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book review of

Le Salon de 1827: Classique ou romantique? by Eva Bouillo

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Eva Bouillo,
Le Salon de 1827: Classique ou romantique?
Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2009.
324 pp.; 62 color illus; 114 b/w illus; bibliography; index.
23€ (paper)
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The first illustration in Eva Bouillo's *Le Salon de 1827: Classique ou romantique?* is a print subtitled *Grand Combat entre le Romantique et le Classique à la Porte du Musée*, which depicts a confrontation between the Classicist, an ideal male nude male gripping a javelin, and the Romantic, bearded and dressed in Renaissance garb brandishing a rapier, in front of a door at the Louvre and under the watch of a museum guard. The print visually summarizes the main interests of Bouillo's study—the relationship between art, art institutions, art criticism, and the art market. Truth be told, these are the same interests that have animated the reevaluation of art created and consumed during the Bourbon Restoration underway for the last twenty years. The works of Nina Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, Richard Wrigley, and Elisabeth Fraser are just some examples of this historiography that addresses the relationship between art, institutions and cultural meaning.^[1]

Rather than interpret the connection between art, art institutions, art criticism, and the art market through a theme like Athanassoglou-Kallmyer's study of images of the Greek Wars of Independence, through the origin and development of an institution like Wrigley's study of art criticism, or through the work of an artist like Fraser's examination of Delacroix's painting and its cultural meaning during the Restoration, Bouillo takes up the issue of the *bataille romantique* as described by art critics in the 1820s and first studied by Leon Rosenthal over a hundred years ago.^[2] Citing Dorathea Beard's work on the Salon of 1824 as a model for analyzing one exhibition to understand the struggle between the old and new school, she focuses her work on the Salon of 1827.^[3] "To show the role of this Salon, to analyze the manner in which the new painting established itself there, its evolution from 1824, and to determine what was new in Romanticism," she writes, "are the principle objectives of this book" (12). She analyzes the institutional workings of the Salon and critical reaction to the paintings through an admirable profusion of archival documents, correspondence, and the press, relying on the methodology

of Marie-Claude Chaudonneret.^[4] And, unsurprisingly, her work corroborates many of Chaudonneret's conclusions.

Bouillo constructs her study in three interrelated parts, elucidating first the institutional workings of the Salon, second the state patronage surrounding the exhibition, and third the press and the emergence of Romanticism. She begins the first section by clearly outlining the workings of the Salon, explaining the choice of exhibition dates, the number of works permitted by artist, the composition of the jury, and the jury's selection of works. She explains that most of these elements were controversial in some way; for instance, the public called into question the jury's impartiality, since some of its members judged their own students' work. Perhaps the most interesting and important revelation of this section is the eclectic nature of the works on display, which she cleverly illustrates through a series of statistical tables based on data abstracted from unpublished administrative documents. These tables address the number of works exempt from jury scrutiny and acceptance rates of those submitted to the jury by media, genre of painting as well as gender and nationality of the artist. From this meticulous quantitative approach, the Salon of 1827 emerges as an eclectic mix of media and genres, where 376 submissions were history paintings, 766 were portraits, and 1685 were from the minor genres, with still lifes enjoying the highest acceptance rate (31).

The man behind this organization was Auguste de Forbin, Director of the Royal Museums, who exercised great power on the jury, organized the placement of the works in the Louvre, and recommended purchases and commissions after the exhibition. Bouillo presents new evidence that Forbin's administration supported Romanticism at the Salon. Her statistical analysis reveals that artists identified as Romantic in the press enjoyed a much higher acceptance rate at 84% than that of painters in general at 47% (35), and that Forbin exhibited many works by Romantic artists that bypassed the jury and went directly to exhibition (30). A further contribution is to identify the rooms used for the exhibition in the Louvre, and how they changed over the four separate hangings that comprised the Salon, complete with instructive floor plans. Here, she notes that Forbin was unable to hang works in the Salon Carré, traditionally a place of honor, when the Salon opened on 4 November, but regained use of the room after public outcry for the second hanging which opened on 15 December. She reminds us that Forbin placed the most controversial Romantic paintings of the exhibition, Eugène Delacroix's *Sardanapalus* and Charles-Emile Champmartin's *Janissaries*, in the grand salon, generating a heated debate in the press and with his superior Sosthène de la Rochefoucauld, although this is well known in the historiography.^[5]

Forbin is also central to the second part of the book which addresses royal sponsorship of art at the Salon, including commissions, purchases, and a variety of honors accorded at the closing of the show. If the Salon represented the king's encouragement of the arts, the budgetary power to purchase art rested with the Ministry of the Royal Household, the Ministry of the Interior and the Prefect of the Seine. She underscores again that Forbin was the real power, sometimes bypassing his superior and always exercising influence on state patronage, particularly on the acquisition strategy of Chabrol de Volvic, Prefect of the Seine, who engaged young artists to adorn Paris's churches and municipal buildings. She focuses first on works commissioned prior to the Salon of 1827 and then exhibited there. Her analysis of these commissions reveals that, unlike the jury's eclectic choice of genres and subjects, history painting comprised the majority of works (57.5%) contracted for prior to, and then exhibited at,

the Salon, and many of these glorified the monarchy (89). She also underscores that nine Romantic painters benefitted from these commissions, comprising 12% of them (118).

Honors accorded, and paintings purchased and commissioned, after the Salon encouraged all genres, but privileged history painting and rewarded the Romantics. Romantic paintings comprised nearly 43% of works acquired after the Salon of 1827 (143). She, however, concludes the second part of the book by erroneously claiming that Forbin, in an audacious gesture, purchased Champmartin's *Janissaries*, the work that critics attacked and that provoked Rochefoucauld's rebuke (151). On the contrary, Champmartin only managed to sell the work to the state in 1863, after protracted negotiations documented in the National Archives.^[6] This important mistake, of course, does not invalidate her argument. In fact, her work brings new evidence to support conclusions already advanced by Chaudonneret: the Bourbon regime, largely through the efforts of Forbin, sought to advance French art free of aesthetic preferences and political loyalties and simultaneously supported the growth of Romanticism.

In the last part of her book, Bouillo addresses the Salon's public, the press, and critical reaction to the art. She reasons, based on sales of the catalogue that the number of visitors was significantly higher in 1827 than at any other Salon between 1822 and 1831 and speculates that Romantic painting drew the new crowds. Art criticism often mediated this public's experience of art, and her exhaustive research uncovered four books and 285 articles from 40 periodicals on art published during the Salon of 1827. She also contends that the number of artists identified as Romantic more than doubled from the Salon in 1824 to 1827, which may well be the case. There is, however, a significant flaw with her statistical methodology. The two sets of data do not have the same controls, as the set from 1824 comes from Beard's classification system and the set from 1827 from Bouillo's own more exhaustive study of art criticism detailed in tables in her annex. Obviously, the more articles evaluated the greater chance of finding references to Romantic artists. Her method is also problematic for her assessment of the evolution of Romanticism, which the case of Champmartin illustrates. Based on Beard's classification, Bouillo writes "Some mutations occurred. If Champmartin remained indecisive in 1824, he appeared next to Delacroix and Sigalon as an uncontested leader of the modern school at the exhibition of 1827" (199-200). Bouillo accepts the characterization of Champmartin as an "indecisive" in 1824, whereas contemporaries placed the painter in the vanguard of Romanticism. An independent reading of the criticism of 1824 and recent historiography reveals that the *Drapeau Blanc* characterized Champmartin's *Flight into Egypt* (Courbevoie, Church of St. Pierre St. Paul) as a Romantic manifesto piece, and Chabrol de Volvic, who commissioned the work, implored Forbin to remove the painting from the Salon in 1824 and then banished it from Paris.^[7]

In her own reading of criticism from the Salon of 1827, she points out that the discourse was often hyperbolic and infused with metaphors of war and politics. Classicist critics accused Romantic artists of breaking artistic rules or worse, of being mad, whereas Romantic critics characterized most of their brethren as reformers of a stale tradition. Bouillo, in fact, underscores the complexity and fluid nature of Romanticism and develops three categories of Romantics: the leaders, disciples, and indefinites (199). She also points out that critics on both sides of the issue claimed artists like Paul Delaroche, and provides lengthy quotations from critics on many paintings from 1827. She defines three principles of Romantic aesthetics from the Salon criticism: truth, originality, and liberty. Truth was faithfulness to history by painting

all periods and places and to nature by painting the reality of place; originality seemed to be understood as invention by those supportive of Romanticism; and freedom meant freedom from the rules of composition, drawing, beauty, and finish. All of this seems an accurate enough reading of the criticism and follows closely the outline of the debate laid out by Pontus Grate fifty years ago.[8]

In the end, Bouillo offers a wealth of information gleaned from archives and criticism and presents it in helpful tables. Particularly useful are tables that present state acquisition of paintings and criticism of paintings exhibited, and 62 excellent color and 114 black and white illustrations give easy access to important but rarely reproduced images. She clarifies for the first time the complex workings of the jury. In short, Bouillo publishes a great deal of instructive data. Her determined focus on the facts of administrative decisions and the literal words of the critics, however, has left it to others to interpret the political, social, and cultural meaning of those decisions and words. This seems particularly odd given the obvious political nature of the state patronage of art: why did Forbin seek to exhibit an eclectic mix of media and genres at the Salon, and why did he support the most disparaged of Romantics at every turn? These were very political actions that had social and cultural import. She would have done well to consult Fraser for one interpretation of Forbin's endeavors.[9] As for the critics' words, they are often constructed as metaphors, and a metaphor is a figure of speech that employs a concrete image to represent a less tangible idea: why define the emergence of Romanticism as a battle between two camps, and why describe it in political, social, and cultural terms? After all, Auguste Jal claimed 'Romanticism in painting . . . is a revolution; it is the echo of the cannon of 1789'.[10] It is clear to this reviewer that Romanticism was an artistic manifestation of the great political, social, and cultural transformations in post-Revolutionary France. This understanding animates the best art history of the last twenty years, and used carefully, the information presented by Bouillo will provide rich material for future interpretive studies.

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[1] Nina Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, *French Images from the Greek War of Independence (1821-1830): Art and Politics under the Restoration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989). Richard Wrigley, *The Origins of French Art Criticism from the Ancien Régime to the Restoration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Elisabeth Fraser, *Delacroix, Art and Patrimony in Post-Revolutionary France* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[2] Léon Rosenthal, *La Peinture Romantique: essai sur l'évolution de la peinture française de 1815 à 1830* (Paris: L.H. May, 1900).

[3] Dorathea Beard, "The Salon of 1824: The Emergence of the Conflict between the Old School and the New," Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1966.

[4] Marie-Claude Chaudonneret, *L'état et les artistes de la Restauration à la Monarchie de juillet, 1815-1833* (Paris: Flammarion, 1999).

[5] See John P. Lambertson, "The Genesis of French Romanticism: P.-N. Guerin's Studio and the Public Sphere," Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, 1994, 206-215. Fraser, 172-173.

[6] See John P. Lambertson, "Champmartin et les dimensions de la Méduse," *La Méduse*, March 1997, 4.

[7] Lambertson, "The Genesis of French Romanticism," 151, 163.

[8] Pontus Grate, "La critique d'art et la bataille romantique," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, vol. 54, September 1959, 129-148.

[9] Fraser, 78-114

[10] Auguste Jal, *Esquisses, croquis, pochades, ou tout ce qu'on voudra sur le Salon de 1827* (Paris: A. Dupont, 1828), iv.