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Susan L. Siegfried, *Ingres: Painting Reimagined*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2009. ix + 518 pp. Figures, notes, bibliography, list of illustrations, and index. \$75.00 (U.S. (cl)). ISBN 978-0-300-14883-1.

Review by Heather Belnap Jensen, Brigham Young University.

Susan L. Siegfried's *Ingres: Painting Reimagined* is a magisterial consideration of one of the most intriguing and elusive artists of the nineteenth century, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres. As the summation of a three-decade long engagement with Ingres studies, this ambitious tome sets out to account for the strange and yet beguiling nature of his paintings, c. 1800-1840. In this book, Siegfried argues that the reason Ingres has remained an enigma has much to do with his refusal to produce works that conformed to centuries-old conventions structuring narrative painting. Ingres's imaginative project, then, was to conceive of innovative strategies for imaging classical tales in the modern era. The outcome was the development of an approach that testified to his cogent and potent artistic vision. In the end, this "post-narrative painting" (p. 3), as Siegfried terms it, was nothing short of revolutionary.

Central to the book's thesis regarding Ingres's artistic enterprise is the assertion of the artist's agency. For Siegfried, the killing of the artist, has had a particularly deleterious effect on Ingres scholarship because the artist's autonomy and vision had never been fully granted. With the advent of the new art history, those early studies which deemed Ingres a mindless copyist, naïve realist, or decadent aesthete were quickly replaced by scholarship that accorded a sizable share to the viewer/critic in the making of meaning in his paintings. This had the effect of bypassing the artist as a critical agent. Siegfried is intent upon showing that Ingres's practice involved a sophisticated use of material culled from myriad historical, literary, and religious sources, and involved reading these texts against the grain in order to achieve his unique artistic project. Hence, what is called for is an interpretive practice that revives the artist and makes clear Ingres's serious investment (both conscious and unconscious) in his aesthetic, and then weds this to postmodern theoretical approaches that have proven so productive for recent Ingres scholarship.[1] By adopting such tactics, Siegfried contends, we will be able to better apprehend just what was at stake in Ingres's art and why viewers continue to be both puzzled and mesmerized before these paintings made strange.

Siegfried persuasively argues that Ingres's artistic vision and viewers' complicated responses to his history and genre paintings are best understood through the lens of post-narrativity. Ingres's art is conceptually and formally rife with competing discourses, with an oscillation between symbolic and descriptive modes, archaeological and materialist concerns for the object, and classical and modernist motifs and impulses. Because Ingres's works do not adhere to traditional models in narrative painting, they have been read as unstable, incoherent, and just plain weird. But, as Siegfried points out, the ambiguity and contradiction that were central to Ingres's aesthetics were also key features of early nineteenth-century France and the uneven and unwieldy process whereby art and life became more bourgeois (pp. 18-19). Hence, the artist's troubling of Davidian classicism should be seen as both a desired effect of the artist-agent and an expected consequence of the artist-social creature.

In the first chapter, the author attempts to mitigate earlier characterizations of Ingres as a simplistic painter by exploring the artist's variegated reading practices. Unfortunately, Baudelaire, whose criticism has enjoyed perhaps too much preeminence in modernist art-historical narratives, banished the artist to the annals of mediocre painting when he declared that with Ingres's painting, "imagination, that queen of faculties, has vanished" (qtd. on p. 22). What such a pronouncement neglects, however, is just how textually engaged this artist actually was, and that he promulgated a unique and progressive approach to art when he ruptured and restructured narratological time and space and interpreted multiple texts to new ends. In essence, Ingres "internalized, and made art from, the contradictions" (p. 24) that David's students had discovered in the logic of their master's neoclassicism.

Siegfried deftly analyzes several of Ingres's early history paintings to argue for his generative reading practices. In her discussion of paintings such as *Oedipus and the Sphinx* (1808, reworked in 1827) and *Roger Freeing Angelica* (1819), we see how Ingres deviated from traditional norms of history painting by selecting unusual motifs, creating strange juxtapositions of figures and objects, suspending temporality, antagonizing the relationships between the center and the periphery, and generally wreaking havoc with time-honored expectations of how one tells (and reads) stories pictorially. The artist's purview was expansive; indeed, he found inspiration in myriad sources ranging from Renaissance frescoes to contemporary fashion plates, and from classical artifacts to modern commodities. Of course, Siegfried is not merely about the business of finding sources. Rather, she is interested in pursuing how this eclecticism was emblematic of the artist and his culture's overinvestment in the archaeological and the material--and how the structures of conventional narrative painting could not bear the weight of these bloated fixations. While Siegfried is careful to consider the viewer's part in interpreting these paintings, offering trenchant observations regarding the possible psychosexual dynamics and sociopolitical dimensions of the spectatorial experience, she forcefully asserts Ingres's autonomy and vision as the initial reader.

Sexual tension (or, as artist Barnett Newman aptly phrased it, "passion held") is perhaps *the* leitmotif of Ingres's painting, and Siegfried assiduously pursues Ingres's use of sex as an organizing principle. One of the primary ways the artist travestied neoclassical ideologies was that he "sexualized its stories and its forms, introducing a tension between sexuality and sovereignty at the heart of his dramas" (p. 13). The picturing of narrative conflict in terms of desire was further nuanced by Ingres's frequent positioning of the female figure as the hinge in these post-narrative paintings. Siegfried's consideration of how women as subjects were privileged in Ingres's art both extends as well as complicates earlier feminist scholarship on Ingres, and this serves as a major--and extremely forceful--tributary to her thesis regarding Ingres's project.[2]

Chapter two addresses how Ingres's strategies of imaging in his female nude paintings and portraits were consonant with those used in his narrative work. The author also emphasizes the artist's crucial role in reorienting western art towards the representation of women's bodies (p. 72). This shift, she maintains, was accomplished in significant measure via orientalist themes and aesthetics. Paintings of nudes such as Ingres's *Bather of Valpinçon* (1808) or *Grande Odalisque* (1814) are juxtaposed with his well known portraits of the excessively clad Mesdames Rivière and Moitessier to illustrate the co-dependence that existed between bodies and objects. Throughout his career, Ingres developed signature motifs such as the nude woman seen from behind or the female sitter ensconced in fabric and surrounded by luxurious objects. Ingres's masterful ability to pull taut and then hold an exquisite sexual tension in his paintings of female nudes and portraits was accomplished by sensualizing animate and inanimate objects alike--and reveling in the fetishizing powers of the (male?) gaze.

In the next two chapters, Siegfried offers particularly sensitive readings of paintings she views as paradigmatic of Ingres's post-narrative approach. In the course of analyzing Ingres's works that dealt with great artists and cultural icons of the past, such as his *Raphael and Fornarina* (1814) and *The Apotheosis of Homer* (1827), it is made clear that such paintings were also intimately connected to Ingres's own valuation of artistic creativity and desire to insert himself into the lineage of painters who made history. However, as in his other narrative paintings, expectations for classical history painting are frustrated in that the binary oppositions that are set up are immediately dismantled by virtue of the circularity of motifs (p. 185). Another key aspect to this section is the focus on women's performance of pivotal roles in Ingres's history paintings. Canonical works such as *Jupiter and Thetis* (1811) and *Antiochus and Stratonice* (1840) are treated as manifestoes of his artistic vision in that they employ his usual formal strategies to expose the contradictions of classical visual rhetoric. These paintings are also quintessential Ingres in that they articulate his obsession with the motif of empowered women. In one of the most compelling interpretations of the book, Siegfried focuses on the destabilizing of gender that occurs in *Jupiter and Thetis*, with the concomitant figuration of the phallic mother, and demonstrates that such a representation had particular and problematic social and political resonances for its post-Revolutionary audience. In valorizing strong women who threaten the power of male figures, Ingres's post-narrative painting "seemed to mock the masculinist heroics long championed by French neoclassical art" (p. 171). Thus, central to the artist's refusal to become a mindless torchbearer of Davidian principles was his insistence upon the necessity of probing the politics of gender.[3]

Sustained attention to the materiality of the historical and the sacred is given in three chapters devoted to Ingres's grand commissions from church and state. The power of objects in his paintings is one of the primary themes of the book, and nowhere is this made clearer than in her analysis of Ingres's *Napoleon Enthroned* (1806) and *The Vow of Louis XIII* (1824). Due consideration is given to how these post-narrative paintings made innovative use of the descriptive mode. The competition between the human and the inanimate, as found in his female nude and literary paintings, along with his portraits of women, becomes perhaps even keener in his depictions of great men. In these paintings, Ingres attempted the highly fraught activity of representing rightful rulers in the wake of the Revolution.[4] Navigating the dangerous pass between the reification of the ruler's body and its complete disintegration, Ingres took recourse in emphasizing the material over the corporeal. The oddness of these paintings can be explained in part by the abundance of objects and their overloaded qualities, for while items such as costume, furniture, and decoration have expressive potential, these can have "an excess of possible meanings" (p. 238) and thus fail to signify. Indeed, this is the crux of Siegfried's argument vis-à-vis his *grandes machines*. It is clear that Ingres both fostered and fed off the early nineteenth-century mania for commodities. The proliferation of objects old and new, which were catalogued ad nauseam, along with their separation from original frames of reference, frequently spelled a loss of unity when deployed by the artist. With Ingres's historical paintings and their inability to cohere, we see that "he was prescient in enacting the unconscious breakdown of the Enlightenment's encyclopedic enterprise of cataloguing classical antiquity" (p. 249).

The final chapter of this book concerns Ingres's controversial *The Martyrdom of Saint Symphorien* (1834), a work that Siegfried positions as a summation of his artistic vision. In this painting, the primary indicator of the artist's innovative approach is its "'suffocating' density" (p. 342). Here, as in his other works, Ingres suggests the multivocality of the texts that informed his art. In his *Martyrdom*, he incorporates motifs from other works, such as the powerful female figure as narrative linchpin, along with what had become signature markers of the artist's post-narrative painting: suspended temporality, the dominant line, sensuous coloration, displacement of

narrative potency onto material objects, play between iconic and narrative modes, spatial compression, arrested movement, compositional all-at-onceness, and penchant for excess.

This book's tight focus on Ingres and thesis regarding his singularity occasionally obscures the contributions made by other artists to the shifts in post-Revolutionary art, such as the turn to female subjects, and tacitly downplays the possibility that the conception and development of post-narrative painting was a shared enterprise. For instance, while Siegfried points to how Ingres and other students of David effected this shift to the female nude, she gives little attention to how sculptors of the period like Canova, Bosio, and Cartellier also participated to this phenomenon, or to how women artists were also involved in this move toward valorizing the maternal figure. Moreover, one can find narrative constructs that are similar to (if not always as creative as) Ingres in some of the *genre historique* and the troubadour paintings of the early nineteenth century, thus suggesting that the artist was not alone in his quest. A study that integrated Ingres and his milieu of brothers and sisters of the brush would be most welcome; however, the author's aim was not to write a revisionist overview of the early nineteenth-century French art world and one can only hope that such a project is on the horizon.

To my mind, one of the invaluable contributions Siegfried makes to Ingres scholarship concerns her acknowledgment of women in the production of "Ingres." She signals the generative work done by feminist scholars on Ingres and female patronage and spectatorship and extends such explorations by considering the collaborative efforts of Ingres and female sitters/patrons like Madame Moitessier. While one might wish for a more sustained and theoretical investigation of such collaborations, i.e. how/did sexual tension figure into these relationships, as well as want considerations of the gaze that put pressure on the concept of the male, heterosexual viewer as normative, this book promises to do much to advance the conversations about gender and art in post-Revolutionary France.

With *Ingres: Painting Reimagined*, Siegfried has produced a monograph that is meticulously researched, convincingly argued, and written with remarkable lucidity. This is a sumptuous tome, weighty and lavishly illustrated; its stunning appearance does justice to Siegfried's rich interpretations of Ingres's art and his obsession with materiality. Doubtlessly, it will stand as the authoritative text on Ingres for many years to come. But this book's significance does not merely lie in its merits vis-à-vis what it contributes to Ingres studies; rather, this book is also particularly noteworthy in that it opens up new avenues of exploration for scholars intent upon reimagining the field of early nineteenth-century art.

## NOTES

[1] Ingres studies have enjoyed a renaissance in the last fifteen years or so, and Siegfried's book joins the ranks of a number of significant texts devoted to the artist. See especially Sébastien Allard and Marie-Claude Chaudonneret, *Ingres: La réforme des principes, 1806-1834* (Lyon: Fage Editions, 2006); Valérie Bajou, *Monsieur Ingres* (Paris: Biro, 1999); Carol Ockman, *Ingres's Eroticized Bodies: Retracing the Serpentine Line* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995); Vincent Pomérad, et. al., *Ingres, 1780-1867, Ex. cat.* (Paris: Gallimard/Musée du Louvre, 2006); Andrew Carrington Shelton, *Ingres and His Critics* (New York and London: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Adrian Rifkin, *Ingres: Then and Now* (New York and London: Routledge, 2000); Susan Siegfried and Adrian Rifkin, eds., *Fingering Ingres* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2001); and Gary Tinterow and Phillip Conisbee, eds. *Portraits by Ingres: Image of an Epoch*, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1999).

[2] For feminist interpretations of Ingres's work, see Sarah Betzer, "Marie d'Agoult: critique d'art

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*ingrisme*,” *Les voix des femmes dans le discours sur l’art*, eds., Mechthild Fend, Melissa Hyde, and Anne Lafont (Paris: Institut nationale d’histoire de l’art, forthcoming); Wendy Leeks, “Ingres Other-Wise,” *Oxford Art Journal* 9 (1986): 29-37; Tamar Garb, *The Painted Face: Portraits of Women in France, 1814-1914* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2007); and Ockman, op. cit.

[3] Of course, Ingres was not the only student of David to undermine French neoclassicism by means of problematizing representations of gender. For general discussions of this phenomenon, see Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, *Extremities: Painting Empire in Post-Revolutionary France* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2002); *Necklines: The Art of Jacques-Louis David after the Terror* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999); and Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Male Trouble: A Crisis in Representation* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1999).

[4] Ingres’s critical enterprise of representing political power in the post-Revolutionary period is also taken up in Todd Porterfield and Susan Siegfried’s *Staging Empire: Napoleon, Ingres, and David* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006).

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