

Marit Werenskiold, *The Concept of Expressionism; Origin and Metamorphoses*, transl. by Ronald Walford. Oslo, Universitetsforlaget, 1984. XXI + 251 pp., 50 illus. and 8 colour plates, \$42.00 (cloth.)

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history of American painting, do not do the pictures justice and we are left with a 'coffee-table' book of indifferent quality which does little more than inform us, if we needed to be, that the history of American painting is well represented in public collections in Washington, D.C.

I say 'unfortunately' because, contrary to what we are normally taught to assume, 'coffee-table' books need not be trivial, and because the quality and scope of the works included in the volume make one feel that an opportunity to say something interesting and significant about American painting has been unnecessarily missed; that the hasty, seemingly mechanical production of yet another attractive volume for the trade has taken the place of a thoughtful consideration of outstanding works of art and their place in American cultural history.

The brief one or two paragraphs devoted to each painting generally attempt to do too much by providing a thumbnail sketch of the artist's entire career (which, since each artist is represented by only one painting, does not seem especially urgent) in addition to discussing the particular work. This means that the comments on the paintings tend to be vague and inconsequential. The comments are harmless at best and unintentionally funny at worst, as when we are solemnly informed with regard to de Kooning's *Woman, Sag Harbour* that 'The female image has been a major subject in the history of art and de Kooning has made his contribution to that history.' The works would be better served, I should think, by either more or less.

The prefatory text is a well-organized, well-written survey of the history of American painting which summarizes the current 'received' tradition. Such essays – and this one is no exception – tend to be predictable and pedestrian. While there is certainly nothing wrong or controversial in what is said, neither is there anything particularly new, interesting or challenging, no thesis or well-defined viewpoint that a reviewer can get his teeth into. This does not need to be the case. I would prefer and argue for another kind of approach to the sort of task which faced Mr. Brown in this volume, an approach like that which Ernst Kitzinger took when he wrote his justly admired and much reprinted survey of early mediaeval art in the British

Museum. In this essay, Kitzinger was confronted with a limited, somewhat idiosyncratic selection of material, viz., the early mediaeval works belonging to the British Museum, and he used them as his examples. Brown's selection of works was also limited by the terms of the original exhibition, viz., paintings from Washington public collections, but he chooses not say anything about them at all. Rather, his essay deals in generalities only loosely connected to the specific works illustrated in the books and the text often degenerates into mere lists of names of artists associated with a particular group or movement. There may be many and serious objections to Croce's demand that 'the history of poetry do no more than portray the character – that is the genesis and the history – of particular works of art,' but one's sympathy for the notion grows as one ploughs through Brown's essay wondering about what might have been said. In the end, one lays aside the volume just a little puzzled about why it was produced. A good exhibition does not necessarily make a good or even a useful book.

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MARIE WERENSKIOLD *The Concept of Expressionism; Origin and Metamorphoses*, transl. by Ronald Walford. Oslo, Universitetsforlaget, 1984. xxi + 251 pp., 50 illus. and 8 colour plates, \$42.00 (cloth).

The Modern World, a concept fraught with as many confusing and contradictory interpretations as Expressionism, should be, in actuality, the essential backdrop for this text. For without this postulation, expression as well as self-expression would not have gained the often unquestioned status that allowed it to flourish in art throughout much of the last two centuries.

In 1798, Friederich and August Wilhelm Von Schlegel divided Western history into two components: the Classical or Ancient World distinguished by its formal excellence, and our epoch, beginning in the Middle Ages, marked by a commitment to expression that

revealed an inner life. This concept, intrinsically wed to Romanticism (another lexicographer's nightmare), has consistently manifested itself in the many art movements that have credited artists and their expression with therapeutic and didactic qualities.

It comes, therefore, as a great surprise in a book bearing the promising title of *The Concept of Expressionism; Origin and Metamorphoses*, that little reference is made to the major trends in the history of ideas that paved the way for 20th-century Expressionism. In fact, Werenskiold shows little interest in the philosophical, thus conceptual, development of Expressionism. Indeed, her well-documented text forces the reader to assess Expressionism independently.

Werenskiold reveals in the preface to her five chapters that she undertook her scholarship within the framework of Scandinavian art between the years of 1905 to 1925. This research came to fruition in her Master's thesis entitled, *Matisse's Norwegian Pupils: Their apprenticeship and breakthrough 1908-1914* (Oslo, 1972). During this investigation, Werenskiold explored some puzzling questions. She discovered that art historians were reluctant to recognise Matisse's Norwegian as well as Swedish pupils' work as fulfilling the generally accepted dictates of Expressionism. Subsequently, it is this issue she chose to address.

The resulting text, Werenskiold's doctoral dissertation, published in 1981 in her native Norwegian, appears here in its English translation, *The Concept of Expressionism; Origin and Metamorphoses*. In the five chapters, Werenskiold makes the case for the existence of an international Expressionist movement that preceded the German stronghold. She places Matisse at the helm of this movement and credits Roger Fry with the coining of the term.

Werenskiold is quick to point out that the term was used interchangeably, at first, with Post-Impressionism. In 1910 both critics and artists were beset with the particular problem of how to label a growing body of work that was either an extension of Impressionism or a backlash to it. Symbolists, Primitives, Intimists and Neo-Impressionists found themselves grouped together under the tentative title of Expressionists.

Werenskiöld notes that earlier within the same year, Aby Warburg, in *Kunst Und Künstler*, had referred to the graphic art of the Late Middle Ages as 'expressionistisch.' She adds as well that, in the 19th century, the 'Expressionist School of modern painters' is employed in the *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* to describe the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. None the less, Werenskiöld fails to draw attention to the problematical nature of a term that can be used so broadly.

Werenskiöld's methodology operates on a 'first come, first serve' basis. Thus an artist is a 20th-century Expressionist if so labeled by contemporary critics experimenting with a new term. Equally of importance is the artist's stated commitment to expression, even though this idea had been bandied about by artists throughout the 19th century. Within this framework, Werenskiöld is able to trace an international Expressionist movement that is dependent upon Matisse as its star performer.

A section of the first chapter is given over to the examination of Matisse's 'Notes d'un peintre,' published in 1908. Matisse's belief in the expressive and therapeutic qualities of art is given much prominence. Werenskiöld differentiates between Matisse and his teacher Gustave Moreau, also an aficionado of expression, by drawing attention to Matisse's precision of the term. It is quite remarkable that the author confuses the fact that the term being discussed here is *expression* and not *Expressionism*.

In the same chapter, the author reveals that the term Expressionism employed in the British press in 1910 is 'naturally associated with Matisse's concept of expression' by the European mainland, especially in Scandinavia where the foreign students of Matisse had disseminated the term. This is corroborated by the fact that in March 1911, the Scandinavian art historian Carl David Moselius employed the term Expressionism in his discussion of the young school of French and Scandinavian painting emanating from Cézanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh and Matisse. He saw this work as being in opposition to the sensibilities associated with Impressionism.

In view of this knowledge, one can then assume rightly that the term is implicitly a synonym for Post-

Impressionism. Werenskiöld does not refute this fact. However, she props her argument for Expressionism – in fact an international Expressionism – by calling attention to certain stylistic similarities, whether expressed in words or in actual images, that constitute for her an artistic movement.

Even in the face of her abundant documentation one recognises that it is the call for the rejection of Impressionism that binds the divergent artists and critics. In essence, they are perpetuating and expanding upon the theories expounded by Rousseau, Kant, the Schlegels and Bergson. What we witness is the exaltation of the emotional and instinctual aspects of humankind. There is no set program for this movement other than the refusal to take part in an art that represents the world without paying close attention to the psychological nature of its human filter.

Werenskiöld's text, flawed by its lack of attention to philosophical issues, is, none the less, an important addition to the literature devoted to Expressionism. It is extremely well-researched, revealing many 20th-century sources for the dissemination of the term. Werenskiöld's final and longest chapter dedicated to the Scandinavian artists involved in this new art, be it Post-Impressionism, is an important reminder of the myriad of artists that are often overlooked in a star system. Werenskiöld arouses our interest in this body of artists and critics whose sensitivity to concepts born on foreign soil resulted in their enthusiastic acceptance and promulgation.

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JIM M. JORDAN *Paul Klee and Cubism*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984. xxiv + 233 pp., 81 illus., \$77.00 (cloth).

ANDREW KAGAN *Paul Klee/Art & Music*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1983. 176 pp., 82 illus., \$34.50 (cloth).

One sign of an artist's critical acceptance is the publication of book-length studies on particular aspects of his or her work. Even though Paul Klee's art has exercised writers

since the 1920s, his status as a leading twentieth-century artist, at least according to this measure, has only recently become secure through studies like these by Jordan and Kagan, which build on the standard Klee criticism of the 1950s and 1960s. The specificity and sophistication of these new books demonstrate the maturity that Klee scholarship has attained.

Klee was part of mainstream European modernism for most of his life, but – with the exception of a brief affiliation with the Blaue Reiter group – he was not one to join artists' movements. Perhaps because his art defies easy categorization, historians have frequently tried to understand Klee through his relation to movements like Symbolism, Expressionism and Surrealism or to an institution like the Bauhaus. *Paul Klee and Cubism* follows this method: Jordan's detailed account of Cubism's importance to Klee from 1912 to 1926 (the middle third of his career) provides numerous insights into individual works, Klee's stylistic development and his methodical assimilation of sources.

The first chapters survey the young Klee's reactions to Impressionism (which interested him mostly for its tonal range) and Symbolism (whose Neo-Romantic mysticism he always retained) and thus put down a foundation for our understanding of Klee's first serious flirtation with Cubism in 1912. These opening chapters are somewhat slow – as were Klee's beginnings – but significant claims follow. Jordan shows that Klee 'understood Cubism progressively as a new kind of shape, a new relationship between shapes, and finally as a new way of composition,' in short, that Cubism was much more important to Klee's art than most critics have allowed. We are told what Cubist paintings Klee knew through exhibits, dealers and through his famous visit to Robert Delaunay in 1912, and, more importantly, just how he absorbed this new art. Jordan then examines Klee's 1913 output, his use of Picasso and Braque's highly analytic style and his inklings of the synthetic phase just before World War I severed artistic contact between France and Germany. Klee was fluent in the new Cubist form language by 1913, and since his military duty did not come until 1917-18, he was able to experiment immediately. Klee used