, Rome, a museum based in his former house. This idea of including the monument as a record of the visit to Rome had become standard practice and can be seen perhaps most famously in the self-portrait work by [Maarten van Heemskerck](#), painted in 1533.

4: Dress and the classical context

Kauffmann's time in Italy informed her artistic repertoire by dint of being surrounded by the remains of Roman glory in the form of ancient ruins and the active volcano near Naples. In her portraits she recycles elements of her environs in order to enhance the Classical references within her work, for example the Colosseum (see previous painting discussed) and, in the portrait of John Simpson (1751–1817), the classical urn he leans on, which also bears her signature. Additionally her portraits sometimes involved fancy-dress whereby her paintings make oblique homage to former portrait artists such as Van Dyck (1599–1641) and Rubens (1577–1640).

**John Simpson**

Angelica Kauffmann
Oil on canvas, c. 1777
NPG 1485

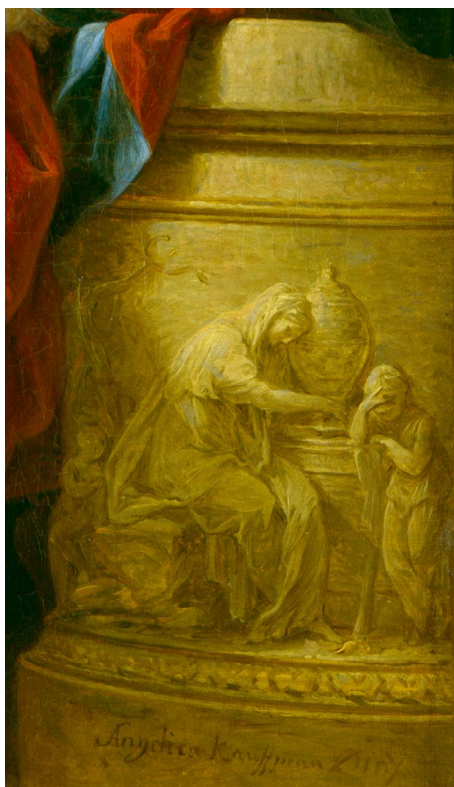
**John Baker Holroyd, 1st Earl of Sheffield**

John Raphael Smith after Angelica Kauffmann
Mezzotint, published 12 March 1777
NPG D40687

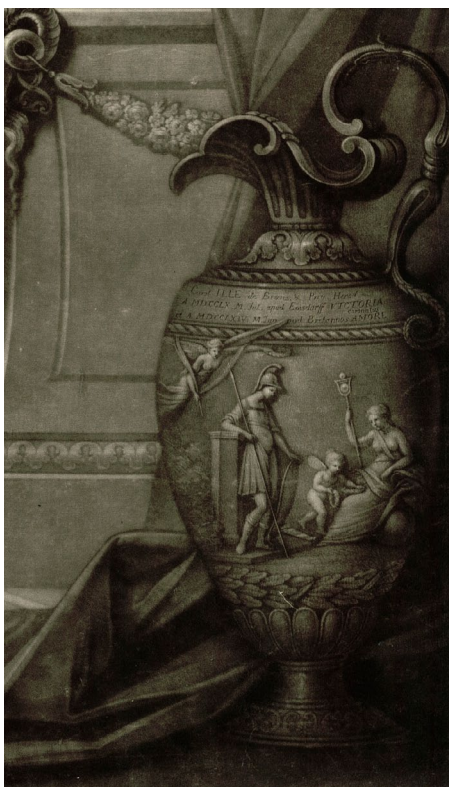
This example shows an eighteenth-century sitter, John Simpson in 'Van Dyck' style costume with slashed doublet, lace collar and extravagant plumed hat. Such seventeenth-century costume had been popular at fancy-dress parties as well as in portraiture since the 1730s. Here the quoted period style contrasts with a sculpted pedestal, showing *bas relief* modelling of a grieving woman that reflects the rise of sometimes sentimental, neo-classical taste in the 1770s.

The standing full length of John Baker Holroyd, 1st Earl of Sheffield, (1735–1821) is a print by the eminent printmaker John Raphael Smith (1652–1743) well known for his *mezzotints*. This method of printing from metal plates exploits the possibilities of creating deep, dark, sooty, black tonal prints. The sword and plumed hat worn at a jaunty angle create an atmosphere of privileged, traditional portraiture. The *impressa* (sculpted decorative shield) at his feet adds a touch of class and history.

The *mezzotint* of Princess Augusta and her son, reproduced on the back page (p.15) has much in common visually with the John Raphael Smith print, precisely because they derive from work by the same artist. Mother and child are portrayed under a canopy of curtains, the drapery echoed in her quasi-Roman style clothing. A decorated urn-like pitcher in the foreground balances the clutch of armour hanging on the second pillar. The dedication reads: *Most humbly dedicated to Her Royal Highness Augusta Princess of Wales, by Her Royal Highness's most humble and most dutiful servant, Angelica*. The print was produced from a painting created in 1767.



Detail from:
John Simpson
 Angelica Kauffmann
 NPG 1485



Detail from:
Princess Augusta Charlotte,
Duchess of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel;
Prince Charles George Augustus of
Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel
 Jonathan Spilsbury after Angelica
 Kauffmann
 NPG D33048

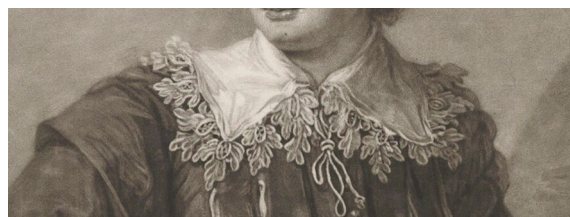


Detail from:
John Baker Holroyd, 1st Earl of Sheffield
 John Raphael Smith after
 Angelica Kauffmann
 NPG D40687

Portraits in 'Van Dyck dress' were fashionable throughout the eighteenth century, the most famous example being Gainsborough's, *The Blue Boy* (Huntington Art Gallery, Los Angeles), exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1770. John Simpson's lace collar is very similar to that shown in the Smith print. Both portraits are stylistically close to that of Thomas Noel Hill, 2nd Lord Berwick, another Grand Tourist who Kauffmann painted in Rome. This is evidence of a certain amount of compositional recycling that was a frequent artistic practice. Sitters who were inspired by seeing a portrait painted by Kauffmann, sometimes desired the same type of personal icon for themselves. Simpson appears as a thoughtful intellectual, evoking Van Dyck's melancholy cavaliers of the Stuart era, 150 years earlier.



Detail from:
John Simpson
 Angelica Kauffmann
 NPG 1485



Detail from:
John Baker Holroyd, 1st Earl of Sheffield
 John Raphael Smith after Angelica Kauffmann
 NPG D40687

5: Prints and drawings

American artist Benjamin West (1738–1820) met Kauffmann while in Rome in 1762, and this drawing may have been done in preparation for her oil portrait of him now in the Uffizi, Florence, however, in that painting he wears simple Quaker clothes. The inscription on the drawing reads 'Mr. West, drawn in Rome in 1763'. Artists portraits of each other often bear witness to a close relationship. It was rumoured that West was in love with Kauffmann, but it is more likely that their relationship was professional as they both cultivated British clients in Italy. West was engaged to Elizabeth Shewell from Philadelphia, America, whom he later married in London in 1765. This drawing, showing him in a 'Van Dyck' lace collar, might have been exchanged as a gift. It would be rare for one artist to pay money to another for such drawings. West settled in London in 1763 and became one of [George III](#)'s favourite painters. He succeeded Joshua Reynolds as President of the Royal Academy, a post he held between 1792–1805 and again between 1806–1820. West was a history painter, best remembered for his large historical group painting, *The Death of General Wolfe* (1770).

Near right:
Benjamin West
Angelica Kauffmann
Black chalk on
greenish grey paper,
1763
NPG 1649



Far right:
**Emma (née Lyon),
Lady Hamilton**
Raphael Morghen
after Angelica
Kauffmann
Line engraving, 1791
NPG D19120



Lady Emma Hamilton, *née* Lyon, (1765–1815), is portrayed holding a mask in this faintly erotic print that pictures her performing one of her so-called 'Attitudes'. Her famous poses were a cross between eighteenth-century performance art and burlesque. The print is based on a Kauffmann painting of her as the comic muse Thalia (1791). Emma was painted by numerous artists of the period particularly George Romney (1734–1802), (see NPG 294) and Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun who was in Naples after fleeing Paris and the French revolution. Many of these works were translated into cheaper print format. Sir William Hamilton commissioned Le Brun in 1789 to paint his wife Emma as a *Bacchante* (a female follower of the god Bacchus), now in the Lady Lever Gallery, Port Sunlight. Kauffmann spent fifteen years working in Britain but despite her success in this country returned to Italy in 1781 with second husband Antonio Zucchi (1726–95). They lived in Naples from 1782–4 before settling in Rome in 1785.

General enquiry questions

- How did Kauffmann's situation as a woman influence her career?
- How does portraiture evidence change in fashion and art?
- How important was it for her to know the 'right people' when she came to London?
- Why might she have made so many self-portraits?
- In what way might it have been useful to speak more than one language?
- Why was travelling in the eighteenth century complicated?
- Why were Kauffmann and Moser shown as paintings on the wall within the group portrait of assembled Royal Academicians?
- What might have an equivalent symbolic resonance to a Roman urn or sculpture in a portrait today?
- Kauffmann also painted decorative ceilings and furniture. Does this make her a lesser artist as her output is not restricted to oil on canvas?

Further research

The Angelica Kauffmann Research Project:
angelica-kauffman.com/en/vita/biographie/

All of Kauffmann's work in British public collections are grouped here:
artuk.org/discover/artworks/search/actor:kauffmann-angelica-17411807

Compare this artist's clothing with that of Kauffmann's. It is purported to be the portrait of Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun in her studio with a student hard at work:
metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/436875

Maarten van Heemskerck, 1498–1574, Self-portrait, with the Colosseum behind, 1553:
fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/pharos/collection_pages/northern_pages/103/TXT_SE-103.html

Brilliant Women: 18th century Bluestockings and Presidents of the Royal Academy:
npg.org.uk/whatson/exhibitions/2008/brilliant-women/the-bluestockings-circle
and:
npg.org.uk/collections/search/group/1078

Compare this young man to Kauffmann's portrait of John Simpson (NPG 1485):
artuk.org/discover/artworks/thomas-noel-hill-17701832-2nd-baron-berwick-of-attingham-131126

Kauffmann's portrait of the 9th Earl of Exeter painted at the same time as David Garrick:
burghley.co.uk/collections/collection/portrait-of-brownlow-9th-earl-of-exeter-1725-1793-angelica-kauffman-r-a-1741-1807/

Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun's portrait of Emma Hamilton as a *Bacchante* with Vesuvius in the background:
liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/picture-of-month/displayPicture.aspx?id=119

John Baker-Holroyd, 1st Earl of Sheffield by Kauffmann in the State A. Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow:
fine-art-images.net/en/showIMG_10905.html

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Front cover pictures, left to right:

[Angelica Kauffmann](#)

Self-portrait

Oil on canvas, c. 1770–1775

NPG 430

[Angelica Kauffmann \(1741–1807\)](#)

Francesco Bartolozzi

Published by John Boydell after Sir Joshua

Reynolds' stipple engraving

Published 3 September 1780 (c. 1777–1778)

NPG D14701

Back cover picture, above:

[Princess Augusta Charlotte,
Duchess of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel;
Prince Charles George Augustus of
Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel](#)

Jonathan Spilsbury after Angelica Kauffmann

Mezzotint, 1767

NPG D33048