
H-France Review Vol. 19 (October 2019), No. 190

Zürcher Kunstgesellschaft and Kunsthau Zürich, eds., *Praised and Ridiculed: French Painting, 1820-1880*. Munich: Hirmer Verlag, 2017. 248 pp. Foreword, introduction, essays, exhibition catalogue, appendices, notes, bibliography, list of works exhibited. \$49.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-3-7774-2946-5.

Review by Benjamin Harvey, Mississippi State University.

This catalogue was published in conjunction with *Praised and Ridiculed: French Painting, 1820-1880*, an exhibition held at the Kunsthau, Zürich, from November 2017 to January 2018. Drawing on works from the institution's own holdings and on loans from mainly American, French, German, and Swiss collections, the show brought together work by fifty-seven different artists, totaling 105 paintings and—somewhat anomalously—two sculptures. The “praised and ridiculed” of the title evokes the sharp critical divisions that are so central to our understanding of nineteenth-century art and to histories of the origins of modernism. One reflexively thinks of Courbet's mixed fortunes at the Salon, of the famously rocky reception of Manet's works in the 1860s, and of the repeated failures of certain artists (like Paul Cézanne) to get work past the Salon jury. Alongside these familiar figures, the exhibition placed work by artists “who enjoyed success at the Paris Salon, [but] are today unfamiliar to our ears”—artists such as Bouguereau, Cabanel, Couture, Delaroche, Gérôme, and Meissonier (p. 7). The “our” here seems to refer to a typical museum-goer, for these names are familiar enough to students of nineteenth-century French art. Though welcome, the approach is hardly groundbreaking and brings to mind books like Ross King's *The Judgment of Paris* (2007), which illuminated Manet and Meissonier's careers by placing them in counterpoint, as well as earlier shows with similarly catholic methodologies—for example, John House's *Landscapes of France: Impressionism and its Rivals* (1995). If art history has tended to weed out much of the eclecticism from nineteenth-century French painting, then *Praised and Ridiculed* is part of an ongoing effort to bring some of that variety back.

The symmetrical dates of the title (1820-1880) create what we might call a “short nineteenth century,” but are also somewhat puzzling: they align neither with shifts in political regimes nor with obvious milestones in art history. Sandra Gianfreda, the show's curator, explains the chronology in the catalogue's introduction. The earlier date corresponds (albeit loosely) with Delacroix's first appearance at the Salon, when he submitted his *Barque of Dante* (1822), and thereby evokes romanticism's challenge to the neo-classicism that then dominated the state-controlled art world; the later date, in contrast, nods to the end of this hegemony. In 1880, we learn, “Jules Ferry, the minister for education and the fine arts, transferred organization of the Salon to the Société des Artistes Français, founded in 1881 for this purpose, thus ending the era

of the Salon as a state institution” (p. 18).

Judging from the catalogue, the exhibition did not attempt to give a comprehensive institutional history of the Salon during this period. We are provided with a timeline “On the History of the Salon” (p. 223) but otherwise this history is only fleetingly and patchily addressed in the catalogue. Rather, the emphasis is on the diversity of painting that was being made in France, a diversity that has subsequently been obscured by modernism’s triumphalism. Gianfreda argues that the need to “revise the reception of nineteenth-century painting, and to rehabilitate academic art in particular” is especially strong in a city like Zürich. For as compared to, say, France and the United States, “museums in German-speaking countries, with few exceptions, collected the work almost only of those artists who fit easily into the generally endorsed development of nineteenth-century art, one which celebrates impressionism as the interim culmination of a line leading toward modern art” (p. 14).

Like House’s memorable exhibition, *Praised and Ridiculed* pays attention to landscape painting, which was probably the fastest growing genre during the nineteenth century. But beyond the portion of the catalogue given over to landscape (“Depictions of Nature: Between Ideal and Reality”), there are further sections devoted to the following genres or themes: history painting (“Staging (Hi)stories”); orientalism (“Images of the Orient”); genre painting (“‘One must be of one’s time’: Scenes from Contemporary Everyday Life”); figure painting (“The Eroticised Body,” which includes the two sculptures, both female nudes); and portraiture and still-life (lumped together in a section called “In the Studio: People Posing and Arranged Objects”). The organization found in the catalogue broadly follows, one assumes, the spatial organization of the exhibition itself, and—for those who saw it—the catalogue would serve as an adequate aide-mémoire. Artworks in the exhibition are reproduced in full color and generously scaled, one per page. In a “List of Works Exhibited” each work is given a catalogue entry containing the standard information about it (artist, title, date, medium, size, and collection).

Regrettably, there are no detailed catalogue entries in this list. Most works are discussed in a scant paragraph of text and these entries are rather perfunctory, reading rather more like exhibition wall-labels than the short essays typically found in more comprehensive exhibition catalogues. More frustratingly still, over a quarter of the works are not discussed at all. To take just one of many possible examples, it’s not self-evident why a work like Honoré Daumier’s *The Free Performance* (ca. 1843-45) requires exegesis, no matter how cursory, while his *Man Smoking and Absinthe Drinker* (ca. 1856-60) does not.

In contrast, the catalogue is to be commended for its collection of “Short Biographies of the Artists.” Written by Monika Leonhardt, these are each around four to five hundred words long and provide a densely factual career overview for every artist in the exhibition. Together with the catalogue’s bibliography, they would be well worth consulting as a starting point to learning more about the artists and constitute a particularly valuable source of information for the lesser-known figures—say, Jean-Jacques Henner or Marcello (Adèle d’Affry’s male pseudonym). Marcello is one of just two women included in the exhibition: the other is the much better-known Rosa Bonheur.

The rest of the catalogue is given over to a series of four critical essays. These are ordered roughly chronologically and, although they also align with the major thematic divisions of the exhibition, three of the show’s topics have no corresponding essay: orientalism, genre painting,

and figure painting. Again, the comprehensive ambitions of *Praised and Ridiculed* can tend, in actuality, to fall a little short.

Oskar Bätschmann's essay looks at some works shown in the Salons of 1824, 1831 and 1834; these are considered in relationship to the institution of the "Salon, the Public and Artists," to cite the essay's title. The public turns out to be the least stable part of this changeable trinity. After the July Revolution, Bätschmann observes, the "unrest had by no means subsided by the time the Salon of 1831 opened, and the disruptive noise from the street could be heard in the galleries of the Louvre" (p. 23). It was in this context that the public thronged to look at Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* (28 July 1830). "It was," he notes, "the revolutionary *peuple* that charged at the public here in the Salon, to which Delacroix's painting was addressed, the greater part of which was surely comprised of the *public instruit*" (p. 25). But even when crowds were not depicted, viewers could be manipulated by art's rhetoric, its appeal to mass psychology, and so the essay turns towards the "emotional works" of Paul Delaroche, which were highly popular before rapidly dropping out of favor in the later 1830s. In *The Execution of Lady Jane Grey* (1833), Delaroche used a battery of theatrical effects in a painting that inevitably turned people's thoughts towards the "parallels between the executions of royalty in England and France" (p. 27). Finally, Bätschmann attends to a different type of victim. Episodes taken from artists' biographies and hagiographies, often deathbed scenes, became increasingly popular subjects in nineteenth-century art. In works such as Vernet's *Raphael at the Vatican* (1832), artists served up themselves, or their brethren, for public consumption.

Matthias Krüger's fascinating contribution to the catalogue, "The Demise of a Genre: History Painting under Fire from the Critics," considers how history painting was changing in the 1860s. It does so by examining works by Meissonier and Gérôme shown, respectively, in the Salons of 1864 and 1868, a period when the show was no longer taking place in the Louvre but in the Palais de l'Industrie. This move from royal palace to trade hall echoed the broader cultural changes that could also be detected in history painting. Krüger quotes the critic Jules Castagnary's thoughts on the subject from 1857: "Religious painting, and history or heroic painting, have gradually weakened as theocracy and monarchy, the social organisations that are their points of reference, have also weakened" (p. 34). History painters responded to these changes by innovating, Krüger notes, but "it was often the very innovations with which they sought to breathe new life into history painting that conservative commentators interpreted as symptoms of its decline" (p. 35). Accordingly, Meissonier's meticulously researched paintings--*Campaign of France, 1814* (1864) and *The Emperor Napoleon III at the Battle of Solferino* (1863)--defied the norms of history painting in various telling ways. They were small, detail-oriented works that often relegated the most significant action to the background. Krüger invokes Barthes: the works had a compelling "reality effect," but this only served to compromise history painting's "long-established conventions and rules, according to which the historical event itself was less important than its transhistorical, metaphysical content, which the artist should reveal in his painting" (p. 38). "One does not," quipped a critic, "paint three nations in close combat as if one were observing through a microscope infusoria at battle in a drop of water" (p. 37).

Meissonier's history paintings *Jerusalem* (1867) and *7 December 1815, Nine o'clock in the Morning* (1868) presented similar problems and rather than simply showing the central action, required viewers to "reconstruct events from what they can see," thereby plugging "the *Leerstelle* or gap in the story" (p. 39). *Jerusalem*, for example, shows a view of that city from Golgotha, but shifts

the expected focal point, the crucifixion, just offstage. It takes a moment or two to notice the shadows of three crosses falling into the bottom right of the picture. As critics and caricaturists recognized at the time, such compositional tactics owed as much to “popular visual gags” as they did to the norms of history painting. Krüger makes a compelling case that lower genres or types of art—not least, photography and genre painting—were invading the hallowed body of history painting, which was losing its traditional moorings. Manet could even tackle historical themes while simultaneously proclaiming his opposition to history painting. It suggested, to him, not just a type of subject matter, but a fussy, overly finished approach to painting. “The question of genre,” Krüger concludes, “had thus become a question of painting technique” (p. 42).

Manet is still the central figure in accounts of modernism’s emergence and, for all the reformist gestures found in *Praised and Ridiculed*, this remains the case here. Five of his paintings were on display in Zürich, and he is the artist firmly at the heart of the third of the catalogue’s essays, Marianne Koos’s “Manet and the Reception of Chardin in Nineteenth-Century French Painting.” The first half of the essay looks at Manet’s *Portrait of Eva Gonzalès* (Salon of 1870), an image of the sitter painting a floral still-life. This portrait of a woman artist serves as a reminder that the exhibition might have benefited from the inclusion of Gonzalès’s work, as well as that of Manet’s other pupil, Berthe Morisot. Koos, however, is keen to read the image not so much through the lens of gender, but more as a “programmatic statement with regard to his specific concept of painting, which in this case Manet is developing by intertwining the portrait with another genre—still life” (p. 45). Usefully, Koos identifies the painting within Manet’s portrait as an “exact quotation of a picture by Jean-Baptiste Monnoyer (1636-1699)—a French painter of floral still lifes” (pp. 45-7). Manet based his painted copy—“exact quotation” is surely stretching it—on the black-and-white engraving included in Charles Blanc’s *Histoire des peintres de toutes les écoles*. “It would not be correct,” Koos suggests, “to see this picture [of Eva Gonzalès] as a rivalrous negation or restriction of her active agency...Rather, in this image within an image, Manet is addressing a fundamental principle of his own painting: the copying, appropriation and translation of Old Masters” (pp. 47-9). But it is unclear why we have to choose between these alternatives and perfectly plausible that both are correct, even mutually reinforcing. The act of copying was, after all, seen as reproductive, mechanical and uninspired (read: feminine), and therefore entirely consonant with Manet’s characterization of Gonzalès as a bit of a dabbler, a “lady artist.”

Manet himself was more inclined to the comprehensive transformation of his pictorial sources, as the second half of the essay suggests. Here, through a series of engaging comparisons and close readings, Koos persuasively argues that much of Manet’s still-life practice was in dialogue with Chardin, whose legacy was benefiting from “the new enthusiasm for the French Rococo” (p. 49). To give just one example, she points out that in his *Peony Stem and Secateurs* (1864) Manet based his composition on Chardin’s *Dead Rabbit with Powder Horn and Gamebag* (1728-29), despite the obvious differences in subject matter. But, in general, Manet “reduces the transparency of the illusion” in his paintings. In his fabrics, for example, his “open style of *exécution* is no longer a mere imitation of the textile, but rather exhibits paint in its pure substance, the brushwork on the flat surface of the canvas” (p. 53). Such qualities, Koos argues, “separate Manet’s pictures from other works of his era.” And this sets him apart from “high-finish painters such as Jean-Léon Gérôme, Alexandre Cabanel, William Bouguereau and their grandiose works depicting an idealizing scopophilic dream-world (in the style of Hollywood movies)” (p. 55). This is the familiar story of modernist progress facing down retardataire

academicism, and at such moments one detects definite limits to the exhibition catalogue's attempt to "rehabilitate academic art" (p. 14).

In the final essay—"Landscape into Modernity: Nineteenth-Century Transitions"—James Rubin provides a survey of the genre of painting that would become closely associated with impressionism. The chronological span of the exhibition fits nicely with this enterprise. Constable exhibited works at the Salon of 1824, and his "British version of Dutch naturalism" (p. 58) provided the French with an alternative model to their own school of landscape, which had its roots in the work of Poussin and Claude. Rubin progresses from here to the Barbizon school, landscape photography, realism, and finally impressionism. This allows Rubin to tease out the technical and aesthetic differences between impressionist landscape and these other approaches, as well as some important continuities. The Impressionists, for example, inherited from the Barbizon school an interest in the expressive and subjective possibilities of landscape painting, where natural forms might "echo personal emotion" (p. 61), as well as a "freer, colourist style" that called "attention to the artist's presence and temperament" (p. 63). On the other hand, the Impressionists "made modernity their prime concern" and their commitment to "scenes of modern life led them away from Courbet and the Barbizon School's retreat to the countryside" (p. 65).

One nice aspect of Rubin's synoptic and useful essay is the degree to which his subject allows him to refer to specific artworks included in the exhibition. The other essays, in contrast, tend to focus on a fewer number of key works, works that were not on display in Zürich but rather chosen because they were necessary in order to advance particular arguments. In general, the essays are not directly about the works in the exhibition, but rather aim to provide a broader critical context in which to understand them. Equally, for readers looking for brief introductions to, say, French landscape or history painting in the nineteenth century, some of these essays would work well independently of the framework of the exhibition catalogue.

Consider again the two key words in the exhibition catalogue's title. Their ordering of "praised" and "ridiculed" points primarily to the so-called academic works that were once Salon successes before they dropped out of critical favor in the early to mid-twentieth century, during the reign of modernism and formalism. (In contrast, the works of Courbet, Manet and the Impressionists tended to elicit ridicule and then praise.) Dramatic reversals of fortune make for good box office, but the cumulative effect of the exhibition catalogue and the essays is not really to elevate these so-called academic painters to the same level of now better-known avant-garde artists; rather, it's to integrate them into viewers' understanding of nineteenth-century art. The catalogue, then, serves to remind the reader that removing the stain of ridicule does not necessarily mean praising everything and everyone equally.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Oskar Bätschmann, "Salon, the Public and Artists"

Matthias Krüger, "The Demise of a Genre: History Painting under Fire from the Critics"

Marianne Koos, "Manet and the Reception of Chardin in Nineteenth-Century French Painting"

James H. Rubin, "Landscape into Modernity: Nineteenth-Century Transitions"

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ISSN 1553-9172