
H-France Review Vol. 14 (August 2014), No. 134

Stephen Bann, *Distinguished Images: Prints in the Visual Economy in Nineteenth-Century France*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013. 276pp. 7 1/2x10 10 color + 95 b/w illus. \$65.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN: 9780300177275.

Review by Katie S. Hornstein, Dartmouth College.

Stephen Bann's *Distinguished Images: Prints in the Visual Economy of Nineteenth-Century France* is the product of a life's worth of scholarly devotion to the study of nineteenth-century French cultures of print; it is the sort of book that only a scholar of Bann's erudition and experience could write. Over the past decades, Bann has produced an important body of work on what he calls the "visual economy" of nineteenth-century France: this implies "the sum total of all the means of visual reproduction available at the time, taking into account not only the specific processes of production, their cost, and their duration, but also the available means of publication and dissemination" (p. 19). *Distinguished Images* provides readers with yet another facet of his ongoing investigations and goes further than Bann's previous work in its insistence upon the importance of nineteenth-century French print cultures and the discourses they generated as objects of inquiry unto themselves.

While the relationship between prints and painting is one of the many thematic threads of the book, it is through the discourse of printmaking that painting is addressed, not the other way around. The book focuses on works made by artists who specialized exclusively in print media, and which "achieve a high level of aesthetic distinction" (p. 5). Though art historians have closely examined the print oeuvres of well-known artists such as Eugène Delacroix and Édouard Manet among others, this book focuses on printmakers whose names will not be immediately recognizable, even to specialists of the period: this is one of the book's main virtues. As Bann argues in his introduction, this "golden age of printmaking" has been unjustly relegated to the margins of art history in favor of accounts of art historical change that prioritize "the emergence of the ideology of modernist painting" and photography after 1839. *Distinguished Images* is many things: a history of a diverse set of nineteenth-century print techniques; a semi-chronological survey of the shifting status of the practice of printmaking across different visual forms (engraving, lithography, photography, etching, illustrated magazines); as well as a call to scholars: prints (as especially reproductive printmaking), far from marginal to art history, are at the very heart of its disciplinary history and identity. For readers interested in understanding the complexities of nineteenth-century print cultures, Bann's latest book is indispensable.

The first chapter, "Reproducing the Mona Lisa," examines the role of print media in provoking the meteoric rise to prominence of Leonardo's portrait in the nineteenth century; but more than an examination of the popularization of a well-known painting, the main thrust of Bann's argument concerns the relationships between rival media (lithography, burin engraving and photography) during the mid-nineteenth century. Thus an examination of the *Mona Lisa* affords Bann the opportunity to think carefully about specific intermedial interactions and challenge the "evolutionary scheme" of media change that dominates accounts of the period. Bann begins the chapter by referring to Henri Focillon's contention that it was the twin forces of lithography and Romanticism that were responsible for the painting's status as a masterpiece in the nineteenth century. Bann contends instead that it was the allegedly outmoded form of burin engraving (along with the literary climate of the 1850s) that was

responsible for the *Mona Lisa's* rise to prominence. Focillon's writing appears throughout *Distinguished Images* and serves as a foil to many of its arguments. This is appropriate because, as Bann notes, Focillon was the last art historian "willing to look long and hard" at nineteenth-century prints (p. 21).

Though the chapter gives equal attention to different forms of visual reproduction, its discussion of reproductive lithography is particularly penetrating. As Bann points out, art historians have tended to focus on the medium's early use as a form of counter-discourse and have marginalized discussions of it as a reproductive medium. Painters such as Pierre-Narcisse Guérin, Horace Vernet and Anne-Louis Girodet-Trioson experimented with the medium as a way of reproducing their oil paintings. One of Girodet's students, Hyacinthe Aubry-Lecomte, who reappears as a central figure in a later discussion of lithography toward the end of the book, produced the first lithographic reproduction of the *Mona Lisa* and exhibited it at the Salon of 1824. The chapter sets the stage for the rest of the book's commitment to allowing different print media to intermingle as they would have in the visual economy of the nineteenth century.

The second chapter, "Representing Normandy" returns to the issue of lithography's ability to popularize through widespread dissemination. While lithography was not responsible for transforming the *Mona Lisa* into a masterpiece, Bann asserts that it produced Normandy as an object of the French cultural imagination in the 1830s and 1840s. Lithography was the ideal medium for depicting the atmospheric landscapes and seascapes of the region as well as for documenting its rich medieval heritage, which had become especially prized because of the returning Bourbons' commitment to Catholicism. The luxurious lithographic publication *Les Voyages pittoresques et romantiques dans l'ancienne France* features prominently in the beginning of the chapter. This chapter demonstrates the flexibility of early lithography, its openness as a form of visual representation and the rich set of possibilities that it offered its practitioners; but more valuable perhaps than this, is the way that Bann analyzes representations of Normandy in other forms of reproductive media, including the illustrated magazine and photography. In one illuminating example, Bann focuses on the Norman abbey of St. Georges de Boscherville, whose renown in the 1830s and 1840s was produced by a succession of different print techniques including a profusion of lithographs and woodblock engraving. Bann's discussion of Boscherville's 1834 appearance in the pages of the *Magasin Pittoresque* as a woodblock engraving serves as a useful counterpoint to discussion of the lithographic reproduction of the church. At the end of the chapter, painting, watercolor, and photography enter into the discussion in order to suggest how different modes of visual production worked to disseminate Normandy as a cultural object.

In what this reader found to be the most scintillating portion of the book, Bann focuses his third chapter, "Nadar in Retrospect," on the nineteenth-century photography impresario, Nadar, né Félix Tournachon, in order to interrogate the relationship between the proliferation of reproductive imagery on a dramatic scale and the production of historical memory. Bann persuasively connects "an ongoing transformation in conceptions of history" during the nineteenth century to the increased availability of images. Within the terms of Bann's argument, reproductive images constitute "memory traces" of past events, causing them to be "figured as representations of the present" (p. 92). If the book's previous chapters focused on lithography's ability to stimulate cultural interest in works of art (the *Mona Lisa*) and French national identity (Normandy), this chapter turns toward darker matters, to what Bann intriguingly calls the "more disquieting and disruptive role" of the medium (p. 87). The chapter opens with a powerful example of lithography's ability to figure death and to create its own disquieting temporality: Louis Gudin's *Il terminera ce dessin le 4 Mars 1823, Jour de sa mort* from 1824. Just after creating this allegorically suicidal lithograph, Gudin drowned himself in the Seine. The connection between Gudin's death and the image opens a discussion of lithography's ability to record historical events—a function that is normally ascribed to time-based media such as photography. In a fascinating rhetorical knight's move, Bann uses Roland Barthes' seminal text on photography, *Camera Lucida*, to argue in favor of lithography's ability to conjure a "new, urgent mode of temporality" (p. 89). Bann advances this claim through the example of the lithographic representation of the July Revolution,

which he contends “gave rise to a phenomenon never witnessed before on anything like the same scale” (p. 89).

This line of argument challenges Walter Benjamin’s conception of a teleological media history of displacement whereby new media effectively render more traditional media obsolete—a media theory that Bann has also argued against in *Parallel Lines*. For Bann, this line of thinking has produced the discourse of “photographic exceptionalism” that has had the unfortunate effect of causing historians to isolate photography from other media that coexisted alongside it. As Bann argues, the discourse of “photographic exceptionalism” has skewed our understanding of Nadar’s career at the expense of his work in other reproductive media, notably lithography. Before turning to Nadar’s status as one of the most prolific and successful portrait photographers of the nineteenth century, Bann attends to Nadar’s work as a politically engaged lithographer (and contributor to *La Caricature*) in the wake of the July Revolution. Many of the arguments of the chapter are centered around Nadar’s shockingly understudied corpus of writing, including *Quand j’étais étudiant* (1856) and his Salon criticism.

The fourth chapter, “Is Lithography Art? Aubry-Lecomte and Lemud,” asks a question that most readers would associate with debates within the history of photography: whether or not nineteenth-century lithography “possessed any common core of qualities” that could classify it as an art. Bann returns to a series of debates that occurred when lithography came into social use in France during the early years of the Bourbon Restoration to argue that right from the beginning, lithography’s status as a form of artistic practice was ambiguously situated between art and industry: it was not until the Salon of 1824 (a watershed moment in exhibition history that is often identified with the triumph of romantic painting) that lithography finally received its own special section, set apart from painting and engraving. To describe the debates about lithography’s specificity as a medium of artistic production, Bann turns to two artists who specialized in lithography: Hyacinthe Aubry-Lecomte and Aimé de Lemud. Aubry-Lecomte worked as a reproductive lithographer, whereas Lemud belong to the category of lithographer that Etienne-Jean Delécluze called “artist-painters who compose on the stone” (p. 145). Bann’s choice to compare two lithographers with different career trajectories provides readers with a fascinating analysis of the complexities of nineteenth-century lithography that extends far beyond our dominant understanding of the medium as a mode of political critique, or as an experimental off-shoot of painting in the hands of an artist such as Théodore Géricault. While Bann is more interested in examining the contours of the debate surrounding lithography’s status as a mode of artistic practice, he obviously delights in the task of helping readers discover its aesthetic merits: this is indicated by the frequent passages of beautifully written formal analysis that appear throughout the book.

One of the most exciting aspects of this book is its focus, especially in the concluding chapter, on the history of art history and its indebtedness to reproductive printmaking. This final chapter, “Exit Etching: Flameng, Waltner, Gaillard,” addresses competing modes of reproductive media from the 1860s to the late 1870s—etching, burin engraving and photography—and their circulation in nineteenth-century art periodicals, including the *Gazette des beaux-arts*, which was founded in 1859 by Philippe Burty and which published small-scale reproductive etchings, and the lavish periodical *L’Art*, published between 1875 and 1907, which specialized in large-scale fine reproductive etchings. The technique of etching flourished in a historical moment when the photographic reproduction of works of art was still impracticably expensive and laborious. Bann focuses on three artists who made their careers as etchers: Léopold Flameng, Charles Waltner, and Ferdinand Gaillard. All three began as engravers and later turned to reproductive etching. The chapter’s end, which serves as the book’s conclusion, brings readers back full circle, to the Mona Lisa, specifically a reproductive etching undertaken by Ferdinand Gaillard for the Chalcographie du musée du Louvre, an institution that might have deserved more attention within this chapter, since one is left wondering about the connection between state patronage and reproductive printmaking at the end of the nineteenth century. Bann claims that Gaillard had been “meditating” on Leonardo’s painting for over twenty years (p. 214). Over the course of working on the commission, Gaillard completed nine proofs: the first state through etching and the

subsequent ones through engraving. He died while working on the print, which current-day visitors can purchase at the Chalcographie du musée du Louvre for 55€. The great print scholar Henri Beraldi claimed just before Gaillard's death that the public would never want to purchase a print of the Mona Lisa: they would prefer photographic reproductions instead. Bann ends the book by arguing that while Beraldi's prediction would ultimately prove true, it is in this last work by Gaillard that reproductive printmaking "achieved a terminal degree of refinement not to be matched in any other time or place" (p. 216).

Distinguished Images uncovers a trove of material that has been buried in print archives since the nineteenth century. In so doing, Bann has delineated a different kind of history of art that can be discovered if we pay attention to the transformations that took place within nineteenth-century print cultures and take its debates seriously on their own terms. Bann can lay out the stakes of this shift in perspective because he is so deeply invested in the terms of nineteenth-century printmaking in a way that many art historians are not. In this sense, some of the footnotes do not delve deep enough into explanation for those of us who want to learn more (for example, Bann tells readers that "the conviction that there could be a visual record of an event...was certainly not exclusive in this period to producers and consumers of lithography" and offers a footnote with a vague reference to Constable, which does not quite do his contention justice [p. 89]). This is a minor complaint in an otherwise breathtaking demonstration of scholarly disquisition that has injected new life into the study of nineteenth-century French printmaking.

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ISSN 1553-9172