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Fleur Roos Rosa de Carvalho, *Prints in Paris 1900: From Elite to the Street*. Amsterdam: Van Gogh Museum; and Brussels: Mercatorfonds, 2017; distributed by Yale University Press. 192 pp. 160 color + 25 b/w illus., notes, timeline, map, bibliography. \$50 U.S. ISBN: 9780300229134.

Review by Patricia Mainardi, The Graduate Center of the City University of New York

*Prints in Paris 1900* is the catalogue for the eponymous exhibition mounted at both the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam (3 March-11 June 2017) and at the Mitsubishi Ichigokan Museum in Tokyo (17 October 2017-17 January 2018). Based primarily on the holdings of the Van Gogh Museum, the catalogue's purpose is to celebrate the expansion of the museum's collection and the inauguration of its online catalogue ([www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en/prints](http://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en/prints)). With a chronological scope extending from the last decades of the nineteenth century to the early twentieth with a close focus on France (Paris to be precise), its emphasis is on commercial printmaking such as posters and related ephemera, and on efforts to raise the status of hitherto disdained print media, particularly color lithography. Despite an opening section entitled "Private Printmaking," however, well-known printmakers such as Paul Gauguin, Mary Cassatt, and Odilon Redon are largely absent and seem to lie outside the scope of this publication. Instead, lithographic posters and their ascent in prestige from street ephemera to valued collectables are really the subject of this book. In this, it follows numerous earlier publications by Philip Dennis Cate and the recent major publication by Ruth E. Iskin, *The Poster: Art, Advertising, Design, and Collecting, 1860s-1900s* (Dartmouth College Press, 2014). Rosa de Carvalho, the book's author and curator of prints and drawings at the Van Gogh Museum, doesn't really break new ground with this publication, but she synthesizes earlier conclusions and illustrates them with a rich assortment of images beautifully reproduced in color. She also contextualizes the collecting of printed material with numerous period photographs of interiors and exteriors, and of furniture, portfolios and other accouterments of collecting. Particularly engaging are the photographs of street print dealers, kiosks, and Paris walls, visual documentation that, when it is included in studies at all, is usually reproduced in small size and inferior image quality.

*Paris Prints 1900* is a peculiar publication in that it diverges from the standard scholarly format where illustrations align with the text so that the reader can follow the author's arguments. Here it seems like the book was designed first, and then the text fit in around the images, which are often separated far from their related discussions. Combined with an unfortunate choice of font and typeface, with all the notes at the end of a book that is so large as to be unwieldy (10 x 15"), one must conclude that it is intended as a coffee-table production to be looked at, rather than a scholarly contribution or even a general-audience publication meant to be read. This is regrettable because, notwithstanding these drawbacks, it does constitute a concise and cogent

introduction to the topic, with valuable insights and high quality illustrations, that allows the reader to better understand the trajectory that enabled the medium of lithography to produce the images that have come to define fin-de-siècle France.

The book has three main text sections: “Private Printmaking,” “Popular Printmaking,” and “From Popular Back to Private.” These are followed by a catalogue of full-page reproductions, a timeline of 1881-1900, a map of Paris showing the location of dealers and printers, and a bibliography. There is no index or illustration list, which makes it virtually impossible to track inclusions and exclusions or to use the book as a tool of scholarship. Rosa de Carvalho’s text serves as a compendium of information on the subject (a valuable project in itself), but throughout the book numerous technical terms are introduced without definition, such as *crachis* (spattering), *grattage* (scraping), *gypsograph* (a print made from a plaster mold). It would have been useful for the general reader—surely the intended audience for this book—to have included a glossary of such terms, or at least to have defined them at first usage.

An introduction gives the background information necessary to establish the historical context. It points out that color lithography was disdained because of its association with chromolithography, which produced cheap color prints used in advertisement or at the low end of popular imagery. In truth, lithography had been disdained right from its invention c. 1800, long before the era of color printing, because it was perceived as a commercial medium competing with the traditional arts of etching and engraving. The book’s purpose is stated as the examination of not just the artists and the prints, but also of “the broader field of cultural production to which the critic, the dealer and the consumer also belonged, each contributing in their own way to the appreciation and hence also the significance of the artistic print” (p. 15). The major point, well-demonstrated in the rest of the book, is that critics, dealers and collectors were not interested in proposing the equality of all the arts but instead wanted to preserve the traditional hierarchy of high culture while attempting to insert prints into it. There is some confusion here because the reference is really to the more popular lithographic prints that are the major, though unstated, focus of this book, and not to traditional high art prints; in France, engravers could even be elected to the Academy, a privilege that lithographers never enjoyed. Rosa de Carvalho’s real focus is the elevation of the poster, and by extension lithographic ephemera such as menus, book covers, etc. Her thesis as set out in the introduction is that distinctions between high art and popular art faded in the fin de siècle when, for example, the same print could be sold with and without lettering to different markets. A convincing example of this is presented through an 1893 sheet-music cover by Henri-Gabriel Ibels, *Comment on s’aime* (*The Way We Love*), reproduced in triplicate: in black and white, in color, and in color with text (p. 94). The distinctions between high and low, private and public, unique and large scale, artistic craft and industry—in a word, the elite and the street of the book’s title—blurred during these decades.

The section “Private Printmaking” discusses general background when, in the second half of the nineteenth century artists, critics and publishers all attempted to raise the status of prints from what were denounced as slavish copies (i.e. reproductive printmaking) to that of original works of art. The focus here is on the institutional apparatus that attempted to do this, from exhibitions, to critics’ writings, to collectors’ societies. Publishers created albums by commissioning “original prints” from artists, an important distinction whereby the print does not reproduce a prior work of art, such as a painting, but constitutes in itself an original work of art, although this distinction fades when one reflects that the artist’s original drawing was often transferred to the plate or

stone by professionals. The arguments in favor of lithography that the author cites from the later nineteenth century began at its very inception and were much in evidence in its first decades; the definition of lithography as drawing in multiple was proposed by the first report on the new medium to the Institut de France in 1816, and the frontispiece of Henri Fantin-Latour's *Les graveurs du XIXe siècle*, c. 1889, reproduced here (p. 24), depicting an allegory of lithography, is strikingly similar to the image by Nicolas-Henri Jacob that appeared in the treatise of its inventor, Alöys Senefelder, *L'art de la lithographie* (1819). What is of great interest in this study is the detailed chronicle of attempts by all concerned to endow color lithographs with the same prestige as more traditional print media. These include the establishment of small elite exhibitions and small print editions, the exclusivity of which, it was hoped, would preclude the criticism usually directed at mass culture. The desire to elevate popular prints resulted in ingenious strategies such as the many ways artists could make unique objects out of what were basically repeated images; artists added *remarques* (marginal drawings) or varied the color or paper within an edition. Collectors participated in this endeavor by searching out artist's proofs, especially those printed *avant la lettre* (before the text was added). Somewhat awkwardly placed in this discussion is a section on "The Dark Side of Popular Printmaking" where erotica, often crossing into misogyny, is "normalized" as just another subcategory of prints. This problem occurs again later in the book where the author notes that images of pretty young women, often partially undressed, were introduced as an advertising ploy (p. 69) and where the image of a nude prostitute by Adolphe Willette used as a business card by Edouard Kleinmann, a major dealer, is labeled an "impudent muse" with "saucily outstretched arms" (p. 92). Surely in this "Me-Too" era, uninterrogated delectation over such images is problematic.

The section on collecting, "The *amateur d'estampes*," makes the point that collectors attempted to rival artists both in their sensibility and in their exquisite taste. One longs for a sociological analysis of these new collectors of previously devalued material, a prosopography of collecting à la Pierre Bourdieu that would show whether they came from the same elite social classes that traditionally collected art. A gender analysis (most collectors were men) would provide insights into the radical constriction of gender roles in the late nineteenth century that not only catalyzed a new feminist movement but that also propelled these men to value traits of sensibility that for a century had been relegated to females. While these issues might lie outside the scope of this study, it might have been valuable to at least mention them as topics worthy of future exploration.

The author is more comfortable in the second section of the book "Popular Printmaking," which represents the true focus of the publication. She lists an astonishing array of graphic art omnipresent in the fin de siècle: besides posters, there were illustrated books and the illustrated press, sheet music, paper money, postage stamps, bank notes and lottery tickets, menus, industrial labels, theatre programs, etc. Posters, ubiquitous in urban environments, were pasted up on walls and kiosks; they were even mounted on horse-drawn advertising carts that were drawn through the city streets. The chapter is illustrated with numerous examples not only of the images themselves, but also of the environment in which they were seen. The author perceptively contrasts the jangling excitement of street culture with the private pleasures of print delectation in interiors. This section also discusses briefly an interesting initiative paralleling the later Russian use of design as a revolutionary tool to transform society. In the late nineteenth century, the Inspector General of Departmental Museums, Roger Marx—he is identified here as "an official of the republican government" (p. 77)—commissioned the redesign of banknotes and postage stamps, as well as popular decorative art for school classrooms. The entrance of proletarian themes into art and music is also outlined here, with the artist Théophile Steinlen

and the singer-composer Aristide Bruant (memorialized in a famous poster by Toulouse-Lautrec, p. 158), both adopting gritty urban themes. Not surprisingly, the audience for such visual imagery of the underclass and their abject living conditions came primarily from the upper classes.

The last section of the book traces the transformation of popular print forms such as the poster into private collectables. The oft-told tale is repeated of how early poster collectors ripped them off walls, then graduated to bribing billstickers for pristine examples, and finally created a market where editions were made specifically for collectors. An interesting sidelight here is the late-century creation of a market for preparatory drawings for posters, a phenomenon that is repeating itself now in the twenty-first century with the burgeoning sale of original drawings for comic strips, our own once-devalued ephemera. The growing market for *petites estampes*, insignificant printed imagery, is well-discussed here— the author notes that the notary Roger Braun had 20,000 menus! There is also an excellent discussion of the rising market for prints sold *avant la lettre*, what earlier would have been considered merely artist's proofs. Perhaps the most valuable contribution of this book is the author's detailed exposition, with numerous illustrations, of the many stages through which these prints passed in their trajectory from ephemeral popular art to collector's prized possessions. The last section "Posters for the Interior," continues this theme. Here posters adopted all the attributes that, in the late nineteenth century, defined high-art prints, in particular impressions on quality paper, and signed numbered editions after which the plate would be destroyed to guarantee rarity. An amusing sidelight is that, as posters began to be used as interior decoration, there had to be a parallel merchandizing project of shrinking their dimensions to a reasonable size as street posters were just too large for interior display.

Rosa de Carvalho's conclusion is that by c.1900 there were no more private etchings for portfolios; printmaking (by which she really means color lithography) had become synonymous with the avant-garde, but the avant-garde had by then begun to shift its interest to painting instead. It is not as simple as that, however. The battle to redefine lithography as a fine-art medium had been, in a word, lost because, despite these efforts, its overwhelmingly commercial connotations could not be assimilated successfully into a high-art framework. It was not until the mid-twentieth century when lithography had been replaced as a commercial process by the new photographic methods of reproduction that, liberated from its longstanding commercial taint, lithography finally became acceptable as art.

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