



The Writings of James Barry and the Genre of History Painting, 1775-1809

Liam Lenihan

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Examining the literary career of the eighteenth-century Irish painter James Barry, 1741-1806 through an interdisciplinary methodology, *The Writings of James Barry and the Genre of History Painting, 1775-1809* is the first full-length study of the artist's writings. Liam Lenihan critically assesses the artist's own aesthetic philosophy about painting and printmaking, and reveals the extent to which Barry wrestles with the significant stylistic transformations of the pre-eminent artistic genre of his age: history painting. Lenihan's book delves into the connections between Barry's writings and art, and the cultural and political issues that dominated the public sphere in London during the American and French Revolutions. Barry's writings are read within the context of the political and aesthetic thought of his distinguished friends and contemporaries, such as Edmund Burke, his first patron; Joshua Reynolds, his sometime friend and rival; Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, with whom he was later friends; and his students and adversaries, William Blake and Henry Fuseli. Ultimately, Lenihan's interdisciplinary reading shows the extent to which Barry's faith in the classical tradition in general, and the genre of history painting in particular, is permeated by the hermeneutics of suspicion. This study explores and contextualizes Barry's attempt to rethink and remake the preeminent art form of his era.

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