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**Frances Fowle and Richard Thomason, Eds.,** *Soil and Stone: Impressionism, Urbanism, Environment*. Aldershot and Burlington, VT.: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003. xiv + 175 pp. Notes. £52.50 (cl). ISBN 0-7546-3685-2.

Review by William Hauptman, Independent Scholar, Lausanne, Switzerland.

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This collection of ten essays originated as lectures delivered in a symposium in Edinburgh in 2001 around the exhibition *Monet: The Seine and the Sea*, then in preparation and which was to be mounted in the refurbished rooms of the Royal Scottish Academy from August to October 2003. The symposium was generated by the Visual Arts Research Institute of Edinburgh, established in 1999, whose goal was to foster closer research ties between curatorial and academic groups of scholars. Because the theme of the exhibition developed interlocking notions of the country and the city, and the impact of agrarian and then industrialized urban society, the essays reach far beyond art historical considerations. The resulting dialogue therefore takes into consideration a wide scope of economic, social, and literary elements as related to Impressionist ideology in very broad terms, indeed following current trends to open fields by employing sister fields. Considering that the themes of the symposium were already treated in many different ways, from an exhibition entitled *The Country and the City* three decades ago, to individual articles and other papers since, the essays published here are intended to revise or update material already explored in other contexts.

As in any collection of studies by diverse authors, the approach of different scholars tends to vary, as does quality, methods of research, expression of arguments, and processes of demonstration. While all of the essays relate directly and indirectly to the general theme of land, environment, society, and art, they equally expose aspects of the subject that are at times incompatible within a unified collection. The essays in fact range dramatically from the reflections of well-known art historians of Impressionism, such as John House, to the expositions of such scholars as David Hopkin, a social historian, whose specialty is the oral literature of rural France, thus reaching disciplines far afield from purely art historical considerations. Consequently, subjects extend to sometimes incongruous and extraordinary aspects of Impressionist ideology as they offer diverse views of urbanistic, environmental, and spoken traditions. Themes thus traverse Courbet's melding of realist and academic themes; the application of auctions and market places by Rousseau and Diaz in promoting their landscapes; provincial nostalgia in Millet; the importance of Monticelli's painting in Provence; and Monet's series of paintings of Rouen cathedral. In doing so, they sometimes skirt the accepted bounds of Impressionism as defined by art historians and opt for interpretations that are on the perimeter of these.

The more traditional art historical essays are generally anchored in familiar territory and therefore develop previous notions in ways that are hardly evident or in some instances particularly relevant. Paul Galvez, whose biography is not included in the list of contributors, writes about some of Courbet's painterly ideas without advancing matters significantly or adding to the ideas we already have of his work, sources, ideas, or techniques. So too Claire Willson's writing on the influence of the new Paris envisioned by Haussmann's restructuring process on the budding Impressionists. The essays on the Provence of Cézanne, Van Gogh, and Monticelli, and the duality between the modernity of Monet's Rouen Cathedral series and the nostalgia for the past seem also slight, however interesting they might be. All of these are to some degree extended footnotes, stretched to show other aspects of the picture of Impressionism and its times, but they can hardly be said to be fundamental to the general reader who has not yet read the basic sources.

More troubling, however, is the too broad approach to the problem that is underlined particularly by essays with especially curious subjects that encircle art historical ideas only in very nebulous terms. Michael Pakenham, a scholar of French literature, explores the sensual impact of Zola's *Le Ventre de Paris* (1873), while Anna Green contributes an essay delightfully entitled "Rivers of lemonade and mountains of sugar," which discusses the representations of country and urban life in French children's literature. Both argue for the importance of peripheral areas as important to painters inclined toward Impressionism, but it is difficult to connect either essay with the pictorial material at hand. Pakenham's essay, which is absorbing for its insights into Zola's sensual world of sights,

sounds, and atmosphere, is difficult to literally situate among those contributions that should have centered on a substantially pictorial problem. Add to this Hopkin's essay on oral history and folk geography in Brittany and one tends to wonder where the central thesis lies or in which direction the collection is headed. None of these essays provides material that truly enlightens our views of Impressionist art or provokes thought on its history, execution, influence, or any other matter that seems significant. Despite the dialogue between sister disciplines the volume wishes to promote, the true place of these essays is elsewhere, not in a volume that places the word "Impressionism" before "urbanism" or "environment." For the art historian or the lay reader interested in any aspect of Impressionist art in France, there is indeed little here that opens new ground or even sows the seed of new thinking.

There is in fact not much to applaud in this curious potpourri that under the guise of an academic colloquy has no binding center that can be clearly discerned, despite certain insights that are carefully prepared in some of the writers' thoughts. Moreover, many of the essays are marred by the fact that they read as lectures that have been inadequately edited for the publication. The results show a fluidity that has its place in the lecture hall but appears awkward on the page. The volume, too, includes illustrations that are reproduced in mediocre black and white, which makes it all the more difficult to defend the excessive price of the book even by recent art historical standards--\$94.95 in the American market. The volume, therefore, is hardly destined for the popular market, or can be recommended for it, but will surely remain on the library shelf where specialists might consult a specific ideology professed by an individual contributor.

#### LIST OF ESSAYS

- Richard Thomson, "Introduction."
- John House, "The viewer on the beach."
- Paul Galvez, "Courbet's touch."
- Simon Kelly, "'This dangerous game': Rousseau, Diaz and the uses of the auction in the marketing of landscapes."
- Bradley Fratello, "Footsteps in Normandy: Jean-François Millet and provincial nostalgia in late-nineteenth-century France."
- David Hopkin, "Legendary places: Oral history and folk geography in nineteenth-century Brittany."
- Anna Green, "'Rivers of lemonade and mountains of sugar': Representations of country and city in nineteenth-century French children's literature."
- Clare A.P. Willsdon, "'Promenades et plantations': Impressionism, conservation and Haussmann's reinvention of Paris."
- Michael Pakenham, "The insatiable appetite of Paris : Zola's Claude Lamier before L'Œuvre."
- Frances Fowle, "Painting like a Provençal: Cézanne, Van Gogh and the secret of Monticelli's 'alchemy.'"
- Richard Thomson, "Monet's 'Rouen Cathedrals': Anarchism, Gothic architecture and instantaneous photography."

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