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Iris Moon and Richard Taws, eds. *Time, Media, and Visuality in Post-Revolutionary France*. London: Bloomsbury, 2021. xiv + 261 pp. Figures, plates, notes, and index. \$120.00. (hb). ISBN 9-78-1-501348396.

Review by Stephanie O'Rourke, University of St Andrews.

One of the acute ironies of the visual culture of the French Revolution is that its events were often characterized as happening “too quickly” for them to be adequately represented; long before Jacques-Louis David had finished sketching the portraits for his painting of the Tennis Court Oath, one famous example goes, the political winds had already turned against several of his sitters. Yet this period also witnessed a stunning proliferation of visual media that nonetheless attempted to give it pictorial form. Some of their efforts were monumental and durable, while others were more fleeting and provisional (to recall a term from Taws’s important work on the subject).^[1] If the pace of political change in the post-revolutionary era was generally less frenetic, the same could not be said of its media.

In their edited volume Iris Moon and Richard Taws present a new account of post-revolutionary French visuality, here taken to encompass roughly the entire first half of the nineteenth century. The result is a collection of essays in which we can finally begin to apprehend just how much the post-revolutionary period served as the crucible of modern visual culture in France and beyond. It also tells a history that will be delightfully unfamiliar to many scholars, in which a variety of understudied practices and underappreciated actors come into focus. As Moon and Taws’s introduction announces, the book employs a polemical focus on the marginal and outliers, “objects frequently excluded from the period’s canon” (p. 7). Taken together they “tell a different history of French art’s modernity, in which the singular masterpieces of French painting take a back seat in favor of the small scale, market driven, functional, decorative, perverse, or outmoded” (p. 7).

One of the major advantages of this approach is that a range of new protagonists come into view, many of them women. Alongside this, the reader is compelled to give more serious scholarly consideration to practices that have historically been neglected because coded as feminine. A number of the essays explore how makers and users self-consciously played with highly gendered categories in creative and subversive ways, contributing to an on-going and much-needed revision of the explanatory priority traditionally given to the world of male-dominated academic history painting. We are reminded that the circles around senior figures like Jean-Baptiste Regnault and Jacques-Louis David hardly had a monopoly on the visual texture of life in France during and after the Revolution, and that influential accounts of the male homosociality that

characterized their studios and their artworks have perhaps exhausted their usefulness.^[2] Alternative forms of agency are explored throughout the volume. In a particularly striking example, Moon argues that women's fans "were the means by which representations of sovereignty could be manipulated by the hands of female subjects" (p. 75). By many metrics, politically charged fashion accessories were a far more pervasive post-revolutionary medium than monumental Salon paintings. Why would we assume they had any less power? Attending to a considerably more diverse set of actors and practices is one of the most urgent tasks the field has set itself, and this volume marks an important contribution.

"Visuality" is a capacious term but can also be unwieldy in its vagueness and breadth. The same can sometimes be said of "time." When pressed upon, surely any object that calls forth a durational act of looking could be said to be about "time." There is no single concept of post-revolutionary time that informs the essays, although Moon's piece supplies one of the book's most detailed explorations of temporality, both imagistic and experiential. (For Moon, "temporarily being out-of-step or out-of-date became intrinsic to a post-revolutionary condition" (p. 59).) What the essays do nonetheless share is a focus, as described in the introduction, on instances of "recursion, failure, overlap, or adaptation...rather than a teleology in which the emergence of one medium displaces forever that which came before" (p. 12). An important intellectual prompt for the larger project seems to come from John Durham Peters, whom Taws quotes in his essay at the end of the volume: "above all, media capture and fail to capture time."^[3] Much like its focus on supposedly minor media, the volume makes room for temporalities that are not monumental, heroic, or teleological. The very notion of a totalizing explanatory framework or monodirectional narrative arc seems antithetical to such an approach.

Rather than a narrowly targeted intervention into the field of post-revolutionary French art, then, I see this volume as a collection of exceptionally interesting and profoundly researched case studies about what the field has forgotten to attend to along the way, and about the many important histories that come into view when we take seriously a much more plural field of visual practices. Illustrations, especially color plates, are almost always in short supply these days. Nonetheless, the volume features illustrations of a range of compelling objects that will be new to many readers and which will facilitate exciting research going forward. One of the insights that emerges through this book and its illustrations is an understanding of the post-revolutionary period as one of exceptional pictorial heterodoxy.

Daniel Harkett's essay asks why the Restoration government commissioned expensive reproductions of paintings on porcelain. His text is one of several in which understudied female protagonists come into view, and through which we explore the period's curious preoccupation with art's permanence and impermanence. Attending to what she calls "miniature style," Jann Matlock reflects on what kind of affective valences an image can have when its (female) sitter is rendered partially or completely anonymous. Matlock considers a related dynamic when the identity of women artists is likewise lost or suppressed in the historical record. Susan Siegfried, focusing on fashion plates, reveals how fashion acted as a vehicle for "directed political critique" *circa* 1830 (p. 205). Her discussion of race and Indigeneity in Grandville's satirical lithograph "La Revanche, ou les Français au Missouri" is especially welcome. Moon, writing about Percier and Fontaine's curious Napoleon Fan, remarks on its uncanny commemoration of a male sphere of revolutionary war and statecraft within a medium associated not only with the feminine and the decorative but also with modes of concealment and revelation.

The professional precarity of artists, which often doubled as a debate about the status of the artist and the social value of art, is another theme that emerges across the volume. Stephen Bann's account of the career of Louis Lafitte explores how draughtsmanship, itself a practice that was able to transit up and down the hierarchy of genres, could likewise facilitate the unexpected professional mobility of some of its practitioners. Kathryn Desplanque traces the satirical trope of the failed or aspiring fine artist who paints shop signs, which indexed the uncertain and often mutable boundaries between commercial and fine art practices while also revealing a deep precarity in the perceived public value of fine art. In a related manner, Steven Adams explores how vaudeville plays reflected the often-troubled relationship that artists had to the world around them and the potential disjunction between an artist's professional confidence and the actual quality of their work. Adams's text also offers a corrective of our longstanding inability to properly read this period in relation to modernism. The essays by Adams and Desplanque remind us that this was a period in which the purpose and value of art was a topic of widespread public contestation, perhaps more so than in any era since the Reformation.

Although the entire volume is ultimately concerned with historical acts of forgetting and remembering, this dynamic comes to the fore in essays by Matlock, Katie Hornstein, and Taws. Hornstein argues that Jean-Baptiste Huet's animal portrait of a family of lions emblemizes the period's anxieties about containing the destructive forces of the Revolutionary era as well as other more contemporary threats. Taws likewise considers how picturing the natural world was freighted with the material and political legacies of the Revolution and its aftermath. His essay on the atmospheric effects of George Michel's landscapes supplies a fitting conclusion to the book, revealing how the paintings pictured a "layered archaeology of media" and histories (p. 234).

A book that attends so thoughtfully to that which has been overlooked in histories of post-revolutionary French art might also inspire us to dwell on the omissions that continue to hinder our understanding of the period. French visual culture was not merely "shadowed by the Haitian Revolution" (p. 13) and the colonial territories that powered a significant portion of French industrial modernity. What remains on the margins of this account is the extent to which French visuality was co-produced with those spaces and their people. One wonders whether it will remain possible in the future to treat Paris as synonymous with territorial France, and to treat territorial France as if it can be siloed off from its colonial and mercantile networks. [4] Michael Garnier's early portrait of Joséphine de Beauharnais (1790) alludes tantalizingly to the other forms of forgetting our field participates in. What happens for example if we treat Mauritius as a crucible of French romanticism and perhaps of French modernity more broadly? In my view, this is the kind of question the book raises rather than a question it fails to answer. This new volume will be of great interest to those of us who study and work on nineteenth-century French art. It will inspire readers to look again, to be less beholden to our teleologies, and to attend to our various forgettings.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Iris Moon and Richard Taws, "Introduction"

Jann Matlock, "Miniature Style, 1789-1815"

Iris Moon, “Rupture, Interrupted: Rococo Recursions and Political Futures in Percier and Fontaine’s Napoleon Fan”

Stephen Bann, “A Draughtsman’s Contract: Court and Country in the work of Louis Lafitte”

Katie Hornstein, “Jean-Baptiste Huet's Lions and the Look of the Captive in Post-Revolutionary France”

Steven Adams, “First as Farce, then as Tragedy: Art, Vaudeville and Modern Painting after the French Revolution”

Kathryn Desplanque, “Monsieur Crouton, The Shop Sign Painter: The Unexceptional Artist in Early Nineteenth-Century Satirical Print”

Daniel Harkett, “Medium as Museum: Marie-Victoire Jacquotot's Porcelain Painting and Post-Revolutionary Fantasies of Preservation”

Susan L. Siegfried, “The Cultural Politics of Fashion and the French Revolution of 1830”

Richard Taws, “A Storm is Coming: Georges Michel in the Wind”

NOTES

[1] Richard Taws, *The Politics of the Provisional: Art and Ephemera in Revolutionary France* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013).

[2] Notable examples include: Thomas Crow, *Emulation: Making Artists for Revolutionary France* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995); and Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Male Trouble: A Crisis in Representation* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1997).

[3] John Durham Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 11.

[4] Although apparently posed in a mischievous, slightly self-ironizing sense the question “Is Paris Still the Capital of the Nineteenth Century?” seems quite estranged from current developments in the field. Hollis Clayson and André Dombrowski, eds. *Is Paris Still the Capital of the Nineteenth Century? Essays on Art and Modernity, 1850-1900* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

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