

## Introduction

July 2007, Yale Center for British Art – reflections on Agostino Brunias's *A Planter and his Wife* (fig. 1) ...

The painting is relatively small – about 12 x 10 inches – and a wonderfully exquisite little gem, its bright gold frame setting off the work of a talented colourist. Pristine whites and vivid pale blues are punctuated with punches of coral red; deep greens and rich ochres define the landscape. In the background are all the hallmarks of an idyllic island day; under a perfect canopy of blue sky and fluffy white clouds, a pair of palm trees rise in the right margin of the picture, nestled against the calm, crystal waters of the Caribbean Sea. However, in the midst of this quintessential tropical splendour, two figures in the foreground, a man and a woman, command the viewer's immediate attention. Although he is dressed to beat the heat, the man manages to cut an impressive figure in long white trousers, white shirt, and white waistcoat – all immaculately spotless. He accessorises the outfit with black cravat, black shoes with silver buckles, and a long mustard-coloured dress coat with shiny gold buttons, completing the ensemble with a black 'planter's hat'. Surely his elegant dress demonstrates his wealth and status, but not so much as his pose, for the artist has frozen him in a perpetual state of showing off; his outstretched arm gestures towards the splendid natural beauty all around him as he turns his face to the lady at his side in a move that silently proclaims his ownership of all that surrounds them.

In response to her mate's grand gesture of possession, the miffed expression on the woman's pinched face seemingly replies, 'Really, is this all?' She stands exceedingly unimpressed, one arm akimbo, in her fine white gown, the open robe of her skirt revealing a bright blue petticoat in a striking hue that echoes the sky. The delicate lace at her elbows and décolletage, along with the coral laces that cinch the stays at her trim waist, the beribboned straw hat set haughtily on the side of her head, and the large gold earbobs that dangle from her lobes – all these announce that she was born for better than this. Behind both figures, a black woman nearly recedes into the shadowy background of



1 Agostino Brunias, *A Planter and his Wife, with a Servant*, c. 1780, oil on canvas

a thick tree on the left, saved from obscurity by the brilliant white of her open blouse and kerchief and the bright red of her simple skirt. As charming as this little island tableau may be, it is a rather predictable Caribbean take on the typical English conversation piece – complete with marginal black attendant – and unremarkable except for the subtlest hint of domestic discord thrown in for drama. That and the fact that, in comparison to the dark skin of the African woman, the flesh tones of her master and mistress are pale but, then again, not

as pale as all that ... With their elegant hats perched on heads of full of naps, the saffron-skinned planter and his wife are, perhaps, less white than black.<sup>1</sup>

From unimportant pebble to bedrock, or why Brunias? Why now?

On 7 August 1981 a certain high-up at the Yale Center for British Art (YCBA) wrote an inter-office memorandum recommending the sale of this painting of a mixed-race planter and his wife and nine other late eighteenth-century works in the Center's collection by a little-known Italian artist named Agostino Brunias (c. 1730–96).<sup>2</sup> Apparently the writer of the Yale memo felt that Brunias's small, colourful canvases, depicting scenes of Caribbean life in some of the newly acquired territories of Britain's growing empire and concerned almost exclusively with people of colour, did not reflect the Center's concern with 'British' art; he ticked off his primary arguments in favour of selling the paintings in a terse, itemised list:

I would recommend the sale of the Brunias paintings ... for the arguments below:

1. Brunias is not English and very, very minor.
2. The paintings are Mr. Mellon's and we have told him that we intend no further changes to the lists of sales.<sup>3</sup>
3. His books on West Indian subject matter are classed among his "Americana".
4. We have the prints. The paintings may or may not be for or after the engravings. They are not of high quality.
5. Prof. Thompson has the photographs and slides.<sup>4</sup>
6. They have tenuous connection with British Studies but, I suppose, could, if Mr. Mellon were persuaded, be offered to the Afro-American Cultural Center (if they have anywhere to look after them) or to the Ethnography department at the Peabody.

He added, 'I do not think we ought to stub our toe over such an unimportant pebble.' While the memo might seem to undermine the project I undertake (after all, what sort of foolhardy scholar proposes a monograph about a 'very, very minor' artist?), I point to it in order to underscore the dramatic shifts in the field that have moved Agostino Brunias and his work from a footnote in the annals of British art studies to a subject deserving of scholarly attention.

After arriving in London in 1758 to work as a draughtsman and decorative painter for the renowned architect Robert Adam (1728–92), Brunias, an Italian born and trained in Rome, left England some time around 1770 and landed in the British West Indies where he worked mainly on the Lesser Antilles islands of St Vincent and Dominica, initially painting for his primary patron, the colonial governor Sir William Young. For roughly the next quarter century,

Brunias painted for plantocrats and the colonial elite like Young, creating romanticised tableaux that featured Caribbeans of colour – so-called ‘Red’ and ‘Black’ Caribs, dark-skinned Africans and Afro-Creoles, and people of mixed race. His refined pictures obscured the horrors of colonial domination and plantation slavery by presenting instead picturesque market scenes, lively dances, and Edenic outdoor scenes often tinged with rococo naughtiness. The first comprehensive study of Agostino Brunias’s work, this book explores the role of the artist’s paintings in reifying notions of race in the British colonial Caribbean and also considers how the artist’s images both reflected and refracted ideas about race commonly held by Britons during the long eighteenth century.

Had the author of the Yale memo been in possession of a crystal ball that could have predicted the striking turn that studies of British art (and the discipline of art history, in general) have taken in the nearly four decades since he penned these words, I suspect that he would have either quit the field in disgust or argued vehemently in favour of the Brunias works’ importance to the Center’s collection. Indeed, fortunately for me, the Yale Center did not sell its Brunias pictures, and, in fact, in the summer of 2007, generously offered me a fellowship to spend a month in residence, studying the Brunias pictures there and enjoying access to the institution’s enviable collection of British art and related resources. Moreover, during the tenure of my fellowship, the Center was in the throes of final preparations for *Art and Emancipation in Jamaica: Isaac Mendes Belisario and His Worlds*, an historic exhibition developed around the *Sketches of Character* series by Belisario (1795–1849), a nineteenth-century Jewish Jamaican Creole artist whose work, despite some critical differences that this book will later explore, shares a number of features with Brunias’s own. In particular, like Belisario’s work, Brunias’s richly detailed paintings offer a unique, complex, and important depiction of Britain’s involvement in slavery, the development of colonial culture in the Americas, and the lives of people of various colours and conditions – indigenous, transplanted, and Creole; red, black, and brown; wealthy and poor; enslaved, free, and somewhere in-between – who lived under Britain’s colonial regime in the West Indies.

Though the writer of the Yale memo insisted that Brunias’s ‘Americana’ have a ‘very tenuous’ connection to British Studies, the histories of slavery, colonialism, and the construction of race that they illustrate are now considered integral to any study of British identity, and these concerns, far from being ‘unimportant pebbles’, constitute the very bedrock upon which some of the most exciting and rigorous recent scholarship in studies of British and American art and history is founded. My own project joins a distinguished chorus of voices including those of Anna Arabindan-Kesson, Tim Barringer, Jill H. Casid, David Dabydeen, Kay Dian Kriz, Charmaine A. Nelson, Beth Fowkes Tobin, Geoff Quilley, and Marcus Wood, among others, that is prob-

ing the relationship between art and visual culture and the joint projects of Atlantic slavery, colonialism, and British imperial expansion during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These scholars, like my colleagues in Atlantic world studies, are also persistently and provocatively troubling the artificial and generally hierarchical boundaries between the Continent and Britain, Britain and the Americas, metropole and colony, centre and periphery.

I point to the memo, therefore, not to criticise its writer, whose opinions, though they now seem hopelessly out-of-touch, probably reflected the mainstream at the time they were written, or the Yale Center for British Art, which continues to make progressive contributions that importantly redefine the boundaries of British art. Instead, I aim to underscore the dramatic shifts in the academy, in art historical scholarship in general, and in British and American art studies in particular that have occurred over the last quarter century and made this project both possible and relevant. These include the rise of African diaspora studies and slavery studies scholarship and the subsequent attention paid to critical race theory and other branches of identity studies in the academy (especially feminist scholarship across the disciplines, gender studies, and queer theory); understandings of the intersectional experience of identity; colonial and postcolonial studies; and the growing interest in challenging constructed national boundaries as the best delimiters of historical inquiry. These changes in the scholarly terrain over the last several decades have transformed Brunias's work – considered 'very, very minor' only a few decades ago – from curious trifles of exotica to important examples of colonial art worthy of serious critical attention.

Writing the book on Brunias: on argument and scope

While I cannot dispute the fact that Agostino Brunias was not English by birth, this book contends that the artist's work is most certainly 'British', depicting in rich detail – and subtly, albeit probably subconsciously, challenging with great insight – some of the ways in which Britons imagined their colonial world, particularly with regard to race. A commitment to close visual analysis grounds the entire project, with interpretations informed by period texts, history scholarship, and the influence of relevant critical scholarly discourses such as those that I have just mentioned. Moreover, it should – but in the interest of unequivocal clarity, will not – go without saying that notions of race are inextricably tied to and informed by other vectors of identity, particularly, in this case, gender, class, and status as free or enslaved, and that examination of these dynamics of interrelation are integral to any discussion of Brunias's work. For the most part, however, my interpretations of Brunias's images – particularly as guided by available period sources – accept the dominant colonial gaze as white, male, and heterosexual.<sup>5</sup> Of course, although this may have

been the *dominant* gaze, it certainly was not the only one, and I very much look forward to future Brunias scholarship that entertains the perspectives of white female viewers and male and female viewers of colour – both heterosexual and queer – more fully than the scope of this project has permitted.<sup>6</sup>

In viewing Brunias's paintings through a variety of methodological lenses, I have aimed to be cognisant of the potential dangers of applying theories born of twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholarship to paintings produced roughly three centuries before such ideas shaped the academy, let alone the popular imagination. Moreover, I want to be clear about the fact that I am certainly not offering Brunias as some sort of contemporary critical race theorist *avant la lettre* who consciously brought constructionist theories of race to his canvases. I do not aim to assign such agency or intention to the artist whose paintings, in my view, reveal more about the complex and messy project of racial classification in the eighteenth-century Caribbean than they do about the artist himself or what his contemporary viewers fully understood. Throughout the chapters, I consider how the paintings might have been readily understood by eighteenth-century viewers and also explore some interpretations that might have been less easily accessible to Brunias's contemporaries but nonetheless reveal the artist's work as a potential index of the state of race in the time and place that he worked. Ultimately, I am interested in how works that were unequivocally meant to shore up the boundaries of race in the British colonial Caribbean manage to reveal instead – even if only for the modern viewer – what a fraught proposition that was. This complex quality of Brunias's paintings distinguishes them from many other visual texts that were produced for the same purpose (and to which Brunias's works are often likened) but that do not provide the same sort of evidence of the slippery state of race in the British colonial West Indies.

In this project, I complicate the conventional and somewhat limiting interpretation of Brunias's images as straightforward typological works of visual ethnography that, as part of the great Enlightenment project to catalogue the natural world, worked to establish fixed, empirically discernible racial categories. While associated with natural history's passion for classification and the 'scientificisation' of race in that they were undoubtedly commissioned for this sort of purpose, Brunias's pictures often fail to conform to the conventions of visual natural history or ethnographic tradition, and, in fact, often undermine the aims of these traditions. Superficially, the artist's images of Red and Black Caribs, Africans and Afro-Creoles, and mixed-race women and men do, indeed, seem to reify racialised categories of being by ostensibly providing an unequivocal, visual guide to identify various racial groups. However, careful looking reveals that Brunias's images, actually visually undercutting developing systems of racial categorisation as much as they help to define them, consistently fail to function as these unambiguous racial

keys. I show how Brunias's paintings might be understood as simultaneously participating in and subtly, but significantly, troubling ideas of race and racial classification during the eighteenth century. Ultimately, I understand the artist's images as not so much recording race as helping to construct it while simultaneously exposing its constructedness and underscoring its contradictions. Furthermore, in exposing this tension, I also question the extent to which we should continue to regard Brunias unproblematically as the 'plantocracy's painter', an artist whose works uncomplicatedly reflect plantocratic fantasies of Caribbean life in the service of slavery and colonial domination.<sup>7</sup> Although one can certainly understand the appeal of Brunias's idealised West Indian tableaux to colonial officials and planters, when read against the grain of its commission the artist's oeuvre can also be understood to offer a completely original perception of this fundamentally inchoate moment in the history of race and of the forces that critically informed it.

In the eighteenth century 'race' was a more elastic, contextually contingent term than it is today. Indeed, a cacophony of different understandings about the cause and significance of physical variation among human beings competed for primacy during this inchoate racial moment and contributed to eighteenth-century Britons' unstable, frequently incoherent, and often contradictory notions about race. Scholarship on the early modern period has clearly demonstrated that, long before the 1700s, Britons registered complex differences between Europeans and Africans and even evaluated those differences in ways that confirmed their own superiority.<sup>8</sup> However, for most of the eighteenth century, the notion of race as an objective category of being and primary marker of human difference based upon a complex reckoning of ancestry and visual cues (e.g. skin colour and other phenotypic traits) by which humans could be classified into discrete groups was a nascent way of thinking.

Roxann Wheeler's scholarship has done much to elucidate the protean nature of the concepts and terminology related to race and skin colour in the eighteenth-century British world. Concentrating primarily on the first three-quarters of the eighteenth century, Wheeler's work challenges much other eighteenth-century scholarship that, not explicitly concerned with race, assumes that the relatively fixed concepts of race and its relationship to skin colour and physiognomy that are operative today functioned with similar currency by the 1700s. Instead, Wheeler demonstrates the far more 'fluid articulation of human variety' and 'elastic conceptions' that characterised racial designation in eighteenth-century British culture, such that a dark-skinned man of African origin might be classified as a 'white man' by virtue of his Christian religion or a white Englishman called a 'black man' because of his unsavoury character.<sup>9</sup> Wheeler convincingly argues that, for most of the eighteenth century, skin colour and other physical attributes were less important than markers such as religion, civility, and social rank – expressed

through clothing, manners, language, and even systems of government – as fundamental distinctions of human variety. Furthermore, Wheeler’s scholarship shows how these ‘proto-racial ideologies’ persisted alongside developing racial ideologies long after the social and economic factors that originally produced them had changed.<sup>10</sup>

Focused on the dynamic definition of race and difference persistent during the majority of the eighteenth century, Wheeler identifies the last quarter of the eighteenth century – the precise period of Brunias’s Caribbean activity – as the moment of pivotal shift in racial discourse in which the notion of skin colour as *the* primary signifier of human difference emerged. Fundamental to this shift was a generally more ‘scientific’ view of the body, the product of Enlightenment thinking informed by advances in medicine that produced an anatomical model of the body and by the development of the natural history tradition with which Brunias’s work is so closely aligned. These developments formed the crucible in which the concept of race as a fixed, discrete, objective, and empirical category of identity was being forged. However, the proto-racial ideologies with which Wheeler is most concerned, as well as persistent ancient explanations for phenotypical variety such as those based on climate or the four humours, continued to inform the unstable reality of race in the time and place in which Brunias worked.

The lack of consensus resulting from these competing ideologies significantly informed the fraught state of white identity in the colonial West Indies. In addition to new ideologies of human difference that regarded skin colour as a primary signifier of identity, the ever more essential role of slavery as a part of the British colonial project and the imperial economy also influenced the calcification of racial classification schemes. With ‘black’ becoming an increasingly synonymous shorthand for ‘slave’, racial whiteness achieved an unprecedented currency, especially in relation to defining Britishness.<sup>11</sup> Earlier in the century, a free, dark-skinned man of African descent might be counted as an unqualified Englishman based upon his profession of Christianity; however, by the century’s end, such a designation, while still a possibility, was far from a likelihood. As whiteness, both in terms of complexion and culture, became increasingly prerequisite to Britishness, the claim to white identity also became more and more uncertain for Britons living in the so-called ‘torrid zones’ who carried the racial burden of the confluence of older ideas about race such as climate theory and newer ones about culture such as that of Creole cultural degeneracy. The latter charge was disproportionately directed towards women, and the scholarship of Kathleen Wilson, Kay Dian Kriz, Deirdre Coleman, and Angela Rosenthal aptly demonstrates how the female body constituted a sort of ‘cultural battleground’.<sup>12</sup> Here the fight to shore up the shared boundaries of whiteness and British identity in the face of anxieties about the ‘precariousness of whiteness as an absolute value in



an island culture' was waged.<sup>13</sup> Considering Brunias's disproportionate attention to the female body, and particularly the mixed-race or ambiguously raced female body, my own scholarship joins this body of work in examining the inextricable tangle of race, gender, and place in the development of Caribbean colonial identities.

This book aims to provide a thorough analysis of Agostino Brunias's images of the West Indies. As the first project to survey the full breadth and depth of Brunias's oeuvre, it offers several new observations made possible by an extensive knowledge of the artist's works rather than reliance on the most widely known examples, especially since considering the entire body of work often yields different conclusions than viewing individual works in isolation. A variety of types of texts inform the careful visual analysis that foregrounds each chapter, including primary source material from Britons living in the West Indies, period texts relating to the British settlement of the Caribbean, relevant period fiction, and secondary scholarly material by historians, art historians, and literary critics. While much can be said about the British Caribbean as a region, each island had and has its own particular history, patterns, and culture. Not surprisingly, but rather unfortunately for projects such as mine, the vast majority of period texts and scholarship on the British West Indies pertains to the more well-established colonies such as Jamaica and Barbados. The study of the Ceded Islands where Brunias was active represents an exciting frontier of Caribbean studies scholarship to which this project hopes to contribute. Where possible, I have used sources related to the islands where Brunias is known to have worked such as Mrs A. C. Carmichael's account of her time in St Vincent or Bernard Marshall's work on free people of colour in the British Windward Islands. However, where useful and relevant, I have also drawn upon sources relating to other islands while trying to remain cognisant of the issues inherent in doing so.

Mimicking the organisation of a colonial natural history text with an intentional irony signed in the stylised chapter titles, each of the first four chapters focuses on the depiction of one racial group while simultaneously suggesting the way in which Brunias's images potentially undermine ideas of race as a fixed element of identity. This organisational strategy has allowed me to think critically about the several different types of paintings Brunias made in the Caribbean, while attending to the larger theoretical questions that unite the artist's oeuvre. Although the representation of a particular racial group anchors each chapter, this does not preclude discussion of how Brunias depicted interaction between racial groups or analysis of the racialised dynamics of power in interracial scenes. Indeed, the book aims to show how the representation of one given racial group informed and was informed by the others.

The first chapter, 'Brunias's tarred brush, or painting Indians black: racing the Carib divide', considers how the artist's pictures of Carib Indians

visually reinforced the insistent – and, following Peter Hulme and others, I argue, largely imagined – distinction between so-called ‘Red’ (also known as ‘Yellow’) and ‘Black’ Caribs made by British colonialists. By ‘largely imagined’ I do not mean to imply that there were no genotypic or phenotypic differences among various Carib communities in the Lesser Antilles, but to suggest that the British imagined – or, at the very least, exaggerated – the substance and significance of those differences in order to fit their colonial needs. While the limited scholarship on Brunias has tended to focus on his images of mixed-race and dark-skinned African and Afro-Creole people, his images of Caribs have been almost entirely neglected, with some scholars not even realising that two ostensibly very different types of Carib peoples are being represented. This chapter provides a focused study of Brunias’s Carib pictures within the political and cultural context of their creation, observing marked differences in the artist’s depictions of the two supposed Carib groups and considering the implications of those differences. Ultimately, I contend that Brunias’s images reinforced the separateness of ‘Red’ and ‘Black’ Caribs insisted upon by the British and supported their perceptions of Black Caribs as a problematic entity in the British colonial world. However, careful analysis also reveals the extent to which these works simultaneously underscore the problematic nature of the racial and cultural distinctions they aim to reify and point to deeply felt cultural anxieties about the inevitably hybrid character of colonial life and the difficulty of assigning and recognising race and place in colonial island society.

The next chapter, ‘Merry and contented slaves and other island myths: representing Africans and Afro-Creoles in the Anglo-American world’, analyses the imaging – or, rather, the conspicuous lack thereof – of Africans and Afro-Creoles in British colonial art. This chapter places Brunias in the context of other British painters who worked in the Caribbean during the long eighteenth century, particularly George Robertson (1742–88) and Isaac Mendes Belisario, keeping in mind important differences in genre (*vis-à-vis* Robertson) and time period (*vis-à-vis* Belisario). With a particular emphasis on Brunias’s dancing scenes within the context of Anglo-American visual production, I consider the significance of the artist’s portrayal of presumably enslaved black people typically engaged in episodes of entrepreneurialism, leisure, or merrymaking.

In his analysis of Atlantic slave traders, James Pope-Hennessy claimed that nothing better illustrates what he termed the ‘Myth of the Merry and Contented Slave’ than ‘a series of vignettes in the mode of the lovely coloured engravings of slave festivals based on the pictures of the eighteenth-century painter Agostino Brunyas [*sic*]’.<sup>14</sup> For Pope-Hennessy and others, Brunias’s beautiful, orderly compositions depicting black West Indians paint a rosy picture of slave life in the islands that unequivocally denies the brutal reality of plantation slavery and amounts to nothing more than plantocratic

propaganda.<sup>15</sup> This is certainly one way to interpret Brunias's pictures which, particularly in their focus on leisure rather than labour, do, undoubtedly, offer an idealised vision of life for black West Indians. However, given the overwhelming predominance, in the colonial Caribbean, of topographical and landscape art that primarily glorified planters' visions of themselves while obscuring the role of slavery in generating West Indian wealth, the unique attention given to black people and to black culture in Brunias's work deserves critical consideration. For example, Brunias's inclusion of some specifically Afro-Creole elements of black island culture implicitly acknowledges the transplantation of black bodies to the colonial space, constituting a marked distinction from the construction of Afro-Caribbeans as pseudo-natives in many colonial West Indian landscapes.

Brunias uniquely highlights the African past of his black figures and the continuing influence of this past on the development of a vibrant Afro-Creole colonial culture that, although created by it, also exists separate and apart from the world of the planters. Favourably comparing the lot of the enslaved to that of the poor in Britain, accounts by white Britons living in the West Indies such as those of William Young, 2nd Baronet, and Mrs A. C. Carmichael typically stressed the bondsfolk's love for and dependence on their supposedly benevolent 'masters'. In contrast, as in his Carib pictures, Brunias's images of enslaved West Indians superficially seem to conform to plantocratic ideas about race – his black figures do indeed appear merry and content; however, their merry contentment has *nothing* to do with their enslavement and everything to do with the culture they create for themselves. The artist's paintings appealed to plantocratic delusions that justified slavery by providing his patrons with scenes of Afro-Caribbeans engaged in leisure rather than labour, but these images also implicitly suggest that the enslaved survived not through the benevolence of their so-called masters but through the strength of their own community and culture. Moreover, in his scenes of enslaved people selling their produce at market or engaged in dancing, playing music, or sport fighting can be read tacit references to that which he could not explicitly portray: the reality of individual agency among enslaved people and even the possibility of resistance. Brunias might not have painted these subversive elements, but he did paint the sort of independent black culture capable of producing them. In contrast to an artist like Belisario, whose compositions of black performers feel specifically staged for the white gaze in order to satisfy the psychic needs of British colonists confronted with the imminent reality of emancipation, Brunias's paintings generally present Afro-Caribbeans in their own world (or as agents in the interracial marketplace) and concerned with their own activities. Moreover, he portrays the dynamism and diversity of this black world without caricature and with unparalleled sensitivity.

To the extent that he can be considered well known at all, Brunias is most famous for his images of mixed-race women, and the third chapter, 'Brown-skinned booty, or colonising Diana: mixed-race Venuses and Vixens as the fruits of imperial enterprise', considers the virtual omnipresence of the mixed-race beauty, or 'mulatress', in the artist's Caribbean pictures and within the context of gendered interracial relations of power in the islands.<sup>16</sup> Kay Dian Kriz has argued that the ambiguous racial and social status of the mulatress figure served as a visual metaphor allowing Brunias to capture the state of the colonial West Indies – a locale popularly associated with laziness, leisure, luxury, licentiousness, and other forms of moral laxity such as heartless profit-making – as a potentially refined civilisation in the midst of development. Building upon Kriz's scholarship, I assert that the mulatress appealed to Brunias – and to Britons – because of her ability to represent *both* the baser pleasures and profits to be taken in the Caribbean *and* the islands' potential to conform to British ideals of societal refinement.<sup>17</sup> Developing a sustained visual analogy between the mixed-race female body and the West Indian islands and their produce, Brunias paints the mulatress as the quintessential colonial Caribbean figure. This chapter also analyses Brunias's adaptation of models from canonical Western art and eighteenth-century popular visual culture to consider the artist's compositional and conceptual inventiveness.

Taking a more theoretical tack than the previous chapters, the fourth chapter, 'Can you find the white woman in this picture? Agostino Brunias's "ladies" of ambiguous race', culminates the study of Brunias's work according to racial categorisation, exploring the artist's depiction of racially ambiguous bodies (those that cannot be identified by sight as white or of colour) and offering a more comprehensive exploration of how the artist's work can be understood as subtly undermining the fixed racial categories that it was commissioned to reify. In its consideration of Brunias's 'ambiguous' bodies, the chapter necessarily grapples with the conspicuous rarity of figures, especially women, who can confidently be identified as white in Brunias's oeuvre (i.e. almost none), and both period texts and current scholarship regarding the state of whiteness, and particularly white womanhood, in the British colonial Caribbean inform much of the analysis in the chapter. Presaging constructionist theories of racial identity, Brunias's ambiguously raced figures point to the dilemmas of visualising race as well as to the artificiality of fixed racial identities, ultimately problematising the very idea of racial whiteness itself.

A versatile artist, Brunias produced a number of engravings in addition to his paintings. These were published in books that apparently circulated rather freely. Several notable engravers – among them Philip Audinet (1766–1837), Charles Grignon (1714–1810), Nicolas Ponce (1746–1831), and Louis Charles Ruotte (1754–1806) – copied Brunias's images or modelled their own scenes upon his, a fact that has troubled the waters of attribution,

especially as Brunias's star has risen in recent years. Moreover, in addition to the plethora of prints after Brunias, there is even a set of painted buttons that have been attributed to the artist. For the most part, I have focused this study on Brunias's paintings, coming to this decision for a number of reasons. First and foremost, Brunias's paintings incorporate the greatest diversity of subject matter and the most complex and challenging scenes, and most of the engravings made by the artist himself are after the paintings or feature very similar scenes. Additionally, Brunias was a talented colourist, and colour is a primary element of analysis in this investigation. Concentrating on the paintings has allowed me to attend carefully to colour as both a means and an end of expression in Brunias's images while avoiding the vexing question of who made the colour choices in the extant hand-coloured engravings of the artist's work (I would venture that, in all of the cases I have seen, it was almost certainly not Brunias himself). However, because of the significant proliferation and circulation of Brunias's work in forms other than the original paintings, the concluding chapter, 'Pushing Brunias's buttons, or rebranding the plantocracy's painter: the afterlife of Brunias's imagery', addresses the reproduction and appropriation of the artist's imagery as well as the curious case of the 'Brunias' buttons.

This coda examines the diverse ends to which Brunias's images have been mobilised, almost from the very moment of their creation (at least as early as 1791) and continuing into the present day, as a way of understanding the flexibility and persistence of the artist's oeuvre. The chapter opens with an investigation of the painted buttons in the collection of the Cooper-Hewitt Museum that have been attributed to Brunias and are purported to have adorned the coat of Toussaint L'Ouverture, legendary leader of the Haitian Revolution. It concludes with a consideration of recent museum interest in acquiring Brunias's work as a means of responding to calls for greater diversity in their collections. Although the claims of Brunias's authorship and Toussaint's ownership are both almost certainly apocryphal, ultimately I contend that the fact that Brunias's imagery can, more than two centuries after its creation, simultaneously be characterised as plantocratic propaganda and regarded as fashion fit for an iconic Haitian revolutionary points to both its fundamental complexity and its enduring significance.

But first ... who was Agostino Brunias, or how does a classically trained Italian artist end up painting in the British colonial Caribbean?

As I previously mentioned, while the assertion that Brunias's work is 'not of high quality' is arguable, the fact that he was not an Englishman or even British is not in dispute, and, upon initial consideration, it is indeed curious that the largest cache of paintings by an eighteenth-century Italian artist working in

the Caribbean ended up in a repository devoted to the study of British art. Even more curious is that a scholar initially trained in the study of American art should undertake an analysis of his work as her first book project. However, these curious facts simply reflect the state of a field too theoretically big for the small thinking that adheres to artificial boundaries. In the course of pursuing support for this project, I have marketed myself as a historian of British art and of American art, as an African American studies scholar and a scholar of the culture of the Atlantic world, as a postcolonialist, as an eighteenth-century studies specialist, and as a Latin Americanist specialising in the Anglophone Caribbean, and throughout the course of this project I have had to be all of these things at one time or another. But really, Brunias's work refuses to conform to the simple disciplinary boxes one is required to check off for a grant application. How could it? As a previously London-residing Italian, painting pictures of outnumbered indigenes, enslaved Africans and Afro-Creoles, and 'mixed-breed' mulattoes for transplanted Britons and their Creole children in colonial islands that ping-ponged between England and France, even in his own day Brunias and his work defied easy definition.

This may explain why, though much can be said about the *work* of Agostino Brunias – who, particularly for an artist of the middling sort, left behind an impressive collection of paintings and engravings that can be reliably attributed to his own hand – little can be said with certainty about the artist himself. Even the artist's name – both first and last – and his nationality have, at times, been in doubt. For example, the minutes of a meeting of the President and Fellows of Harvard College, dated 15 November 1790, include a notice thanking John Gardiner, Esquire, for his gift of, among other things, 'six excellent Paintings finished by Brunias, a *French* painter of eminence',<sup>18</sup> while Edward Edwards's 1808 *Anecdotes of Painters* confirms his nationality as Italian but records the painter's name as '*Augustine* Brunias'.<sup>19</sup> Edward Croft-Murray's entry for Brunias in *Decorative Painting in England, 1537–1837* attempts to reconcile these competing bits of Brunias biography by declaring him 'of uncertain origin' and noting that his nationality had been previously recorded as Italian but that his name 'suggests he was a Frenchman'.<sup>20</sup> Croft-Murray also records some of the many versions of the artist's name; he has been known as Brunias, Brunais, and Brunyas, as Agostino, Augustine, Auguste – even Abraham, Austin, and Alexander!<sup>21</sup> The erroneous notion that Brunias was French might have been derived from records of his participation in a 1748 masquerade held by the French Academy in Rome, *Caravanne du sultan à la Mecque* or Caravan of the Sultan to Mecca. Joseph Vien recorded what might be the only portrait of Brunias, a sketch inscribed 'Eunuque: M. Brunias', in his drawings of the event, and, in the published folio he depicted the artist as a eunuch in elaborate Oriental dress (fig. 2). That the artist painted in islands that bounced back and forth between the French



Joseph Vien, 'Eunuque Blanc', etching from *Caravane du sultan à la Mecque*, mascarade turque donnée à Rome par Messieurs les pensionnaires de l'Académie de France et leurs amis au Carnaval de l'année 1748 (Paris: n.p., 1749), p. 53

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and the British throughout the last half of the eighteenth century and that he painted 'mulattresses', popularly identified as French, also probably informed this misconception.

Given the themes prevalent in Brunias's work and engaged in this book, it is tempting to consider whether Brunias might have consciously identified the parallels between the masquerades born in his native Italy and popular – as well as popularly derided – in his temporarily adopted home in England and the potentially protean character of identity in the colonial outposts of the Caribbean. Having seen, in Europe, white ladies dressed as blackamoors and princes pretending to be paupers, what might Brunias have made of a black-skinned 'Indian', an upstart planter assuming the airs of the old money elite, an enslaved African in the elegant attire of a planter, a saffron-skinned mulatto who *was* indeed a planter, or a free coloured maid whose pale skin was indiscernible from her mistress's? Might the West Indies have appeared to him like one big masquerade, a place where seeing could be deceiving, and identity – malleable and mutable – was uncertain and unfixed? There is no small irony in the fact that the only surviving image of Brunias, an artist whose work underscores the constructedness of social identity, depicts him trying on a foreign persona and that the assumption of this fictional identity may have confused the truth of his own for a century.<sup>22</sup> Still, it is impossible to know the extent to which Brunias consciously recognised the artificiality of the racial identities he depicted or how his paintings might have made manifest the constructedness of these identities. What is certain, however, is that, more than two hundred years after they were made, Brunias's paintings offer insight into the uniquely inchoate moment in the history of racial identity that they represent.

The details of Brunias's biography are important to this book only insofar as they further illuminate the artist's work or the time and place in which it was created; therefore, I have devoted more time and energy to researching the paintings and the context of their creation than the life of the artist who created them. While I would certainly love to know more about the man who created these fascinating paintings, far better archival researchers than I have done their best to pin down the particulars of Brunias's biography, establishing a rough sketch of the artist's life with a few illuminating details, and my own research has yielded little to add to this pool of facts. The historical record remains stubbornly silent when it comes to questions such as Brunias's personal life in the islands or his relationship with British colonial clients other than William Young.

Published biographical notices such as those by Edwards and Croft-Murray, auction catalogue entries, and short articles by Neville Connell and Hans Huth published in connoisseurship magazines during the 1960 and 1970s provided important starting points for establishing the basic points of



Brunias's biography. After cross-referencing these with each other, where details seemed dubious, suspicious, or conflicted with other accounts, I fact-checked them against extant records and, when all else failed, consulted with other Brunias-philes and used common sense to develop what, I believe, is an accurate, though inevitably spotty, account of the painter's life. In addition to the aforementioned sources, my understanding of Brunias's life is greatly indebted to the original research of John Fleming and Lennox Honychurch. Fleming's inquiry into Robert Adam yielded period records of Brunias's time in England and his relationship with the Adam brothers (albeit from Robert Adam's perspective).<sup>23</sup> Additionally, the archival research and critical insights of the noted Dominican historian Honychurch have provided invaluable information about the artist and the colonial Caribbean he would have encountered. Where tantalising speculations – those of others or my own – could not be verified, I have offered them to the reader as just that: enticing hypotheses with provocative implications that are worth considering but are impossible to confirm.

Given that Brunias's deceptively quaint and beautiful canvases do much to obscure the harsh realities of life for people of colour in West India's colonial plantation economy, it is somewhat ironic that, after having endured a difficult boat passage from Italy to England, the artist washed up on foreign shores and into the historical record dedicated to the service of his own unbending master, the famed British neoclassical architect Robert Adam, and that Adam clearly regarded Brunias as little more than a slave. Obviously, drawing any sort of direct comparison between Brunias's experience in Adam's employ and that of the enslaved Africans who survived the Middle Passage to labour in the Americas is both highly problematic and, perhaps, even irresponsible. The two situations *are not* comparable. However, as will become more evident in the following chapters, it is important to recognise the uncertain terms of Brunias's relationship with the Anglo-Protestant elite who employed him both in England and in the colonies, and to consider how this might have informed Brunias's vision of the people of colour whom he painted.

Although ostensibly white-skinned, Brunias was an Italian, a Roman Catholic, and a hired hand existing on the periphery of the upper-class British and Anglo-Caribbean circles with which he was affiliated as an employee. In this respect, the artist had, perhaps, more in common with the free people of colour who conspicuously dominate so much of his Caribbean oeuvre, their French Catholic culture (a legacy of earlier French attempts at settlement and colonisation of the islands where Brunias worked) having much in common with that of his native Italy. Therefore, Brunias occupied a perhaps unique liminal position between the elite culture of his British patrons and that of the free coloured population, one that might, in part, account for his distinctive Caribbean vision.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, much like the Caribbean inhabitants who are

the focus of his paintings, most of the details of Brunias's life must be gleaned from the records of those for whom he laboured.

Born in Rome about 1730, Brunias was reared and academically trained there. A pupil at the Accademia del Disegno di San Luca, in 1752 he won third prize in the institution's second class among the field of religious subjects for his painting *Tobias and the Angel*, now lost. Upon leaving the academy, he apparently made his living painting souvenir pictures for well-to-do Europeans making the Grand Tour and caught the eye of Adam, who would eventually rise to fame as one of Britain's most celebrated architects and an innovator of British neoclassical design. The son of the successful Scottish architect William Adam, Robert had high ambitions for improving upon his father's legacy. In 1754 he left Great Britain to begin studies on the Continent, working most notably with Charles-Louis Clérisseau. In 1757 Adam and Clérisseau embarked upon an architectural pilgrimage to Italy. Italy represented the capstone of a professional education for the aspiring architect Adam; moreover, always business-minded, he banked on the fact that the portfolios he prepared there would set him apart in the minds of potential clients in Britain and assure the success of the London office he hoped to open upon his return. To that end, Adam was especially keen to assemble a collection of drawings documenting the antique ruins he surveyed in Italy, paying particular attention to decorative motifs and architectural details that could later be used both as models to present to future clientele and references during the design process.

Impressed by Brunias's drawing skills, during his Italian sojourn Adam hired the artist to work as a draughtsman engaged in just this sort of visual documentation of classical design detail. In fact, Brunias, along with another draughtsman, Laurent-Benoît Dewez, travelled around the country with Adam and Clérisseau for some time and even accompanied them to Spalato (now Split, in Croatia) to survey the ruins of Diocletian's palace. Adam was so satisfied with – and dependent upon – the work of these two that he determined to bring them back with him to help establish the London office:

I have a young lad from Liège that is become my greatest draughtsman, is active, exact, expeditious and attentive. This lad I intend to bring to England and make him overseer of the Firelines or line-drawers. Then I have one for ornaments, for landscapes and figures and other things of that nature, who will prove very useful and who I shall likewise plant in London.<sup>25</sup>

Dewez, the 'young lad from Liège', Adam described later as his 'plan man and line drawer'. Brunias, who the architect acknowledges had been 'bred a painter' but was 'converted into an architect' by Clérisseau and himself, applied his skills more to figures and ornaments.<sup>26</sup>

Brunias and Dewez were the inaugural members of the large stable of draughtsmen, painters, and decorators who maintained the increasingly

ambitious Adam family architectural empire, managed principally by Robert with his brother James. Architects frequently worked as contractors and even sub-contractors, overseeing the design details of a project above and beyond the structure of the building. However, affecting the ‘Adam style’, as it came to be known, required an unusual amount of involvement on the part of the architectural firm regarding such elements as interior painting, decor, and furniture selection to achieve an overall aesthetic. Actually achieving this aesthetic was accomplished not so much by the brothers themselves as by their assembly of a team of reliable draughtsmen, painters, and artisans of diverse description. In fact, according to Adam scholars Joseph and Anne Rykwert, Adam’s ‘most obviously striking quality’ was not his creativity or skill as an architect but his ‘brilliant management’.<sup>27</sup> While the Rykwerts’ work most effectively elucidates the role of these workers in the Adam brothers’ increasingly ambitious architectural enterprise, John Fleming’s scholarship, particularly his review of Robert Adam’s papers, illuminates the architect’s opinions of the underlings he employed.

Adam’s own words reveal the deeply contradictory feelings that shaped the dynamics and relations of power between the architect and the employees upon whom his success depended. Not entirely unlike the plantation slaveholders that Brunias would encounter in the West Indies, Adam unequivocally considered himself inherently superior to his employees on the one hand, yet also acknowledged his complete and utter helplessness without them on the other. Clearly aspiring to something greater than the provincial Scottish architectural reputation that his father had established, Adam had his heart and his sights set upon London and understood Brunias and Dewez as essential to the success of his London plans. Objecting to his brothers’ requests to avoid any commitment to employing Brunias and Dewez in England, he argued:

at London there is not one who knows my manner of drawing nor would learn it in two years. And then the very name of bringing two Italians will do more than he [Robert’s brother, presumably James] is aware of ... These two [Brunias and Dewez] Clérisseau and I have actually bred and to have allowed them to fall into other people’s hands would have been our own ruin and destruction. I really would not have the courage to settle in London without them.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, while simultaneously indicating his inability to function without them, Adam’s insistence that ‘the very name of bringing two Italians’ (even if one was actually Liégeois) would help make the firm’s reputation suggests that he saw them as trophies to some extent. Moreover, his letters demonstrate his generally low opinion of those he employed, illustrating that he regarded them as little more than his mindless possessions. He frequently called Dewez ‘my Liégeois’ while Brunias was known as ‘his Italian’;<sup>29</sup> Adam referred to

the two of them together as his 'two young myrmidons'.<sup>30</sup> However, these demeaning epithets aside, Brunias and Dewez were held in high esteem in comparison to the lowlier artists in Adam's employ. In fact, referring to less well-regarded members of his collection of workers in Italy, Adam explicitly calls upon the language of slavery, and one can hear in his words the echoes of the voices of slaveholders who regarded those who they held in bondage as subhuman. For example, Adam refers to 'an Italian lad [not Brunias] who does all the drudgery business of putting things in proportion from sketches, but ... [who he regards] in no esteem but as a daily slave at one shilling per day'; another draughtsman he calls a 'beegle' and 'the most worthless dog I ever knew but draws my ornaments to perfection'.<sup>31</sup>

I want to reiterate that I am not claiming, in any way, that Brunias was Robert Adam's slave. I point to rhetorical echoes here between West Indian slaveholders and the words of Adam regarding his employees, which would have reflected a not uncommon perspective of employers vis-à-vis their hired hands in eighteenth-century London, to illustrate the uncertain terms of labour that Brunias and his fellows encountered. While the plight of enslaved people and that of free white workers in England were not equivalent to any extent, the fact that the *language* of slavery was commonly used with reference to workers in Britain is significant, as is the constant invocation, in the raging debates over abolition, of the relative merits or disadvantages of slavery versus wage labour and other forms of servitude.<sup>32</sup>

Moreover, in addition to Adam's opinions of those in his employ, their own uncertainty about their status and the terms of their work must be considered relative to debates about labour, including slavery, in Great Britain at the time. Adam scholar Eileen Harris cites Joseph Bonomi, who Adam hired on a subsequent trip to Italy and who became noted as an architect in his own right, as claiming that he and others employed in Adam's London office were bound to seven-year terms during which he 'could do nothing, not even for [his] own use, under a penalty of paying them (Messrs. Adam) £200:0:0'.<sup>33</sup> While Bonomi and two others agreed to stay for a second term, others in the Adam brothers' employ, tired of such exploitation, left after their first term of service. One striking episode took place in December 1758 when Dewez, the premier Adam draughtsman along with Brunias, fled London for Brussels:

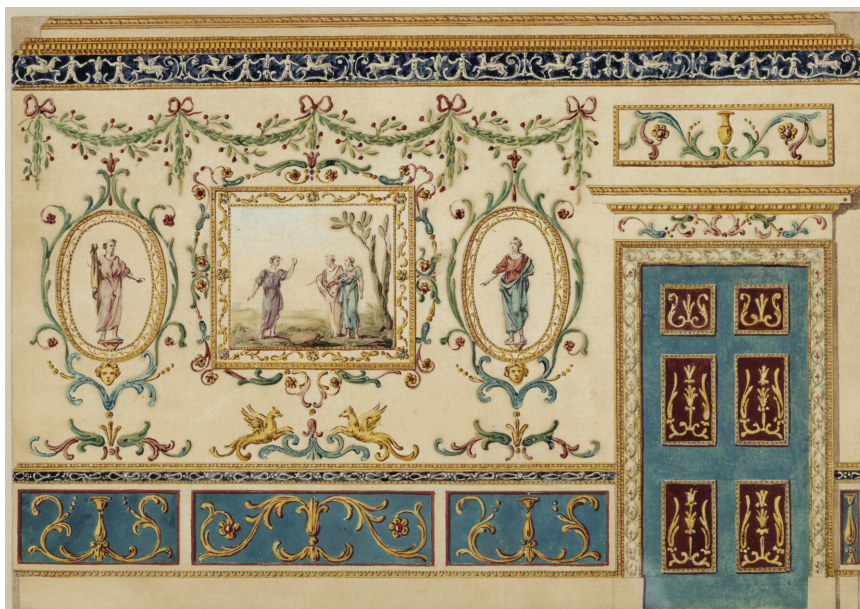
at this juncture when friends, business and hurry threaten to take hold of me, has the Liégeois thought fit to take to his heels and have gone off to Brussels without warning or without even telling Brunias of his intention. This morning I received a letter from him from Dover telling me that as I had used him as a slave he imagined I had authority to do so and says he always suspected some paper that I had desired Brunias and him to sign witness to when you was in London in February was a paper that made him a slave and that till such time as

I would send him an attestation by the hand of a notary public that no writing made in England could be brought against him he would not return back, so begs an immediate answer. If I could do without such a wretch you may be sure I never would hear of him again, but he knows my manner of drawing and I have nobody to supply his place...<sup>34</sup>

Adam's letters and Dewez's concern that he had been conscripted into some sort of slavery suggest something of the working conditions under which he, and presumably Brunias, laboured after leaving Italy for England in 1758. In fact, in speaking of the merits of bringing artists from abroad to the London office, Adam added that 'They [specifically referring to Brunias and Dewez] speak nothing but French and Italian so have no chance of being soon debauched by evil communication, which is no small advantage.'<sup>35</sup> In other words, being unable to communicate in English, they could not be encouraged to advocate for better wages or proper credit for their work.

As Adam operated his office much like a workshop, the architect was and continues to be directly credited for the work of his draughtsmen, including Brunias. The preface to a 1987 book produced by Britain's National Trust about the designing of Kedleston Hall, *Robert Adam and Kedleston*, notes that 'perhaps the least known, and most beautiful, of all items lent from the house was an exquisite watercolour by Robert Adam, a design for a "painted Breakfast Room" ... that showed one of Britain's greatest architects at the height of his powers'.<sup>36</sup> However, the text then nonchalantly acknowledges that this work and other 'Drawings given to Robert Adam should be understood as emanating from his office, and thus produced by carefully supervised draughtsmen (such as Agostino Brunias...)'.<sup>37</sup> The exquisite watercolour in question (fig. 3), which incidentally was also the cover art chosen for the book, is, in two other Adam monographs, attributed unequivocally to Brunias.<sup>38</sup>

Regarded as '[o]ne of the greatest of all English country houses', Kedleston Hall was and is considered among Adam's crowning achievements,<sup>39</sup> and Adam's papers document Brunias's intense involvement in the Kedleston project. Brunias played no small role in the design programme for the famed painted breakfast room at Kedleston, renowned for its innovative style which resulted from the freedom of design that Adam was granted there.<sup>40</sup> Discussing Adam's signature use of colour (which decidedly rejected the colour theories of Winckelmann typically associated with neoclassical design), Fleming credits Brunias's influence on Adam's style, referring to the 'colour schemes *developed by Brunias* that Adam had admired and written about so enthusiastically'; moreover, speaking in terms that suggest the architect and his employee as collaborators, Fleming observes that '[i]f nothing else, this room showed Adam's and Brunias' understanding of the



- 3 Attributed to Agostino Brunias for Robert Adam, 'Design for the Painted Breakfast Room in the Family Pavilion', one of three designs in pen, ink, and watercolour by Robert Adam in 1760

importance of colour and their readiness to experiment'.<sup>41</sup> Surely, Brunias – whose academic training as a painter drew upon the great antique and Renaissance models and who put his work forward for exhibition with the Free Society of Artists in 1763 and 1764, the Society of Arts in 1770, and the Royal Academy in 1777 and 1779 – thought of himself as more than a mindless brush for hire.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, he, no doubt, resented being regarded as such by others. For example, Honychurch suggests that disputes with Adam over proper pay and fair credit for his work led Brunias to seek his fortune in the Caribbean when the opportunity arose.<sup>43</sup>

Though he almost certainly worked for others during his West Indian sojourns, Brunias's primary benefactor in the West Indies was Sir William Young, 1st Baronet.<sup>44</sup> A Scotsman like many of the other settlers of the Windward Islands, Young had been appointed to the Commission for the Sale of Lands in the Ceded Islands and was the body's president. Escaping his troubles with Adam in exchange for the promise offered by a new patron in the so-called New World, some time between 1764 and 1770 Brunias accompanied Young on an expedition to the Caribbean as the aristocrat's personal artist, ostensibly hired to capture life in these islands, the newest jewels in the British crown.<sup>45</sup>

A man of influence in the British West Indies, Young served in various official colonial capacities during the eighteenth century, including terms as governor of St Vincent and Dominica, and was made baronet in 1769, four years after his arrival in the Caribbean. During his eight years of primary residence in the islands, from 1764 to 1773, Young amassed a small West Indian empire of his own, no doubt using his position on the land commission to reserve some of the best pieces of real estate for himself. He eventually owned three sugar plantations in St Vincent (including the legendary Calliaqua) as well as two in Tobago, two in Antigua, and one in Dominica. At the time of his death in 1788, his combined holdings were valued at £200,000.<sup>46</sup> His son, also named William, whose edition of his father's writings on the Carib Wars in St Vincent is referenced extensively in the first chapter of this book, inherited his title and the plantations. To Brunias, he bequeathed a mourning ring and fifty pounds sterling.<sup>47</sup>

As Chapter 2 will discuss in greater detail, eighteenth-century artists working for British interests in the colonial West Indies were often charged with supplying absentee planters living in Britain with pictures of their Caribbean holdings, providing evidence of their wealth in the form of forts, ports, and plantation landscapes. Rarely did they train their brushes on the various communities of colour residing there. British planters, seeking to elevate rather than implicate themselves, wanted pictures of their land – not the brown bodies they had exterminated or extirpated to usurp it, the black bodies they had transplanted to work it, or the yellow ones whose existence they had had a role in creating upon it. However, Brunias's work focuses virtually exclusively on Caribbeans of various colours – Red and Black Caribs, Africans and Afro-Creoles, and people of mixed European and African ancestry – marking his oeuvre as unique within the realm of eighteenth-century colonial Caribbean visual production. Moreover, Brunias's romance with Caribbeans of colour, perhaps not limited to the easel, may have extended to intimate relationships as well. Based upon a number of archival records, including baptismal records for two illegitimate mixed-race boys, born in 1774 and identified as Edward and Augustin Brunias, Honychurch speculates that Brunias, like so many European men who sojourned in the islands, was intimately connected with a woman of colour there, and evidence indicates that the artist started a family with a mixed-race woman in Dominica.<sup>48</sup> This speculation seems confirmed by the numbers of mixed-race people of the Bruney family in Dominica who trace their ancestry back to an Italian surveyor who worked for the British government in the late 1700s and whom they identify as one and the same as Brunias, the artist.<sup>49</sup>

Whether or not Brunias had a romance with a West Indian woman, he must have fallen in love with the islands. Although William Young quit the West Indies for Britain for good at the end of 1773, Brunias returned to England

only for a few years during the 1770s. He apparently lived in London's West End, listing addresses at 20 Broad Street, Carnaby Market, and 7 Broad Street, Soho during the late 1770s, and he exhibited paintings – West Indian scenes probably completed in London – at the Royal Academy in 1777 and 1779.<sup>50</sup> During this brief return to England, Brunias completed beautiful engravings after his paintings with elaborate dedications to military and colonial officials that showcase his technical prowess as an engraver as well as a painter. His use of stipple technique allowed him to emphasise subtle gradations of skin colour just as he had done in his paintings. His time back in Britain was short lived, however, and by 1784 Brunias was apparently back in St Vincent completing a commission of botanical drawings for the St Vincent Botanical Gardens. According to the record of his death, 'Agustin [*sic*] Brunias natif de Rome' died on 2 April 1796, in Roseau, Dominica, at the age of sixty-six.

An inevitably brief Brunias historiography

Agostino Brunias was not, by any accepted definition of the term, an artistic genius. He was not at the forefront of an avant-garde movement; he did not rise to fame and fortune during his lifetime, nor did his precious canvases garner widespread admiration even after his death. Indeed, it may not even be fair to say that Brunias's work attracted any sort of cult following worthy of note until the last few decades. Brunias's primary significance, however, exists not in his technical or aesthetic innovation but in his unique imagining of the British colonial project in the West Indies during the late eighteenth century. Whereas so-called artistic geniuses may develop a vision too original to function as an index of a particular culture, artists of the middling sort frequently create works that provide precisely this sort of information, and serve as touchstones of the ideological imperatives operating in the cultures for which they are produced. Brunias's work, therefore, offers valuable insight about how his patrons – wealthy plantation owners and colonial officials – imagined the coloured inhabitants of the West Indian islands. In their depiction of colonial Caribbeans of colour, Brunias's paintings inevitably tell us more about how Britons saw themselves and understood their relationship to the joint projects of slavery, colonialism, and Empire that so profoundly defined their existences than they do about the actual lives of the Caribbean's indigenous, enslaved, and free coloured populations against whom these existences were defined. Moreover, Brunias *was* unique in the way that he accomplished this task, providing his patrons with pretty pictures that reflected their own ideas but also offered the possibility of a different interpretation that potentially undermines them.

Because Brunias was not widely regarded as a painter of any great significance, little has been written about him. Moreover, most of what has been



written (much of it with the aim of piquing interest for upcoming auctions of his work) concerns itself less with a critical analysis of the artist's oeuvre than with biographical details and a summary of the work's 'exotic' subject matter. Just twelve years after his death, Brunias received a brief mention in Edward Edwards's *Anecdotes of Painters who have Resided or been Born in England* (1808). However, the entry is primarily biographical, lacking the 'Critical Remarks on their Production' that Edwards's title page promises, though it does mention Brunias's interest in Caribbean subjects and paintings featuring the 'amusements' of West Indian 'negroes'. Brunias continued to receive small mentions in biographical dictionaries and catalogues of British painting, including Algernon Graves's important *Royal Academy of Arts: A Complete Dictionary of Contributors and their Work* (1905) and *Society of Artists of Great Britain, 1760-1791 [and the] Free Society of Artists, 1761-1783* (1907) and the aforementioned *Decorative Painting in England, 1537-1837* (1970) by Edward Croft-Murray.

The first critically significant investigation of the artist's work, however, appeared in 1890 when E.-T. Hamy wrote about Brunias for the inaugural issue of the journal *L'Anthropologie*. In 'Alexander Brunias, peintre ethnographe de la fin du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, courte notice sur son oeuvre', Hamy describes his chance encounter in 1888 with four unframed Brunias works '*representant des scènes exotique qui me parrurent curieuses*'.<sup>51</sup> Presaging the general mode in which Brunias's work would be understood and appreciated for more than the next century, Hamy describes Brunias's pictures as at once exotic and meticulously accurate. He names the artist among the first 'ethnographic' painters and praises the documentary quality and detail of Brunias's work: '*Tout l'ensemble de l'œuvre de notre peintre ethnographe est d'ailleurs, je l'ai dit déjà, d'une exactitude quasi scientifique, dont ne se préoccupaient guère les peintres de 1780.*'<sup>52</sup> Hamy's high opinion of the ethnographic value of Brunias's work apparently had little influence on the esteem in which the artist was held by historians of art, however, and with the exception of brief mentions in dictionaries and catalogues, there was little to no discussion of the artist in the secondary literature for more than a half century.

Hans Huth broke this silence in 1962, publishing a brief but important article, 'Agostino Brunias, Romano, Robert Adam's "Bred Painter"' in the December issue of *The Connoisseur*, a periodical intended primarily for dealers and collectors. Huth, a curator at the Art Institute of Chicago and researcher of the Institute's painting catalogue, was inspired to write the piece by the museum's acquisition of a Brunias painting in 1953. At the time, the work had been entitled *American Plantation* and erroneously attributed to Richard Wilson.<sup>53</sup> Huth's extensive background research uncovered what even he acknowledged were 'scrap[s] of knowledge about Brunias's early

life<sup>54</sup> including his training in Rome and the drawing by Joseph Vien, and it was he who established, once and for all, the now conventionally accepted form and spelling of the artist's name as 'Agostino Brunias'.<sup>55</sup> In 1971 Neville Connell, then director of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society, published two articles in *Antiques*, another journal with a readership of primarily dealers and collectors, on the general subject of colonial era prints of the West Indies, the first of which featured only an illustration of a print which may or may not be after Brunias, while the second included several paragraphs about the artist that drew extensively on Huth.<sup>56</sup>

The work of the Oxford-trained anthropologist and native of Dominica Lennox Honychurch made pioneering advances into the study of Brunias and his oeuvre. Honychurch, who works on an impressively broad range of topics relating to Caribbean history and culture, first encountered Brunias in the work for his doctoral thesis at Oxford and has been a committed Brunias scholar ever since, writing the first pieces on the artist to bring biographical details together with some critical discussion of his artistic production and the social and historical milieu in which it was created. Drawing on archival records related to the Young family, Honychurch's work has done much to flesh out the relationship between Brunias and Sir William Young, and he was the first scholar to subject the artist's work to any sort of critical visual analysis, attending separately to Brunias's portrayal of aboriginal Antilleans, Chatoyer and the so-called Black Caribs, and people of African descent, both dark-skinned and visibly of mixed race. After publishing a brief article 'Agostino Brunias, a Precursor of Gauguin' in 1975, Honychurch lectured on the artist periodically before publishing 'Chatoyer's Artist: Agostino Brunias and the Depiction of St. Vincent' in the *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society* in 2004.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, the scholar has made the findings of his research widely available to the public through a website that he maintains and which is dedicated to promoting the art, culture, and history of Dominica.<sup>58</sup>

The first to include a critical analysis of any significant length on Brunias's work in a scholarly book, Beth Fowkes Tobin devoted a chapter of her important 1995 book *Picturing Imperial Power: Colonial Subjects in Eighteenth-Century British Painting* to a discussion of the potentially subversive power of the dressing practices of colonial Caribbeans of African descent as represented in Brunias's paintings.<sup>59</sup> As the title of her Brunias chapter, 'Taxonomy and Agency in Brunias's West Indian Paintings', demonstrates, Tobin places Brunias's art squarely within the context of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment-inspired project to catalogue the natural world. Moreover, inspired by scholarship in fields such as performance theory and postcolonial studies, particularly the work of thinkers such as Homi Bhabha and Dick Hebdige, Tobin analyses the costumes

captured by Brunias's brush to investigate the potential of dress as subversive performance.

Accepting and expanding upon the ethnographic designation assigned to Brunias by Hamy more than a century before, Tobin locates Brunias within the conventions of eighteenth-century natural history. She understands his work as the visual equivalent to the 'customs and manners' sections of literary iterations of this tradition and emphasises the taxonomic quality of the artist's paintings without significant complication. I agree that the *raison d'être* for Brunias's paintings, as ostensibly expressed by the patrons and demonstrated by the way in which they have conventionally been titled, has everything to do with Enlightenment concerns about classification and empiricism. However, as I argue throughout this book, I subscribe to quite a different view of the documentary value of Brunias's paintings, asserting that they cannot be described as unequivocally typological or ethnographic, and I detail how the paintings differ from the conventions of so-called ethnographic artwork concerned with racial typology.

My work on Brunias's oeuvre builds significantly upon the insightful scholarship of Kay Dian Kriz, published first as an essay in Felicity Nussbaum's 2003 anthology *The Global Eighteenth Century* and expanded upon as a chapter in her own 2008 book *Slavery, Sugar, and the Culture of Refinement: Picturing the British West Indies, 1700–1840*. Like Kriz, I analyse Brunias's images as images, thinking about them more as constructed representations of Caribbean life than as documentary ones. Kriz trains her attention on the conspicuous prevalence of mixed-race women in the artist's work, considering this pervasive presence especially in light of the vexing role that such figures played in both Caribbean perception and reality. Ultimately, Kriz argues that 'Brunias mobilizes the mulatress's ambiguous social and racial status – her in-betweenness – in order to represent civilised society "under development" in a place more commonly associated with base pleasures and profit-taking.'<sup>60</sup> Expanding upon Kriz's work, in Chapter 3 I assert that, for Brunias, the multivalent figure of the mulatress emerged as the quintessential Caribbean body because of her ability to represent *both* potential refinement *and* those baser pleasures popularly associated with colonial life in the West Indies.

Kriz is also the first scholar to allude to the fact that reading race in Brunias's paintings is not always the unequivocal task that the more conventional characterisation of his works as racial 'field guides' would suggest.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, the discrepancy between the way that she and Tobin read the same figure in one Brunias picture – Tobin describes the woman as unqualifiedly white, while Kriz asserts that she is, in all likelihood, of mixed race – piqued my curiosity and interest in uncovering more figures like this ambiguously raced beauty within the artist's work. Though Kriz contends that this woman

of questionable racial designation 'is an exceptional figure within the artist's oeuvre', I have found several other examples.<sup>62</sup> These form the foundation for Chapter 4's consideration of anxieties around racial ambiguity and whiteness in the British colonial Caribbean.

In putting my own ideas into conversation with those of other recent scholars who have explored Brunias and his world, I aim to build upon and broaden the current scholarship on his work to present a more comprehensive picture of the artist's oeuvre. While I certainly hope that *Colouring the Caribbean* will be accepted as the definitive text on Brunias for some time to come, I also hope it will not be understood as closing the book on Brunias once and for all. Instead, in offering new interpretations of Brunias's paintings and examining heretofore unexplored aspects of his work, I hope this book will encourage scholars and students to continue to reconsider both the significance of Brunias's images in particular and, more generally, what light the study of art and visual culture can shed upon the histories of slavery, colonialism, and Empire and the construction of race in the Atlantic world.

#### A few words on word choice

Racialised terms, freighted with the weight of history, are never neutral. Whether I refer to myself as a negress, a coloured girl, a black woman, a Black woman (with a capital 'B'), an African American female, a woman/person of colour, a woman/person of African descent, a Creole of colour, a womanist, a Nubian queen, or an Afrikan sistah, the choice I make conveys more than simply gender or skin colour, suggesting something of how I think about myself with regard to history, politics, geography, culture, and social class. Therefore, I make no pretence about the neutrality of the terms I have used throughout this book. In general, I have aimed to be respectful of the humanity of Brunias's subjects and mindful of the implications of particular terms without being overly pedantic. For the most part, I have used twenty-first-century racial terms, making a number of necessary adjustments to accommodate Brunias's eighteenth-century subject matter.

After surveying the field and finding no one term dominant and not being able to determine any real consensus regarding the most appropriate term to refer to the original inhabitants of the West Indian islands (outside of Canada where 'First Nations' is clearly preferred), I have taken the liberty of using a diverse array of terms relatively interchangeably to describe such peoples throughout this project. These include, for example, 'Native Americans', 'indigenes', 'Amerindians', and 'Indians,' and, where appropriate, more specific terms such as 'Carib' and 'indigenous Antillean'. The variety of terms available for use here provided a welcome respite from the verbal constraints felt elsewhere.

In general and strictly for the sake of clarity, I have used the term 'black' to refer only to dark-skinned individuals of African descent and not to those who would be considered 'coloured' or 'mulatto' by eighteenth-century West Indian standards, regardless of whether these individuals might be considered or might consider themselves 'black' today. Without a hard and fast standard like the odious and unforgiving paper bag test of yore, 'dark-skinned' may be in the eye of the beholder, but after living with a multitude of Brunias images for more than the last decade, I believe I know Brunias's 'black' when I see it. I am not unaware of the irony of this statement given my arguments in this book. However, Brunias's black and Red Carib figures represent distinctive entities in his oeuvre specifically because they are readily identifiable, constituting the hard lines that underscore the murky boundaries of the other types of figures: Black Carib, mixed-race, and even, vexingly, 'white'. I have used the term 'Afro-Creole' to describe people of African descent raised in the West Indies to distinguish them from 'Africans' born and raised in Africa, while the terms 'Afro-Caribbean' or 'Afro-West Indian' refer to both groups together unless otherwise noted.

More dated and loaded terms such as 'negro' are generally used only in quotations or for intentional rhetorical effect. The exception to this is my use of the term 'negress' in Chapter 3. After giving the issue quite a bit of thought, I concluded that the raced and gendered connotations of 'negress' best correspond to those of 'mulatress', a term decidedly employed throughout the book because of its own connotations and the inability of any other term to capture as precisely the ideas that Brunias aimed to convey in paint. Unless there was a persuasive reason to assume otherwise, I have generally assumed that Brunias's Afro-Caribbeans were not of free status and have tried to follow the now preferred convention of using the adjective 'enslaved' rather than the noun 'slave' to refer to such individuals (again with the exception of quotations or examples used for explicit rhetorical effect). I have also employed the terms bondspeople, bondsfolk, and the like interchangeably with nouns modified by 'enslaved' for variety. In the same vein, I have generally employed 'slaveholder' and 'planter' over 'master' to describe those who did the enslaving.

The terms 'mixed-race' and occasionally 'mulatto' refer to figures of African and European ancestry. The Gallicised 'mulatress', commonly used in the titles of Brunias's paintings to refer to mixed-race women, has also been employed, especially to reiterate the exotic connotation of its original usage. Following the popular usage of the day in the British West Indies, unless otherwise indicated, 'mulatto' does not refer to a combination of black and white ancestry in any particular mathematical proportion but to any person of obviously mixed racial heritage, including those who in other places or other times or by some racial stickler insistent upon precision in classification might have

been referred to as a *terceron*, a *quadroon*, a *griffe*, or a *morisca*. Except when referring to a free person, male or female, of colour I have tried to avoid the use of 'coloured' or 'of colour' as these terms have had more longevity than some of the others and have had various, differently freighted meanings at different times and in different places (e.g. 'person of colour' means something very different in the United States today than it did in St Domingue in 1790). An exception to this is my use of the phrases 'West Indians of colour' and 'Caribbeans of colour' to refer to Brunias's subjects – Carib, black, and mixed-race – collectively.

In the colonial British West Indies, prescriptive ideas about races of men as separate and distinct and about racial identity as fixed and discrete helped to define whiteness as a social commodity. Shoring up the boundaries of white British identity, especially for white Creoles, was an integral part of the colonialist ideological programme. Because this book concerns itself particularly with the context of the British West Indies, I have favoured 'British', 'the British', and 'Britons', using the more specific designations of 'English' or 'Scot', etc., where necessary. Recognising that, in the eighteenth century, 'white' did not function as a designation that referred equally to all those of exclusively European heritage and that some who were ostensibly 'white' considered themselves whiter than others, where I have used 'Caucasian' or 'white' (interchangeably), 'British white' should be understood unless otherwise noted. Just as 'Afro-Creole' refers to black people raised in the islands, 'white Creole' refers to Britons who were island born and raised.

The historian Douglas Hamilton, in *Scotland, the Caribbean, and the Atlantic World, 1750–1820*, has observed that while the connotation of 'planter' suggests high birth, grand estates, fabulous wealth, and a luxurious lifestyle, in reality many 'planters' did not hail from elite circles in Britain and were seeking to make their names and their fortunes in the islands. Nevertheless, while there was certainly some elitism among whites in the islands, social boundaries there tended to collapse somewhat in the face of the colonies' black majorities, making friends and neighbours of those who might never have met, much less socialised together, in Britain. Indeed, whiteness made allies of a sort even of those French settlers who remained after the islands were ceded to the British (and who, almost certainly, were allowed to stay, in part, because they helped increase the declining white population at a time when the mixed-race community was growing). Although the French enjoyed only very limited political participation (and at times were deprived of even this), the British recognised a shared interest with the French in perpetuating the white racial dominance upon which the system of slavery – and, therefore, their fortunes – depended, and the British and French 'shared in the economic and social dominance' their whiteness afforded them. Moreover, the significant opportunities for economic and social mobility that the islands

afforded their white inhabitants meant that all whites aspired to be ‘planters’ in every sense of the word, whether or not they actually possessed such wealth or status or could ever reasonably hope to have it. Therefore, I have used ‘planter’ to describe those who might claim all that it connotes legitimately as well as the aspirants. ‘Plantocracy’ refers specifically to the collective power of planters and colonial elites and the systems put in place to secure and perpetuate that power.<sup>63</sup>

Referring to Brunias’s works by title poses its own set of issues with regard to language. Brunias’s paintings do not bear original titles, and I know of no painting definitively or even probably titled by Brunias himself.<sup>64</sup> Most of his works have been titled by collectors, auction houses, or museum curators to reflect the *perceived* racial identities of the featured figures (or, somewhat less often, the ‘ethnic’ activity captured in the image). This practice proves problematic on a number of levels. First and quite significant given the concerns of this book, as Chapter 4 will demonstrate, one viewer’s white ‘lady’ may be another’s ‘mulatress’. However, the title of a work informs the experience of looking and has the potential power to predetermine and, in fact, overdetermine the viewer’s perception of a figure’s racial identity and the scene at hand. Additionally, the standard convention for naming Brunias’s paintings means that many of the works bear bland, unimaginative, or awkward titles (for example, *Three Caribs outside a Native Hut* or *A Lady and a Mulatress with a Negro Servant Standing in Back*). Such titles, in my view, elide important differences between works that are nominatively of the same subject (the artist’s many ‘mulatress’ pictures, for example) and make Brunias’s oeuvre appear more uniform and typologically driven than it actually is.

Sometimes no definitive consensus exists regarding a painting’s title, particularly as the titles of some works have evolved to reflect the changing times. For example, an image once known as a *West Indian Dandy and Two Ladies* now bears the more politically correct title *Free West Indian Dominicans*. Unfortunately, the well-intentioned practice of retitling Brunias’s paintings to steer clear of racial terms that might potentially offend the modern ear or to avoid the appearance of legitimising racialised hierarchies sometimes results in even longer and more phonically clumsy titles than the original ones, and further confuses the already challenging task of devising a definitive catalogue raisonné. The similarity of the titles given to Brunias’s paintings elicits inevitable confusion about the size of his corpus. With several different works known as *Linen Market* or *Handkerchief Dance* and the same work known by multiple titles, it is hard to determine precisely how many works are extant and how many were once known and are now lost, especially as entries in early auction catalogues are not accompanied by images.

Despite the limitations of the titling conventions for Brunias's works, I have tried to avoid exacerbating an already challenging situation by opting to keep titles as I have found them rather than adding yet another title to the mix. Where multiple titles for the same work exist, I have simply chosen the title I found the most fitting, trying to balance clarity, sensitivity, and phonic fluidity. I have followed this practice of using a previously given title with two exceptions: in instances where the given title both varies significantly from the standard convention *and* offers the reader no substantive information about the work (as in a series of paintings each known only as *Colonial Scene*) and when the title includes language so generally offensive to the modern ear that I felt uncomfortable including it in my text (for example, *French Mulatress Purchasing Fruit from a Negro Wench*). In these cases I have devised my own titles modelled on the general convention of naming Brunias's works, marking them with an \* and including the original title either in-text or in a footnote.

Finally, I initially resisted the term 'New World', hesitant to reinforce the notion that Europeans had discovered something 'new' when, in 1492, they encountered the islands on which people had made their homes and developed vibrant cultures for thousands of years. However, I have ultimately come to embrace 'New World' as descriptive of the unprecedented reality that this encounter created and that is ultimately the focus of my scholarship. The world that Agostino Brunias's paintings sought to capture – born of economic greed, sustained by slavery, dependent upon white supremacy, and distinguished by unparalleled diversity – was, indeed, one that had never before been seen.

#### Notes

- 1 While almost certainly not a portrait, Brunias's genre study of this mixed-race planter and his wife defies the modern viewer's expectation regarding the wealth and status of people of colour in the Caribbean. Although some free people of colour did eventually manage to secure plantations and even enslaved people to work them, restrictions placed upon free people of colour by colonial administrations across the region such as exclusion from political participation, prohibition from owning large tracts of land, and limited work opportunities precluded the vast majority of them from rising to the station of the couple that Brunias presents. Consequently, they did not comprise a significant proportion of the planter population. Therefore, it makes sense that, although Brunias frequently painted mixed-race men and women in elegant dress, this picture represents a bit of an anomaly. In no other extant work does Brunias present a mixed-race couple of such obvious status as the singular focus of the picture. For a comprehensive accounting of the economic and social position of free people of colour in the Windward Islands, see Bernard Marshall, 'Social Stratification and the Free Coloured in the Slave



- Society of the British Windward Islands', *Social and Economic Studies*, 31.1 (1982), pp. 1–39, [www.jstor.org/stable/27861974](http://www.jstor.org/stable/27861974) (accessed 16 May 2017).
- 2 The memo can be found in the Brunias clippings file at the Yale Center for British Art.
  - 3 'Mr. Mellon' is Paul Mellon (1907–99), American philanthropist, Anglophile, and British art collector, who donated the building, primary art collection, and endowment with which the Yale Center for British Art was established.
  - 4 'Prof. Thompson' is Robert Farris Thompson, esteemed professor of the art and culture of Africa and the Afro-Atlantic world.
  - 5 As a scholar whose training included a significant amount of gender and sexuality studies work and queer theory – and as being a queer woman of colour myself – I struggled with this issue (although, as I express in the Coda to this book, I was not fully aware of the extent of it until I had finished the first draft of the main chapters). Ultimately, however, I decided to let the sources available to me dictate how I framed my interpretations. I did not feel comfortable speculating about how viewers who left behind no trace of how they perceived Brunias's paintings and for whom contextual evidence also offers little insight on this matter might have understood the painter's images. See, for example, Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley's scholarship which I discuss in the Coda.
  - 6 Kay Dian Kriz's groundbreaking scholarship on Brunias also observed the necessity of considering his work from a variety of viewer perspectives. She admonishes, 'It is all too easy to assume that Brunias's images were designed to appeal to heterosexual men, but they equally, if perhaps more surreptitiously, invite the gaze of white women, who might fantasize about "possessing" (in either sense) a body that is so closely associated with "dark" sexual pleasures.' Kay Dian Kriz, *Slavery, Sugar, and the Culture of Refinement: Picturing the British West Indies, 1700–1840* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 55.
  - 7 The general view of Brunias as the 'plantocracy's painter' was explicitly articulated in the title of a breakout session on Brunias at the conference coinciding with the opening of YCBA's 2007 Belisario exhibition, and has been expressed, albeit to different extents and with varying degrees of scholarly rigour, in virtually every critical analysis of his work.
  - 8 See, for example, Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (New York: Norton, 1977), first published by University of North Carolina in 1968, and the impressive body of scholarship by Kim F. Hall.
  - 9 Roxann Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), pp. 3–4.
  - 10 *Ibid.*, p. 9.
  - 11 For example, the historian Douglas Hamilton observes that 'By the eighteenth century, the sight of multi-racial gangs of labourers, once a common feature in seventeenth-century Barbados, was unthinkable.' See Douglas Hamilton, *Scotland, the Caribbean, and the Atlantic World, 1750–1820* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 35.

- 12 Angela Rosenthal, 'Visceral Culture: Blushing and the Legibility of Whiteness in Eighteenth-Century British Portraiture', *Art History*, 27.4 (2004), p. 579.
- 13 Kay Dian Kriz, 'Marketing Mulatresses in the Paintings and Prints of Agostino Brunias', in Felicity A. Nussbaum (ed.), *The Global Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), p. 206. Kriz published a revised and expanded version of this essay as a chapter in her own book *Slavery, Sugar, and the Culture of Refinement*.
- 14 James Pope-Hennessy, *Sins of the Fathers: A Study of the Atlantic Slave Traders, 1441-1807* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967), p. 14.
- 15 See, for example, the text for catalogue entries 163 and 164 in Tim Barringer, Gillian Forrester, and Barbaro Martinez-Ruiz (eds), *Art and Emancipation in Jamaica: Isaac Mendes Belisario and His Worlds* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 458-459.
- 16 Those of Brunias's paintings for which eighteenth-century titles survive, such as the ones at Harvard University's Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography, often employ the Gallicised term 'mulatress', from the French *mulâtresse*, to refer to the mixed-race women they portray rather than the more common English forms such as mulatto or mulatta. As I argue later, this probably has much to do with implicating the French and absolving the British from participation in interracial sexual activity. Where I have employed 'mulatress' I have done so in order to capture the connotations that the term would have originally carried or for intentional rhetorical effect.
- 17 My work on Brunias began in 2005 and primarily engages with the version of Kriz's Brunias essay in the 2003 Nussbaum anthology. The version of the essay that appears in Kriz's own 2008 book, published long after the completion of my chapter on mixed-race women in Brunias's art, offers a slightly revised argument more in line with, but certainly not identical to, my own. While Kriz's main argument remains the same in both versions of the essay, near the end of the book version she offers a sentence that concedes that the mulatress might represent both potential refinement and the baser pleasures to be enjoyed in the islands: 'Brunias's images held out to their viewers ... the promise of refinement without relinquishing the baser pleasures of the flesh.' My scholarship expands upon this notion. See Kriz, *Slavery, Sugar, and the Culture of Refinement*, p. 64.
- 18 Emphasis added; a photocopy of the original manuscript record 'At a Meeting of the President and Fellows of Harvard College, Nov. 15, 1790' is in the Brunias clippings file at the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography, Harvard University.
- 19 Emphasis added; Edward Edwards, *Anecdotes of Painters who have Resided or Been Born in England* (London: Luke Hansard & Sons, 1808), p. 65.
- 20 Edward Croft-Murray, *Decorative Painting in England, 1537-1837*, vol. 2 (London: Country Life, 1970), p. 177.
- 21 *Ibid.*
- 22 The Vien portrait is the only surviving image that claims, itself, to be a portrait of Brunias. However, both Lennox Honychurch and Joan McMurray speculate

- that Brunias might have inserted his own self-portrait into his works. See Lennox Honychurch, 'Agostino Brunias', [www.lennoxhonychurch.com/brunias.cfm](http://www.lennoxhonychurch.com/brunias.cfm) (accessed 23 November 2016), and Joan F. McMurray, 'Agency in the Paintings of Agostino Brunias or Reading the Graphic Text', paper given at the Eleventh Annual Eastern Caribbean Island Cultures Conference, Curaçao, 6–8 November 2008.
- 23 See John Fleming, *Robert Adam and his Circle in Edinburgh and Rome* (London: John Murray, 1962).
  - 24 Barringer, Forrester, and Martinez-Ruiz (eds), *Art and Emancipation in Jamaica*, p. 459.
  - 25 Adam quoted in Fleming, *Robert Adam and his Circle*, p. 216. This second man, the painter of ornaments, landscapes, and figures, is Brunias.
  - 26 *Ibid.*
  - 27 Joseph and Anne Rykwert, *The Brothers Adam, The Men and the Style* (London: Collins, 1985), p. 98.
  - 28 Adam quoted in Fleming, *Robert Adam and his Circle*, p. 217.
  - 29 *Ibid.*, p. 216; James Adam quoted in Doreen Yarwood, *Robert Adam* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1970), p. 92; emphases added.
  - 30 Adam quoted in Fleming, *Robert Adam and his Circle*, p. 242.
  - 31 Adam quoted in Fleming, *Robert Adam and his Circle*, p. 216.
  - 32 I would like to thank David Bindman for encouraging me to clarify my thoughts on this issue.
  - 33 Joseph Bonomi quoted in Eileen Harris, *The Genius of Robert Adam: His Interiors* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 2.
  - 34 Adam quoted in Fleming, *Robert Adam and his Circle*, p. 369.
  - 35 *Ibid.*, p. 216.
  - 36 Leslie Harris, *Robert Adam and Kedleston: The Making of a Neo-Classical Masterpiece* (London: The National Trust, 1987), p. 7.
  - 37 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
  - 38 Both John Fleming and A. A. Tait attribute the work to Brunias.
  - 39 Harris, *Robert Adam and Kedleston*, p. 7.
  - 40 For more information on the free hand given to Adam with regard to this assignment, see Harris, *The Genius of Robert Adam*, pp. 22–23.
  - 41 Fleming, *Robert Adam and his Circle*, p. 97; emphasis added. Brunias also contributed at least five paintings to the Kedleston breakfast room. Painted using an experimental technique that did not hold up well over time, they were removed when the room was dismantled in 1807 and were subsequently acquired by the Victoria and Albert Museum which displays them in the British galleries with direct attribution to Brunias. The extant works indicate that each panel featured a pair of classically inspired female figures interacting with each other in a landscape setting. In three of the extant pictures, classical decorative features such as columns and vessel-topped plinths centre the landscape. However, a third depicts the two women – one standing, the other kneeling – with a basket of fruit between them, similar to several of Brunias's Caribbean compositions (see, for example, fig. 24).

- 42 For documentation of Brunias's participation in these exhibitions, see Algernon Graves, *The Royal Academy of Arts; a complete dictionary of contributors and their work from its foundation*, Volume 1 (London: H. Graves and Co., Ltd [etc.], 1905–06).
- 43 Honychurch, 'Agostino Brunias', n.p.
- 44 The Young Baronetcy of North Dean in Buckingham County was created on 2 May 1769 for this William Young. His son, also called William Young, was 2nd Baronet. In addition to the sheer number and wide dispersal of his paintings, the fact that Brunias dedicated his engravings to colonial elites in addition to Young and that collectors besides Young (Gardiner, for example) owned his Caribbean pictures as early as the 1790s provides a clear indication that Young was not his only client.
- 45 The exact date of Brunias's departure for the Caribbean remains uncertain despite vigorous efforts to pin it down. Honychurch claims that Brunias first travelled to the West Indies with Young in 1764; however, Croft-Murray finds the artist, in the years 1766–67, carrying out a decorative commission under the direction of William Chambers for Lord Clive's Berkeley Square house in London.
- 46 Honychurch, 'Agostino Brunias', n.p.
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 Honychurch bases this speculation upon records he discovered at the Roseau Cathedral in Dominica recording the baptisms of 'Edward and Augustin two illegitimate children born on the 1st October 1774 of Louis Bruneas and a free mulatto woman'. Additionally, he cites tax records of 1827 that indicate that one Elizabeth Brunias owned a small estate, worked by eleven slaves, that produced 1,225 pounds of coffee that year. Honychurch wonders whether this Elizabeth might be the painter's daughter or even the mother of his children and offers that the present-day 'Bruney' family of Dominica may be Agostino Brunias's descendants.
- 49 Given the ubiquity of rape, sexual coercion, and less than voluntary concubinage relative to West Indian slavery and colonialism, my characterisation of Brunias's relationship with at least one woman of colour as 'romantic' requires explanation. In the final months of preparing an early draft of this manuscript, I was contacted by Wendel Thomas, a member of the Bruney family of Dominica. Thomas confirmed that he considers Brunias his forebear and that, according to family lore, property that has been in the family for generations was originally given to Brunias through a land deal that he had with the government (of course, his patron Young was, in effect, the government) and that this tract was later inherited by the mixed-race mother of Brunias's children, a fact that would coincide with Honychurch's findings. According to Bruney family oral history, Brunias's longstanding relationship with the free woman of colour who was their ancestor was more than a casual affair (Wendel Thomas, e-mail communication with the author, 10 and 11 June 2009), and I have tried to be sensitive to the family's own understanding of their history in my choice of language. However, the dynamics of interracial relationships between white men and women of African descent in the islands makes it difficult to characterise any of these relationships as unproblematically consensual, an issue that I address significantly in Chapter 3.

- 50 On Brunias's return to London, see Neville Connell, 'Colonial Life in the West Indies as Depicted in Prints', *Antiques* (May 1971), pp. 732–737.
- 51 E.-T. Hamy, 'Alexander Brunias, peintre ethnographe de la fin du XVIIIe siècle, courte notice sur son oeuvre', *L'Anthropologie* 1.1 (1890), p. 49.
- 52 *Ibid.*, p. 55.
- 53 Hans Huth, 'Agostino Brunias, Romano: Robert Adam's "Bred Painter"', *The Connoisseur* (December 1962), p. 269.
- 54 *Ibid.*, p. 266.
- 55 The decision regarding Brunias's name seems to be originally derived from the record of his participation in the annual competition at the Accademia di San Luca where he was known as 'Agostino Brunias, Romano'; see Huth, 'Agostino Brunias, Romano', p. 265.
- 56 See Neville Connell, 'Early Printed Views of the West Indies', *Antiques* (January 1971) and 'Colonial Life in the West Indies as Depicted in Prints', *Antiques* (May 1971). 'Early Printed Views of the West Indies' features a print, *Vue de la Ville, du Port, et des Habitations de Basse-terre, dans Isle de St. Christophe prise de la Rade*, attributed to the engraver I. F. Miller after Brunias. The image in the article is too small and grainy to ascertain a definite attribution; however, I would question whether it is after Brunias. As I discuss at length in Chapter 2, while other colonial artists concentrated on topographical views and picturesque landscapes, Brunias was exceptional in devoting his work, almost exclusively, to the depiction of people. Moreover, in the few instances when Brunias did paint a primarily landscape picture he always included small figures – miniature versions of the bathers, dancers, and promenaders – recognisable from his more typical work. See Chapter 2 for images and further discussion.
- 57 Lennox Honychurch, 'Agostino Brunias, a Precursor of Gauguin', *The Bajan and Southern Caribbean Magazine* (June 1975), and 'Chatoyer's Artist: Agostino Brunias and the Depiction of St. Vincent', *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society*, 50 (2004), pp. 104–128.
- 58 Lennox Honychurch, 'Dominica: Art, Culture. History & Resources', [www.lennoxhonychurch.com](http://www.lennoxhonychurch.com) (accessed 23 November 2016).
- 59 Beth Fowkes Tobin, *Picturing Imperial Power: Colonial Subjects in Eighteenth-Century British Painting* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).
- 60 Kriz, 'Marketing Mulatresses', p. 198.
- 61 Tobin makes precisely this suggestion; see *Picturing Imperial Power*, p. 146.
- 62 *Ibid.*, p. 206.
- 63 Marshall, 'Social Stratification and the Free Coloured', pp. 6–9. In addition to a very useful discussion of the status of free people of colour that particularly informs Chapter 3, Marshall offers general discussion about social stratification in the Windward Islands, including both the potential for economic and social mobility among whites and the recognition by the British of their shared interests with white French settlers.
- 64 As I have already acknowledged, this book focuses on Brunias's oil paintings. The artist did, however, publish two series of engravings during his brief return to England, one in 1779 and one in 1780, that bear both dedications and descriptions,

for example 'This plate (representing a cudgeling match between English and French Negroes in the Island of Dominica) is humbly dedicated to Sir Ralph Payne, Knight of the most honorable Order of Bath by his most obedient and devoted Servant A. Brunias.' While the descriptions do generally include information about the racial designation of the figures, they tend to focus more on the activities shown in the scene, suggesting the importance of narrative in the artist's work. Incidentally, in the example given, there is no discernible visual difference between the English and French 'negroes'.