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Patricia Mainardi

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Déjà Vu? Revealing Repetition in French Masterpieces

The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore: 7 October 2007 – 1 January 2008

Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, Arizona: 20 January – 4 May 2008

[In Phoenix, the exhibition is titled *Masterpiece Replayed: Monet, Matisse & More*]

Exhibition catalogue:

Eik Kahng, ed. *The Repeating Image: Multiples in French Painting from David to Matisse*.

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As we rethink nineteenth-century art production outside the familiar canon of modernism, the issue of repetition has become increasingly important. Art historians have long been aware that often there exist multiple versions of even major paintings by canonical artists, but it wasn't until the ground-breaking exhibition of 1983, *Ingres, In Pursuit of Perfection: The Art of J.A.D. Ingres*, that scholars and curators began to openly thematize this phenomenon. [1] Since then, there has been a small but growing body of scholarship and exhibitions focusing on—or at least acknowledging—the practice. It is, then, especially welcome when a major museum attempts to survey this phenomenon. *Déjà Vu? Revealing Repetition in French Masterpieces* was organized by Eik Kahng, curator of eighteenth and nineteenth-century painting at the Walters Art Museum, who also edited its catalogue, *The Repeating Image: Multiples in French Painting from David to Matisse* (fig. 1). The exhibition covers about 150 years of French art, devoting separate galleries to each of several major artists; the exhibition catalogue contains essays by six scholars paralleling the installations.



Fig. 1, Exhibition catalogue cover. *The Repeating Image Multiples in French Painting from David to Matisse*. Edited by Eik Kahng. Baltimore Walters Art Museum, 2007. [\[larger image\]](#)

It was the end of modernism and the coming of postmodernism, no doubt, that initiated the new interest in the practice of creating multiple images, the very existence of which seems so antithetical to modernist values of originality and authenticity. Postmodernism is,

in fact, a guiding principle of the exhibition, which mixes audio-visual, digital, and computer experiences with the paintings, drawings and prints. Despite this, the exhibit organizers have not summoned up the boldness to make the break with modernism that their method would require, so the exhibition is betwixt and between. The slippery usage of the term "repeating," caused by this methodological confusion, makes for a flawed show and an uneven catalogue.

First, the issue of postmodernism. The postmodern version of the practice of repetition extends to the show itself, in that installations that made their first appearances elsewhere are partially recycled in Baltimore. This gives an added dimension to the show's title, *Déjà Vu*. The 1983 exhibition, *Ingres, In Pursuit of Perfection: The Art of J.A.D. Ingres*, focused on his repetitions, and featured three paintings of Ingres's *Oedipus and the Sphinx*, now reinstalled in Baltimore. In 1989, the Basel Museum of Fine Arts mounted the major exhibition *Paul Cézanne: The Bathers*, which included over a hundred of the artist's paintings, drawings and prints of this motif, eight of which are on display here.^[2] The installation highlighting six repetitions of Delacroix's *Christ on the Sea of Galilee* was drawn from the 1998-99 exhibition *Delacroix: The Late Work*,^[3] and two paintings and a lithograph of Gérôme's *Duel after the Masquerade* were originally shown, along with numerous other repetitions, in the 2000-2001 exhibition, *Gérôme & Goupil: Art and Enterprise*.^[4] Degas's etchings, like all prints for which multiple states exist, really fall outside the practice of repetition except in the broadest sense of the term, but in any case, the eleven states of Degas's *Leaving the Bath* that are on display in Baltimore come from the 1984-85 exhibition, *Edgar Degas: The Painter as Printmaker*, which showed over twenty states of this print and first documented Degas's printmaking practice.^[5]

While one is always happy to see familiar works of art again, we might have hoped for more new research and an enrichment of what is already known, rather than partial reinstallations of other scholars' and curators' work, especially since these earlier shows were accompanied by exhaustive catalogues. Perhaps this is why the catalogue of *Déjà Vu* includes only essays and a checklist, with no catalogue entries for individual works. The essays do, however, present some new scholarship, largely concerning works in the collection of the Walters, and that is most welcome.

While there are many and varied motivations behind an artist's repetitions (the correct value-neutral nineteenth-century term for this practice), an explanatory wall label in the opening gallery of *Déjà Vu* lists the three main reasons for this practice: the artist's desire for a wider distribution of images, the emerging culture of the commercial art gallery, and the artistic process itself, in which one rendition does not necessarily exhaust the potential of the motif. While true as far as it goes, this explanation preserves modernism's fixation on the purity of the artistic process, since here the only locus of economic factors is identified as the dealer, not the artist. One wonders where this would leave centuries of artists like Titian and Rubens, who worked before commercial art galleries but who nonetheless repeated their most sought-after compositions for a variety of patrons.

On the Phoenix Museum website advertising this exhibition, the question is asked: "If artists repeat themselves or profit from their art, have they 'sold out'?"^[6] The very question betrays its modernist ideology, and is like the elephant in the room of this exhibition. By embracing

both this modernist shibboleth and its postmodern rejection, the result is intellectual confusion. The installations and catalogue essays treating the artists of the earlier nineteenth century are focused on the production of repetitions by the artist and his assistants while those of the later nineteenth century and twentieth century (the latter represented only by Matisse) focus on repetitions created during the artistic process. Thus, the taint of commercialism is eliminated from Monet onward. By the end of the exhibition, and its catalogue, the concept of repetition has become so attenuated that virtually *any* kind of repetition is included, from preliminary studies to replicas, from states of prints to photographic contact sheets, in a kind of postmodern delirium. As a result, the whole becomes considerably less than the sum of its parts, although some of these parts are intriguing.

The exhibition as a whole is organized in three sections with the first dedicated to what are called "academic painters": David, Ingres, Gérôme, Delaroche. The second section, "departures from the academic," features Delacroix, Millet, and Corot, while the third, "the rejection of the academic," offers works by Monet, Cézanne, Muybridge, Degas, and Matisse. Since repetition as the production of salable works is limited, in this exhibition, to the earlier sections, the implication is that later artists (*i.e.*, non-academic artists) never indulged in this form of commercialism. This, of course, is untrue. The binary opposition between academic painting and modernism has been so challenged in recent decades that it is surprising to find it still being used here as an organizing principle.

The first gallery features an anonymous seventeenth-century French repetition of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* and a conceptual video, *This is not the Mona Lisa*, which sets the tone of a postmodern romp through the theme, focusing on the formal quality of repetition. There are also introductory wall plaques defining the terms "copying," "replica," "variation," "series." The term "repetition" which was the operative nineteenth-century term, and the one used in both the title of the exhibition and in the catalogue essays, is not, however, included here.

The opening section is devoted to four repetitions of Jacques-Louis David's *Death of Marat* produced wholly or in part by the artist's studio assistants (fig. 2). While the autograph version of this painting (1793, Brussels, Musée d'art ancien, Musées royaux des beaux-arts) is not included in the exhibition, the press release promises that the absence of the only autograph *Marat* would be compensated by its first-ever digital reproduction. This is somewhat undercut by the reality that the image, in a separate gallery area, is in constant flux, morphing into images of visitors to the Royal Museums of Brussels on three walls, accompanied by what seems to be the soundtrack of a docent tour in Flemish. It was like watching a movie of tourists looking at a painting. Needless to say, the paintings in the *Marat* installation are upstaged by all this sound and fury. The first essay in the catalogue, "Repetition as Symbolic Form" by Eik Kahng, is the only one to deal with the David repetitions, but she mentions them only on the last page of her eleven-page essay, most of which is focused on the art of the 1960s. She writes: "It may seem odd that I should have expended my word allotment in this volume on the art history, art, and criticism of the 1960s, given the time frame of the art included in this exhibition. But the persistent recurrence of repetition as a leitmotiv in all three areas has needed decompounding, so that the historical foundation of my initial intuition – that is, repetition as symbolic form – might be uncovered" (20).



Fig. 2, Installation shot of *Déjà Vu? Revealing Repetition in French Masterpieces* at the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore. Gallery with Jacques-Louis David images. [\[larger image\]](#)

Without an introductory essay that clearly explains what the show is about and that places it in historical perspective, the rest of the essays present something of a grab bag, with the authors revealing a greater or lesser degree of familiarity with the historical concept of repetition. Not surprisingly, Stephen Bann's essay, "Reassessing Repetition in Nineteenth-Century Academic Painting: Delaroche, Gérôme, Ingres," is the most developed of these as he has a long history of intellectual engagement with this concept. Since both the show and the catalogue are organized more or less chronologically, the next section of both treats the artists of Bann's essay's title. The space occupied by the *Marat* audio-visual circus, however, prevented a coherent installation of the subsequent section, on J. A. D. Ingres's *Oedipus and the Sphinx*, represented by the 1808 version in the Louvre, the 1864 version in the collection of the Walters (in which Ingres reversed his image) and the tiny c.1826 version in the National Gallery, London (fig. 3). If the point of the exhibition is to contemplate the various repetitions in relation to each other, this proves impossible here since one has to exit the Ingres installation in order to see the National Gallery painting in the next gallery. Scholarship has been able to learn little of the circumstances behind the production of these paintings: why, for example, did Ingres reverse his image in the later repetition? Why did he paint a tiny reduction around the time he reworked the 1808 painting for the 1827 Salon? Nonetheless, Bann's essay provides fascinating information and interpretation of numerous paintings by Ingres and by other artists.



Fig. 3, Installation shot of *Déjà Vu? Revealing Repetition in French Masterpieces* at the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore. Gallery with J.A. D. Ingres images. [\[larger image\]](#)

The installation of Jean-Léon Gérôme's *Duel after the Masquerade* had a problem similar to that of David's *Marat*, in that the first version, the 1857 painting in Chantilly, is not in the show. The theme is represented by two subsequent *Masquerade* paintings (The Hermitage, 1857, The Walters, 1857-59) and a hand-colored lithograph. This deprives the viewer of the pleasure of recognizing Gérôme's ability to hone his earlier image for maximum dramatic effect. Gérôme has been receiving much more attention recently than he did in the entire twentieth century, with an upcoming exhibition of his work scheduled for the Musée d'Orsay in 2008. Once freed from the tunnel vision of the modernist optic, we seem (finally!) to be able to recognize his genius for theatrical narrative, displayed even in this reduced installation from the *Gérôme & Goupil* show. For those who missed the earlier shows of Ingres and Gérôme, these truncated installations will present a valuable introduction, although without the scholarship that accompanied the earlier exhibitions.

The section on Paul Delaroche followed the Gérôme installation, although since Delaroche was older and, in fact was Gérôme's teacher, it should logically have preceded it. (Bann's essay discusses the three artists in correct chronological order.) In 1841, Delaroche painted the immense *Hémicycle des beaux-arts* in the Paris Ecole des beaux-arts, representing the history of Western art through depictions of over seventy painters, sculptors and architects from antiquity to the eighteenth century. When the art dealer Adolphe Goupil commissioned the engraver Louis-Pierre Henriquel-Dupont to create a print of it, a reduced replica had to be painted to serve as model for the project. The production of a reduced-size replica for an engraver, painted either by the artist or by his studio, was a common nineteenth-century practice: the repetition of Cabanel's *Birth of Venus* in the Dahesh Museum of Art collection had the same genesis. In his essay, Bann presents a convincing argument that the *Hémicycle* replica was painted by Delaroche's student Charles Béranger. In 1853, after Béranger's death and the completion of the engraving, Delaroche reclaimed the work from Goupil and completely repainted it. After Delaroche's death in 1856, it was sold and eventually made its way into the Walters collection. In his essay, Bann traces the entire history and provenance of this work. Here the catalogue does what one expects from such a publication; it presents extensive, previously unpublished documentation and interpretation, including the conservation report and ultraviolet light

photographs as well as supplementary illustrations not in the exhibition. The Delaroche gallery of *Déjà Vu* featured the 1841-53 Delaroche/Béranger reduction of the *Hémicycle* (257.3 cm in length!) along with the 1853 three-part Henriquel-Dupont steel engraving. While the installation was impressive, it would have been vastly improved by the inclusion of a chart identifying the principal figures in Delaroche's painting, which is never adequately explained either in the show or in the catalogue. Nonetheless, these galleries featuring Ingres, Gérôme, and Delaroche represent a high point of the show and well illustrate the complex practice of repetition in the nineteenth century, presenting an admixture of artistic practice "in pursuit of perfection" with that of economic exigency and normative studio practice.

The "departures from the academic" section features the work of Eugène Delacroix, Jean-François Millet and Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, the first of whom was actually a member of the Academy, but in the Manichean universe presented by this exhibition, it would be quibbling to point this out. Delacroix was represented by six repetitions of his *Christ on the Sea of Galilee* (paintings also known as *Christ on the Lake of Genesareth* or *Christ Asleep during the Tempest*), an impressive display first seen in the *Late Delacroix* exhibition at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1999. This earlier exhibition made a start in establishing a more nuanced reading of Delacroix's many repetitions, showing that, while they were often painted to sell, they also allowed the artist to revisit a motif that was clearly important to him. The paintings are as interesting as ever, and in fact raise important questions about the role of repetition not only in Delacroix's oeuvre, but, by extension, in nineteenth-century art practice as a whole, since their brushy surfaces, thick with impasto, call into question the traditional ascription of the practice to "the Academy," with its pedagogy of linear drawing and enameled surfaces. Delacroix and his works were orphaned in the *Déjà Vu* catalogue, however, where they went unremarked, reproduced in the middle of Richard Shiff's essay on Cézanne.

In the installations of Millet and Corot, the Walters was at last able to present a major work in most of its repetitions. Seven repetitions of the Millet's *The Sower* (1847-50) were on display, three oil paintings, three pastels, and a lithograph, alongside three paintings of Corot's *Evening Star* of 1863-64. Simon Kelly's catalogue essay, "Strategies of Repetition: Millet/Corot" as well as the wall labels in this section both propose Millet's repetitions as the solution to his formal problems, and Corot's as the solution to his financial problems (a reprise of the Ingres/Gérôme dichotomy), but the evidence suggests mixed motives in both cases. This is, in fact, a modernist dilemma, the assumption that artists could not do two things at once: work out formal problems at the same time as they were providing repetitions of salable works for the market. Here too, probably because one version of Corot's *Evening Star* is in the Walters collection, there was a conservator's report along with infrared photographs in the gallery and in the catalogue, documenting changes made by the artist. Simon Kelly's essay discusses all these repetitions, but his conclusion is modernist, that both artists "sought to create works that varied from their first treatment or 'performance' of their selected theme. Rarely, if ever, did they produce exact replicas of their own work" (72). What needs to be remembered here is that, until late in the nineteenth century, variations in repetitions were the norm in a universe that still lacked the valorization of the exact replica that is so much a part of factory production and that, as a consequence, became so devalued in modernist high-art production. Exactitude was necessary only in the production of replicas for reproductive printmaking, a task often

delegated to studio assistants. Otherwise, since exactitude was not yet a competing ideal against which artists were forced to measure their repetitions, it was simply irrelevant to their concerns.

As I read the opening pages of Simon Kelly's catalogue essay, I had the feeling that Yogi Berra immortalized as "déjà vu all over again." In my 2000 article "The 19th-Century Art Trade: Copies, Variations, Replicas," I listed the nineteenth-century terms used for the different kinds of repetition, as they were defined by the 1884 *Dictionnaire de l'académie des beaux-arts*. I concluded by proposing a conceptual model: "The correct term for an artist's later version of his own theme ... was not *copie*, but *répétition*, the same word used in performance for a rehearsal. In performance, we never assume that opening night is qualitatively better than later presentations – first performances are, in fact, usually weaker than subsequent ones, which gain in depth from greater experience and familiarity with the material."^[7] Simon Kelly writes: "An autograph *copie* was described more precisely in the *Dictionnaire* as a *répétition*, or 'rehearsal.' The theatrical analogy is instructive since an initial performance is generally seen as less accomplished than subsequent versions, which benefit from increased experience and knowledge of the material." In the spirit of the exhibition, I propose that Simon Kelly has made a *copie* of my work. A footnote would have covered the situation and left me more enthusiastic about the scholarship in the rest of his essay.

In sum, the installations of the first half of the exhibition survey various aspects of the nineteenth-century studio practice of repetition. While Gérôme is singled out for his commercialism (he married Goupil's daughter, which certainly helped his career but damaged his reputation in modernist circles), what this exhibition demonstrates is that, in his production of repetitions, reductions and replicas, his studio practice was similar to that of other artists of his time. A convincing argument cannot be made that the artists in this first section should be divided into sheep and goats, some motivated by idealism, some by greed. Only modernism insists on such purity of motivation that had little reality in the world of nineteenth-century art production.

Beginning in the next section, the exhibition dramatically changes conceptual direction by focusing on Claude Monet, represented by three of his *Grainstack* paintings and two of *Rouen Cathedral* (fig. 4). Charles Stuckey's catalogue essay, "The Predications and Implications of Monet's Series," acknowledges the role of Monet's dealer, Paul Durand-Ruel, in their inception and exhibition, but the museum installation focuses only on the aesthetic aspects of their creation. Monet's 1891 show at Durand-Ruel's Paris gallery was the first exhibition of what we now call a "series," a word that only slowly made its way into the art lexicon, and Stuckey makes the important point that series exhibitions were possible only because of the rise of commercial art galleries. No artist could commandeer enough wall space in the various Paris Salons (there were several by 1891), to install such a display even had he wanted to do so. In 1998, John Klein provided a reassessment of Monet's exhibition practice with regard to his series in a groundbreaking article, "The Dispersal of the Modernist Series," making the point that scholars' efforts to reconstruct the appearance of these early exhibitions of Monet have limited value since there was never a program governing their installation.^[8] The same works were exhibited in different arrangements, depending on what was available, what was sold, how much space was available, etc. Even when they were exhibited together, there was no attempt to group them either on the walls

or in the accompanying catalogue or checklist. Stuckey seems surprised that, even at Monet's 1891 exhibition when the entire show was made up of repetitions of a single motif, there was no attempt to install the paintings in a coherent conceptual arrangement such as the "dawn to dusk" chronology that Monet's friend Georges Clemenceau suggested. This is surprising only in a retrospective view of art history.



Fig. 4, Installation shot of *Déjà Vu? Revealing Repetition in French Masterpieces* at the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore. Gallery with Claude Monet paintings. [\[larger image\]](#)

In his catalogue essay, Stuckey attempts to inventory every instance of a repeated image from 1859 when Eugène Boudin did a series of pastels of Normandy skies to 1891 when Monet exhibited his grainstacks at Durand-Ruel's gallery. This is clearly a different project from that of Bann and Kelly, who discussed work that nineteenth-century artists would themselves define as repetitions. While Stuckey's article is valuable as a compendium of repeated images created during this thirty-two year period, his conflation of all different kinds of repetition muddies the waters considerably. Landscape painters, particularly if they had to travel to get to their motif, often embarked on a campaign of plein-air drawing and painting, producing multiple renditions of a motif. One recalls the numerous sketches made by Pierre-Henri de Valenciennes in the late eighteenth century, as well as the dozens of similar images produced by generations of artists on their Italian tour. Was Boudin's 1859 campaign of Normandy sky pastels so different from, for example, Constable's numerous sky sketches several decades earlier? Because Stuckey begins his essay with Courbet (the typical modernist point of origin), the repetitions of all the earlier artists featured in this show are transformed into something of a "back story" that gives way to the force of evolutionary modernism. He contrasts Gérôme unfavorably with Courbet (97), but if the "commercial" Gérôme produced three repetitions of his *Duel after the Masquerade*, the "noncommercial" Courbet produced four of his *Portrait of Jo*.^[9] In fact, their practice was quite similar, for if it is important that Degas used the word *suite* in describing his pastels in 1882 (116), then let us remember that Géricault created his *Suite anglaise* of lithographs in 1821. Degas is actually a good example of how *Déjà Vu* changes direction in mid-show, for this artist was quite articulate in his disdain for what he called his "petits articles," namely his many repetitions made expressly for the market, a practice that was as common among Impressionist painters as it was among their academic colleagues.^[10] Had Stuckey focused on the history of the exhibition of repetitions *as series* and not simply catalogued all instances of works that shared a motif, his essay would have been more valuable to scholars.

The installation would certainly have been more impressive had the audio-visual circus not reinserted itself here: computers set up in the gallery invited the public to participate in "The Virtual Monet Gallery," *i.e.*, to make their own installations of his paintings, complete with words of encouragement from the Walters Director Gary Vikan.

While the Monet catalogue essay acknowledges the collaboration between the artist and his dealer Durand-Ruel in the creation of Monet's series, the Cézanne installation and essay seem like a different project entirely. The installation focuses on Cézanne's small images of *Bathers*: four small oil paintings, two sketchbook pages, and two lithographs. This meaning of repetition is more related to that of traditional art practice, especially since there are corresponding major paintings that are not in the show. The point is made that these are not preparatory studies but independent paintings in their own right, but considering that one of Stuckey's main points is that there was "series fever" in France following Monet's 1891 exhibition (all but one of the Cézanne works postdate 1891), it would have been intriguing, though perhaps heretical to modernists, to see the *Bathers* in this context, especially since Cézanne's 1895 exhibition at Ambroise Vollard's Paris gallery included numerous repetitions. Unfortunately, the Stuckey essay concludes with Monet's 1891 exhibition, so later exhibitions of repetition fall into the purview of the next catalogue essay, Richard Shiff's "Risible Cézanne." Shiff takes the orthodox modernist position that the subject, repeated or not, is irrelevant to the "real" meaning of Cézanne's painting. His essay seems to be an attack on the social and cultural art history that has informed so much of recent scholarship, and that has challenged earlier, exclusively formalist, interpretations of Cézanne. Shiff reserves his harshest words for Meyer Shapiro's classic 1968 article, "The Apples of Cézanne: An Essay on the Meaning of Still Life," calling it "a rear-guard scholarly action" (151).^[11] While "Risible Cézanne" eloquently re-asserts and defends traditional modernist dogma, I would question its value in this context. Yes, *The Bathers* represented for Cézanne an "inexhaustible theme," as the wall labels tell us, and, to be sure, Cézanne's numerous small paintings of *Bathers* have validity apart from their role in the creation of the major paintings. But we know all that. In the context of this exhibition, the Cézanne gallery serves to further refocus the questions asked away from the complicated interplay of motivations and practices that the earlier installations reveal and to focus it onto the aesthetic process alone.

By placing the work of Muybridge and Degas after that of Cézanne in the exhibition, although in fact the works shown are chronologically earlier, the modernist thesis of the exhibition is underscored, that commercialism has been left far behind in favor of an interest in the formal and aesthetic aspects of repetition. Three plates of Eadweard Muybridge's collotypes of horses, seen in stop-action frames, make the point that the repeating image was identified with photography. Muybridge's work is, in fact, specifically cited on the wall labels as an inspiration for Degas, whose work was installed on both sides. The eleven states of Degas's etching, *Leaving the Bath*, are thus subsumed into a postmodern serial technique. Since states have been, for centuries, a standard aspect of printmaking, never intended to be exhibited serially, this represents a seriously ahistorical interpretation based solely on the contrived formal resemblance of a museum installation. Besides *Leaving the Bath*, Degas is represented by two paintings and three sculptures of horses and horse races. Degas here is presented in the modernist mode of Monet and Cézanne, as an artist who obsessively reworked his motifs again and again. The wall label tells us that "Such repetition deemphasized the idea of a singular finished product; frequently one version

cannot be considered developmentally 'better' than another." Stuckey's catalogue essay quotes Degas in a letter to his friend, the sculptor Albert Bartholomé: "You must repeat the same subject ten times, one hundred times" (116). And yet, Degas's letters make frequent reference to works such as these as his "articles," commercial items created specifically for the market; he called them his "gagne-pain," his "bread-earner."^[12] An undated letter from Degas to that same Bartholomé states, "I had some wearying *articles* to do, I still have some to do, and they needs must have, alas, bad as they are, the best that is in me."^[13] Most artists whose work was in demand produced "articles" as a "gagne-pain," and, if truth be told, artists continue to do this today. It is revelatory to note that the values of modernism are still so very much with us that it remains difficult to simply acknowledge this fact while also acknowledging that the work of art so produced is not therefore "tainted" by its origins, like an illegitimate child conceived in the "sin" of commercialism. Though it would be considered heretical in modernist circles to say so, Degas was, in fact, very like Gérôme in his studio practice, meeting demand with supply by using repetitions of his sought after works to generate income. The irony is that while modernists insist on the separation of art and economics, even postmodernists seem to seek principled reasons for artists' repetitions, either as criticism of the modernist fetish of originality and authenticity, or as in the Matisse exhibition in *Déjà Vu*, as a celebration of the industrialization of visual experience.

The last section of the exhibition is devoted to Matisse's photographic documentation of his own painting practice, focusing on two paintings of 1940 in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., *Woman Seated in an Armchair* and *Still Life with Sleeping Woman*. Jeffrey Weiss, in his accompanying essay "The Matisse Grid," tells us that Matisse developed the habit of photographing his paintings at regular intervals, thus keeping a record of their development. Matisse not only pasted these photos into a notebook, but, in 1945, he also exhibited them in the Galerie Maeght in Paris along with his paintings. The installation at the Walters is a "repetition" of this practice, showing the paintings and photographs together. Because it is situated in the same general area as the states of Degas's *After the Bath* and Muybridge's photographs, this section seems designed to bridge the gap between nineteenth-century repetition and that of artists such as Giorgio De Chirico, who unabashedly produced replicas of his most famous paintings, and, that master of repetition, Andy Warhol, both of whom are discussed in Weiss's article but not represented in the show. The inescapable implication is that there was a progressive development of repetition from David through Matisse, and that the historical progression is from repetition as the production of works for sale to repetition as a formal quality per se. While Weiss's essay makes an interesting and important contribution to the Matisse literature, in this context, it deflects attention from what was surely an unmentioned and unmentionable aspect of the exhibition and publication of Matisse's "grid," namely the function of special pleading. Whatever Matisse's own motivations in documenting the creation of his images, their exhibition and publication would be instrumental in convincing a skeptical public that his paintings, which seemed so insouciant, were actually the result of the artist's hard work. This would be especially important in America, where the series of photographs, as published in *ArtNews* and exhibited at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, would help to allay American anxiety over modern art by emphasizing Matisse's labor.

The concept and practice of repetition merits our sustained attention and, when adequately investigated, will rewrite much of the assumptions and prejudices of modernist art history. While this exhibition represents a lost opportunity, part of the problem was undoubtedly

economic, that the loans for a truly ambitious show could not be obtained, and so it had to be built around the holdings of the Walters, many of which had already been featured in similar installations in previous exhibitions. A more serious problem, however, is that the premise of the show remained unclear throughout the installations and the catalogue, and so it ends up as a potpourri, with the overriding concept being a mechanistic definition of repetition limited to, as the catalogue title tells us "the repeating image." The show's and the catalogue's modernist insistence on the idealism and resolute non-commercialism of its canonical artists, coupled with a postmodern taste for the juxtaposition of fragments of previous scholarship, has hopelessly hamstrung any serious attempt to investigate the dimensions of the practice of repetition in the art of the period. As a result, the project of acknowledging the extent of repetition among nineteenth-century artists, and re-evaluating the art that resulted from this widespread practice, still remains to be accomplished.

Patricia Mainardi
The Graduate Center, City University of New York
PMainardi[at]gc.cuny.edu

Notes

- [1] The exhibition was at the J.B. Speed Art Museum, Louisville, Kentucky, December 6, 1983 to January 29, 1984, and at the Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas, from March 3, 1984 to May 6, 1984. See Patricia Condon with Marjorie B. Cohn and Agnes Mongan, ed. Debra Edelstein, *Ingres, In Pursuit of Perfection: The Art of J.A.D. Ingres* (Louisville, Ky.: J.B. Speed Art Museum, 1983).
- [2] See Mary Louise Krumrine, *Paul Cézanne: The Bathers* (Basel: Museum of Fine Arts, 1989). The exhibition was at the Basel Museum of Fine Arts September 10 - December 10, 1989.
- [3] See *Delacroix: The Late Work* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1999); the exhibition was at the Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, Paris, April 10-July 20, 1998, and at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, September 15, 1998-January 3, 1999.
- [4] *Gérôme & Goupil: Art and Enterprise* (Paris: RMN, 2000). The exhibition was at the Musée Goupil, Bordeaux, October 12, 2000 – January 14, 2001, the Dahesh Museum of Art, New York, February 6 – May 5, 2001 and The Frick Art & Historical Center, Pittsburgh, June 7-August 12, 2001.
- [5] Sue Welsh Reed and Barbara Stern Shapiro, *Edgar Degas: The Painter as Printmaker* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1984); the exhibition was at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, November 14, 1984-January 13, 1985, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, February 17-April 14, 1985 and the Hayward Gallery, London, May 15-July 7, 1985.
- [6] See the entry for Corot at: [http://www.masterpiecereplayed.org.](http://www.masterpiecereplayed.org;); accessed December 30, 2007.
- [7] See Patricia Mainardi, "The 19th-Century Art Trade: Copies, Variations, Replicas," *Van Gogh Museum Journal* 2000, Special Issue: *Theo Van Gogh and the 19th Century Art Trade* (Amsterdam: Van Gogh Museum, 2000), 64.
- [8] John Klein, "The Dispersal of the Modernist Series," *Oxford Art Journal* 21/1 (1998): 121-35.
- [9] For a discussion of Courbet's repetitions, see Patricia Mainardi, "L'Exposition complète de Courbet," In *Courbet: Artiste et promoteur de son œuvre*, Jörg Zutter and Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, eds. (Paris: Flammarion, 1998), 101-29.
- [10] For an overview of this practice among later painters, see Patricia Mainardi, "Impressionist Replication and the Market," in *Artwork Through the Market*, Jan Bakos, ed. (Bratislava: Institute of Art History, Slovak Academy of Sciences, 2004), 155-72.
- [11] Meyer Schapiro, "The Apples of Cézanne: An Essay in the Meaning of Still Life," *ARTnews Annual* 34 (1968): 34-53; reprinted in Meyer Schapiro, *Modern Art: 19th and 20th Centuries* (N.Y.: George Braziller, 1978), 1-38.

[12] *Lettres de Degas*, ed. Marcel Guérin (Paris: Grasset, 1931), #LXXIV, à Bartholomé, Menil Hubert, lundi [15 septembre 1884], 74-75; *Edgar Germain Hilaire Degas: Letters*, ed. Marcel Guerin, trans. Marguerite Kay (Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1947), #74, 91-92. "...je serai certes rentré à Paris et il faudra, après quelque temps passé à exécuter mes (sic) gagne-pain, repartir pour la Normandie..."

[13] *Lettres de Degas*, LXXVII, à Bartholomé [undated], 128; *Degas, Letters*, #10, 132. "J'ai eu des articles embêtants à faire et il leur faut, hélas, tout mauvais qu'ils soient, le meilleur de moi."

Illustrations



Fig. 1, Exhibition catalogue cover. *The Repeating Image Multiples in French Painting from David to Matisse*. Edited by Eik Kahng. Baltimore Walters Art Museum, 2007. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 2, Installation shot of *Déjà Vu? Revealing Repetition in French Masterpieces* at the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore. Gallery with Jacques-Louis David images. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 3, Installation shot of *Déjà Vu? Revealing Repetition in French Masterpieces* at the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore. Gallery with J.A. D. Ingres images. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 4, Installation shot of *Déjà Vu? Revealing Repetition in French Masterpieces* at the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore. Gallery with Claude Monet paintings. [\[return to text\]](#)