
H-France Review Vol. 16 (July 2016), No. 146

Margaret MacNamidhe, *Delacroix and His Forgotten World: The Origins of Romantic Painting*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris & Co, 2015. 60 colour images. 280 x 240 mm. 224 pp. \$49.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN: 978-1-78076-937-0.

Review by Katie Hornstein, Dartmouth College.

The title of Margaret MacNamidhe's *Delacroix and His Forgotten World: The Origins of Romantic Painting* suggests the author's ambitions to examine Delacroix as an originator of French romanticism and reclaim aspects of his practice that have been neglected by other scholars. The title also suggests the book's monographic approach to the artist. Upon closer inspection, however, it soon becomes clear that MacNamidhe has not written a traditional, single-artist monograph. Rather, this study revolves around a very specific set of issues related to one of his early history paintings, Delacroix's submission to the Salon of 1824, *The Massacres of Chios*. The book's arguments focus on the problems of form and facture in the work of Delacroix and other contemporary history painters who submitted works to the Salon of 1824.

In addition to analyzing the *Chios* in great detail, the most important contribution of this beautifully illustrated book to the field of nineteenth-century French art history is its willingness to give the other history paintings at the Salon of 1824 by Delacroix's contemporaries, Xavier Sigalon, Michel-Martin Drolling and Léon Cogniet among others, serious consideration in relationship to the singular, yet uncertain achievement of the *Massacres of Chios*. It is also to be commended that many of these long-forgotten paintings by Delacroix's contemporaries receive the honors of full-page color reproduction. It must be said, however, that this book occasionally lacks focus and dwells on details of Delacroix's practice that are not connected back to a larger argument about the artist. This is likely due to MacNamidhe's tendency throughout the book to concentrate on isolated details of paintings at the expense of the whole. The unique brand of formalism that the author relies on has the effect of focusing attention on the fragment as a formal and narrative feature of Delacroix's painting, which theorists past and present have understood in terms of problems of dispersal and formal incoherence. It might even be argued that this book's methodology reproduces these aspects of Delacroix's practice. This strategy sometimes comes at the expense of a broader argument, even if it also allows readers to benefit from "seeing" small portions of large paintings in fresh ways.

In the preface, MacNamidhe announces that the book's "polemical move" is to begin not with the Salon of 1822 (the first Salon in which Delacroix participated), but with the Salon of 1824. MacNamidhe justifies this decision by arguing that "the kinds of work he did in the 1820s and beyond were shaped by the setting of the 1824 Salon, along with its participants" (p. viii). But one wonders if this is less a question of "polemics" than of selectivity, since it is not the case that any consideration of Delacroix must necessarily begin with 1822. While *Chios* is not as iconic as some of Delacroix's other works, established scholars of nineteenth-century French art, including Darcy Grimaldo-Grigsby, Elisabeth Fraser, and Nina Athanassoglou-Kallmyer have written extensively about it.^[1] The painting is routinely reproduced in college textbooks and is prominently displayed in the Louvre. It is therefore all

the more remarkable that Margaret MacNamidhe has found something new to say about it: the most compelling part of her argument about the painting is her sharp visual analysis of some of its details that appear in the first three chapters.

These three chapters deal both directly and indirectly with the painting. Chapter one is a historiographic chapter that discusses what the author calls an “unexamined interpretative tradition of dispersed responses to Delacroix’s painting” (p. 3). In addition to connecting Delacroix’s practice to some of the arguments about visual modernity made by Michael Fried, Clement Greenberg, and Jonathan Crary, MacNamidhe identifies a failure among some of Delacroix’s nineteenth-century hagiographers, including Charles Baudelaire and Paul Signac, to come to a consensus regarding the paintings that would, taken as a group, comprise Delacroix’s overall achievement. A fascinating two-page spread reproduces all of the paintings that Baudelaire listed in his discussion of the artist in his “Salon of 1846.” Other color plates reproduce Delacroix paintings that one rarely sees in color, such as *The Virgin of the Sacred Heart* (1821, Ajaccio Cathedral, Corsica). The chapter shows how Signac and Baudelaire focused on isolated details of paintings at the expense of the whole, which is a device that the author also uses over the course of the book’s first three chapters to describe several works by Delacroix, especially the *Chios*.

Chapter two examines the legacy of Davidian history painting as it was both challenged and emulated by history painters at the Salon of 1824. Here, the author considers the criticism of Jacques-Louis David’s former student-turned art critic, Étienne-Jean Delécluze, in relationship to Delacroix and other history painters who exhibited paintings that year. The author is interested in Delécluze’s preference for history paintings that depicted “favored or sovereign figures who appeared as if sealed off from the work” (p. 52). She dedicates most of the chapter to considering this choice in light of the prominently pictured male nude in *Chios* and takes the reader through some of the other history paintings on display at the Salon of 1824 that interested Delécluze. To this end, the chapter gives serious consideration to paintings that have almost completely vanished from contemporary art historical accounts of the nineteenth century, including most notably Alexandre Abel de Pujol’s *Germanicus on the Battlefield of Varus* (1824, Musées d’art et d’histoire, La Rochelle), Victor Schnetz’s *Saint Genevieve Distributing Provisions during the Siege of Paris* (1822, Notre-Dame de Bonne Nouvelle, Paris) and Michel-Martin Drolling’s *The Separation of Polyxena and Hecuba* (1824, Musée Crozatier, Le Puy-en-Velay).

Chapter three considers Delacroix’s facture in *Chios*. The chapter reproduces a proliferation of details with increasing visual intensity as the chapter unfolds. They focus on two key areas of the painting: on the mother figure on the ground who critics identified in 1824 as hovering between life and death, and on the horse in the middle of the painting. A particularly compelling insight revolves around the slippery interaction between the horse’s mane and the sky, where “atmospheric effects sift into the horse’s mane” (p. 73). Some of MacNamidhe’s formal analyses, such as this one, are richly evocative; they help focus our attention on the importance of careful and sustained looking as the basis for interpreting a painting. Despite the visual and textual pleasure that these extended passages of formal analysis can provide, the focus on details at times creates a scattered effect for the reader, who is left searching for a larger idea to emerge.

The last two chapters of the book are devoted to issues that are connected to the Salon of 1824, specifically Xavier Sigalon’s submission that year, *Locusta, Giving to Narcissus a Poison Destined for Britannicus, Tests It on a Young Slave* (1824, Musée des Beaux-arts, Nîmes) and Stendhal’s responses to history paintings exhibited that year. For those interested in French academic painting that has fallen into relative obscurity, MacNamidhe’s chapter on Xavier Sigalon’s *Locusta* will prove illuminating. This reader found this chapter to be the most original, clearly written and pleasurable to read. It does an excellent job describing the plight of history painting during the Restoration through an almost completely forgotten, yet mesmerizing, painting. Unfortunately, it is also very short in comparison to

the rest of the chapters, so it also feels a bit orphaned in the context of the book's larger focus on Delacroix.

MacNamidhe's intellectual debt to Michael Fried is apparent in nearly every chapter of the book; lengthy discussions about matters as diverse as Delacroix's experimentation with the genre of history painting, his struggle to produce a *tableau* and the relationship between Denis Diderot and Stendhal's art criticism are set into relief against issues staked out by Fried's books and articles. There is no question that using Fried's pioneering scholarship advances MacNamidhe's arguments in some sections of the book, especially in her fascinating discussion about Diderot's Salon criticism in Chapter five. But because Fried is referred to so many times and so consistently, the scholarly conversation risks becoming very narrow at times. This reader wanted to hear MacNamidhe's own voice a bit more. If Fried's scholarship is addressed in a deep and generous way by the author, her repeated reference to a textbook chapter written by Tom Crow (the textbook is cited in the course of the book on at least five separate occasions) suggests more of a summary approach to the work of other scholars whose scholarship would seem to be more relevant to the artists she is writing about. For example, I was puzzled by the author's decision to base an important discussion on the question of the painterly origins of Romanticism in relation to Antoine-Jean Gros's *Battle of Nazareth* on Crow's textbook chapter. She credits Crow for having made an original argument about the *Nazareth* without mentioning the important scholarship of Susan Siegfried and David O'Brien that Crow used (and openly acknowledged having used) to write his chapter, which was intended for an undergraduate reading audience (p. 14).^[2]

In addition to the five main chapters, there are also two appendices. Appendix one reproduces the text of Étienne-Jean Delécluze's 1832 short story *Le Mécanicien roi* in French. This is a text that the author relates to Delécluze's art criticism in chapter two of the book. While it is wonderful to have the text reproduced in full as a reference, it would have been more valuable to translate it into English to suit the English-speaking audience for whom this book is written (it has never been translated into English; the French text has also been freely available on Gallica since 2007). Appendix two comes as something of a surprise since it is in fact an extra chapter on the relationship between Théodore Géricault and Delacroix as it relates to the presence of horses in their paintings. The text feels out of place, and adds to the scattered impression that one is given from the book overall.

The presence of an extra chapter in the appendix betrays the book's sometimes confusing organization, which defies many of the conventions of scholarly book publishing, notably the organization of chapters into a logical sequence of issues and arguments that build upon one another and establish a set of inter-related conclusions. At times, the style of writing, which at its best guides the reader into wonderfully suggestive and poetic passages of formal analysis, sometimes makes it difficult to comprehend some of the complexities of the arguments being deployed. Overall, this book will appeal to readers who are already familiar with Delacroix's practice and with nineteenth-century French painting in general. It might also be useful in the context of the classroom, specifically with regard to teaching art history students how to put formal analysis to work in the interpretation of painting.

NOTES

[1] See Darcy Grimaldo-Grigsby, *Extremities: Painting Empire in Post-Revolutionary France* (New Haven, Conn., and London: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 237-280; Elisabeth Fraser, *Delacroix, Art and Patrimony in Post-Revolutionary France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 39-77; Nina Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, *French Images from the Greek War of Independence, 1821-1830* (New Haven, Conn., and London: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 14-37.

[2] The textbook chapter in question is Thomas Crow, "Classicism in Crisis: Gros to Delacroix," in *Nineteenth Century Art: A Critical History*, ed. Stephen F. Eisenman (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2011), pp. 59-86. Thomas Crow states in the bibliography section of the textbook: "I want gratefully to

acknowledge research by others, published and unpublished, which has informed Chapters 1 and 2...David O'Brien on Gros's *Battle of Nazareth*; Susan Siegfried likewise on the *Nazareth*" (p. 489).

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ISSN 1553-9172