



THE SOCIETY OF DILETTANTI

DATE: June 24, 2008
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Exploring Antiquity in the Enlightenment New Book Examines the Society of Dilettanti

LOS ANGELES—With elegance and wit, Bruce Redford re-creates the vibrant culture of connoisseurship in Enlightenment England by investigating the multifaceted activities and achievements of the Society of Dilettanti. In *Dilettanti: The Antic and the Antique in Eighteenth-Century England* (J. Paul Getty Museum, \$49.95, hardcover) he dissects the British connoisseurs whose expeditions, collections, and publications laid the groundwork for the Neoclassical revival and for the scholarly study of Graeco-Roman antiquity.

The society's support of expeditions to the Levant yielded pioneering architectural and archaeological folios, from *The Antiquities of Athens* (1762) to *Specimens of Ancient Sculpture* (1809). These monumental volumes aspired to empirical exactitude in text and image alike. As Redford shows, they combine the didactic (detailed investigations into technique, condition, restoration, and provenance) with the connoisseurial (plates that bring the illustration of ancient sculpture to new artistic heights). By pursuing both elements, the Society's publications provided illustrations that were beautiful and also portrayed ancient sites and monuments more scientifically than earlier publications had done.

Redford also explores the more social aspects of the Dilettanti—in sometimes titillating detail—including the initiation ceremonies and requirements for membership. One stipulation was that each member commission his portrait for the society. Portraits were painted by George Knapton, Sir Joshua Reynolds, and Sir Thomas Lawrence, including a striking group of mock-classical and mock-religious portraits, which Redford deconstructs deliciously. A chapter on James Gillray's scathing caricatures of members of the Society of Dilettanti is also included.

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Dilettanti: The Antic and the Antique in Eighteenth-Century England inspired the accompanying exhibition *Grecian Taste and Roman Spirit: The Society of Dilettanti*, which will be on view at the J. Paul Getty Museum at the Getty Villa from August 7 through October 27, 2008.

About the Author—**Bruce Redford** is University Professor and Professor of Art History and of English at Boston University.

Publication Information:

Dilettanti

The Antic and the Antique in Eighteenth-Century England

J. Paul Getty Museum/Getty Research Institute

232 pages, 8 1/4 x 10 1/4 inches, hardcover

105 color and 45 b/w illustrations

ISBN 978-0-89236-924-9, \$49.95

Publication Date: August 7, 2008

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Kindly send two tearsheets of your review when published to Melissa Crowley, Getty Publications, 1200 Getty Center Drive, Suite 500, Los Angeles, CA 90049-1682.

Available at bookstores or through Getty Publications (800-223-3431). Distributed to the trade in the U.S. by Oxford University Press, in the U.K. and Europe by Orca Book Services, and in Canada by the Jaguar Book Group.