

H-France Review Vol. 20 (April 2020), No. 75

Serge Guilbaut, ed., *Lost, Loose and Loved: Foreign Artists in Paris, 1944-1968*. Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2018. Plates, black-and-white photographs, and historical texts. 264 pp. 35.00€. (pb). ISBN 978-84-8026-580-5.

Review by Natalie Adamson, University of St Andrews, Scotland.

Lost, Loose and Loved: Foreign Artists in Paris, 1944-1968 is the catalogue edited by Serge Guilbaut that accompanied the exhibition of that title at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid in 2018-2019 (this review concerns only the book). It is a follow-up to the mammoth exhibition and book entitled *Be-Bomb: The Transatlantic War of Images and all that Jazz. 1946-1956* (Barcelona and Madrid, 2007-2008), and a footnote of a kind to Guilbaut's key statement on the ranking and fate of French art (or, art in Paris, to be specific) after 1940 in his book *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art* [1] whose polemical title, if not its more complex content, has exerted enormous influence upon subsequent scholarship and popular ideas about movements of modern art. *Lost, Loose and Loved* contains a lengthy survey essay by Guilbaut accompanied by clusters of images, a collection of "historical texts" nicely printed on contrasting blue paper, and five scholarly essays by art historians Amanda Herold-Marme, Tom McDonough, Maureen Murphy, Isabel Plante, and Kaira M. Cabañas.

Taken together, Guilbaut's great knowledge of the field and the examples drawn from a wide range of artists and artworks in this exhibition and book suggest that we might find here a significantly expanded and revised mapping of the multifarious artistic activities taking place in Paris during the so-called postwar years.[2] 1944 is the chosen start date, highlighting the Liberation and a corresponding notion of Paris as a revived "vital space" of renaissance creative activity (p. 15). Two short introductions by Minister for Culture and Sports José Guirao Cabrera, and Manuel Borja-Villel, Director of the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, establish an overarching argument for what follows: the exhibition depicts a "varied Parisian scene" and "complex situation in France" that has been "crowded out by the New York art world"—a skulduggery tale in which the "skilful exercise of American propaganda" has spun a "spell-binding" web of influence over art institutions, not to mention the "operations of canonical art history" (p. 2). *Lost, Loose and Loved* wants to redeem Paris and its artists by retrieving a sidelined or forgotten story of modern art and restoring it to its proper place on the stage. The narrative is concluded in 1968 according to the title, but it really ends in July 1967, with the production of a collective mural in Havana, Cuba by some one hundred European artists and writers, alongside a re-staging of the annual Parisian *Salon de mai* (inaugurated in 1945). This decision avoids the task of accounting for May-June '68, while implying a radical trajectory of just over two decades of Parisian artistic activity.

This dynamic artistic (and political) world is emblematised by a curious image choice for the cover (also included on the page facing the list of contents): a photograph of three artists (two Italians, Valerio Adami and Tancredi Parmeggiani, and one French, Jean-Jacques Lebel) plus the French art critic, Alain Jouffroy) in front of a mural-sized painting known as the *Great Collective Anti-Fascist Painting* created in the Milanese studio of Roberto Crippa in 1960.[3] This studio photo is seemingly a visual stand-in for the innovative "foreign artist in Paris" who either revitalised, or unforgivingly routed, a moribund School of Paris by producing an experimental and politicised art from the margins, thus underwriting what Cabrera calls a "new international paradigm" (pp. 2-3).

The focus upon foreign artists in Paris adds an exciting roster of practitioners to the more established and well-known names, in addition to hinting at several directions in (art) history writing that might offer productive pathways out of the national-patrimonial cul-de-sac. Most obviously, the focus on the metropolis suggests a reading of the city space as what scholar Ming Tiampo has called a "crucible of global encounter and 'trans modernity'," where imperial, colonial, and postcolonial cultural and political relationships have the potential to be reimagined and redefined.[4] To at least some extent, each of the essays in this catalogue positions Paris as a unique melting-pot site characterised by creative freedom, cultural transnationalism and the over-coming of national constraints. The danger of over-valuing this cosmopolitan, yet imperial city in beginning the work of effecting the "interlacing of histories and the concatenation of distinct worlds" that Achille Mbembe defines as postcolonial critique looms here.[5] As a specifically art-historical corollary issue, how the experience of being a foreign artist in Paris translates into, or can be read out of, artistic style, is also a highly moot question; one tackled most instructively in the essays by Murphy, Herold-Marme, and Plante.

What exactly this "new international paradigm" adds up to is left unstated for the most part, though the project as a whole rightly suggests that we interrogate notions of essence in art writing, artistic style or ideas about national tradition. A list of works shown concludes the catalogue and re-affirms the internationalism of the artists by giving birth and death dates and places, but further biographical information is absent. For example, a footnote reminds us that the reception of Carmen Herrera's (b. Havana, 1915) work has been scandalously belated, but we learn nothing about the development of her geometric abstraction and the exhibition of her work in Paris at the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles between 1949 and 1953. The career of American artist Minna Citron (b. 1896 - d. 1991) remains obscured from view, while Egyptian surrealist Ramses Younan (b. 1913 - d. 1966) receives citation but little else. Given the premise of the catalogue and the welcome inclusion of numerous little-known or written-about figures, the absence of some life information is a serious omission. It is perhaps an old-fashioned task of retrieval, but such details would start to open up the intricate and over-lapping narratives of the "how, why, and to what end" of a foreign artist's life in Paris.

Moreover, a denser and more accurate sense of the lives of artistic actors in their local situations and international communities would productively enable the de-centralisation of Paris. The goal would not be to marginalise or eradicate France, French art or Paris from the story of twentieth-century modern art. Instead, it would be to explicitly reconfigure it within a more transnational map of the world and to conceive of a mobile and relational geographical mesh, rather than a one-directional exchange. The tense topic of the artistic, social and political relations between France and the USA--treated here with indecision--would be just one key dialogue to benefit.[6]

Another important move would be to push towards a more “horizontal” understanding of the European avant-garde instead of a verticalized hierarchy, to use the words of art historian Piotr Piotrowski.[7] The individual example of the Italian multi-media artist Enrico Baj (b.1924, Milan – d. 2003, Vergiate), represented by a powerful painting *Al Fuoco, al fuoco (Fire! Fire!)*, 1963-1964, and as a contributor to the *Grand Tableau anti-fasciste* (one of his many collaborative and activist projects), demonstrates the necessity of better understanding European trans-avant-garde artistic constellations and activities. Correspondingly, such powerful historical, social and art-critical constructions as the avant-gardes and neo-avant-gardes, the “French tradition,” or indeed the École de Paris, might come further into focus in their relational (and also untranslatable or incompatible) mediations between local, national, international, and increasingly globalised concerns.

Despite its great potential, the survey of foreign artists in Paris in the titular and lengthy catalogue essay by Guilbaut is a muddled one. The ever-so-notorious École de Paris proves one of the most vexatious terms. Borja-Villel’s claim that the exhibition has uncovered marginal pathways that were “not part of the so-called School of Paris” (p. 5, my emphasis) allows foreign artists to be identified as outsiders who save French art from itself, and for Paris to assert its status as a magical “out of this world” space. As multiple studies have shown, however, the École de Paris was, from its late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century origins onwards, constituted by and around the presence of foreign-born artists in Paris and their complex relationships to the notion of a French tradition(s) of art.[8] Guilbaut circumvents the issue by inserting the names of “foreign dreamers” (p. 17) and their artworks into a broad-brushed art scene that is characterised, simply and above all else, as a “vital space of freedom” (p. 15), where the larger issues of racial, sexual and political dividing lines are hinted at with sideways clues, but are for the most part elided.

Foreign artists are presented in *Lost, Loose and Loved* as a vital, distinct, and central artistic formation in Paris in a move that is key to writing new and expanded histories of postwar art. Simultaneously, the absence of more depth to the careers and works by these artists runs the risk of re-inscribing them into a binarized frame in which they remain apart, exotic and disruptive, restricted to “adjusting or responding to the evolution of an art scene” (p. 13). We are left to infer that there is some kind of important relationship between artworks, politics, and a cosmopolitan existence in Paris and, moreover, that this is somehow bound to be a radical revision of conservative national tradition. Foreign artists have found liberty in a Parisian utopia and are praised as the escapees of an essentialised idea of a “French” tradition or School of Paris that is boiled down to a tired reiteration of Clement Greenberg’s discourse: “weak, effeminate and passé” (p. 116). Guilbaut’s desire to tear down clichés and have artworks “scream at each other,” (p. 15) produces a re-enacted battle of styles and traditions that re-entrenches many of the stereotypes operating in art criticism of the period. Too little is done to accurately describe the active participation by, and construction of, this very art scene by foreign artists, from their considerable participation in the proliferating salons and gallery shows for contemporary art (notably, but not only, the venues dedicated to abstraction and non-figuration) to the multi-layered networks of affiliation that worked in alignment with and also often across stylistic tendencies, political references and national origins.

It is equally exciting to see so many women artists mentioned and just as deflating to learn next to nothing about their work and careers, aside from guessing at their affiliations via the style of their works. The paintings of Portuguese-born artist Maria Elena Vieira da Silva are given some

description, although her acknowledged success is promptly undermined by the opinion that the work was apparently only appreciated because of its visual links to the "French tradition" of decorative, spiritual, elegant, post-Cubist grids. Significant artists such as Falkenstein, Karskaya, Herrera, Marta Minujín, Nancy Spero, Alina Szapocznikow and Loló Soldevilla, are plopped into the rough and ready chronology without solid context, biography, detail or analysis of their work produced in Paris. The historical problematic of their lively presence in this Parisian artworld and beyond it, and the obliteration of this presence in art historical narratives is sequestered in a strangely metaphorical footnote referring to the veiling and shrouding of artistic production by women (p. 34), when the opportunity to pay close attention was, for once, there for the taking.

A handful of sculptures are key inclusions (such as Falkenstein's important and intriguing work and the presence of Shinkichi Tajiri), but the preference is for painting, with abstraction announced victor of the battle in hewing to Cold War parameters. An oddball selection of figurative and realist paintings are thrown into the mix (we have French-born painter André Fougeron's *La Bretagne*, 1946, representing his pre-Socialist Realism association with the generally maligned *Jeunes peintres de tradition française*, such as Édouard Pignon or Jean Bazaine, when it would have been interesting to see a more relevant painting like his *Nord-Africains aux portes de la ville (La Zone)*, 1954, Musée de l'Immigration, Paris). The puzzling inclusion of a handful of French-born painters—Fougeron, Jean Bazaine, Alfred Manessier, Roger Bissière, the recalcitrant realist Bernard Buffet—in this show of foreign-born artists in Paris seems confusingly designed to function as a negative sort of *repoussoir* device referring to the denigrated stylistic and technical identifiers of, variously, either the École de Paris or the "French tradition."

Guilbaut's essay and the illustrations are followed by a section containing thirteen "historical texts," mostly translated from French to English: amongst them an excerpt from James Baldwin's "The Negro in Paris", 1950; an art critical article of 1945 by Charles Estienne; a telling account by Michel Ragon of a visit to the studio of Jean-Michel Atlan in 1953; and a handy biographical portrait of the Russian-born artist Karskaya by the German-born art critic and German-born art critic and historian Herta Wescher from 1956; various polemics on the School of Paris and the complex relationship of the USA to France; an overlong text taken from a 1991 speech by Oliver Harrington; and a segment of a key text by French critic Alain Jouffroy from 1960-1964 pointedly examining the shift from abstract painting to the neo-dada and kinetic production of objects. There is no introduction or framing context for the texts and, even in conjunction with Guilbaut's preceding essay or the many primary source texts in *Be-Bomb*, it is difficult to comprehend them in any useful way as a teaching-friendly anthology.

Although they sit somewhat disjunctively to the main text and portfolios of images, the five more narrowly-focused essays provide a suite of very welcome, detailed case studies. In a succinct and legible contribution to a growing literature in this specific area, Murphy lays out the dialectical relationship of African artists such as Mohammed Khadda (Algeria), Ernest Mancoba (South Africa) and Papa Ibra Tall (Senegal) to questions of primitivism, colonial painting and value systems, the notion of origins, and the modern tradition as it was taking shape in both Paris and art schools in Africa.[9] Plante's essay explores the highly visible group of kinetic artists from South America based in Paris during the 1960s who were central to the powerful (and under-explored) trajectories of geometric abstraction, kinetic and op art as supposedly universal artistic languages exceeding national frontiers and origins. Both these essays, along with Herold-Marme's analysis of "Spanish Art and Exile in Post-war Paris: The Case of José García Tella, 'Hombre-Artista'," crucially explore why artists came to Paris, and stayed, or departed, for all

kinds of reasons. In an essay entitled "The Philosophical Harem," Tom McDonough adds to the mountain of literature on Picasso with a detailed analysis of the 1954-1955 series, *Women of Algiers*, placing it within an enervated tradition of Orientalist nudes that disturbingly and obliquely interacts with the Algerian War of Independence. The final essay by Kaira M. Cabañas is an intensely researched examination of two artists—the Romanian-born founder of Lettrism Isidore Isou (b. 1925 - d. 2007, Paris) and Brazilian Lygia Clark (b. 1920 - d. 1988), linked together in Paris through their activist interventions into the terrain of the anti-psychiatry movement during the 1970s.

In his article "For a Revolution of the Gaze" (noted above), Alain Jouffroy proclaimed Paris as the location of a "revolt against the clichés of modern art, of this resurrection beyond all isms..." (p. 179). His choice of artists and works—from Raymond Hains (b. 1926, Saint-Brieuc, France - d. 2005, Paris) and Jacques de la Villeglé (b. 1926, Quimper, France), to Takis (b.1925, Athens - d. 2019) and Yaacov Agam (b.1928, Rishon Le Tsiyon, Israel; moved to Paris in 1951)—foregrounded mobility: creative mobility above all and, implicitly, a conceptual and geographical versatility and diversity that both Jouffroy, as an activist critic of the times, and we as historians, are charged with recording.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Serge Guilbaut, "Lost, Loose, and Loved: Foreign Artists in Paris, 1944-1968"

Amanda Herold-Marme, "Spanish Art and Exile in Postwar Paris: The Case of José García Tella, 'Hombre-Artista'"

Tom McDonough, "The Philosophical Harem"

Maureen Murphy, "Moments of a Shared History: African Artists in Paris, 1944-1968"

Isabel Plante, "Professional Aspirations and Universal Appeal: Paris as a Cultural Center for South American Geometric Abstraction from the Postwar Period to the 1960s"

Kaira M. Cabañas, "The Artist as Therapist: Isidore Isou and Lygia Clark"

NOTES

[1] Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism*, (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

[2] Laurence Bertrand Dorléac and Jacqueline Munck, eds., *L'Art en guerre: France 1938-1947* (Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 2012) and *Paris, Capital of the Arts 1900-1968* (London: Royal Academy, 2002) are two large-scale efforts at grappling with a periodisation that too neatly circumscribes 1939-1944/1945. Maurice Fréchuret, et al, 1946, *L'art de la Reconstruction* (Antibes: Musée Picasso, 1996); Sylvie Ramond and Éric de Chasse, eds., *1945-1949 Repartir à Zero, comme si la peinture n'avait jamais existé* (Lyon: Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon, 2008); and Laurence Bertrand Dorléac, Thomas Kirchner, Déborah Laks and Nele Putz, eds., *Les Arts à Paris après la Libération: Temps et Temporalités* (Paris: Centre Allemand d'Histoire de l'Art & Bibliothèque de l'université de Heidelberg, 2018, at <http://www.arthistoricum.net>) all

treat the postwar moment from different angles. However, as Hannah Feldman eloquently points out, there is no “postwar” for France after 1944-1945 and we should rather speak of “art *during-war*” (see: *From a Nation Torn: Decolonizing Art and Representation in France, 1945-1962* [Durham: Duke University Press, 2014]).

[3] Enrico Baj, Roberto Crippa, Gianni Dova, Erró, Jean-Jacques Lebel & Antonio Recalcati, “Grand tableau antifasciste collectif” (*Large Collective Anti-Fascist Painting*), 1960, oil on canvas, 400,5 x 497 cm, exhibited in Milan in 1961 before being sequestered by the Italian police until 1987. See Jill Carrick, “The Assassination of Marcel Duchamp: Collectivism and Contestation in 1960s France,” *Oxford Art Journal* 31/(2008): 1-25 on this painting and the Havana Mural of 1967.

[4] Ming Tiampo, citing Enrique Dussel, “World System and ‘Trans’-Modernity,” *Nepantla: Views from the South* 3/2 (2002): 221-244, in the talk “Paris from the Outside In ...”, 9 November 2015, available at <https://www.ici-berlin.org/events/ming-tiampo/>.

[5] Achille Mbembe, “Provincializing France?” trans. Janet Roitman, *Public Culture* 23/1(2011): 85-119; 86 & 118.

[6] There is a vast literature on Americans in Paris, with the Grey Art Gallery, New York University and the Musée d’Art, Nantes, taking a new look at the topic of visual artists in the City of Light between 1946 and 1962 in an exhibition programmed for Winter 2022. Hiroko Ikegami, *The Great Migrator: Robert Rauschenberg and the Global Rise of American Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2010) offers an important corrective to one-directional readings of American dominance, as does Vanessa Schwartz, *It’s so French!: Hollywood, Paris and the Making of Cosmopolitan Film Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). See also Natalie Adamson, “Sam Francis and Painting in Paris,” *In Focus: Around the Blues 1957, 1963-3 by Sam Francis*, July 2019, <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/in-focus/around-the-blues/painting-in-paris>, and Sophie Cras, “An American in Paris,” in Sophie Cras, ed., *In Focus: Parts of the Face: French Vocabulary Lesson 1961 by Larry Rivers*, Tate Research Publication, 2016, <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/in-focus/parts-of-the-face-french-vocabulary-lesson-larry-rivers/an-american-in-paris>.

[7] Piotr Pietrowski, *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*, trans. Anna Brzyski, (London: Reaktion 2012): 25-27; Noit Banai, “Avant-garde or Civil Service? Yves Klein, Werner Ruhnau and the European Situation,” in Sascha Bru ed., *Europa! Europa? The avant-garde, modernism and the fate of a continent* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), pp. 244-263, is an important example of the explicit foregrounding of Europe as critical framework of analysis. See too, Luke Skrebowski, “Untranslating the Neo-Avant-Gardes,” *ARTMargins* 7/2(June 2018): 4-21; and the interview “On Curating ‘Postwar’ at Haus der Kunst” between curator Katy Siegel and Romy Golan, published in *ARTMargins Online* 07/02/2019: <https://artmargins.com/on-curating-the-exhibition-postwar-at-haus-der-kunst-artmargins-print-8-2/>.

[7] Karen L. Carter and Susan Waller, eds., *Foreign Artists and communities in modern Paris, 1870-1914: Strangers in Paradise* (Farnham and Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2015); Sophie Krebs, ed., *L’École de Paris, 1904-1929: La part de l’autre* (Paris: Musée d’art moderne de la Ville de Paris, 2000); Kate Kangaslahti, “Foreign Artists and the École de Paris: Critical and Institutional Ambivalence between the Wars,” in Natalie Adamson and Toby Norris eds., *Academics, Pompiers,*

Official Artists and the Arrière-garde: Defining Modern and Traditional in France, 1900-1960 (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2009), pp. 85-112; Natalie Adamson, *Painting, Politics and the Struggle for the École de Paris, 1944-1964* (Farnham and Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2009).

[8] Most recently, Elizabeth Harney, “Constellations and Coordinates: Repositioning Postwar Paris in Stories of African Modernism,” in Harney and Ruth B. Phillips eds., *Mapping Modernisms: Art, Indigeneity, Colonialism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018), pp. 304-334.

Natalie Adamson
University of St Andrews
na14@st-andrews.ac.uk

Copyright © 2020 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for redistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of H-France Review nor re-publication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. The views posted on H-France Review are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies.

ISSN 1553-9172