NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

Useful Knowledge in Minute Particulars:
Rembrandt Peale's
"Notes of the Painting Room"

In 1976 Peter Marzio published The Art Crusade, An Analysis of American Drawing Manuals, 1820-1860 in which he described a phenomenon represented by the approximately 145 drawing manuals to appear in the United States between 1820 and 1860. Marzio argued that these manuals represented a veritable crusade based upon the premise that "anyone who can learn to write can learn to draw." He identified Rembrandt Peale as one of the three most important leaders in the movement, along with John Rubens Smith and John Gadsby Chapman. Peale, he notes in the abstract that precedes his full text, was a:

fine painter and draughtsman, classical in approach and somewhat out of step with the advanced aesthetic movements of the pre-Civil War years. [His] efforts formed a loose but intelligible approach to art promotion. But by 1860 the crusade disintegrated: new drawing theories popularized by the English writer, John Ruskin, placed shading and mass above line in the definition of form; specialization in art, in science, in education, and in mechanical drawing warred against the general approach of the art crusade. . . .

Elsewhere in this issue of the Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, Paul Staiti describes Peale's participation in that crusade; his Graphics enjoyed the largest circulation of any American drawing book before the Civil War. Marzio suggests that the Graphics was informed by a belief inherited from Peale's father, Charles Willson Peale, that "high art was the product of practice and understanding, not innate talent." Rembrandt apparently insisted that "drawing and

painting were to be clear, direct statements that emanated from the artist's mind."

This article will suggest that Peale's "Notes of the Painting Room" are not part of the art crusade. They are, instead, an effort to assist younger artists to make clear, direct statements. Peale sought to "record his experience for the benefit of others . . . (so that they may) profit by any improvements he may possibly have made." Peale compiled his "Notes" for the professional artist, not for the consumers of his Graphics, whom he exhorted to "TRY."

Sometime between June and September of 1852 Rembrandt Peale committed his Introduction to "Notes of the Painting Room" to an unknown Philadelphia printer for publication. The pamphlet, which appeared in eight pages with a brown printed wrapper, consisted of two parts: the "Introduction" itself and a "Prospectus" for publication of the "Notes." The text of the introduction differs from that contained in the two surviving manuscripts of the "Notes," differences which Peale may have thought represented editorial improvements. The fact that the differences exist suggests that Peale was continually tinkering with his manuscript for the "Notes," a fact which will be discussed in more detail later in this article.

The purpose of the pamphlet was to advertise and promote the publication of Peale's "Notes of the Painting Room." Clearly, the heart of the pamphlet was the Prospectus, which occupied only the last two pages. Here Peale proposed that "a few gentlemen should purchase the Manuscript and Copyright of the 'Notes of the Painting Room' for their immediate publication, so that the work may be obtained by every artist at a small cost." Peale continued, "The author has done his duty in preparing them for the public eye; it now remains for the friends and PATRONS of the Art to accomplish the Boon to the Artists by a small sacrifice from their superfluous wealth. . . ."

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By the time Peale had completed his "Notes" and prepared the Introduction he had already established himself as an experienced publicist. He had written about gas lighting, about his grand tour to Italy, and about the arts and artists for The Crayon. He had also prepared an enormously successful series of manuals called Graphics; a Manual of Drawing and Writing, for the use of Schools and Families, which appeared in many editions between 1834 and 1866. When compared with Peale's other efforts as a booster and publicist, the Introduction must be considered a dismal failure. No patrons with "superfluous wealth" are known to have come forward to publish the "Notes," and even Peale's promotional pamphlet seems to have all but disappeared. When preparing for The Historical Society's exhibition, Rembrandt Peale: A Life in the Arts, guest curator Carol Hevner and her associate Carrie Scheflow could locate but three copies in Philadelphia.

Because Peale's Introduction is an integral part of the history of the "Notes" themselves, and because The Historical Society now plans, after more than 130 years, to publish the "Notes" in cooperation with the National Gallery of Art, it seems fitting that we complete the historical record by publishing the text of Peale's promotional pamphlet. That will be followed by a brief consideration of the surviving texts of the "Notes."

The text which appears below has been literally transcribed from a copy of the pamphlet surviving in the Sartain Collection of The Historical Society. Several of the more significant persons or things mentioned by Peale in his text have been identified in the notes.

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1 See Scheflow's bibliography; see also Marzio, Art Crusade, Appendix of American Drawing Books, 71-78.
2 A Life in the Arts, 111.
NOTES AND DOCUMENTS  January

(EXTRACT.)

NOTES OF THE PAINTING ROOM,
The Experience of more than half a Century,
BY
REMBRANDT PEALE.

INTRODUCTION

A great portion of the life of a Painter is consumed in acquiring the elements of his art; in learning how others, his predecessors and contemporaries have accomplished it; and in efforts to make some advances, if not beyond the models which have been his guide, at least to lessen the difficulties in competition with them, and the faithful and beautiful imitation of nature. It is therefore only in the later years of his life, that an Artist feels himself assured in the course he has chosen, without the prospect of living long enough to develop the means he has acquired, and to enjoy the full reward of his arduous studies. Under these circumstances it would seem to be the duty of an Artist who has surmounted some of these difficulties, before he sinks into the incapacity of old age, to record his experience for the benefit of others, who may gain by his loss of time, and profit by any improvements he may possibly have made.

In the "Art and Mystery of Painting," the knowledge which may be obtained by constant practice, the study of Nature and the works of painters, during a long life, must possess a value not easily to be estimated; because very little of it can be found in books, which are generally compilations of doubtful merit, or repetitions of obsolete errors. These treatises are but little indebted to the experience and practice of the great masters in the Art, whose pens have been as barren as their pencils have been prolific of excellence.

It is an extraordinary fact, that the methods employed by the most distinguished painters, whether Italian, Flemish, or even English, have not been described by themselves; and only in a very few particulars have been transmitted to us by their pupils and immediate
successors; and therefore Merimée, Field, and Eastlake, have been induced to prosecute the most learned and laborious investigations, to discover from the writing of amateur friends of the artists and other documents, what were probably their methods—leaving us still involved in a cloud of doubt and uncertainty, and sometimes led astray by erroneous conclusions, deduced from obscure circumstances.

A vast amount of useful knowledge consists in minute particulars, slowly acquired, and gradually brought into habitual operation. Few persons take note of these gradual accretions of knowledge in their own practice, and often forget their operation in forming their judgments. Unless recorded fresh as they occur, they are partly forgotten, and often lost to the community; the constant occupation of the artists seldom permitting even to look back upon the course they had pursued; being more intent on actual labor, and speculations of future hope and ambition.

Amid this dearth of reliable authority, Bouvier's Manual of Painting stands almost alone. It is the result of forty years' practice and observation, communicated with great candour and extreme minuteness, and is considered the best written authority; established more from his chemical and experimental skill, than from any reputation as an artist.

An epitome of this work has been published in New York by an anonymous artist, who has mingled with the matter selected from Bouvier (which he has considerably methodized), many judicious observations, which he acknowledges to be derived from other authors, and offers rather as a result of his reading than of his "limited


9 (Laughton Osborn (1809-1878)), Handbook of Young Artists and Amateurs in Oil Painting (New York, 1845). The author's copy, used for this article, is dated 1846.
practice." It is a valuable work to the young artist; but it repeats the tedious and complicated processes by which Bouvier instructs the student to elaborate a picture, instead of furnishing him with a simple palette, to be enlarged and refined as his eye should become critical in the estimate of tints, to imitate the infinitely varied effects of Nature.

Taylor's translation of the work on oil painting by Merimée, a French painter and chemist, published under the patronage of the Royal Academy of London, possesses considerable merit; but the author relies almost entirely on the authority of Bouvier, and his chief purpose appears to be to ascertain the vehicles\textsuperscript{10} employed by the old masters, an important subject that Bouvier has disregarded. The technical inaccuracy, however of the English translator is evident from such passages as this: instead of \textit{cork black}, he says "Liege black is prepared by \textit{calcining}\textsuperscript{11} it in a crucible, and then washing it to carry off the soluble \textit{salts}, which it contains," without seeming to know the word \textit{liege} (although also the name of a city) is the French word for \textit{cork}, and that it must not be calcined but \textit{carbonized}\textsuperscript{12} in a close vessel. Again, he says of \textit{coffee} black that it is prepared from the \textit{husks} of coffee, when he should have said coffee grounds, or grains of roasted coffee. Such mistakes are not only delusive to the student, but calculated to impair the authority of the work, however correct in many respects: besides, the author in several instances, gives the processes for making colours, which from the fugitive nature, should never be employed—such as carmine, minimum, massicot,\textsuperscript{13} \&c.; and in speak-

\textsuperscript{10} Osborn defines \textit{vehicle} as "Any liquid, by combination with which colours are conveyed to the subjectile, to be there fixed by its partial evaporation." \textit{Handbook}, 397.

\textsuperscript{11} Calcining: driving off volatile liquids from a substance by heating to a high temperature, frequently in an open or vented vessel.

\textsuperscript{12} Carbonizing: reducing a substance to carbon, usually in a closed vessel.

\textsuperscript{13} These substances as well as other mentioned by Peale in his full text of the "Notes" will be further studied by the Scientific Office of the Conservation Department of the National Gallery of Art under the direction of Gary Carriveau for the proposed cooperative edition of the "Notes" to be edited by Carol Hevner and Dr. Carriveau. Carmine, for example, is the aluminum salt of carminic acid, made from the cochineal, a bright red insect. There are modern inorganic equivalents, but both the art historian and conservator should know more about the earlier forms of such substances as used by Peale and his contemporaries.
ing of Naples yellow leaves it doubtful whether it be safe to use it as a permanent colour, founded upon the hypothetical idea that it contains arsenic, which is not the case, and citing authorities for and against it, instead of testing it by experiment.

The Chromatography of Field, from his knowledge of the chemical composition of pigments, contains much valuable information concerning their qualities; but his chief pride is an exhibition of the "poetic use of colours," and their "powers of expression"—which is more amusing to the amateur than useful to the artist. In the preface to his work, however, he judiciously says—"among the means essential to proficiency in painting, none is of more importance than a just knowledge of colours and pigments—their qualities, powers, and effects; and there is none to which the press has hitherto afforded fewer helps. There have appeared, it is true, at different times, several works professing this object, and most of our encyclopedias and books of painting, treat cursorily of this branch of Art, but not only are these, for the most part, transcripts of the same obsolete originals, unsuited to the present state of the Art, but they are inadequate, irrelevant, and often erroneous or untrue." He adds—"There is no want, in the present day, of the furniture of the palette; since pigments, and fine ones too, so abound that it requires nearly as much experience for a judicious selection of them, as was formerly required for their acqui-

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sition or production." "And since the necessity for, and the practice of, the artist's preparing his own materials have ceased, it is more essential that he should be enabled by precept to select, appreciate, and understand the pigments and vehicles he employs."

Eastlake's "Materials for a History of Oil Painting," is a learned investigation "to trace the recorded practice of oil painting from its invention; and by a comparison of authentic traditions with existing works, to point out some of the causes of that durability for which the earlier examples of Art are remarkable." The work contains a vast amount of interesting matter, concerning "the processes, which
were adopted at different times in certain schools, *without entering into the discussion of their comparative merits*—consequently the reader is left pretty much to form his own conclusions from this conflicting mass of "documentary evidence."

The Art of Painting is sufficiently difficult in all the circumstances of invention, composition, design, drawing, anatomy, perspective, light and shade, character and expression,—without suffering by embarrassment and doubt in regard to the materials and mechanisms of Art, which, however, are as important to the most talented artist, as good materials and tools, and modes of using them, are for the constructions of watches or steam engines. Nor will the pride or vanity of the artist most gifted in these preeminent qualities, which confer on him the title of genius, have reason to despise or neglect any assistance which may be offered in the choice of his instruments of the materials he would employ. He must learn from the manufacturer their composition; from the chemist their mutual action; and the facilities of their application, and their durability, from the records of an experimental artist, who may have consumed in this investigation time that otherwise might have been devoted to higher attainments; for much of the time employed in experiments is necessarily abstracted from that which might be engaged in the productive practice of an Art which demands, if possible, the whole mind. How important, then, that the genius of an artist, should not be distracted by the necessity of studying the nature of his materials, or be embarrassed with doubts of their efficacy or durability, or best modes of combination and application—merely from the want of authentic documents.

Had it been the practice of the painters of former ages freely to communicate what they had been taught, or had discovered by their own researches, we should not now have to lament our ignorance of what constituted *Van Eyck's* or the *Venetian* process; nor of the many advantages which, it is evident from an inspection of their works, were possessed by several painters of Holland and Italy. It is seldom that a student could purchase or procure the means of learning what was then called "the Art and Mystery of Painting," for much of it, in all ages, was kept as a mystery; and in so doing those artists were not greatly to be blamed, considering the difficulties they had
to surmount, the task of writing, and the little compensation they generally received; for it was seldom, till after death, that their works have risen into such reputation as to command great prices: and then solely for the benefit of picture dealers—as a class of men who are disposed to undervalue all living merit.

Whilst we have to lament that no painters of celebrity, have left any records of their methods, it is some satisfaction that a little insight into their mysteries is afforded by some remarks of their friends. APELLES is celebrated for the perfection of his colouring, which Pliny ascribes chiefly to his use of a glazing material he calls Atramentum: among the writings of DAVINCI none have been preserved that are of use to the colourist: a few maxims by RUBENS, in a short paragraph, are repeated, without any certain information of his vehicles or process of colouring: VANDYKE has written nothing; but from his friend de Mayerne, a physician, we learn of his process of purifying linseed oil: and Eastlake, in his history of oil painting, quotes some notes by Reynolds recently discovered, which obscurely indicate some of his experiments; evidently written for his own use, and to be kept secret from others; and his biographer, Northcote, although his favorite pupil, professes to know but little of the ultimate results of his experiments.

It is a circumstance worthy of notice, that the method and practice of VANDYKE are scantily recorded by de Mayerne, who appears to have enjoyed some privilege of the artist’s painting room: VANDYKE certainly did not freely communicate his knowledge for the physician to record; or we should not now be so much in doubt respecting the materials, vehicles and methods of Reynolds, as Vandyke was the confidential pupil and companion of the great colourist.

The experience of a painter is not restricted to his most successful operations, which are the objects of his inquiry, and the goal

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at which he would arrive. In a course of moral conduct, in the study of excellence, it is incumbent on us “to know the wrong, and yet

In a letter to Rachel Parrish Sellers, wife of his nephew in Cincinnati, written on September 26, 1852, Peale asked that Rachel correct the copies of the Introduction he had sent her to read Reynolds instead of Rubens. This letter is the basis for the 1852 dating of the pamphlet, established by Carrie Scheflow, who kindly shared her information with the author. Peale-Sellers Papers, American Philosophical Society.
the right pursue," so to the artist his failures are of salutary use—to
know their causes, and to avoid the recurrence of them.

The experience which I claim, besides offering many facilities in
the various processes of painting, includes several discoveries both in
regard to new materials and improved modes in employing the old,
by which much of the embarrassment incident to the practice of the
art is obviated: and further, the notes of this experience are not the
obscure recollections of past conception or doubtful methods, but the
fresh and bona fide memoranda of the painting room, founded on
the observation of a long life. These results of my practice were not
fully recorded, when a second marriage\(^17\) gave me a companion and
pupil, whose love of painting and zeal for improvement constantly
drew from the store-house of my memory for instant use, much matter
which might else have been forever lost.

I mention this circumstance for the purpose of showing that no
other occasion could occur, so well calculated to elicit appropriate
information; recall the results of past experience; and prescribe the
requisite exact details necessary for immediate use. It is scarcely
possible for an artist, after years of practice, even the most successful,
to recollect all the means by which he learned \(\text{gradually}\) to accomplish
the best results of his pencil unless he has, constantly at his side, a
pupil in whose progress he is much interested, and whose difficulties,
similar to those he had himself experienced, should thus serve to
revive his memory; explaining by practice the doctrines in which they
are both equally interested.

In this manner a great body of materials, to my own surprise, has
accumulated, calculated to impress me with the conviction that the
publication of them would be regarded with complacency, and that
the cause of art would be promoted by some of the means which are
suggested, to lessen the difficulties which are felt, not only by every
student, but every professor of art.

Instead of endeavouring to reduce these NOTES into a regular
scheme or system of painting, it was thought best to let them remain
nearly in the manner they were produced, as distinct axioms; because
the occupation of an artist is not in carrying on a

\(^17\) Peale's second wife was Harriet Cany, whom he married in 1840.
system, but in performing some particular act, according to ever-varying circumstances—and the information he wants is to know how best to do the thing he is about, which he can seek, by an index under its distinctive head. It is to be presumed that he possesses a general knowledge of painting, such as may be found in the best treatises on painting; if he is not himself an able Professor. These NOTES are to assist his judgment, and especially to facilitate his operations by the promulgation of several original discoveries of great importance, which must be known to be duly appreciated. To these are added some quotations from other authors, preferring to give their sentiments in their own words, as corroborative evidences, rather than otherwise to appropriate them, except for the credit of judgment in their selection; thus evincing a due veneration and regard for truth wherever it may be discovered.

R.P.

(PROTEM.)

PROSPECTUS.

"NOTES OF THE PAINTING ROOM"

Whereas Rembrandt Peale, the oldest artist in the United States, having for more than half a century been engaged in the study of his art, in Europe and America; and having from an early period sought, by experiments and variations of practice, to ascertain the best modes by which facility of execution and durability of colour could be attained; and having from time to time embodied the results of this course of study, discoveries and improvements, into a manuscript volume—"Notes of the Painting Room"—and being now desirous of communicating to his fellow artists the results of his long experience, by the publication of this work,—

It is therefore proposed that a few gentlemen should purchase the Manuscript and Copyright of the "Notes of the Painting Room," for their immediate publication, so that the work may be
obtained by every artist at a small cost. The author has done his duty in preparing them for the public eye; it now remains for the friends and PATRONS of the Art to accomplish this Boon to the Artists by a small sacrifice from their superfluous wealth—a contribution equally honorable to themselves and beneficial to the cause of the Fine Arts.

TESTIMONIALS.

It will be satisfactory to many persons to know the opinion pronounced on this work by artists of undisputed authority to judge of its merits.

A. B. DURAND,
President of the National Academy of Design.

At the request of Mr. Peale I have examined his “Notes of the Painting Room”—the experience of a long life—and find them to embody a greater amount of reliable matter than can be found in any publication; besides several discoveries and inventions of great value in the practical details of painting: I therefore consider their publication a most desirable object.

A. B. DURAND

THOMAS SULLY,
Portrait and Historical Painter.

I have great pleasure in giving my unequivocal approbation of the

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18 Asher Brown Durand (1796-1886), American engraver, landscape and portrait painter. Durand was quite a successful engraver until about 1835 when he chose to devote himself to painting and soon became identified with the Hudson River School. He served as President of the National Academy of Design from 1845 to 1861.

19 Thomas Sully (1783-1872), American portrait painter and friendly rival of Rembrandt Peale for Philadelphia portrait commissions. Born in England, trained in South Carolina, Sully moved to Philadelphia in 1808, where he enjoyed an enormously successful career. Sully, too, prepared some “notes” for younger artists, but his are less complete than Peale’s. After 1840, Sully sometimes painted his sitters from daguerreotypes.
matter and manner of "Peale's Notes of the Painting Room," which has been confided to my examination. His long experience and successful education for the perfect understanding of what is essential in the practice of our Art, are all that could be desired: and the improvements and discoveries which his work contains, to insure facility of execution and durability of colour, must render it of peculiar interest to every artist.

THOMAS SULLY

Address—R. Peale, 502 Vine Street, Philadelphia.
J. H. Williams, 353 Broadway, New York. 20

Neither Durand's nor Sully's testimonials were able to secure the publication of Peale's "Notes" during his lifetime. On November 26, 1860, shortly after Peale's death, Daniel Huntington wrote from New York to Peale's son-in-law and executor, Dr. John Griscom, that there was "some prospect of publication." 21 It is not known which of the two complete surviving texts of the "Notes" Huntington may have examined. One copy had been sent to Asher B. Durand, then president of the National Academy of Design (NAD) in New York; that copy is still in the Academy's possession. The other text, now owned by The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, remained in Peale's estate to be auctioned as part of the sale conducted by M. Thomas & Sons in Philadelphia on November 18, 1862. 22 It was bid in by the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts for fifteen or sixteen dollars. Subsequently it came into the personal possession of John Sartain whose papers were donated to the Society by his daughter

21 Huntington to Griscom, ALS, New York, 26 November 1860. Sartain Papers, HSP.
22 M. Thomas & Sons, Catalogue of Valuable Original Portraits of the Late Rembrandt Peale (Philadelphia, 1862). The HSP copy of the catalogue list the "Notes," lot 99 1/2, as bid in at $15; the APS copy of the catalogue lists the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts as the purchaser for $16. Personal communication from Carrie Scheflow to the author, August, 1983.
Emily.\textsuperscript{23} It is the Society’s Peale-Sartain draft that Carol Hevner intends to use as her base text for the cooperative publication of the “Notes.”

The draft belonging to the National Academy of Design is contained in two calf-bound volumes measuring approximately 32.8 x 21.4 cm. Neither of the NAD volumes contains the complete text, and, although both are earlier than the Society’s Peale-Sartain draft, neither volume can be considered a first draft. The text is too polished, the hands are too neat. Both NAD volumes are labeled “Notes of the Painting Room” on their front covers, although, clearly, neither volume was originally intended for the purpose that it served. One was a ruled day book, or account book, used by members of Harriet Cany’s family before her marriage to Rembrandt Peale in 1840; the other was a stock blank book such as might be found in any metropolitan stationery shop. Although the paper in neither volume is watermarked, both volumes would appear to date from the 1830s, although Peale did not use them until the following decade.

The Historical Society’s draft of the “Notes” is contained in an inexpensive stock copy book in brown paper covers made up of highly sized paper of a type manufactured in Philadelphia after 1845. The volume measures roughly 28 x 21.5 cm. There are several leaves of standard commercial stationery on which the index is written stitched in at the end.

The precise dating of these three volumes must be somewhat hypothetical. One of the two NAD volumes is written in Rembrandt’s open, unaffected hand. Some of the early pages of this volume have been torn out, but the rest follows the base Peale-Sartain text rather closely, beginning at page 30 of the latter. It is probably the earliest of the three drafts, although it is already a fairly well-developed text. The second NAD volume is in a rather more formal hand that has not yet been positively identified. This second volume reflects some of the small editing changes made between the first text and the

\textsuperscript{23} Emily Sartain (1841-1927), Philadelphia engraver, painter, and art educator. Sartain became principal of the Philadelphia School of Design for Women, now Moore College of Art, in 1886, a position she held until 1920, at which time she was succeeded by her niece, Harriet Sartain. HSP’s Sartain collection is formed from gifts from both Emily and Harriet, although some Sartain family material remains at Moore College of Art.
Peale-Sartain base text. Both were probably completed by 1848, but certainly no earlier than 1845, the year of publication of Laughton Osborn’s *Handbook of Young Artists*, a text which Peale cites in all versions of his “Notes.” The Society’s base text was, if we are to believe Peale himself, completed by 1852, the year that he published his *Introduction*. For the purposes of this discussion the NAD texts have been dated as 1848 and the Society’s base text as 1852.

This tentative dating of the “Notes” also suggests one of the reasons why they were created. In 1845, the New York firm of Wiley & Putnam published an anonymous *Handbook of Young Artists and Amateurs in Oil Painting*, being chiefly a condensed compilation of the celebrated manual of Bouvier. This was the first of six stereotyped printings of the volume to appear between 1845 and 1865. The only significant changes appear to be in the resetting of the title pages. The National Union Catalogue identifies the author as Laughton Osborn, a New York recluse, quondam playwright, poet, and painter.

In his Preface Osborn identifies his audience, a rather different one from that which Peale had in mind: the amateurs identified in the title, and the connoisseurs, who probably never will paint, but for whom Osborn thinks the knowledge of the processes is essential. He wishes to instruct not the artist, “but those that would be such.” He pulls his forelock in the direction of Everyman “with broadcloth on his back,” and then proceeds to offer a highly structured extrapolation of Bouvier in seven parts. The first describes “The Materials and Implements of Painting” in a manner that any young amateur might find particularly daunting. Chapter One consists entirely of a “List of the colours employed by artists.” Not until the end of the section does Osborn deal with canvases and boards. And so the *Handbook* continues for 314 pages, filled with what lawyers might call black-letter rules which deal more with the materials and products of oil painting than they do with the process of placing light and form on canvas. 24

Osborn’s text is almost a perfect foil for Peale’s. Where Osborn’s is structured in the tradition of Reynolds and Bouvier, Peale’s is rambling and discursive: Osborn has written seventy-seven chapters;
Peale prepared 380 much shorter sections. Peale’s text is experiential, “a vast amount of useful knowledge consists in minute particulars, slowly acquired and gradually brought into habitual operation.” Peale notes that “Few persons take note of these gradual accretions of knowledge in themselves and often forget their influence in forming their own judgments.”

The way in which these brief sections—some as short as fifty words—are strung together would baffle a modern editor. Peale admits that “Instead of endeavoring to reduce these notes into a regular scheme or system of painting, I have thought it best to give them as they were produced in distinct and obvious axioms.” Some are pithy, some repetitive, some auto-laureate, but all are well grounded on Peale’s own experiences.

He notes, for example, that *impasto*, or applying paint thickly to the canvas, increases the chances of the paints being improperly mixed, resulting in changing color or tone. He continues, probably remembering his experiences as a varnisher in his father’s painting room, “Whatever may be the advantage to a picture which has been painted with full impasto, it should not be forgotten that this commendation is usually given by authors who are picture cleaners or dealers.”

Peale can be charming: “Nothing is more embarrassing to the young artist than the painting of wrinkles. Distinctly to mark them should be deferred until the general forms and effects are nearly finished.” Or, perhaps unintentionally, Peale is funny: “The English atmosphere is the most favorable to the portrait painter because the sky is seldom blue.”

Peale is at his best when riding his own hobby-horse while defending from attackers to the rear. The longest section of the “Notes” deals with copying the work of other artists as well as one’s own. “No one can be sure to make a good original that cannot copy a good picture; nor can he methodize his practice, if he cannot repeat or copy his own work.” He continued with an animus that can only be a response

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25 Rembrandt Peale, Ms. draft (Peale-Sartain copy), “Notes of the Painting Room,” p. 2. Sartain Collection, HSP.
26 “Notes,” 9.
27 “Notes,” 25.
28 “Notes,” 45, 49.
to those who criticized him for his repetitive Washington copies. He challenged those who claimed that the copies could be painted with the eyes closed to judge the copies with their eyes closed. He concludes, "It is an Antiquarian weakness to value nothing but what is original." 29

If Peale had limited his remarks to wrinkles, copies, and the quality of English light the "Notes" would probably have deserved to remain unpublished; they would simply have been the ramblings of an artist past his time. But, unlike Osborn's and many of the drawing manuals produced before the Civil War, Peale's "Notes" are more concerned with the process and techniques of painting than they are with the materials and models to be used by the artist. In the "Preliminary Remarks" of the The Society's base text, Peale remarks, "The greater portion of the life of an Artist is . . . consumed . . . in efforts to make some advances, if not beyond the models which have been his guide, at least to lessen the difficulties in his own execution." Peale believes it to be "the duty of an artist, before he sinks into the incapacity of old age, to record his experience, & explain any advantage he may have acquired. . . . " 30

The advantages which Peale records run the gamut from noting that in summer the artist should have more paint on his palette than in winter because the paint will dry before it is applied to his observation that colors darken as they dry because of the separation of the tint from the oil. Peale recommends that flesh tints, in particular, should be mixed and applied somewhat lighter than the shade desired. 31 Like Bouvier and Osborn, Peale devotes considerable attention to the materials an artist must use, but his approach is much more practical for the practicing artist. Osborn, for example, spends an entire chapter of five pages on asphaltum, or tar, stating where it comes from, how it is used, and offering two different techniques for preparing it for use as a pigment. 32 Peale, by contrast, assumes that the young artist knows that it is a pigment and then cautions his readers that "It dries so slowly that it is necessary to expose the Picture for a few hours in the sunshine. When this cannot be done, a little

29 "Notes," 71-76.
30 "Notes," 1.
31 "Notes," 43, 67.
Japan or Manganesed oil may be added.” Peale’s entire entry for asphaltum is eighty-three words long, but of considerably more use than Osborn’s essay.33

It is because Peale’s “Notes of the Painting Room” are filled with so many “minute particulars” that they are of such value to both the art historian and the conservator. The Historical Society trusts that its publication, after more than 130 years, will add considerably to their stock of useful knowledge.

Historical Society of Pennsylvania

Peter J. Parker

33 “Notes,” 93.