

Hanson on Ives (2018)

Ives, Colta. *Public Parks, Private Gardens: Paris to Provence*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2018, pp. xi + 204, ISBN 978-1-588-39584-9

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Colta Ives's *Public Parks, Private Gardens: Paris to Provence*, a history of horticulture and visual representations of ornamental plants and green spaces, explores the excitement surrounding human interactions with the vegetal world in nineteenth-century France. Ives's book examines the significance of horticulture by analyzing a selection of pictures whose imagery ranges from vistas of landscaped parks to intimate views of pathways, ponds, trees, and women in gardens. The lavishly illustrated publication serves as the catalog for an eponymously titled exhibition that Ives and Susan Alyson Stein co-curated for the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The spring-summer 2018 exhibit highlighted paintings, botanical illustrations, photographs, landscape designs, and other objects in The Met's collection, as well as gardening tools and artworks lent by private collectors.

Ives's book conveys new knowledge about the plant world to historians of French society, art, culture, and literature by expanding on Clare A. P. Willson's catalog *In the Gardens of Impressionism* (2004) and her contributions to the catalog *Painting the Modern Garden: Monet to Matisse* (2016). Ives's main contention, that "the nineteenth century proved to be a great age for horticulture," encourages readers to consider the historical conditions that promoted the enthusiasm for ornamental gardens in everyday life and art (5). While Ives adequately explains that plant hunters travelled around the globe to collect vegetal materials during periods of European expansion, a critical examination of the imbalances of power that made the trade profitable for French nurserymen lies beyond the scope of her study. Still, Ives successfully demonstrates that the French favored "exotic" species, laying the groundwork for future scholars to analyze artistic and literary responses to France's horticultural entanglement with other world regions.

The democratization of horticulture through the creation of public green spaces is a central theme of Ives's book. Ives explains that the French Revolution led to both the transformation of the Jardin des Plantes (formerly Louis XIII's medicinal herb garden) into a national institute for learning and the opening of the park at Versailles, the Forest of Fontainebleau, and other sites for French citizens. Additionally, Ives describes how Emperor Napoléon III and Baron Haussmann oversaw the creation and revitalization of Parisian parks, gardens, promenades, and squares at the mid-century, while also appropriating public land for urban development. Pertinent to today's environmental movement is Ives's observation that certain artists who painted *en plein air* advocated for preserving ecologies. Ives draws on Greg M. Thomas's scholarship when she cites Théodore Rousseau's successful campaign to make a portion of Fontainebleau a nature preserve and notes Claude Monet's protection of poplars from being felled.

Ives devotes two chapters to investigating the importance of private gardens, which emerged in France by 1820. Flowers attained a prominent place in pleasure gardens, as Ives maintains, due to horticultural advances in transporting and cultivating "exotic" species. The fashionability and gendered associations of floral imagery is a topic that, Ives shows, male artists explored in paintings of their gardens inhabited by elegant women: Claude Monet of Camille Monet with hollyhocks at Argenteuil, Gustave Caillebotte of Charlotte Berthier with roses at Petit Gennevilliers, and Alfred Stevens of a model with a flowerbed at his property in Paris. To enhance her interpretations of these pictures, Ives effectively analyzes how catalogs, fashion plates, and trade cards marketed gardening to the middle classes—the most charming advertisement endorses a "parasol pruner" for women (92). Decorative blooms are also a theme of Ives's chapter on flower painting, which builds on the insights of Heather MacDonald and Mitchell Merling's catalog *Working among Flowers: Floral Still-Life Painting in Nineteenth-Century France* (2014). Although Ives convincingly argues that Eugène Delacroix, Gustave Courbet, Henri Fantin-Latour, and Édouard Manet contributed to a revival of the genre, her passing mention of the artist Victoria Dubourg, the wife of Fantin-Latour, demonstrates a necessity for more scholarship on her and other women who painted flowers.

Nonetheless, Ives emphasizes the centrality of female royalty in the blossoming of horticulture, focusing on the role of Joséphine, first wife of Napoléon I, as a "patroness of the horticultural arts" (18). In 1799, Joséphine purchased the Château de Malmaison, financing the construction of a glasshouse to display her renowned collection of "exotic" plants and the import of new species for a *roseraie*. Joséphine's influence on the popularization of the rose and the use of planters in interior décor is illuminated, as Ives shows, by Pierre Joseph Redouté's botanical illustrations of her flora and an image of a jardinière published in Pierre de La Mésangère's *Collection de meubles et objets de goût* (1806–18). Ives also considers the relationship of gender, class, and plants by noting that botany and horticulture were acceptable pursuits for bourgeois women and flower

selling and bouquet making were historically female professions. Ives mainly limits her discussion of Berthe Morisot and Mary Cassatt to a chapter on portraiture in gardens, though their œuvres would certainly support a study of other aspects of horticulture such as indoor gardening.

Ives's research participates in an "ecological turn" in French studies alongside a chapter of Laura Anne Kalba's book *Color in the Age of Impressionism: Commerce, Technology, and Art* (2017) and Daniel A. Finch-Race and Stephanie Posthumus's co-edited volume *French Ecocriticism: From the Early Modern Period to the Twenty-First Century* (2017). Ives's book, a delight for art historians and gardening enthusiasts, provides fertile ground for future scholars to take a transregional perspective on the historical impact of the plant trade on society, art, culture, and ecology in nineteenth-century France and elsewhere.

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