

Ortiz on Hornstein (2018)

Hornstein, Katie. *Picturing War in France, 1792–1856*. Yale University Press, 2018, pp. 208, ISBN 9780300228267

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Katie Hornstein's *Picturing War in France: 1792–1856* pushes against the high and low binary that exists in the field of art history. Hornstein argues that the boundaries between the two realms blurred during this period, and that there was a fundamental interrelation between traditional forms of art, mainly large-scale battle painting, and new models of artistic representation such as lithography, panoramas, print materials, and photography. This breaking down of barriers was in part inspired by public desire for representations of contemporary military events. Hornstein explores new forms of media that served to satiate popular hunger for images of war, as well as devoting time to more traditional approaches like history painting. By the mid-nineteenth century, images of war had massive appeal, and technological advances in print and travel inspired more widespread consumption of art.

Representations of conflict—whether displayed on the walls of the Salon, brought to life through panoramas, or printed in illustrated texts—created what Hornstein calls communicative spaces. These spaces brought French citizenry close (but not too close) to the violence of war and invited them to take part in political discourses that would construct and negotiate their relationship to the French nation. Visual culture, Hornstein argues, implemented new ways of seeing and speaking in late eighteenth and nineteenth-century France.

Throwing aside the “heroic narrative” of French artists such as Jacques-Louis David and Théodore Géricault, Hornstein seeks to incorporate and highlight artists who have been marginalized by the field of art history. Although their approaches to war imagery may have diverged from that of the historiographic “greats,” Hornstein asserts that the artists at the heart of her study exemplify the blurring of the high and low dichotomy and would often have been viewed in concert with the more celebrated pieces of their time. Although she incorporates images of works by Jean-Baptiste Henri Durand-Brager, Louis-François Lejeune, and Jean-Charles Langlois, the bulk of the examples and narrative revolve around Horace Vernet.

Hornstein breaks her chronology into four sections. Spanning 1792 through 1856, she tackles major political turning points in France's history, and demonstrates the intertwined relationships among art, culture, politics, economics, and war. Hornstein opens by looking at works of military art during the Revolution through the First Empire. Materials of interest include battle paintings, maps, and prints, a contrast from previous studies that have focused on more illustrious and grandiose works. Hornstein argues that such proliferation and availability of works gave French viewers the opportunity to participate in visual discourse. Public consumption of maps and prints of battle paintings allowed the citizenry to stay engaged with current events, but also provided entertainment. Although scholarship has often kept these works separate from the likes of Antoine-Jean Gros and David, Hornstein asserts that they would have been seen in relation to each other in the spaces they occupied.

Chapter two is grounded in the context of the Bourbon Restoration. In a time of great divide and tumult in France, Hornstein examines the role painting served and what forms it took. Despite Bourbon attempts to rid the nation of images of the Revolution and Napoleon, retrospective military images were in vogue, due in large part to contemporary warfare. Regardless of censorship, Hornstein explains that works representing Revolutionary warfare not only showed up in salons, but also in books and engravings. It was through art, Hornstein posits, that ideas about the nature of the nation could be negotiated and tested against a wary citizenry. During the instability of the Restoration, art inspired discourses about how a nation should be organized and what agency individuals had.

Hornstein then shifts to the July Monarchy, demonstrating how art was used and consumed in the period. Censorship had been largely a failure during the Restoration, and King Louis-Philippe abandoned official attempts to censor art, resurrecting Napoleonic battle paintings at new galleries in an attempt to reinvigorate public support of the French military. This chapter perhaps best illustrates Hornstein's argument that new technologies and innovative ways of making and viewing art were mutually influential. With the expansion of public transport, more people could come to the museums erected by Louis-Philippe. Even in the privacy of their homes, citizens consumed these images through woodblock prints that came to be common place in newspapers. Each way of viewing the image, whether in person at the museum or in a newspaper, impacted the way that people saw and interpreted paintings. Hornstein explores how ways of seeing differed from form to form with this new circulation of visual culture.

The book's final chapter centers upon the Crimean War and the impact that new media had at this time. This was the first

major French conflict to be photographed on a broad scale. Widespread coverage of the war was accessed in newspapers and other forms of illustrated press, and this coverage was accompanied by photographs. Hornstein focuses on one such press, *L'Illustration*, which operated off of a fragmentary marketing strategy to encourage readers to buy the latest installments as they came out. Jean-Baptiste Henri Durand-Brager and Jean-Charles Langlois reemerge in this chapter as battle painters-turned-photographers. Their experiences with photography transformed the way they saw the art of executing battle paintings.

Hornstein's writing is complemented by an impressive selection of full-color reproductions of lesser-known battle paintings, panoramas, woodcut prints, and photographs. She weaves thorough historical context with art analysis in a way that solidifies her argument that art history as a discipline benefits from examining these elements of visual culture that have too often been ignored. Blurring the boundaries between what constitutes high and low media adds texture, depth, and a new perspective to the study of military art throughout the nineteenth century.

Volume: 47.3–4

Year:

- 2019