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Gloria Groom, ed., *Impressionism, Fashion, and Modernity*. Exh. cat. Chicago, Ill.: The Art Institute of Chicago; in association with The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; and the Musée d'Orsay, Paris; and New Haven and London: Yale University Press: 2012. (In Paris, the exhibition and its catalogue bore the title *Impressionnisme et la mode*.) 336 pp. Key dates in fashion and commerce, checklist of the exhibition, appendices (fashion plates and *cartes de visite*), notes, selected bibliography, index. \$65 U.S. (hc). ISBN: 978-0-300-18451-8.

Review by Jane M. Roos, Hunter College and The Graduate Center of CUNY.

Philippe Dagen's review of *Impressionnisme et la mode*, shown at the Musée d'Orsay in 2012, ran under the headline "L'Impressionnisme, cette machine à cash-flow."^[1] Writing for *Le Monde*, one of the most prestigious newspapers in France, he disparaged the pairing of Impressionism and fashion as an attempt to maximize profits by pandering to popular taste. The exhibition demeaned the paintings, in his view, by ignoring their deeper significance and focusing on clothing—their most frivolous, "most superficial aspect." Admittedly this is Dagen at his contrarian best, but he was not the only critic to have questioned the exhibition's *raison d'être*.^[2] Absent from these reviews is a recognition of the more serious issues that drove the exhibition and its catalogue: that the connection between fashion and Impressionism originated in the aesthetic imperatives of French modernism and in the painters' pictorial strategies in the 1860s and 1870s.

In his often-quoted essay "The Painter of Modern Life," first published in 1863, Charles Baudelaire criticized contemporary art for its lack of contemporary dress: "Casting an eye over our exhibitions of modern pictures, we are struck by a general tendency among artists to dress all their subjects in the garments of the past."^[3] The practice derived, in his view, from the artists' lazy reluctance to seek out the particular beauty, the modernity, in the clothing of one's time. As he continued: "By 'modernity' I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable." Each age had its own modernity, so that to clothe figures of the 1860s, say, in the fashions of earlier times ruptured, for Baudelaire, the idea of "a completely viable whole."^[4]

In the mid-nineteenth century one need not have read Baudelaire to grasp the significance of contemporary dress for images of modern life. Already in the late 1840s, Gustave Courbet had made the point in paint, when he depicted the people of Ornans in the garments of the time. For Courbet, as for the Realists and Impressionists who followed, contemporary clothing was an essential strategy for signifying a particular moment in time: that is, for establishing a *specific*, here-and-now modernity and distinguishing it from all others. For artists working in Paris, which reigned as the fashion capital of the Western world, time-marker clothing meant the most recent cutting-edge styles rather than trickle-down imitations that might be clumsily made and a bit out of date. Recognizably contemporary locations, such as the boulevards of Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann's new and spectacular Paris, could establish a painting as anchored in the modern world; and chic, up-to-the-moment interiors could evoke the same idea. However, fashionable clothing was so time-sensitive that it could index modernity with much greater accuracy, concision, and flexibility. In the words of Édouard Manet, "The latest fashion, you see, is absolutely necessary for a painter. It's what matters most" (p. 243).

Conceived and directed by Gloria Groom of the Art Institute of Chicago, *Impressionism, Fashion, and Modernity* took a blazingly original approach to French art of the 1860s and 1870s. Large paintings by the Impressionists were exhibited alongside contemporary dresses, suits, and accessories, and the juxtaposition illuminated with unusual specificity the close attention these artists had given to the constantly changing fashions of the period. A secondary and surprising pleasure of the exhibition came from the decision to include works by the Impressionists' more conventional colleagues, which provided a fresh and unusually rich look at painterly practice in the period.

In shaping the exhibition, Groom drew upon contributions from specialists not only in the visual arts, but also in French literature, fashion, and the contemporary press. This interdisciplinary approach resulted in a refreshingly free-flowing catalogue that views the issues at stake from multiple perspectives and employs multiple methodologies. The topics of Impressionism, fashion, and modernity are divided into thirteen chapters that take a wide-angle view, and many of them end with a "focus section" that zooms in and discusses a relevant painting at length. In chapter one, Gary Tinterow launches the catalogue's themes by elucidating the changing role of modern fashion in French nineteenth-century painting. His essay moves from portraits by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres and Franz Xaver Winterhalter to figural works by the modernists and their colleagues, and to the pervasive "fashion fatigue" (p. 25) of the century's end. In the focus section Tinterow considers the erotic implications to Manet's *Young Lady in 1866* (1866) and to the pale pink *peignoir* the figure wears.

Groom's "The Social Network of Fashion" (chapter two) analyzes the ways in which the modernist painters "were nurtured and supported by their relationships with models, writers, and distributors and collectors of fashion and art" (p. 43). Rather than engaging professional models for their figural portrayals, the Impressionists used *modèles privilégiés*—sitters with whom the artists had a close relationship. As a result Manet's depictions of Victorine Meurent and Berthe Morisot, Claude Monet's of Camille Doncieux, and Pierre-Auguste Renoir's of Lise Tréhot have an affective dimension that is rarely seen in portrayals based on professional models. Groom also explored the ways in which the *modèle privilégié* often contributed her fashion sense and thus became a collaborator in the creative process. The chapter then considers the modernists' relationships with avant-garde writers and department-store founders, and Groom's focus section looks at the fashionable dress and jacket shown in Monet's *Camille* (1866) and the critical reception the painting received.

In chapter three, Heidi Brevik-Zender explored the fascination with fashion that occurred in French literature of the Second Empire. Looking to Baudelaire, she connected his influential essay of 1863 with his poetry, both aspects of his oeuvre manifesting the themes of fleetingness and immutability that compose the two halves of his concept of modernity. A key contribution of the essay concerns her discussion of artifice in relation to feminine appearance. For Baudelaire, as for Théophile Gautier, the female body needed enhancements to correct the imperfections of nature: corsets and crinolines to reshape a woman's anatomy, and rice powders, black kohl, and rouge to conceal what Gautier described as "the ruddy-faced healthy look that is an indecency in our civilization" (p. 57). As Brevik-Zender noted, Gautier's emphasis on artifice comes freighted with "an uneasy, misogynistic view of women's bodies that was typical of many male authors of his day" (ibid.). Finally, she probed Stéphane Mallarmé's interest in contemporary female fashion, which resulted in his short-lived periodical, *La Dernière Mode* and informed his search for "a new lyrical language" (p. 59).

Françoise Tétart-Vittu's essay turns to the Parisian fashion industry and traces the personnel involved from the manufacture of fabric to the sale of a finished article. A key participant in the process was the industrial designer, who devised the fashions and provided detailed illustrations to guide in their making. These illustrations morphed into the paper patterns that became available in the mid-1860s, a development that greatly expanded the public for the latest trend-setting designs. Also in place by that time was an efficient publicity system that employed the talents of fashion illustrators to promote the new designs via store catalogues and advertisements and in the well-developed fashion press. An

efficient mail-order system made Parisian garments available throughout the provinces and abroad, with fashion brokers acting as intermediaries between the producer and the customer. The introduction of copyright laws in 1880 ensured Paris's preeminence as the fashion capital of the Western world for many years to come. In the focus section Tétart-Vittu analyzes Manet's *La Parisienne* of 1875, the title indicating a Parisian female type that had become synonymous with impeccably high style and appeared frequently in paintings by the Impressionists and their contemporaries.

In chapter five, "Fashion en Plein Air," Birgit Haase scrutinizes the items of apparel that appear in landscapes by Courbet, Manet, and the Impressionists. By the mid-1860s Monet had begun to paint with broad brushstrokes and sharp distinctions between shadow and light, and in several large landscapes he fused this avant-garde approach toward form with content of commensurate modernity. In the *Luncheon on the Grass*,^[5] the female figures sport the latest summer day dresses and ensembles, and as Haase perceptively observed, "the short-lived fashion of the day—itsself a symptom of the time—expresses, according to avant-garde aesthetics, the idea of the fleetingness of modern perception" (p. 92). The chapter analyzes the construction of one of the ensembles depicted by Monet, and then discusses the implications of several summer dresses that appear in plein-air paintings by Renoir. Monet's idyllic *Women in the Garden* (1866) occupies Haase in the focus section, where she reviews the dress styles he depicted and suggests the influence of both Doncieux and fashion plates. Noting the idleness of these women and the emphasis on their cumbersome dresses, she posited that "Monet's portrayal mirrors a patriarchal image of womanhood, characteristic of the bourgeoisie at this time (p. 105).

"Fashion and Intimate Portraits," by Justine De Young, differentiates Impressionist portraits from those by conventional painters in terms of the former's informality, intimacy, and immediacy. Often the sitters are women, and often they are shown in moments of quiet solitude. Emphasizing the paintings' temporality, she links the figures' currently fashionable day dresses and *peignoirs* to the shifting effects of delicate lighting and "diaphanous shadow" (p. 108). The paintings taken into account include interior scenes by Edgar Degas, Morisot, Manet, James Tissot, and Renoir. The focus section, written by Valerie Steele, looks at Manet's *Nana* (1877) in terms of undergarments, notably Nana's blue satin corset. Characterizing underwear as a "liminal category" (p. 126) between nudity and dress, Steele traces the history of corsets into mid-nineteenth-century Paris, where probably over one million of them were purchased each year. Whereas the typical corset was made of plain white cotton or linen, it bears little resemblance to the garment Nana wears: "Nana is every inch the fashionable demimondaine, spearheading the new fashion for corsets made from luxury materials like satin in colors such as blue, pink, and red" (p. 127). The rest of her intimate attire consists of a chemise, a petticoat, and drawers—all made of silk—plus "racy blue silk stockings" and high heels (p. 127). As for the painting's eroticism, Steele concludes that "[i]t was the movement between dress and undress—and, of course, the idea of a woman who takes off her clothes for a man—that aroused and scandalized viewers" (p. 133).

Chapter seven, written by Philippe Thiébaud, studies male fashion and "virile urbanity" (p. 135). In a period when female clothing took center stage, the fashionable Parisian male wore subdued garments, meant to set off and enhance the apparel of the women around him. This role as "accompanist" (p. 137) demanded plain fabrics and somber colors, as depicted in paintings by Henri Fantin-Latour, Degas, and Gustave Caillebotte. The cut of male clothing varied little over the years, though the early Third Republic saw the popularity of the *paletot*, a loosely cut short overcoat that provided a more comfortable alternative to a frockcoat or redingote. The essay also considers the male bathing attire in Frédéric Bazille's *Summer Scene* (1869) and the fad for the cigars and cigarettes that turn up in Impressionist works. For the focus section, Guy Cogeval joined Thiébaud in elucidating the male fashions seen in Tissot's paintings, especially his group portrait of the well-dressed and "arrogantly relaxed gentry" (p. 151) of *The Circle of the Rue Royale* (1868).

A brief, but informative essay by David Van Zanten takes to the streets of Paris and looks at the transformations wrought by Haussmann during the Second Empire. Much has been written about the

rebuilding of Paris and the impact of its wide, rectilinear boulevards, but Van Zanten's focus is more subtle and specific in that he examines the ways in which certain features of the new architecture affected patterns of visual perception. Large plate-glass windows opened cafés and shops to the street, and shallow balconies linked interiors to the outdoors, these developments informing the looking-through or looking-across sight lines implied in paintings by Caillebotte, Manet, and Tissot.

Groom's essay, "Spaces of Modernity," pursues modern Paris further and considers how Haussmannization created sites for "the cultures and performances of fashion" (p. 166).^[6] Among paintings of Parisian street life, she contrasts Jean Béraud's emphasis on stylish garments and social interaction with Caillebotte's "much more ambiguous statement on fashion and manners" (p. 166) in his large-scale *Pont de l'Europe* (1876). After discussing the role of fashion in garden scenes by Manet and Monet, she comments on the absence of modernist paintings of department stores—seemingly readymade sites for referencing modernity by linking it to the fleetingness of fashion and the grand new emporia of Paris—and concludes that it stemmed from a reluctance to associate their paintings with the commercial transactions that shopping entailed. The essay then considers evening dress, as it relates to paintings by Morisot, Mary Cassatt, Béraud, and Tissot, and the focus section, by Aileen Ribeiro, ends the chapter with a close and sensitive reading of Caillebotte's *Paris Street: Rainy Day* (1876).

Chapter ten segues into photography, and Elizabeth Anne McCauley addresses the mania for *cartes de visite* and the way they communicated fashion and promoted the cult of appearances. Invented in the 1850s, these small, inexpensive photographs, about the size of a visiting card, appealed to a wide public that avidly collected images of celebrities—"not only members of the court, but also entertainers, courtesans, and occasionally geniuses from the arts, music, and literature" (p. 198). For neophyte sitters, the purchase of such photographs, along with photographers' manuals, provided basic instruction in how to present a pleasing appearance before the camera. McCauley also investigated the (sometimes comic) reactions that set in when *cartes de visite* spread across the social spectrum, and the uneasy relation between the photographic and the painted portrait. Looking at Monet's *Portrait of Madame Louis Joachim Gaudibert*, she suggests that the *carte de visite* influenced the pose of Monet's figure, as well as the tendency for clothing to dominate the image.

Tétart-Vittu's "Shops versus Department Stores" questions Émile Zola's theory, as expressed in his novel *Au bonheur des dames* (1883), that the two types of establishments existed in conflict. Rather, she traces the increasing stylishness of small shops and the emergence of larger, more sumptuous *maisons* and posits that department stores evolved from those earlier purveyors of fashion. By 1865 department stores offered their bourgeois clientele ready-made imitations of the luxurious features and fashions found in more prestigious establishments. Tétart-Vittu, also, questions why the Impressionists rarely depicted shop or department-store interiors and theorized that the artists were reluctant to have their paintings associated with the by-then ubiquitous commercial fashion advertisements. Exceptional in this regard is Degas's *The Millinery Shop* (1879/86), which Groom discussed in the chapter's focus section. Partial to hats, Degas frequently situated his paintings in a milliner's shop, which had for him parallels with an artist's studio. After considering the changes Degas made to the painting's composition, which X-radiographs and infrared radiographs have recently revealed, Groom engages the issue of the woman's social status, and, concluding that she is probably a milliner, provides a bleak account of the meager wages and sexual harassment that such women often faced. The chapter also broaches the fetishes attached to hats and shoes, the latter stemming from the period's unease with the fully uncovered foot.

In chapter twelve, Justine De Young looks at fashion in art from the perspective of the press. Clothing had long been read as revealing a person's character and predispositions. With the proliferation of paintings depicting modern dress in the 1860s, discussion of the issue became widespread. Critics often equated extravagant fashions with loose morals and tasteful dress with bourgeois respectability, and a painting's reception could be influenced by the clothing an artist chose to depict. Contrasting the

response given to paintings by Tissot and Charles Carolus-Duran, the chapter proceeds into the ultra-conservative years of the early Third Republic, when ideology of the post-war “moral-order” government engendered an uneasiness about fashionable dress, which influenced the readings of paintings by Manet et Renoir. An exception, however, was Renoir’s portrait of *Madame Georges Charpentier and Her Children* (1878), the success of which De Young attributes to the “the bourgeois domesticity of the scene, compounded by the restrained sophistication of Madame Charpentier’s dress, [which] made any aspersions on her morality impossible” (p. 239). Another factor was Marguerite Charpentier’s well-known prominence in the literary world, a subject which Sylvie Patry picks up and analyzes in the chapter’s focus section. Wife of the prosperous publisher Georges Charpentier, Marguerite participated in managing the business and created an influential literary circle that attracted a wide range of people involved in the arts. Patry also examines the Charpentiers as collectors of Impressionist works and the significance the painting held for Renoir as “a manifesto of modern portraiture” (p. 248).

“Changing Silhouettes,” by Helen Burnham, reviews female fashions of the *fin-de-siècle*, a period when women became more active in the public realm. In *Mary Cassatt at the Louvre: The Paintings Gallery* (1885), Degas portrayed the painter wearing the type of stylish tailored dress that had become fashionable all across the social spectrum. However, just as some fashions for women became suitlike and slimmer in silhouette, the bustle returned “with a vengeance” (p. 263), this time in the form of a much larger protrusion, as seen in paintings by Jacques-Émile Blanche and Henry Lerolle and in Georges Seurat’s *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte—1884* (1884-86). Throughout the chapter Burnham relates the more structured silhouettes of the century’s end to the period’s new aesthetics, in the sense that both fashion and art sought to impose order and “control over the unruly phenomena of urban life” (p. 269).

As I hope these synopses convey, Groom brings together a groundbreaking compendium of well-honed scholarly essays, which radiantly illuminate the deep-set connections between Impressionism, fashion, and modernity. Although I sometimes disagreed with the conclusions an author reached, and although I would have preferred a checklist organized by catalogue number (rather than date), these criticisms amount to no more than quibbles in view of the rich tapestry of insights that Groom and her team have created. Throughout, the shifts in narrative voice and areas of professional expertise energize the catalogue, avoid the myopia of a single point of view, and offer an invaluable model of interdisciplinary collaboration. I cannot conclude this review without mentioning Roy Brooks’s elegant design, which beautifully structures and frames the essays, as well as re-creating on the page a sense of the exhibition’s visual impact.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Gary Tinterow, “The Rise and Role of Fashion in French Nineteenth-Century Painting”

“Édouard Manet: *Young Lady in 1866*”

Gloria Groom, “The Social Network of Fashion”

“Claude Monet: *Camille*”

Heidi Brevik-Zender, “Writing Fashion from Balzac to Mallarmé”

Françoise Tétart-Vittu, “Who Creates Fashion?”

“Édouard Manet: *The Parisienne*”

Birgit Haase, "Fashion in Plein-Air"

"Claude Monet: *Women in the Garden*"

Justine De Young, "Fashion and Intimate Portraits"

Valerie Steele, "Édouard Manet: *Nana*"

Philippe Thiébaud, "An Ideal of Virile Urbanity"

Guy Cogeval and Stéphane Guégan, "James Tissot: *The Circle of the Rue Royale*"

David Van Zanten, "Looking Through, Across, and Up: The Architectural Aesthetics of the Paris Street"

Gloria Groom, "Spaces of Modernity"

Aileen Ribeiro, "Gustave Caillebotte: *Paris Street, Rainy Day*"

Elizabeth Anne McCauley, "Photography, Fashion, and the Cult of Appearances"

Françoise Tétart-Vittu, "Shops versus Department Stores"

Gloria Groom, "Edgar Degas: *The Millinery Shop*"

Justine De Young, "Fashion and the Press"

Sylvie Patry, "Pierre-Auguste Renoir: *Madame Georges Charpentier and Her Children*"

Helen Burnham, "Changing Silhouettes"

NOTES

[1] Philippe Dagen, "L'Impressionnisme, cette machine à cash-flow," *Le Monde*, Oct. 4, 2012, <http://www.lemonde.fr>, cited May 15, 2014.

[2] See, for example, Anka Muhlstein's review, which raised a similar objection, albeit in milder form: "in fact, the link between Impressionism and fashion is tenuous, verging on the deceptive"; "Paris: The Thrill of the Modern," *New York Review of Books*, May 9, 2013, <http://www.nybooks.com>, cited 2 June 2014.

[3] Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life," in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. and ed., Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon Press, 1995), p. 12.

[4] Ibid.

[5] These comments obtain for all the paintings relating to *Luncheon on the Grass*: the two studies, as well as the two fragments cut from the unfinished, large-scale final painting.

[6] The quotation comes from John Potvin, ed., *The Spaces and Places of Fashion, 1800-2007* (London: Routledge, 2009).

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