



# HISTORIES OF BRITISH ART

## 1660-1735 RECONSTRUCTION AND TRANSFORMATION

### ABSTRACT: CAROLINE GOOD

**Caroline Good** (University of York/Tate Britain)

Graham's *Short Account* (1695) and Buckeridge's *Essay Towards an English School* (1706)

The focus of my paper will be two literary works that encompass vital issues of cultural hegemony, artistic identity, and the interpellation of art and politics at the turn of the eighteenth century. The first of these is Richard Graham's *Short Account* (1695), the first attempt at writing a historical account fully aware of the existence of a native school of English painters. The author's name is associated with the earliest club of artists and connoisseurs - the Virtuosi of St Luke - and with the earliest project of the Royal Academy. Graham's example was soon to be followed by Bainbrigg Buckeridge. In 1706, Buckeridge answered Graham's *Short Account* in his *Essay Towards an English School* - the first history of painters active in England. In the *Essay* the author criticizes the views propagated by contemporary English Virtuosi such as Graham, who supported the idea of an art academy shaped along Continental lines. He insists instead that such an academy should be English in its nature, and by this that it should be fully aware of the past and present identity of the English School. Buckeridge implicitly states that to adopt the ideas of the Virtuosi would mean undervaluing English tradition and the contemporary art market.

The issues directly or indirectly raised by these two publications reveal a new and powerful consciousness that bound artistic practice with national identity. This was a time when the political, religious and bureaucratic transformations that established the modern British state were effected, and these years saw the birth of a self-styled British school of art theory and history. My paper aims to generate an interpretation of this literature and the ways in which it was shaped by the society and politics of the period.