



# The Life of Anne Damer: Portrait of a Regency Artist

*Jonathan David Gross*

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The first biography of Anne Damer since 1908, *The Life of Anne Damer: Portrait of a Regency Artist*, by Jonathan Gross, draws on Damer's notebooks and previously unpublished letters to explore the life and legacy of England's first significant female sculptor. Best known for her portraits of dogs and other animals, Damer also created busts of England's most important political heroes, sometimes within days or hours of their historical accomplishments. This in-depth biography traces her life during the American Revolution, the French Revolution, the Peace of Amiens and the Hundred Days. Damer was convinced that art could have significant political influence, sending her bust of Nelson to the King of Tanjore to encourage trade with India. Her art stands at the transition between neoclassicism and romanticism and provides a wealth of insight into 19th century British sculpture. In the last twenty years, there has been a strong revival of interest in Damer's life, particularly in gay and lesbian studies due to her famous relationship with author Mary Berry. This text serves as a deeper investigation of this fascinating and important figure of British art history. The emotional ménage à trois of Anne Damer, Mary Berry, and Horace Walpole forms the heart of this new biography. Gross contends that all three individuals, had they led more conventional lives, would never have given the world the literary and artistic gifts they bestowed in the form of Strawberry Hill, *Belmour*, and *Fashionable Friends*. The struggles they faced will encourage modern readers to appreciate anew the fluidity of sexual identity and passionate friendship, as well as the restraints put in place by society to control them. Anne Damer's life has much to teach a new generation concerned with the complex relationship between love, art, and politics. *The Life of Anne Damer* will interest historians of Georgian England, and readers in the fine arts, literature, and history.

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