

Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide

a journal of nineteenth-century visual culture

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book review of

Vistas de Espana: American Views of Art and Life in Spain, 1860–1914 by M. Elizabeth Boone

Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide 10, no. 1 (Spring 2011)

Citation: Marjorie Munsterberg, book review of *Vistas de Espana: American Views of Art and Life in Spain, 1860–1914* by M. Elizabeth Boone, *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 10, no. 1 (Spring 2011), <http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/spring11/vistas-de-espana-american-views-of-art-life-spain-elizabeth-boone>.

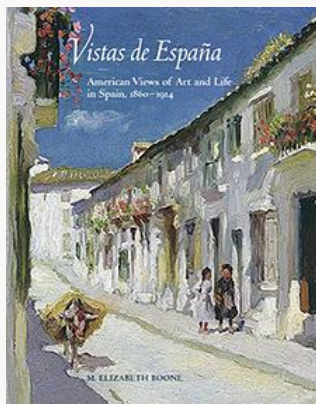
Published by: [Association of Historians of Nineteenth-Century Art](#)

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M. Elizabeth Boone,
Vistas de España. American Views of Art and Life in Spain, 1860–1914.
New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.
280 pp, 107 b/w + 31 color illus.
\$60.00 (cloth)
ISBN: 9780300116533

Elizabeth Boone's *Vistas de España. American Views of Art and Life in Spain, 1860–1914* is a very welcome addition to the scholarly literature about nineteenth-century art. Despite the limitations suggested by its title, the book provides an introduction to American depictions of Spain from the whole of the nineteenth-century, as well as to political relations between Spain and America during that time, nineteenth-century Spanish art, and connections between Spain and selected British and French artists. In fact, astonishingly, *Vistas de España* offers longer discussions about more nineteenth-century Spanish painters than any readily available book in English since Richard Muther's *History of Modern Painting* was published in translation more than a century ago.^[1] In addition to the information in the text, seven of the color plates and fifteen of the black-and-white illustrations in *Vistas de España* are devoted to pictures by Spanish artists. All of this appears in yet another handsome book from Yale University Press: comfortable to hold, printed on high-quality paper, with illustrations of excellent quality.

Boone's book is such a rich introduction to the material because she treats her subject expansively, consistently placing the American artists within their larger political, social, and cultural context. Relations between Spain and America also are related directly to the art. The major painters she discusses, with a chapter centered on each, are Samuel Colman, George Henry Hall, Thomas Eakins, Mary Cassatt, John Singer Sargent, and William Merritt Chase. Each chapter also contains discussions of artists associated with them, as well as more general topics such as the difficulties of travel in nineteenth-century Spain, characteristics of different regions of the country, contemporary Spanish history and politics, and roles for, and images of, women. The popularity of the Old Masters whose work many of the Americans came to see, with Diego Velázquez overtaking Bartolomé Esteban Murillo during this period, and El Greco discovered at the end of the century, is discussed at length. Travel books, novels, stories, and letters provide evidence of the expectations American artists brought with them, while

exhibition reviews of some of the works that resulted from the trips offer additional contemporary responses. Finally, the book ends with three immensely useful appendices: “A Chronological List of American Artists in Spain,” “Visitor and Copyist Registers at the Prado,” and “Visitor Registers at the Alhambra.”

The first chapter is devoted to Samuel Colman, the “first artist from the United States to paint an extensive number of images based on a journey through Spain.” His three-month trip, taken during the summer of 1860, provided him with his major pictorial subjects for the next seven years (13). Colman started in Gibraltar, then went on to the Andalusian cities of Seville, Cordoba, and Granada, before visiting Madrid and the Prado, and then leaving for France by steamer (14–5). Boone’s approach to his pictures introduces the methodology she uses throughout the book. She discusses the history of Gibraltar, quotes descriptions of it by Washington Irving and from Alexander Slidell MacKenzie’s popular book, *A Year in Spain, by a Young American*, and analyzes its representation in the work of John Singleton Copley and John Trumbull (neither of whom traveled to Spain), as well as Charles Temple Dix and James E. Butterworth (who did) (15–20). Seville was Colman’s next stop. Boone summarizes the city’s history: the association with Christopher Columbus for Americans, and its brilliant rise followed by long economic decline, a process already complete by the early nineteenth century. She relates Colman’s paintings of Seville to this history, filled with reminders of a glorious past as well as a melancholy present (20). The pictures also are compared to views by American writers, British artists, contemporary Spanish painters, and the actual topography of the city (22–6). After a brief stop in Cordoba, Colman went to Granada, a city associated with Islam and Christianity. The most important literary account was Washington Irving’s immensely popular *The Alhambra*, first published in America and England in 1832 and translated into many languages, including Spanish (27). Not surprisingly, Colman’s depictions reflect the influence of Irving’s writings. (30–1). This phase in Colman’s career ended in 1867, with his last public exhibition of a Spanish subject at the National Academy of Design. (35)

The next chapter centers on George Henry Hall, who was in Spain for extended stays during 1860–1 and 1866–7. Like most Americans, he came with preconceptions about the country drawn from the writings of Irving, Mackenzie, and Richard Ford, whose *Hand-book for Travellers in Spain, and Readers at Home* appeared in 1845. The most important Old Master for Hall was Murillo, still immensely popular at the time (37–41). Illustrations of work by the British painter John Phillip as well as Spanish painters who shared Hall’s enthusiasm for Murillo convincingly make Boone’s argument of their important influence on Hall (42–4, 52–54). The subject of Murillo offers Boone the opportunity for an extended discussion of American attitudes toward Catholics and Catholicism and the part they played in the decline in Murillo’s popularity (56–8). It also occasions a mini-history of British and French interest in the seventeenth-century painter, including the role of the Musée Espagnole in bringing his paintings to France (39–41). Colman and Hall, traveling primarily in southern Spain, the least developed part of the country, and depicting traditional subjects without reference to modernization, established the Andalusian themes continued by American artists in the 1870s and 1880s (59).

Not surprisingly, the chapters about Thomas Eakins, who traveled to Spain with William Sartain and Henry Humphrey Moore in the winter and spring of 1869–70, Mary Cassatt, who went to the Prado before spending the winter of 1872–3 in Seville, and John Singer Sargent,

who first visited Spain as an artist in 1879, contain much familiar material. The painters themselves have been the subjects of considerable scholarly attention, and a trip to Spain was more common by the 1870s. Furthermore, these artists arrived in Spain from France, which, Boone explains, framed their experience in distinctive ways. Like so many others who made the trip at the urging of Jean-Léon Gérôme and Léon Bonnat, they recognized Velázquez rather than Murillo as the most important Spanish baroque painter. Mariano Fortuny was the most famous contemporary Spanish painter (61–3). Known for his brilliant color and painterly handling, he was an important participant in the craze for Spanish Orientalist subjects (64). These were of special and lasting interest to Moore, who married a Spaniard and spent years in Granada, where he worked with a group of Spanish artists (79).

Each of these chapters also analyzes topics that have more general relevance to nineteenth-century art. Eakins and Moore occasion discussions of different types of realism, associated with Velázquez and Fortuny respectively, and the ways in which their paintings of Spanish subjects resonated with contemporary American concerns such as slavery (86–7). Cassatt's *On the Balcony* introduces a lengthy discourse about the motif of a woman on a balcony and the idea of the balcony as a liminal space, not unlike travel itself (96–103). Cassatt's paintings related to the bullfight illustrate another quintessentially Spanish subject for American artists (103–8). These paintings, which engage with appearances of women in public, the new fluidity of social class, and Velázquez as well as Goya, are all "transgressive, modern themes," making Cassatt's identification with the modern very clear (102, 110). The chapter about Sargent centers on *El jaleo*, exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1882. Boone discusses the painting's artistic precedents, the popularity of the subject, the contemporary image of gypsies, and the influence of Georges Bizet's *Carmen*, all topics related to many other artists (120–31). She also describes the American tour of the Spanish dancer Carmencita, including the astonishing evening when she performed before Isabella Stewart Gardner—which ended with Gardner dancing in front of her (139–45).

The last chapters of Boone's book describe the increasingly close connections between contemporary Spain and the Americans who traveled there. William Merritt Chase, whose admiration for Velázquez was legendary, painted landscapes of "sunny Spain," some of which contain elements of the modern world (154). Robert Frederick Blum's landscapes also combine the stereotypical Spain of Washington Irving with aspects of actual life in front of him (159–60). While painting outdoors, he came to know many Spanish artists, with whom he worked (163–5). Once again, Fortuny was to be a major figure, despite having died in 1874 (151–3). The final chapter, about España negra and the Generation of '98, gives most attention to Sargent, F. Luis Mora, and Robert Henri. The Spanish modernist painters Ignacio Zuloaga and Santiago Rusiñol, both of whom worked in Paris, were instrumental in furthering the new interest in El Greco's work (177–9). Joaquin Sorolla, who like Fortuny had an international reputation, was friendly with Chase, Sargent, and Mora (185–6, 195). Rusiñol and Sorolla seemed to represent the two sides of Spain, a dark nationalistic view versus a sunny one, presented to American audiences in the exhibitions organized by Archer B. Huntington at the Hispanic Society of America in 1909. By the early 1900s, both Chase and Robert Henri brought classes from the New York School of Art to study in Spain (199, 204). The book concludes with an Epilogue about Robert Motherwell and his deep relationship with Spain, as well as a quick history of Spain between the start of the century and the free elections in 1977 (207–9).

Vistas de España provides visual and textual substantiation of Boone's argument that changing visions of Spain during these years reflected the shifting political and cultural relations between the two countries. It is also true though, as she remarks, that the popular image of Spain created for English-language readers by Washington Irving among others is still very much alive, with Hemingway's novels being highly visible indications of its survival. But recent interest in the subject may finally displace at least some of those well-worn clichés. Since Boone's book appeared in 2007, new publications include a doctoral dissertation and book about nineteenth-century Finnish artists in Spain, a catalogue of an exhibition about British artists and Spain at the National Gallery of Scotland, a very detailed study by Alisa Luxenberg of the Galerie espagnole in Paris, and an English translation of a catalogue of the nineteenth-century paintings in the collection of the Prado—mostly by Spanish artists.[2] Even more recent is a show at El Museo del Barrio, *Nueva York (1613–1945)*, and the announcement that Jonathan Brown, the best-known American historian of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Spanish art, will be honored this year by the College Art Association. All welcome news indeed.

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[1] Detailed art historical information about the period and a great many color illustrations appeared in the exhibition catalogue, *Prelude to Spanish Modernism: Fortuny to Picasso*, by Mark Roglán, Javier Barón et al. (Albuquerque, NM: Albuquerque Museum in collaboration with the Meadows Museum, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX, 2005).

[2] Marie-Sofie Lundstrom, "Travelling in a Palimpsest. Finnish Nineteenth-Century Painters' Encounters with Spanish Art and Culture" (Helsinki: Finnish Academy of Science and Letters, 2008, as well as a PDF of the pre-print: <http://bibbild.abo.fi/ediss/2007/LundstromMarie.pdf>); *The Discovery of Spain: British Artists and Collectors: Goya to Picasso*, by Christopher Baker et al. (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 2009); Alisa Luxenberg, *Galerie espagnole and the Museo Nacional 1835–1853: Saving Spanish Art, or the Politics of Patrimony* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008); and *The Nineteenth Century in the Prado*, ed. José Luis Diez and Javier Barón (Madrid: Museo Nacional del Prado, 2008).