

Irvine and Sutton on Madeline, et al. (2017)

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The exhibition *Women Artists in Paris, 1850–1900*, guest-curated by Laurence Madeline for the American Federation of Arts, brings together paintings from sixty-eight different lenders in ten countries. The exhibition toured the Denver Art Museum, the Speed Art Museum in Louisville, Kentucky, and the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts (2017–18). This beautiful exhibition catalogue includes reproductions of the paintings, useful artist biographies, and six essays that provide context and analysis. These enrich our understanding of the obstacles, the training, the influences, and the communities of women artists who participated in the cultural life of the Impressionist “capital of the nineteenth century.”

Laurence Madeline’s contribution to the volume, “Into the Light: Women Artists, 1850–1900,” explains how female artists had been largely dismissed, evaluated primarily for their feminine qualities, and limited to gender-appropriate subjects. However, these gender norms were already becoming outdated. Male artists began to represent subject matter that was usually associated with women, while women artists were committing themselves to the figure and history paintings usually reserved for men (13). By the time women gained access to the *Académie des Beaux-Arts* in 1897, the institution itself was no longer influential. In order for women to make a difference in the art world, they needed to turn their backs on the Académie and exhibit independently.

Bridget Alsdorf’s essay, “Painting the *femme peintre*,” examines how women artists and their communities were represented in relation to the artistic identities of men. Using Henri Fantin-Latour’s *Hommage à Delacroix* as an example of the depiction of male artistic sociability, Alsdorf observes that Fantin’s wife, Victoria Dubourg, a well-respected artist herself and frequent collaborator of her husband’s, is missing from the famous painting. Alsdorf argues that, like Édouard Manet in relation to Berthe Morisot, Fantin may have been more comfortable depicting women artists as students rather than partners and peers. By contrast, Alsdorf discusses how Rosa Bonheur actively controlled the portraits that Édouard Louis Dubufe and Consuelo Fould painted of her to showcase her talent as a *peintre animalier*. She also collaborated with her biographer Anna Klumpke to control how she would be represented textually. Alsdorf’s analysis provides an analytical lens through which to understand the representations of artists and artistic sociabilities included in this exhibition.

Richard Kendall discusses the three best-known women (Marie Bracquemond, Mary Cassatt, and Berthe Morisot) who participated in the Impressionist exhibitions in Paris from 1874 to 1886. Although these exhibitions were marginal, poorly organized, and unfocused, they were both a threat to tradition as well as a positive influence over the new French school (42). Unfortunately, studies of this period have focused on a small group of Impressionist artists and have left out the five women and over fifty other men who participated. Kendall brings these lesser-known artists to the foreground by showing how the social class and training of Cassatt, Bracquemond, and Morisot affected their paintings and their participation in the art world. For example, Morisot’s paintings reflect the pleasures of her home life, while Bracquemond’s art communicates the tension in her marriage, and Cassatt’s work highlights her independence.

Picking up on the comparison of Cassatt, Morisot, and Bracquemond, Jane R. Becker’s contribution is a case study which focuses on Bracquemond (1840–1916), traditionally the least studied of the three artists. From a working-class family, Bracquemond did not have the early access to artistic training that the other two women did. Unlike Morisot, Bracquemond’s spouse, Félix, was critical of his wife’s work and insisted on his artistic superiority. Like Morisot and Cassatt, Bracquemond nevertheless found support in other family members, notably her sister Louise Quivoron, a frequent model. Fashion prints and *japonisme* also influenced all three artists. Sadly, Bracquemond left a smaller oeuvre than Morisot and Cassatt as she seems to have made the decision to stop painting around 1890.

In “Female Artists in the Nordic Countries: Training and Professionalization,” Vibeke Waallann Hansen posits the advanced status of women artists in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Iceland, as well as their success in Paris during the late nineteenth century. In Paris, Nordic artists such as Elin Danielson-Gambogi, Marie Luplau, Kitty Kielland, Helena Westermarck, and Harriet Backer formed a close network, sharing studios and sometimes living together. They were successful painting in the *juste milieu* style, although some critics found their work to be “provocative” and their lifestyles “debauched” (77). These artists abandoned gender-appropriate paintings and painted primarily “en plein air.” Even as they enjoyed commissions in Paris, in their home countries they were largely ignored and eventually abandoned their careers for

marriage. The presentation of their work to a North American audience is one of the great strengths of this exhibition, which takes Finnish artist Ellen Thesleff's *Echo* (1891), a powerful painting of an adolescent girl finding her voice, as its cover image.

To end the volume, Joëlle Bolloch's chapter provides helpful historical context for the training, exhibition opportunities, and recognition afforded women artists. Bolloch traces the participation of women in the Paris Salon from 1848–1900. Although no woman was ever a member of the Salon jury, participation by women in the annual exhibition increased during this period. She also describes the possibilities that were available for women seeking artistic training and documents the official recognition of women artists, through the granting of awards and medals, by tracing the number of women included in publications, and through the lists of works purchased at Salons by public, political, and religious institutions.

In addition to the insightful critical essays in this catalogue, the thematic presentation of the paintings encourages readers to draw parallels between the works of Cassatt, Morisot, and lesser-known paintings from this rich period. The inclusion of work by the Nordic artists, in particular, provides a welcome new lens on women's artistic training, communities, and the subjects of their art.

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