

[To] Mr [George] Cumberland, Bishopsgate,
Windsor Great Park

13 Hercules Buildings, Lambeth, 2 July 1800

Dear Cumberland

I have to congratulate you on your plan for a National Gallery being put into Execution. All your wishes shall in due time be fulfilled the immense flood of Grecian light & glory which is coming on Europe will more than realize our warmest wishes. Your honours will be unbounded when your plan shall be carried into Execution as it must be if England continues a Nation. I hear that it is now in the hands of Ministers That the King shews it great Countenance & Encouragement, that it will soon be up before Parliament & that it must be extended & enlarged to take in Originals both of Painting & Sculpture by considering Every valuable original that is brought into England or can be purchasd Abroad as its objects of Acquisition. Such is the Plan as I am told & such must be the plan if England wishes to continue at all worth notice as you have yourself observd only now we must possess Originals as well as France or be Nothing

Excuse I intreat you my not returning Thanks at the proper moment for your kind present. No perswasion could make my stupid head believe that it was proper for me to trouble you with a letter of meer Compliment & Expression of thanks. I begin to Emerge from a Deep pit of Melancholy, Melancholy without any real reason for it, a Disease which God keep you from & all good men. Our artists of all ranks praise your outlines & wish for more. Flaxman is very warm in your commendation & more and more of A Grecian. Mr Hayley has lately mentiond your Work on outline in Notes to [Epistles on Sculpture] an Essay on Sculpture in Six Epistles to John Flaxman, I have been too little among friends which I fear they will not Excuse & I know not how to [gi] apologize for. Poor Fuseli sore from the lash of Envious tongues praises you & dispraises with the same breath he is not naturally good natured but he is artificially very ill natured yet even from him I learn the Estimation you are held in among artists & connoisseurs.

I am still Employd in making Designs & little Pictures with now & then an Engraving & find that in future to live will not be so difficult as it has been It is very Extraordinary that London in so few years from a City of meer Necessaries or at l[e]ast a commerce of the lowest order of luxuries should have become a City of Elegance in some degree & that its once stupid inhabitants should enter into an Emulation of Grecian manners. There are now I believe as many Booksellers as there are Butchers & as many Printshops as of any other trade We remember when a Print shop was a rare bird in London & I myself remember when I thought my pursuits of Art a kind of Criminal Dissipation & neglect of the main chance which I hid my face for not being able to abandon as a Passion which is forbidden by Law & Religion, but now it appears to be Law & Gospel too, at least I hear so from the few friends I have dared to visit in my stupid Melancholy. Excuse this communication of sentiments which I felt necessary to

my repose at this time. I feel very strongly that I neglect my Duty to my Friends,
but It is not want of Gratitude or Friendship but perhaps an Excess of both.

Let me hear of your welfare. Remember My & My Wifes Respectful
Compliments to Mrs Cumberland & Family

& believe me to be for Ever Yours

WILLIAM BLAKE