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Melissa Berry, *The Société des Trois in the Nineteenth Century: The Translocal Artistic Union of Whistler, Fantin-Latour, and Legros,* New York: Routledge, 2018, 152 pp. 37 b/w and 10 colour illus. $ 150 US (Hardcover) ISBN 9781138503151

Alison Syme

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Découvrir la revue

Citer ce compte rendu

ideological work that it is doing. Gérin reminds us to "remain cautious; comic images are often duplicitous and call for a skeptical attitude with regard to representations—all representations—as active constructors of knowledge" (293).

In this important and well-illus-

trated volume, contributors use a range of methods, including the social history of art, iconography, feminism, formalism, and even psychoanalysis, as in Laurier Lacroix's chapter on the iconic Québecois figure Baptiste Ladébauche, revealing the extent to which graphic satire is inextricably linked with anxiety. The authors critically examine a range of visual material from many different archives in order to continue building on previous scholarship concerned with humour, irony, and caricature in Canadian visual culture. On a minor note, a list of illustrations would be helpful at the beginning of the volume. This absence notwithstanding, *Sketches from an Unquiet Country* should absolutely be read beyond Canadian borders so that these images and arguments will circulate globally for further study and debate. ¶

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1. Dominic Hardy, "Editorial Introduction: Humour in the Visual Arts and Visual Culture: Practices, Theories, and Histories," *RACAR*, vol. 37, no. 1 (2012), 2.
2. Jean-Philippe Uzel, "Les objets trickster dans l'art contemporain autochtone au Canada," *Histoire de l'art et anthropologie*, Musée du quai Branly / actes de colloque, 2009, https://actesbranly.revues.org/241.
3. In Walker's fonds at the McCord Museum in Montreal, there is an engraving of Cruikshank cut from an unknown periodical with several holes at the top of the clipping, suggesting that Walker had pinned the photograph to his wall at various points in his life.

Melissa Berry
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Melissa Berry offers the first book-length study of the *Société des Trois* and its role in the artistic development of its members, Henri Fantin-Latour, Alphonse Legros, and James McNeill Whistler. She argues that this group, formed by the three in their early professional lives, was "far more than a footnote" in their careers (131). The Société has been touched upon in monographs and elsewhere; for instance, it is briefly mentioned in Michael Fried's 1996 book *Manet's Modernism: or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s* and Bridget Alsdorf's *Fellow Men: Fantin-Latour and the Problem of the Group in Nineteenth-Century French Painting* (2013). It was the subject of an exhibition (The Society of Three) at the Fitzwilliam Museum in 1998, the catalogue for which contains an important essay by Paul Stirton and Jane Munro. Berry's book, however, offers the most in-depth examination of the group's formation and function. She uses sociological and psychological understandings of small group dynamics to analyse the role of the *Société* in the artists' professionalization and cultivation of distinct artistic identities, which she explores through their works, correspondence, peer networks, exhibition venues, patrons, dealers, and cross-Channel activities.

Berry's introduction to the book stresses the artists' differences. Whistler, inspired by Realism, became drawn to Aestheticism. Fantin painted portraits, still lifes, and fantasy scenes throughout his career. And Legros concentrated on religious images. What, then, drew them together in the late 1850s in Paris, what commonalities may be found in their oeuvres, and what made their belonging to this group—rather than the others with which the artists were associated during their student days and later (societies of etchers, lovers of Japanese art, etc.)—so formative? The answer, Berry suggests, was its "translocal" character, for Whistler and Legros worked, over much of the ten-year period in which the *Société* existed (ca. 1858–1868), in London, corresponding with and visiting Fantin in Paris with different degrees of intensity during this time. The term translocal, as opposed to transnational, "avoids the traps of tidy cultural and geographic categories both for the artists as well as the cosmopolitan cities in which they worked" (7), and Berry stresses the cross-Channel traffic of artists, collectors, dealers, materials, and reviews in this period, contributing to a growing literature concerned with breaking down narrowly nation-focused understandings of "French" or "British" art of the period.

In her first chapter, "The Importance of Unity: Parisian Students in the Early Second Empire," Berry describes the transformations of Paris in the 1850s as Fantin and Legros began their studies there. Berry's focus, though, is on the desire for small artistic groupings, and she examines an initial alliance of artist friends including Charles Cuisin, Guillaume Régamey, Léon-Auguste Ottin, Adolphe-Auguste Férlet, and Marc-Louis Emmanuel Solon, as well as Fantin and Legros, who trained, socialised, and compiled albums together in the mid-to-late 1850s.

This early collaboration points to the comradeship and support groups offered, though the *Société de Trois* would offer Legros, Whistler, and Fantin much more.

Chapter two, "United: The Formation of the *Société*," describes how Whistler, who had been in Paris since late 1855, came into contact with Fantin and Legros in October 1858. Although the two French artists had just formed the *Société des Vrais Bons* with Louis-Réné-Hippolyte Sinet, that group was abandoned after a dinner with Whistler, which led to the formation of the *Société des Trois*. The chapter focuses on an event that helped catalyse the identity and goals of the *Société*: an exhibition held in 1859 at the studio of François Bonvin of the works of five artists he thought should not have had works refused by the Salon: Whistler, Fantin, and Legros, along with Théodule Ribot and Antoine Vollon. Whistler displayed *At the Piano*, Fantin a self-portrait and a portrait of his sister, and Legros a portrait of his father. While each artist's work suggested different interests, they had in common their absorptive depictions of family members, their contemporary middle-class subjects, and a range of stylistic influences including Courbet, Velazquez, and seventeenth-century Netherlandish art. Legros did in fact exhibit a well-received Salon painting that year (*L'Angelus*), but he joined his fellow *Société* members for this exhibition at Bonvin's, which, Berry argues, reflects the group's "desire for exposure" and the "adaptability and willingness to market themselves" that helped ensure their future success (40).

The third chapter, "A Cross-Channel Union: Beyond Paris, Beyond Students," examines the launch of the group's careers in both London and Paris. The three still submitted to the Paris Salon, and Berry considers several of the works accepted in 1861, identifying, despite their diverse subjects and styles, a continued focus on absorptive contemporary themes

and a Realist palette. But in this early period, London, no stranger to artistic brotherhoods, became for them an important market and source of exhibition venues, including the Royal Academy, Agnew & Sons, and The French Gallery. Whistler provided the initial link between London collectors and the other *Société* members, who earned long-term supporters this way, and he introduced artists from both cities to each other. In addition to charting the artists' exhibitions, this chapter considers the trio's printmaking activities in terms of the larger English and continental revival of etching and printmaking.

Chapter four, "Unity in Action: 1863 and the *Salon des refusés*," examines what Berry deems the zenith of the group's solidarity. While correspondence from 1862 to 1864 attests to their mutual loyalty and shared desire for success, it was the 1863 *Salon des refusés* that provided the greatest opportunity for the *Société* to demonstrate both their modernity and their allegiance to one another. All had submitted works to the regular Salon. A portrait by Fantin and *La féerie*, one of his fantastic compositions, had been rejected by the Salon, along with Whistler's *White Girl*, which became, after Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, one of the biggest scandals at the Salon des refusés. Although three of Legros's works had been accepted by and received favourable reviews at the regular Salon, he was as excited as his two colleagues about the alternative venue, and in fact withdrew his portrait of Manet to exhibit it with the rejected works. This significant moment for the group was followed by another: after the *Salon des refusés* closed, Legros moved to London permanently.

Chapter five, "Unity on Canvas: Pivotal Portraits of the *Société*," focuses on Whistler's *Wapping* and Fantin's *Homage à Delacroix* (both completed in 1864), paintings that Berry argues exhibit the members' dedication to each other. *Wapping*, about which

Whistler corresponded with Fantin, contains a portrait of Legros. It depicts a busy site on the Thames and draws on French and British forms of realism. In highlighting the exchange of ideas as well as goods, it suggests that "Victorian artists were a necessary part of the multifaceted conversation out of which European art production was constituted" (102). In *Homage à Delacroix*, Fantin depicts a range of artists and writers including the three members of the *Société*, all of whom had been "misunderstood in their artistic aims" at some point (105). Berry argues that the painting suggests the "importance of the wider conversation surrounding artistic culture while highlighting the *Société*'s distinct identity" (102) through the figures' arrangement, poses, and attire, at the same time predicting their future success.

The final chapter, "The Union Undone: An Inevitable End," explores the gradual dissolution of the *Société*. Artistic differences, external pressures, the development of new family bonds, and tensions over money and commissions played their roles in the group's unravelling. Berry takes pains to point out that, from "a sociological viewpoint, the termination of their union was both inevitable and necessary, primarily because the *Société*'s formation occurred to facilitate the evolution of these artists, from students to independent professionals." She stresses, somewhat needlessly, that no one member "need shoulder the blame" (124). By the end of the 1860s the three had established careers and distinct artistic identities. She suggests, though, that "the rippling impact of these artists' collaboration could be felt through" the London and Paris art scenes for some time (126). The book's epilogue notes that all three artists continued to exhibit in both cities, that cross-Channel relations remained key to their careers, and that they were "among the first to band together and actively, unabashedly, court these markets" (139).

Berry's volume convincingly establishes the significance of the *Société des Trois* for these three artists. She sketches the relevant contexts for her analyses and offers insightful readings of individual works in terms of the group's dynamics and tenets. She could have situated and defined her scholarly intervention more thoroughly and clearly, however. A number of key points are buried in chapters, and there is little contextualization of her work within extant scholarship. She might have made more use of Alsdorf's work, which situates the idea of the group in nineteenth-century French social thought in life and thought. The book, as a whole, could also have used considerably more proofreading. One of the authors of the most important scholarly precedent for this book, cited numerous times, is repeatedly listed as "James" rather than Jane Munro, and there are garbled and ungrammatical sentences in various places. While these errors are certainly the author's responsibility, they raise the question of whether a copy editor is employed for the Routledge Research in Art History series, the only unifying element of which seems to be the $150 US price tag per volume. But these are quibbles, and do not diminish the volume's merits as a useful study offering insights into a formative stage of the artists' identities and careers. ¶

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Dovima with Sacha, cloche and suit by Balenciaga, Café Les Deux Magots, Paris, 1955. Photo: Richard Avedon © The Richard Avedon Foundation.

Balenciaga: Master of Couture
McCord Museum, Montréal
June 15 to October 14, 2018
Organized by the Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A) of London. Curator: Cynthia Cooper, Head, Collections and Research, and Curator, Dress, Fashion and Textiles, McCord Museum.

Stephanie Weber

Narratives championing mid-century design giants as innovative geniuses vary little across the boundaries of genre. The mainstays in apparel design are described in much the same way as are architects, artists, and furniture designers: as individuals who single-handedly ushered in a new era of visual culture through their contribution in their field. Of course, prestigious fashion design houses benefit from the mythologization of their founders, who, often posthumously, are elevated to the status of cultural icons and household names. They are remembered as iconoclastic innovators of the intellectual and physical aspects of craft and skill. The two most recent fashion house retrospectives in Montreal, namely, that of Yves Saint Laurent in 2008 and of Jean Paul Gaultier in 2011, both presented at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, exalted the innovation and influence of the two successful designers with little reference to the labourers associated with the houses, thus saying little about the working conditions for or

contributions made by the "petites-mains" who are responsible for much of these designers' material legacies. In this tradition, The McCord Museum's *Balenciaga: Master of Couture* reveres the originality and craftsmanship of Cristóbal Balenciaga, especially as his clothing designs proliferated throughout Montreal and the globe in the mid-twentieth century. The exhibit constructs a narrative of his revolutionization of the female silhouette and a celebration of his bold independence, ideas that are explored through an emphasis on his extensive knowledge of fabric and technique and his exacting craft skills.

Organized by the Victoria & Albert Museum of London and including four of the fifteen Balenciaga designs from the McCord's permanent collection, the designs exhibited are mainly from the later years of the Paris couture house and its ancillary ateliers. The viewer is led through a selection of some of Balenciaga's most iconic gowns, suits, and sets from the 1950s and 1960s, and the exhibition highlights those designs that have earned archetypal status in fashion discourse. Hats are exhibited in one of the main spaces, and this display is flanked by interactive elements: on one side, a garment is available to be tried on, and on the other, the visitor is encouraged to fold a paper pattern into the design of the "one seam" dress for themselves. As part of the exhibition, the visitor is offered a tactile experience: one can construct and take home a "craft" of one's own, inspired by a "great" of design.

The exhibition forges connections with its locale, including photographs and documentation of some of Balenciaga's more well-known Montreal clients. The viewer is informed that these elegant Montreal women kept abreast of trends and paid for personal tailoring, cementing a particular notion of the in-vogue cosmopolitanism of the city. The McCord's slogan, "Our People Our Stories," suggests a commitment to the inclusion of local histories, though it is a relatively minor