



Reading Guide:

A Revolution in Color: The World of John Singleton Copley (2016)

by Jane Kamensky

1. Jane Kamensky included reproductions of many John Singleton Copley works of art in her book, and perhaps you have seen other examples (in Bayou Bend's collection, for example). What is your favorite Copley artwork? What about it do you like?
2. *A Revolution in Color* weaves together the story of John Singleton Copley's biography and the history of the American Revolution as seen from Boston. Did this approach work for you? Why or why not?
3. Perhaps more than any other book we have read, this book centers around a single choice—Copley's decision to relocate to London (and to a lesser extent, the decision not to return). With historical hindsight, do you think Copley made the right decision for himself and his art?
4. This narrative sees the American Revolution through the lens of Copley and his family—all Tories—a viewpoint from which the story of the revolution is less often told. Did your perspective on the revolution change after hearing their story?
5. What is the most important information or perspective you will take away from this book? Do you think it matches the author's intentions?
6. Would you recommend this book to others? Who do you think the ideal reader for this book would be?
7. What other resources on the subject would you recommend to someone who wanted more on the subject?

Author Biography

Jane Kamensky is professor of history at Harvard University. She is a historian of the Atlantic world and the United States with particular interests in the histories of family, culture, and everyday life. Born in Manhattan, Kamensky received her BA (1985) and PhD (1993) in history from Yale University. Before coming to Harvard, she taught for two decades at Brandeis University. She has also served as Mary Ann Lippitt Professor of History at Brown University. Kamensky's previous books include *The Exchange Artist: A Tale of High-Flying Speculation and America's First Banking Collapse* (2008), *Governing the Tongue: The Politics of Speech in Early New England* (1997); and the novel *Blindspot* (2008), jointly written with Jill Lepore. Her next book, *Candida Royalle and the Sexual Revolution: A History from Below*, will be published by W. W. Norton.

If you liked *A Revolution in Color*, you may find these other books of interest

(descriptions courtesy of Amazon.com):

The Painter's Chair: George Washington and the Making of American Art (2009) by Hugh Howard

An eloquent new look at the beginnings of the American republic through the portraits of its first icon, George Washington, and the painters who defined him. When George Washington was born, the New World had virtually no artists. Over the course of his life and career, a cultural transformation would occur. Virtually everyone regarded Washington as America's indispensable man, and the early painters and sculptors were no exception. Hugh Howard brings to life the founding fathers of American painting, and the elusive Washington himself, through the history of their portraits.

Painters and Paintings in the Early American South (2013) by Carolyn J. Weekley

This beautifully illustrated volume presents the complex ways in which the lives of artists, clients, and sitters were interconnected in the early American South. During this period, paintings included not only portraits, but also seascapes, landscapes, and pictures made by explorers and naturalists. Featuring works by John Singleton Copley, Charles Willson Peale, and Benjamin West, among many others, this important book examines the training and status of painters, the distinction between fine art and the mechanical arts, the popularity of portraiture, and the nature of clientele between 1540 and 1790, providing a new, critical understanding of the history of art in the American South.

Of Arms and Artists: The American Revolution through Painters' Eyes (2016) by Paul J. Staiti

As Paul Staiti reveals, the lives of the five great American artists of the Revolutionary period—Charles Willson Peale, John Singleton Copley, John Trumbull, Benjamin West, and Gilbert Stuart—were every bit as eventful as those of the Founders with whom they continually interacted, and their works contributed mightily to America's founding spirit. Living in a time of breathtaking change, each in his own way came to grips with the history being made by turning to brushes and canvases, the results often eliciting awe and praise, and sometimes scorn.

Picturing Power: Portraiture and Its Uses in the New York Chamber of Commerce (2013) by Karl Kusserow, et al.

Picturing Power reveals the strategies and preoccupations of an American business culture that strove for egalitarian virtue while remaining firmly committed to the principles of competitive capitalism. Americans' shifting and ambivalent relationship to commerce places these portraits representations of the human face of business at the critical intersection of enduring contests in American life, between self-interest and the greater good, between equality and the social hierarchy that wealth engenders.

Bayou Bend/Rienzi Book Club

Join us for the next selection of the Bayou Bend/Rienzi Book Club in November: *The Church in the Barrio: Mexican American Ethno-Catholicism in Houston* by Roberto R. Treviño. For more information, visit mfah.org/historybookclub.

MFAH Book Club

Art and literature meet here! Designed for both established book clubs and individuals interested in creating connections between literary and visual arts, the MFAH Book Club links works of literature to works of art from the collections of Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. The MFAH Book Club presents three selections per year. Each book is accompanied by a downloadable discussion guide and is featured on the MFAH Goodreads group: mfah.org/goodreads. For more information and resources, visit mfah.org/bookclub.

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