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Queen Victoria and Thomas Sully

Carrie Rebora Barratt

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In 1837, Thomas Sully, who had created a vogue for full-length portraiture among the elite of Philadelphia, was offered a commission to paint the young Queen Victoria. He had already painted Andrew Jackson and Lafayette, but it was his refined and sensual portraits of women that had won him the greatest renown. Queen Victoria and Thomas Sully tells the story of his complex and challenging sojourn abroad, in which he spent five months waiting for a sitting with Her Majesty. He kept expectations in check as he navigated his way through the corridors of British protocol and power, biding time by becoming an active participant in London's lively art scene. By drawing upon Victoria's and Sully's journals, as well as contemporary letters, Carrie Barratt deftly arrives at exactly how Sully achieved his stunning portrait of Victoria, which took great liberties with conventions of state portraiture and was acclaimed as a masterpiece.

This volume, which accompanies an exhibition originating at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and traveling to The Wallace Collection in London, is beautifully illustrated and illuminates not only the creation of this painting but the competitive process of making portraits in order to advance political power. Barratt includes an edited version of Sully's engrossing journal, the diary of a highly articulate and entrepreneurial American in London with his twenty-one-year-old daughter during the exciting coronation year. Both the exhibition and the book have been undertaken at this time to commemorate the anniversary of Queen Victoria's death in January 1901--an even sure to garner considerable attention on both sides of the Atlantic.

Queen Victoria and Thomas Sully provides entrance to the creative process of an artist who thought of the world in terms of painting and recorded observations of the "essentials of the pictures" of Correggio, Titian, Reynolds, Rembrandt, and Rubens. His chronicle of early Victorian England is replete with colorful adventures: his visits to aristocratic soirees; his identification of the man who took the Elgin marbles from the Parthenon; his sightings of unemployed weavers singing for their supper and washerwomen beating clothes by the edge of the river.

A work of scholarship valuable to art historians and students of Victoriana, this book also has the novelistic charm inherent in telling the true story of someone who really has "been to London to visit the Queen."

Exhibition Schedule:

http://www.metmuseum.org The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

September 19-December 31, 2000

http://www.the-wallace-collection.org.uk The Wallace Collection, London

January 22-April 29, 2001

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