



HISTORIES OF BRITISH ART

1660-1735 RECONSTRUCTION AND TRANSFORMATION

ABSTRACT: LYDIA HAMLETT

Lydia Hamlett (University of York/Tate Britain)

Rupture through Realism: Louis Laguerre's murals at Marlborough House

This paper examines Louis Laguerre's murals at Marlborough House and their meaning within a wider cultural context. Commissioned by Sarah Churchill, duchess of Marlborough, circa 1712, the battle scenes represent a rupture in terms of both style and subject in the development of mural painting in Britain 1660-1735. A close examination of the paintings, and how they are experienced within the architecture which was planned with them in mind, reveals the full extent of their goriness and the stark difference in effect compared to depictions of the same subject in both moveable canvases and tapestries, including those owned by the Marlboroughs themselves. The murals, located close to the heart of royal quarters in St James's, will be considered as a counterpoint to those at the Marlboroughs' country house of Blenheim. Do the painted schemes in each residence offer two quite different, but just as effective/ affective, examples of a sublime visual rhetoric? According to documentary evidence the duchess was instrumental in developing the Marlborough House murals, and that invites us to consider how far she may have influenced their iconography and to what extent we can see them as a statement of her personal politics. Finally, in the course of assessing the impact of the murals on so-called 'decorative' history painting, the status of the genre at the time will be reevaluated.