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### Peter Parshall (ed.), *The Darker Side of Light - Arts of Privacy 1850-1900*

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## REFERENCES

Peter Parshall (ed.), *The Darker Side of Light - Arts of Privacy 1850-1900* (Farnham and Washington: Ashgate and National Gallery of Art, 2009), 180 p, ISBN: 978-1-84822-021-8

- 1 *The Darker Side of Light - Arts of Privacy 1850-1900* is the catalogue of an exhibition that was on view at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, from April 5 through June 28, 2009. It was then shown at the National Gallery of Art, October 1, 2009 through January 18, 2010 and ended at the Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago, from February 11 through June 10, 2010. The editor is Peter Parshall, Curator of Old Master Prints at the National Gallery in Washington, D.C., who curated the exhibition. The exhibition centered mainly on art from France and Germany, but also included works by artists in Britain, Belgium, the United States, and Norway. More than 120 works on paper were featured, notably prints, but also drawings, illustrated books and portfolios, along with several small sculptures. Most of these objects were drawn from the National Gallery's extensive collection.
- 2 The catalogue includes four fully illustrated chapters: the first one reflects on late 19th-century collecting, the next two focus on a selection of prints, and the last one on sculpture.
- 3 The first essay, by Peter Parshall, deals with the experience of owning prints, that were taken out of shelves to be viewed—which was a common 19th-century private activity, especially during the etching revival of the 1860s-1880s in England, France, Germany, Belgium, and Austria. This revival set its hierarchies (eg. the original print as opposed to the reproduction of artistic masterpieces), created its institutions (for instance, the Société des Aquafortistes founded in 1863), its commercial rhetoric—even though the market was never really profitable—, used by its defenders and its apologists such as

Baudelaire. The private confiding self-revelatory character of the print made it propitious to shadowed subjects and arcane states of mind, linking it to the romantic idea as a means of direct communication with the artist. Less publicly exposed, prints—which were destined for portfolios and not for framing—provided leeway for transgression of decorum and lifted the constraints of etiquette. Sometimes more expressionistic in their pathos, they potentially offered an arena for artistic experimentation.

- 4 Privacy and domesticity were specifically bourgeois Western concepts which evolved in the 19th century and were gendered. The domestic interior was widely discussed, and tastemakers (such as Charles Locke Eastlake, Edith Wharton, for instance) published their instructions, destined to an aspiring bourgeoisie looking for standards of good taste. In 1871, Jacob von Falke published a study of the history of the house where he said women were qualified—as guardians of domesticity—for the daily running of the house and its decoration. Arranging the interior was the woman's province, but the venerable pastime of collecting was the man's preserve. However, the ways of acquiring prints through booksellers, art deals and auction houses often involved both men and women, who invested a lot of their time ferreting actively, sometimes following the prescriptions of landmark treatises such as John Evelyn's *Sculptura*. Private collecting provided fertile terrain for indulging in oddities such as obsession with classification, connoisseurship and the fetishist pursuit of rarity. (Print collections were no longer encyclopaedic like during the Renaissance.) Even though this shared experience created silent fraternities and communities of humanists, such traits were ridiculed by La Bruyère, Wilkie Collins, to name but a few.
- 5 In the second essay, Hollis Clayson starts by saying that 19th-century Haussmanization exalted private domestic space just as much as public urbanism, and as a corollary, enhanced subjectivity and emotional intimacy, especially of female protagonists. Clayson then examines closely some of the prints of the exhibition involving women: women asleep, pensive women engaged in reading, toilette scenes, women in company are images that proliferated in the 1880s.
- 6 The author is very sensitive to the eeriness, the edgy and baleful strain that hover in the images. She delves into the *unheimlich* quality of the introverted (quasi-claustrophobic) private precincts of the home at a time when domestic space was greatly celebrated. Although some of her description may seem a bit far-fetched, she knows all too well how, in quirky moody scenes, propriety can go awry, and how scenes of women as hothouse plants caged in their well-padded private interior had their dystopic underside—modern bourgeois women confined to a haunted house.
- 7 In the third chapter, Christiane Hertel traces the origin of the 19th-century German idealist philosophy and romantic art back to the Lutheran view of religious freedom as a matter of personal conscience. She examines the works of three founding members of the Berlin Secession—organised in May 1898 to counter the generally insipid and worn-out production of art of the period—: Käthe Kollwitz, Max Liebermann and Max Klinger, who came from different social backgrounds. Kollwitz was of an educated middle-class family, and her success was financially more modest than Liebermann or Klinger who both came from wealthy bourgeois families. Hertel also alludes to the hovering influence of Adolph Menzel—an artist of the previous generation—, and mentions Liebermann's will to subvert the deep-rooted notion of "German interiority".

- 8 In his popular treatise *Painting and Drawing*, Klinger coined the term *Griffelkunst*, that is monochromatic stylus drawings which, he claimed, were freer in their choice of topic. Other liberties specific to drawings were the “unadulterated outline, the possibility of working without a definitive background, the ready amalgamation with ornament” (88). Hertel compares and contrasts the vigorous sketchy style of Lieberman with Klinger’s technical and representational freedom, and with Kollwitz’s very tense and emotionally charged placement of masses and figures in her cross-hatched and grainy lithographs.
- 9 This chapter’s interest lies mainly in the series of microanalyses Hertel engages in, going over Klinger’s attraction to female culprits, Kollwitz’s empathy for social misery and plight, and her dark expressive intensity. Relevantly—considering the medium lends itself well to depicting privacy—, many prints draw their inspiration from themes related to the dramatic intrusion of the public sphere in private life. But unfortunately, the reason why they do is not developed.
- 10 Moreover, the links between all three artists do not seem closely-knit enough to drive the analysis very powerfully and efficiently. Their comparison is a little artificial at times and justified mainly by the fact they are contemporaneous. Furthermore, Liebermann’s strengths are not pinpointed, or at least less convincingly than those of Kollwitz, for instance.
- 11 In chapter 4, Nicholas Penny goes through different examples of sculptures which can be associated with the idea of privacy:
  - Sculptures that are small in scale—such as bronze statuettes—require close-up perusal, and were often reduced reproductions of marble carvings that had been awarded a prize in a public exhibition, especially in Paris (where the number of public commissions was much greater than in Great Britain). The reproductive techniques of the early 19th century, such as sand casting, lost popularity in favour of a fad for lost wax casting introduced in Britain in 1883. It was valued for its precision and uniqueness (its direct method was revived by Gemito and Alfred Gilbert).
  - Other objects linked to scale are medals or very low relief sculptures, which demanded close scrutiny under particular angles (Dupré, Roty, Charpentier).
  - Other examples include nature casts—already made in Renaissance Italy and 16th-century Padua—, sketch models exploited commercially by Hébrard (by Dalou for example), body fragments, such as the casts of hands of the departed—recalling the disembodied hands which visited the popular spiritualist séances, or the dismembered parts of the body that were frequent in Rodin’s art. In the 19th century, plaster casts made by 18th-century specialist plaster-cast makers called *formatori* (who were often Italian) began to circulate outside the artist’s studio.
- 12 This book with its many quality illustrations has the advantage of probing into an area which is not often studied and makes us discover lesser known artists. Maybe the format of the catalogue is to be held accountable for the fact that sometimes examples are juxtaposed and closely analysed, with the danger that the reader lose track of the historical thread and national specificities. A broader scope with more synthetic ideas would at times have been welcome. Moreover, one may regret the lack of bibliography, even though there are notes.
- 13 All in all, the book must be praised nonetheless for opening the intimate European print collectors’ cabinets, and for granting the intellectual pursuits of artists in the late

19th century—that were kept aside and stored away in albums and portfolios—the attention and consideration they deserve. It is its great merit to throw into light artwork that remained offstage. Reading this book restores the quiet enjoyment of focused study, which the medium of the exhibition—which hangs the works on public walls by definition—cannot reproduce.

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**Keywords:** prints, etching, gender, exhibition, Unheimlich, Griffelkunst, Berlin Secession, formatori, sculpture, medal, low-relief, lost-wax casting

**Mots-clés:** estampes, société des aquafortistes, eau-forte, gravure, sécession berlinoise, sculpture, médailles, bas-relief, moulage à cire perdue

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