
Materials for a History of Oil Painting

Eastlake Charles Lock

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C. L. Bastiat

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MATERIALS

*1847
— Bishop of Manchester*

FOR A

HISTORY OF OIL PAINTING.

BY

CHARLES LOCK EASTLAKE,

R.A. F.R.S. F.S.A.

SECRETARY TO THE ROYAL COMMISSION FOR PROMOTING THE FINE ARTS IN
CONNECTION WITH THE REBUILDING OF THE HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT,
ETC., ETC.

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P R E F A C E.

THE following work was undertaken with a view to promote the objects of the Commissioners on the Fine Arts. It professes 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 the art are remarkable. It was considered that such an inquiry, if desirable on general grounds, must be especially so at a time when the best efforts of our artists are required for the permanent decoration of a national edifice.

The want of a sufficiently extensive investigation of original authorities relating to the early practice of oil painting has led to various contradictory theories ; and the uncertainty which has been the result has too often induced an impression that the excellence of art, in former ages, depended on some technical advantages which have been lost. It

is the object of the present work to supply, as far as possible, the facts and authorities which have hitherto been wanting, so as to enable the reader to form a tolerably accurate notion respecting the origin and purpose of the methods described, and to estimate the influence of the early characteristics of the art even on its consummate practice. Whatever may be the value of the methods in question considered in themselves, a knowledge of them cannot fail to be, at least indirectly, useful. It is hoped that by substituting an approach to historical evidence for the vagueness of speculation, and by rendering it possible for modern professors to place themselves in the situation of their great predecessors in regard to merely technical circumstances, one source of interruption, if not of discouragement, in the study of the more essential qualities of art, will be removed. At the same time, the author trusts that details relating to the careful processes which were familiar in the best ages of painting will not lead the inexperienced to mistake the means for the end; but only teach them not to disdain even the mechanical operations which have contributed to confer durability on the productions of the greatest masters.

The author has, for the most part, confined himself to the description and explanation of the