

# *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide*

a journal of nineteenth-century visual culture

Margaret MacNamidhe

book review of

*The Deaths of Henri Regnault* by Marc Gotlieb

*Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 16, no. 2 (Autumn 2017)

---

Citation: Margaret MacNamidhe, book review of *The Deaths of Henri Regnault* by Marc Gotlieb, *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 16, no. 2 (Autumn 2017), <https://doi.org/10.29411/ncaw.2017.16.2.7>.

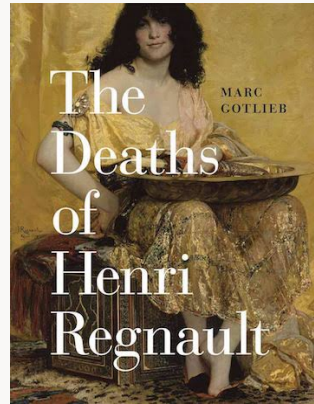
Published by: [Association of Historians of Nineteenth-Century Art](#)

Notes:

This PDF is provided for reference purposes only and may not contain all the functionality or features of the original, online publication.

License:

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License Creative Commons License](#).



Marc Gotlieb,  
*The Deaths of Henri Regnault*.  
Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2016.  
298 pp.; 124 illus.; notes, index.  
\$45.00  
ISBN: 13 978-0-226-27604-5

This book is the first major study of the now obscure, once illustrious painter Henri Regnault (1843–71). It is a book that will be of greatest interest to scholars interested in all facets of the French nineteenth century. Over the course of Regnault’s short career, he won every plaudit offered by Paris-based institutional structures of French academic training—still vigorous into the 1870s—even as his struggle against those structures marked that ascent. The reception afforded Regnault’s gloriously yellow-hued, full-length portrait *Salomé*—it provides the cover illustration to this beautifully illustrated, full-color book—at the 1870 Salon made him the toast of Paris; less than a year later, Regnault was dead. During the Siege of Paris he had joined the Volunteer Guardsmen—contributors to a later “cult of *patrie*” (151). Regnault fell not so much in the thick of the Battle of Buzenval but in its dismal twilight. French forces sent out by the Government of National Defense to break the siege beat a ramshackle retreat down a muddy hillside after a failed attempt to regain the ridge from the Prussian army headquartered at Versailles (133).

Regnault’s neglect in the face of “Manet and the impressionist revolution” was unthinkable as late as 1913 (126). Driven by a conviction that his work could last forever, Regnault would not have imagined its journey into the “wreckage our modern canon left behind” (217). In “one of the historical ironies that Regnault’s story” attracted, it was the father who pleaded against Henri’s volunteering who would inscribe the family name in the twentieth-century record. Regnault *père* was a “pivotal figure” in pioneering wet-plate photography (5, 184, 221). Gotlieb’s focus on Henri won’t come as a surprise to readers who know the concerns established by his previous work. These include the pressures of emulation; the unsung phenomenon of canon disappearance; the desires within studio pedagogy.<sup>[1]</sup> Those readers and others new to Gotlieb’s scholarship will welcome an extended opportunity—seven weighty chapters preceded by an innovative, Buzenval-centric, introduction—that this book affords to spend time with one of the most distinctive voices currently writing in art history. Gotlieb’s knack for sinuous phrasing, his ear for the enlivening properties of a precisely detonated vernacular, and his pitch-perfect evocations of principals and ancillaries alike on

the crowded stage of nineteenth-century Parisian culture—these and other familiar qualities are abundant in *The Deaths of Henri Regnault*.

But it would be an underestimation of this book to line it up in any simple continuity with earlier work. To be sure, there is no mistaking the concentration on one career shot through by a yearning for greatness so profound that it alone can explain otherwise baffling choices or embarkations upon the most grandiose of schemes. Familiar also is Gotlieb's particular ability to show how that yearning was bound up with a community of peers, superiors, celebrators, taunters, and rivals. Few readers of *The Plight of Emulation* will forget the "notoriously erudite, notoriously pessimistic" Paul Chenavard sinking into a "calamitous" commission at the Pantheon.<sup>[2]</sup> His friend Ernest Meissonier had sought out his own wall, magically thinking leadership of the French school could be his once that wall was covered. Not surprisingly—canvases miniature in scale were Meissonier's comfort zone—it wasn't.<sup>[3]</sup> And Gotlieb's most recent book doesn't lose sight either of the particularly French nineteenth-century dream of producing "one serious and important work." The words are Regnault's, written as he busily planned a *tableau* on a colossal scale—and this with the *Salomé* not long down from Salon walls (104). That the letter was written in Tangiers, however, along with the fact that preparations for a canvas "roughly the size of Veronese's *Wedding at Cana*" were forever interrupted by Regnault's return to Paris "as Prussian forces crossed onto French soil" alerts us to directions and topics launched in *The Deaths of Henri Regnault*, preoccupations brought into closely argued alignment with established concerns (105).

The topic of Regnault requires order to be imposed on widely varying material. Until the mid twentieth-century, traces of this artist were thin on the ground. An almost novelistic approach to convey "the spell that Regnault cast" is inaugurated by Gotlieb's "Introduction: 19 January 1871"—the date is the day that Regnault died (9). This approach retreats for four "thematically organized chapters" and re-emerges for chapters five, six, and seven (7). The novelistic mode is used to great effect in the book's riveting opening pages. We join the artist's inner circle on two journeys to the most haunted of Regnault's "sacred topographies" (9). An account of art made and lives lived under extraordinary duress during and after Paris's 133 days under siege that "opens *in medias res*": Jane Mayo Roos praised a similar decision in her review of S. Hollis Clayson's landmark study *Paris In Despair: Art and Everyday Life under Siege 1870–1871* (2002), noting that the author obliges the reader to "zoom" in via a "a close-focus lens."<sup>[4]</sup> *The Deaths of Henri Regnault* joins *Paris under Siege* in contributing groundbreaking research and insights on a turning point for late nineteenth-century France long ignored in art historical accounts, moving from Second Empire art and visual culture on to their seamless continuation in the Third Republic. What is more, Regnault's attachments to his fiancée, Geneviève Bréton, and Georges Clairin—Regnault's friend and the only person to have seen him bolt inexplicably into Prussian fire during a retreat—are discussed by Clayson.<sup>[5]</sup> Nonetheless, the hallmarks of Gotlieb's scholarship, especially his step-by-step tracing of one career, demand exclusive attention to his account of Regnault.

That some of *The Deaths of Henri Regnault* has to be told as a story shouldn't be taken as imperiling a close reading, either of works or of research finds. An imprint of the artist—a charcoal drawing of the fateful woods by Clairin—launches the book. Twigs broken off from one of those trees by Bréton, on the day of her visit to Buzenval, are described soon after. Pressed that evening into her diary, there those twigs remain "to this day, desiccated and

nearly turned to dust” (4). The Introduction’s second part turns to the career of the “painter of super-sized ambition” who inspired such grief (9). The six or so major pictures—some are watercolors—that remain his legacy and the places from which those pictures arrived in Paris indicate that Regnault broke much more dramatically than Meissonier did from disabling academic categories.

The first chapter describes a painter who suffered a creative drought after winning the 1866 Prix de Rome in history painting. Regnault felt overwhelmed by the anxiety of influence: in this chapter Gotlieb acknowledges the effect of Harold Bloom’s groundbreaking book of the same title.<sup>[6]</sup> The legacy of great precursors weighed heavily on Edouard Manet, J.-A.-D. Ingres, and Paul Delaroche. For any academically trained French painter of the nineteenth century, however, the anxiety of influence was acute.<sup>[7]</sup> Dominant shadows cast by the Old Masters seemed inescapable.<sup>[8]</sup> Awareness dawned on these painters that they had been born too late. Delaroche tried to resign himself to the fact that “the harvest is over” (28). Statements such as Delaroche’s reflect the “exhaustions of being a late-comer.”<sup>[9]</sup> Regnault felt them upon arrival in a city defined by its masterpieces and monuments. As Gotlieb notes, strategic mediations with the past by Manet, Ingres, and Delaroche have been charted by other scholars.<sup>[10]</sup> Regnault, too, would have to find ways of learning from the history of painting if he wanted to escape a latecomer’s predicament.

Nothing in Rome pleased Regnault. Ancient Roman monuments were “puny” (25). His attraction to scale was already evident: his “one serious and important work” would have colossal dimensions (25). The Sistine Chapel met his criteria, but its achievement loomed unattainable. Gotlieb emphasizes shared distress: “the legend of Michelangelo’s sublime inimitability” felled many nineteenth-century French artists (27). Only when Regnault escaped to Madrid did he breathe a sigh of relief. He ascribed to the Prado a sense of welcome.<sup>[11]</sup> The Spanish School “didn’t hide their techniques” (34). This response links Regnault to the same sources to which Manet was drawn. The well-regarded painting, *Marshal Juan Prim* (1868), broke Regnault’s dry spell (fig. 15).

Chapter two gives us a discussion that, along with chapter four, seemed to me the book’s most polemical part—without a doubt, readers seeking to expand their appreciation of what we might call the nerve centers of French history would do well to ponder these discussions. Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby has alerted us to how the imperialist project preoccupied French painters from Anne-Louis Girodet-Trioson to Edgar Degas and Manet.<sup>[12]</sup> As Clayson has pointed out, studies of nineteenth-century French painting increasingly acknowledge the role of Paris at the center of an empire.<sup>[13]</sup> The full accounting Gotlieb provides of the efflorescence of Orientalist painting as an expanding genre in mid to late nineteenth-century France must also be considered essential reading here.

Orientalist canvases started off small. But they became increasingly welcome—and increasingly large—augmentations of the Salon diet. Here again, Regnault initially appears exemplary. Like him, painters most ardent about this subject matter were trained in the academic system. As Gotlieb notes, this combination ensured that dual epithets (Salon painter, Orientalist painter) were affixed to these artists in the twentieth century. Doors to north Africa were opened by French imperialism at its most virulent, a fact that is often noted.<sup>[14]</sup> Less often considered is why such large numbers of academic artists proclaimed

themselves ecstatic about experiences available only under a dazzling sun. Confessions of “drunkenness,” eyes trained on the sun, an inability to gain “respite”: Gotlieb argues that such testimonials are a naturalization of an “Orientalist sublime.” A vast array of sources supply his evidence, including writings by canonical figures of French nineteenth-century literature, artists’ travel diaries, “a rare depiction of an Orientalist artist in the field,” and a journey through Gustave Guillaumet’s development over six visits to Algeria (53–7).

This analysis has two consequences. First, the boundaries of French nineteenth-century painting are further eroded. Claude Monet “credited his teenage experience doing military service in Algeria” with planting in his mind the seeds of “future research” (46, 52). In fact, Guillaumet’s conversion experience was in many aspects characteristic (50, 53). Guillaumet’s biographer Eugène Mouton describes a painter on a traditional path to Rome; on a whim, he changed his mind and travelled to Algeria. This was a “lucky break,” according to Mouton, who believed that Guillaumet was thereby saved from “contemplation of the masterpieces of the past.” Such contemplation would have extinguished his “originality” (53). Instead, his perception of desert landscapes as an “immensity of virgin nature” offered Guillaumet “a field for action.” The sun itself became his “master” (53). Whether a member of the avant-garde or the academy, painters from the 1860s on sought to directly experience the motif’s effects. Orientalist painters, however, set out increasingly in search of the sublime, for “the immensity of virgin nature” that Guillaumet had encountered—even as he professed himself surprised by solar dazzle. For artists not long out of the *École des Beaux-Arts* but, like Regnault, already in a slump, the memory of dominant precursors could be wiped clean by a “sublime re-set.” A present that seemed surprising, “primordial,” and “unmediated” captured them instead (53). Second, the chapter’s analysis of testimonials anticipates Regnault’s singularity within commonality. The sublime re-set would shift into high gear for an artist whose paintings were never “efforts to legitimate Orientalist painting in a naturalist key” (67). Regnault would soon arrive at “appalling” subject matter: his *Execution without Judgment under the Kings of Morocco* (121). The uneasy quality of that canvas was already apparent in Regnault’s response to the “divine Alhambra” in his 1869 watercolor studies of the Hall of the Two Towers. Archways, steps and hallways rest almost on bottom framing edges: a “destabilizing sense of immersion” veers toward the “vertiginous” (61). Gotlieb points out how well Regnault took to this sketch medium—setting the stage for his recourse to the medium during the Siege of Paris in what would become a significant late work.<sup>[15]</sup> Regnault’s “golden lattice[s]” were praised as offering “a breakthrough” to the “French school” (64).

The subject of chapter three, “Art and Desire,” is *Salomé*. The setting for this discussion is virtually canonical: an attention grabbing Salon painting considered within a welter of reviews and contemporary reactions. Anyone even remotely acquainted with nineteenth-century French art criticism knows it to be characterized by language that was intended to convey not shocking or entrancing effects per se, but the critic’s supposed confounding by these effects. To bring such description into alignment with the specifics of the work is easier said than done. When it has been done, some of the most praised examples of scholarship on the French nineteenth century are the result. Gotlieb achieves such alignments in chapter three.

Théophile Gautier was attracted to strong surface effects; no viewer was “more attuned” to the painting of *Salomé* (50, 96). The alignment occurs between Gautier’s identification of a “piercing beam of light” and Regnault’s decision to frame his canvas in rosewood: Gautier attributed chiaroscuro to a painting that had none. T. J. Clark has commented that “[m]ost pictures seem happy with their gold frames.”<sup>[16]</sup> This is a painting that wasn’t. The “mysterious black box,” now overlooked, around gold gave Gautier a replacement for chiaroscuro, a painting “illuminated in its own right” (97). Gautier also said that *Salomé* wasn’t an Orientalist painting; it was an “Orientalized” transformation of a particular woman (89). Crucial to the chapter’s argument is that *Salomé* captured the contemporary imagination because like Gautier, viewers saw in Regnault’s painting a distinctive personality. Mouth slightly open, she sat gazing at you (or perhaps not). She seemed insolently to hold court and even a seat of judgment—the title was essential to this effect—in borrowed finery she had made her own. By contrast, to Salon viewers, the implacable wearing and holding of props was exasperatingly familiar after a decade of disorientation in front of Victorine Meurent’s appearance in Manet’s paintings.

Two strategies secure this argument. Whereas Gotlieb had brought the discourse on the sublime and the literature on orientalism into an expanded encounter in the previous chapter, a vast, apparently relevant tradition can’t be affixed to Regnault’s Salon success: “[p]erhaps the supreme figure in a modern mythology of feminine evil, the figure of Salomé came to dominate Europe’s cultural horizon so massively that she seems almost to stand for the fin-de-siècle *tout court*” (72). Also demonstrated is Regnault’s contribution to the modern mythology. Whether embarking on full-length portraits or depicting Salomé herself, artists painting in Regnault’s wake were loathe to wipe their memories clean (73–8). The second strategy is alerting the reader to the model’s expanded role in nineteenth-century French culture. Stories of a lovelorn Regnault abounded: the artist had painted *Salomé* under a spell his model cast.<sup>[17]</sup> Everyone said so; the unfortunate Bréton overheard some of the chatter and it found a place in her diary (87).<sup>[18]</sup> The roots this story put down show a “tectonic shift around the status, standing, and visibility of the female model at the scene of representation” (85). A “literalization” within studio walls of the struggle between painting’s claim to intellectual status and its dependence on “color and matter, thematized as feminine,” had become common lore (85). Some of the most famous novels and short stories of the French nineteenth century tell of a creative flourishing—a work like *Salomé*—before a dominated domestic fate befell the artist.<sup>[19]</sup> Accordingly, seeing in *Salomé* a young woman imbued “with her own character, motives and history” wasn’t a stretch (73). But what about that borrowed finery? The painting’s very title, together with the depicted Orientalist paraphernalia, revealed that *Salomé* was awash in connotations, ugly stereotypes included. But with the likes of Gautier as commentator, these associations were seen to augment the *Salomé*. Key within an amassing of signification is the empty “platter or basin” that we see on this Salomé’s lap; it allows this dancer “to step out of the narrow role assigned to her in the biblical story” (73).

An adequate summary of Gotlieb’s chapter on *Salomé* has to take final note of three consequences drawn from Gautier’s comments on chiaroscuro. First, they confirm why the Alhambra watercolors were heralded as “a breakthrough” for the “French school” (64). Their sense of soaring, brightly lit space eclipsed old-fashioned Orientalists who’d pummeled chiaroscuro into a jaded technique—dark interiors cut by shafts of sun (64). Second,

chiaroscuro's decline ties Regnault to other contexts such as Manet's dispensing with centuries of customarily dark under-painting, and the Impressionists following suit.<sup>[20]</sup> Third, the discussion of chiaroscuro reminds us that at no point in *The Deaths of Henri Regnault* does the larger context ever hint at a fancifully unified vision of nineteenth-century French painting. Chapter one warded off later praise for the "cool tonalities" of *Marshal Juan Prim* (34). Gotlieb comments that "a future generation of critics shaped by Impressionism" would cite the sky in this painting as evidence that Regnault's 1868 canvas was his best, but he cautions against such retrospective attempts to pluck evidence of prescient Impressionism from Regnault's oeuvre (34). Those attempts are guided by later preferences for the instantaneity of atmosphere, fleeting effects generated by the "subtlest motifs" Impressionist painting favored, such as "reflections on water or the flapping of flags." Instantaneity is central to the tradition of history painting too, but there it is always located in scenes of great drama.

Sensational is one word for the subject matter Regnault chose for *Execution without Judgment under the Kings of Morocco*, which is at the center of chapter four; its title is "How to Paint Blood." If appreciation of the *Salomé's* success required the marshaling of a range of contexts, such demands increase exponentially for a discussion tasked with accounting for *Execution without Judgment*, one of the nineteenth century's most lurid paintings. Given its current obscurity, a short description is in order.<sup>[21]</sup> Alhambra-derived steps are now painted right on the canvas's bottom framing edge. Regnault's sublime reset looking up into soaring interiors also accounts for the *Execution's* emphatic verticality. In fact, the composition splits the viewer's gaze in two directions: upwards at the towering executioner, downwards to the severed head. The chapter earns its title: the executioner wipes a sword framing the fallen body while "long streamlets" of blood (Gautier's description) flow and pool onto the next step.

Just as Leo Steinberg bemoaned the capture of the *Demoiselles d'Avignon* by interpretations that by-passed an "intensity of address" in a "*maison close*" in favor of overarching "proto-Cubist" readings, so too does this chapter oblige us not "to ricochet off" Regnault's ghastly scene toward its definition by the ideological work Orientalist painting is generally assumed to do (50, 121).<sup>[22]</sup> This chapter's discussions take us further toward veritable nerve centers in the French imaginary. A fascination for juridical punishment carried out amid splendor far from Paris stretches back to Montesquieu. One of the most compromised, longest established strands in "the Orientalist political economy," summary execution in an exotic setting is a key to Gotlieb's close reading of this painting (120, 121). At virtually the same time as social reformers across Europe worked to legislate an end to the spectacle of the scaffold, Regnault offered viewers "safe haven for [these] fantasies" (119). His drive to "leverage" stereotypes of despotism in search of a sublime reset had him summon the "unspeakably transgressive" (121). More discomfiting still are medical, literary, and artistic inquiries generated by the invention of the guillotine and its promise of instantaneous death. Regnault had gone to school with Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, whose story, *The Secret of the Scaffold*, is part of this literature. The guillotine had split the Cartesian ego—"I think, but I am not"—and one question dominated: "what, if anything, might be sensed by the beheaded victim in the seconds or minutes immediately following execution[?]" (122).<sup>[23]</sup> When that question was asked in visual terms it became part of a remarkable resolve not so much to depict blood as to have it perform on canvas and on paper. Feats of intense verisimilitude were the result; effects, however, from which the hand seemed completely removed. The

Symbolist Salomé is part of the story: Gustave Moreau's *The Apparition* (1876) astonished critics with "blood that drips from the Baptist's head onto the floor, where it spreads in a slowly expanding stain" (115). Like the *Execution*, brushwork seemed non-existent: "Moreau applied thick darks upon lights allowing him to nearly eliminate highlights [thus] promoting the impression that his medium has not been worked with a brush" (115). For the *Execution*, according to Clairin in his temporary role as studio assistant, Regnault "threw the paint" at the already depicted marble steps so that the blood would fall in "distinct drips" that looked "just like spurting blood" (124). Characterized by a multitude of tiny individual boxes, the Alhambra watercolors' lattice-like properties are Regnault's response to an intransigent medium. With a dexterous use of the brush, he kept minute areas of pigment and water strictly separate (61). By contrast, in his depiction of the "hail" of blood in the *Execution*, Gotlieb emphasizes that Regnault seemed to want to deny the transitive properties of oil painting, a capacity for verisimilitude that had cast "a naturalist spell over Western representation lasting nearly five centuries."<sup>[24]</sup> In the feat of verisimilitude on the steps in the *Execution*, the hand seemed not to have been used, leading to the impression of an exit from oil painting's tradition of illusionism.

Chiaroscuro also continued to disappear from depicted drama: Regnault disregarded Théodore Géricault's famous studies for the *Raft of the Medusa* where severed heads appear in deep shadow (109). The Romantic artist's first-hand fidelity to decapitation's consequences also precluded the ability to gloat on improbable quantities of blood. In 1933 Mario Praz commented on the excessiveness of the *Execution*. Praz saw blood that seemed to rain down on its foreground steps. Bringing out the long-established link between summary execution and a luxurious, Orientalist setting, Praz saw the blood as a hail of rubies. Gotlieb underlines the *Execution's* intermingling of effects: "the larger decor functions as both token and echo, blood and brilliant decor standing for the other along a single axis of excess" (123). This enhances the impression of an excluded illusionism: "this blood seems not simply depicted but performed, which is perhaps what Praz meant when he spoke of it as erupting in a veritable hail" (123).

The next chapter ("Buzenval") returns to the unwitnessed circumstances of Regnault's killing. The chapter is titled "Painter to Legend" and "Canonicity" is the book's last chapter. Clayson's cover endorsement praises the book's "archival perspicuousness" and this commendation describes these chapters especially well. The process of Regnault's memorialization takes us far and wide. Intimate testaments are part of it (with its fragments from Buzenval, lock of Regnault's hair, and tag cut from his coat, Bréton's diary was closed for a century before Gotlieb opened it) (150). So are monuments that showed that "all of France had mourned Regnault" (8).<sup>[25]</sup> Memorialization sprang up quickly and travelled fast among multiple forms: poetry, prints, watercolors, oil paintings, panoramas, postcards, children's story books, and street names. Regnault's legend expanded on "new technologies of reproduction and mass-market publications on an international scale" (9). Over time, signifiers proper to Regnault wore away, but such was the amount of imagery his death generated that some of it was pressed into the service of other figures, other causes. From Regnault's suitably white and gold École memorial, its allegorical figure of *Youth* circulated for decades in "copies and adaptations" (184).<sup>[26]</sup> In another Regnault-specific irony, the Protestant graveyard in Montpellier where Frédéric Bazille is buried contains one such copy. Bazille, friend of Manet and Monet, had been killed in battle a year before Regnault; his death went practically unnoticed. This *Youth* raises her palm not to a bust of Regnault, but to an artist modernism



would canonize. Frédéric's father commissioned the monument; the local sculptor in charge seemed to have decided that "Bazille would profit from [an] association with Regnault" (185).

Private memories ultimately fueled, however, what passed into monumentalism or the mass media.<sup>[27]</sup> We can point first to the perceived availability, through the publication of letters, of innermost thoughts. This may be the most significant of the intriguing parallels between Regnault and Vincent van Gogh. For painters seen to have died before their time, "published correspondence" was essential to their fame: it lifted "the curtain on their dramas of interiority" (9). Second, Regnault's circle felt compelled to pool knowledge about where and when they had last seen the artist. Eyewitness reports passed to and fro. Gotlieb diagnoses these memories as characterized by spatial and temporal markers that function as the opposite of traumatic memories. "[F]lashbulb memories" (the expression coined by social psychologists) are not hard to share; they're actually defined by sharing. First-hand reports often turn out to be unstable, but that doesn't matter. They're generated "not from belated recollection but from desire" (146). The importance of temporal and spatial markers within them generate in turn "sacred topographies." Here another important parallel with van Gogh arises; the last period of his life is also defined by pilgrimage sites (142, 143, 9). But those associated with Regnault were fixed in place with unsurprising speed: friends of the artist included many who were already or would become principals on the stage of late nineteenth-century Parisian culture. They would define the contours of Regnault's posthumous celebration: it wasn't "top down but bottom up" (146).

I don't mean to suggest that Gotlieb describes a reparative process that cheered up Regnault's inner circle. Chapter five leaves us in no doubt as to the suffering and logistical horrors Buzenval created for all. Because Prussian forces quickly regained lost ground, excruciations of "temporal indeterminacy" set in: a search for bodies, Regnault's included, went on for days. The manner of defeat could not have inflicted more pain on a humbled nation (140). A reader whose knowledge of André-Adolphe-Eugène Disdéri was, like mine, confined to the *carte-de-visite* form he invented, may not be prepared for evidence of the work he did after Buzenval: photographing the dead for the purposes of identification. I found an example of this work the book's most harrowing illustration and was grateful for the pages of particularly fine writing around it (figs. 68, 150–53).

I've described a passage from personal to public as crucial to the memorializations evoked in the book's last three chapters. Nonetheless, there are notes of difference between them. In chapter five the mood is hushed; we contemplate Regnault's death mask and read about the voices of mourning issuing from the artist's inner circle. (Regnault's own famed tenor is even evoked). In chapter six, the clamor begins. Friends feel drowned out as memorialization draws on emotions even beyond those of patriotic fervor, and eventually this extends to both sides of the Atlantic. The din continues into part of the last chapter until—complete silence. Perhaps this is the most affecting drama of the book, one internal to it. Why the eventual, complete extinction of Regnault in life and on canvas? First, a national investment in a single fallen soldier who could inspire such grief would become a relic of the nineteenth century. This remained the case even as historians of proto-modern wars and twentieth-century conflicts pointed to a development in commemorative practices to which Regnault contributed: a new sympathy "for the fate of the ordinary soldier" (172). A gruesome battle in a bitter war whose horrors were great was still nothing compared to later calamities. World

War I put an end to cultures that favored the memorialization of particular individuals. Second, in the world of art, the twentieth century got on with the job of ignoring Regnault, as well as the structures of achievement in which he invested his being. Total apathy, not even the compliment of opposition, led to his disappearance from the canon.

When Svetlana Alpers and Michael Baxandall revisited the paintings of Giambattista Tiepolo, they regretted the degree to which this artist's role had become "simply that of marking a tradition's end."<sup>[28]</sup> Worse had happened to Regnault. His paintings, most of all the *Execution*, had been simply kept out of sight. Therefore, neither this book nor previous scholarship by Gotlieb can be seen as part of some ongoing, formulaic rallying in the fortunes of nineteenth-century French academic painters. Time doesn't fade what can be the profound challenges of such work. Study of nineteenth-century French painting remains vibrant because it is unafraid to bring difficult paintings out of museum storage, question longstanding interpretative trajectories, or overturn fossilizing categories. *The Deaths of Henri Regnault* stands out, even within a field to which new work is being contributed all the while. The book combines scholarship of exceptional thoughtfulness with a meditation of unprecedented originality on the nature of early death and historical memory.

Margaret MacNamidhe  
School of the Art Institute of Chicago  
margaretmacnamidhe[at]fastmail.fm

---

## Notes

[1] See, for example, Marc Gotlieb, "The Painter's Secret: Invention and Rivalry from Vasari to Balzac," *Art Bulletin* 84 (Sept. 2002): 469–90; "Creation and Death in the Romantic Studio," in *Inventions of the Studio: Renaissance to Romanticism*, eds. Michael Cole and Mary Pardo (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 147–84; "Delacroix's Pedagogical Desire," in *Delacroix and the Matter of Finish*, exh. cat. (New Haven: Yale University Press distributed for the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 2013), 57–75. The exhibition was on view at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art from October 27, 2013–January 26, 2014 and at the Birmingham Museum of Art from February 23–May 18, 2014.

[2] Marc J. Gotlieb, *The Plight of Emulation: Ernest Meissonier and French Salon Painting* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 60, 37, 36–8; 57–76.

[3] Gotlieb, *The Plight of Emulation*, 15, 17–53.

[4] Jane Mayo Roos, Review of *Paris in Despair: Art and Everyday Life under Siege 1870–1871*, in *French Politics, Culture, and Society* 22 (Fall 2004): 153.

[5] S. Hollis Clayson, *Paris in Despair: Art and Everyday Life under Siege 1870–1871* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2002), 268–72.

[6] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).

[7] Clinging to rules on the part of institutions didn't help matters. Although Regnault succumbed to a crisis in 1866 that was his alone, Gotlieb is careful to point out the stifling effects on all laureates of the French Academy's determination—enforced by an "infantilizing regulatory apparatus"—to mandate history painting as *ne plus ultra* well into the second half of the nineteenth century (15).

[8] Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, 11. An exception to this powerful argument is Svetlana Alpers and Michael Baxandall's characterization of Giambattista Tiepolo as a "late-comer," who was able to think of himself as heir to a mature tradition of painting because he was nurtured in a culture of revival and replication. See Alpers and Baxandall, *Tiepolo and the Pictorial Intelligence* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), 21.

[9] Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, 12.

[10] Michael Fried, *Manet's Modernism, or The Face of Painting in the 1860s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 29–30, 45. Ingres placed his star under the influence of Raphael. Norman Bryson, *Tradition and Desire: From David to Delacroix* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 113, 101. Delaroche looked to Davidian compositions, but remained open to scenography from other traditions that offered him a compression of “heavenly” and “earthly” dimensions within one space. These were variations on the “deferred and graduated response” and other aspects of Annunciation scenes from the early modern painting of northern Europe. Stephen Bann, *Paul Delaroche: History Painted* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997), 83, 101. In large-scale etchings of trees being felled, Alphonse Legros, Manet’s contemporary, embedded a weightiness obtained from canonical depictions of St. Peter’s crucifixion.

[11] An expedition away from the Academy on Pincian Hill had been hard fought for (32).

[12] Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, *Extremities: Painting Empire in Post-Revolutionary France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); “Still Thinking about *Olympia’s* Maid,” *Art Bulletin* 97 (Dec. 2015): 430–46.

[13] S. Hollis Clayson, “Geography,” in Clayson and André Dombrowski, eds., *Is Paris Still the Capital of the Nineteenth Century? Essays on Art and Modernity, 1850–1900* (London: Routledge, 2017), 109.

[14] See Gotlieb’s remarks on the fall of Laghouat (49–51). See also Guy Pervillé, *La France en Algérie, 1830–1954* (Paris: Vendémiaire Éditions, 2012). *The Plight of Emulation* shows some of Horace Vernet’s yards of murals recording Napoleon III campaigns against Abd-el-Kader. Gotlieb, *The Plight of Emulation*, 13032.

[15] Regnault, *Hassan and Namouna* (1870). This work is also discussed in Clayson, *Paris in Despair*, 168–72.

[16] T. J. Clark, “Phenomenality and Materiality in Cézanne,” in *Value, Art, Politics: Criticism, Meaning, and Interpretation after Postmodernism* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), 147.

[17] Gotlieb later identifies the sitter as an Italian model, Maria Latini. This identification is made after much detective work: there were many decades of false guesses (stereotypes around class and ethnic origins abounded). Regnault wasn’t averse to fanning speculation either. Then his fame and a lineage of fabulation around a number of models—a dispersed array of candidates—clouded the issue for many years (87–92).

[18] In the same diary to which she turned on the night of her Buzenval pilgrimage, Bréton confessed insecurities about her ability to domesticate Regnault; there was no place for her desire in the charged field around *Salomé* (86–7).

[19] Stories by Honoré Balzac, Emile Zola, and Edmond and Jules Goncourt polarize “art and desire” and scuttle vocational re-sets (85). The artist is tasked with escaping the woman briefly his muse: creativity disappears after the easel becomes the model’s rival. An awful “anti-Semitic variation” of the tale is noted by Gotlieb in the Goncourts’ *Manette Salomon*; this variation was part of the swirl of stereotypes mixed into a “reservoir” (85, 86).

[20] This chapter emphasizes that in the late 1860s, a white ground was used by a variety of painters. For example, Mariano Fortuny’s genre paintings fascinated Regnault (83, 93).

[21] As a laureate’s third proof of progress sent back to Paris, the painting was never shown at the Salon and disappeared for years from public views after the Musée du Luxembourg sent it into storage after the mid 1880s, even though Regnault’s exultantly received retrospective had included it thirteen years before.

[22] Leo Steinberg, “The Philosophical Brothel,” *October* 44 (Spring 1988): 33.

[23] The quotation about the Cartesian cogito comes from Marc Gotlieb, “The Guillotine Sublime,” in Clayson and Dombrowski, eds., *Is Paris Still the Capital of the Nineteenth Century?*, 60. The quotation is taken from a discussion by Daniel Arasse found in his book on 1793. Daniel Arasse, *The Guillotine and the Terror*, trans. Christopher Miller (London: Allen Lane, 1989), 35–47.

[24] Gotlieb, “The Painter’s Secret,” 470.

[25] Previously unknown drawings by Regnault were even found in 1896 “carefully preserved behind glass” in a British army outpost in Gibraltar (171).

[26] *Youth* was the contribution of sculptor Henri Chapu; Regnault’s bust was sculpted by Ernest Barrias from Regnault’s death mask (174).

[27] A posthumous retrospective (1872) became a pilgrimage site and a glamorous one at that. The Barrias bust was “draped in velvet and adorned” with flowers by thousands of visitors (224).

[28] Alpers and Baxandall, *Tiepolo and the Pictorial Intelligence*, 6.