Responses to "Questionnaire on Impressionism and the Social History of Art"

Emily C. Burns Auburn University "Local Color': Social Art History, Global Impressionism, and Comparative Interpretation"

"There can be no art history apart from other kinds of history," T.J. Clark insisted. While the political exigencies of this challenge to formalist narratives of the history of modernism have ebbed in the succeeding decades, the notion of art history as defined by the mutually constitutive relationship between aesthetics and social discourse remains an important framework. Social art history enables us to interrogate the intellectual, cultural, and national implications of *plein air* painting around the world in the late nineteenth century and thereby invites the question "Was there a 'local color' that redefined the cosmopolitan style of Impressionism as national in each context, as some contemporary critics contended?"²

The political and aesthetic relationships between the international, national, and local continue to be enmeshed. For instance, Arthur Streeton's *'The Purple Noon's Transparent Might'* and Jane Sutherland's *The Harvest Field* were celebrated for blanched colors that seemed to respond to the heat of the Australian sun, and, indeed, the paintings invite the viewer to squint at their glaring light [Fig. 1]. The brushwork in these paintings is not readily confused with French Impressionist pictures, which suggests that subtly different aesthetics are at work. But if contemporaries recognized these paintings as uniquely "Australian," such a "period eye"—or a "culturally relative" "mental equipment" for viewing—is not necessarily retained today.³

The idea of "local color" is also confounded by surprising confluences. What might explain the similarities in color, brushwork, and iconography between English-Australian Charles Conder's *A Holiday at Mentone* made outside Melbourne and Romanian Nicolae Grigorescu's *At the Seaside* painted in France? Both artists embrace the cues of *plein-air* painting with their attention to light, shadow, and air in their depictions of women in profile sitting in beach chairs. Neither artist is French. Should their national origin play a role in how we interpret these pictures? Is Grigorescu's less a Romanian painting for having been produced in France and Conder's more Australian for its location? Grigorescu's locale is ambiguous, defined only

¹ T.J. Clark, *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1972), 18. My thanks to Alexis Clark and Noelle Paulson for their comments on this piece.

² See Hamlin Garland, *Crumbling Idols: Twelve Essays on Art and Literature* (Gainesville, Flor.: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1894), 62–5.

³ Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in fifteenth-century Italy: a primer in the social history of period style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 40.

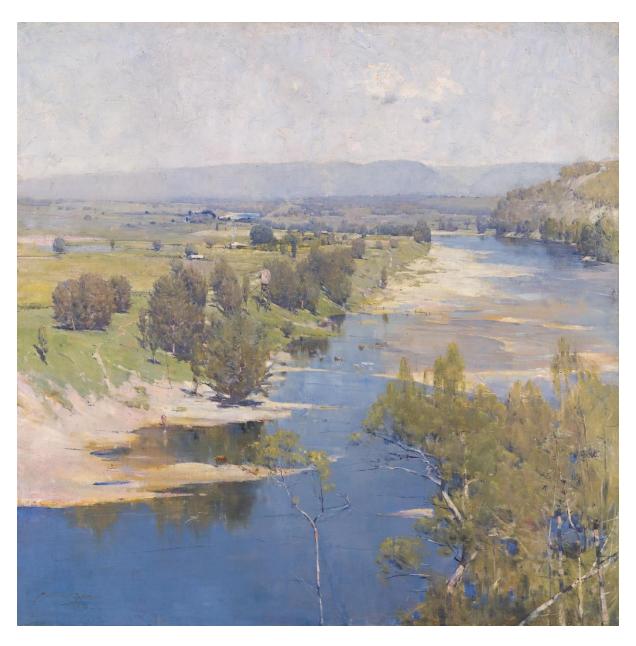


Fig. 1: Arthur Streeton, *'The Purple Noon's Transparent Night*,' c. 1896. Oil on canvas, 123 x 123 cm (National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia).

perhaps through the type of chair and knowledge of the artist's travels, whereas Conder includes iconographic clues to identify his seaside retreat to viewers, with the structure on the pier at right announcing "MENT." In this, he parallels Puerto Rican Francisco Oller's Impressionist depiction of a homegrown icon in *The Old Ceiba Tree at Ponce*.⁴ For both Conder and Oller, the local seems built more through iconography than color and brushstroke, and in Grigorescu's ambiguity, he obscures such details. These questions are compounded by artists' movements. How do discourses of nationalism function through place when artists of

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⁴ Edward J. Sullivan, From San Juan to Paris and Back: Francisco Oller and Caribbean Art in the Era of Impressionism (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 69.

many backgrounds converge in the same location, such as Giverny?⁵ What are the cultural politics of comparative competition within such multi-layered international interactions?⁶

Such complications need the tools of social art history to effectively interpret them. Comparative models build on and redirect the tenets of social art history by considering how visual culture shapes identities in both dialectical and non-dialectical terms. Newer methodological apparatuses of transnationalism, cultural transfer, and crossed history are crucial tools in adapting social art history in current scholarship. ⁷ By thinking comparatively, and beyond center-periphery models that re-inscribe the French metropole, studies of world Impressionism expand our understanding of the formal strategies that we associate with the movement—painting en plein air, loose brushwork, and bright colors. At times such queries risk reifying nationalist layers rather than unpacking their underlying mechanisms. Indeed, attempts to read pictures within the nationalist discourses of the late nineteenth century can border on exceptionalism. For example, as a U.S. art historian analyzing how late nineteenthand early twentieth-century critics drew out qualities they deemed uniquely American in American Impressionist pictures, it can be tricky to fine-tune language to unravel the threads of those claims without inscribing them as truly revealing a "unique American character." Furthermore, by building a discourse of selective difference from French Impressionism that highlights unique national perspectives, world Impressionism runs the risk of merely expanding the canon, rather than using intellectual history to explore the elasticity of the concept of Impressionism.

To open the possibilities of interpreting an interwoven web of international and transnational Impressionisms, comparative frameworks of intellectual history broaden the questions of social art history into new terrain. For example, the concept of the "innocent eye", so central to Impressionism, resonated differently across the world, which shows how the aesthetics and politics of Impressionism participated in overlapping but also distinct discourses. In its French context, Impressionism celebrated forgetting as a modernist artistic strategy and promised to rejuvenate a culture seen by some to be in decline under the weight of its own history. But in national contexts that seemed "young," such as in the burgeoning Australian nationalist movement, longstanding mythologies about United States culture, or the Young Poland movement in the 1890s, Impressionist strategies function as the opposite form of cultural

⁵ See also Nina Lübbren, *Rural Artists' Colonies in Europe, 1870-1910* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001); Katherine Bourguignon et al., *Impressionist Giverny: A Colony of Artists, 1885-1915* (Giverny: Musée d'art américain, 2007); Katherine Bourguignon, ed., *American Impressionism: A New Vision, 1880-1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014); and William Gerdts, *Monet's Giverny: An Impressionist Colony* (New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 1993).

⁶ On aesthetics and cultural politics, see Martin J. Powers, "The Cultural Politics of the Brushstroke," *Art Bulletin* 95, no. 2 (June 2013): 312–27.

⁷ Patricia Clavin, "Defining Transnationalism," *Contemporary European History* 14, no. 4 (November 2005): 421–439; Michel Espagne, "La notion de transfert culturel," *Revue Sciences/Lettres* 1 (2013): http://rsl.revues.org/219 (accessed 15 August 2017). and Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, "Penser l'histoire croisée: entre empire et réflexivité," *Annals. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 58, no. 1 (2003): 7–36.

⁸ See Barbara Ehrlich White, ed., *Impressionism in Perspective* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1978), 33–34; and Lilla Cabot Perry, "Reminiscences of Claude Monet from 1889 to 1909," *American Magazine of Art* 18, no. 3 (March 1927): 120.

⁹ Joel Isaacson, "Constable, Duranty, Mallarmé, Plein Air and Forgetting," Art Bulletin 76, no. 3 (1995): 435.

apologetics.¹⁰ These confluences and divergences disclose the complexities of international Impressionism through the lens of social art history.

Pitfalls of this comparative methodological angle are logistical in the challenge of acquiring depth of local, national, and art historical knowledge on an array of distinct contexts to enable productive comparison and that questions of class become obscured by the focus on national politics. Furthermore, the place of nationalism within transnational perspectives remains muddy, yet probing the interconnections between aesthetics and the social opens the up dynamic layers of meaning within Impressionist objects. By insisting on pictures as social and political discourse within such comparative models, inquiries into world impressionism disrupt modernist canons and expand the possibilities of social art history and attempts at global art histories.

Hollis Clayson Northwestern University "Impressionism: A Procrustean Bed?"

I open with a qualification that will distance me somewhat from the topic under discussion. I don't identify as a "historian of Impressionism." I often say, not altogether in jest, that if "Historian of Impressionism" were to appear on my tombstone, I would not rest in peace. I frame my art-historical work otherwise, to the degree that I see Impressionism as an arthistorical Procrustean Bed for a historian of nineteenth-century art. Paris-based (and implicated transatlantic) art practices are my subjects, and I interrogate them and pose my research questions without according priority in advance to certain "isms," camps, or media. Or rather my interest has long been in tracking diverse aesthetic expressions and practices in an array of genres and modes vis-à-vis their links to moments of crisis and change in the Capital of the Nineteenth Century, always aware of and sensitive to their rootedness in and entanglement with social and political attitudes, not to mention the mythos that undergirded the French capital's centrality. I have also tried to insist upon the differences and the tensions between the aesthetic and the social. The circumstances of interest to me have included anxiety about a rising tide of prostitution, the singular conditions and challenges of the Franco-Prussian War, the haunted bourgeois interior, and the visualities of the hybrid lighting environment of the later 1800s. Paintings, drawings, intaglio prints, caricatures, posters, and sculpture produced by artists hailing from diverse backgrounds and formations converge in my work.

Inasmuch as I have studied the work of Impressionist artists (especially Edgar Degas and Mary Cassatt), I have benefited decisively from the insights and commitments of the leading social historians of modernist French art of the 1980s, including most importantly T.J. Clark, Robert L. Herbert, and Griselda Pollock, but also Michel Melot, Linda Nochlin, Tamar Garb, Meyer Schapiro, Michel Foucault, and Roland Barthes. Their work taught us, among many things, that the social art historian must, of course, identify a work's objective referents, but that the documentation of subject matter is merely the first step on the road to interpretation.

There is little doubt that social art history, which has become the discipline's orthodoxy, will continue to thrive, but younger scholars are less interested in French Impressionism or other Europe-based forms of modernism than were their forebears. They gravitate instead to

¹⁰ My article in progress on Australian and U.S. appropriations of impressionism is titled "Aesthetics and the Nation: US and Australian *Plein Air* Painting and Tropes of the New."

conditions (exile, diaspora, colonialism, decolonization, racism, environmental devastation), geographies (not European), eras (post-1960s) and media (photographic and popular) that are not entirely irrelevant to Impressionist studies, but are nonetheless aimed and centered elsewhere. What pushed the center of gravity of the discipline in those directions? Pressed for an answer, I would argue that the shift was caused in large part by the effects of two bellwether books: Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe* (2000). Both drove interdisciplinary art history beyond the hexagon by forcing a dawning awareness of art's hitherto concealed colonial entanglements and heterogeneities. There are, of course, questions about French Impressionism that remain unanswered (about, for example, transnationality, translation, and nationalisms; image technologies and intermediality; structures of sociability and/in studio practice; incursions of the market; and so on). Curiosity about and open-mindedness toward the approaches taken by younger scholars to Global Contemporary art (especially their hyper-attentiveness to conflict and friction) can help us to address "our" questions, and to keep the study of nineteenth-century art in the forefront of contemporary art historical practice.

Frances Fowle University of Edinburgh "Peripheral Impressionisms"

Today few Impressionist scholars recall the era when the Clark that dominated and determined the way we talked about art was the author of *Civilisation* (1969); when art history was synonymous with connoisseurship; and when art historians adopted a methodology without social referents. In 1970 Impressionism was still articulated through the language of Fry's formalism. By the late 1980s the pioneers of the new social history of art—T.J. Clark, Robert Herbert, Linda Nochlin and Griselda Pollock—had produced an entire generation of scholars. Their socio-historical approach to Impressionism has prevailed, even if it has been persistently challenged by advocates of modernism such as Michael Fried and largely ignored by the French academic system. Indeed, French institutions such as the Ecole du Louvre and the Institut National de l'Histoire de l'Art (INHA), intent on training the curators of the future, continue to privilege historiography, style, and object-based analysis.

Arguably a formalist approach is also relevant when considering some of the great British (and indeed American) collections of Impressionism. Samuel Courtauld, for one, was the archetypal connoisseur collector; he acquired his pictures under Fry's influence, favouring Manet and Cézanne over Monet, Sisley and Pissarro (the last three defined by some critics as "scientific" impressionists¹³ and in George Moore's *Modern Painting* (1893) as "decadent"). ¹⁴ William

¹¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books 1979); and Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

¹² Kenneth Clark, Civilisation (London: BBC books, 1969).

¹³ For example, the critic "Ion" defined Monet and his contemporaries as those who "work from a new direction altogether, namely a scientifically analytical one." See Ion, "Some Phases of Modern Art, II: Impressionism," *Scots Pictorial* (16 August 1913), 502.

¹⁴ Critics often distinguished between the "impressionism" of James McNeill Whistler, which meant painting tonally in a broad, sketch-like manner, and the "impressionism" of Claude Monet, which meant analyzing light and color. See Frank Rutter in Kate Flint, ed., *Impressionists in England: The Critical Reception* (London: Routledge, 1984), 33.

Burrell, too, was guided indirectly by Fry, preferring to lend his Impressionist paintings to the Tate Gallery rather than upset the "harmony" of his Medieval interiors at Hutton Castle. But collectors of Impressionism such as Courtauld and Burrell are also part of the social art history, a by-product of the economic changes that saw the rise of the mercantile classes and the establishment of a market for Impressionism in the late nineteenth century.

Perhaps, then, a new direction for Impressionist scholarship is to be found in this emerging area of art history, namely art market studies. This relatively new discipline brings the emphasis back to the object and, yet, is firmly rooted in the historical, economic, and social context of its time. It is still viewed with suspicion by some scholars, perhaps due to its interdisciplinary fusion of economics and art history. Yet the way was indicated some years ago by pioneering texts such as Nicholas Green's "Dealing in temperaments: economic transformation of the artistic field in France during the second half of the nineteenth century" and Robert Jensen's *Marketing Modernism in Fin-de-siècle Europe*. ¹⁵ Meanwhile, exhibitions on Impressionist dealers such as Theo van Gogh (1999), Ambroise Vollard (2007), and Paul Durand-Ruel (2015) have gradually refreshed and invigorated this important field of art history. ¹⁶

As well as underpinning new research on the Impressionist art market, social art history can enrich the discourse in other areas, notably around more "problematic" French Impressionists who have been "written out" of art history. These might include artists on the edge of Impressionism, such as Armand Guillaumin, the "people's" Impressionist, who worked for the Paris-Orléans railway before winning the lottery. His paintings of steam-driven cranes on the Paris *quais* can be discussed as products of the artist's own social struggle. Moreover, Guillaumin's virtual disappearance from the Impressionist canon is, at least in part, a consequence of the formalist approach, which dismisses him as "second-rate" and difficult to categorise, falling as he does between Impressionism and fauvism.¹⁷

Finally, rather than ask the question "Is the social history of art 'finished' in relation to Impressionism?" should we not question the current status of French Impressionism in relation to recent scholarship? From a curatorial perspective, virtually every topic has been exhausted: from *Impressionists by the Sea* to *Impressionist Gardens* and *Impressionism, Fashion and Modernity*. Meanwhile, art history is beginning to shift the focus from Paris towards other parts of Europe and beyond. In the past few years, there have been major international

¹⁵ Nicholas Green's "Dealing in temperaments: economic transformation of the artistic field in France during the second half of the nineteenth century", *Art History*, 10, 1, March 1987, 59-78; Robert Jensen, *Marketing Modernism in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

¹⁶ Chris Stolwijk, Richard Thomson, and Sjraar van Heugten, ed., *Theo Van Gogh 1857-1891: art dealer, collector, and brother of Vincent* (Amsterdam: Van Gogh Museum, 1999); Rebecca A. Rabinow, ed., *Cézanne to Picasso: Ambroise Vollard, Patron of the Avant-Garde* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2006); and Sylvie Patry et. al., *Inventing Impressionism: Paul Durand-Ruel and the Modern Art Market* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015).

¹⁷ James Rubin notes the relatively few examples of Guillaumin's work in public collections, due to his reputation as "an undisciplined Impressionist or an avant-garde Fauve". http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/spring10/armand-guillaumin (accessed 15 August 2017).

¹⁸ John House and David Hopkin, *Impressionists by the Sea*, (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2007); Clare A. P. Willsdon, *Impressionist Gardens* (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 2010); and Gloria Groom, *Impressionism, Fashion and Modernity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012).

exhibitions on Belgian, Scottish, American, and Australian Impressionism, raising new and very different questions around colonialism, race, nationhood, gender, and class in these countries. ¹⁹ The social history of art is not "finished," but in order for it to have relevance for future scholars of Impressionism it needs to expand towards the periphery: towards new disciplines such as economics and the art market; towards those Impressionisms located outside France; and towards those artists sidelined in earlier histories of Impressionism. It is only then that new and exciting discoveries will be made.

Anna Gruetzner Robins University of Reading "Impressionist Futures"

Impressionism is not easy to define. It could include the artists in the eight Impressionist exhibitions that took place between 1874 and 1886, but it would be difficult to explain why some of them fit that label, while Edouard Manet and James McNeill Whistler, two major Impressionist artists, refused to exhibit in them. Impressionism quickly became a blanket term within the anglophone world and a global movement that encompassed a wide range of artists of different nationalities. Do we place all of these artists under this umbrella? Impressionist pictures challenged contemporary conventions of picture-making, with a new subject or a new representation of that subject, using new pictorial methods. These were the building blocks for the extraordinary range of new painting in the late nineteenth and twentieth century.

Many different artists represented modern life subjects, but, as T.J. Clark showed in his work on Manet's *Olympia*, we need to study the initial response to a picture to fully understand the meaning that it had in its own time (Fig. 2). Juliet Bareau has provided rich and nuanced interpretations of many of Manet's other pictures. Anthea Callen's study of the Edgar Degas' *Little Dancer of Fourteen Years*, the work of Richard Kendall and Jill de Vonyar on the dancers, and Richard Thomson's work on the nudes all changed the way we think about Degas. It goes without saying any social history is determined and informed by the investigator.

Feminism accounts for some of the most groundbreaking recent work on Impressionism. The work of Kathy Adler and Tamar Garb on Berthe Morisot, who was more or less left out of John Rewald's *The History of Impressionism*, the writing of Griselda Pollock and others on Mary Cassatt, and Carol Armstrong's study of Eva Gonzales have reinstated these artists as key players in the original movement. The many important contributions of Linda Nochlin on the images of women in Impressionist painting, Pollock's mapping of the social spaces of women Impressionists, and also Hollis Clayson have contributed to a greater understanding of pictures by women Impressionists and the representation of women.

Research on some of the lesser known Impressionists has lagged behind, which suggests to me that the interconnection between the subject of Impressionist art and the innovatory way in which it was made is too important to ignore. Mocking the current popularity of Impressionism is to miss the point. We need an intelligent and informed understanding of how the established

¹⁹ For example, Frances Fowle, *Impressionism and Scotland* (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 2008); Marina Bocquillon-Ferretti, *Brussels: An Impressionist Capital* (Giverny 2014); Richard R. Brettell and Frances Fowle, *American Impressionism: A New Vision 1880-1900* (Giverny, 2014-15); *The Glasgow Boys: Scottish Impressionism 1880-1900* (Assen: Drents Museum, 2015-16); and Tim Bonyhady, Alex J. Taylor, and Sarah Thomas, *Australia's Impressionists* (London: National Gallery, 2016-17).'

norms were challenged in a pictorial way to appreciate their subsequent visual appeal. The work of Paul Smith and Richard Shiff's many publications on Cézanne are a model of how this might be done.

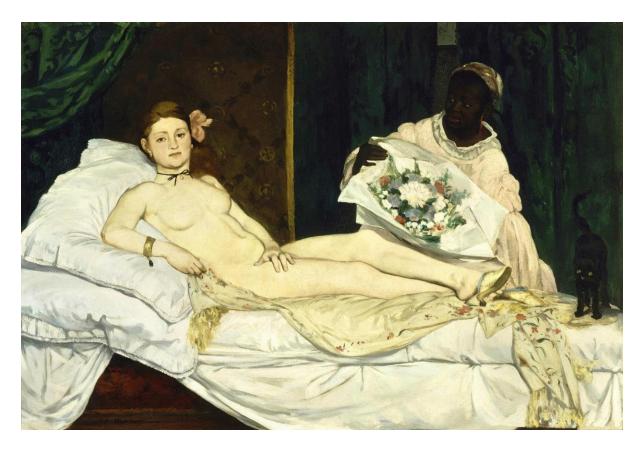


Fig. 2: Edouard Manet, *Olympia*, c. 1863. Oil on canvas, 130 x 190 cm (Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France).

Does a social history encompass more than a study of the subject of Impressionist art? I would say definitely yes. The work on Impressionist exhibition histories and interconnecting artistic networks might not fall within the traditional canon, but these social structures are an integral aspect of Impressionism. World Impressionism the international movement 1860-1920, a collection of essays edited by Norma Broude, could be a stepping stone for further study of the global effect of Impressionism and the formative influence that it had on the larger art world. We need to take account of the ways in which a new pictorial language, a new way of looking, and a new form of social organization had a worldwide impact on artists, collectors, educationalists, and institutions.

I have suggested that a social history of Impressionism must accommodate and reflect the global concerns of our present day; then it will always be of value. More work needs to be done on the impact of the Paris art world on artists outside France and its dissemination. The Impressionist market, Impressionist exhibitions, and publications on Impressionism need to be studied at a global level. Then the interconnections between them will be clearer.

French Impressionism, on the other hand, is an increasingly neglected field even by those institutions whose reputation was built on its riches. Yet, for me, this painting remains a source

of endless delight, and I never cease to tire of looking at it and learning about it. The Impressionists became twentieth-century Old Masters, but they continued to inspire younger artists. A number of artists, including Francis Bacon, Lucian Freud, Howard Hodgkin, and R.B. Kitaj, all pointed to the importance of Degas for their respective painting. (I explore what Degas meant to them in an essay for the forthcoming Degas exhibition at the Fitzwilliam Museum.) They will not be the last to appreciate the rich potential of his art. Whether, in the future, there will be someone with the expertise to teach French Impressionism to a younger generation, and to understand the importance of its worldwide impact, is another matter.

Laura Anne Kalba Smith College "Is Impressionism History?"

It's telling that, in the face of declining scholarly interest in Impressionism, prompting concerns that the field itself will soon be *history*, the study of artists' materials, techniques, and the technological bases of vision has emerged as an especially important trend.²⁰ For some, the topic provides an opportunity to reinterpret key formal concepts—color, collage, flatness, etc.—and, thereby, reassert the central importance of the Impressionists and their followers in the history of modern art.²¹ For others, it's a chance to understand Impressionist art's ties to material culture and the economic, technological, and aesthetic forms of everyday life.²² The differences between the two lines of inquiry are more ones of scope and focus than method per se. The rise of visual studies hasn't had the flattening effect some had feared.²³ Indeed, scholars' turn to materiality, process, and the technological underpinnings of Impressionists' formal innovations, one could argue, owes far more to Walter Benjamin than to Clement Greenberg or Michael Fried.

More than its critique of or challenge to the canon, visual studies' most valuable contribution to the study of art history lies in its overhauling of dominant socio-historical notions of "context." It asks, "what if, instead of trying to interpret the meaning of Impressionist artworks by situating them in their historical context—the expression makes art seem small and contexts

²⁰ Until recently, the study of artists' materials and techniques had largely been the preserve of conservators and a few, isolated scholars: Theodore Reff, *Degas: The Artist's Mind* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1976), chap. VII; Anthea Callen, *Techniques of the Impressionists* (London: Orbis,1982); Anthea Callen, *The Art of Impressionism: Painting Technique & The Making of Modernity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); and Anthea Callen, *The Work of Art: Plein Air Painting and Artistic Identity In Nineteenth-Century France* (London: Reaktion Books, 2015). The papers delivered by Michelle Foa ("The Making of Degas: Duranty, Engineering, and Materials"), Heidi Hirschl ("The Symbolism in Degas's Landscape Monotypes"), and Kathryn Brown ("Degas in Pieces: Rethinking the Late Bather Pastels") at the last annual conference of the College Art Association in New York City (February 15-18, 2017) underscore scholars' growing interest in these topics.

²¹ For example, Carol Armstrong, "Seurat's Media, or a Matrix of Materialities," *Grey Room*, no. 58 (Winter 2015): 6-25.

²² For example, Laura Anne Kalba, *Color in the Age of Impressionism: Commerce, Technology, and Art* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017). Hollis Clayson's interests fall midway between these two approaches. See her *Electric Paris: The City of Light in the Era of Thomas Edison* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, forthcoming).

²³ Michael Yonan, "Toward a Fusion of Art History and Material Culture Studies," *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture* 18 (Fall-Winter 2011): 232-248; and Carol Armstrong, "Visual Culture Questionnaire," *October* 77 (Summer 1996): 27-8.

knowable and fixed—we thought with and through our objects, employing them to make sense of history?" Some may protest that this is tantamount to relegating art to the status of evidence in service of some other enquiry, distinct from, and less authentically art historical, than analyzing Impressionism. But is it not precisely the Impressionists' conscious attempts to make sense of their times, notably the ways signs succeed or fail to carry meaning in the modern world, that make their artworks so endurably compelling?²⁴ Their aesthetic choices are neither "text" nor "context" but productive tools with and through which we can think about the nineteenth century and its continued significance today.

Several reviewers of Clark's *The Painting of Modern Life* (1984) complained that the book focused too much on history and not enough on art.²⁵ More than Impressionist art narrowly defined, the book's central concern was "the *interests* that helped determine the visual world, the imagery, of Manet and the impressionists," a more sympathetic reader explained.²⁶ Over time, the task of elucidating the system of signs and material configurations by which the forces of modernity became normalized has been taken up by a range of disciplines, from media studies to anthropology. In the meantime, if the social history of art has become too predictable, it's most likely, I suspect, because scholars have paid too little, rather than too much, attention to history.

Richard Kendall Independent curator and art historian "The Positive and the Negative"

My half-century as an art historian has taught me that social art history can have both a positive and a negative effect on engagement with works of art. As a graduate student of art history at the Courtauld Institute of Art in the 1970s, I encountered almost no social history of art. When I began my own research concerned with Italian trecento painting, I found that the standard books on the subject touched on some historical material that broadened my understanding of the period, but I was not encouraged to pursue this. Nevertheless, I did travel to Italy to study trecento art in its native context and became interested in the material culture of the arts at that period.

In my subsequent teaching career at Manchester Metropolitan University, I was brought into regular contact with both students of art history and practical art students, a most informative experience. The first group tended to be comfortable with books, the second with paintings. At their best, seminars in which both kinds of student participated could be vividly instructive for

²⁴ "If a work of art is inevitably to be understood in terms of its particular historical circumstances, it is arguable that great art will result from a conscious working out of this recognition. Great art is, in short, in this essential way political in nature," Svetlana Alpers writes. Svetlana Alpers, "Is Art History?," *Daedalus* 106 (Summer 1977): 2. The title of my essay is directly inspired by Alpers's.

²⁵ See, for example, Hilton Kramer, "T.J. Clark and the Marxist Critique of Modern Painting," *The New Criterion* 3 (March 1985): 1-8; and Françoise Cachin, "The Impressionists on Trial," *The New York Review of Books*, May 30, 1985.

²⁶ Klaus Herding, "Manet's Imagery Reconstructed," October 37 (Summer 1986): 124.

all concerned. In general, the art students were more likely to engage a particular canvas as something fabricated to correspond to a particular experience or an 'idea' about painting itself. In contrast, the art historians were more comfortable with history and context.

This dichotomy still troubles our discipline. I recently went to a "scholars" event at a major museum where extraordinary works of art had been brought together to celebrate a single artist's achievement. Almost all the discussion was concerned with social history: the background to the iconography, the identity of certain depicted individuals, the precedents for specific compositions, the stories behind some of the scenes, the class implications, etc. As with my Manchester students, I know from looking at such works with current artist-friends that practitioners, members of the public, and artists themselves typically see paintings as visual constructions that carry meanings of a different kind. This is not an exclusive view, of course, but it is one that is too frequently overlooked.

Morna O'Neill Wake Forest University "Moving Beyond 'Post T. J. Clark Ad-Hocism"

1) How has the social history of art shaped the discourse on Impressionism?

Working against the popular perception of art objects being autonomous, timeless, and open to any interpretation, books such as T. J. Clark's *Painting of Modern Life* positioned Impressionist paintings as active agents in the politics of France in the 1860s and 1870s. By clearly charting changes in thought, vision, and politics over time, this book transformed art into active agents in both the creation and representation of history. Clark foregrounded a detailed reading of the work of art to anchor a proposition about the political and social contexts. As a student in college in the early 1990s, the social history of art was *the* discourse on Impressionism.

2) Is the social history of art done? If not, how may the types of questions raised by the social history of art--around race/ethnicity, gender/sexuality, and especially class--be reworked in the future? What new perspectives, approaches, and insights will those reworked questions produce in relation to the study of Impressionism?

An American Marxist art historian complained to me of the rise of "post-T. J. Clark adhocism," which I take to mean a version of the social history of art that located social concerns, whether race, class, or gender, in the formal qualities of the work of art. The disdain implied here suggests two things: that subsequent scholars have viewed Clark's model as a formula that could be applied as and when it suited the needs of an argument. And that formalism has survived by another name, as visual description becomes the lynchpin for an argument about social context.

My own consideration of Impressionism has come through a study of the art market, specifically the work of the art dealer Hugh Lane (1875-1915). Lane assembled two collections of modern art in the early-twentieth century for municipal art galleries in Dublin (1908) and Johannesburg (1910-11), and each featured Impressionist painting. One further avenue for the social history of art is to address the art market. This approach would allow for an acceptance of the economic fact of the market while also seeking to understand the creative agency of the art dealer (such as Paul Durand-Ruel) in facilitating the "social life" of a given work of art, to

borrow from Arjun Appadurai.²⁷ For example, an account of socioeconomic class would consider the audience for a work of art, or a discussion of gender and sexuality would encompass the purchaser as well as the space of display.

3) What is the future of the social history of art?

There is great promise in thinking about a global social history of Impressionism—in charting a geography of Impressionism. Any understanding of the "global" nature of this practice should attend to the historical specificity of this term. One notable recent example was the exhibition "Impressionism and the Caribbean: Francisco Oller and his Transatlantic World" at the Brooklyn Museum of Art in 2015, an examination of the hybrid aesthetic pioneered by the artist when he returned to his native Puerto Rico after twenty years in Paris. When scholars today call for a "global" consideration of a topic, they usually seek to re-assess the European framework that has governed most studies of the field and dislocate it from the center. To return to the example of Hugh Lane, the global reach of his practices depended upon the centering, or the perceived centering, of London, and it relied upon the framework provided by the British Empire. Impressionism could cut across imperialism, but it could also be co-opted by it and embedded within it. A global social history of Impressionism would be attentive to celebration and emulation as well as appropriation and mimicry.

Samuel Raybone

Courtauld Institute of Art

"A millionaire who paints in his spare time'. The social history of art and the multiple rediscoveries of Gustave Caillebotte"

Nineteenth-century critics were rather split about Gustave Caillebotte (1848-1894). Some, like Gaston Vassy, saw him as "un millionnaire qui fait de la peinture à ses moments perdus." Others identified his draughtsmanship and attention to detail as recompense (albeit scant) for a cohort otherwise beset by intransigence; a painter "n'est impressionniste que de nom" who would be well advised to "quitter prochainement les impressionnistes, s'il ne veut être quitté par eux." For many Caillebotte's "précision inouïe," "force de coloris remarquable," and "personnages […] bien campés" were cause for unabashed celebration (and perhaps even a "médaille d'honneur"). 31

²⁷ Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

²⁸ For more information on this exhibition, see https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/francisco_oller (accessed 15 August 2017).

²⁹ [A millionaire who painted in his spare time]. [Gaston Vassy], "La Journée à Paris : L'Exposition des impressionnistes," *L'Evénement* (6 April 1877), 2.

³⁰ [Impressionist only in name]. La Petite République française, "Exposition des impressionnistes : 6, rue Le Peletier", *La Petite République française* (10 April 1877), 2; and [leave the impressionists quickly, if he doesn't want to be left by them]. Bernadille [Victor Fournel], "Chronique parisienne : L'Exposition des impressionnistes", *Le Français* (13 April 1877), 2.

³¹ In order: [incredible precision] E. Lepelletier, "Les Impressionnistes," *Le Radical* (8 April 1877), 2-3; [remarkable force of colour] L.G., "Le Salon des 'impressionnistes," *La Presse* (6 April 1877), 2; [firmly

For John Rewald, however, critique and praise were equally damning: Caillebotte was dismissed as little more than an "engineer [... who] also painted in his spare time". ³² It followed logically that Caillebotte, "timid in his own works," fared better with the capricious critics of his day than did artists whose style was genuinely transformational. ³³ There was thus no place for Caillebotte's paintings—the experimental force of which resides in their combination of exacting visual detail, careful manipulations of perspective, and deep wells of narrative and psychological ambiguity—in the formalist metanarrative constituted in Rewald's wake. Clement Greenberg's rehabilitation of Monet's late work, which for him "offered the mere texture of color as adequate form in painting," set a standard of Impressionism which Caillebotte—with his preference for a sombre and figurative realism, as opposed to abstraction and flatness—could not but fail to meet. ³⁴

Caillebotte's ambivalent complexities—provoking, as Kirk Varnedoe puts it, questions of context and category *vis-à-vis* normative Impressionism—challenge a linear trajectory of modernism and are largely unanswerable within a formalist paradigm.³⁵ It was thus no accident that the resurgence of Caillebotte scholarship in the 1970s coincided with the germination of the social history of art, the horizons of which were chiefly defined by T. J. Clark's work in that decade and the one following.³⁶ The critical apparatus of the social history of art—being inflected by Marxism inherently attuned to contradictions, ruptures, and antagonisms—was well-equipped to identify the ideology that governed the Third Republic's socio-political structures reflected and refracted in Caillebotte's psychologically challenging portraits, spatially bizarre cityscapes, and ambivalent scenes of labour and leisure (Fig. 3).

However, in the case of Caillebotte, the social history of art proved to be just as obfuscatory as it was revealing. Its privileging of "art" as a distinct historical and historiographical category—the axiom of "immanent aesthetic value", as Keith Moxey diagnosed it—induced a problematic asymmetry.³⁷ While Caillebotte invested his time, energy, and identity in a diverse and decentred slate of activities that ranged from philately to horticulture, yachting to art collecting, art historians have insistently conceived of him exclusively as a painter in relation to other painters. Although the social history of art offers the critical tools to comprehend Caillebotte's

established figures] Jacques, "Menu propos : Exposition impressionniste," *L'Homme libre* (12 April 1877), 1-2; and [medal of honour] L.G., "Le Salon des 'impressionnistes," *La Presse* (6 April 1877), 2.

³² John Rewald, *The History of Impressionism* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1980), 346.

³³ Rewald, The History of Impressionism, 388.

³⁴ Clement Greenberg, "Art," The Nation (5 May 1945), 526.

³⁵ Kirk Varnedoe, "Odd Man In. A Brief Historiography of Caillebotte's Changing Roles in the History of Art," in Anne Distel, et al., *Gustave Caillebotte. Urban Impressionist* (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1995), 14.

³⁶ The two titans of early Caillebotte scholarship are incontrovertibly Marie Berhaut and Kirk Varnedoe. See Marie Berhaut Gustave Caillebotte (1848-1894) (Paris: Wildenstein, 1951); Caillebotte, l'impressionniste (Lausanne: International Art Book, 1968); Caillebotte, sa vie et son œuvre. Catalogue raisonné des peintures et pastels (Paris: La Bibliothèque des Arts, Fondation Wildenstein, 1978, updated 1994). See also Kirk Varnedoe and Thomas P. Lee, Gustave Caillebotte. A Retrospective Exhibition (Houston: The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1976); and Kirk Varnedoe, Gustave Caillebotte (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

³⁷ Keith P. F. Moxey, "Semiotics and the Social History of Art," New Literary History 22 (1991), 985.

activities in relation to historicized structures of labour, leisure, and class, its delimitation of art from wider culture has engendered a hermeneutic privileging of painting that finds no correlate in Caillebotte's actual practice.



Fig. 3: Gustave Caillebotte, *Portraits in the Countryside*, c. 1876. Oil on canvas, 95 x 111 cm (Musée Baron Gérard, Bayeux, France).

I would propose that the solution to this problem—as a microcosmic case-study for Impressionism generally—is to be found in the critiques of the (social) history of art newly emerging from the fields of visual and material cultural studies, which seek not only to depriviledge and recontextualize art objects, but also to historicize aesthetic value and thus decentre the discipline of art history itself. Stripped of its reliance on the primacy of "art," oriented towards everyday visual practices and an expanded media archive, and conscious of the omnidirectionality of vision's (and art's) relation to society, the social history of art (and indeed Marxist criticism more generally) still has something to say about Impressionism's "odd man in." While Sophie Pietri recognized the possibility that "[le] portrait de Caillebotte amateur, donne peut-être une clé pour comprendre sa peinture" as early as 1994, it will only be possible to fully realize the potential of this idea, to rediscover Caillebotte once again, via an

interdisciplinary approach that deconstructs our understanding of art and reconfigures its relation to the social.³⁸

Harmon Siegel Harvard University "Social Art History, A Thing of the Past?"

The term "social science," writes Bruno Latour, "would be excellent except for two drawbacks, namely the word 'social' and the word 'science." According to Latour, a French philosopher and historian of science best known for his interdisciplinary attention to fundamental concepts, the word "social" implies an autonomous domain, one realm among others. "Science" suggests an insurmountable gap between observer and observed, a division of the world into scientists and informants, "the scientists [doing] 'reflexively' what the informants are doing 'unwittingly."

Latour exemplifies a recent turn in social science to fundamentally reconceive "the social," and his criticisms of social science writ large apply as well to social art history. ⁴¹ We art historians also tend to treat "the social" as a separate domain, as though what we needed to do were to break through something asocial (the painting on the wall, here-and-now) to its social substratum (market ideology, urbanization, etc.).

Certain speech patterns recur: artworks "reflect," "express," or "embody" social phenomena. But none of these gives us what we need. Consider T.J. Clark: "I am not interested in the notion of works of art 'reflecting' ideologies, social relations, or history." Instead, Clark says the social art historian seeks to understand "the general nature of the structures that [the artist] encounters willy-nilly," structures visible only from the outside. This approach thereby secures a methodological distance between past and present, the artists and ourselves. But what if the past was not so naive?

The questionnaire asks, "How has social art history shaped our discourse on Impressionism?" It seems to ask how a twentieth-century methodology shaped twenty-first century

³⁸ [The portrait of Caillebotte the amateur perhaps gives us a key to understanding his painting]. Sophie Pietri, "Introduction", in *Gustave Caillebotte : catalogue raisonné des peintures et pastels*, by Marie Berhaut (Paris: Wildenstein Institute, La Bibliothèque des Arts, 1994), viii.

³⁹ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, 1st ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 2.

⁴⁰ Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 33.

⁴¹ The best introduction to this turn is Patrick Joyce, ed., *The Social in Question: New Bearings*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2012); other key works include Patrick Joyce, "What Is the Social in Social History?" *Past & Present* 206, no. 1 (February 1, 2010): 213–48; Michael E. Brown, *The Concept of the Social in Uniting the Humanities and Social Sciences* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015); and Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, trans. Janet Lloyd, (University of Chicago Press, 2014). On the relation between this turn and art history, see Eduardo de la Fuente, "The 'New Sociology of Art': Putting Art Back into Social Science Approaches to the Arts," *Cultural Sociology* 1, no. 3 (November 1, 2007): 409–25.

⁴² Clark, *Image of the People*, 10.

⁴³ Clark, *Image of the People*, 13.

understandings of nineteenth-century art. But it can also be taken another way, one that suggests a direction for future research.

"Social art history" could also refer to a practice contemporaneous with Impressionism, one debated in the artists' circles. For example, in 1865 Émile Zola reviewed Pierre Proudhon's *Art and its Social Destination*. ⁴⁴ Proudhon offered a materialist history of art from the pyramids to the present, claiming that social structures determine artistic choices – i.e., stiff, hieratic Egyptian sculptures express their despotic society, whereas the individuality of Greek statues reflects their participatory democracy. Proudhon's putatively descriptive method also fosters normative criteria: "Art attains perfection insofar as the artist effaces himself.... [Art] is the product of an entire epoch, like Egyptian statues or our Gothic cathedrals." ⁴⁵ We hear the echoes of these criteria in Courbet's proclamation, "Each epoch must have its artists, who express it for posterity."

To Zola, however, such claims were paradoxical: art requires freedom from social constriction, must manifest individual temperaments, "personalities." Art does not "express" social bases, does not "reflect" but "negates" society, affirms "the individual, outside of all rules and social necessities." Rather than express preexisting social structures, artists express *themselves*. Contra Proudhon, Zola insists, "Art is a corner of creation seen through a temperament." In context, this oft-quoted definition directly criticizes the scientism of social explanations. Temperaments fracture the social into kaleidoscopic impressions, refusing "reflection" and "expression" as methodological tropes.

Today, we often use Zola's definition to explain features of the impressionist ethos such as originality and subjectivity. But those same features themselves *respond to the prospect of social explanation*. Because the Impressionists valued originality, their movement encompassed a hitherto unknown range of subjects and stylistic diversity. To Zola, this diversity expressed a variety of individual temperaments. And indeed, it is unclear how Edgar Degas' chalky ballerinas and Camille Pissarro's rural laborers, Claude Monet's anonymous crowds and Zacharie Astruc's exotic socialites could all "reflect" their time, other than through the kaleidoscope of personal style. If they do, it was a moment when artists witnessed how the art of the past was interpreted, stylistic features taken as straightforward indices of social history. In such a context, each artistic decision takes on a new weight, not only becomes a potential referendum on a given society, but also takes a position on how artworks socialize and are socialized.

Perhaps it is so hard to say just how "the social" gets into nineteenth-century artworks because those artworks self-consciously asked the same questions we do, anticipated our interpretative

⁴⁴ Emile Zola, "Mes haines, causeries, littéraires et artistiques," in Jean-Pierre Leduc-Adine, ed., *Ecrits sur l'art* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), 33-84. Zola reviews Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *Du principe de l'art et de sa destination sociale* (Garnier frères, 1865).

⁴⁵ Zola, "Mes haines," 44.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Jules-Antoine Castagnary, *Les Libres propos*, 1864, 180, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6457082k (accessed 15 August 2017).

⁴⁷ Zola, "Mes haines," 53.

⁴⁸ Zola, "Mes haines," 44

methods and reacted accordingly. We find our method inexorably imbricated with our object of study: the Impressionists saw us coming.

Marnin Young Yeshiva University "On the Limits of Context"

Who would care to dispute that the social history of art now dominates our understanding of Impressionism? To visit a museum exhibition or to open a textbook on late nineteenth-century French painting is to learn, among other things, about bourgeois fashion, prostitution, and urbanization. ⁴⁹ In its scholarly version, this form of analysis might be called more aptly "social iconography"—that is, a deciphering of the cultural meanings of black suits, brothels, and the boulevards of Paris. ⁵⁰ And yet rephrasing the social history of art in these terms also helps to explain the perceived obsolescence of the method. A Marxist-derived social history of art once asked questions about ideologies, mediation, and the nature of representation. This was achieved largely by placing artists and artworks as active agents within—not as mere recorders of—charged historical contexts. ⁵¹ Flowing from the German-language tradition, the social history of art could be unflinchingly dialectical in its move between the historical situation of artistic production and the horizons of expectation a community of viewers might have brought to the interpretation of artworks. ⁵²

What, if anything, remains of this old-fangled social history of art in Impressionist studies? To be fair, any sense of decline signals more properly a dispersion into other questions, methods, and areas of research. Feminist and post-colonialist art histories have, at their best, taken up similarly dialectical strategies. And serious versions of social art history continue to be done in fields adjacent to and far outside Impressionism.⁵³ This is not to say, however, that challenges in and to the social history of Impressionism do not persist. Most notably, I think, is a fundamental problem in art history—indeed, an existential problem—one that the social history of art has provoked for a very long time. In what way, the criticism goes, does our

⁴⁹ For two exhibits that exemplify a curatorial embrace of the social history of art, see *Impressionism, Fashion, and Modernity* (Musée d'Orsay, Paris, September 25, 2012–January 20, 2013, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, February 26–May 27, 2013, Art Institute of Chicago, June 26–September 22, 2013); and *Splendours & Miseries: Images of Prostitution in France, 1850–1910* (Musée d'Orsay, Paris, September 22, 2015–January 17, 2016, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, February 19–June 19, 2016). For two textbooks that presume a social historical understanding of Impressionism, see Michelle Facos, *An Introduction to Nineteenth-Century Art* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 311–12; and Fred S. Kleiner, *Gardner's Art Through the Ages: The Western Perspective*, volume II, 14th ed. (Boston: Wadsworth, 2014), 687.

⁵⁰ On social iconography, see Vivian Rehberg, "Thomas Crow: Où on est l'histoire de l'art sociale?," *Art Press* 274 (December 2001), 19; and Timothy J. Clark, "Art History in the Age of Image-Machines," *EurAmerica* 38, no. 1 (March 2008), 5.

⁵¹ On artistic production as "a series of actions in but also on history," see Clark, *Image of the People*, 12.

⁵² See T. J. Clark, "The Conditions of Artistic Creation," *Times Literary Supplement* (24 May 1974): 561–2; and Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "The Social History of Art: Models and Concepts," in Hal Foster, et al., *Art since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism,* 2nd ed. (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2011), 22–31.

⁵³ See, for example, Nina L. Dubin, *Futures & Ruins: Eighteenth-Century Paris and the Art of Hubert Robert* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2010); and Hollis Clayson and André Dombrowski, eds., *Is Paris Still the Capital of the Nineteenth Century?: Essays on Art and Modernity*, 1850–1900 (New York: Routledge, 2016).

understanding of a work of art in its historical context tell us anything about why such a work might continue to be compelling for us today?⁵⁴ I would like to think that understanding the relation of Gustave Caillebotte's paintings of Paris and his ownership of property in the city, for example, allows us to understand his distinctive artistic style and its relation to Impressionist techniques (Fig. 4).⁵⁵ I am not at all sure, however, that this would allow us to gauge his artistic interest relative to Edgar Degas. Increasingly, such questions of value have become harder and harder for many of us to address within the confines of the social art history. And maybe rightly so. Up to a point I believe the historian should be resolutely nonjudgmental. The risk, however, of such a position—a position that folds into the study of visual culture more broadly conceived—is a collapsing of the very distinction between a work of art and any other object in the world. Or as Nicholas Brown puts it more pointedly (if ironically and critically), "we are wise enough to know that the work of art is a commodity like any other."⁵⁶



Fig. 4: Gustave Caillebotte, *Paris Street, Rainy Day*, c. 1877. Oil on canvas, 212.2 x 276.2 cm (Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois).

⁵⁴ On this problem more broadly, see Charles Palermo, *Modernism and Authority: Picasso and His Milieu around 1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).

⁵⁵ See my *Realism in the Age of Impressionism: Painting and the Politics of Time* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

⁵⁶ Nicholas Brown, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Real Subsumption under Capital," *nonsite.org* (March 13, 2012), http://nonsite.org/editorial/the-work-of-art-in-the-age-of-its-real-subsumption-under-capital (accessed 15 August 2017).

What role, then, for the social history of art? Perhaps uniquely, the Marxist underpinnings of the social history of art offer the possibility not only for a critique of the commodity form but for a revived critical engagement with the dialectical problem of what Michael Podro calls the discipline's "two-sidedness": the sense that any work of art is "both context-bound and yet irreducible to its contextual conditions." In its present version, the social history of art sticks rather closely to the former, perhaps to the exclusion of the latter. It cannot justify or explain, for example, why Impressionism should matter to us now any more than Salon Naturalism or the posters of Jules Chéret. But it could, and maybe it should. Perhaps it is high time to give up the ghost of Art—I sometimes think so—but if we want to keep the history of art alive, if we care about things that are not mere commodities, if we want the study of Impressionism to matter, it will take a far more dialectical habit of mind than we have at present.

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⁵⁷ Michael Podro, *The Critical Historians of Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), pp. xviii, xx.