



# **The American School: Artists and Status in the Late Colonial and Early National Era (The Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art)**

*Susan Rather*

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This fascinating book is the first comprehensive art-historical study of what it meant to be an American artist in the 18th- and early 19th-century transatlantic world. Susan Rather examines the status of artists from different geographical, professional, and material perspectives, and delves into topics such as portrait painting in Boston and London; the trade of art in Philadelphia and New York; the negotiability and usefulness of colonial American identity in Italy and London; and the shifting representation of artists in and from the former British colonies after the Revolutionary War, when London remained the most important cultural touchstone. The book interweaves nuanced analysis of well-known artists—John Singleton Copley, Benjamin West, and Gilbert Stuart, among others—with accounts of non-elite painters and ephemeral texts and images such as painted signs and advertisements. Throughout, Rather questions the validity of the term “American,” which she sees as provisional—the product of an evolving, multifaceted cultural construction.

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