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Simon Kelly, *Théodore Rousseau and the Rise of the Modern Art Market: An Avant-Garde Landscape Painter in Nineteenth-Century France*. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing Inc., 2021. 250 pp. 8 colour & 64 b/w illustrations and appendices. \$150.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9781501343797; \$135.85 U.S. (eb). ISBN 9781501343803; \$135.85 U.S. (pdf). ISBN 9781501343810.

Review by Steven Adams, University of Hertfordshire.

Théodore Rousseau was a seminal figure in mid-nineteenth-century French painting. Alongside Paul Huet, Jules Dupré, Diaz de la Peña, Jean-Baptiste-Camille Camille Corot and others, Rousseau was seen as a founder of a modern school of painting, one that emerged in France in the 1830s. Its innovative and intuited approach to landscape painting stood in stark opposition to the moribund traditions of the art establishment, the Académie des Beaux-Arts. Rousseau's credentials for membership in this protean vanguard were impressive. In 1824 he tried his hand in a competition for officially sanctioned academic landscape painting--the Rome prize for historical landscape--but apparently fled midway during the examination, as its stage-managed approach to the natural world was inimical to the painter's more finely-honed sensibilities. Thereafter, we find Rousseau increasingly on the margins of the profession. He exhibited at the Parisian Salons of 1832 and 1834. In 1836, however, his monumental landscape *The Descent of the Cattle in the High-Jura Mountains* (1834-1835) was rejected by the Salon, along with other work in 1839 and 1840, earning Rousseau the epithet "Le Grand Refusé." Rousseau was then said to have retired to the countryside in lonely isolation. His singular devotion to his art earned him, it was said, a privileged access to a feminised Nature. Rousseau's career concluded with official recognition, the *Légion d'Honneur*, but--consistent with the spirit of rejection that haunted his entire career--it arrived at the eleventh hour while the painter was on his deathbed. As Kelly explains, what we know of Rousseau's career was shaped in large part by art critics and fellow travellers, not least by his biographer and agent Alfred Sensier. Sensier's *Souvenir sur Théodore Rousseau* of 1872 was first published in instalments in Paul Durand-Ruel's *Revue Internationale de l'art et de la curiosité*. Best known perhaps for his promotion of Impressionist painting, particularly the work of Claude Monet, Durand-Ruel used the journal as a tool to promote Rousseau's work, a technique he learned, Kelly shows, from marketing strategies used by the Parisian banking community. In this densely researched and authoritative book, Kelly explores the myth of "Le Grand Refusé," but crucially looks at the painter's career against the backdrop the rapidly changing art market in mid-nineteenth-century Paris.

Kelly begins with the myth, largely the one perpetrated by art critics working in the second half of the century: Rousseau's career on the margins of the profession and his failed attempts to make much of a mark at the Paris Salon, the main forum in which artistic careers were made or crushed.

We learn of Rousseau's sensitivity to nature, his search for "natural sensation," "mystical experience[s]" while painting landscapes at the Bas Bréau near the village of Barbizon on the edge of the Fontainebleau Forest (p. 27). Those who know the story of the life and work of Rousseau will find Kelly's analysis familiar; indeed, it is one Sensier and Durand-Ruel might relish. The depth of analysis is however impressive, here, and throughout. Indeed, the tone of Kelly's book often resembles that vein of enthusiastic, but densely researched scholarship undertaken by mid-nineteenth-century historians, Théophile Thoré, Eugène Emile Belier de la Chavignerie and not least Sensier. For example, in Kelly's discussion of Rousseau's seminal painting, *The Descent of the Cattle*, we learn that this was a depiction of a region that had long resisted modernisation, one touched with what Charles Nodier described as an "antique simplicity" uncorrupted by tourism.[1] Kelly shows how the young Rousseau and Rousseau *père* had long-established connections with the Jura, the latter as an active regional patriot; we learn that the *Descent* was made at the time the July Monarchy was becoming increasingly repressive, and that the art critic Prosper Dorbec, (writing half a century later), saw the picture in politicised terms as anticipating the work of Gustave Courbet. We also learn of the picture's genesis and the influence of the working methods of Rousseau's friend, the painter Ary Sheffer with whom he shared a studio. There follows a detailed and again no less densely researched account of other pictures by Rousseau that were rejected by the Salon, as well as his support from luminaries such as the writer George Sand and art critic Théophile Thoré. Being a curator as well as an art historian, Kelly has a very keen eye for Rousseau's pictures, their facture, and the critical responses they garnered, all of which are again impressively referenced; footnotes are numerous, often long, but enormously informative. In the early 1990s, Nicholas Green's book *The Spectacle of Nature: Landscape and Bourgeois Culture in Nineteenth-Century France* examined nineteenth-century French landscape painting and the cultural commodification of nature broadly from a post-Marxist perspective.[2] The book explored not so much art, but the ideologically generative power of landscape imagery and its role in the formation of a bourgeois ideology. Kelly's approach is much less theoretically driven. His admiration for and knowledge about the painter trumps theory. But the book reminds us how art history has changed and how ecumenical the discipline has become. Not least, whatever our ideological point of departure, it is a reminder of the enormous value of research underpinned by the diligent accumulation of art historical data.

In the chapters that follow, Kelly offers no less detailed insight into the production and promotion of Rousseau's painting through independent exhibition societies from the 1830s onwards and the formation of commercial and charitable agencies to support landscape painters of the period. Kelly explores the role of dealers, art critics and patrons in creating a platform for the promotion of Rousseau's work outside the Paris Salon, and it is here that the author really gets into his stride. The book's keynote is that the production, consumption, circulation, and display of art changed profoundly in the second half of the nineteenth century and that Rousseau, his patrons, and dealers had defining roles within its operation. It is instructive for example, to learn of Rousseau's concern for the integrity of his painting when seen against the backdrop of the various literary and musical *soirées* held by Société Nationale de Beaux-Arts, one of several societies examined by Kelly dedicated to the promotion of the painter's work. The analysis of the part played by regional exhibition venues in Marseilles, Nancy, Reims, Amiens, and Lyon is also enormously instructive; so too, the no less densely footnoted section on artists' strategies for showing his work in Belgium, Germany, and the UK. Clearly, there is much to do in this book. These and other passages are sometimes quite short but, as ever, very densely footnoted, and clearly draw on a raft of Kelly's scholarship on the subject (cited in the bibliography).

The part played by Rousseau's circle of liberal patrons is subject to similar analysis. Far from the *idée reçue* of the painter as a victim of the art establishment, Kelly shows how through the intercession of fellow painters, the duc Orléans and his brother, the entrepreneur Paul Collot, the banker Paul Perier (a collector who offered sustained support to the artist in the 1840s), and notably the Alsatian textile magnate Frédéric Hartmann, Rousseau's works fetched high—sometimes spectacularly high—prices. Kelly writes in detail about the intimate relationship between the Hartmann and Rousseau. Through a careful analysis of the correspondence between the two, Kelly shows the importance Rousseau gave to the facture of the *Farm in the Landes* made specifically for Hartmann. The exchange reveals much about Rousseau's working methods and the specific issues that shaped the picture's execution. Similar attention is given to the role of art dealers. Paul Durand-Ruel's role in marketing the generation of landscape painting that preceded the Impressionists is generally well known, but again, the strength of Kelly's research lies in the detailed analysis he brings to the work of, in this instance, Durand Ruel's partnership with fellow dealer Hector Brame. The partnership was instrumental, Kelly shows, in developing sophisticated marketing methods that called upon a strategic collaboration between the artist, dealer, collectors and the public. The circle colluded in establishing monopolies of the painter's work and promoting it at auction, public exhibitions, and commercial galleries. The book concludes with Rousseau's legacy and the posthumous reception of his work in Europe and the United States, and Rousseau's recognition in the liberal republican administration of the 1880s. For Leon Gambetta, Rousseau was one of the "three great representatives of the French School" (p.208).

Kelly might even have underplayed Rousseau's importance a little. The bohemian ideal so effectively enshrined in Rousseau's career—the path of rejection and isolation, a steadfast commitment to an independent vision, a vision shunned at first by the establishment, only to be recognised when it was almost too late—mirrors in many respects the careers of other painters of the period. The landscape painters Simon-Mathurin Lantara, Georges Michel, Lazzarre Bruandet, Huet, Corot, Jules Dupré, and Diaz de la Peña also worked (or were said to have worked) on the margins of the establishment, sustaining themselves by their own personal conviction, often in the face of official opposition, and they too were often subject to the kinds of marketization Kelly describes. This kind of landscape painting officially comes into its own in 1889 and 1900, in time for the respective celebrations of the French Revolution's centenary and the end of the nineteenth century. Here it was said that the political and artistic disputes of the last hundred years were now over. According to the exhibitions' organisers, this is the point at which art might be used as a "cultural balm."<sup>[3]</sup> If Salon painting embodied "systems and theories" and "divided opinion," landscape rested on personal insight.<sup>[4]</sup> This kind of art was no less revolutionary, but the barriers were erected within the sphere of art. As Gustave Larroumet, Chief of Staff in the Ministry of Public Instruction, put it, perhaps for this reason the state prefers landscapes, leaving to one side more expressive works.<sup>[5]</sup> Rousseau's work might then be seen as a component part of a radically changing market but also the state's final recognition of modern art (and modernism) in France.

This is an excellent book and makes a very substantial contribution to our understanding of Rousseau's work; it is driven by decades of careful reflection (the book emerged from a doctoral thesis published in 1998), diligent research in archives, and draws on the author's scholarly research published more recently in academic journals. As a curator, Kelly's informed admiration of Rousseau's paintings, drawings and prints, their facture and provenance is keenly apparent, a significant strength in a book devoted in large part to the context in which such works were

circulated and consumed. As such, the book must emerge as a primary point of reference for scholars of nineteenth-century French painting, changes in the art market, and Rousseau's role within them. The book concludes with appendices on the sale of Rousseau's pictures taken from the Archives Nationales de France, the painter's contract with Frédéric Hartmann for a loan guaranteed against some fifty works by the painter, and details of the pictures in Durand-Ruel's stock books.

Not least, the book is lucidly written with a powerful narrative, some achievement when we consider the weight of scholarship on which Kelly manages to draw. As in many research monographs, the quality of the black and white reproductions is just about acceptable. Rousseau's innovative painting techniques have not helped. The pictures have darkened considerably over the years, and it is good to see a handful of revealing coloured plates in the book. This is a generous and meticulously researched book and will be a likely cornerstone of scholarship on the painter for some years.

## NOTES

[1] As quoted in Simon Kelly, *Théodore Rousseau and the Rise of the Modern Art Market: An Avant-Garde Landscape Painter in Nineteenth-Century France* (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2021), p. 21.

[2] Nicholas Green, *The Spectacle of Nature: Landscape and Bourgeois Culture in Nineteenth-Century France* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990).

[3] Paul Mantz, "La peinture française," *Gazette des beaux-arts* 2 (1889): 345-358.

[4] Gustave Larroumet, *L'art et l'État en France* (Paris: Hachette, 1895), p. 17.

[5] *Ibid*, pp. 17-18.

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