

Society for the Encouragement of the

Arts

Date

1791

Primary Maker

James Barry

Medium

Engraving on paper

Dimensions

43 x 52.7 cm

Description

This intaglio print (engraving) shows a group of men and woman in late 18th century dress from various social classes. There are aristocrats, merchants, scholars and servants standing around in front of various architectural features and conversing in groups. The background comprises of Italianate baroque architecture, a square column in the centre, with an arch and engaged corinthian columns to the left, a flight of wide steps leading to the portico of what appears to be a church on the right, flanked by a balustrade with a crisscross pattern. Beyond the balustrade is a ship's mast and in the far background is the cupola of a church. On the steps are two couples, one couple on the far right are leaning on the balustrade and looking towards the cupola in the distance, while the second couple, who are accompanied by a small dog, marvel at the façade of the church. Directly in front of the portico of the church are two men, one looking through a telescope out towards the ship's mast. There is a painting by James Barry entitled, 'St Michael or the Fall of Lucifer' hanging on the central column. This is a print of the painting by Barry entitled 'The Distribution of Premiums by the Society of Arts' (1777-1784, oil on canvas, 360 x 462 cm). The Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce was founded in 1754. The subject matter of both the painting and this print involves 18th century England. Barry wished to 'show how its culture might be improved, particularly in light of the potential role that the Society could play in social advancement. [This work] addresses such important concerns as Britain's embrace of the cult of commerce, the areas of its superiority over classical culture, contemporary anxieties over pitfalls of luxury, arguments over the evolving social roles of women, the impact of anti-slavery movement, and the role of art in a commercial society.' Source: William L Pressly, 'Barry's Murals at the Royal Society of Arts', James Barry 1741-1806 'The Great Historical Painter', Crawford Art Gallery and Gandon Editions, 2005, p. 48.