



## Richard Cosway, RA and Maria Cosway

**Richard Cosway, RA** (5 November 1742 – 4 July 1821) was a leading English portrait painter of the Regency era, noted for his miniatures. He was a contemporary of John Smart, George Engleheart, William Wood, and Richard Crosse. His wife was the Italian-born painter Maria Cosway, a close friend of Thomas Jefferson.

Cosway was born in Tiverton, Devon, the son of a schoolmaster. He was initially educated at Blundell's School but at the age of twelve he was allowed to travel to London to take lessons in painting. He won a prize from the Society of Artists in 1754 and by 1760 had established his own business. He exhibited his first works at the age of 20 in 1762 and was soon in demand.

He was one of the first group of associate members of the Royal Academy, elected in August 1770, and was elected a full member the following March, on the casting vote of the academy's president, Sir Joshua Reynolds. He is included in Johan Zoffany's group portrait of the members of the academy (begun in 1771); a late addition to the composition, he was painted on an extra strip of canvas, attached to the right-hand side of the painting.

Cosway painted the future King George IV in 1780 and was appointed Painter to the Prince of Wales in 1785—the only time this title was ever awarded. His subjects included the Prince's first wife, Maria Anne Fitzherbert, and various English and French aristocrats, including Madame du Barry, mistress of King Louis XV of France.

Cosway's pupils included Andrew Plimer (1763–1837).

From 1995 to 1996, the National Portrait Gallery in London held an exhibition entitled Richard and Maria Cosway: Regency Artists of Taste and Fashion, with 250 works on display.

On 18 January 1781, Cosway married the Anglo-Italian artist Maria Hadfield. Maria was a composer, musician and authority on girls' education and was much admired by Thomas Jefferson, who wrote letters to her decrying her marriage to another man and kept an engraving made from one of Cosway's paintings of Maria at Monticello.

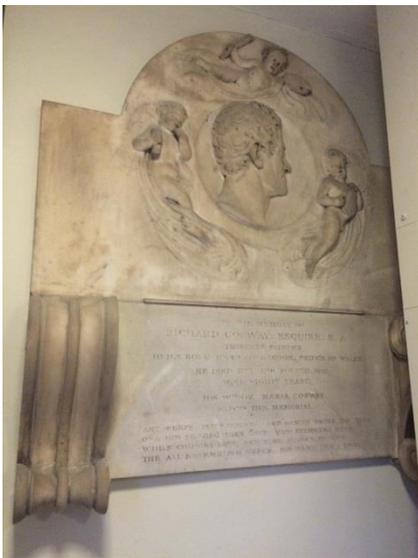
The Cosways' marriage is thought to be an arranged marriage and later a marriage of convenience due to his being 20 years her senior. Richard was "well known as a libertine and commonly described as resembling a monkey." The film *Jefferson in Paris* depicts Maria Cosway's romance with Thomas Jefferson and also depicts Richard Cosway as effeminate, something which is not certain historically.

Richard realized his wife's talent and helped her to develop it.

In 1784, the Cosways moved into Schomberg House, Pall Mall, which became a fashionable salon for London society. In 1791 they moved to a larger house in Stratford Place. However, the marriage did not last, eventually being annulled.

In later life, Cosway also suffered from mental disorders and spent some time in various institutions. He died in London in 1821 and was buried at St Marylebone Parish Church. Sir John Soane bought more than 30 objects put up for sale at auction after Cosway's death.

*Richard Cosway's memorial stone in St Marylebone Parish Church*



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**Maria Cosway** (11 June 1760 – 5 January 1838) was an Italian-English artist, who exhibited at the Royal Academy of Arts in London. She also worked in France, where she cultivated a large circle of friends and clients, and later in Italy. She commissioned the first portrait of Napoleon to be seen in England. Her paintings and engravings are held by the British Museum, the New York Public Library and the British Library. Her work was included in recent exhibits at the National Portrait Gallery in London in 1995 – 96 and the Tate Britain in 2006.

Cosway was an accomplished composer, musician, and society hostess with her husband, painter Richard Cosway. She is notable for sharing a short romantic relationship with the American statesman Thomas Jefferson in 1786 while he served in Paris as the American envoy to France. They kept up a lifelong correspondence until his death in 1826.

Cosway founded a girls' school in Paris, which she directed from 1803 to 1809. Soon after it closed, she founded a Catholic convent and girls' school in Lodi, northern Italy, which she directed until her death.

Cosway was born Maria Luisa Caterina Cecilia Hadfield (pronounced Mariah) in 1760 in Florence, Italy to Charles Hadfield, said to have been a native of Shrewsbury, England, and an Italian mother. Her father was a successful innkeeper at Livorno, where he had become very wealthy. The Hadfields operated three inns in Tuscany, frequented by British aristocrats taking the Grand Tour. One of eight children, Maria demonstrated artistic talent at a young age during her Roman Catholic convent education. She remained a devout Catholic all her life.

Four of the Hadfield children were killed by a mentally ill nursemaid, who was caught after being overheard talking about killing Maria. The nurse claimed that her young victims would be sent to Heaven after she killed them. She was sentenced to life in prison. Maria, her brothers Richard and George, and a younger sister Charlotte were the survivors.

At her father's death, Maria expressed a strong desire to become a nun. Three years later, her mother returned with her to England; they settled in London in 1779.

Maria's brother George Hadfield became an architect and designed Arlington House in Virginia. It later was owned by Robert E. Lee, noted as a Confederate general during the American Civil War.

While still in Florence, Maria Hadfield studied art under Violente Cerroti and Johann Zoffany. From 1773 to 1778, she copied Old Masters at the Uffizi Gallery. For her work, she was elected to the *Accademia del Disegno* in Florence in 1778. She also went to Rome, where she studied art under Pompeo Batoni. She studied with Anton Raphael Mengs, Henry Fuseli, and Joseph Wright of Derby.

Two women artists, Angelica Kauffman and Mary Moser, were among the original members of the Royal Academy of Arts in London in 1768. Kauffmann helped Maria Hadfield to participate in academy exhibitions. In 1781 she exhibited for the first time, showing the following three works: *Rinaldo, Creusa appearing to Aeneas* (engraved in mezzotint by V. Green), and *Like patience on a monument smiling at grief*. Bradfield went on to gain success as a painter of mythological scenes.

On 18 January 1781, Maria Hadfield married a fellow artist, the celebrated miniature portrait painter Richard Cosway, in what is thought to have been a marriage of convenience. He was 20 years her senior, known as a libertine, and was repeatedly unfaithful to her. Richard was "commonly described as resembling a monkey."

Her Italian manners were so foreign that her husband kept Maria secluded until she fully mastered the English language. Cosway also forbade his wife from painting, possibly out of fear of the gossip which surrounded women painters. Her Self-Portrait with Arms Folded is seen as a response to his limitation of her work, her folded arms acting as a sign of her inability to practice. But, in time he realised his wife's talent and helped her to develop it. More than 30 of her works were displayed at the Royal Academy of Art from 1781 until 1801. She soon enhanced her reputation as an artist, especially when her portrait of the Duchess of Devonshire in the character of Cynthia was exhibited. Among her personal acquaintances were Lady Lyttelton; the Hon. Mrs. Darner, the Countess of Aylesbury; Lady Cecilia Johnston; and the Marchioness of Townshend.

In 1784, the Cosways moved into Schomberg House, Pall Mall, and developed a fashionable salon for London society. Richard was Principal Painter of the Prince of Wales, and Maria served as hostess to artists, members of royalty including the Prince, and politicians including Horace Walpole, Gouverneur Morris and James Boswell. She could speak several languages and due to her travels in Italy and France, she gained an international circle of friends. These included Angelica Schuyler Church and the artist John Trumbull. Maria Cosway organised concerts and recitals for her guests. She became known as "The Goddess of Pall-Mall".

Richard and Maria had one child together, Louisa Paolina Angelica, but the couple eventually separated. Maria often travelled on the continent, on one occasion accompanied by Luigi Marchesi, a famous Italian castrato. (Richard Cosway had painted his portrait, which afterward was engraved by Luigi Schiavonetti (1790).) At the same time Richard was having an open affair with Mary Moser, with whom he travelled for six months. In his notebooks he made "invidious comparisons between her and Mrs Cosway," implying that she was much more sexually responsive than his wife.

When staying in Lyon, France, Maria Cosway made a pilgrimage to the shrine of the Virgin Mary at Loreto. This was to fulfill a vow she had made after giving birth to a living child. While she was travelling on the continent, her young daughter Louisa died.

Engraving by Francesco Bartolozzi of Maria Cosway's painting *The Hours*, described by Jacques-Louis David as "ingenious"

Throughout this period Cosway cultivated international contacts in the art world. When she sent an engraving of her allegorical painting *The Hours* to her friend the French painter Jacques-Louis David, he replied, "On ne peut pas faire une poésie plus ingénieuse et plus naturelle" ("one could not create a more ingenious or more natural poetic work"). Cosway became well-known throughout France and had customers from all over the Continent.

Cosway also showed an interest in French politics. In 1797, then living on Oxford Street in London, she commissioned artist Francesco Cossia to create what was to be the first portrait of Napoleon seen in England. Cosway may have been the first person in Britain to see the face of Napoleon. Her commission of the portrait would later be called the "earliest recorded evidence of British admiration for Napoleon." Later acquired by Sir John Soane, the painting is displayed in the Breakfast Room of Sir John Soane's Museum.

While living in Paris between 1801 and 1803, Cosway copied the paintings of the Old Masters from the Louvre for publication as etchings in England. After the death of her daughter while she was in France, she did not finish the project.

Maria Cosway met Napoleon while copying Napoleon Crossing the Alps by her friend David. She became close friends with Napoleon's uncle, Cardinal Joseph Fesch. During the Peace of Amiens, she gave British visitors tours of the Cardinal's art collection. One historian pointed out that her admiration for Napoleon may have been inspired by her then-lover Pasquale Paoli, a Corsican general in exile in London, who had been an associate of Bonaparte.

At the Grain Market (Halles aux Bleds), in Paris, August 1786, John Trumbull introduced the Cosways to Thomas Jefferson, then a widower aged 43 serving as American Minister to France. Maria was 27.[9] Jefferson then begged off his scheduled dinner companion, saying he needed to tend to official business, and instead spent the evening with Maria at the Palais Royal.

Cosway and Jefferson shared an interest in art and architecture; together they attended exhibits throughout the city and countryside. He would write of their adventures: "How beautiful was every object! the Pont du Neuilly, the hills along the Seine, the rainbows of the Machine of Marly, the terraces of Saint Germain, the chateaux, the gardens, the statues of Marly, the Pavilion of Louveciennes... In the evening, when one took a retrospect of the day, what a mass of happiness had we travelled over!" Over the course of six weeks, Jefferson developed a romantic attachment to Cosway, spending each day with her.

At her husband's insistence, the Cosways departed for London. Jefferson's 4,000-word "The Dialogue of the Head vs. the Heart" love letter followed dated 12–13 October 1786. He describes his head conversing with his heart—a struggle between the practical and the romantic.

*I feel more fit for death than life. But when I look back on the pleasures of which it is a consequence, I am conscious they were worth the price I am paying.* – Thomas Jefferson to Maria Cosway, "A Dialogue of the Head vs. the Heart"

Scholars suggest that Jefferson was particularly partial to a romantic attachment at this point in his life. His wife had died four years before; he had just learned of the death of his youngest daughter Lucy; and his other two daughters were away at school. At least one account held that Cosway began to develop stronger feelings for Jefferson, but when she travelled to Paris to meet him again, she found him more distant.

A devout Catholic who did not want to have children, she worried about pregnancy. Some historians believe nothing further developed besides correspondence. Since Jefferson was very discreet, no one knows for certain of their relationship. Jefferson eventually stopped writing her until sometime later when she contacted him; their renewed correspondence continued until his death. Historians such as Andrew Burstein have suggested the relationship romantic mostly on Jefferson's side, and that Cosway was his opposite, more artistic than rational. Their correspondence survives. Before Jefferson left Paris, he wrote her, "I am going to America and you are going to Italy. One of us is going the wrong way, for the way will ever be wrong that leads us further apart."

Cosway introduced Jefferson to her friend Angelica Schuyler Church, the sister-in-law of his rival Alexander Hamilton. Church kept up a correspondence with both Jefferson and Cosway in later life; her correspondence with them is held at the University of Virginia's archive.

They both maintained images of the other. Jefferson kept an engraving by Luigi Schiavonetti from a drawing by Maria's husband. Trumbull was commissioned by Maria for a portrait of Jefferson, while on loan from the Italian Government formed part of a Smithsonian exhibition and on close of the exhibit and in celebration of the American Bicentennial it was bestowed to the White House where it now hangs.

Cosway eventually returned to the continent, travelled with her brother George Hadfield in Italy, where she lived in the north for three years and then returned to England after her daughter's death at age 10, concentrating on painting, completing several religious pictures for chapels.

Despite Napoleon's war with England, she travelled to France. In Paris Cardinal Joseph Fesch persuaded her to establish a college for young ladies, which she managed from 1803 until 1809. The Duke of Lodi invited her to Italy to establish a convent and Catholic school for girls in Lodi (near Milan). She directed the Collegio delle Grazie in northern Italy until her death in 1838.

In 1821 Cosway briefly returned to England to care for her husband before his death. With the aid of her friend Sir John Soane, she auctioned Richard's large art collection, and used the funds to support the convent school.

In a letter to Jefferson (held by the University of Virginia), Cosway mourned the loss of mutual old friends following the death of Angelica Schuyler Church. As a tribute to Church, Cosway designed a temple ceiling depicting the Three Graces surrounding her friend's name. In June 1826, she wrote to the Italian engraver Giovanni Paolo Lasinio Junior, respecting the publication of her husband's drawings in Florence.

Cosway died in 1838 at her school in Lodi. Amongst her bequests was one for Charlotte Jones who was a previous student of her husband but who had failing eyesight at the end of her life.

Cosway's engravings from the Old Masters of the Louvre are held in the collection of the British Museum. Two of her paintings that relate to a poem by Mary Robinson were acquired by the New York Public Library. They were included in the exhibit Gothic Nightmares: Fuseli, Blake and the Romantic Imagination at the Tate Britain museum in London in 2006.

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