

The Photographic Effect: Making Pictures After Photography, 1860-1895

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the effects of photography and photographic concepts of picturing on painterly practice and theory in late-nineteenth century Europe. It argues that the permeation of photography into the material production and critical interpretation of pictorial art impelled painters, art photographers, and their critics to differentiate more sharply the qualities of creative labor from those of unthinking imitation. Focusing on case studies in France and England, the two countries with the longest histories of photographic practice and discourse, I consider methods of making that challenged the framework of medium, and the standards of “art” and “truth” on which distinctions between media were based. Subjects of analysis include the art criticism of British painter Walter Sickert (1860-1942); a libel trial initiated by Belgian painter Jan Van Beers (1852-1927); the *plein-air* painting practice of French naturalist Jules Bastien-Lepage (1848-1884); composite photographs and theories of pictorial art by British photographer Henry Peach Robinson (1830-1901); the “photographic” characteristics of paintings by Gustave Caillebotte (1848-1894); and the painterly realism of French artist Edgar Degas (1834-1917), which was set apart from photography in the nineteenth century and came to be aligned with it in the twentieth.

I distinguish my approach from traditional narratives of cross-media exchange, which emphasize artists' visual responses to paintings and photographs, by showing that photography's influence was felt most palpably in the *invisible* realms of pictorial production and its theoretical conception. Photography provoked no single stylistic response from painters, nor was its presence in a picture substantiated by any fixed set of criteria. By the 1890s photography had destabilized "medium" as a secure category of classification, as paintings were designated "colored photographs" and photographers employed the term "picture" to classify their images as art. I examine the radical reconfiguration of the hierarchy of pictorial art that took place in the late nineteenth century, showing that photographic methods of making and paradigms of picturing undermined the visual surface as a reliable source of meaning. As a result, these hybrid pictorial practices intensified anxieties about the terms of truthful depiction, and how an authentic sense of the real might be conveyed through material means. Rather than being settled by the turn of the century, as modern theories of medium specificity would have it, I maintain that photography catalyzed tensions between the manual and intellectual aspects of art-making that trigger debates and fuel artistic experimentation to this day.

INTRODUCTION

Finding and Defining the Photographic Effect

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, artists and art critics throughout Europe became increasingly anxious about the infiltration of photography into art. In articles with titles like “La Photographie dans l’art,” “Is the Camera the Friend or Foe of Art?” and “Die Photographie in der modernen Kunst,” writers asserted that the mechanical medium had insinuated itself into every stage of pictorial production, from the artist’s initial perception of his or her subject matter to the material execution and surface treatment of paintings, adulterating the creative act at the heart of the artistic process. This transformation of paintings into photographs might not even be perceptible to contemporary viewers, critics claimed, because the human eye had changed to accommodate the perspective of the camera.

Writers beseeched artists to purify their procedures and defend painting from what English author George Moore termed “photographic effects,” yet the material practices of both painters and photographers reveal that media segregation was already impossible.¹ Realists and symbolists alike worked from photographs in the late nineteenth century, transferring these images into paintings by copying them or projecting glass plate

¹ George Moore, “The Camera in Art,” *Modern Painting* (London: Walter Scott, 1898), 185.

negatives directly onto canvas.² Analogous practices existed in the darkroom, whereby photographers designed ambitious pictures through sketches or collage, and painted or drew on their negatives and prints. Art theorists denounced these ways of working as deceptive and inartistic, but critical discourses played an equally integral role in cross-media contamination as jargon like “photography in color” and “proofs on canvas” permeated the lexicon to characterize non-photographic approaches to picturing.³

This dissertation turns attention to the pervasive yet overlooked hybridity of late-nineteenth century artistic practice and proposes a new model for interpreting the effect of photography on the pictorial arts. In contrast to traditional narratives of exchange that emphasize artists’ visual responses to this technology, I argue that photography’s influence was felt most palpably in the *invisible* realms of pictorial production and its theoretical conception. Photography provoked no single stylistic response from painters, nor was its presence in a picture substantiated by any fixed set of criteria. By the 1890s, as this dissertation demonstrates, painting could no longer be considered independently of photography, destabilizing “medium” as a secure category of classification.

I examine this critical moment of doubt in late-nineteenth century Europe, showing that photographic forms of making undermined the visual register as a reliable source of meaning. The illegibility of surface appearance intensified anxieties about the terms of truthful depiction, and how an authentic sense of the real might be conveyed through

² For the disparate range of artists who worked from photographs in the late nineteenth century see Dorothy Kosinski, *The Artist and the Camera: Degas to Picasso* (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Art, 1999); Alain D’Hooghe, *Autour du symbolisme: photographie et peinture au XIXe siècle* (Brussels: Palais des Beaux-Arts, 2004); and Dominique de Font-Réaulx, *Painting and Photography 1839-1914*, David Radzinowicz, trans. (Paris: Flammarion, 2012).

³ See Gustave Geffroy, *La vie artistique 2* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1893), 298 and Walter Sickert, “Modern Realism in Painting” in *Jules Bastien-Lepage and His Art. A Memoir*, ed. André Theuriet (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1892), 140.

material means. In response, artists and art critics emphasized the *work* of art, maintaining that it was the artist's process, both manual and intellectual, that distinguished creative artistry from mechanical imitation. Even here, however, boundaries between media proved permeable. By the end of the nineteenth century, proponents of art photography deployed the same logic to position the "picture" as a unifying category that encompassed painting and photography equally. What distinguished art from non-art was not the medium in which it was made, photographers argued, but the practice and intentions of the maker.⁴

The Photographic Effect traces this neglected but critically important trajectory for the history of modern art, shedding light on the significance of artistic labor and methods of making for shifting notions of pictorial meaning. Through a series of case studies in France and England—the two countries with the longest histories of photographic production and discourse—I analyze pictorial practices in painting and photography that tested the framework of medium, both materially and conceptually. These challenges to the straightforward categorization of objects (and the artistic work that produced them) put pressure on existing hierarchies of value and the standards of truth in pictorial art. Rather than being settled by the turn of the century, as modern theories of medium specificity would have it, I argue that hybrid pictorial practices catalyzed longstanding tensions between the mental and physical aspects of art-making that trigger debates and fuel artistic experimentation to this day.⁵

⁴ In his defense of the burgeoning Pictorialist movement, French art critic Robert de La Sizeranne argues that the word "photographer" is not an appropriate description for the practice of these artists, whose work is indistinguishable from that of a painter. Robert de la Sizeranne, "La Photographie: est-elle un art?" *Revue des deux-mondes* 144 (Dec. 1, 1897): 564.

⁵ This position can best be characterized by Clement Greenberg in his 1960 essay "Modernist Art," in which the author argued that the ambition of modern art was to "eliminate from the effects of each art any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art." For Greenberg, this would render each art "pure." See Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," *Forum Lectures* (Washington DC:

Methodology

Histories of photography in the nineteenth century often focus on the medium's beginnings, the "figuring it out" moment when photography's ontological identity and function as a pictorial practice were unfixed and in the process of formation.⁶ Notions of a dramatic confrontation between new and old—exemplified by the apocryphal statement credited to Paul Delaroche upon seeing the daguerreotype: "From today painting is dead!"—have more recently given way to an understanding of photography as emerging from and perpetuating preexisting discourses concerning representational exactitude, and the hand of man as a help or hindrance to the directness of depiction.⁷

While concerns about the threats that photography posed to art were expressed almost immediately, for the first thirty years of the medium's history these were largely theoretical, and based on photography's potential rather than any demonstrable damages it was causing.⁸ A hierarchical relationship between painting and photography was a given;

Voice of America, 1960) in *Art in Theory 1900-1990. An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 755.

⁶ See, for example, Geoffrey Batchen, *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997); Jordan Bear, "Indistinct Relics: Discerning the Origins of Photography," in *Disillusioned: Victorian Photography and the Discerning Subject* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Press, 2015), 119-30; Tanya Sheehan and Andrés Mario Zervignón, eds. *Photography and Its Origins* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

⁷ The pioneering text in this category is Peter Galassi, *Before Photography: Painting and the Invention of Photography* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1981). Stephen Bann examines the historical accuracy of the exclamation attributed to Paul Delaroche in *Parallel Lines: Printmakers, Painters and Photographers in Nineteenth-Century France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 104-115. Louis Roubert offers an excellent overview of the ways that photography was understood in terms of exactitude, mechanical reproduction, and painting during the first twenty years of its existence in *L'image sans qualités: Les beaux-arts et la critique à l'épreuve de la photographie, 1839-1859* (Paris: Éditions du patrimoine, 2006). See also Stephen Bann, "Against Photographic Exceptionalism," in *Photography and Its Origins*, 94-103.

⁸ See, for example, Charles Blanc's negative critique of the daguerreotype in *Revue du progrès politique, social et littéraire*: "Quelles sont donc les destinées de l'art ? La gravure est-elle sur le point de périr ou de se transformer ? Voici qu'un homme vient de découvrir un moyen de fixer la nature sur un miroir. Qui empêchera M. Daguerre de faire de ce miroir une gravure ? Oh ! si la chimie nous envahit, je crains bien que tous les mystères ne s'en aillent et la poésie avec eux." Charles Blanc, "Beaux-Arts. Gravure," *Revue du progrès*

painters and photographers alike characterized the relationship as one between a master and servant, and positioned photography's usefulness to artists as its own most artistic quality.⁹ This conception of the mechanical medium was perpetuated by allegorical images like Oscar Rejlander's c. 1856 photograph *The Infant Photography Giving the Painter an Additional Brush*, in which the immature and merely mortal photography offers the unseen and God-like painting a modest tool to aid representation (Fig. 1).

The Photographic Effect is premised on the assertion that a radical shift transpired in the power dynamic between painting and photography during the last three decades of the nineteenth century. Traditional histories of photography have credited technological innovations for photography's shifting status in this period, and the highlights are worth reviewing here. The invention of the gelatin dry plate in England in the early 1870s, which was much more sensitive to light than wet collodion and could be prepared in advance, greatly simplified the process of picture-taking and the subjects that could be imaged.¹⁰ The dry plate was in widespread use in France by the early 1880s, and it paved the way for industrially-prepared glass plates (and eventually roll film) that could accommodate astonishingly short exposure times of one-hundredth of a second. Improvements in camera equipment followed suit, with the introduction of instant shutters, faster lenses, and handheld instruments that made photography available to a broad, amateur usership (even

politique, social et littéraire (Feb. 15, 1839) in Roubert, 46. On the tendency to value photography in terms of its future potential see Jan von Brevern, "The Eternal Child: On Expectations in the History of Photography" *Getty Research Journal* 7 (January 2015): 67-80.

⁹ Steve Edwards outlines the ways that early photographers looked to painting as a model in *The Making of English Photography: Allegories* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006).

¹⁰ Richard Leach Maddox first reported on his experiments with dry emulsion in "An Experiment with Gelatino-Bromide," *British Journal of Photography* 18 (Sept. 8, 1871): 422-23.

though cameras remained expensive until the 1890s).¹¹ Physicians, astronomers, biologists, and sociologists incorporated the medium into their research, changing the ways that information and data were identified, collected, and presented in visual form.¹² In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, related advances in photomechanical and halftone reproductions enabled the printing of photographs alongside text for the first time, transforming the look and communicative approach of newspapers and journals.¹³ These substantial expansions in photography's technical capacities, and its integration into nearly every aspect of contemporary life, lend credence to Naomi Rosenblum's assertion that, by the end of the nineteenth century, the medium had become "the most significant pictorial means in modern industrial society."¹⁴

Alongside these technological developments, which played an instrumental role in changing the ways that photographs were used and perceived in contemporary culture, this dissertation considers the concomitant normalization of photography during this period. For painters and their critics, it was photography's very banality and inconspicuousness that caused the greatest anxiety, because these qualities adulterated the standards of "art" and "truth" on which distinctions between the two media were based.

¹¹ Todd Gustavson, "Innovative Devices: George Eastman and the Handheld Camera," in *Snapshot: Painters and Photography, Bonnard to Vuillard*, ed. Elizabeth Easton (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011): 17-19.

¹² Developments in stop motion photography, such as the photographic gun pioneered by Etienne-Jules Marey, one of the first French photographers to use gelatin silver-bromide emulsion, enabled exposures of up to one one-thousandth of a second, producing photographs of moving animals and objects with such clarity they appeared—paradoxically, as Michel Frizot has pointed out—perfectly frozen in motion. For a brief history of the snapshot see Michael Frizot, "The New Truths of the Snapshot" in *Snapshot: Painters and Photography*, 25-27.

¹³ In his book on photomechanical reproduction, Gerry Beegan describes this shift in the look of newspapers, wherein long descriptive passages were substituted for short paragraphs and an image, a format that was seen to be more lively and entertaining while simultaneously positioning the photograph as an authoritative source of information. Beegan points out, however, that these photographs still required hand-touching to "focus" the meaning of the image. Gerry Beegan, *The Mass Image: A Social History of Photomechanical Reproduction in Victorian London* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 7-9, and chapters four and seven.

¹⁴ Naomi Rosenblum, *A World History of Photography* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1997), 245.

Instead of being daunted by photography's technical expansions and contributions to the realms of science and documentation—domains to which the medium was seen to be eminently suited—proponents of “pure” painting felt that photography menaced art in hallowed and traditional areas of practice and technique where it was *imperceptible*. These included the realm of the studio, where artists utilized photographs as source material or aids to their compositions, and the gradual assimilation of a photographic aesthetic into painting, which, by the end of the century, had become the pictorial standard in any format. For those invested in distinguishing painting from photography, the pervasiveness of a photographic “look” was all the more disturbing because it was no longer recognized as specifically photographic at all. In this way, photography could be present but undetectable, rendering the perception of its visual qualities entirely subjective. If viewers could not pinpoint photography's influence on painting, critics warned, the photographic contagion would continue unabated and painting stood to lose its independent identity altogether.

By drawing attention to what I describe as the “invisible” consequences of photography on art, I do not mean to suggest that visual matters played no role in critical perceptions of the effects of photography on art. Reviewers could, and did, draw connections between the appearance of late-nineteenth century paintings and the qualities associated with photographs. My study seeks to show, however, that this most literal comparison between paintings and photographs formed part of a broader set of analogies that concerned the production and public display of works of art as well. The multivalent points of connection between photography and painting can be complicated to disentangle because of the formal parallels between photographs and naturalism, the dominant

aesthetic in European painting during the last two decades of the nineteenth century.

Concerns about photography's influence on art emerged in tandem with the ascendancy of painterly techniques that were themselves seen to be reproductive and "styleless"—qualities that offer obvious points of comparison with photography.¹⁵

Yet as this dissertation argues, it was not only visual appearance that writers sought to critique when they employed photographic language and concepts to describe naturalist paintings. The pervasiveness of a highly detailed and seemingly mimetic mode of representation across national boundaries and institutional contexts in the 1880s and 90s suggested that artistic thought and originality were themselves in jeopardy. Alarming, this direct threat to artists was encouraged and perpetuated by academies of art, which set the standards for training and controlled exhibition opportunities and professional advancement for painters. Critics who described naturalist paintings by way of photography, therefore, engaged far-reaching debates about the dwindling standards and values of art in the late nineteenth century—all of which seemed to endanger the creative labor and professional standing of artists themselves.

In bringing the multifarious tensions in discourse to bear on the hybridity of pictorial practice, and vice versa, my approach is distinct from the two dominant accounts of exchanges between painting and photography that developed in twentieth-century scholarship. During the early 1900s artists and theorists proposed a model of rejection, in which photography's ascendancy as a mode of realistic representation encouraged painters to embrace abstraction. This position is neatly summarized by the German Expressionist painter Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, who purportedly declared in 1907: "Today photography

¹⁵ Richard Thompson offers a useful overview of the international reach of naturalism in *Art of the Actual: Naturalism and Style in Early Third Republic France, 1880-1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 1-9.

takes over exact representation. Thus painting, relieved from this task, gains its former freedom of action.”¹⁶ Peter Galassi has pointed out that the notion that photography “usurped” the representational function of painting is largely unsubstantiated, but elements of this model persist in scholarship that reduces the signification of nineteenth-century photography to a matter of realism.¹⁷ As my research demonstrates, artists and writers in the late nineteenth century associated photography as much with distortions and superficiality as with exactitude or accuracy, raising questions about the terms of “truthful” depiction and the capacity of photography to provide it. As such, I distinguish the concerns that emerged in the 1880s and 90s from those in the mid-nineteenth century, when photography was employed more consistently to characterize the realism and lifelikeness of paintings.

Realistic representation constitutes one aspect of a broadly defined and deeply mutable category I term “artistic truth” in this dissertation. Throughout the chapters that follow, I show that artists and critics invoked terms like “truth” and “truthfulness” to describe a range of qualities in pictorial practice and appearance, including the directness or sense of immediacy in an image, compositional harmony, the absence of convention, and most significantly for the purposes of this project, the appropriateness of methods of making within the context of a given medium. There was more at stake in truthfulness than the *look* of a picture, in other words. Truth was the barometer by which the artist’s own contribution to the pictorial process was judged, and it designated the overall value of a work of art. Hybrid techniques of production, whether real or perceived, threatened this

¹⁶ Ernst Ludwig Kirchner as quoted in Dietrich Scheunemann, “From Collage to the Multiple. On the Genealogy of Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde” in *Avant-Garde/Neo-Avant-Garde*, Dietrich Scheunemann, ed. (New York: Rodopi, 2005), 26.

¹⁷ Galassi, 12.

notion of artistic truth by misrepresenting or disrupting the supposed relationship between the artist's process and the surface appearance of a picture. By foregrounding the ways that artistic truth was conceived and wielded as a critical tool in the late nineteenth century, my study establishes that realism, in the most inclusive sense of the term, remained a crucial goal of pictorial art throughout a period long associated with the origins of abstraction.

The Photographic Effect highlights the tensions that emerged when painting and photography were perceived to co-exist in a picture. My methods are therefore distinct from a second dominant model in scholarship on this topic, which understands cross-media fertilization in terms of strategies of emulation. This approach developed in the mid-twentieth century in tandem with the institutionalization of photography in art museums, and it tends to present the relationship between painting and photography as one of reciprocal interest and unfettered exchange. The model of emulation is exemplified by the 1955 exhibition *Un siècle de vision nouvelle*, organized by Jean Adhémar at the Bibliothèque nationale (now the Bibliothèque nationale de France). Adhémar's groundbreaking installation presented photographs alongside paintings for the first time, and it emphasized formal correspondences between images, such as the loose facture of Impressionism and photographic "blur." The stated goal of the project was to present photography as the equal of painting, which Adhémar realized by compressing one hundred years of photography's history into a single narrative that ended with the triumphant emergence of pop art.¹⁸ The curator's conclusion that photography now functioned as a form of neo-realist painting usefully countered the credibility of the narrative of rejection, but by collapsing together

¹⁸ Jean Adhémar, *Un siècle de vision nouvelle* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale, 1955), 9.

the distinctions between media Adhémar's approach ended up being no less teleological than its predecessor.

I maintain that there was an extended period of time, roughly coinciding with the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when artists and art critics sought terms for a truthful, artistic painting that was nonetheless distinguishable from photography. In this way, I seek to nuance the model of emulation that persists in scholarship today. The approach taken by *Un siècle de vision nouvelle* has been perpetuated by curators and art historians on both sides of the Atlantic, and it continues to be disseminated in museum exhibitions and scholarly surveys on painting and photography.¹⁹ Recent projects have revealed a wealth of archival documents that demonstrate the extent to which painters of all stylistic proclivities utilized photography in the late nineteenth century.²⁰ These discoveries complicate assumptions about the privileged relationship between photography and naturalism in this period, but the even-handed treatment of exchanges between media has tended to water down the contentiousness of shared practices and influences that was felt in the 1880s and 90s. Applying contemporary understanding of photography to historical circumstances obscures what photography could and did mean to viewers at this earlier moment. Throughout my study, I show that perceptions of hybridity were inconsistent and sometimes contradictory in meaning, to make clear that it

¹⁹ In addition to the texts already cited, see Diane Waggoner, ed., *The Pre-Raphaelite Lens: British Photography and Painting, 1848-1875* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2010).

²⁰ For example Gabriel P. Weisberg, *Beyond Impressionism: The Naturalist Impulse* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992); Elizabeth C. Childs, "The Colonial Lens: Gauguin, Primitivism, and Photography in the *Fin de siècle*," *Antimodernism and Artistic Experience: Policing the Boundaries of Modernity*, Lynda Jessup, ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 50-70; Geneviève Lacambre, "Les collections de photographies du peintre Gustave Moreau (1826-1898)" in *Genres et usages de la photographie*, Bertrand Lavédrine, ed. (Arles: Actes des congrès nationaux des sociétés historiques et scientifiques [édition électronique]), 2007.

was the very ambiguity of the relationship between media, and of the boundaries between art and non-art, that proved so disruptive.

The Photographic Effect operates between two poles of interpretation, one that holds painting and photography apart, and another that incorporates them into a shared network of exchange. I contend that it was the difficulty of extricating the aesthetics and material identities of one medium from another in the late nineteenth century that forced artists and art critics to seek meaning in artistic practice. In this way, the period just prior to the emergence of modernist and expressionist aesthetics at the turn of the twentieth century offers fascinating points of comparison with the perspectives and approaches we now associate with post-modernism. As Suzanne Hudson explains in the introduction to her recent survey *Painting Now*, artistic practice has become a more useful category of comparison at a moment when “objects that look alike might have nothing to do with one another, just as images that look different might be powerfully related.”²¹ I maintain that a similar set of uncertainties emerged in the last three decades of the nineteenth century, when painters, photographers, and their critics struggled to preserve—yet simultaneously dismantled—the material identities and value systems associated with “medium,” a category that came to bear extraordinary meaning at the start of the modern period.

Chapter Outline

To substantiate the richness of exchange within the making and interpretation of pictures in the late nineteenth century, each of my chapters avoids a binary between “painting” and “photography” by proposing the impossibility of media segregation in this

²¹ Suzanne Hudson, *Painting Now* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2015), 27.

period. In Chapter One, I examine a body of critical literature that emerged in France, England, Belgium, and Germany in the 1880s and 90s, which cited photography as the instigator of widespread changes in the look and practice of painting. Critics blamed the “brittle” and “lifeless” appearance of contemporary art on painters’ use of photography in the studio, and asserted a direct link between working with photographic source material and the appearance of a picture. I test these theories by outlining a series of instances in which artists employed photographs and photographic effects in their studio practices, and to disparate visual and stylistic ends. The chapter shows that rather than passively responding to photography’s influences, painters actively perpetuated and encouraged the use of photographs in their studio practices throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, and were often commended for doing so.

The acceptability and affirmation of photographic techniques at mid-century draws a striking contrast with the suspicion and condemnation that they raised in the 1880s. In the second half of the chapter I examine a legal trial that took place in Brussels in 1881 when a Belgian painter named Jan Van Beers (1852-1927) sued a particularly vociferous critic for accusing him of painting directly over photographs. Through an analysis of the trial testimony and related media coverage, I outline the impediments to distinguishing paintings from photographs on either material or visual grounds. The chapter reveals medium to be a category in flux as critics employed theoretical associations with artistic labor and authenticity to differentiate painterly picturing from photographic reproduction.

The second chapter broadens the terms by which painting could be deemed photographic by considering an early definition of “photo-realism” proposed by British artist and art critic Walter Sickert (1860-1942). Sickert was a significant realist painter and

art critic in London in the 1880s and 90s, and I situate him as a key voice in the debates about painting and photography throughout this dissertation. In his 1892 essay “Modern Realism in Painting,” Sickert labeled French naturalist painter Jules Bastien-Lepage (1848-1884) a photo-realist on the basis of his method of painting out of doors and directly from life. For Sickert, this essentially mimetic way of working implied that the painter could be replaced by a camera. Through an analysis of the shifting reception of Bastien-Lepage’s work over the course of the 1870s and 80s, I show that the visual qualities associated with “photographic” painting expanded during this period, as critics began to question the artistic limitations of techniques like painting *en plein air*.

These shifts in the interpretation of painting practices developed alongside an increasingly promiscuous use of photographic terminology and concepts to characterize the making, appearance, or public presentation of a work of art. By the 1880s, as this chapter demonstrates, Bastien-Lepage’s paintings could be labeled “colored photographs” because of perceptions about his methods, the profusion of surface detail in his canvases, or the popularity of his technique, which influenced painters across Europe even after the artist’s death. Chapter Two highlights the forms of hybridity that were generated by critics themselves, as they employed photography to characterize and critique methods of realism in painting that were deemed superficial, unoriginal, or merely descriptive. I contend that this compulsion to describe painting by way of photography further disintegrated distinctions between the two media, and exacerbated anxieties about the terms of truthful depiction going forward.

Rather than examining exchanges between media from the perspective of painters alone, my third chapter addresses hybridity within the context of photographic practice

and theory. Here I analyze critical responses to techniques of composite printing and other methods of handwork that emerged around 1860, when art theory in photography began to be codified, and trace them through the 1880s and 90s. Taking British photographer Henry Peach Robinson (1830-1901) as a case study, Chapter Three considers the photographer's method of printing photographs from more than one negative in the context of widespread belief that this "mechanism" of making was perceptible in the appearance of his prints. By examining Robinson's preparatory and darkroom procedures, as well as his extensive writing about photographic practice, I suggest that this photographer encouraged viewers to pay attention to process, and to take it into account in their evaluation of an image. This attitude challenged key tenets of academic art theory—the paradigm for nascent concepts of art in photography—by refusing to subordinate manual labor to that of the mind. While many theorists of photography rejected Robinson's approach, the accolades that attended the photographer's work at exhibitions in Europe and the United States, as well as the popularity of composite printing and other methods of manipulation throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, reveal a persistent fascination with making that undermined the standards of "untouched" photographic truth espoused by art critics.

The tensions between making and visual appearance in photography parallel the discourses in painting discussed in the previous two chapters. Articles in photographic journals also called for photographers to "purify" their procedures, and authors debated the status and visibility of composite printing, retouching, and other methods of handwork in the production of photographic art. Chapter Three shows the distinctions between media to be crumbling on the side of photography as well, as practitioners struggled to articulate

consistent divisions between pure and impure techniques. Theorists of art photography, like those of painting, wanted to benefit from the aesthetic associations between their images and paintings while rejecting mixed-media making as false and corrupt. The chapter establishes that photographers needed to distinguish their work from “mechanical” or utilitarian photography to justify the status of their images as art. In their cases, however, this required a particularly delicate negotiation between highlighting the evidence of artistic intervention, and maintaining their medium as the standard-bearer of unadulterated pictorial truth.

The dissertation concludes with the singular artistic practice of Edgar Degas (1834-1917), cited by Sickert and his contemporaries as the painterly opposite of photo-realists like Bastien-Lepage. For late-nineteenth century critics, Degas’s realism was truthful and artistic because he “processed” his observations and generated new pictures from memory, rendering them in unusual, mixed-media techniques. This anti-photographic understanding of Degas’s work stands in stark contrast to assessments of his paintings in the early- to mid-twentieth century, when the artist’s compositional approach was often described in terms of a snapshot or credited to the painter’s “photographic eye.” Chapter Four seeks to recover the pre-and, for a time, *anti*-photographic Degas by reviewing the shifting reception of his art over the course of the Impressionist exhibitions (1874-1886). It argues that tensions within a surface-oriented conception of pictorial truth, one associated with “photographic” qualities such as direct observation and rapid reproduction, gave way to a new model of pictorial realism in the 1880s based on the artist’s synthetic and materially experimental practice. For Degas’s supporters, it was his process of making, both mental

and material, that differentiated the artist's personal and highly mediated form of pictorial truth from mere reproduction.

The great irony is that Degas took up the camera himself in the last decade of the nineteenth century, producing group portraits and street scenes in a concentrated burst of activity around 1895 that helped to bring about the reassessment of his work as photographic in the twentieth century. By all accounts Degas remained a protracted worker even in his photographic practice, requiring extraordinary lengths of time to set up and take his photographs, experimenting with night photography, and judiciously supervising the enlargement of his negatives to identify the picture within his picture. This investment of time and energy in his photographs impelled writers such as Paul Valéry to unify Degas the photographer with Degas the artist in the twentieth century, securing the compatibility of his painterly and photographic practices despite evident differences between the carefully staged photographs and the "snapshot" aesthetic ascribed to his paintings. By extending my study into the 1930s and beyond, I suggest that the historical relationships between painting and photography are renegotiated in every generation, and are most often informed by the status of photography in the present.

CHAPTER ONE

Pursuing “Pure” Painting in the Snapshot Era

Concerns about photography’s influence on painting loomed large for artists and art critics at the end of the nineteenth century. Recent technological advancements in the production of photographic negatives and equipment had made it significantly easier for artists to take their own photographs, rather than relying on the services of an independent photographer.¹ This increased access to and control of photographic images introduced deeply hybrid ways of working into painters’ studio practices, raising questions about the material identity of paintings and the role of the artist in making them. At the same time, photography’s authority as a mode of realist representation, with its own vernacular and methods of communication, recalibrated the expectations for visual truth in ways that painters (and all producers of pictures) were obliged to acknowledge. Together, these changes in how pictures were made and what they should look like put real pressure on painters and their advocates to identify the values specific to pictorial *art*, while

¹ The factory production of gelatin dry plates and the invention of roll-film cameras made photography accessible to a much larger, non-professional public. Gelatin dry plates, which suspended silver salts in a form of gelatin emulsion that was more stable than wet collodion, could be prepared in advance and developed well after exposure. By 1879, dry plates began to be produced in factories rather than exclusively by photographers themselves, contributing to a boom in the use of photography. See Michel Frizot, “The New Truths of the Snapshot” and Todd Gustavson, “Innovative Devices: George Eastman and the Handheld Camera” in *Snapshot: Painters and Photography, Bonnard to Vuillard*, ed. Elizabeth W. Easton (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 13-21, 25.

accommodating (and continuing to benefit from) the cultural status and technical possibilities of photography.

Some of these concerns had been sounded earlier, notably by Charles Baudelaire in his review of the Paris Salon of 1859. In response to what he saw as the modern public's misguided infatuation with material reality and mimetic reproduction, Baudelaire warned that "[i]f photography is allowed to deputize for art in some of art's activities, it will not be long before it has supplanted or corrupted art altogether."² Yet a threat that was largely predictive for Baudelaire had deeply intensified by the 1880s and 90s, such that artists and art critics on both sides of the Channel could claim that the hierarchical relationship between painting and photography was in a process of reversal.

This chapter analyzes a series of discourses that emerged in fine arts communities across Europe at a time of significant expansion in photography's technical possibilities and pictorial power. It shows that while artists and art critics often attributed photography's impact on painting to the use of photographs as source material, linking particular techniques to pictorial appearance proved inconclusive. Painters of every stylistic ilk employed photographs and photographic technologies in their studio practices, while a photographic "look" might not accompany the physical use of photographs at all.

Photography's unfixed material identity was a contributing factor in this confusion, as the

² Charles Baudelaire, "The Modern Public and Photography" in *Classic Essays on Photography*, Alan Trachtenberg, ed. (New Haven: Leete's Island Books, 1980), 88. The context of Baudelaire's critique was the exhibition of the Société française de Photographie, which was held in the same building as the Salon that year. See André Gunthert, "Naissance de la Société française de photographie," in *L'Utopie photographique. Regard sur la collection de la Société française de photographie* (Paris, 2004), 15-24. Jan von Brevern has pointed out that this forward-looking perspective dominates the discourses on photography at mid-century and beyond in "The Eternal Child: On Expectations in the History of Photography," *Getty Research Journal* 7 (January 2015): 67-80.

medium could be constituted by any number of chemical- or light-based procedures rendered invisible or intangible when employed to make a painting.

I suggest that the inability to differentiate painting from photography by any consistent set of standards engendered a crisis in visual interpretation that, by the end of the nineteenth century, became impossible to ignore. Painters and their critics, wishing to protect artistic picturing from the photographic paradigm of unthinking imitation, stressed the importance of the artist's creative labor in the production of works of art. By situating the difference between art and non-art in the maker's process, both manual and intellectual, writers sought to secure the meaning of painting on terms that were not in competition with the camera.

Diagnosing Photographic Effects

In 1893 art historian Robert de La Sizeranne published his first essay of art criticism in the French literary and cultural review *Revue des deux mondes*.³ Dedicating his debut to the subject of photography's influence on art, La Sizeranne opened this account with a melodramatic interpretation of a public sculpture depicting French chemist and inventor Nicéphore Niépce (Fig. 2):⁴

There exists, in Chalon-sur-Saône, a statue of Niepce [sic] in which the famous inventor is depicted standing, his finger poised to activate a camera, with the air of an artilleryman defying you to approach. You search in vain for the invisible enemy menaced by the photographer. In certain moments it seems that it is the artist; that is, the man of interpretation, of fantasy, and of dreams. And with him, the

³ For a short biography of Robert de La Sizeranne see Stephen Bann, "La Sizeranne, Robert (de)," *Dictionnaire critique des historiens de l'art*, Institut national d'histoire de l'art, accessed July 8, 2017: <http://www.inha.fr/fr/ressources/publications/dictionnaire-critique-des-historiens-de-l-art/la-sizeranne-robert-de.html>.

⁴ Robert de la Sizeranne, "Le Photographe et l'artiste," *Revue des deux-mondes* 115 (Feb. 15, 1893): 839-59.

indefinable, intangible, intuited world that he makes his domain, his passion, and his joy.⁵

With this introduction, La Sizeranne positioned the photographer as a direct threat to the artist in one of the longest and most in-depth assessments of photography's effects on painting that appeared in print in the late nineteenth century.

This text, entitled "The Photographer and the Artist," outlined the range of ways that photography had pervaded the training, practice, and aesthetics of painting over the past fifty years. Within art academies, La Sizeranne explained, traditional methods of study "handed down by the masters" had been replaced by photographic projections, such that painters now preferred copying the *têtes d'expression* by French doctor Guillaume Benjamin Duchenne de Boulogne to studying great masterworks.⁶ Duchenne's most influential book, *Mécanisme de la physionomie humaine: ou analyse electro-physiologique de l'expression des passions* (1862), juxtaposed photographs of human subjects whose facial muscles had been stimulated by electric current with iconic works of art to show that the involuntary expressions captured in photographs "corrected" the depiction of emotional states in paintings and sculptures (Fig. 3).⁷ While the physical procedures of learning to draw may not have changed, La Sizeranne suggested that photography's representational authority had come to undermine the role of invention in the act of making art.

⁵ "Il existe, à Chalon-sur-Saône, une statue de Niepce, où le célèbre inventeur est représenté debout, montrant du doigt un objectif prêt à fonctionner, avec un faux air de canonnière qui défie qu'on approche. On cherche quel ennemi invisible le photographe menace ainsi dans l'infini. Il semble, à certains momens [sic], que ce soit l'artiste, c'est-à-dire, l'homme de l'interprétation, de la fantaisie et du rêve et, avec lui, le monde indéfinissable, intangible, pressenti, dont il fait son domaine, sa passion et sa joie." La Sizeranne, "Le Photographe et l'artiste," 839.

⁶ La Sizeranne, "Le Photographe et l'artiste," 840. Duchenne's photographic oeuvre was acquired by the École des beaux-arts in 1875. See Emmanuel Schwartz, *Les sculptures de l'École des beaux-arts de Paris: Histoire, doctrines, catalogue* (Paris: Ecole nationale supérieure des beaux-arts, 2003), 77-78.

⁷ Hayes Peter Mauro, "Duchenne: Discourses of Aesthetics, Sexuality, and Power in Nineteenth-Century Medical Photography," *Athanos XVIII* (2000): 56 and Schwartz, 77-78.

Outside of the classroom, pressure to obey the camera persisted. La Sizeranne cited developments in stop-motion photography in the 1870s and 80s, which had transformed the expectations for rendering movement in pictorial form. After English photographer Eadweard Muybridge proved that all four of the horse's hooves came off the ground during a gallop, photography was credited with invalidating the "rocking horse" pose prevalent in painted battle scenes up to that point (Figs. 4 and 5).⁸ Painters treated these instantaneous photographs as "sacred text," La Sizeranne reported, rejecting the authority of tradition lest they be labeled ignorant or incorrect.⁹

"The Photographer and the Artist" was written for discursive effect, but the basic facts of La Sizeranne's narrative were not exaggerated. In the wake of discoveries in stop-motion photography, painters like American realist Thomas Eakins incorporated lessons learned from photographs into their pictures. Yet the use of photographic source material could weaken the representational accuracy of paintings. Eakins was widely criticized for conflating two different speeds of vision in his picture of a horse-drawn carriage entitled *A May Morning in the Park* (Fig. 6). Critics noticed that the horses' legs appeared frozen in motion—adhering to Muybridge's example—while the wheels of the coach were depicted in a blur, the speed of human sight (and the traditional method for communicating motion

⁸ Eadweard Muybridge became famous in 1878 for taking a series of successive photographs of California Governor Leland Stanford's horse at a gallop, proving that all four of the horse's hooves came off the ground during this action. Muybridge's findings were published in New York, London, and Paris, and they had a substantial impact on the representation of motion in painting. See Beaumont Newhall, "Photography and the Development of Kinetic Visualization," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 7 (1944): 42. Étienne-Jules Marey, a close follower of Muybridge, produced similar images utilizing a photographic gun to record sequences of motion too fast for the human eye to perceive. For a discussion of the influence of Muybridge and Marey on painters see Van Deren Coke, *The Painter and the Photograph from Delacroix to Warhol* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1972), 155-56.

⁹ "Or le grand nombre de ces citations, mises sous nos yeux, nous fait connaître le texte sacré de telle façon que l'artiste qui voudra y changer un mot sera tout de suite pris en défaut." La Sizeranne, "Le photographe et l'artiste," 843.

in painting).¹⁰ Following the lead of photography put painters in an impossible position: by ignoring the findings of photographers they seemed uninformed, but incorporating such evidence often produced visual inconsistencies that challenged the cohesive realism of the scene. Far from functioning as a passive tool, La Sizeranne asserted, photography had become a powerful means of controlling and criticizing the work of the painter.¹¹

Robert de La Sizeranne was one of many writers who protested the photographic standard in art, but “The Photographer and the Artist” went much further in connecting these demonstrable uses of photography to broader developments in the aesthetics of painting. In the author’s assessment, photography was responsible for the entire stylistic movement of realism, as it had persuaded painters to reject idealization in favor of “awkward,” “angular,” and “graceless” bodies, and to abandon the aspiration of beauty for “brittle, precise, and rapid motions that no longer take the time to be elegant.”¹² Likewise, in the genre landscape painting, painters traded the classical model of composition for accidental or arbitrary framing that conveyed little more than a glimpse out of a window.¹³ The problem had moved far beyond the matter of source material, as photography and its representational value system had fully permeated the stylistic and compositional approaches of painters.

By tracing a range of developments in painting to their origins in photography, La Sizeranne made a dramatic case for the overarching impact of the reproductive medium on

¹⁰ See Michael Leja, *Looking Askance: Skepticism and American Art from Eakins to Duchamp* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 68-69. For a discussion of Eakins’ relationship with Muybridge see Newhall, 43.

¹¹ La Sizeranne, “Le photographe et l’artiste,” 843.

¹² “Elles sont remplacées par des formes grêles, étriquées, équarries, sans grâce...Le geste, précis, rapide, hâté vers son but, ne prend plus le temps d’être élégant. Ibid., 841.

¹³ “Or, vous savez ce qu’un artiste de 1893 voit dans la nature : ce qui peut tenir entre les chambranles d’une fenêtre, comme cela s’arrange et avec toutes les inélegances qu’un hasard facétieux peut apporter dans la composition.” La Sizeranne, “Le Photographe et l’artiste,” 842.

the making, appearance, and pictorial ambitions of works of art. Yet the author was inconsistent and ultimately equivocal in his assessment of the problem. He peppered his text with examples of the ways that photography was useful to artists, or had contributed to improvements in painting, punctuating the persuasiveness of his rhetoric with moments of ambiguity. In a section of the essay that considered the production of panoramas, for example, La Sizeranne explained how French artists Alphonse de Neuville and Edouard Detaille had projected photographs of each scene onto canvas and traced the results to create their famed panorama of Rézonville. Photography enabled them to integrate a complicated composition, the author suggested, improving the process of painting and its pictorial results. He this anecdote on an ominous note, however, by pointing out that a circular camera had recently been invented that could create a “true” panorama on its own.¹⁴

Throughout a text that lambasted the influence of photography on painting, La Sizeranne also positioned the medium as a superior, and even more reliable method of imaging in certain regards. In the case of the panorama, for example, the synchronic relationship between photography’s means of depiction (a single shot of the camera) and the representational result (a coherent scene) offered a more unified method of picturing than the piecemeal process employed by painters. Useful and subservient tool, or latent threat? La Sizeranne played both hands in “The Photographer and the Artist,” even while he doubled down on the need to differentiate photographic reproduction from the creative labor of the artist. “[E]veryone uses this machine now,” the author warned. “And if the camera evolves still further, and tomorrow manages to register the most subtle colors as

¹⁴ La Sizeranne, “Le Photographe et l’artiste,” 844.

today it records the most fugitive lines, what path is left to artists who do not want to be confused with photographers?"¹⁵

La Sizeranne's concerns about the effects of photography on painting were echoed by artists and writers working elsewhere in Europe, many of whom situated shifts in practice as the point of origin for problems in the appearance or artistic standards of works of art. Karl Raupp, a painter and professor at the Munich art academy, published an essay similar in tone and content to that of La Sizeranne in the journal *Kunst für Alle* in 1889. Here, the German artist made his point powerfully by detailing the experience of visiting a contemporary painter's studio, where photographs and photographic equipment were integrated into every stage of the pictorial process:

Out in the open, alongside the artist's umbrella, stands the camera, and if formerly the artist was only busy underneath the umbrella, now he just as frequently sticks his head under the black cloth to make a "setting." And when you enter a modern artist's studio, the chances are one hundred to one that the proprietor is in the darkroom, from where his muffled greeting and request for patience resounds. Artists who are not familiar with the photographic apparatus are already in the minority. By contrast, among many of the younger ones, including frequently mentioned names, it has already become their right-hand man, as it were. With its help, the work of art is pieced together in all its parts; the apparatus helps in preparing the draft for the painting, and guides and supports its completion through all its various phases.¹⁶

As Raupp outlined, photographic techniques were now so deeply integrated into the procedures of making paintings that they had become essential to artists. As a result, the

¹⁵ "Toutefois, puisque tout le monde aujourd'hui emploie cette machine, l'astronome et le soldat, l'explorateur et le naturaliste, le touriste et le juge d'instruction, pourquoi le peintre ne l'emploierait-il pas? S'il en use, à quoi lui sert-elle déjà? à quoi peut-elle dorénavant lui servir? Sont-ce des inspirations qu'il doit lui demander ou de simples renseignements qu'il peut en attendre? Et si cet appareil progresse encore et parvient demain à enregistrer les couleurs les plus subtiles comme il enregistre aujourd'hui les traits les plus fugitifs, dans quelle voie cette découverte acheminera telle nécessairement les créateurs qui ne voudront pas être confondus avec les photographes?" Ibid., 840.

¹⁶ Karl Raupp, "Die Photographie in der modernen Kunst," *Die Kunst für Alle* 4 (1889): 325-26 in Ulrich Pohlmann, "Another Nature; or, Arsenal of Memory: Photography as Study Aid, 1850-1900," *The Artist and the Camera: Degas to Picasso*, ed. Dorothy Kosinski (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 54.

painter's practice was all but indistinguishable from that of a photographer. Raupp associated the expansion of photography's pictorial authority with the medium's sheer usefulness. The development of dry plates and improvements in cameras enabled painters to make their own images, the author explained, which eventually supplanted all other methods of study in the painter's process.¹⁷ For Raupp, these changes in the ways that painters made their pictures were perceptible: the "flawed perspective" of the snapshot was evident everywhere, he complained, where it was "translated onto canvas with oil paint."¹⁸ This photographic adulteration of painting threatened the "true" and "genuine" work of art, because it limited a picture to only what could be photographed.¹⁹ Pictorial truth, in Raupp's account, was associated with the purity and self-sufficiency of painting. The professor fervently hoped that German painters would shake off the foreign influence of photography—which he blamed on Parisian art as much as on photographs themselves—by returning to the rigorous realism for which German art had always been known.²⁰

Texts like those of La Sizeranne and Raupp sought to outline the state of a problem, but they also served as appeals to contemporary artists to reject photographic forms of making and aesthetic standards and reclaim painting's independent, and by extension more "truthful," identity. Interestingly, the justification for doing so often involved undermining

¹⁷ "Erzeugnissen der produzierenden Künste bekannt und vertraut gemacht, das Interesse geweckt und erhalten wird, ist auch sonst noch die Photographie dem schaffenden Künstler förderlich und notwendig geworden, Lehrmeisterin und Dienerin zugleich." Raupp, 325. I am grateful to Charles Talbot for translating this text and discussing it with me.

¹⁸ "Die sehr vielfach geschmacklose Darstellung der Momentaufnahmen und ihrer grotesken, fehlerhaften Perspektive erfreuen sich heute, mit Ölfarbe auf Leinwand übertragen, von vornherein von gewisser Seite einer ganz besonderen Respektierung und achtungsvoller Beurteilung." Ibid., 326.

¹⁹ "Es ist dies alsdann das wahre, echte Kunstwerk, das auf der Höhe der Zeit stehend, alle veralteten Traditionen abgestreift hat...Die direkte Mithilfe des photographischen Apparats erlaubt für die Wahl des bildlichen Stoffes nur die engsten Grenzen—was sich eben photographieren läßt!" Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

and challenging the qualities with which photography was often associated: its accuracy and exactitude. Writing in the *Magasin pittoresque* in 1898, for example, French critic Gaston Cerfberr argued that photography often distorted what it pictured, making it an inappropriate and ultimately false source for artists.²¹ Photographic lenses rendered detail and froze motion, but this was not how people perceived and experienced the world. Imitating this visual standard, in other words, was counterproductive. In Cerfberr's assessment, artists who took their cues from Muybridge's photographs produced bizarre-looking paintings depicting horses that galloped like "beasts of the Apocalypse."²² Similar problems emerged in portraiture and landscape painting, where photographs distorted facial features or misconstrued the size of foreground objects and the recession of depth. In paintings where photographic sources had been mined, their use was not only recognizable and distracting, it also undermined the claims for representational truth that the medium was employed to convey.²³ To produce accurate-looking images, Cerfberr concluded, painters should rely on their own eyes.

Cerfberr's characterization of the influence of photography on painting, like that of Raupp and La Sizeranne, was based on reliable distinctions between media. Photographs produced one kind of visual image, paintings another, and painters who worked from

²¹ Gaston Cerfberr, "La photographie dans l'art," *Magasin pittoresque* 16 (1898): 60-61. A similar approach is taken by Philip Gilbert Hamerton in "The Relation Between Photography and Painting," *Thoughts About Art* (London: MacMillan And Co., 1889), 52-65.

²² "...tout le monde, par exemple, connaît ces étonnantes épreuves décomposant le galop du cheval, et qui nous ont révélé sur la position des jambes, aux divers temps de ce galop, des détails tout à fait inconnus ; eh bien, ces épreuves nous ont valu, de la part de certains artistes, des séries désolantes de chevaux galopant d'une manière bizarre, avec des mouvement de bêtes de l'Apocalypse ; jamais personne, eux moins que tous autres, n'avaient vu les chevaux courir ainsi, mais triomphalement ils s'écriaient : --Quoi que vous en pensiez, ce mouvement est exact, puisque le photographie, à défaut de votre œil, l'a saisi au vol. Et pourtant la plupart de ces copies d'après photographies vous donnent le vertige, ou vous exaspèrent comme un non sens !" Cerfberr, 60.

²³ "La photographie perd ainsi son principal avantage, qui serait de représenter la vérité absolue, exempte de toute fantaisie, de toute aberration de l'œil...loin d'atténuer ces défauts, elle les exagère." Ibid., 60-61.

photographs reproduced a photographic look. Elsewhere, however, writers observed a disconcerting assimilation between pictorial modes that troubled clear-cut demarcations between media. In an essay published in the inaugural issue of the London-based *The Studio* magazine, editor Gleeson White pointed out that painters no longer needed photographs to conjure a recognizably photographic aesthetic. They appeared to be generating one on their own. White's 1893 article "Is the Camera the Friend or Foe of Art?", argued that photography had so thoroughly pervaded artistic conventions and the public's perception of nature that identifying specific photographic sources was beside the point.²⁴ The author described photography as a form of "unconscious education" that was all the more dangerous because viewers no longer noticed the camera's mediation of a scene; they looked right through a photograph's distortions of form and absence of color to the visual truths they expected to find there.²⁵

White's overarching concern was that photography had become more authoritative than the human eye, and that this new standard of reference had significant consequences for both the look and practice of painting. While artists of the past had not hesitated to modify the appearance of a scene to suit their pictures, painters today were beholden to "photographic accuracy," White claimed, obliging them to reproduce details rather than freeing them to create works of art.²⁶ So fully had painters embraced these expectations, White argued, that artists like William Logsdail produced photographic-looking pictures without drawing from photographs at all. Logsdail's *Bank and Royal Exchange* was just "as a photograph would record them," the author maintained, noting the haphazard distribution

²⁴ Gleeson White, "Is the Camera the Friend or Foe of Art?" *The Studio* I (April 1893): 96.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 96-98.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 98.

of forms and the quality of light in the painting (Fig. 7).²⁷ White blamed this misguided value system on the excessive influence of the public: nothing would change in the appearance of paintings, he concluded, until viewers sought qualities beyond what a photograph could provide.²⁸

White and his contemporaries characterized the state of contemporary painting as if painters had taken on the identity of photographers, both in terms of material practice and aesthetic goals. While this approach was intended to shame painters and discourage them from employing photographs or photographic effects in their work, it had the unintended effect of shifting the meaning and status of a medium from its material identity to the practice and intentions of the artist. Robert de La Sizeranne's "The Photographer and the Artist" offers a particularly salient example of how a case for distinguishing painting from photography could easily be inverted. While the first two-thirds of La Sizeranne's article operated on the basis of a binary between painting and photography, the latter portion of the text turned the tables on this logic by suggesting that what ultimately differentiated art from non-art was not the medium in which the artist worked, but the goals and intentions of the maker.²⁹ By following the "teachings of art," La Sizeranne explained, photographers like Henry Peach Robinson made photographs that functioned more like drawings, and therefore reinstated the authoritative position of painting in hierarchy of picturing.³⁰ The division between painting and photography that undergirded the first portion of the essay simply served to bolster the legitimacy of traditional artistic values—values upon which

²⁷ White, 97.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 98.

²⁹ By the end of the decade, La Sizeranne would become a key supporter of the Pictorialist movement in photography. La Sizeranne's support of art photography is further developed in "La Photographie: Est-elle un art?" *Revue des deux-mondes* 144 (Dec. 1, 1897): 564-95.

³⁰ La Sizeranne, "Le Photographe et l'artiste," 858.

both painting and art photography depended. La Sizeranne's claims about the negative effects of photography on art were revealed to be a rhetorical device that enabled the author to define pictorial art based on theory and practice, rather than the material identity of a medium. At the same moment that writers expressed the urgent need to distinguish painting from photography, every aspect of the production, appearance, and goals of the pictorial process proved that the two practices could no longer be separated.

Secrets of the Studios

For artists reflecting on the impact of photography on painting in this period, concerns about the infiltration of photography into painters' studio practices were not merely theoretical. Photographs and photographic technologies changed how artists could make paintings in ways that seemed to marginalize the role of the artist in the process. Anxieties about what this meant for the future of painters undergirded much of the writing on photography's impact on art in the 1880s and 90s. This perspective is evident in the responses to a poll that Gleeson White issued to contemporary artists in Great Britain, which was published at the end of his 1893 article "Is the Camera the Friend or Foe of Art?" In this questionnaire, White asked artists to address "[w]hether the camera has, on the whole, been beneficial or detrimental to art" and "if the conventions hitherto accepted by the painter have been modified since its introduction."³¹ The published opinions varied widely, and ranged from describing photography as "healthy" and "beneficial" to "evil" and "injurious," but the most detailed and impassioned answers came from those who felt that

³¹ White, 99.

photography was sidelining the artist's work, with a direct impact on the quality of the paintings that resulted.³²

Painter and illustrator Walter Crane described a cause-and-effect situation in which the use of photographs as source material encouraged artists to imitate the medium's aesthetic. "In painting, so far as photography has taken the place of other studies, and has induced the painter to consciously attempt photographic renderings of fact and aspect, the effect has been evil to my mind," Crane asserted, "for the scientific registering of certain facts and accidents of aspect is one thing, and the selection, treatment, and feeling—the impression, in short, of the painter's mind—quite another."³³ Another respondent, William Richmond, blamed new hybrid processes of making, such as printing photographs directly on canvas or using a snapshot camera in place of a sketchbook, for the sorry state of contemporary art. Such developments spelled the "ruin" of painting, Richmond declared, and he hypothesized that these effects could already be felt in the lackluster attendance at the annual Royal Academy exhibition.³⁴

British artist Walter Sickert went even further in outlining the causal relationship between working from photographs and the appearance of paintings in his response to White's poll. Sickert, an accomplished realist painter and active art critic in his own right, wrote a regular column in the London edition of the *New York Herald* in 1889, and contributed articles to *Art Weekly*, *The Whirlwind*, and the *Pall Mall Gazette* throughout the 1890s. Concerns about photography appeared with frequency in Sickert's essays and exhibition reviews, where his condemnation of artists who painted from photographs

³² See the responses by Lawrence Alma-Tadema, John Everett Millais, James Orrock, and W.P. Frith in White, 99, 102.

³³ Walter Crane in *ibid.*, 101.

³⁴ W.B. Richmond in *ibid.*, 100.

overlapped with broader complaints about the condition of contemporary realist painting. In his response to the *Studio* poll, Sickert reiterated the common opinion that painting from photographs produced inartistic paintings, but he went further in his analysis of the issue to explain how photography compromised a painter's creative development. "In proportion as a painter or a draughtsman works from photographs, so is he sapping his powers of observation and of expression," Sickert wrote. "It is much as if a swimmer practiced in a cork jacket, or a pianist by turning a barrel-organ. For drawing, which should express three dimensions, is substituted a kind of mapping, and colour is simply non-existent."³⁵ By substituting a photograph for what was otherwise a lengthy and laborious process of learning to create, painters undermined the aspects of their work that defined it as art. The resulting pictures were flimsy and insubstantial, the mere "mapping" of images on the surface of the canvas. For Sickert, photography introduced deficiencies at the level of conception that could not help but betray themselves in the material composition and appearance of the pictures that followed.

In their responses to White's survey, Sickert, Richmond, and Crane characterized photography as an aggressor; a contagion that permeated the pictorial process and took root, contaminating the physical production and visual appearance of works of art. Yet the longer history of artistic practice in the nineteenth century tells a different story, one in which painters actively promoted and perpetuated the use of photographs, often with the encouragement of their peers and contemporary art critics. The lineage of artists that descended from French painter Paul Delaroche offers a particularly compelling example of

³⁵ Walter Sickert in White, 102.

the ways that photography was employed, reconceived, and shared over three generations of artists.

Delaroche ran a large and successful studio at the Institut de France in the late 1830s and early 1840s, and he was a champion of the daguerreotype at its nascent stage.³⁶ After serving on the government committee charged with determining if Daguerre's process was worthy of a lifelong pension, Delaroche provided a written report on the artistic potential of the new technique that was read aloud at the decisive meeting of the Academies of Sciences and Fine Arts in August 1839.³⁷ In this text, Delaroche championed the emergent technology, reporting that "Daguerre's process...completely satisfies all the requirements of Art," and emphasizing its usefulness as a subject of study.³⁸ Stephen Bann has pointed out that Delaroche's familiarity with and interest in the daguerreotype played a key role in the dissemination and acceptance of the medium; it is probable that many artists encountered daguerreotypes for the first time in Delaroche's studio, and the master encouraged their use.³⁹

It is not a coincidence, therefore, that a number of important early photographers got their start as painters in Delaroche's studio. These include such well-known

³⁶ Paul Delaroche (1797-1856) took over the studio managed by Antoine-Jean Gros (1771-1835) after the latter's death. He maintained it until 1843 when the administration of the École des Beaux-Arts ordered its closure following the death of a student in a hazing incident. See Stephen Bann, *Paul Delaroche: History Painted* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997), 228 and Eugenia Parry Janis, *The Photography of Gustave Le Gray* (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1987), 23.

³⁷ Bann, *History Painted*, 16 and James Borcoman, *Charles Nègre 1820-1880* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1976), 12.

³⁸ Bann, *History Painted*, 264. A letter from Delaroche to François Arago, which indicates that photography will be useful to even the most accomplished of painters, is housed at the George Eastman Museum. See Françoise Heilbrun, *Charles Nègre: photographe, 1820-1880* (Paris: Ed. de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1980), 16.

³⁹ Stephen Bann, "Delaroche, Hippolyte (Paul) (1797-1856)," in *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Photography*, ed. John Hannavy (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2008), 406-07. Both Bann and Borcoman discuss Delaroche's interest in photography and the ways that it served a utilitarian and aesthetic purpose for painters. See Bann, *History Painted*, 264; Borcoman, 21; and Janis, 24.

practitioners as Gustave Le Gray, Henry Le Secq, Édouard-Denis Baldus, Roger Fenton, and Charles Nègre.⁴⁰ Nègre, whose origins as a painter have now been all but forgotten, entered Delaroche's studio in 1839, and he took up daguerreotypy after observing a demonstration of the technique at the Institut de France.⁴¹ The artist initially made photographs to serve as source material or "sketches" for his paintings, but after switching to paper-based methods of photography in the late 1840s he began painting directly on his own staged genre photographs.⁴² In his Ph.D. dissertation on the artist, Jacob Lewis has described the quite radical hybridity of Nègre's process, which involved painting on single or sometimes composite photographs that he pasted onto a wood support.⁴³ One of these, *Le joueur d'orgue*, was exhibited at the 1853 Paris Salon and then again at the 1855 Exposition universelle, where Ernest Lacan reviewed the picture positively and encouraged other painters to follow Nègre's example (Fig. 8). Though Lacan may not have been aware of the printed photograph that lurked beneath Nègre's painting, it was not difficult to link Nègre's

⁴⁰ Heilbrun, 14, 17.

⁴¹ Nègre claimed that he took up photography as a "supplement to painting" after observing a demonstration at the Académie des beaux-arts in 1844. See Charles Nègre, "Mémoire à l'Empereur sur l'héliogravure" (1858) reprinted in Heilbrun, 366. Jacob Lewis has suggested that Nègre had in all likelihood already been exposed to photography in Delaroche's studio by that point. Jacob Lewis, "Charles Nègre in Pursuit of the Photographic," Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 2012, 56.

⁴² Nègre probably turned to the paper process of photography after Louis Désiré Blanquart-Évrard published improvements to William Henry Fox Talbot's calotypy process in 1847. See Borcoman, 12-13 and Heilbrun, 15-16. Borcoman also notes that Nègre treated his photographs like drawings by touching up his negatives with pencil. This handwork is often invisible in the paper prints themselves, as the texture of his hatchmarks is obscured by the weave of the paper. Borcoman, 13, 21. See also André Jammes, *Charles Nègre, photographe, 1820-1880: Étude ornée de 31 illustrations* (Choisy-le-Roi: Impr. de France, 1963), 12.

⁴³ Lewis, 64-68. Nègre's process has more in common with commercial practices of about a decade later, notably the "photo-peinture" process pioneered by André-Adolphe-Eugène Disdéri. Staff at Disdéri's studio enlarged portrait photographs on card or heavy paper, then colored them with oil paint or watercolor to produce images that resembled miniatures on ivory. Parallel practices existed in North America as well, where Canadian photographer William Notman had a staff of 75 distributed over several studios to create enlargements of photographic *cartes-de-visite* that were fixed to canvas and painted in oil or watercolor before being mounted in gilded frames. See Mervyn Ruggles, "Paintings on a Photographic Base," *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation* 24 (Spring 1985): 94 and M.V., "A propos de la photo-peinture," *Le Monde illustré* 9 (Sept. 9, 1865): 175 in George Ayres, *How to Paint Photographs in Water Colors and in Oil* (Philadelphia: Bernerman & Wilson, 1871). Anne McCauley also discusses a number of contexts in which painters utilized commercially-produced photographs in *Industrial Madness: Commercial Photography in Paris 1848-1871* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

painting to its source;⁴⁴ the artist exhibited the *Joueur d'orgue* photograph at the same exposition, and then again at the Société Française de Photographie just a few years later (Fig. 9).

French painter Jean-Léon Gérôme, who also studied with Delaroche, employed photographic source material in a more conventional way. After traveling to Egypt with photographer Auguste Bartholdi in 1855-1856, Gérôme utilized some of Bartholdi's images as sources for architectural details in paintings like *The Prisoner* and the *Cairene Horse Dealer* (Figs. 10-13). He also appears to have commissioned photographs of a male model wearing Albanian dress, as figures in these costumes and poses appear in a number of his paintings.⁴⁵ Photography was a convenient source of details for Gérôme, but the role that it played in the production of his pictures was somewhat limited, and most scholars agree that the scenes he depicted were largely invented.⁴⁶ The photographic qualities of Gérôme's aesthetic, however, did not go unnoticed. A critic for *Le Monde illustré* described the artist's skills of observation as having "the mark of a photographic print,"⁴⁷ while

⁴⁴ "M. Charles Nègre, en copiant rigoureusement cette épreuve, a fait une charmante peinture qui figurait au dernier salon. Pourquoi d'autres peintres ne suivraient-ils pas son exemple! On comprend facilement tout l'avantage qu'ils auraient à faire reproduire par la photographie les groupes et les figures qui composent leurs sujets, de façon à avoir un croquis exact pris sur nature, qu'ils pourraient modifier sur la toile, s'il en était besoin." Ernest Lacan, *Esquisses photographiques à propos de l'exposition universelle et de la guerre d'orient* (Paris: Jean Michel Place, 1986 [orig. 1856]): 151 in Lewis, 386. For a recent exhibition catalogue of Nègre's painted photographs see Françoise Heilbrun, *Charles Nègre (Grasse 1820-1880): Un Photographe peintre. Peintures et dessins provenant des archives familiales* (Paris: De Bayser, November 2014). Théophile Gautier likewise characterized the daguerreotype as Nègre's "collaborator," and credited the reproductive medium for having "worked hard for this exhibition." Théophile Gautier, "Salon de 1861," *Le Moniteur* (July 1861) in Jammes, 16.

⁴⁵ See Dominique de Font-Réaulx, catalogue entries 125 and 126 in *The Spectacular Art of Jean-Léon Gérôme* (Los Angeles: Getty Museum, 2010), 226.

⁴⁶ Dominique de Font-Réaulx, "Gérôme and Photography: Accurate Depictions of an Imagined World," *The Spectacular Art of Jean-Léon Gérôme*, 218-19.

⁴⁷ Amédée Cantaloube writes that Gérôme's nature is to grasp "exactement ce qu'il voit, et à le marquer d'une empreinte photographique." "Salon de 1868," *Le Monde illustré* 22 (1868). See also the response of a critic named Louis Browne, who wrote: "Quant au Petit boucher turc à Jerusalem, M. Gérôme s'y montre totalement glacial, photographe, quoique toujours intéressant par sa précision savante." Louis Browne, "Les Beaux-Arts

Theophile Gautier expressed admiration for Gérôme's ability to suggest that his painting offered a "photographic" experience of the subject. In his review of Gérôme's *The Death of Caesar* in 1858, Gautier claimed that "[n]ever has an historical scene seemed more real. If photography had been known in the days of Caesar, we might think that the painting had been done from a print made on the spot at the very moment of the catastrophe" (Fig. 14).⁴⁸ What is worth noticing here is that the camera-like qualities of Gérôme's representation were praised at this point, and that photography functioned as a positive analogy for pictorial realism. Both of these associations would undergo substantial revision in the 1880s and 90s, as we have seen.

Gérôme managed a significant studio of his own in the late nineteenth century, and several of the students that studied with him developed photographic practices alongside their painterly ones. Thomas Eakins studied with Gérôme in the late 1860s, and upon his return to the United States he began employing a painstaking process of photographic projection and notation to transfer his own photographic images to canvas.⁴⁹ To make the 1881 painting *Shad Fishing at Gloucester on the Delaware River*, Eakins traced the contours of projected photographs as the basis for the composition, then continued to project negatives onto his canvas at later stages of the process to add new figures or paint over existing ones (Fig. 15). To guide the placement of these additions, Eakins incised tiny lines

au Palais de l'Industrie. Salon de 1863," *Revue du progrès morale* I, no. 6 (August 1863): 595. I would like to thank Scott Allan for sharing his research on the critical reception of Gérôme's paintings with me.

⁴⁸ T. Gautier, "À travers les ateliers," *L'Artiste* 4 (1858): 18 in De Font-Réaulx, "Gérôme and Photography," 215.

⁴⁹ Thomas Eakins studied at the École des beaux-arts between 1866 and 1869, spending two years in Gérôme's atelier and one in that of Léon Bonnat. See Gerald M. Ackerman, "Thomas Eakins and His Parisian Masters Gérôme and Bonnat," *Gazette des beaux-arts* 73 (April 1969): 235, 238, 250.

into the paint, marks so small he surely required a magnifying glass to make use of them.⁵⁰

French viewers seem to have sensed something deceitful in the artist's technique.

Reviewing the 1875 Salon in Paris, one critic speculated that Eakins' paintings "resemble photographic prints covered with a light watercolor tint to such a degree that one wonders whether they are not specimens of a still secret industrial process."⁵¹ With this new emphasis on secrecy, criticism in the 1870s began to employ a notably different tone in the interpretation of "photographic" realism from the one inspired by Gérôme two decades earlier.

Eakins' contemporary, French naturalist Jules-Alexis Muenier, trained with Gérôme in the 1880s and subsequently purchased his master's home in Coulevon, part of which he converted into a photography studio where he could develop his own negatives and prints.⁵² Muenier exhibited these photographs, which numbered in the thousands, and used some of them as sources for his paintings.⁵³ The 1889 painting *Aux beaux jours*

⁵⁰ Conservators Mark Tucker and Nica Gutman identified Eakins' use of photographic sources based on the quality of the artist's lines, which were continuous and revealed none of the hesitations or variations that regular draftsmanship normally does. Tucker and Gutman suggest that this method of building up a composition from discrete photographs is consistent with the "piecemeal" techniques that Eakins learned under Gérôme. See "Photographs and the Making of Paintings," in *Thomas Eakins*, ed. Darrel Sewell (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2001), 231-32, fn 31. Eakins played an instrumental role in facilitating the use of photographs by his students in Philadelphia, such as Thomas Anschutz who helped Eakins to translate Muybridge's studies of locomotion onto canvas. See Gabriel P. Weisberg with the collaboration of Jean-François Rauzier, "Photography as Illusionary Aid: Constructing Reality" in *Illusions of Reality: Naturalist Painting, Photography, Theatre and Cinema, 1875-1918* (Amsterdam: Van Gogh Museum, 2010), 31.

⁵¹ F. de Lagenevais, "Salon de 1875," *Revue des deux mondes* 9 (June 15, 1875): 927 in Tucker and Gutman, 232. Paul Leroi also reviewed Eakins' work in relationship to photography: "...M. Thomas Eakins, un disciple de M. Gérôme, qui envoie de Philadelphie un bien étrange tableau ; c'est loin toutefois d'être mérite. Une Chasse aux Etats-Unis (no. 757) est un véritable ouvrage de précision ; c'est rendu comme une photographie." Leroi did not seem to find Eakins' technique incompatible with the standards of painting, as he described the picture as having "une vérité de mouvement." Paul Leroi, "Salon de 1875," *L'Art* 2 (1875): 276.

⁵² For Muenier's purchase of Gérôme's house in the mid-1880s see *Les Orientalistes, Jean-Léon Gérôme, monographie et catalogue raisonné* (Paris: ACR Editions, 1986), 14.

⁵³ Muenier took several thousand photographs during his travels in the south of France, Corsica, and Switzerland, and fellow painter Pascal Dagnan-Bouveret referred to him as "the Nadar of the Photographic Society of the Haute-Saône." See the letter from Dagnan-Bouveret to Muenier dated Oct. 21, 1890 in Gabriel P.

probably developed from a series of photographs that Muenier took of his family and local models posing out of doors (Figs. 16-17). The artist translated these images to canvas by squaring the prints for transfer, or by projecting the glass-plate negatives directly using a lantern slide projector.⁵⁴ These procedures represent a step forward in the technological possibilities of working with photographs, but they are also the logical extension of techniques that developed at the earliest stages of photography's history—methods that were put in place by, and directly benefited, artists themselves.

It is easiest to identify and document hybrid pictorial practices when a painting can be recognizably traced to its photographic source, and practices like Eakins' and Muenier's have done little to dismantle the notion that painters who worked from photographs aimed to translate these sources as mimetically as possible. Yet the wide range of painterly contexts and styles that were served by photographs in the nineteenth century suggests that artists utilized photographs for reasons beyond strict duplication. Photography was easily absorbed into academic models of study and design that involved constructing a composition from numerous discrete studies. French painter Gustave Moreau incorporated images sourced from photographs into many of his historical and mythological subjects. To develop the composition for *The Triumph of Alexander the Great in India*, the artist reproduced motifs from photographs of Indian sculptures and architecture that he had encountered at the Palais de l'industrie in 1873, and designed the elephants (barely visible

Weisberg, *Beyond Impressionism: The Naturalist Impulse* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992), 34. For Muenier's own photographs, see the exhibition catalogue *Souvenir de l'Exposition du 15 Juin 1890 offert à Monsieur Jules Mellier, Maire de la ville de Vesoul* (Vesoul: Société d'Agriculture, Sciences et Arts de la Haute-Saône, 1890). Muenier's glass plate negatives are in the collection of his family in Coulevon; his prints can also be found in the Archives départementales de la Haute-Saône in Vesoul. See Weisberg, *Illusions of Reality*, 33.

⁵⁴ Although there is no visual evidence that Muenier worked with a lantern slide projector, his relatives contend that such a device was part of his studio equipment. Weisberg suggests that Muenier also employed calibrated drawings, probably on tracing paper, to translate photographically-sourced images to canvas. Weisberg, *Beyond Impressionism*, 34-7, 40.

in the lower left register) by studying a live animal at the Jardin des plantes, working from photographs by at least two different photographers, and sketching a plaster statuette of an elephant from multiple angles (Fig. 18).⁵⁵ Photography was one source among many in Moreau's practice, and not necessarily given pride of place in his finished paintings.

Later in the century Moreau worked from photographs of nude models that he commissioned himself, and used these images as sources for paintings such as *Hesiod and the Muse* (Fig. 19). According to Geneviève Lacambre, former director of the Musée Gustave Moreau, the artist planned his pictures through a series of preliminary drawings and painted sketches, then employed his assistant, Henri Rupp, to photograph a model in the poses he required (Figs. 20-21). The relationship between the figure in the painting and that in the photograph is cursory at best, and it was only recognized after the photographic material was discovered in a box in Moreau's studio.⁵⁶ The alterations that Moreau made to these sources raise questions about what purpose photography served for the painter, particularly if these images were introduced at an intermediary stage in his pictorial process.

In addition to academic painters like Gustave Moreau, those working outside the traditional studio context also found photographs to be useful tools. Paul Gauguin took a trunk of photographs and reproductions of works of art on both of his trips to Tahiti during

⁵⁵ Geneviève Lacambre, *Gustave Moreau: Between Epic and Dream* (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1999), 246; Michel Maucher, "Gustave Moreau et les collections asiatiques d'Henri Cernuschi" in *L'Inde de Gustave Moreau* (Paris: Paris-Musées, 1997), 39, 43, and 140-44; Geneviève Lacambre, "Les collections de photographies du peintre Gustave Moreau (1826-1898)," *Genres et usages de la photographies*, ed. Bertrand Lavédrine (Arles: Actes des congrès nationaux des sociétés historiques et scientifiques [édition électronique], 2007), 110-11.

⁵⁶ Lacambre suggests that the photographs were taken by Moreau's longtime friend and occasional studio assistant, Henri Rupp, based on a tag on the box in which the prints were found, which indicates that the contents belonged to "M. H.R." See Lacambre, "Les collections de photographies du peintre Gustave Moreau (1826-1898)," 103.

1890s, and he continued to acquire photographs while he was based in Polynesia.⁵⁷ Aspects of these prints have been found to relate to no fewer than sixty works of art.⁵⁸ One such image, depicting a woman drinking from a spring in the Samoan Islands, was probably purchased at a colonial photographer's curio shop in Papeete, and it seems to relate to the figure of a woman drinking in the supernatural subject *Pape moe (Mysterious Water)* (Fig. 22-23).⁵⁹ After completing the painting in Tahiti in 1893, Gauguin continued to revisit the *Pape Moe* subject over the next few years, producing versions of the drinking figure in watercolor, monotype, and a bas-relief carved in oak.⁶⁰ As with Moreau, the link to photography would not have been made if the photographic source, with its vague resemblance to the pose in Gauguin's painting, had not been noticed. Coincidentally, as Elizabeth Childs has revealed, an American artist named John La Farge selected the very same photograph as the basis for a completely different interpretation of the subject, here transforming the Samoan woman into a European type with a contemporary up-do (Fig. 24).⁶¹ Examples such as these suggest that rather than being passively influenced by photographs, or mimetically reproducing photographic images in paint, artists like Moreau,

⁵⁷ In a letter to Redon in 1890 Gauguin wrote, "I am bringing a whole little world of friends with me in the form of photographs [and] drawings who will talk with me every day." Roseline Bacou and Ari Redon, eds., *Lettres de Gauguin, Gide, Huysmans, Jammes, Mallarmé, Verhaeren...à Odilon Redon* (Paris: J. Corti, 1960) in Charles Stuckey, "The First Tahitian Years," *The Art of Paul Gauguin* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1988), 214.

⁵⁸ Starr Figura, "Gauguin's Metamorphoses: Repetition, Transformation, and the Catalyst of Printmaking" in *Gauguin: Metamorphoses* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2014), 16 and Elizabeth C. Childs, *Vanishing Paradise: Art and Exoticism in Colonial Tahiti* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 95.

⁵⁹ The print was exhibited in the colonial pavilion at the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1889, and was published in the French travel journal *Autour du Monde* in the early 1890s. According to Childs, the print dates to c. 1887, because of its appearance in an album of photographs that was compiled by Reginald Gallop in that year, which now belongs to the State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. See Childs, *Vanishing Paradise*, 112, 207, and 266, fn 56.

⁶⁰ Belinda Thomson, ed., *Gauguin: Maker of Myth* (London: Tate Publishing, 2010), 155 and 170-71.

⁶¹ For a discussion of this painting and its relationship to Gauguin's version see "Gauguin in Tahiti," The Modern Art Notes Podcast, accessed September 3, 2017, <http://blogs.artinfo.com/modernartnotes/2013/08/the-modern-art-notes-podcast-gauguin-in-tahiti/>.

Gauguin, and even La Farge treated photographs as loose starting points for pictures that had no ambition to convey reality.

L’Affaire Van Beers

The range of ways that painters used photographs in the nineteenth century complicates assumptions about the point at which a painting may be said to “derive” from a photograph. But while paintings like Moreau’s and Gauguin’s do not put pressure on viewers to consider this issue, pictures that look more like photographs did and do, particularly if one suspects that the artist relied on a photographic source or technique of transfer. A particularly infamous case occurred in 1881, when a Belgian artist named Jan Van Beers exhibited two small-scale, highly detailed pictures entitled *Lily* and *Le Yacht, La Sirène* at the Paris and Brussels Salons. Both of these pictures are now lost, but I reproduce a photographic postcard of *La Sirène* to offer some sense of Van Beers’ aesthetic (Fig. 25).⁶²

Viewers of *Lily* and *Le Yacht, La Sirène* gossiped that the artist must have had “assistance” to paint in such a precise manner, and art critics for the 1881 exhibitions jumped on the bandwagon, using clever puns to emphasize the photographic nature of Van Beers’ paintings.⁶³ George de Mons, a writer for the Brussels-based paper *Le National*, called the paintings “l’art à vingt francs la carte,” while a critic for the Parisian *La Fédération artistique* sniped “[h]ow many copies of this photo-painting have been

⁶² *Lily* was probably a portrait. The visual appearance of the genre painting *La Sirène* may be ascertained by two recently discovered reproductions: a postcard of the full canvas, reproduced as Fig. 25, and a photograph of what appears to be a preliminary study or copy after the two main figures. These images were identified by Jan Baetens and published in his detailed article on the Van Beers case. See Jan Dirk Baetens, “Photography in the Picture: Style, Genre and Commerce in the Art of Jan Van Beers (1852-1927), Part I,” *Image and Narrative. Online Magazine of the Visual Narrative*, July 2006, accessed August 17, 2017, http://www.imageandnarrative.be/inarchive/painting/Jan_Dirk_Baetens.htm.

⁶³ This is the version of the story reported in the French journal *L’Art*, which draws heavily from a report in *L’Indépendance belge*. See “Vandalisme,” *L’Art* 3 (1881): 257-58.

printed?"⁶⁴ Another Belgian, Lucien Solvay, envisioned a fictitious scene in which a group of visitors to the Salon debated which photographer had produced Van Beers' paintings.⁶⁵ The pictures could not conceivably have been made *without* photography, Solvay insisted, and he encouraged spectators to study them with a magnifying glass.⁶⁶

Van Beers responded by sending a registered letter to the three most vociferous critics, De Mons and Solvay among them, offering to scrape the paint off *Lily* or *la Sirène* to prove that no trace of photography could be found there. When the critics demurred, an overzealous visitor took matters into his or her own hands and defaced the female figure's face in *La Sirène* to expose the purported photograph below.⁶⁷ Van Beers, eager to put an end to the speculation, appointed a committee of artists, writers, photographers, and chemists to investigate his damaged picture. The team was charged with seeking to identify any evidence of a photograph or the use of a photographic means of transfer lurking beneath the painted surface.⁶⁸ After examining the picture the committee could find no

⁶⁴ Georges De Mons, 'Le Salon', *Le National* 2, 238 (1881) in Baetens, part I. The quip "...à combien d'exemplaires cette photo-peinture (avait) été tirée" is printed in "Les Artistes Belges devant la Critique Française," *La Fédération Artistique* 8 (1880-1881): 296-97 and 306-08.

⁶⁵ Lucien Solvay, 'Le Salon', *La Gazette* 11 (1881): 236-37 in Baetens, part I.

⁶⁶ "Le Procès Van Beers," *L'Art moderne* I (Nov. 20, 1881): 302. Charles Tardieu made more of a distinction between *Le Yacht la Sirène* and *Lily*, writing that *la Sirène* had good composition, "spirit of observation," and a feeling for modernity, and he would be disappointed to learn that it derived from a photograph. *Lily*, on the other hand, was mediocre, and it wouldn't bother the critic if it turned out to be a "photographic collage." See Charles Tardieu, "Notes sur le salon de Bruxelles," *L'Art* 4 (1881): 111-12.

⁶⁷ Gustave Lagye, 'L'incident Van Beers', *La Fédération artistique*, 8 (1880-1881a): 387-92 and Gustave Lagye, 'L'incident Van Beers', *La Fédération artistique*, 8 (1880-1881b): 400-01. In response to the damaged painting a critic for *L'art moderne* wrote, "Qu'est-elle donc devenue, la pauvre petite sirène ? A l'endroit où le regard avait coutume de rencontrer sa frétilante image s'élargit un trou noir, triste comme une plainte ou comme un remords." "Vitriolisme artistique," *L'Art moderne* I (Sept. 11, 1881): 223.

⁶⁸ The committee included the president of the Brussels *Cercle artistique et littéraire*, painters Charles Verlat (1824-1890) and Jean-François Portaels (1818-1895), and two professors who specialized in photography and chemistry. See Gustave Lagye, "Le dossier de 'la sirène'," *La Fédération artistique* 8 (1880-1881c): 408-10 in Baetens, part I.

physical trace of photography and proclaimed Van Beers an “honest man,” underscoring the association between “truthful” painting and the absence of photographic assistance.⁶⁹

Relaying the committee’s findings to the public, a writer for the Brussels art journal *L’Art moderne* reported: “[t]he minute and decisive report of the experts who agreed to verify the technique of *La Sirène* no longer leaves any room for doubt...It remains thus agreed that Van Beers’ painting was executed in the legal conditions of art, that only the able hand of the artist was employed there, both in the preliminary drawing, which served as the point of departure, as in the application of colors; [and] that no help was asked of photographic processes, either by transfer on the panel or through a layer [on the surface].”⁷⁰ As corroboration, both the committee and the journalist cited Van Beers’ thickly painted impasto, which was too opaque to facilitate direct tracing.⁷¹ With material evidence on the artist’s side, the case seemed to be closed.

Lucien Solvay, however, would not let the matter go without a rejoinder. In a letter to the editor of *L’Art moderne*, the critic refuted the committee’s conclusions and the evidence upon which they were based. The consistency of the artist’s paint revealed nothing about the nature of Van Beers’ preliminary drawing, Solvay pointed out, since all

⁶⁹ Lagye, “Le dossier de ‘la sirène,’” in Baetens, part I.

⁷⁰ “Il reste donc acquis que le tableau de Van Beers a été exécuté dans les conditions légales de l’art, que seule la main habile de l’artiste y a été employée, tant dans le trait primitif qui lui a servi de point de départ que dans l’application des couleurs ; que notamment aucun secours n’a été demandé aux procédés photographiques, par transport sur le panneau ou sur son enduit.” “L’Incident Van Beers,” *L’Art moderne* I (Sept. 30, 1881): 236.

⁷¹ The *L’Art moderne* journalist took credit for making a similar supposition: “Telle avait été notre impression dès le début, notamment quand en mai dernier, au Salon de Paris, avant que l’œuvre fut connue chez nous, nous avons été les premiers à l’apprécier dans un journal belge. Ce qui nous avait fixés, c’était l’épaisseur visible de la pâte. A notre avis, elle suffisait à écarter la supposition d’une photographie recouverte d’un coloriage, pareil procédé ne pouvant être une facilité pour l’exécutant que si l’empreinte peut transparaître.” Ibid.

artists inevitably cover over their initial design in the course of making a painting.⁷²

Furthermore, the investigation relied upon a very narrow definition of photographic aid.

Quoting the committee's report, Solvay replied:

I admit perfectly that M. Van Beers, in his *Sirène*, 'has not made use either of a proof adhering to his panel, or of an impression or photographic transfer on it,' but I declare very frankly not seizing the difference that there is—from the point of view of art, from the point of view of the result that I have before my eyes when I contemplate the *Sirène*—between these two procedures. One, which employs an adhered proof or a photographic transfer, and the other which uses a tracing after a photograph or a camera lucida. Now, for me it is certain—undeniable—that, since it appears that he has not had recourse to the former, M. Van Beers is served by the latter.⁷³

As Solvay explained, attempting to determine Van Beers' process on the basis of material evidence made little sense if the artist had simply copied a photograph. The paintings had a photographic quality that was plainly apparent to the critic, regardless of the physical evidence. "There are there some things which cannot, perhaps, be proven materially," Solvay concluded, "but which are no less true for all those who have some knowledge of drawing. They feel it, so to speak, immediately at first glance."⁷⁴

Solvay's response clearly incensed Van Beers. That fall, the artist filed a civil lawsuit against the critic, alleging that Solvay had been libelous in his claims and demanding that

⁷² "Que ce dessin soit fait à la plume ou qu'il soit obtenu au moyen d'une empreinte quelconque, l'épaisseur de la pâte le fera toujours, immanquablement, disparaître. L'habileté du peintre consiste à ne pas perdre ses contours." Lucien Solvay, letter to the editor, in "L'Incident Van Beers," *L'Art moderne* I (Oct. 2, 1881): 245.

⁷³ "J'admets parfaitement, et avec le plus grand plaisir, que M. Van Beers, dans sa *Sirène*, « n'a fait usage ni d'une épreuve adhérente à son panneau, ni d'une impression ou transport photographique sur celui-ci. » Mais, entendons-nous bien : nous discutons ici, n'est-ce pas ? une question d'art, avant tout...Eh bien, je déclare très franchement ne pas saisir la différence qu'il y a,—au point de vue de l'art, au point de vue du résultat, que j'ai là, devant les yeux, quand je contemple la *Sirène*,—entre ces deux procédés qui consistent, l'un à faire usage d'une épreuve adhérente ou d'un transports photographique, et l'autre à faire usage d'un décalque d'après photographie ou d'une chambre claire. Or, il est pour moi certain, indéniable, que M. Van Beers, puisqu'il appert qu'il n'a pas eu recours au premier, s'est servi du second." Ibid., 246.

⁷⁴ "Ce sont là des choses qui ne peuvent peut-être pas se prouver matériellement, mais qui n'en sont pas moins vraies pour tous ceux qui ont quelque connaissance du dessin; elles se sentent, pour ainsi dire, immédiatement, au premier coup d'œil." Ibid.

he publish a retraction in no fewer than fifteen national and eight foreign newspapers.⁷⁵

Over the course of the trial testimony in late 1881 and early 1882, lawyers for the defense sought to prove that the critic had been reasonable in his claims by describing the range of ways that painters could make their pictures using photography. They showed paintings made directly on top of photographs, and offered a side-by-side comparison between a different painting by Van Beers and a photograph that shared its compositional layout, persuasive evidence that the artist's protests had been more than a little insincere.⁷⁶

Solvay's lawyers also quoted from a pamphlet entitled *Du rôle de la photographie dans la peinture*, written by the vice president of the Belgian Association of Photography, Charles Thiel. In this text, Thiel detailed a number of chemical methods for transferring photographs to canvas or wood panel that left no visual or material evidence behind. In one example, the painter duplicated the procedures used to make a photographic print on paper by painting the support with a solution of silver salts and exposing it to a negative.⁷⁷ By substituting greasy ink for the traditional salt process when developing the impression, all evidence of the photographic substrate would be eliminated.⁷⁸ A second procedure, which Thiel termed the "powder" method, involved simulating the appearance of a

⁷⁵ In light of the looming trial, there seems to have been some backpedaling in terms of how literal Solvay's claims were intended to be. Some members of the press suggested that phrases such as "transferring collodion to canvas" were meant as stylistic criticism, rather than an assertion of the painting's physical manufacture. Solvay's own writing on the subject, however, remained literal. In a later memoir, the critic contended that he was "shocked" to see the photograph peeping out of Van Beers' painting. See "Petite Chronique," *L'Art moderne* I (Nov. 13, 1881): 295; "Le Procès Van Beers," *L'Art moderne* I (Nov. 20, 1881): 302; and Lucien Solvay, *Une Vie de journaliste* (Brussels: Office de publicité, 1934): 104-08.

⁷⁶ Baetens, part I and "Petite Chronique," *L'Art moderne* I (Dec. 18, 1881): 335.

⁷⁷ Charles Thiel, *Du rôle de la photographie dans la peinture* (Brussels: Librairie Universelle de Rozez, 1881), 5-6.

⁷⁸ "De plus, comme l'encre d'impression dont on se sert et qui forme en quelque sorte sur la toile une sous-couche de la peinture, est de la même nature que la peinture elle-même, les substances qui composent l'une et l'autre étant identiques et ne différant que par la quantité plus ou moins grande de vernis qu'elles renferment—la possibilité de reconnaître sous les couleurs la présence du procédé photographique n'existe plus." *Ibid.*, 6-7.

preliminary drawing with photography. The artist began by painting the canvas with a sticky liquid that became sensitive to moisture once dried. After exposing the canvas to a negative, the photographic image was rendered visible by brushing the hydrophilic surface with a neutral-colored powder that imitated the appearance of an *ébauche*. Once the artist had painted over this monochrome “drawing,” the powder was absorbed into the paint layer leaving no photographic residue behind.⁷⁹

A final method treated photography like a form of monotype, by painting the print and pressing it on to canvas or panel while the image was still wet. The support, thus imprinted with the photograph, could be carefully retouched to “reinforce the light, add some impasto, in a word, give to [the picture] all the appearance of a true painting in oil worked with great attention to detail...as in paintings of a free and personal facture.”⁸⁰ Photography offered limitless possibilities for the painter in Thiel’s account, many of which were undetectable in the material composition of the picture. *Du rôle de la photographie dans la peinture* proposed the possibility of a new, materially hybrid form of picture-making, in which photography was the painter’s invisible but essential collaborator. For Thiel, such approaches were harmless and “natural,” and he stressed that there was no shame in using them. Photographic technologies made the artist’s work faster and easier,

⁷⁹ A less precise but cheaper “drawing” could be made by preparing the canvas with a solution of iron salts before exposing it to a negative. The photographic image would appear in an attractive Prussian blue, and could be changed from blue to black or “café au lait” by plunging the support in a potassium bath or rinsing it in ordinary water. Thiel assured that none of these tones would interact negatively with the painted surface, but he cautioned readers that traces of the photograph remained present and could be revealed if the paint layer was dissolved or scraped away. Thiel, 8-10.

⁸⁰ “La toile s’imprime pendant le séchage et, dès que l’adhérence est parfaite, on peut, si l’on veut, faire sur l’image photographique des retouches adroites, renforcer les lumières, ajouter des empâtements, en un mot donner au tout l’apparence d’une vraie peinture à l’huile...comme dans les tableaux d’une facture libre et personnelle.” Ibid., 12-13.

while preserving the “essence” of painting.⁸¹ To refuse such assistance was simply irrational, the author insisted, akin to choosing to travel by sailboat rather than railway.⁸²

Within the context of the Van Beers’ trial and in its accompanying media analysis, however, Thiel’s emphasis on disguising photography in a painting provoked a completely different response. To the ears of the Brussels fine arts community, the photographer was promoting fraud. In its biweekly report on the Van Beers trial, *L’Art moderne* reviewed Thiel’s *Du rôle de la photographie dans la peinture*, and responded derisively to every one of the author’s points. Most troubling for the author was Thiel’s description of pictorial appearance as if it operated independently from the production of the painting. Beauty was inextricable from the personal labor of the artist, the journalist insisted. It was this work that enabled a picture to accrue meaning, and to invite emotional and sympathetic responses on the part of the viewer. Thiel’s mechanical techniques facilitated only the most superficial forms of picture-making, and they ultimately concealed a lie.⁸³ So certain was the *L’Art moderne* reviewer of the communicative potential of artistic labor, that even perfect copies were believed to be incapable of generating an authentic emotional response on the part of the viewer.⁸⁴ It was the artist’s personal touch that translated spirit and meaning to canvas, the writer argued, and as soon as this authenticity was “assured, it is as

⁸¹ As Thiel put it: “Pourquoi d’ailleurs la peinture ne profiterait-elle pas des progrès que l’art de la photographie a faits depuis quelques années ? Celle-ci peut lui venir en aide sans que pour cela *l’essence* de la peinture soit diminuée ou compromise : pourquoi la peinture refuserait-elle cette aide qui vient à elle ?” Thiel, 4.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 5.

⁸³ “Ce paradoxe se recommande, en effet, et il est embarrassant d’en montrer le défaut. Cependant, tout en tournant autour pour découvrir le joint, on sent qu’il y a là un mensonge habilement dissimulé.” “L’Art et les procédés mécaniques,” *L’Art moderne* I (Dec. 4, 1881): 315.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

if new qualities have been added to what we see.”⁸⁵ For this critic, photography’s domain was the surface of an image, while truthful art developed through the artist’s intellectual and material process and generated meaning from within.

Far from settling the questions raised by Van Beers’ paintings, the trial and related commentary only revealed how murky the distinctions between painting and photography had become. Lawyers for the defense presented photographs that looked suspiciously similar to other paintings by Van Beers, but this evidence was circumstantial at best. Meanwhile, the vice-president for the Belgian Association of Photography outlined a range of chemical processes by which photographic images could be transferred to canvas without leaving any evidence behind. Paintings might betray photographic effects, but proving the material use of photographs was another matter altogether.

In the end, Thiel’s revelations may not have had much bearing on the official outcome of the case, because the legal obligation of the lawsuit was to determine whether Solvay had been reasonable in his claims, not to prove that Van Beers had actually worked from a photograph.⁸⁶ The court found in favor of the art critic, upholding the rights of Solvay and his colleagues to express their “personal and divergent views on the mission of art,” and to “analyze the technical procedures employed to produce this effect.”⁸⁷ It did not matter that Solvay could not prove how Van Beers had made his painting, because proof

⁸⁵ “Oui, là où passe la main de l’homme, traductrice de son âme, se répand un charme qui nous trouble toujours. Dès que son activité apparaît, dès qu’elle nous est assurée, c’est comme si des qualités nouvelles s’ajoutaient à ce que nous voyons.” “L’Art et les procédés mécanique,” 315.

⁸⁶ As Jan Van Baetens explains, Van Beers’s civil action against Solvay was based on article 1382 of the Belgian Civil Code, the Belgian equivalent of tort law. As a result, the artist had to prove that Solvay had demonstrated “an imprudence or recklessness alien to any normal and reasonable art critic.” In other words, he had to establish that no rational critic would have responded as Solvay had done. Baetens, part I.

⁸⁷ “Attendu que les critiques selon leurs vues personnelles et divergentes sur la mission de l’art, sur l’imitation de la nature, sur le rôle de la couleur et du dessin, ont le droit de discuter les tendances de l’artiste, de consulter l’effet produit par son œuvre et d’analyser les procédés techniques employés pour produire cet effet...” *L’Art moderne* printed the closing remarks in their entirety. “Le Procès Van Beers,” *L’Art moderne* 2 (Feb. 5, 1882): 46.

was impossible to obtain. If anything, the evidence introduced during the trial only underscored the complexity of determining whether an artist had relied on photographs, and by what terms such use would be defined. In the absence of reliable evidence, critics turned to the intangible values associated with the artist's process, arguing that it was the painter's personal labor that distinguished artistic picturing from mere reproduction.

“Pure Craftsmanship” vs. “Cheap Realism”

Walter Sickert made artistic labor the central theme of his art criticism, which he began publishing in the 1880s and continued well into the twentieth century.⁸⁸ In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, Sickert's writing was firmly focused on the influence of photography on painting, and he seems to have made it his personal mission to educate readers on the difference between “artistic” realism—that which was the result of creative work—and its more superficial, unthinking, and reproductive forms. Both Anna Gruetzner Robins and Richard Shone have noted Sickert's deep commitment to the craft of painting, and Shone has pointed out that the gravity of Sickert's paintings, their sober colors, emphatic brushwork, and stark subject matter, “are directed to a truth beyond mere description or situation.”⁸⁹ The stakes for Sickert, in other words, were real ones. As a committed realist himself, he was invested in distinguishing the truths of painting and painterly practice from mere photography, and he frequently called out fellow painters for

⁸⁸ Sickert's career as an art critic began in the early 1880s, around the time that he commenced his apprenticeship with James Abbott McNeill Whistler. Initially authoring texts in support of his teacher, Sickert continued writing throughout his life and developed a reputation for engaging in lively, heated debates concerning artistic techniques, aesthetics, and the status and function of distinct media. Sickert's criticism was gathered and edited by Anna Gruetzner Robins as *Walter Sickert: The Complete Writings on Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁸⁹ Robins, *Complete Writings on Art*, xxvii and Richard Shone, “Walter Sickert, the Dispassionate Observer” in *Sickert Paintings*, ed. Wendy Baron and Richard Shone (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1992), 4.

working from photographs or for pandering to what he saw as a watered down definition of art. This maliciousness served a purpose, however, as Sickert sought to defend values he held dear, and which seemed to be under threat in the era of the snapshot.⁹⁰

Photography was employed as a barometer and a rhetorical tool in Sickert's writing, one that enabled him to distinguish and characterize artistic approaches to painting from their superficial or fraudulent counterparts. When reviewing a portrait by Jan Van Beers that was exhibited at the Royal Academy in London in 1890, for example, Sickert undermined it as a "supremely skillful copy in oils of an admirable instantaneous photograph of M. Henri Rochefort," and corroborated the critique by noting, "M. Rochefort told me himself that he gave a sitting for a photograph and no more."⁹¹ On the other hand, a series of pictures of Singapore and Japan by Louis Dumoulin were complimented for their poetic sensibility and technical expertise by differentiating them from paintings made from photographs. "No hasty tour with a camera here, followed by long periods of mysterious incubation," Sickert wrote appreciatively.⁹² In texts such as these, photography offered a clear and comprehensible way to differentiate legitimate and illegitimate forms of realism using a set of standards that was familiar to every reader.

Australian artist Mortimer Menpes, a former colleague of Sickert's when the two were students of James Abbott McNeill Whistler in the early 1880s, was often on the receiving end of Sickert's vitriol on this subject. In a series of texts published between 1889

⁹⁰ In one early article, Sickert noted that people "resent any medium that comes between the painting and the viewer, so photography is preferable." Walter Sickert, "Abiding Art," *New York Herald* (Mar. 3, 1889) in Robins, *Complete Writings on Art*, 11. Likewise, a review of the annual Royal Academy exhibition compliments a painting by British artist Arthur Lemon for being the opposite of a second-rate French painter for whom "the camera, human or mechanical, is deified for its artistic selection and simplicity." Walter Sickert, "The Royal Academy," *New York Herald* (May 16, 1889) in *ibid.*, 49.

⁹¹ Walter Sickert, "The Royal Academy Exhibition," *Art Weekly* (May 10, 1890) in *ibid.*, 64.

⁹² Walter Sickert, "Art," *The Whirlwind* (June 28, 1890) in *ibid.*, 67.

and 1893, Sickert repeatedly disparaged Menpes for making pictures from photographs and trying to pass them off as “authentic” works of art.⁹³ Responding to an exhibition of the artist’s watercolor drawings in 1891, for example, Sickert described the visual evidence that Menpes had made his pictures from photographs. Menpes handled architectural details well enough, since these aspects of the image could be copied from photographic sources, but the skies and other transient subjects in drawings like *A Bazaar in Amritsar* were completely inept (Fig. 26). Menpes deserved no artistic credit for work like this, Sickert declared, given that his drawing had been “done for him by a machine.”⁹⁴

Similar assessments of Menpes’ art appeared in the writing of Irish art critic and novelist George Moore. In his 1898 book *Modern Painting*, Moore claimed that Menpes worked exclusively from photographs, a technique that compromised the appearance and overall quality of his pictures. “At the first glance you were deceived,” Moore wrote of Menpes’ pictures, but “at the second you saw that it was only such cursive taste and knowledge as a skillful photographer who had been allowed the run of a painter’s studio for a few months might display.” Denigrating Menpes as little more than a photographer, Moore argued for a basic incompatibility between this artist’s methods and the material of oil paint, which automatically rejected the incorporation of photography that Menpes attempted to impose on it. “The painter has not been able to affect with the brush any slight air of capacity,” Moore insisted. “[T]he material betrays him at every point.”⁹⁵

While Sickert was consistently offended by painters who relied on photographs, Moore dismissed the method as a matter of laziness, and a superficial disguise for basic

⁹³ See Walter Sickert, “Correspondence,” *The Whirlwind* (August 23, 1890) in Robins, *Complete Writings on Art*, 80.

⁹⁴ Walter Sickert, “Drawing and Photography,” *National Observer* (May 2, 1891) in *ibid.*, 84.

⁹⁵ George Moore, “The Camera in Art” in *Modern Painting* (London: W. Scott, 1898), 186-88.

incompetence. He pointed out that landscape painters of the past had been willing to endure hardships for their work, but “artists in these days are afraid of catching cold, and impatient of long and protracted studentship. Everything must be made easy, comfortable, and expeditious; and so it comes to pass that many an artist seeks assistance from the camera.”⁹⁶ For Moore, there was a loss when an artist relied on photographs, even if it was an intangible one. Turning to the case of a painter named Mr. Gregory, Moore suggested that once this artist began working with photographic source material, he lost “all the noble synthetical life which comes of long observation and gradual assimilation of Nature. His picture of a yachtsman in this year’s Academy was as paltry, as ‘realistic’ as can be.”⁹⁷

This language of flimsiness and poor quality came up repeatedly in both Moore’s and Sickert’s analyses of paintings made from photographs. When Moore described the work of Hubert Herkomer, he suggested that the “cheap realism of the camera” was plainly apparent in the artist’s paintings.⁹⁸ Sickert, for his part, complimented painter Philip Burne-Jones (the son of Edward Burne-Jones) for his authenticity, noting that this artist “does not, like Mr. Menpes, disguise his use of the camera under the name and style of cheap impressionism, which covers a multitude of sins.”⁹⁹ Regardless of how the photograph was translated to canvas (and whether or not it was perceptible in the appearance of the picture), its presence de-valued painting, according to Moore and Sickert. Assessing artistic quality was one of the critic’s most important responsibilities, and both of them took this aspect of their work extremely seriously.

⁹⁶ Moore, 183.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 184.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 184-85.

⁹⁹ Walter Sickert, “The Old and New Grosvenor Galleries,” *New York Herald* (May 31, 1889) in Robins, *Complete Writings on Art*, 52.

Given what he perceived to be obvious signs that Menpes had worked from photographs, Sickert expressed bafflement when other critics failed to mention the artist's procedures. In a letter to the editor of the *National Observer* in 1891, Sickert chastised other reviewers for declining to discuss Menpes' sources, writing "I have waited to see whether one of the art-critics who have noticed the exhibition of sketches of India by Mr. Menpes would make the slightest allusion to the fact that they owe their drawing almost entirely to the use of instantaneous photography. It is hardly possible that they should not know this. It is the *secret de Polichinelle* of the studios." He continued by stressing that this revelation was nothing less than a moral responsibility: "a critic fails in an obvious duty to those whose drawing is the result of special gifts of brain and eye and hand, arduously and painfully cultivated, when he discusses such an exhibition as Mr. Menpes's without premising that his initial drawing has throughout been done for him by a machine," Sickert fumed.¹⁰⁰ By neglecting to draw attention to Menpes' debt to photography, critics implied an equivalence between his work and that of painters who had "arduously and painfully cultivated" their talents. In other words, with painters like Sickert himself.

Sickert's exasperation was particularly acute because Menpes' methods were well known: the *secret de Polichinelle* of the studios. Yet in his repeated emphasis on evidence—in this case, the fact that Menpes' process was a poorly kept secret—Sickert revealed his own doubts that these procedures of making were actually legible in the surface appearance of pictures.¹⁰¹ This insecurity is also suggested by Sickert's response to Gleeson

¹⁰⁰ Walter Sickert, "Drawing and Photography," *National Observer* (May 2, 1891) in Robins, *Complete Writings on Art*, 84.

¹⁰¹ In the late nineteenth century, a *secret de Polichinelle* referred to a secret that everyone knows but is not openly acknowledged. The expression derives from an episode in the *commedia dell'arte*, in which a character named Polichinelle tells a secret to each member of the court individually. See William Duckett fils, *Dictionnaire de la conversation et de la lecture: inventaire raisonné des notions générales les plus indispensables*

White's survey, discussed earlier in this chapter. In the second part of this text, Sickert argued that painters who worked from photographs should be required to declare this fact at exhibitions so that it could be taken into account when viewers looked at their pictures. "It would be well if the fact that a painting was done from or on a photograph were always stated in the catalogue," Sickert continued in his response to the poll.

A serious critic should be able to detect the most blatant cases for himself. It is extremely misleading to the public and to young students to find work of that order critically compared to works of pure craftsmanship, without a hint of the means employed. It sets false standards, and compares things that have not a common denomination. The sentence that seems to me to contain both the aesthetics and the morals of this question, I heard from the lips of Sir John Gilbert, a splendid authority. "I think," he said, "an artist must do it all himself."¹⁰²

On the one hand, Sickert argued that replacing the intellectual processes of picturing with a photograph blocked the creative act at the heart of art-making, and placed photographically-sourced pictures in a different category from "works of pure craftsmanship." On the other, he recommended labeling these superficial and poorly colored paintings to ensure that their inauthenticity did not go undetected. Thus while Sickert underscored the visual, material, and moral disparities between paintings made of "pure craftsmanship" and their photographic counterparts, his move to label such works sends a rather different message. It was possible that the distinctions he identified as "blatant" were not perceptible at all.

Sickert was not the first critic to suggest labeling paintings made from photographs. Ten years earlier, in an editorial in the American edition of the *Studio*, an anonymous writer encouraged artists to disclose their use of photographic sources on the basis that

à tous (Paris: Librairie de F. Didot frères, 1873), 695 and Octave Feuillet, *Aventures de Polichinelle, vignettes de Bertall* (Paris: Le club français du livre, 1957).

¹⁰² Walter Sickert in White, 102.

they offered painters an unfair advantage. For this correspondent, paintings made from photographs looked more accomplished than those made without such aid, putting “pure” painters at a disadvantage. The writer suggested that if a painting was derived from photographic source material, “it should at least be fairly and honestly stated when thus done...otherwise [painters that abstain from photography] place themselves at an immense disadvantage in exhibitions, where their own drawing and modeling is side by side with photographic work, not stated to be such.”¹⁰³ For this author, the benefits of working from photographs made the temptation to use them all the greater, since they improved the process and appearance of paintings.

Similar expectations undergirded the responses to Van Beers’ paintings in 1881. In describing the origins of the scandal, a critic for *L’Art modern* explained that it was the meticulous quality of the Belgian artist’s pictures that instigated assertions that the artist had painted over photographs, not a look of “cheapness.”¹⁰⁴ This disparity between the perception of photographically-made paintings and the pictorial results offers some further explanation for Sickert’s insistence on the poor quality of such pictures. As it became more and more difficult to differentiate pure paintings from those made with photography, the intangible values associated with artistic labor proved to be critically important in assessing the meaning and quality of works of art.

Although Sickert occasionally offered specific visual evidence that artists like Mortimer Menpes had worked directly from photographs, more often he emphasized photography’s pre-pictorial effects on the painter, including the capacity for knowledge, or limitations for the intellectual work of making pictures. Painting from photographs

¹⁰³ P.D.N., “Letter to the Editor,” *The Studio* 2 (November 1883): 198.

¹⁰⁴ “Vandalisme,” *L’Art* 3 (1881): 257-58.

prevented the artist from developing key skills of observation and expression, Sickert explained; these qualities were central to the definition of art, and informed the meaning and status of the medium before brush ever came in contact with canvas. Photography might seem to offer a harmless short cut in the painter's process, but it undermined painting's essential identity.

Sickert employed this tactic in his response to White's poll, and it emerged in other contexts as well. In a review of the Royal Academy Exhibition in 1890, the artist compared making pictures from photographs to the process of taking a cast from life and labeling it a sculpture. Each method reduced the creative aspects of art to simple surface reproduction. As Sickert explained,

Both habits have their foundation in a radical misconception of the nature of art, and of the reasons for being an artist. A work is a work of art only when, and inasmuch as, it expresses in the language of an elevated convention the results of personal observation. Progress in art is, therefore, only possible by the strenuous exercise, to the utmost of the artist's powers, of his faculties of observation, selection and expression. For an artist to trust to mechanical means to fill up the gaps in his observation, or, as is but too frequent, for the whole of his drawing, is to arrest once for all the education of his artistic faculties.¹⁰⁵

In this assessment of art, Sickert emphasized the importance of the artist's personal point of view, a perspective that owes much to Émile Zola's notion of artistic temperament.¹⁰⁶ Yet Sickert went even further than Zola in connecting the artist's individuality to his or her practice. To replace the artist's work with a photograph undercut the very reasons for painting in this first place, Sickert stressed, because the work of art and its value and meaning as an object was inseparable from the process through which it was made.

¹⁰⁵ Walter Sickert, "The Royal Academy Exhibition," *Art Weekly* (May 17, 1890) in Robins, *Complete Writings on Art*, 67.

¹⁰⁶ Émile Zola, "Mon Salon (1866)," *Le Bon Combat. De Courbet aux Impressionistes. Anthologie d'écrits sur l'art*, Jean-Paul Bouillon, ed. (Paris: Hermann, 1974), 62.

The importance of the artist's labor was the connective tissue in contemporary writing about photography and painting. Throughout the 1880s and 90s, artists and writers invoked the loss of legitimate artistic work when they bemoaned the tendency to paint from photographs. English artist Alfred Hartley offered a particularly in-depth assessment of the value of the artist's time and work in another article that appeared in the 1893 volume of the *Studio*. Hartley opened his article in an evocative way, by describing the permeation of photography into the artist's studio, where "the snap of the instantaneous shutter is heard on all sides, the odours of 'pyro' (a loving abbreviation for pyrogallic acid) and of other developers pervade the air, and while the Ross or Dalmeyer replace the lens of nature, the sensitised film and printing frame supply, in numbers of cases, the place of sketch-book and pencil."¹⁰⁷ But he quickly turned to less abstract explanations for the impact of photography on artmaking, and the value of the artist's efforts even though photographs offered a similar image in less time.

Drawing was the technique most closely connected to the artist's personal identity, Hartley argued. It was through the sustained and repetitive practice of drawing that artists learned to select a subject, to train the hand to represent it, and to cultivate personal style. This was not a quick process: Corot took twenty years to find his method, the author noted, while Turner made some 19,000 drawings over the course of his lifetime, the bulk of which were only discovered after the artist's death. There was no shortcut to becoming an artist, which is why the use of photographs was counterproductive. "[T]he mind and the eye must be continually trained and the hand schooled into power," Hartley emphasized. "[W]ithout this perpetual training of the eye the more lovely aspects of Nature must remain

¹⁰⁷ Alfred Hartley, "Sketching From Nature," *The Studio* I (1893): 171.

unrevealed, and without this schooling of the hand those beauties, even if seen, can never be adequately recorded.”¹⁰⁸ Reiterating Sickert’s point of view, Hartley stressed that the pictorial surface was only as meaningful as the work that went in to making it. To presume that the hard-won labor and knowledge of the artist could be substituted for a mere snapshot was to misinterpret the meaning of art and the role of the artist in producing it. As a result, Hartley concluded, a sketch should always be “of fuller meaning than is apparent on the surface.”¹⁰⁹

Painting with Freedom

Given Sickert’s repeated emphasis on the harmful effects of working from photographs, it comes as some surprise to find him admitting to engaging in the practice himself in 1897. In a text comparing English artist Mortimer Menpes to the Belgian Jan Van Beers, and with some of the details confused, Sickert reminded his readers that the use of photographs was not so easy to spot. “Some years ago, Mr. Van Beers won a case in the French courts against someone who had charged him with painting a picture...on a photograph. The paint was rubbed off in places, and no photograph was found,” Sickert explained. “In reality it proved nothing, as the very slight film which can be put on a canvas or panel is taken up by the paint, and could not be traced by the rough-and-ready method of rubbing the paint off with chloroform.” Sickert corroborated his account by pointing to personal experience. “I myself had the occasion to paint portraits from photographs, and the method pursued is this,” he wrote. “The photograph is carefully traced on to the panel, and then pinned up beside the easel and painted from, with the same freedom which an

¹⁰⁸ Hartley, 176.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 181.

artist would use in painting from a drawing.”¹¹⁰ Using his own practice as an example, Sickert described a completely different set of pictorial possibilities from the ones he associated with Menpes. When Sickert himself worked from photographs, he managed to paint with the same “freedom” as he would from a preliminary sketch of his own making.

Sickert’s use of photographic source material has been well documented, with examples ranging from his 1905 portrait of Mrs. Swinton to a particularly prolific period in the 1920s and 30s in which he painted primarily from photographs (Fig. 27). He hardly attempted to hide his methods, as evidenced by the painting of the actress Gwen Ffrangçon-Davies in her role as Isabella of France (Fig. 28). Painted from a photograph that he borrowed from the actress’s collection of press clippings, Sickert left visible the evidence that he had squared the image for transfer, and even added the name of the photographer, Bertram Park, in the lower right hand corner of the picture to credit his source. Rather than revealing his painterly practice to be hypocritical, however, I suggest that Sickert’s relationship to his photographic sources helps to elucidate the distinction he made between paintings sourced from photographs and “pure” painting. Sickert recommended treating the photograph with the same freedom that an artist would take with an image he made himself. This approach differed from that of Mortimer Menpes, who adhered so closely to his sources that the photograph took on the authoritative role in the process. For Sickert, photographs only compromised the artist’s creative process if he or she allowed them to. It was when photography served as the pictorial standard that the painter reduced his work to “mapping.”

¹¹⁰ Walter Sickert, “Van Beers and Menpes,” *The Speaker* (May 22, 1897) in Robins, *Complete Writings on Art*, 170-71.

Sickert elucidated the interrelationship between these categories in a review of the New English Art Club exhibition in 1889. Prompted by a figure in Henry Scott Tuke's *The Bathers*, which he described as "posing" rather than "pointing" as the narrative implied, Sickert outlined three possible approaches that an artist could take to depict a subject in motion (Fig. 29). Painting from a photograph was positioned as a subsidiary of painting from the model; both practices were discussed in terms of duplication, and neither resulted in a convincing picture.¹¹¹ While working from a photograph would seem to be the opposite of painting a figure from life, by Sickert's logic these approaches shared the same basic misunderstanding of the requirements of art. Genuinely artistic painting was concerned with more than the mere reproduction of the visual world; it was generated through, and reflective of, the creative labor of the artist himself.

Seen in relation to his own pictorial practice, Walter Sickert's writing about pictorial practice reveals the porousness of medium-based categories in late-nineteenth century art. Artists and art critics denounced painters for working from photographs, but diagnosing a painter's methods based on the surface appearance of a picture was hardly a straightforward process. Even when an artist worked directly from photographs, as more or less everyone did during the second half of the nineteenth century, there was little visual or material evidence to prove it. Sickert called for fellow painters to purify their procedures, but the working practices of artists—and the critical responses they engendered—indicate that segregation was already impossible. In this way, Sickert reveals the paradox of a critique that was intended to set painting apart from photography, when the two media were already so deeply and unavoidably enmeshed. By emphasizing creative

¹¹¹ Walter Sickert, "The New English Art Club," *New York Herald* (June 14, 1889) in Robins, *Complete Writings on Art*, 53-54.

labor as the foundation of art, Sickert and like-minded critics positioned the realism of painting below the surface, in the mind and material practice of the painter.

CHAPTER TWO

Painting Like a Camera: Jules Bastien-Lepage as Photo-Realist

In an 1891 essay entitled “Modern Realism in Painting,” Walter Sickert excoriated French naturalist painter Jules Bastien-Lepage for the blatant “photographic” qualities of his practice. Blaming the artist’s technique of painting *en plein air*¹—taking his canvas into nature to work directly from the motif—Sickert labeled Bastien-Lepage a “photo-realist,” an artist who reproduced the surface appearance of his subjects rather than thoughtfully interpreting them. This approach fundamentally misunderstood the terms of truthful realism, Sickert claimed, by implying that the painter could be replaced by a camera.²

Unlike the more familiar, twentieth-century iteration of photorealism, which characterizes artists like Chuck Close and Gerhard Richter who openly co-opted photographic sources, Sickert made no claims that Bastien-Lepage painted from photographs, or even imitated their visual appearance.³ In “Modern Realism in Painting,” the term photo-realism characterized Bastien-Lepage’s *process* of painting, an essentially documentary procedure that rendered the artist himself obsolete. As Sickert explained,

¹ Although the concept of painting *en plein air* is usually associated with impressionism, in the late nineteenth century it referred more generally to the practice of painting out of doors and depicting subjects in their original context. See Anthea Callen, *The Art of Impressionism: Painting Technique & The Making of Modernity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 7.

² Walter Sickert, “Modern Realism in Painting” in *Jules Bastien-Lepage and His Art. A Memoir*, ed. André Theuriot (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1892), 133-43.

³ Some scholars have interpreted Sickert’s use of the term “photo-realism” quite literally. Emmanuelle Amiot-Saulnier evoked this text to point out that it is not known if Bastien-Lepage worked directly from photographs. Emmanuelle Amiot-Saulnier, “L’Influence de Jules Bastien-Lepage: Un passage vers la modernité” in *Jules Bastien-Lepage (1848-1884)*, ed. Serge Lemoine (Paris: Musée d’Orsay, 2007), 62-63.

“[t]he tacit assumption on which the theory and practice of the so-called realist rests, is that if photography, instead of yielding little proofs on paper in black and white, could yield large proofs on canvas in oils, the occupation of the painter would be gone.”⁴

Bastien-Lepage had been dead for seven years when Sickert published “Modern Realism in Painting,” but the French painter’s influence seemed to grow more deeply entrenched in contemporary art with each passing year.⁵ Gallery walls in London and Paris were crowded with paintings that looked just like Bastien-Lepage’s: large-scale, highly detailed “portraits” of peasants and laborers rendered in the full light of day. Imagination and creativity played no role in pictures like these, Sickert insisted. If realist painting continued to develop along these lines, the medium risked being replaced by the “sterile ideal of the instantaneous camera.”⁶

Sickert was one of several art critics writing in England and France in the 1880s and early 90s who cited Bastien-Lepage as the point of origin for an unwelcome, “photographic” turn in contemporary art.⁷ Yet as this chapter shows, the conditions for an “authentic,” *artistic* realism changed dramatically during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. When Bastien-Lepage began exhibiting his paintings at the Paris Salon to great enthusiasm in the mid- to late-1870s, the very same factors that Sickert associated most closely with photography—portraying a subject from life without editing or idealization—were used by

⁴ Sickert, “Modern Realism in Painting,” 140.

⁵ Bastien-Lepage died from a stomach tumor at the age of 36 on December 10, 1884. His death was eulogized in many newspapers, both immediately after his death and in the months that followed. See, for example, Louis de Fourcaud, “Bastien-Lepage,” *Le Galois* (Dec. 11, 1884) and A. de L. “Nécrologie,” *La Chronique des arts et de la curiosité* (1884): 497-98.

⁶ Sickert, “Modern Realism in Painting,” 135.

⁷ See Claude Phillips’ statement in 1896 that a *plein-air* painting by Pascal Dagnan-Bouveret is of the type “first perfected by Bastien-Lepage; for M. Dagnan-Bouveret, though in his beginnings a pupil of M. Gérôme [sic], is in the ultimate and definitive development of his style the artistic child of the ill-fated peasant painter of Damvillers.” See Claude Phillips, “The Collection of George McCulloch, Esq.,” *Art Journal* 58 (1896): 66.

earlier reviewers to validate the painter's sincerity and originality. This abrupt reversal in critical assessments of Bastien-Lepage's work took place over a relatively short period of time, alongside the increasing popularity of his style, which paralleled photography in its ubiquity and apparent ease of reproduction. Terms like photo-realism were intended to characterize and contain a phenomenon with broad and ominous implications for realist painting, but the facility of the expression rendered it a self-fulfilling prophecy. The more that critics cried "photography," the easier it was to conceive of painting in its image.

This chapter analyzes the critical responses to Bastien-Lepage's work between the mid-1870s and early 1890s to show that the terms for a truthful realism were cast into doubt as a result of the comparison with photography. Critics employed photographic terminology with abandon to characterize the look and practice of painting, but these analogies only succeeded in qualifying what painting should *not* be. Meanwhile, its unstable and progressively inclusive set of characteristics narrowed the material and conceptual possibilities for realism in painting. As Sickert's essay indicated, the future of contemporary realism was an open-ended question at the end of the nineteenth century.

Reading Walter Sickert's "Modern Realism in Painting"

Born in Germany and raised in England, Walter Sickert trained as an artist under the London-based painter James McNeill Whistler, and, long after the two parted ways, adhered to the elder artist's conception of painting as an inherently personal and subjective process.⁸ Sickert was frequently described as the head of the English Impressionists, but he

⁸ The relationship between Sickert and Whistler ended in 1897 after the latter testified on behalf of Joseph Pennell in a libel suit that the printmaker brought against Sickert. The lawsuit concerned an article that Sickert authored in which he claimed Pennell's method of lithographic transfer was not a genuine lithograph

rejected such labels, insisting that adherence to any single stylistic program or school of thought was in direct conflict with the artist's aspiration to individuality.⁹ He saved his most virulent attacks for painters who appeared to follow trends, or those who undermined the creative imperative of their process by working from photographs.

As I discuss in the previous chapter, Sickert began writing art criticism in the 1880s, a period when the tensions between photography and painting were particularly acute. "Modern Realism in Painting" was one of the longest works of art criticism Sickert had written to date, and in many ways it served as the culmination of his thinking about art and artistic labor in the era of instantaneous reproduction. The essay appeared—somewhat incongruously given its harsh tone—within a compilation of articles written in homage to Bastien-Lepage's life and work.¹⁰ The titular text was an English translation of the memoir *Jules Bastien-Lepage, l'homme, l'artiste*, authored by Bastien-Lepage's close friend and fellow native of Lorraine, André Theuriet.¹¹ Theuriet's first-person account of Bastien-Lepage was accompanied by shorter essays by Sickert and the English painter George

and thus "a commercial and artistic fraud." See Walter Sickert, "Pennell v. Herkomer," *National Observer* (Mar. 28, 1891) in Anna Gruetzner Robins, ed., *Walter Sickert: The Complete Writings on Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 82-83.

⁹ Sickert's discomfort with stylistic labels is evident in an interview with him that was published in *The Sun* on the occasion of an exhibition of the London Impressionists that was held at the Goupil Gallery in December 1889. In response to journalist Herbert Vivian's question about what the term "Impressionists" stood for, Sickert replied: "I think you must not say *the* Impressionists...we only call ourselves a group of London Impressionists...It is a name they give us in the papers." He continued by refusing to corroborate any of Vivian's presuppositions about the movement and its relationship to the French iteration of the group, describing Impressionism as the "study of and reverence for the best traditions of all time" and claiming that Velasquez and Holbein were also Impressionists. See Herbert Vivian, "Topical Interviews: Mr. Walter Sickert on Impressionist Art," *The Sun* (Sept. 8, 1889) in Robins, *Complete Writings on Art*, 56.

¹⁰ The same year Sickert published an article entitled "Whistler To-Day," which was of comparable length to "Modern Realism in Painting" and appeared in the *Fortnightly Review* in April 1892. It was not until 1908 that he contributed a much longer piece to the same publication, "The New Life of Whistler," which was twice the length of anything he had written previously. See Robins, *Complete Writings on Art*, 90-95 and 178-88.

¹¹ Julia Cartwright discusses the close relationship between Bastien-Lepage and Theuriet in *Jules Bastien-Lepage* (London: Seeley & Co., 1894), 32-37.

Clausen, who was credited with popularizing Bastien-Lepage's style in England.¹² The text concluded with a study of the Russian painter Marie Bashkirtseff, a friend and champion of Bastien-Lepage, who also died prematurely in 1884.¹³ Sandwiched in the middle of these tributes, Sickert's essay served as a literal and theoretical intervention into the good opinion of Bastien-Lepage that persisted in certain artistic circles in England and France.¹⁴

To substantiate Bastien-Lepage's shortcomings, "Modern Realism in Painting" took up what was by then a clichéd comparison: the disparity between Bastien-Lepage and the renowned French realist Jean-François Millet.¹⁵ While a "great artist" like Millet separated the stages of observation and execution, Sickert explained, employing his artistic memory to render only the essential elements in paint, Bastien-Lepage collapsed seeing and making into a single gesture that jettisoned the intellectual process of painting entirely. Copying

¹² R.A.M. Stevenson asserted that Bastien-Lepage had influenced Clausen, writing that "[o]n seeing Lepage's work [Clausen] felt prompted to do in England what the Frenchman had done in France." R.A.M. Stevenson, "George Clausen," *Art Journal* 52 (1890): 293. In the same issue, Claude Phillips concurs, "[t]hough it has already been pointed out *ad nauseam*, it must be again repeated, that [Clausen's] work is entirely based and built up on that of the lamented Bastien-Lepage, the pathetic realist *par excellence* of the present generation..." Claude Phillips, "The Summer Exhibitions at Home and Abroad. II. The Royal Academy, The Grosvenor, and the New Gallery," *Art Journal* 52 (1890): 170. Bastien-Lepage may have met Clausen during his first trip to London in 1879. William Steven Feldman, "The Life and Work of Jules Bastien-Lepage (1848-1884)," Ph.D. diss, New York University, 1973, 32.

¹³ Jules Bastien-Lepage and his brother Émile made frequent appearances in Bashkirtseff's journal, which was published after her death and remains the work for which she is best known. *Journal de Marie Bashkirtseff*, 2 vols. (Paris: Charpentier, 1888).

¹⁴ A reviewer for London's *Art Journal* seems not to have questioned the inclusion of Sickert's negative critique of Bastien-Lepage in this volume. The anonymous author dismissed Theuriet's text as "merely a picturesque personal account of the painter's life," and asserted that Mathilde Blinde's study of Marie Bashkirtseff "has naught to do with Bastien Lepage at all." The author felt that the texts by Clausen and Sickert were the only serious contributions to the book, and stated that by taking the two together one might get a reasonable assessment of Bastien-Lepage's achievements. See "Art Gossip and Reviews," *Art Journal* 54 (1892): 160.

¹⁵ Millet was commonly invoked as an example of "artistic" realism at the end of the nineteenth century in both England and France. Claude Phillips' review of the annual Royal Academy exhibition in London in 1896 described paintings by Bastien-Lepage and fellow naturalist Pascal Dagnan-Bouveret as being overly particularized and "immobile" in comparison to Millet, whose works presented "pulsating life arrested on the canvas" as a result of his more generalized treatment of his subjects. Phillips, "Collection of George McCulloch," 66.

exactly what he saw before him, Bastien-Lepage operated as little more than a camera, evacuating his painting of legitimate truthfulness, and of style.

Taking Bastien-Lepage's 1878 painting *October: The Potato Harvest* as an example, Sickert argued that the artist's method of painting out of doors and in front of his subjects actually undermined the picture's claims for representational truth (Fig. 30).¹⁶ The life-size and astonishingly detailed depiction of a pair of female laborers in the process of harvesting potatoes had clearly required Bastien-Lepage to pose his models and paint them over an extended period of time. Though the composition claimed to portray a fleeting moment, the experience of making the picture could only have been the opposite. Returning to the comparison with Millet, Sickert sniped, "[Millet] did not say to the woman at the washtub, 'Do as if you were washing, and stay like that for me for four or five hours a day, while I paint a picture from you.' Or to the reaper, 'Stay like that with the scythe drawn back, pretending to reap.'"¹⁷ Nature does not pose, Sickert intoned, quoting Millet; Bastien-Lepage's naïve dedication to *plein-air* painting sapped his pictures of any pretense to truthful realism.

For Sickert, this intrinsic contradiction between the artist's method of working and the images themselves characterized every aspect of *October*. Bastien-Lepage may have painted real peasants in local Lorrainian landscapes, but he worked from posed models rather than observing his subjects in the course of their ordinary lives. This method of

¹⁶ Sickert's analysis of *October: The Potato Harvest* was prescient, as this painting entered an English collection just a few years later when it was purchased by the London-based collector George McCulloch in 1897 and installed in his Princes Gate home. The painting is mentioned in A.L. Baldry's "The Collection of George McCulloch, Esq.," *Art Journal* 59 (1897): 374, and a photograph of McCulloch's installation was later published in a special number of the *Art Journal* in 1909 when the McCulloch collection was exhibited at the Royal Academy. See *The McCulloch Collection of Modern Art, shown at Burlington House, 1909, as the Royal Academy Winter Exhibition* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1909), 121.

¹⁷ Sickert, "Modern Realism in Painting," 136.

painting was inherently artificial—the mere reproduction of a fabricated theme. “That woman stooping to put potatoes in a sack will never rise again,” Sickert protested.

The potatoes, portraits every one, will never drop in the sack, and never a breath of air circulates around that painful rendering in the flat of the authentic patches on the very gown of a real peasant. What are the truths you have gained, a handful of tiresome little facts, compared to the truths you have lost?¹⁸

By preoccupying himself with the authenticity of his sources, Sickert suggested, Bastien-Lepage failed to perceive the overarching falseness of his project. His superficial version of realism sacrificed the integrity of the pictorial process for the small truths of insignificant details. *October* was not simply *like* a photograph; it took the place of one by documenting the painter’s own inartistic procedure.

Linking Photography to the Academy

“Modern Realism in Painting” presented a binary between the (recent) past and present, aligning Millet with the personal and authentic practices of artistic tradition, and positioning Bastien-Lepage as the unthinking upstart, an instigator of new methods that undermined painting as an art form. Yet Sickert’s standard for rejecting photo-realism—Bastien-Lepage’s practice of painting directly from the motif—was not new. Working directly from the model had been integral to the training and development of painters in France since the seventeenth century, and it formed the apex of the academic studio system.¹⁹ Thus Sickert deemed Bastien-Lepage photographic not on the basis of his renunciation of traditional practices, but rather on his repackaging of conventional techniques that had taken on new associations by the end of the nineteenth century.

¹⁸ Sickert, “Modern Realism in Painting,” 140.

¹⁹ Albert Boime, *The Academy and French Painting in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Phaidon, 1971), 24 and 30-1.

Sickert situated the point of origin for photo-realism in the foundations of official art, by tracing the flaws he associated with Bastien-Lepage to the formulaic nature of studio training. In this model, painters were taught to imitate their masters rather than to cultivate personal style of their own, rendering authorship superfluous and essentially anonymous.²⁰ “[A]lmost any one of [the modern photo-realists] could have painted a portion of the work of any other without making any appreciable discord of execution apparent,” Sickert protested. “They are all equipped from the first at the studios with a *technique* which serves them equally, once and for all.”²¹

This derivative approach to training contrasted significantly with Sickert’s own artistic identity, which was informed by the theories of French drawing instructor Horace Lecoq de Boisbaudran (1802-1897).²² At the *École royale spéciale gratuite de dessin*, where Lecoq taught drawing between 1841 and 1866, he encouraged art students to draw from memory, a method that was believed to cultivate artistic individuality by limiting opportunities to copy.²³ In his most famous class, “Picturesque Memory,” Lecoq advised artists to study an object closely and then look away and depict it from memory. The

²⁰ Ironically, it seems that Sickert was himself a product of a similar system. Anna Gruetzner Robins has argued that Whistler encouraged his students to adopt his manner of painting, understanding that “the process of replication, like the manufacturing processes that attracted and repelled him, had an inherent modernity and was useful and effective publicity for his own originality.” Anna Gruetzner Robins, *A Fragile Modernism: Whistler and his Impressionist Followers* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 4.

²¹ Sickert, “Modern Realism in Painting,” 141.

²² Sickert trained at the Slade School in London under a protégé of Lecoq, and further developed his adherence to the French teacher’s approach while studying under James McNeill Whistler, and later as an admirer of Edgar Degas, who openly encouraged a practice similar to that of the famed drawing instructor. See Susan J. Sidlauskas, A “Perspective of Feeling”: The Expressive Interior in Nineteenth-Century Realist Painting, PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1989, 39-41 and 289-90. For a discussion of Lecoq’s work and influence see Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, “Lecoq de Boisbaudran and Memory Drawing: A Teaching Course between Idealism and Naturalism,” in *The European Realist Tradition*, ed. Gabriel P. Weisberg (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 242-289 and Susan Sidlauskas, “Body into Space: Lecoq de Boisbaudran and the Rhetoric of Embodiment,” *Body, Place, and Self in Nineteenth-Century Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 6-19.

²³ Horace Lecoq de Boisbaudran, *Éducation de la mémoire pittoresque* (Paris: Librairie sociétaire, 1848).

method was meant to encourage art students to develop skills of observation and memory while activating their imaginations.

Lecoq's approach was seen to offer an alternative to the academic paradigm, in which an externally-oriented method of training was reinforced by the requirement to exhibit and the pressures of public opinion. Sickert argued that exhibition culture suppressed artistic creativity and freedom by guiding painters to produce pictures that would "read" on the wall. This disdain for the academy was shared by other artists and art critics in the late nineteenth century, but in characterizing it by way of photography, Sickert offered a particularly efficient way of denigrating the entire industry of academic realism.²⁴ Photo-realist paintings need not *look* like photographs to share many of the medium's most iconic qualities.

To reinforce the division between "purely artistic" painting, such as that of Millet, and the contaminated version perpetuated by Bastien-Lepage and his followers, Sickert emphasized the latter's dependence on the commercial function of exhibition culture.²⁵ Painters spent the whole year preparing an annual "poster," as Sickert termed it, a large-scale painting intended for public display, which aimed to take up a certain amount of wall space and "send the betting on [the artist] up or down."²⁶ Altering the French term *machine*, typically used to describe large-scale history paintings produced for the annual

²⁴ Scottish artist and art critic D.S. MacColl, for example, characterized the taste of the Academy as derivative and uninformed in an 1893 article in the *Art Journal*, writing that a "victory over the Philistines, indeed, is nothing to be proud of; their applause is as unmeaning as their hooting; that the mob or the Academy should accept or reject an artist is an accident of fashion, and a cordial dislike is a pleasanter exhibition of feeling on their part, because more sincere, than a whipped up admiration." D.S. MacColl, "Mr. Whistler's Paintings in Oil," *Art Journal* 55 (1893): 89. Émile Zola describes what he saw as the decidedly undemocratic system of exhibiting at the Salon in "Mon Salon (1866)," *Le Bon Combat. De Courbet aux Impressionistes. Anthologie d'écrits sur l'art*, ed. Jean-Paul Bouillon (Paris: Hermann, 1974), 59.

²⁵ Sickert, "Modern Realism in Painting," 135.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 138.

Salon exhibition, Sickert dropped the “e” and labeled such work a *machin*, or thingamajig—a trivial and reproductive commodity whose date was impressed upon it with the accuracy of a fashion plate.²⁷ The quintessential example was Bastien-Lepage’s 1879 painting *Joan of Arc*, a picture which Sickert had recently seen at the centennial exhibition of French art in Paris in 1889 (Fig. 31). Sickert did not describe *Joan of Arc* in terms of photography; instead he itemized the inartistic results of Bastien-Lepage’s reproductive and unoriginal method of painting. The composition lacked grace and the drawing expressed no novelty of observation. The color was uninteresting, and the painter had employed the “usual mechanically-obtrusive square-brush-work of the Parisian schools of art.” This method of paint handling, which was seen to be all but ubiquitous in the work of Bastien-Lepage and his British followers, was frequently caricatured by English art critics as foreign, monotonous, and superficial. In reviews of the Royal Academy exhibitions in 1886 and 1887, for example, artist and art critic R.A.M. Stevenson disparaged such paint handling as “mathematical” and “impertinent,” a gratuitous and obtrusive form of mark-making that failed to mask the absence of personal style.²⁸

²⁷ Sickert, “Modern Realism in Painting,” 142. In an 1889 article in the *New York Herald*, Sickert defined *machin* as an “exhibition picture,” and he used this term rather than the usual term *machine* or *la grande machine* to characterize paintings exhibited at the Royal Academy. It is unclear if this was an oversight—which would be surprising, given Sickert’s fluency in French—or an intentional (and clever) conflating of the term *machine* (a complex, multi-part contraption) with *machin* (thingy or thingamajig). I thank Howard Lay for discussing the nuances of these two terms with me.

²⁸ See Anon. [R.A.M. Stevenson], “Picture Galleries,” *Saturday Review* 60 (Dec. 4, 1886): 752 and Anon. [R.A.M. Stevenson], “The Royal Academy III,” *Saturday Review* 63 (May 21, 1887). George Moore described the technique in terms of its French foreignness in “Royal Academy,” *Fortnightly Review* 51 (Jan.-June 1892): 839. A.S. Hartrick credited Bastien-Lepage with originating the technique after noticing his use of large, square brushes in Concarneau in 1883, however Stanley Forbes and Henry La Thangue were employing square brushes at least two years earlier, as suggested by a letter that Forbes wrote to his mother requesting “a flat sable brush for oil painting.” See A.S. Hartrick, *A Painter’s Pilgrimage Through Fifty Years* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939), 28 in Adrian Jenkins, *Painters and Peasants: Henry La Thangue and British Rural Naturalism 1880-1905* (Bolton: Bolton Museum and Art Gallery, 2000), 58, and Robins, *A Fragile Modernism*, 213, note 29.

A painter with Bastien-Lepage's creative limitations could only manage "commonplace illustration," Sickert concluded.²⁹ There might be some documentary value in his portraits, such as the well-regarded *Portrait of "My Grandfather"* or depiction of the actress Sarah Bernhardt (Figs. 32 and 33), but at his best Bastien-Lepage was no more than a "workmanlike and photographic copyist," unworthy of the emulation his pictures generated. It was only the "modern gigantic conspiracy of toleration" that promoted Bastien-Lepage as a master of his medium.³⁰

"The best kind of realism": Bastien-Lepage in the 1870s

Sickert's characterization of Bastien-Lepage as the archetypal photo-realist was by no means anomalous in art criticism in the 1890s. Despite the painter's continued popularity and international influence—or more accurately, because of it—critics often identified him as the head of a new school that treated painting as if it was photography.³¹ In France, Gustave Geffroy's 1893 book *La vie artistique* dedicated a distinct subsection to "La photographie des couleurs," which described the new school of painters that derived from Bastien-Lepage. Seeking "exact reality," these artists made prints rather than paintings in their studios, the author explained, which rendered the invention of colored photography wholly unnecessary.³²

The situation was similar in England. The extent to which photographic terminology could be used to describe pictures like Bastien-Lepage's is exemplified by a passage in

²⁹ Sickert, "Modern Realism in Painting," 142.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 143.

³¹ Moore, "Royal Academy," 832-33.

³² Geffroy finished: "Et la conclusion qui vient devant ces rigides images, c'est qu'il serait peut-être inutile d'inventer la photographie des couleurs,—si ce n'est pour prouver l'inutilité des peintres." Gustave Geffroy, *La Vie artistique 2* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1893): 298-300.

Gleeson White's 1893 article "Is the Camera the Friend or Foe of Art?" in which the *Studio* editor managed to characterize every aspect of the painter's process in terms of photography:

The school of Bastien Lepage which, roughly speaking, is responsible for the largest number of brand-new figure-subjects painted in England to-day—that is to say, those wherein 'modernity' is sought and prized—undoubtedly has been largely influenced by the camera. Its presentation of facts are often but coloured photographs to all intents and purposes; whether the artist used the lens or not matters little, he saw Nature with the unloving eye of the camera, and deliberately noted fact after fact, detail after detail, much in the same mechanical way. True, like a modern art-photographer he has thrown the whole a little out of focus, blurred the outlines, modified the harsh tones of the negative, touched up the bare facts; but all the same, he has blackened the shadows, reveled in local textures, and played the game of the camera in colour instead of monochrome.³³

Describing Bastien-Lepage's paintings as colored photographs, his eye as a camera, and the act of painting in terms of photographic procedures of lenticular focus, retouching, and the development of negatives, White conceived of painting exclusively in terms of the manipulations of a photographer in the darkroom. By the late-nineteenth century, critics on both sides of the Channel seemed to have lost the language to describe painting in terms of its own medium.

This widely accepted late view of Bastien-Lepage's work stood in stark contrast to the initial critical responses to the artist's paintings when he began exhibiting at the Paris Salon in the mid-1870s. At that time reviewers were astonished by Bastien-Lepage's technical virtuosity in paintings like the *Portrait of "My Grandfather,"* which was shown to great acclaim at the Salon in 1874 (Fig. 32).³⁴ Rather than being put off by the painting's

³³ Gleeson White, "Is the Camera the Friend or Foe of Art?" *The Studio* 1 (1893): 96.

³⁴ Critics frequently cited Bastien-Lepage's portrait of his grandfather as the source of his reputation. See Roger Marx, "Jules Bastien-Lepage," *La Nouvelle Revue* 34 (May-June, 1885): 194; Louis de Fourcaud's *Préface* (an extract from the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*) in *Exposition des oeuvres de Jules Bastien-Lepage* (Paris: École Nationale des Beaux-Arts, Hôtel de Chimay, Mars-Avril 1885): 17; and Gustave Larroumet, *Discours prononcé*

light palette, equal distribution of light, and the degree of detail in the portrait—all evidence of his *plein-air* technique—these particular qualities were cited as the source of the painting's originality and truthfulness.³⁵ The portrait was so lifelike, one critic claimed, that “one expects the old man to start telling stories.”³⁶

When Bastien-Lepage received only second place in the Prix de Rome the following year for his blatantly unidealized interpretation of the *Annunciation to the Shepherds*, his fellow competitors took matters into their own hands, crowning his painting the real winner with a palm branch tucked in its frame (Fig. 34).³⁷ Critics appreciated the artist's vivid and emotionally resonant representation of the shepherds, which suggested Bastien-Lepage's preference for portraying real life. Roger Ballu and Paul Leroi, both writing for the deluxe journal *L'Art*, expressed admiration for the artist's courage in rejecting the “bloodless” style of the Academy in order to pursue his own, personal path to truthful painting.³⁸ Far from being associated with the conventions of academic art, at this early

à l'inauguration de la statue de Jules Bastien-Lepage à Damvillers, le 29 septembre 1889 (Paris: Maison Quantin, 1889): 11.

³⁵ See Jules Castagnary, *Salons (1872-1879)* (Paris: G. Charpentier et E. Fasquelle, 1892), 125; Nestor Paturot, *Le Salon de 1874* (Paris: Le National, 1874): 131; and Georges Dufour, “Le salon (salon de 1874 et de 1874),” *Des beaux-arts dans la politique* (Paris: E. Lachaud, 1875): 208-09. Ironically, it appears that Bastien-Lepage may have painted the portrait at least partially from a photograph, as evidenced by a print at the Musée Bastien-Lepage in Montmedy, reproduced in Serge Lemoine, ed. *Jules Bastien-Lepage (1848-1884)* (Paris: Musée d'Orsay, 2007): 78.

³⁶ Georges Dufour, “Le salon (salon de 1874 et de 1874),” *Des beaux-arts dans la politique* (Paris: E. Lachaud, 1875): 208-09.

³⁷ Apparently Bastien-Lepage lost the prize on a technicality. William Feldman explains that because the painting depicts the event at twilight (rather than at nighttime, as described in the biblical passage), the jury disqualified Bastien-Lepage's painting from the highest honor. Instead he received the “Premier Second Grand Prix,” which held no official significance. William S. Feldman, “Jules Bastien-Lepage: A New Perspective,” *Art Journal of Victoria* 20 (1980), accessed October 22, 2017, <http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/essay/jules-bastien-lepage-a-new-perspective/>. Julia Cartwright describes the competition for the Prix de Rome in detail, claiming that Sarah Bernhardt and other artists took it upon themselves to hang laurel wreaths on his *Annunciation*. See Cartwright, 24-5.

³⁸ Roger Ballu, “Les Concurrents aux Prix de Rome,” *L'Art* 2 (1875): 346-50; Charles Tardieu, “La Peinture à l'Exposition universelle de 1878. L'École française,” *L'Art* 3 (1878): 112. Paul Leroi describes academic technique as “exsangue” in “Salon de 1875, IX,” *L'Art: Revue hebdomadaire illustrée* 1ère année 2 (1875): 136-40.

stage in his career Bastien-Lepage's exacting realism was seen to overturn its principles entirely.

Excitement about Bastien-Lepage's technique reached a fever pitch in 1878, when the artist exhibited his life-size genre painting *Les Foins (Haymaking)* at the Salon exhibition that year (Fig. 35). *Les Foins* depicted two exhausted laborers resting in a field during their lunch break. A male figure naps with his hat blocking his face, while a female haymaker sits upright in front of him, legs splayed and staring unseeingly outside of the frame. Heightening the illusionism of the female figure, Bastien-Lepage painted her body with fine, almost invisible brushwork that distinguished her materially from the looser strokes used to depict the landscape environment, and carefully nuanced the shading of her bare arms to lend them palpable weight and three-dimensionality.³⁹ The high horizon line of the composition, which would become a noted feature of Bastien-Lepage's paintings, tipped the haymaker out of the canvas feet-first, forcing viewers into a physical and psychological confrontation with this frankly modest subject.

While responses to the female laborer's slack posture and open mouth were mixed—Charles Clément deemed her vulgar and a mere pretext for demonstrating technical virtuosity⁴⁰—the majority of reviewers rallied behind the lifelikeness of the representation and the ingenuity of the approach, both of which were attributed to Bastien-

³⁹ The artist's fifteen-year-old cousin, Marie-Adèle Robert, modeled for the female figure in the garden of the family's house in Damvillers, purportedly posing for five or six hours a day over the course of several months. Marie-Madeleine Aubrun, *Jules Bastien-Lepage 1848-1884: Catalogue raisonné de l'oeuvre* (Paris: M.M. Aubrun, 1985): 135.

⁴⁰ Charles Clément questioned the sincerity of the "truth" that Bastien-Lepage depicted in *Les Foins*, complaining that contemporary genre painters tended to select vulgar and insignificant subjects in order to demonstrate their "technical qualities of execution," which he noted were in fashion at the moment. The majority of the review, however, was given over to describing the hideousness of the female figure. Charles Clément, "Le Salon de 1878," *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires* (June 28, 1878): 1-2. Ernest Chesneau also found the theme of *Les Foins* to be empty of meaning, and compared the female haymaker to an animal in his "Salon de 1878. La Peinture," *Revue de France* 24 (June 15, 1878): 886-907.

Lepage's personal style. Jules Castagnary was in near raptures over the painting in his review in *Le Siècle*, describing it as "*plein air*, at its best and most correct." Admiring the acuity of Bastien-Lepage's observation and the talent of his painterly technique, Castagnary declared with confidence that "nothing will be impossible for him."⁴¹ Arthur Baignères, likewise, could find no fault with *Les Foins*, and expressed incredulity that it was possible to paint like this without employing some method of deceit. "All is right, all is true, all is admirably drawn, all is superiorly painted," Baignères wrote in the politically moderate *Journal officiel de la République française*. "When we consider that there is no string or hoax in this painting...we are amazed by the frankness of his talent."⁴²

Although reviewers seemed stunned by Bastien-Lepage's formidable realism, few found the painter's technique to be incompatible with his agency as an artist. Indeed, rather than interpreting *Les Foins* as a transparent reproduction of reality, critics noticed and commended the artist's deviations from nature. Eugène Véron, the editor of *L'Art*, suggested that Bastien-Lepage had purposely exaggerated the exhaustion of his female worker in order to emphasize the realities of peasant labor. Through this artistic choice, the critic explained, Bastien-Lepage's painting offered more truth than the poem by André Theuriet that purportedly inspired it, and which was installed alongside the painting at the

⁴¹ "On a parlé de plein air : voilà du plein air, du meilleur et du plus juste, avec une incomparable science en plus...Avec son sentiment, si particulier, d'une naïveté qui touche à celle de certains grands primitifs, avec la sûreté de son observation et l'habileté de sa main, rien ne lui sera impossible." Jules Castagnary, "Salon de 1878," *Salons (1872-1879)* (Paris: Bibliothèque Charpentier, 1892): 322-23. Critics' insistence on the fact that Bastien-Lepage painted *Les Foins* entirely out of doors is somewhat misleading. While he made a number of painted studies *en plein air*, the final composition was completed in the studio. Bernard Ponton, *Jules Bastien-Lepage: Peintre lorrain* (Paris: Citédis Éditions, 1999), 36-38.

⁴² Baignères concluded his review of *Les Foins* by setting Bastien-Lepage within a lineage that included Breton and Millet, each of whom had added a chapter to the "poem of nature": "Tout est juste, tout est vrai, tout est admirablement dessiné, tout est supérieurement peint. On est en présence de la nature et de la vie. Quand on songe qu'il n'y a dans ce tableau ni une ficelle ni une supercherie...on est émerveillé de la franchise de ce talent. Après Breton, après Millet, M. Bastien Lepage a ajouté un chapitre au poème de la nature." Arthur Baignères, "Salon de 1878," *Journal officiel de la République française* (May 30, 1878): 6014.

Salon that year.⁴³ While Theuriet idealized the joys of peasant work, Bastien-Lepage presented labor as it really was. “Only city folk find ‘*amoureuse odeur*’ in the fields,” Véron declared. “If this woman is languid and intoxicated it’s only from exhaustion, and if she’s dreaming, it’s in the way of sheep, without thinking about anything.”⁴⁴

When he moved on to describe the artist’s portrait of Theuriet, also on view at the 1878 Salon, Véron was even more insistent about the artistic achievement of the portrayal, which he *opposed* to photography. “Here is realism in the best sense of the word,” Véron wrote. “An intelligent and sagacious realism which is not content to photograph the surface of things, a sincere and true art that develops freely and boldly in the sense of the temperament and personality of the artist.”⁴⁵ Paul Mantz, too, emphasized that *Les Foins* possessed more “thought” than any other picture at the Salon that year.⁴⁶ These supporters of Bastien-Lepage were keen to emphasize that the painter’s technique went beyond the surface and offered something more analytical and artistic than photographic reproduction.

⁴³ In a letter he wrote to Theuriet in August 1877, while painting *Les Foins*, Bastien-Lepage declared: “Your verses are just the sort of picture that I should like to paint. You make one feel the scent of the hay and the heat of the meadow...If only my hay smells as good as yours does, I shall be content.” Cartwright, 37. Critics frequently commented on the relationship between the poem and Bastien-Lepage’s painting, several of them reproducing the verse in its entirety: “Midi ! les prés muchés sont baignés de lumière. / Sur un tas d’herbe fraîche ayant fait sa litière, / Le faucheur étendu dort en serrant les poings. / Assise auprès de lui, la faneuse hâlée / Rêve, les yeux ouverts, alanguie et grisée / Par l’amoureuse odeur qui s’exhale des foins.” See Véron, “Le Salon de Paris, 1878,” 74 and Castagnary, “Salon de 1878,” 323.

⁴⁴ “M. Bastien-Lepage s’est donné une sorte de démenti ; il n’a pas mis son œuvre en accord suffisant avec les vers qu’il donne comme en étant l’explication. Mais il faut le dire, ici c’est l’artiste qui a raison contre le poète. Ce sont surtout les citadins qui trouvent au foin une « amoureuse odeur », et encore faut-il qu’il soit à peu près sec ; de plus, à l’heure où M. Bastien-Lepage prend sa faneuse, si elle est « alanguie et grisée », c’est uniquement de lassitude, et si elle rêve, c’est à la façon des moutons, sans penser à rien.” Eugène Véron, “Le Salon de Paris, 1878,” *L’Art* 3 (1878): 74.

⁴⁵ “Voilà du réalisme dans le meilleur sens du mot, un réalisme intelligent et sagace qui ne se contente pas de photographier la surface des choses, un art sincère et vrai qui se développe librement et hardiment dans le sens du tempérament et de la personnalité de l’artiste.” *Ibid.*, 288.

⁴⁶ Paul Mantz, “Le Salon. III,” *Le Temps* 18, no. 6283 (July 4, 1878): n.p. [2]. The previous year Proth wrote that the artist’s portrait of his father has “une exécution magistrale, étrangement supérieure au plus habile métier de nos photographes à l’huile.” Mario Proth, *Voyage au pays des peintres. Salon de 1877* (Paris: chez Henri Vatou, 1877), 117.

That critics tended to distance Bastien-Lepage from photography in 1878 is significant, given that elsewhere they noted disconcerting parallels between painting and photography. Two years earlier, Véron had expressed concern about painters who appeared to ape the camera, complaining in a review of contemporary art in France that realists aimed only to “rival photography,” and as a result produced nothing but “colored photographs.”⁴⁷ Art historian Anatole de Montaiglon agreed, declaring in the *Gazette des beaux-arts* that the Salon of 1875 was “not at all elevated” since artists had swapped originality for the “mania for accessories, obedience to photography, and the cult of the *morceau*.”⁴⁸ When he described Bastien-Lepage’s portrait of Simon Hayem in the same text, however, Montaiglon positively assessed the realism of the painting and credited this to the artist having painted it from life (Fig. 36)⁴⁹ Not only did critics differentiate Bastien-Lepage’s painting from photography, he was not then seen to be the origin of the problem.

Eugène Guillaume, former head of the École des Beaux-Arts, offered a particularly nuanced interpretation of Bastien-Lepage’s relationship to photography in a review of the Salon exhibition the following year.⁵⁰ Identifying a disconcerting trend in contemporary

⁴⁷ In a passage describing contemporary realists Véron wrote, “Leur ambition est de rivaliser avec la photographie ; et en effet leurs œuvres ne sont pour la plupart que des photographies coloriées.” Eugène Véron, “Quelques Mots sur la situation de l’art en France,” *L’Art* 4 (1876): 84, 87.

⁴⁸ “Ce qui est certain, c’est que, malgré quelques belles œuvres qui sont l’exception, la moyenne du Salon n’est point élevée. Ce qui domine, c’est l’habileté, l’émiettement, la recherche du petit succès, tantôt l’exaspération de l’individualisme sans valeur, tantôt le pastiche ou plutôt la contrefaçon de n’importe quoi et de n’importe qui, pourvu qu’on croie y voir une chance de meilleure vente, la manie des accessoires, l’obéissance à la photographie, le culte du *morceau*, la glorification de l’esquisse et de la pochade, le mépris de la composition, et par-dessus, ce qui comprend tout, l’absence à peu près complète de préoccupations intellectuelles et élevées.” Anatole de Montaiglon, “Salon de 1875,” *Gazette des beaux-arts* 11 (June 1, 1875): 491.

⁴⁹ Describing Bastien-Lepage’s portrait of M. Hayem Montaiglon wrote, “Ce portrait assis de M. Hayem est peut-être le meilleur portrait d’homme du Salon au point de vue de la vie : le modèle est pris sur le vif dans cette pose familière et brusquement aisée des gens qui manient de grosses affaires et qui sont toujours pressés.” Montaiglon, “Salon de 1875,” 498.

⁵⁰ Eugène Guillaume (1822-1905) was a sculptor, professor and art critic, and served as the director of the École des beaux-arts between 1864 and 1878. See Marnin Young, *Realism in the Age of Impressionism. Painting and the Politics of Time* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 84 and 230, note 111; and

painting that he termed *photographisme*, Guillaume identified Bastien-Lepage as the primary example of a group of painters who were charting a new, more personal approach to representing the transience of the natural world.⁵¹ “Impressionists” like Bastien-Lepage were inspired by photography’s aspiration to capture instantaneous moments, but they recognized that the medium often failed to deliver on this promise.⁵² Photographs froze their subjects in motion, presenting a distinctly unreal sense of things—what Guillaume called the exact trace, but a mere “somber specter.”⁵³ In contrast, *plein-airistes* eschewed this “mechanical” treatment of nature by rendering the transitory effects of light and weather through the memory of their own experiences.⁵⁴ In this way, Guillaume distanced Bastien-Lepage from a method of painting that relied on direct observation—a technique the author himself discouraged—by emphasizing the painter’s interpretation of the visible world.⁵⁵

Taking *October* as the paradigm of this impulse (Fig. 30), Guillaume described Bastien-Lepage as rejecting academic conventions and the artificiality of the studio by channeling his own “impressions of exterior truth.” *October* depicted two women collecting

“Directeurs: Guillaume, Eugène,” *Académie de France à Rome. Villa Medici*, accessed November 13, 2016, <http://www.villamedici.it/fr/villa-m%C3%A9dicis/directeurs/g/guillaume-eug%C3%A8ne/>.

⁵¹ Guillaume admitted that photography had offered painters some improvements, namely in terms of encouraging them to defy academic conventions and to depict their subjects with “a more scrupulous spirit.” However he was dismayed by the lifelessness of these pictures, which lacked the feeling for nature that he believed developed through an artist’s direct engagement with his subject. Eugène Guillaume, “Le Salon de 1879. Le Peinture – Résumé,” *Revue des deux mondes* 34 (July 1, 1879): 196-99.

⁵² Marnin Young claims this is the first use of the term “instantaneity” to describe Impressionist temporality. Young, *Realism in the Age of Impressionism*, 84.

⁵³ “La plaque sensible donne une image instantanée, mais qu’y trouve-t-on en dehors de la forme, quand celle-ci n’est pas altérée ? Une sorte de spectre sombre des choses, la trace exacte mais obscure de la réalité.” Guillaume, “Salon de 1879,” 198.

⁵⁴ In contrast to the camera, which operated in “une manière simplement mécanique,” artists used “l’observation et le jugement qui opèrent pour produire un travail entièrement dû à l’activité réfléchie de l’esprit humain.” *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ As Young explains, Guillaume’s belief in art’s “overreliance on visual data likely fueled his insistence that pedagogic training in the arts must move away from the observation of nature.” Young, *Realism in the Age of Impressionism*, 84 and 230, note 112.

potatoes in a freshly mown field, but this theme was not Bastien-Lepage's main concern. Instead, Bastien-Lepage used the premise of laborers at work to explore his own aesthetic response to nature, Guillaume explained. Tonal values, the clarity of forms, light and effect—these were Bastien-Lepage's actual subjects.⁵⁶

Guillaume's assessment of *October* is striking, not only because he interpreted the painting in dramatically different terms from those of Sickert fifteen years later, but because he did so without outright rejecting the artist's relationship to photography. Rather than seeing painting and photography as polar opposites or as parallel practices, Guillaume proposed a gray area in which painters might respond to photography obliquely, even metaphorically. Like Véron, Guillaume situated the depiction of external appearance as part of an intellectual process in which the artist developed a personal and stylistic response to optical stimuli. In this model, an extension of physiognomic theory that posits a relationship between facial features and inner character, it was precisely through his careful attention to surfaces that Bastien-Lepage accessed the inner meaning of his subjects and visualized them in pictorial form.⁵⁷

Tricky Techniques

The first murmurs of equivocation emerged the same year, when Bastien-Lepage exhibited *October* at the 1879 Salon. While many reviewers shared Guillaume's opinion of

⁵⁶ "M. Bastien-Lepage est surtout frappé du caractère naturel des choses. La simplicité et la clarté de l'aspect, la justesse des valeurs, la finesse des dégradations et des nuances, l'unité dans la lumière et dans l'effet, sans les artifices d'un clair-obscur de complaisance, en un mot l'impression de la vérité extérieure, voilà ce qui le touche et ce que son rare talent nous fait pénétrer. Les personnages baignent dans un milieu général, participent de l'unité dominante et sont comme issus de la terre à laquelle leur travail les tient attachés..." Guillaume, "Salon de 1879," 199.

⁵⁷ Jules Castagnary made a similar point in his "Salon de 1876," in *Salons (1872-1879)* (Paris: Bibliothèque Charpentier, 1892): 237.

October, interpreting the painting as a pendant to the much-admired *Les Foins*, a small but vocal group of critics suggested that the painter was intentionally trying to repeat the previous year's success, and therefore had undermined the purported directness and honesty of the representation.⁵⁸ In a lengthy analysis of Bastien-Lepage's technique in *Le Messager de l'Europe*, Émile Zola positioned the artist as the inheritor of the legacy left behind by Jean-François Millet and Gustave Courbet, both of whom had died within the past five years. But he questioned the legibility of the young painter's *facture*.⁵⁹ Bastien-Lepage seemed cunningly aware that only *technique* stood in the way of the Impressionists: Claude Monet was too hasty in his process, while Édouard Manet failed to do justice to his conceptual ambitions.⁶⁰ Bastien-Lepage bested them both, in Zola's view, by bringing the realist principles of Millet and Courbet in line with the Impressionists' approach to naturalism, and treating their themes with the meticulous, academic finesse acquired in Alexandre Cabanel's studio.⁶¹

Yet Zola was troubled. Bastien-Lepage seemed a bit *too* skillful in his handling of paint. This virtuosity had made him a favorite with the Salon-going public—Zola never trusted popularity—but it made it difficult to read intentionality into the artist's work. How

⁵⁸ See Eugène Véron, "La peinture au Salon de Paris, 1879, I," *L'Art*, 5, no. 2 (1879): 146-48 and Émile Bergerat, "Le Salon de 1879," *Journal officiel de la République française* 11, no. 140 (May 22, 1879): 4229-31.

⁵⁹ Émile Zola, "Lettres de Paris. Nouvelles artistiques et littéraires [Le Salon de 1879]. Juillet 1879," *Écrits sur l'art*, ed. Jean-Pierre Leduc-Adine (Paris: Gallimard, 1991): 401.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 399-401.

⁶¹ French academic painter Alexandre Cabanel (1823-1889) ran one of the most popular studios in Paris in the 1860s and 70s. According to Julia Cartwright, at least 112 exhibitors described themselves as students of this master in 1886. Bastien-Lepage entered the studio in 1868, but does not seem to have been a frequent attendee beyond 1870. See Cartwright, 13-14. Critics frequently expressed relief that Bastien-Lepage had rid himself of Cabanel's teachings, even using the verb *désencabanelliser* to describe the artist's process of shedding his academic roots. See Henri Perrier, "Trois Cercles: Paris et Londres," *L'Art* 4 (1878): 225. Zola described Gervex, also a former student of Cabanel, as undertaking a similar process. He writes that it was fascinating to watch "le souffle moderne" sway the best students from academic painters, obliging them to "renier leurs dieux" and to produce naturalist painting with weapons stolen from the École des beaux-arts. Zola, "Le Salon de 1879," 402.

could one know what part of Bastien-Lepage's process derived from his temperament, and what part was put on for the purposes of public approval? Bastien-Lepage's "hybrid" technique—part academic, part impressionist—only stoked Zola's doubts. No one exits the studio of Cabanel unscathed, he warned, and only time would tell if Bastien-Lepage ultimately undermined himself by securing his reputation through "technical tricks."⁶²

Fellow novelist Joris-Karl Huysmans amplified Zola's concerns. While he acknowledged that Bastien-Lepage was a painter of astonishing ability, mastering his *métier* down to the tip of his finger, Huysmans sensed something disingenuous in the artist's technique.⁶³ It was as if Bastien-Lepage had stopped halfway through his painting, doubled back, and "corrected" his work to ensure he pleased the public, the author suggested.⁶⁴ *October* was a mere repetition of *Les Foins*—same model, same theme—but this time Bastien-Lepage had cleaned up his laborer, rendering the potato gatherer a little too pleased by her work. This approach seemed calculated to appeal to the public, and from the point of view of realism the artist had perpetuated fraud.⁶⁵ "Millet haunts the painting," Huysmans concluded, but the "magnificently true look that the peasants of that master had

⁶² "On ne passe pas impunément par l'atelier de Cabanel. Il est encore difficile de distinguer dans les quelques ouvrages du jeune artiste quel rôle y joue l'originalité du tempérament et quelle est la part de la technique...Je pense en outre que cet artiste ne sera pas un homme adroit, attrapant une idée au vol, vulgarisant à l'intention de la bourgeoisie la nouvelle méthode, captant au premier coup la faveur du public par des ruses techniques." Zola, "Le Salon de 1879," 401-02. Richard Thomson has, however, argued that Zola's characterization of naturalists as applying academic techniques to modern subject matter is too simplified. Richard Thomson, *Art of the Actual: Naturalism and Style in Early Third Republic France, 1880-1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 100.

⁶³ As Huysmans put it, "M. Bastien-Lepage est un peintre d'une prodigieuse habileté, qui connaît son métier sur le bout du doigt." J.K. Huysmans, "Salon de 1879," *L'Art moderne* (Paris: 1883): 48.

⁶⁴ "C'est habilement ordonnée, ça a presque l'air d'être agilement peint, c'est assez doucement fanfaron pour faire crier à la bravoure, et je perçois, malgré tout, une préciosité de facture truquée, une marche en avant, interrompue et habilement arrêtée pour ne pas déplaire au public." Huysmans, "Salon de 1879," 48.

⁶⁵ "Le public sera sans doute reconnaissant à M. Lepage d'avoir ainsi escamoté la vérité et d'avoir mis un peu de pâte d'amandes sur ces épidermes. Pour moi, c'est de la peinture polie et bien élevée, maquillée par un rusé compère." Huysmans, "Salon de 1879," 49. Paul de Saint-Victor similarly described the two figures as staged. See his "Le Salon de 1879," *La Liberté* (June 3, 1879): 3.

isn't found here. To be honest, Bastien-Lepage's candor and naïveté seem feigned to me...he's now playing [the role of a peasant] to a great orchestra."⁶⁶

These murmurs of dissent swelled to a din the following year when Bastien-Lepage unveiled his highly anticipated *Joan of Arc* at the Salon of 1880 (Fig. 31). Desiring to portray a version of the teenaged martyr "from our corner of the earth,"⁶⁷ Bastien-Lepage depicted the French heroine as a working class girl from Lorraine, painting the figure at least partially from his usual model, the artist's cousin Marie-Adèle Robert, in the backyard of the family home in Damvillers not far from where Joan herself grew up.⁶⁸ Bastien-Lepage chose an episode of high narrational drama to depict, the moment when Joan heard the voices of the Archangel Michael, Saint Margaret, and Saint Catherine instructing her to defend France during the Hundred Years' War, but one whose significance was difficult to convey in visual form. To render the theme pictorially legible, Bastien-Lepage portrayed Joan with her head cocked and an intense, searching expression on her face as she strains to hear the voices of the saints. Lest there be any confusion, he included the sources of the voices as well: three small-scale apparitions that hover in the trees behind the central figure, just perceptible against the façade of the cream-colored cottage.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ "Millet a hanté ce peintre...Seulement, l'allure magnifiquement vraie que prenaient les paysans de ce maître, dans la campagne, ne se retrouve pas ici. Pour tout dire, la candeur et la naïveté de M. Lepage me semblent par trop feintes...Millet était un franc artiste ; après lui, M. Breton avait commencé déjà à jouer le rôle « du brave paysan de la peinture de la peinture ». M. Lepage est allé plus loin, il le joue actuellement à grand orchestre." Huysmans, "Salon de 1879," 49.

⁶⁷ Fourcaud reported Bastien-Lepage's goal for *Joan of Arc* in his posthumous article on the artist, quoting Bastien-Lepage as stating he wished to "faire une Jeanne d'Arc de son coin de terre et non de son atelier." Fourcaud, *Exposition des oeuvres de Jules Bastien-Lepage*, 10.

⁶⁸ According to J.A. Weir, Joan was modeled on Bastien-Lepage's cousin, Marie-Adèle Robert, as well as two six-year-old children. See J.C. Van Dyke, ed. "Jules Bastien-Lepage," *Modern French Masters* (New York: The Century Company, 1896), 230. Bastien-Lepage stitched two large canvases together to produce the final composition, a process which required the assistance of the village cobbler. E. Simmons, *From Seven to Seventy: Memories of a Painter and a Yankee* (New York, 1922), 147, fn. 9 in Feldman, "Joan of Arc," 4-5.

⁶⁹ Catholic historian Henri Alexandre Wallon published a highly acclaimed biography of Joan of Arc in 1860, which was reissued in a revised and enlarged format in 1876. H. Wallon, *Jeanne d'Arc* (Paris: Librairie de

For once, Bastien-Lepage's critics were united: *Joan of Arc* offended just about everyone.⁷⁰ To the idealists, Joan appeared unkempt and wide-eyed, suggesting the countenance of a hysteric—familiar from Dr. Jean-Martin Charcot's recently published photographs of his patients (Fig. 37)⁷¹—rather than a national hero. Given Joan's status in this period as a symbol of French identity and patriotism, the sense that Bastien-Lepage had represented her as indecent or even insane was seen to be misguided and deeply insulting.⁷²

For the realists, on the other hand, the inclusion of the saints as visible beings was not only hokey and historically inaccurate (as Philippe Burty pointed out, their presence directly contradicted Joan's own report of her experience), their inclusion interrupted the smooth consumption of *plein air* painting as a marker of pictorial truth.⁷³ Bastien-Lepage

Firmin-Didot, 1876). William Feldman posits that Wallon's account was a source for Bastien-Lepage's version of the subject. This text included a reproduction of Léon Benouville's painting of *Joan of Arc Hearing the Voices* (1859), now in the collection of the Musée des beaux-arts, Reims, which, like Bastien-Lepage's version, included depictions of the saints. See Feldman's unpublished manuscript "Bastien-Lepage's *Joan of Arc*: A Reappraisal," held in the object file for *Joan of Arc*, accession number 89.21.1, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

⁷⁰ William Feldman reviews the critical responses to this painting in "The Life and Work of Jules Bastien-Lepage," 115-42.

⁷¹ Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-1893), a French physician and neurologist, took photographs to document his patients and presented them to the public. His three-volume series of these photographs, *L'Iconographie photographique de La Salpêtrière*, was published between 1877 and 1880, the years during which Bastien-Lepage was conceiving and painting *Joan of Arc*. See Mary Warner Marien, *Photography: A Cultural History* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2002), 139-40 and Thomson, 121. Charles Clément suggested that Bastien-Lepage depicted Joan of Arc as insane rather than noble. See *Journal des débats* (May 22, 1880) in *Le Salon: Journal de l'exposition annuelle des beaux-arts* 7 (June 1880): 108-11. Edmond About agreed, writing that she also looked like the mistress of a French soldier in *Le Dix-Neuvième Siècle* (May 23, 1880), published in *Le Salon* (1880), 67. Ernest Chesneau offered this assessment: "This girl with a dazed air, a crazy eye, staggering against the trunk of an apple tree, arms apart in a movement both *gauche* and silly, fiddling with the leaves in a gesture of hallucination, this lost girl in disordered clothing, shirt unlaced, skirt falling off, is this the great inspiration who saved France?" In a later passage, he called her an "escapee of Salpêtrière made refugee in the country." Ernest Chesneau, "La Jeanne d'Arc, de M. Bastien-Lepage," *Le Moniteur universel* (May 13, 1880): 43-46.

⁷² Joan of Arc became a particularly popular subject following the annexation of Lorraine to Germany in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War. Jennifer Kilgore, "Joan of Arc as Propaganda Motif from the Dreyfus Affair to the Second World War," *Revue LISA/LISA* VI (2008): 279-96.

⁷³ As Philippe Burty protested, "Jeanne, elle-même l'a dit à ses juges, « entendait des voix ». M. Bastien-Lepage, ne pouvant appliquer derrière son tableau un accordéon, a dû faire flotter entre les branches des pruniers des

implied a direct link between representation and real life by situating the miraculous experience in a local landscape and rendering it in extraordinary detail, but the imaginary elements of the subject openly undermined him. *Plein-air* painting was revealed to be nothing but a procedure: no more accurate than any other painterly mode, and all the more false since it misrepresented the conditions of its own making. If observation-based painting could accommodate these inventions, how would any form of realism substantiate its claims for truth?

Critical responses to the picture addressed these two, seemingly opposed themes. J.K. Huysmans emphasized the falseness of the painting, by characterizing *Joan of Arc* as a theatrical production with Bastien-Lepage as the inept stage manager preparing his actress for her grand debut. Familiar from her appearances in *October* and *Les Foins*, “Mignon” clutched dramatically at the “varnished” leaf of a tree, clothed—like all of Bastien-Lepage’s “false peasants”—in rags specially fabricated by the theater’s *costumier*. The saints dangled awkwardly behind her, appearing like commercial signage swinging from the roof of the house. Even Bastien-Lepage’s brushwork had a role to play in this interpretation, as Huysmans connected the painter’s typical “doctored” facture to the work of a housepainter who had followed his instructions down to the letter.⁷⁴

vapeurs semi-indécises qui représentent saint Michel, sainte Catherine et sainte Marguerite. De là est né la malentendu. Malentendu qui frise le ridicule : Jeanne tourne le dos à ces apparitions dont les apparences, dans son imagination malade, s’associaient aux sons que ses oreilles croyaient percevoir.” Philippe Burty, “Le Salon de 1880. Les Portraits—La Grande Peinture,” *L’Art* 6 (1880): 180. Émile Bergerat, *Journal officiel* (May 10, 1880) in *Le Salon* (1880), 42-43; Henri Bavard, *Le Siècle* (May 4, 1880) in *Le Salon* (1880), 39-42; and Armand Silvestre, *L’Estafette* (May 6, 1880) in *Le Salon: Journal de l’exposition annuelle des beaux-arts*, 3 (May 1880): 47. Zola suggested that Bastien-Lepage had either neglected to depict the scene with scientific accuracy, or simply misunderstood the realities of a hallucination in which visions would be experienced only within sufferer’s mind. Zola, “Le Naturalisme au Salon (1880)” in *Le Bon Combat*, 219-20. A notable exception to this interpretation is that of Paul Mantz, who asserted that one could not have too many explanations in matters concerning the supernatural. Paul Mantz, “Le Salon I,” *Le Temps* 20, no. 6959 (May 9, 1880): 1-2.

⁷⁴ “L’éternel modèle qui lui sert à représenter, sous les traits d’une femme, ses récoltes de *Pommes de terre* et ses *Foins*, est, par extraordinaire, cette année, debout. Je sais gré à M. Lepage d’avoir bien voulu, pour une fois,

Other writers responded to *Joan of Arc* by describing the picture as too literally true. In these accounts, the painting was no more than an assemblage of sources, such as the photographs of hysterics that supplied the subject with her expression, or the playing cards and stuffed scarecrows that inspired the depiction of the saints.⁷⁵ The landscape environment was composed of “scraps” cut out from the Lorrainian countryside, which Bastien-Lepage reproduced with the “precision of a botanist.” These fragments moved confusingly between foreground and background, refusing to cohere into a rational spatial arrangement.⁷⁶ The artist’s preoccupation with his technique was frequently cited as the source of the problem. Rather than attempting to make a coherent picture, Bastien-Lepage just kept piling on more details—another fence or more foliage that flattened perspectival depth and compromised the significance of the subject herself.⁷⁷

Although *Joan of Arc* was no more true or false than any of Bastien-Lepage’s paintings, the blatant paradox between the imaginary elements of the scene and the artist’s

varier la pose. Le vêtement de sa Jeanne d’Arc est le même que celui dont il use pour habiller ses fausses paysannes. Ce ne sont pas de vraies nippes de pauvresses, mais bien de gentils haillons fabriqués par un costumier de théâtre. Grévin y a même ajouté, pour la circonstance, des mièvreries de toutes sortes, des lacets joliment détirés, des franges décousues mais soigneusement ourlées, tout le bric-à-brac des étoffes portées par Mignon lorsqu’elle entre en scène...les apparitions, gauchement peintes, ne volent pas dans l’air, elles pendent comme des enseignes d’auberge au toit de la maison qu’elles touchent, et branlent au vent sur des tringles ; enfin la facture truquée de M. Lepage continue, c’est une habileté d’ouvrier qui file, d’un trait, la lettre.” J.K. Huysmans, “Le Salon officiel de 1880,” *L’Art moderne* (Paris: 1883), 149-50.

⁷⁵ See Edmond About, *Le Dix-Neuvième Siècle* 67; Charles Clément, *Journal des débats* (May 22, 1880) in *Le Salon: Journal de l’exposition annuelle des beaux-arts* 7 (June 1880): 108-11; and Chesneau, “La Jeanne d’Arc, de M. Bastien-Lepage,” 46.

⁷⁶ Chesneau terms them “lambeaux découpés au hasard dans le paysage du territoire lorrain,” in “La Jeanne d’Arc, de M. Bastien-Lepage,” 46. In an otherwise positive review, Paul Mantz aligns Bastien-Lepage with a botanist, and remarks on the odd perspective and relationship between planes. Paul Mantz, “Le Salon. I,” *Le Temps* 20, no. 6959 (May 9, 1880): 1-2.

⁷⁷ “Quant à la composition, il faut le dire très nettement, elle est aussi mal conçue que possible, et l’on ne s’explique pas qu’un artiste aussi préoccupé de technique et d’effet ait donné à son ouvrage un fond petit, mesquin, encombré de constructions, de palissades, de végétations qui enlèvent au sujet son relief et son importance.” Charles Clément, *Journal des débats*, 108. For similar responses see Philippe Burty, “Le Salon de 1880,” 179; Philippe de Chennevières, “Le Salon de 1880, II,” *Gazette des beaux-arts* 21 (June 1, 1880): 512; Mantz, “Le Salon (1880),” 1-2; Armand Silvestre, *L’Estafette* in *Le Salon: Journal de l’exposition annuelle des beaux-arts* 4 (May 1880): 50.

observation-based approach undermined the cohesiveness of realism and drew attention to it as a process. As Ernest Chesneau explained in the *Moniteur universel*, *Joan of Arc* was fraudulent not because the painting juxtaposed fact and fiction, but because the painter attempted seamlessly to integrate them. The great realists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries represented the invisible, Chesneau conceded, but they did so with integrity by acknowledging the shifts between representational modes. To communicate verbal exchanges, for example, spoken dialogue might be depicted within a “pictorial banner” that differentiated it as unseen.⁷⁸ In contrast, Bastien-Lepage held every aspect of his painting to the standard of visual accuracy, an approach that “slandered the real” and rendered the concept of visual evidence completely absurd.⁷⁹ By focusing on the painter’s process, Chesneau and fellow critics positioned falseness and truth as two halves of the same coin. It was precisely because *Joan of Arc* could not transcend its controversial method of making that the painting was rendered patently false as a picture.

The “Decentralizer”

In the wake of the dismal failure of *Joan of Arc*, Bastien-Lepage returned to the rural subjects that had made him famous. Yet associations with superficiality and deception clung to his works. The painter’s 1881 Salon entry, a life-size picture of a beggar pausing to tuck a morsel of bread in his satchel entitled *Le Mendiant*, was consistently described in

⁷⁸ “Les primitifs, il est vrai, ne reculaient pas devant la réalisation visible des phénomènes invisibles ; c’est peut-être ce qui a décidé à recourir au même moyen l’artiste qu’on leur compare. Mais il s’est arrêté à demi-chemin. Les primitifs allaient plus loin encore, ils inscrivaient sur des banderoles attachées à la bouche de leurs personnages, les paroles mêmes que ceux-ci devaient faire entendre. Malgré la naïveté bien connue de son talent, M. Bastien-Lepage n’a pas eu cette naïve audace.” Ernest Chesneau, “La Jeanne d’Arc, de M. Bastien-Lepage.” *Le Moniteur universel* (May 13, 1880) in *Le Salon: Journal de l’exposition annuelle des beaux-arts 3* (May 1880): 46.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

terms that suggested painting was trying to be something that it was not (Fig. 38). *L'Art* critic René Ménéard described the *Mendiant* as “extraordinary *trompe l’oeil*, exactitude to drive even photography to despair,” but he questioned whether mastery of minutiae was enough to meet the criteria of a *tableau*.⁸⁰ Even positive reviews like those of Théodore Véron qualified the astonishing realism of *Le Mendiant* by claiming that the painting appeared to be “printed” from nature by the “most skillful *oléographe* of the brush.”⁸¹ Veiled compliments like *trompe l’oeil* and *oléographe*, a form of chromolithography printed in oil paint on canvas to simulate the look of a painting, subtly severed Bastien-Lepage’s process from the work of painterly creation, and situated *Le Mendiant* as a direct reproduction of nature with little artistic intervention in between.⁸²

Latent in these observations was persistent unease that Bastien-Lepage privileged surface detail over pictorial composition. By treating the features of his figures to what one critic called “complete scrutiny,” the artist flattened the surface appearance of his pictures, and made it difficult to distinguish the painting’s main subject from its supporting elements.⁸³ In traditional conceptions of art this was one of the most basic definitions of painting: denying compositional organization was grounds for reconsidering a painting’s

⁸⁰ “*Un Mendiant* est un superbe morceau réaliste...C’est un *trompe-l’œil* extraordinaire, une exactitude à désespérer la photographie, mais est-ce un *tableau* ?” René Ménéard, “Le Salon de 1881,” *L’Art* 7, no. 2 (1881): 225.

⁸¹ Véron termed them “traits clichés sur nature et par le plus habile *oléographe* du pinceau.” Théodore Véron, *Dictionnaire Véron ou Organe de l’institut universel des sciences, des lettres et des arts du XIXe siècle. Salon de 1881* (Paris: Chez Bazin, 1881): 41. The same year, Bastien-Lepage’s realism was described as “photographique” in A.C., “La Lorraine au Salon. 2e article. Les Peintres,” *Le Progrès de l’est* (May 10, 1881).

⁸² “*Oleograph*,” Collins English Dictionary, accessed November 13, 2016: <http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/oleograph>.

⁸³ “Depuis les primitifs, nous avons inventé la perspective ; M. Bastien-Lepage ne tient pas grand compte de ce progrès de l’art. Il met les objets et les personnes sur le même plan ; le « mendiant » se détache à peine de la maison d’où il vient de sortir...il faut avouer que leur surface est joliment étudiée. Les mains, le chapeau, la barbe, les sabots du misérable en haillons, méritaient un examen complet.” Daniel Bernard, “La Peinture de genre,” *L’Exposition des Beaux-Arts (Salon de 1881)* (Paris: Ludovic Baschet, 1881): 37.

status as art.⁸⁴ In the *Gazette des beaux-arts*, Jules Buisson termed Bastien-Lepage the “decentralizer,” positioning him at the forefront of a new group of artists who preferred *l’ordre dispersé*. These painters fundamentally misunderstood the requirements of the medium in which they were working, Buisson asserted, since the very basis of painting was an ensemble delimited by a frame.⁸⁵

Judith Gautier reinforced this common observation of Bastien-Lepage’s work by connecting this lack of compositional order to a reproductive method of painting. Bastien-Lepage “does not *compose* [his] pictures,” Gautier wrote in *Le Rappel*, but “contents [himself] with removing a slice of what falls before [his] eyes and copying it as best as possible.”⁸⁶ Characterizing realist painting practice as accidental and reproductive was, by this point, a standard trope of art criticism.⁸⁷ But in the context of broader questions about Bastien-Lepage’s artistic contribution to his process, Gautier positioned the painter as little more than a conduit for the direct replication of nature.

Bastien-Lepage did himself no favors by describing his process in analogous terms. In André Theuriet’s memoir of the artist, first published in the *Gazette des beaux-arts* in 1885, the poet recalled Bastien-Lepage’s defense of the perspectival inconsistencies in his paintings, which he explained as a staunch commitment to reproducing exactly what he saw:

⁸⁴ Thomas Puttfarcken, *The Discovery of Pictorial Composition: Theories of Visual Order in Painting 1400-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 230-40.

⁸⁵ “Dès que vous acceptez la donnée du tableau, c’est-à-dire de l’ensemble limité par un cadre, si vous voulez frapper l’imagination et rester dans la mémoire, il faut centraliser, ordonner, sacrifier, ou bien vous sortez de la loi naturelle et nécessaire de votre état.” J. Buisson, “Le Salon de 1881. Le Portrait,” *Gazette des beaux-arts* 24 (July 1, 1881): 39.

⁸⁶ Judith Gautier, “Le Salon VI. Paysans et Paysages,” *Le Rappel* (June 15, 1881): 3.

⁸⁷ As early as 1851, Courbet’s *Burial at Ornans* was described as a “gigantic, colored daguerreotype.” See Auguste Desplaces, “Lettres sur le Salon,” *L’Union* 29 (Jan. 29, 1851): 29 in Young, *Realism in the Age of Impressionism*, 81.

There is a great deal of routine and prejudice in that criticism of the perspective of my pictures done in the open air. It is the criticism of people who have never looked at a landscape, except crouching down or sitting. When you sit down to paint, you naturally see things quite differently from the way you see them standing. Sitting, you see more sky and you have more objects—trees, houses, or living beings standing out sharply in silhouette against the sky, which gives the illusion of a greater distance and a wider atmosphere. But it is not in this way that we generally see a landscape. We look at it standing, then the objects, animate or inanimate, that are nearest to us, instead of being seen in profile against the sky, are silhouetted upon the trees, or upon the fields, grey or green. They stand out with less clearness, and sometimes mix with the background, which then, instead of going away, seems to come forward. We need to renew the education of our eye, by looking with sincerity upon things as they are in nature, instead of holding as absolute truths the theories and conventions of the stool and the studio.⁸⁸

In emphasizing the importance of the artist's direct encounter with nature, Bastien-Lepage positioned his working process as more personal and truthful than the conventions inculcated in the studio. But by defining the truth of realism in terms of its proximity to an external model, Bastien-Lepage did not differentiate *plein-air* painting from academic practice so much as position the two modes on a sliding scale: both methods of painting involved imitation, it was simply a matter of the source. If the truths of realist painting depended on reproductive accuracy, there was little to distinguish it from the function of a camera.

Working outside the French context, American journalist and literary critic W.C. Brownell offered a positive spin on this aspect of Bastien-Lepage's technique.⁸⁹

In a particularly perceptive analysis of the artist's method, published in the London-based *Magazine of Art* in 1883, Brownell positioned Bastien-Lepage's de-centralizing impulse as the very source of his originality. Rather than doing the viewer's work for him, Bastien-

⁸⁸ Theuriet, *Jules Bastien-Lepage and His Art*, 73-74.

⁸⁹ Brownell was an unabashed admirer of Bastien-Lepage well into the 1890s. In his 1892 survey *French Art: Classic and Contemporary Painting and Sculpture*, the author renewed his appreciation for Bastien-Lepage, writing that he remained the "head of the modern movement" and asserting that between Manet, Monet, and Degas, Bastien-Lepage was the only rival to Courbet's realism. See William Crary Brownell, *French Art: Classic and Contemporary Painting and Sculpture* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1892), 101-04.

Lepage refused to cohere his compositions through “indirect vision,” Brownell explained. Instead, he invited the public to participate in the process of putting the picture together by the very act of perceiving it. This was the last step that painting could take, the author asserted; Bastien-Lepage had pushed realism and standard notions of the pictorial as far as they could go.⁹⁰

Though this anti-pictorial approach positioned Bastien-Lepage as an innovator, Brownell admitted that this quality could also be a weakness. Comparing Bastien-Lepage to an artist like Millet, who portrayed his peasants with such sympathy he seemed to be one of them, Bastien-Lepage seemed to observe his subjects with physical and emotional distance. By way of explanation, Brownell described the artist as a “spectator” in relationship to his scenes, writing “one feels the painter himself as if he were a camera.”⁹¹

Although Brownell intended to convey what was innovative about Bastien-Lepage’s approach, his characterization of the painter’s practice only corroborated critiques that the artist was personally detached from his work. This interpretation situated Bastien-Lepage outside of standard accounts of art as a product of the artist’s personality, what Zola famously termed “temperament” in his Salon review of 1866. In a less frequently cited passage from this text, Zola claimed that without visible evidence of the artist’s temperament, “all paintings must necessarily be simple photographs,”⁹² a line of reasoning that dovetailed with much criticism of realist painting in the last three decades of the nineteenth century.

⁹⁰ W.C. Brownell, “Bastien-Lepage: Painter and Psychologist,” *Magazine of Art* 6 (1883): 267.

⁹¹ Brownell, 267-70.

⁹² « ...si le tempérament n’existait pas, tous les tableaux devraient être forcément de simples photographies. » Zola, “Mon Salon (1866),” *Le Bon Combat*, 62.

From the mid 1870s onward, photography was invoked with increasing frequency to denote painting's inartistic other, the superficial shell that was left when art was absent. Photographic language and concepts could characterize any number of tangible or intangible properties in painting, from a profusion of surface detail to more abstract associations with triteness or banality.⁹³ By 1885, photography had metaphorically infiltrated the body and mind of the artist, such that Eugène Véron could assert that contemporary realists functioned like cameras with nothing but a "photographic lens for an eye."⁹⁴ Asserting it was an "uncontested axiom" that art was defined by the presence of the artist's temperament, Véron explained that while that a perfect copy or a photograph might be agreeable to the eye, it could never approach this more complete definition of the term. "[W]e must reject the school of realist observation," Véron asserted, "which no longer distinguishes art from science, and forbids imagination to the profit of photography."⁹⁵ Throughout the remainder of the review, photographic metaphors sufficed to make his point. The stillness of a painting by Alfred Roll was compared to an "instantaneous photograph," while the camera distinguished the act of reproduction from the interpretive work of the artist.⁹⁶ Photography took up more space than the qualities of artistic painting in Véron's account of the Salon that year, as he enumerated the many failures of contemporary realism.

By the last decade of the nineteenth century, photography's figurative uses had broadened still further to encompass any number of representational practices that were

⁹³ Montaiglon, "Salon de 1875," 491.

⁹⁴ Véron, "Le Salon de 1885," 198-200.

⁹⁵ "...nous repoussions absolument les théories de l'école de l'observation réaliste, qui en est venue à ne plus distinguer l'art de la science et qui proscriit l'imagination au profit de la photographie." Eugène Véron, "Le Salon de 1885. La Peinture," *L'Art* 11 (1885): 194.

⁹⁶ "...d'avoir dans l'œil un objectif photographique." Véron, "Le Salon de 1885," 198-200.

associated with external rather than internal states of being. George Moore called this phenomenon “exteriority” in an 1895 essay published in *The Speaker*. Here, the Irish critic and novelist traced a path of influence from the “descriptive” turn in early nineteenth-century novels to the *plein-air* painting practice of Bastien-Lepage, positioning them as an interrelated series of the developments that had resulted in the “impersonal vision of a camera.” Moore urged artists to deny the path pursued by Bastien-Lepage, and recommit to the intrinsic subjectivity of painting. The medium might be wedded to the visible world, he conceded, but “each man’s hand is his alone.” Artistic realism developed through the body and mind of its maker.⁹⁷

The urgent, even threatening, tone in Moore’s text stemmed from the fact that the “impersonal vision of the camera” was not contained to Bastien-Lepage alone, but appeared to be contagious. As early as 1882, the year that the French painter exhibited *Le Père Jacques: The Wood Gatherer* at the Salon, critics observed that Bastien-Lepage’s brand of realism had spawned a veritable industry of imitators (Fig. 39). In his review of the exhibition, French historian and art critic Henry Houssaye maintained that there were at least 200 impersonators of Bastien-Lepage and Édouard Manet on the walls of the Académie des beaux-arts, rendering the representation of truth its own kind of convention.⁹⁸ The following year, dubbed the “Salon of Bastien-Lepage” by exasperated

⁹⁷ George Moore, “Exteriority,” *The Speaker* 15 (June 22, 1895): 684-86.

⁹⁸ Houssaye introduced his review by writing that it shows “en des limites étendues, de renouvellement des procédés techniques sous l’inspiration de la petite église dont M. Manet a été le précurseur bafoué et dont M. Bastien-Lepage est l’apôtre glorieux...De ce qu’on est convenu d’appeler le vrai est seul à la mode aujourd’hui, comme si le vrai en art n’était pas aussi une convention.” He continued by asserting, “nous avons compté au Salon au moins deux cents tableaux dans la manière de M. Manet et dans celle de M. Bastien-Lepage.” A footnote in the text then lists a number of the offenders. Henry Houssaye, “Le Salon de 1882 I. La Grande Peinture et les grands tableaux,” *Revue des deux mondes* 51 (June 1, 1882): 561-62. Another critic observed the same in Brussels: “L’année dernière [1881], je vous parlais du très grand succès obtenu à Bruxelles par les Foins de M. Bastien-Lepage ; le tableau avait fait sensation. Il a eu une influence à laquelle on ne s’attendait

reviewers, the situation appeared even more extreme. In the frustrated words of Jules de Marthold, who reviewed the exhibition for the daily newspaper *La Ville de Paris*, the elderly wood gatherer inhabited every single entry:

In each gallery, on every wall, at every step, there were heaps of Bastien-Lepage clones! Everywhere, constantly, and incessantly, flat and dull old fellows in dull and flat landscapes, skillfully threadbare peasant smocks stuck on backgrounds of minutely detailed foliage, themselves stuck against patches of dull, depthless skies...Now that everyone paints like M. Bastien-Lepage, M. Bastien-Lepage seems to paint like everyone else.⁹⁹

Considering paintings like Honoré Umbricht's *Au bois, en Lorraine*, a life-size painting of an old wood gatherer and young boy that won a third-class medal in the Salon of 1884, de Marthold's complaints appear to have been well founded (Fig. 40).¹⁰⁰ In its subject matter, compositional approach, and even the location of the scene, *Au bois, en Lorraine* reiterated the format and style of *Le Père Jacques*.

The pervasive influence of Bastien-Lepage over the next few years was a cause for real concern for art critics. It continues to "rain pseudo-Bastien-Lepages," Paul Leroi wrote with palpable exasperation in his review of the Salon of 1886, complaining about the crowd of artists who pastiched the styles of other painters and lacked in any original thoughts of

pas : cette année, je compte ici [in the Antwerp Salon] au moins une trentaine d'exemplaires de ces Foins... [ellipses in original] Grotesques parodies, ces œuvres-là s'entend, et où l'on ne retrouve plus guère que les défauts voulus du maître, poussés à l'extravagance et très apparents." Marguerite van de Wiele, "Lettre de Bruxelles. Le Salon d'Anvers," *La Vie moderne* 4 (Sept. 16, 1882): 588-89.

⁹⁹ "Dans chaque salle, sur chaque pan de mur, à chaque pas, c'étaient des tas de sous-Bastien-Lepage ! partout, toujours et sans cesse, des bonshommes plats et ternes dans des paysages ternes et plats, des sarraux de paysans savamment élimés, collés sur fond d'herbages minutieusement détaillés et collés eux-mêmes sur des coins de ciel étouffés et sans nulle profondeur." Jules de Marthold, "Le Salon I," *La Ville de Paris* 4 (May 1, 1883): 1. This text was quoted in reduced form by William Feldman in his 1973 dissertation, perhaps because he was working from a collection of newspaper clips compiled by Bastien-Lepage or one of his relatives. Its abbreviated content has been repeated numerous times, most recently by Marnin Young in "The Motionless Look of a Painting: Jules Bastien-Lepage, *Les Foins*, and the End of Realism," *Art History* 37 (February 2014): 38-67.

¹⁰⁰ I would like to thank Scott Allan for bringing this painting to my attention.

their own.¹⁰¹ Huysmans dubbed Bastien-Lepage and fellow naturalists like Henri Gervex, Jean Béraud, and Pascal Dagnan-Bouveret the “false moderns.” In Huysmans’ assessment, falseness referred to the representational approaches in these artists’ pictures, in which pretty maids took the place of legitimate peasants and genre scenes simulated the most trivial melodramas, as well as to the superficiality of the artists’ shared stylistic approach. Describing Gervex’s *Memory of the Night of the 4th*, which depicted an injured child in the aftermath of the Coup d’Etat of 1851, Huysmans proclaimed that the painting had been “painted by M. *Tout-le-monde*”—anyone could have signed it (Fig. 41).¹⁰²

The situation was analogous in England, where Moore coined the term “Bastien-Lepageism” to describe the single style shared by painters exhibiting at the Royal Academy. Even a picture as unremarkable as *Pauvre Fauvette*, exhibited for the first time at the United Arts Gallery in London in 1882, inspired a slew of copycats (Fig. 42).¹⁰³ George Clausen’s 1887 painting *The Stone Pickers*, for example, closely follows Bastien-Lepage’s theme, compositional layout, and distinctive high horizon line (Fig. 43). The popularity of a Bastien-Lepage “look,” which increased in the years after the artist’s untimely death, closed the gap between claims that his work was superficial or mimetic, and its alignment with

¹⁰¹ “...il pleut des pseudo-Bastien-Lepage et bien d’autres pseudos !” Paul Leroi, “Le Salon de 1886,” *L’Art* 12, no. 1 (1886): 253.

¹⁰² “L’enfant à la balle, exhibé sur une rampe, cette année, est peint par Monsieur Tout-le-monde ; il pourrait être signé du plus piètre des praticiens qui opèrent le long des salles.” Huysmans, “Le Salon officiel de 1880,” 151. Huysmans made the same point seven years later, writing in the *Revue indépendante* that Henri Gervex and André Brouillet could have painted each other’s pictures. See Thomson, 117.

¹⁰³ *Pauvre Fauvette* was first exhibited in 1882 at the third exhibition of the United Arts Gallery, and it remained in England thereafter, exerting considerable influence on artists of the Newlyn and Glasgow schools. See Kenneth McConkey, “‘Pauvre Fauvette’ or ‘Petite Folle’: A Study of Jules Bastien-Lepage’s ‘Pauvre Fauvette,’” *Arts Magazine* (Jan. 1981): 141 and “The Bouguereau of the Naturalists: Bastien-Lepage and British Art,” *Art History* 1, no. 4 (1978): 375. The painting was owned by James Staats Forbes, and acquired by George McCulloch at least as early as 1896, when it was reproduced in the *Art Journal* 58 (1896): 200-01. The Glasgow Art Gallery acquired the painting at the 1913 sale of McCulloch’s collection.

photography. The ubiquity of “Bastien-Lepageism” only proved the point that this approach to realism was inherently anonymous—as easy to reproduce as a photographic print.

From Photographic to Academic

The critical backlash against Bastien-Lepage’s work in the 1880s developed in response to the painter’s public popularity and his acceptance by the establishment. The recently-deceased artist was honored with a retrospective exhibition at the École des beaux-arts in 1885, a project that was organized by his brother Émile and supported by prominent artists, critics, and politicians, including Alexandre Cabanel, Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, Philippe Burty, and Antonin Proust.¹⁰⁴ Four years later, the painter’s career was represented by no fewer than nineteen paintings at the centennial exhibition of French art at the Paris Exposition universelle of 1889, an exhibition that celebrated the achievements of painting in France since the French Revolution. To put this in perspective, there were more paintings by Bastien-Lepage on display than by artists like Jacques-Louis David, Courbet, and Millet. Bastien-Lepage was outnumbered only by Delacroix and Corot, who were represented by 21 and 44 works respectively.¹⁰⁵ The illustrated catalogue that accompanied the centennial exhibition reflected the same generous attention bestowed upon the Lorrainian painter. Of the eight engraved reproductions that appended the text,

¹⁰⁴ See “Meuse. L’exposition Bastien-Lepage,” *Progrès de l’Est* (Jan. 31, 1885). I consulted a photocopy of this article in the Bastien-Lepage files in the Centre de documentation at the Musée de beaux-arts de Nancy.

¹⁰⁵ *Exposition des oeuvres de Jules Bastien-Lepage* (Paris: École Nationale des Beaux-Arts, Hôtel de Chimay, Mars-Avril 1885). Bastien-Lepage’s works exhibited at the Exposition universelle are listed in F.G. Dumas’s illustrated catalogue of the centennial exhibition, *Exposition universelle de 1889. Catalogue illustré des beaux-arts 1789-1889* (Paris: Baschet, 1889).

two were paintings by Bastien-Lepage—the only contributor to be singled out in this way.¹⁰⁶

Richard Thomson has convincingly argued that the French state co-opted naturalism for its own political purposes over the course of the 1880s, pivoting naturalism from its position on the periphery to more or less the dead center.¹⁰⁷ Centrality came with its own baggage, however, particularly in the eyes of the avant-garde who could not take seriously the large-scale, often sentimental scenes of contemporary rural life that populated the walls in the annual exhibitions. Thus while realism could increasingly be described in photographic terms, it simultaneously came to characterize the kind of work that received official recognition and accolades. The pervasiveness of this trend well into the 1890s is exemplified by art critic and editor of the *Gazette des beaux-arts* Roger Marx, who characterized the entire Salon exhibition of 1895 as an “album of vast, illuminated photographs.”¹⁰⁸

The Nancy-based painter Émile Friant provides a useful example of how academic and “photographic” painting came into close alignment at the end of the 1880s. Friant, like Bastien-Lepage, trained with Alexandre Cabanel, and began exhibiting his work at the Salon in the early 1880s. The young painter achieved official success quickly, garnering second place in the Prix de Rome in 1883, and receiving third-class and second-class honors at the Salons of 1883 and 1884 respectively.¹⁰⁹ Critics immediately pegged him as the “spiritual

¹⁰⁶ Bastien-Lepage was represented by engravings after the *Portrait of “My Grandfather”* and *Le Petit Ramoneur* (1882). The other artists whose works were reproduced in the catalogue are Heim, Regnault, Gérard, Roll, Decamps and Manet. See F.G. Dumas, *Exposition universelle de 1889. Catalogue illustré des beaux-arts 1789-1889* (Paris: Baschet, 1889).

¹⁰⁷ Thomson, 6-7 and Chapter One, “Naturalism at the Service of the Republic,” 33-79.

¹⁰⁸ Roger Marx, “Les Salons de 1895,” *Gazette des beaux-arts* 13 (May 1895): 355.

¹⁰⁹ Henri Claude, *Friant* (Ars-sur-Moselle, France: Serge Domini, 2003): 22-24.

inheritor” of Bastien-Lepage’s legacy, on the basis of the ambitious size of his paintings, as well as their subject matter and technical finesse.¹¹⁰

Friant’s most successful picture, *La Toussaint (All Saints’ Day)*, was exhibited to great acclaim at the Salon of 1889 (Fig. 44). Reviewed in hundreds of articles, *La Toussaint* garnered Friant the *Prix du Salon*, and his picture was immediately snapped up for the collection of the Musée du Luxembourg.¹¹¹ *La Toussaint* depicted a family group on their way to a local Lorrainian cemetery, as was the custom on All Saints’ Day, and it focused on a moment of exchange about to take place between the family’s young daughter and a blind beggar. By painting a coin visible in the daughter’s outstretched hand, and portraying the girls’ foot about to make contact with the road, Friant drew attention to the transience of the scene he depicted, a moment that was clearly supposed to read as instantaneous. Critics were struck by the temporal precision of the young girl’s gesture, which many characterized as “mechanical” on the basis of the frozen stiffness of each figure’s depicted pose.¹¹² A caricature published in the *Journal amusant* makes the resonance of this interpretation quite clear, by transforming the family into a regiment of soldiers with guns slung purposefully over their shoulders as they file past the beggar (Fig. 45). Friant’s painting depicted the beggar holding a sign that proclaimed his blindness, but in the caricature he cradles the latest Kodak camera in his lap, as if poised to snap the family’s

¹¹⁰ Paul Mantz remarked on the debt that Friant owed to Bastien-Lepage in his review of the 1888 Salon in *Le Temps*. This passage is quoted in *Le Courier de Meurthe et Moselle* (June 5, 1888), a photocopy of which I consulted in the Centre de documentation at the Musée des beaux-arts de Nancy.

¹¹¹ Claude, 84. See also DeCourcy E. McIntosh, “Friant: A Forgotten Artist of the Gilded Age,” *Magazine Antiques* (April 1997): 585.

¹¹² Charles Bigot described *La Toussaint* as having “mechanical movement” in his review in *Revue bleue*. This review was cited in an article in *Le Progrès de l’est* (June 5, 1889), which I consulted in the Centre de documentation at the Musée des beaux-arts de Nancy.

photo as they march by.¹¹³ If the official recognition bestowed upon Friant's painting is any indication, photographic pictures were not only acceptable at the Salon, they seemed to be exactly what the committee was looking for.

Sickert's Photo-Realism

It was in this environment that Sickert began publishing his art criticism, which drew extensively from the language and contemporary concerns regarding photography. In one review Sickert complimented an artist for differentiating himself from French realists, for whom "the camera, human or mechanical, is deified for its artistic selection and simplicity."¹¹⁴ In another his discussion of the appropriate way to paint figures in motion digressed into a sarcastic set of instructions for modern painters:

Buy a Kodak. Snap it around. Have the photos mechanically enlarged on the canvas, and colour to taste! But be quick about it. The products are becoming recognizable, and will soon have to be done very cheaply, as the competition is becoming enormous. The Academy still accepts the product, and the dealers like it, as its manufacture leaves a large margin for profit; but the connoisseur is beginning to spot it by marks which there is no disguising.¹¹⁵

Taken literally, Sickert's remarks intimate that the problem stemmed from painters who employed photographs as part of their working processes. However I suggest that this analogy was part of the critic's rhetorical strategy. By describing photography's influence on painting in concrete terms, he presented theoretical concerns as palpable, and therefore all the more pressing. To be clear, Sickert did not fear that photographs would *replace*

¹¹³ Félix Fénéon also described Friant in photographic terms, referring to the paintings exhibited by him and Pascal Dagnan-Bouveret that year as "travaux de photographie." See Félix Fénéon, "Le Salon," *La Revue Indépendante* 11 (April-June 1889): 361.

¹¹⁴ Walter Sickert, "The Royal Academy," *New York Herald* (May 16, 1889) in Robins, *Complete Writings on Art*, 49.

¹¹⁵ Walter Sickert, "The New English Art Club," *New York Herald* (June 14, 1889) in *ibid.*, 54.

paintings, as accounts of the history of photography would have it.¹¹⁶ What motivated his writing was a persistent frustration that the practice of realist painting was so poorly distinguished from the function of a camera.

Photography provided Sickert with a persuasive set of terms for articulating broad problems in the theory and practice of painting. Yet the linguistically hybrid and conceptually unstable language perpetuated by him and fellow late nineteenth-century art critics demonstrates that artists and writers lacked clear methods or models that could reliably constitute truthful realism in painting. Sickert emphasized the importance of separating observation from execution not because there was only one path to artistic creativity, but because the visual and material qualities of realism were still very much in flux. Leaving the question unanswered, Sickert concluded “Modern Realism in Painting” with a plea: “if...we are to speak of Bastien-Lepage as a master, what terms are left for Keene and Millet, for Whistler and Degas?”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Historians of photography frequently cite the purported response of painter Paul Delaroche to the unveiling of the daguerreotype in 1839: “From this day on, painting is dead.” See, for example, William J. Mitchell, *The Reconfigured Eye: Visual Truth in the Post-Photographic Era* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 1. As Stephen Bann has made clear, Delaroche “almost certainly never made the remark with which he has been universally credited: that ‘painting [was] dead’ from the day of photography’s appearance. In fact, Delaroche’s explicit, if cautious, welcome for the new medium anticipated the likelihood that painters would without much difficulty accommodate themselves to it.” Stephen Bann, “Photography by Other Means? The Engravings of Ferdinand Gaillard,” *Art Bulletin* 88, no. 1 (Mar. 2006): 125. Bann outlines the justification for his rejection of Delaroche’s association with this statement in *Parallel Lines: Printmakers, Painters and Photographers in 19th Century France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 89-125.

¹¹⁷ Sickert, “Modern Realism in Painting,” 143. Charles Keene (1823-1891) was an English illustrator deeply admired by Sickert, who aligned him with painters like Degas, Millet, Ingres, and Corot. See Walter Sickert, “Degas,” *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 31, no. 176 (Nov. 1917): 186.

CHAPTER THREE

“Mechanism” Made Visible: Henry Peach Robinson’s Composite Photographs¹

In the previous two chapters I have shown how approaches to making paintings, whether they involved working from photographs or painting directly from life, came to seem reproductive and inartistic by the 1870s and 80s. These developments put pressure on painters to define and draw attention to the creative labor that distinguished their work from photography. This chapter explores an inverse problem within the context of art photography, by focusing on techniques of handwork in the production of prints and the interpretation of these procedures in the photographic press. To situate this material I reach back to the early 1860s, when English photographer Henry Peach Robinson began practicing a laborious method of printing photographs from multiple negatives. Robinson employed what he termed “combination printing” to facilitate pictorial composition at a moment when the registration of photographic images was too slow render complex scenes in focus in all areas of the frame. Although this manual intervention in the process of photography was controversial throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, Robinson continued to employ the method into the 1880s and early 90s, well beyond the technical need to do so.

¹ A version of this chapter was published as “‘Mechanism’ Made Visible: Process and Perception in Henry Peach Robinson’s Composite Photographs,” *History of Photography* 41 (May 2017): 141-58.

By comparing the critical reception of Robinson's photographs to his process of making pictures, and to his own extensive writing about photography, I show that awareness of Robinson's "mechanism" made it impossible for viewers to see his images as genuinely unified. Like many of the painters analyzed in this dissertation, Robinson discovered that his method of making put him in a bind. He employed combination printing to make more cohesive and artistic pictures than was possible with straight photography alone, but knowledge of his piecemeal process—whether it was visible or not—undermined the "natural" integration of his scenes. Robinson consistently expressed frustration with critics' tendencies to read his images in terms of their process, rather than seeing them first as pictures. However I suggest that Robinson's commitment to composite photography reveals his deep investment in the status of the photographer's labor as a marker of *artistic* value. This direct challenge to academic standards of art—which subordinated manual labor to that of the mind—introduced radical forms of hybridity and theories of pictorial art into late-nineteenth century photographic practice.

Concealing and Revealing in *Carolling*

In November 1887, English photographer Henry Peach Robinson presented *Carolling*, his most recent "subject picture," at the Photographic Society of London exhibition at Pall Mall Gallery (Fig. 46). Printed in platinum, a new medium prized for its delicate tonalities and material stability, the substantial 26 x 13" print depicted a carefully crafted rural scene in which two young women stroll across an English meadow while

engaged in conversation or song, as sheep graze contentedly in the background.² Robinson articulated his composition with a gentle zig zag pattern that guides the viewer's visual path through the image. From the clump of stones and shrubs in the upper right corner, one looks left to the pair of female figures at middle ground, then back to the right via the flock of sheep behind them. Their forms may be traced deeper into the image towards trees and misty mountains in the background, each element conveying the unfolding of the landscape and the recession of pictorial depth. Robinson's artistic ambitions for *Carolling* were underscored by the verse of Shakespeare's *As You Like It* that accompanied the entry in the exhibition catalogue,³ which connected the photograph to painterly and literary traditions, and by displaying the print in a gilded oak frame that stood out handsomely against the maroon fabric and ornamental molding of the gallery walls.⁴

Officially, *Carolling* was a great success. The Photographic Society awarded Robinson a bronze medal for the picture, and honored the print with prime placement on the central wall of the exhibition. Reviewers declared the photograph to be the sensation of the season, and *Carolling* continued to garner attention when it was displayed at venues in

² Several critics remarked on the use of platinum as a notable development in the 1887 exhibition. See, for example, "Photographic Notes," *The Artist and Journal of Home Culture* 8 (Nov. 1 1887): 359.

³ The verse "This Carol they began that hour, / How that a Life was but a Flower / In Spring time," a condensed version of a song that appeared in act v, scene iii of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, was published in exhibition catalogues and advertisements for *Carolling* both before and after the Photographic Society of Great Britain Exhibition. See cat. no. 617 in *Catalogue of the Fifty-Fifth Annual Exhibition of the Royal Cornwall Polytechnic Society* (Sept. 6-10, 1887); cat. no. 2255 in the *Official Catalogue of the Fine Arts Section, International Exhibition, Glasgow* (Glasgow: T. & A. Constable, 1888); and an advertisement for the sale of 'Photographs by H.P. Robinson' in *The International Annual of Anthony's Photographic Bulletin* 2 (1889): 22. For a later confirmation that this verse was the inspiration for *Carolling's* title, see G.T. Harris, "Cosmos and 'Carolling,'" *British Journal of Photography* 48 (Sept. 6, 1901): 576. Robinson frequently printed poems and other verses on the mounts of his photographs, as discussed by David Lawrence Coleman in "Pleasant Fictions: Henry Peach Robinson's Composition Photography," PhD Diss, University of Texas, 2005, 118-22.

⁴ A description of the exhibition space, including the presentation of *Carolling*, is provided in "The Big Photo Show in London," *Photographic Times and American Photographer* 27, no. 324 (Dec. 2, 1887): 597.

the UK and abroad over the next few years.⁵ Yet this seemingly innocuous picture was deeply divisive at the time of the Photographic Society exhibition, and reignited debates about Robinson's technical procedures that had dogged the photographer throughout his career.

Critics writing for both the photographic and generalist presses pointed to evidence that Robinson had printed his photograph from more than one negative. The London *Times* described *Carolling* as superficially proficient, but claimed that a "closer inspection" revealed problems of perspective and lighting in various portions of the picture that diminished its "artistic value."⁶ A writer for the *Builder* speculated that the sky had been "touched upon" in watercolor and was not "pure photographic work."⁷ The most extensive and damning critique appeared in the *Amateur Photographer*, a journal founded in 1884 to address the artistic and technical interests of non-commercial photographers. Suggesting that *Carolling's* advantageous location on the gallery wall had too easily persuaded viewers of its merits, the anonymous reviewer subjected Robinson's photograph to an "examination" that itemized its incongruities one by one. The shadows cast by the women were clearly longer than those of the sheep, the writer pointed out, while the illumination on the animals was inconsistent with the appearance of the sky. More disconcerting still

⁵ *Carolling* received subsequent medals at exhibitions in Calcutta, Richmond, Birmingham, and Gloucester, where it was awarded an "extra silver medal" for being the most notable picture in the exhibition. See "Notes," *Photographic News* 32, no. 1545 (April 13, 1888): 232; "Photographic Exhibition at Gloucester," *Photographic News* 32, no. 1546 (Apr. 20, 1888): 241-42; Valentine Blanchard, "Notes Taken at the Richmond Photographic Exhibition," *Photographic News* 33, no. 1585 (Jan. 18, 1889): 34; and "The Awards at the Birmingham Exhibition," *Photographic News* 33, no. 1592 (March 8, 1889): 145.

⁶ "Opinion of the London Daily Press on the Photographic Exhibition [The Times.]," *British Journal of Photography* 33, no. 1431 (Oct. 7, 1887): 634.

⁷ "Opinion of the London Press on the Photographic Society's Exhibition [The Builder.]," *British Journal of Photography* 33, no. 1434 (Oct. 28, 1887): 685. The assertion that a photographer had retouched his photograph was inflammatory, and Robinson felt it necessary to refute the claim in the journal's next issue. See H.P. Robinson, "Carolling," *British Journal of Photography* 33, no. 1435 (Nov. 4, 1887): 702-03. The following year, hand-colored photographs were not admitted in the exhibition. "The Exhibition of the Photographic Society of Great Britain," *Photographic News* 32, no. 1559 (July 20, 1888): 449.

was the discrepancy between the two halves of the picture, as the sheep and plant life on the left-hand side of the picture appeared softer than those on the right. Although Robinson had intended to construct a unified composition, the process of combining images from different sources inevitably undermined his goal. “[W]ere the devices absolutely indiscernible and unsuspected, very little exception could be taken to the method,” the critic asserted, “[b]ut as these puzzles never *are* carried out without detection, they can hardly be regarded as in the right direction for artistic work.” Citing the Latin axiom *ars est celare artem*—it is true art to conceal art—the reviewer concluded by condemning the implicit deceit of Robinson’s endeavor. “Here, the art is to conceal, not art, but mechanism, and the point that does violence to artistic feeling is that the attempt is never wholly successful.”⁸ For this journalist, Robinson’s failure to suppress appropriately the evidence of his process revealed the “art” of combination printing to be little more than manual assembly.

Robinson, never one to let criticism go unanswered, responded to the *Amateur Photographer’s* charges in the journal’s next number. Protesting the writer’s assumption that he printed from multiple negatives in order to mislead, Robinson argued that awareness of his technique need not disrupt the artistic achievement of his photograph. “[W]hatever may be the practice of other photographers,” Robinson replied, “the attempt to conceal the fact that some of my pictures are produced by this method has never been my intention; so far otherwise, indeed, is this the case that I take very little care to hide what you call the mechanism when it does not interfere with the effect of the picture.”⁹

⁸ Original emphasis. “Notes on Art at the Exhibition of the Photographic Society of Great Britain,” *Amateur Photographer* 6, no. 163 (Nov. 18, 1887): 246-47.

⁹ H.P. Robinson, “Combination Printing,” *Amateur Photographer* 6, no. 164 (Nov. 25, 1887): 256.

If critics were distracted by his technique, Robinson continued, they had only themselves to blame. Writers for the photographic press—usually practitioners themselves—consistently interpreted his photographs as the “result[s] of a process,” rather than seeing them as pictures. Accordingly, they analyzed his images precisely *for* process, identifying the “joins” between negatives, and assessing the technical accuracy of his lighting and perspective. So deeply ingrained was this approach, Robinson wrote ruefully, that viewers saw evidence of composite printing even when it wasn’t there, confidently pointing to the outlines between negatives in photographs made whole from a single plate.¹⁰

This exchange between critic and photographer, one of many that Robinson engaged in over the course of his forty-year career, offers insights into the tensions between the production and interpretation of “art photography” in the late nineteenth century that stemmed from its means of making. Steve Edwards has shown that the distinct category of art photography emerged in the late 1850s and early 1860s, as writers for the photographic presses began to offer definitions of the scope and expectations for such work.¹¹ In 1861, for example, photographer Cornelius Jabez Hughes characterized the qualities of “Art-Photography” as distinct from “Mechanical Photography” on the basis of the photographer’s intent to “infuse his mind into [his pictures], by arranging, modifying, or otherwise disposing them, so that they may appear in a more appropriate or beautiful

¹⁰ This was a complaint that Robinson addressed elsewhere, and it proved to be a consistent concern over the second half of the nineteenth century. See, for example, H.P. Robinson, “Persistence of Impressions on the Retina,” *British Journal of Photography* 35, no. 1492 (Dec. 7, 1888): 772-73; Alfred H. Wall, “Practical Observations Upon Photographs in Their Relation to Art,” *British Journal of Photography* 7, no. 109 (Jan. 1, 1860): 3; and W.H. Wheeler, “Artistic Photography,” *Amateur Photographer* 5 (Feb. 25, 1887): 94-96.

¹¹ Steve Edwards, *The Making of English Photography: Allegories* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), especially chapter 3.

manner than they would have been without such interference.”¹² Yet while evidence of the artist’s interference was necessary for substantiating a photograph as art, the terms by which such modifications would be tolerated, either visually or conceptually, remained a contentious issue well through the end of the nineteenth century. This tension is evident in the exchange between Robinson and the *Amateur Photographer* critic: while the journalist held that the visual evidence of composite printing could not be concealed in the resulting image, therefore undermining the picture’s claims to be art, Robinson turned the tables on this logic, and argued that critics were responsible for rendering his mechanism visible by looking for it in the first place.

The use of the term “mechanism” in this context was anything but neutral. By alleging the insubordinate role of Robinson’s technique, the *Amateur Photographer* critic invoked a longstanding binary between manual and intellectual labor that formed the basis of academic theory in painting, and which permeated the lexicon of photographers who sought a framework for articulating the pictorial qualities of their images.¹³ In England, the artistic opposition between hand and mind was codified by Sir Joshua Reynolds, first president of the Royal Academy, in the fifteen *Discourses* he presented to the institution’s members and students between 1769 and 1790. In these lectures, Reynolds differentiated the artist from a “mere mechanick” on the basis of the creative and intellectual aspects of

¹² C. Jabez Hughes, “Art-Photography: Its Scope and Characteristics,” *Photographic News* 5 (Jan. 4, 1861): 3.

¹³ Thomas Puttfarcken offers a concise overview of this binary as it relates to the foundation of the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture in France in the mid-seventeenth century. Supporters of the Académie sought to elevate painting to a liberal art by aligning it with intellect, creativity, and invention, and by distancing the medium from its historical association with handcraft. Thomas Puttfarcken, *The Discovery of Pictorial Composition: Theories of Visual Order in Painting 1400-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000): 229-30.

his or her work.¹⁴ As Reynolds wrote in his fourth *Discourse*, “[t]he value and rank of every art is in proportion to the mental labour employed in it, or the mental pleasure produced by it. As this principle is observed or neglected our professional becomes either a liberal art, or a mechanical trade.”¹⁵

Critics of photography appropriated Reynolds’ hierarchy by employing the term mechanism (and its adjectival form, mechanical) to refer to the technical means by which a picture was produced, or to characterize the utilitarian qualities of the image, contrasting these aspects with the ideals of creative invention.¹⁶ In the photographic context, “mechanical” processes did not necessarily involve the hand, but they denoted the material means by which the picture was produced and thus enabled continuity with the academic paradigm. Take, for example, William Lake Price’s 1860 call for fellow photographers to study the pictorial qualities of great masterworks in order to “raise the practice of photography above the mere mechanism of successful manipulation.”¹⁷ Or the complaint registered by the leading advocate for art photography, Alfred H. Wall, that the recent proliferation of photography exhibitions had spawned a new breed of critic he termed “critical mechanics” who “discours[e] learnedly about baths, processes and tones, sharpness, clearness, and distortion, spots, stains, markings, exposure and other manipulatory details, but utterly ignor[e] the existence of artistic ability, and the higher qualities of pictorial beauty, sacrificing intellectual worth to the minor details of

¹⁴ Joshua Reynolds as quoted in B.A.C. van Brakel-Saunders, “Reynolds’ Theory of Learning Processes” in *Academies of Art between Renaissance and Romanticism*, ed. Anton W.A. Boschloo (The Hague : SDU, 1989), 466. For a general overview of the *Discourses* and their impact on English art theory see Robert R. Wark, ed. *Sir Joshua Reynolds: Discourses on Art* (London: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 1975).

¹⁵ Reynolds in Wark, 57.

¹⁶ See, for example, George Davison, “Impressionism in Photography,” *Journal of the Society of Arts* 39 (1890-1): 69 and “Art in Photography, An Interview with Mr. Frederick Hollyer,” *The Studio* 1 (1893): 194.

¹⁷ William Lake Price, “On Composition and Chiar-Oscuro—VIII,” *Photographic News* 3, no. 83 (Apr. 5, 1860): 368.

experimental science or the petty little tricks of successful mechanism.”¹⁸ This distinction between the photograph’s physical means of production and the intangible values of pictorial art held in the rhetoric of art photography through the end of the century, such that Scottish photographer David Clark could assert in 1888 that it was the photographer’s eye and mind—rather than his or her technical aptitude alone—which enabled a practitioner to distinguish between the “merely mechanical” and “intellectual” aspects of the art.¹⁹

In their elucidations of the term mechanical as it was used to describe nineteenth-century photographs, both Joel Snyder and Steve Edwards have shown that the word derived its meaning from associations with manual labor, and only later came to characterize the operations of a machine.²⁰ To describe a photograph as mechanical in the nineteenth century implied the absence of creative invention by aligning the image with copying by hand. As Snyder points out, this conception of photography undergirds much early theorization of the medium, as when Lady Elizabeth Eastlake asserted in 1857 that “for all that requires mere manual correctness, and mere manual slavery, without any employment of the artistic feeling, [photography] is the proper and therefore the perfect medium.”²¹ Even sympathetic assessments of photography’s artistic potential drew upon

¹⁸ A.H.W. [Alfred H. Wall], “Photographic Exhibitions and Art Progress,” *Photographic News* 3 (Oct. 19, 1860): 293

¹⁹ David R. Clark, MA, “Composition as Applied to Photography,” *British Journal of Photography* 35, no. 1447 (Jan. 27, 1888): 56. Thomas Runciman made a similar point in 1893, asserting that “the mechanical must be helped by the artistic, if there is to be anything but a botch, pictorially.” Thomas Runciman, “The Artist as Photographer,” *Art Journal* 55 (1893): 116.

²⁰ Joel Snyder, “Res Ipsa Loquitur,” in *Things that Talk*, ed. Lorraine Daston (New York: Zone Books, 2004), 198-204. Edwards, *Making of English Photography*, 132-36. See also Laura Saltz, “Natural/Mechanical: Keywords in the Conception of Early Photography,” in *Photography and Its Origins*, eds. Tanya Sheehan and Andrés Mario Zervignón (New York: Routledge, 2015), 195.

²¹ Lady Elizabeth Eastlake, “Photography,” *Quarterly Review* 1, no. 101 (April 1857) in Snyder, 213.

this analogy. Writing in 1860, an author for the *Photographic News* described the medium's place among the fine arts as being that of a "mechanical copyist of artistic designs."²²

When used to describe composite photographs, usually referred to as "composition photography" in the nineteenth century, or "combination printing" by Robinson himself, terms like mechanism and mechanical recalled their etymological origins because the technique of combining multiple negatives on the same sheet of paper involved literal hand work—trimming, joining, measuring, and retouching—that was seen to assert itself in the appearance of the print.²³ Robinson proposed a radical rethinking of the relationship between making and meaning when he retorted in the *Amateur Photographer*: "I take very little care to hide *what you call the mechanism* when it does not interfere with the effect of the picture."²⁴ By sanctioning an easy co-existence between mechanism and artistic effect, Robinson pointed to the limitations of the critic's interpretation, and challenged the accepted divisions between the manual and intellectual processes of art. To be clear, Robinson was not questioning the validity of the term mechanism in general; after all, it was a concept he employed with some frequency.²⁵ Rather, by insinuating that mechanism did not necessarily characterize his own process, Robinson made claims for the artistic potential of combination printing, whether the evidence was visible or not.

The critical reception of *Carolling* and other composite photographs suggests that a complicated dynamic was at play. Awareness of Robinson's techniques—whether signaled

²² [William Crookes], "On the Position Occupied by Photography Among the Fine Arts," *Photographic News* 4, no. 94 (June 22, 1860): 85.

²³ Robinson expressed a preference for the term "combination printing" over "composition photography" in H.P. Robinson, "On Printing from Several Negatives," *Photographic News* 8, no. 317 (Sept. 30, 1864): 471.

²⁴ Emphasis mine. Robinson, "Combination Printing," 256.

²⁵ See, for example, Robinson's advice to fellow photographers to "keep the mechanism of the art out of sight" by placing the joins between negatives in unobtrusive places. H.P. Robinson, *Pictorial Effect in Photography: Being Hints on Composition and Chiaroscuro for Photographers* (London: Piper and Carter 1869), 96.

by the prints themselves or conveyed by the photographer's writing about his procedure—invited viewers to pay attention to process, and to take it into account in their evaluation of an image. This approach challenged key tenets of academic art theory, the paradigm for nascent concepts of art in photography, by refusing to subordinate the physical processes of artmaking to that of the mind. As has been well documented, composite methods remained conceptually controversial throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, even while the prints themselves were widely exhibited and admired.²⁶

This chapter contextualizes the critical responses to *Carolling* within broad debates about the legitimacy of handwork in photography throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. By analyzing the early theorization of combination printing in the 1860s, and its legacy in the 1880s and beyond, I demonstrate that composite techniques generated longstanding and consistent concerns about the status of the photographer's labor as a marker of *artistic* value. In his photographs, as well as his significant body of writing about photographic procedures, Robinson advanced the notion that practice itself bears meaning. While many proponents of art photography rejected this perspective, the debates engendered by Robinson's methods prompted questions about the efficacy of the academic model inherited from painting, which shaped the conceptualization of art photography in the nineteenth century and beyond.

Origins in 1860

Henry Peach Robinson began exhibiting composite photographs in the late 1850s, but it was not until 1860, the year that he submitted *A Holiday in the Wood* to the annual

²⁶ For a review of Robinson's biography and the critical reception of his photographs see Margaret Harker, *Henry Peach Robinson: Master of Photographic Art 1830-1901* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988).

Photographic Society exhibition in London, that critics began paying particular attention to the photographer's technique (Fig. 47).²⁷ Produced from seven separate negatives on a single 22 x 17" sheet of paper, *A Holiday in the Wood* was Robinson's most ambitious combination print to date. The image depicted a spirited group of children picnicking in the forest near Kenilworth Castle, and it employed a dynamic compositional pyramid to animate and organize the scene. At the apex Robinson positioned a standing girl waving her bonnet in a gesture of unencumbered glee, while children of varying ages gather around in clusters of two or three below her, weaving flowers into crowns or animatedly observing each other. To connote relative distance and command of his printing process, Robinson varied the size and degree of exposure of the figural groupings and dispersed them across the pictorial surface.

As soon became routine with Robinson's photographs, *A Holiday in the Wood* was privileged with prime placement on the center wall of the exhibition, and critics responded enthusiastically to the charm of the theme and the ambition of his compositional design.²⁸ Yet even within these positive assessments of the photograph the majority of reviewers

²⁷ Discussions of Robinson's 1858 composite print *Fading Away* drew criticism largely on the basis of the photograph's macabre subject matter—a woman dying of consumption surrounded by her family—as well as its compositional similarity to *pose plastique*. See "Exhibition on Suffolk Street," *Journal of the Photographic Society of London* 5, no. 77 (Jan. 21, 1859): 147; "Exhibit of the Photographic Society," *Illustrated London News* 34, no. 955 (Jan. 15, 1859): 59; "Correspondence. Exhibition of the Photographic Society," *Photographic News* 2, no. 27 (Mar. 11, 1859): 8-9; and the reprint of the *Daily News* review in "Exhibition on Suffolk Street," 146. One notable exception is a review in the *Photographic News* that attributes the flaws in *Fading Away* to Robinson's "patching process." See "The Photographic Exhibition at Crystal Palace," *Photographic News* 1, no. 4 (Oct. 1, 1858): 40-41.

²⁸ In the review of the print for the *Photographic News*, the editor noted that "[i]n the centre of the wall at the top of the room—by common consent regarded as the place of honour—is hung Mr. Robinson's 'Holiday in the Woods.'" [G. Wharton Simpson], "The Photographic Exhibition," *Photographic News* 5, no. 124 (Jan. 18, 1861): 25. A writer for the *Illustrated London News*, for example, cited Robinson as one of an emerging group of photographers who sought to demonstrate the "mind and will of the artist," and deemed him a "successful labourer" in this arena, noting particularly the keen judgment, sensitivity to effect, and the pleasing combination of his efforts. See "Holiday in the Wood," *Illustrated London News* 38, no. 1079 (Mar. 16, 1861): 248.

focused squarely on the photographer's procedures. *A Holiday in the Wood* was introduced in terms of its composite process, and writers reviewed current debates about the technique before describing the image itself. A journalist for the *Photographic News* drew attention to the photograph's "mechanical" flaws, such as the abrupt juxtaposition between a foreground figure's cheek and the dark drapery of the skirt behind her, which revealed the location of a join. The background foliage, too, appeared over-exposed and did not convey an appropriate recession of depth.²⁹ In a similar vein, a writer for the *British Journal of Photography* indicated that the two little girls approaching at far right appeared too close to the foreground given their relative size, and advised Robinson that they should be "thrown further back" in future impressions.³⁰ These faults would be disturbing if photographed as such, the *Photographic News* author acknowledged, but the effect was exacerbated "when the junction is a mechanical one," and the photographer had manually synthesized his scene.³¹

When *A Holiday in the Wood* was exhibited at venues including the Crystal Palace Exhibition and the Belgian Industrial Exhibition over the next few years, negative associations with Robinson's procedure only increased in intensity. Critics described the print as a series of patched-together pieces that revealed the outlines left behind by the photographer's "scissors."³² Robinson had done his best to combine separate studies into a pleasing whole, the reviewer for the London *Times* acknowledged patronizingly, but the effect of the photograph was quite the opposite. "[N]othing more entirely fails in all the true

²⁹ "The Holiday in the Woods," *Photographic News* 4, no. 117 (Nov. 30, 1860): 366-67.

³⁰ "Photographic Contributions to Art," *British Journal of Photography* 7, no. 131 (Dec. 1, 1860): 346.

³¹ "The Holiday in the Woods," *Photographic News*, 366-67.

³² "Report of the Jury, Belgium Industrial Exhibition, 1861" and "Crystal Palace Exhibition 1862," *British Journal of Photography* (June 6, 1862). Both of these citations were included in a scrapbook of press clippings, presumably compiled by Robinson, which was given to the Royal Photographic Society by Robinson's son, Ralph W. Robinson, in 1924. The scrapbook is now housed in the National Media Museum, Bradford, UK.

conditions of picture-making,” the author insisted, reassuring readers that this “unwise encroachment” of photography into the domain of painting only reinforced the boundary between the two media.³³

This emphasis on Robinson’s printing technique followed a series of contentious debates about composite photography that flooded the photographic press in the spring and summer of 1860. The tempest was triggered by Robinson himself when, at the invitation of the Photographic Society of Scotland, he delivered a paper detailing his process that was published in the *British Journal of Photography* that April. “On Printing Photographic Pictures from Several Negatives” described Robinson’s method of assembling his photographs, as well as the preparatory procedures that he employed in advance of making a print. Rather than seeking an appropriate setting in nature, Robinson chose to build one in his backyard, covering a piece of turf with wildflowers to simulate a hill, and constructing a mountain spring by directing the wastewater from his printing apparatus into a hole at the foot of the garden. With this set-up he was able to stage any number of scenes, the photographer explained, revealing that recent photographs such as *Lavinia*, *Nearing Home*, and *Here They Come!* shared the same foreground (Fig. 48). All it took was “the assistance of a spade and a little ingenuity.”³⁴

Printing his pictures involved an equally hands-on series of steps. To compose a photograph from more than one source, Robinson made a print from one negative, cut out the unwanted figures or background elements, then pasted these back over the source

³³ *Times* (Jan. 18, 1861) in the Robinson scrapbook, National Media Museum, Bradford, UK.

³⁴ Henry P. Robinson, “On Printing Photographic Pictures from Several Negatives,” *British Journal of Photography* 7, no. 115 (Apr. 2, 1860): 94.

plate.³⁵ When exposing the now masked-over negative for a second time, only the desired elements of the image would appear on paper. To add a new background or additional figures to the print, the opposite procedure was adopted. Robinson pasted over the areas that corresponded to images he had already printed, and then exposed the second plate on his initial sheet of paper. To ensure proper alignment of each new addition, he ran a needle through the print and matched it with the corresponding negative, shining a candle beneath the printing frame to make the outlines between negatives easier to see. Robinson advised his audience to pick inconspicuous places to situate the seams, or, if printing a head from one negative and a body from another, to “shade off” the joins by allowing them to fall discretely over one other.³⁶ The “mechanical difficulties” were not insurmountable, he assured fellow photographers, urging them not to “discard art” by avoiding this method of working.³⁷

Responses to Robinson’s disclosure were swift and appalled. Michael Hannaford, a council member of the South London Photographic Society, condemned the employment of fictitious sets, claiming that Robinson’s photographs had not been “legitimately obtained.”³⁸ Others expressed concern that cut-and-paste was successfully masquerading as art. In a faux-editorial that appeared in the *British Journal of Photography* in June,

³⁵ On the basis of glass plate negatives related to *A Holiday in the Wood* and other combination photographs currently housed in the National Media Museum in Bradford (but due to be transferred to the Victoria & Albert Museum in London along with the remainder of the Royal Photographic Society collection), it seems that Robinson also used ink or paint to mask out his negatives.

³⁶ Robinson, “On Printing Photographic Pictures from Several Negatives,” 95.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Michael Hannaford, “Letter to the Editor. Photographic Gossip,” *British Journal of Photography* 7, no. 117 (May 1, 1860): 40. A response to this critique appeared under the name “Fairplay,” in which the anonymous correspondent argued that Hannaford was quick to critique a process he could probably not manage himself. The editor intervened to indicate the *British Journal of Photography* would not take sides, and that the journal preferred to let all viewpoints be expressed. See “An Opinion on ‘Composite Pictures,’” *British Journal of Photography* 7 (June 15, 1860): 186. David Coleman identifies Hannaford as a Society council member in “Pleasant Fictions,” 54, fn 26.

penned by “Penelope Ann Spriggins” (although actually authored by professional art critic Alfred H. Wall³⁹), Robinson’s procedure was equated with sewing a patchwork quilt.⁴⁰ Writing in a Cockney dialect for comedic effect, “Spriggins” declared enthusiastically that if joining “pieces from the rag-bag” was all it took to make photographic art, she would gladly make her way to London to collect next year’s prize herself.⁴¹

Writing under his own name later than month, Wall, a leading advocate for the advancement of photography as art, offered a more serious and sustained critique of combination printing that elaborated upon the positions expressed by Hannaford and Spriggins.⁴² In two consecutive articles entitled “‘Composition’ versus ‘Patchwork,’” Wall argued that Robinson’s process of “composition printing” was irreconcilable with both photography *and* art.⁴³ Composite photographs never convincingly transformed a bank into a mountain or a print-washing machine into a river, bringing the medium into “disrepute” by revealing deception at the heart of the process. Moreover, by substituting

³⁹ Alfred Wall published under a number of pseudonyms, including R. A. Seymour, Aud Lens, Paul, Pry, and Dogberry. See Edwards, 112 and 322, fn. 163.

⁴⁰ The characterization of composite photography as a patchwork quilt persisted for some time. In a spoof poem published in 1887, a man is mocked for falling in love with a fictional woman constructed from multiple negatives, which the author terms a “crazy quilt.” See Bessie Chandler, “Her Photograph,” *Amateur Photographer* 5 (April 15, 1887): 174. The poem seems to have referred to composite portraiture, the process of printing multiple negatives directly on top of each other to produce an “average” likeness, pioneered by Francis Galton. This became the more common reference for the term “composite photography” in the late 1880s. See “Composite or Typical Photographs,” *Photographic News* 31, no. 1521 (Oct. 28, 1887): 673-74.

⁴¹ “Now all I says is this ere, let that there Photographic Society of Scotland as they calls it offer a prize for the best piece of patchwork and I’m the *hartist* that will sho my work for it and then let ‘em jest pay my railway carriage and find me a nights lodging and bored, which it must be fit for a eyely respectable female mind you and see if I don’t reed em a paper which will ‘give them some information on the method I employ in producing’ patchwork quilts from a whole lots of little bits, thats all.” Penelope Ann Spriggins, “Letter to the Editor: Mrs. Spriggins on Patchwork,” *British Journal of Photography* 7 (June 1, 1860): 172.

⁴² Steve Edwards characterizes Wall as somewhat exceptional among art critics, based on the argumentative nature of his criticism. Wall’s eclectic professional background included miniature painting, acting, photography, and writing plays and a novel. See Edwards, 5, 95 and 112-13. For further biographical details, see H.S. W[ard]’s obituary of the writer, “The Death of Mr. A.H. Wall,” *British Journal of Photography* 53 (June 29, 1906): 512-13.

⁴³ Alfred H. Wall, “‘Composition’ versus ‘Patchwork,’” *British Journal of Photography* 7, no. 120 (June 15, 1860): 176-77 and (July 2, 1860): 190-91.

the “scissors and paste-pot” for the imperceptible outline between forms in the natural world, Robinson had rejected the inherent pictorial unity that resulted from seizing an image in a single shot. This quality belonged to photography alone and elevated it above all other artistic media, Wall stressed. To produce truthful and genuinely cohesive images, the only acceptable instruments for the art-photographer were a good enlarger and a lens with a wide-angle view.⁴⁴

Figuring Art Theory in Photography

Not coincidentally, the particular values that Wall used to criticize composite photographs—namely truthfulness and unity—were the very ones he and fellow photographers were currently harnessing to align photography with art. In his insightful study of photographic discourse in England in the mid-nineteenth century, Steve Edwards establishes that the early 1860s was a pivotal moment in the conceptualization of art photography, as writers for the photographic press began employing academic art theory as a model for their own medium.⁴⁵ Edwards identifies William Lake Price’s fifteen-part series of articles as the point of origin for this approach. In these texts, Lake Price (an artist and photographer himself) provided a history of pictorial art in Europe by analyzing the compositional devices of great masterworks, such as Théodore Géricault’s *Raft of the Medusa* (Musée du Louvre, 1818-19) or Domenichino’s *The Last Communion of St. Jerome* (Vatican Museums, 1611-14) (Fig. 49). To elucidate the compositional achievement of these paintings, Lake Price paired them with diagrams that purported to clarify the visual

⁴⁴ Wall, “‘Composition’ versus ‘Patchwork,’” 176.

⁴⁵ Edwards, 62 and 124.

patterns in a given design, and substantiated his points with principles drawn from the *Discourses* of Joshua Reynolds.

“On Composition and Chiar-oscuro” opened with a quotation from the seventh *Discourse*, in which Reynolds asserted that “practice, though essential to perfection, can never attain that to which it aims, unless it works under the direction of principle.”⁴⁶ This conception of art, in which the physical production of the image was subordinate to its intellectual origins, formed the basis of what has been described as Reynolds’ “evolutionary” model of artistic development.⁴⁷ Art students learned by copying, first images, then ideas. As the novice artist mastered each level of training, he or she would proceed to the next, shedding the mechanical limitations of the previous stage by replacing them with deeper, more abstract understanding and intuition. As Reynolds explained in his eleventh *Discourse*, “[i]t is by this [comprehensive faculty], and this alone, that the mechanical power is ennobled, and raised much above its natural rank. And it appears to me, that with propriety it acquires this character, as an instance of that superiority with which mind predominates over matter, by contracting into one whole what nature has made multifarious.”⁴⁸

For photographers to ally their practice with Reynolds’ pictorial whole, they were advised to subordinate extraneous details to the organizing logic of compositional unity.⁴⁹ “[A]ll pictorial representations should be so designed that by the *unity* and *simplicity* of their lines...the spectator may *at once* appreciate the intention of the artist,” Lake Price

⁴⁶ Joshua Reynolds in William Lake Price, “On Composition and Chiar-Oscuro,” *Photographic News* 3, no. 76 (Feb. 17, 1860): 281.

⁴⁷ This is how B.A.C. van Brakel-Saunders characterizes Reynolds’ approach in his analysis of the *Discourses*. See Brakel-Saunders, “Reynolds’ Theory of Learning Processes,” 468.

⁴⁸ Joshua Reynolds, *Discourse XI*, in Wark, 201.

⁴⁹ Lake Price, “On Composition and Chiar-Oscuro—VIII,” 368.

wrote in his tenth article. “True art in painting does *not* consist in the working or touching-up of some infinitesimal portion of a subject to microscopic minuteness,” and nor should it in photography: “mere mechanical elaboration is not the object to which the efforts of the producer should be directed in either case.”⁵⁰

Reynolds’ and Lake Price’s emphases on compositional unity had intellectual as well as practical implications. Since the formation of the Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture in France in the late seventeenth century, composition had been associated with the creative and philosophic aspects of art making, in which an artist conceived of the entire *tableau* in his mind before commencing material execution.⁵¹ Drawing from Aristotle’s *Poetics*, French theorists proposed that a picture’s composition ought to unify time and place through depicted action, displaying a clearly coherent main subject that could be comprehended in a single glance.⁵² Reynolds articulated this notion of visual order by guiding students of the Royal Academy to sacrifice unnecessary details to the “general idea” or principal subject of the picture, and he encouraged painters to seek balance between simplicity and variety. Art was located precisely in the capacity to express a “whole,” Reynolds believed, because pictorial composition engaged the mental faculties of both maker and viewer.⁵³

While academic idealism dwindled in importance in England over the course of the nineteenth century, Reynolds’ conception of art as wholeness remained central to artistic theory and criticism throughout the nineteenth century. Caroline Arscott has shown that

⁵⁰ William Lake Price, “On Composition and Chiar-Oscuro—X,” *Photographic News* 3, no. 85 (April 20, 1860): 391.

⁵¹ This is the definition of composition articulated by Roland Fréart de Chambray and André Félibien in their writing in the 1660s. Thomas Puttfarcken points out that prior to the founding of the French academy, composition was associated with the mechanical aspects of pictorial practice. Puttfarcken, 230-40.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 239 and 270.

⁵³ See *Discourses IV, VIII, and XI* in Wark, *Discourses on Art*.

famed naturalist John Ruskin retained Reynolds' basic framework in his influential book *Modern Painters* (1843), even while he reconceived the function of details in communicating the subject's "general idea."⁵⁴ This deft reformulation of academic theory is evident in the fifth chapter of *Modern Painters*, in which Ruskin asserted that "[g]eneralisation is unity, not destruction of parts, and composition is not annihilation, but arrangement of materials. The breadth which unites the truths of nature with her harmonies is meritorious and beautiful, but the breadth which annihilates those truths by the million is not painting nature, but painting over her."⁵⁵ In the naturalist conception of pictorial composition, truthful representation need not be achieved at the expense of unity and thoughtful design.

Ruskin's philosophy of art offered an appealing model for art photographers by providing a bridge between the intellectual traditions derived from the Academy, and moral values associated with the unaltered representation of the natural world.⁵⁶ By emphasizing compositional unity, photographers could—in theory—distinguish their images from unthinking, inartistic reproduction without compromising their medium's cherished relationship with representational exactitude. Between the early 1860s and the turn of the century, pictorial composition was held up as the primary goal of photographic art, as indicated by the ubiquity of articles with titles like "Composition in Photographic Pictures," "Hints on the Nature of Pictorial Beauty and the Principles of Composition," and "On the Composition of the Pictorial," which appeared in major photographic journals over

⁵⁴ Caroline H. Arscott, "Modern Life Subjects in British Painting 1840-60," PhD diss., University of Leeds, 1987, 17-18.

⁵⁵ John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, 3rd ed. (New York: John Wiley, 1848): 194.

⁵⁶ Alfred Wall connects Ruskin's conception of "unity in variety" to photography in "Practical Art Hints: The Dangers and Difficulties in what is called 'Composition Photography,'" *British Journal of Photography* 13, no. 301 (Feb. 9, 1866): 62.

the next four decades.⁵⁷ The language of these texts remained so consistent, that even into the 1890s critics continued to cite Reynolds and Ruskin to corroborate photographic art as a process of pictorial cohesion. This was achieved, as a writer for the *Photographic Quarterly* stressed in 1891, by “hid[ing] the means by which the effect is produced.”⁵⁸ Artistic compositions could not reveal their seams.

Against “Cruel Cutting” and “Ugly Outlines”

Although Robinson employed combination printing in order to facilitate pictorial composition, the knowledge that his picture was constructed from disparate parts made it impossible for critics to perceive his images as cohesive. As Alfred Wall explained in 1866, even minor discrepancies between negatives had catastrophic consequences for pictorial unity:

Let one negative be in the slightest degree under-exposed, and its companion negative be in the slightest degree over-exposed, and the difference in the development of these two plates will be fatal to the perfect unity of a truly finished work. A hundred conflicting difficulties conspire against the harmonious completeness of a work compounded from several different negatives. Figures, backgrounds, and accessories, taken at separate times and most probably under varying circumstances of atmosphere, light and shade &c., cannot blend together as they would do if nature had associated them with her many secretly working but grandly powerful agencies. Only an artist who has studied despairingly the marvelous, all-pervading harmonies of nature can understand the exquisite delicacy, the indescribable refinement, with which part is linked to part in every scene and every object he studies...⁵⁹

For Wall, the standard of unity set by nature rendered the compositional ambitions of combination printing absurd and overtly artificial by comparison. “It is perversion and

⁵⁷ J. Wells Champney, “Composition in Photographic Pictures,” *Photographic News* 31, no. 1481 (Jan. 21, 1887): 44-46; W. H. Davies, “Hints on the Nature of Pictorial Beauty and the Principles of Composition,” *British Journal of Photography* 9 (1862): 3, 232, 147, 165; Norman Macbeth, R.S.A., “On the Composition of the Pictorial,” *British Journal of Photography* 33, no. 1400 (Mar. 4, 1887): 136-38.

⁵⁸ J. Andrews, “Composition,” *Photographic Quarterly* 2, no. 8 (July 1891): 321-26.

⁵⁹ Wall, “Practical Art Hints,” 61.

degradation to an art like ours to make its truth and unity subservient to conventional tricks, shams, and mechanical dodges,” Wall concluded, emphasizing that combination printing “retards rather than advances its upward progress as a branch of the fine arts.”⁶⁰

By asserting a dichotomy between nature and composite photography, Wall and like-minded theorists used combination printing as a foil for the naturally cohesive photograph printed from a single plate. Unity, in this formulation of art in photography, implied meaning that extended beyond the pictorial surface. In one particularly illuminating example of this rationale, portrait photographer Cornelius Jabez Hughes explained to members of the South London Photographic Society that photography’s highest value was its capacity to preserve the photographer’s thoughts “whole”—even painters were forced to work in piecemeal. This oneness of idea and execution was photography’s “natural mode,” which Hughes contrasted with the arbitrary and thoughtless assemblage of “composition-photography.” While the ineffectual composite photographer aimlessly snapped a river one day and a castle or perhaps some distant hills the next, later fitting the pieces together “like a child does its toy puzzle,” the art photographer—a real man—“shall uncover [his] lens, and with one effort seize nature with all her native charms, her local and general hues, her natural *chiaroscuro*, just as she now is, and as she never will be again.”⁶¹

Hughes defended what he termed “Art-Photography” by preserving the hierarchy of labor upon which academic art was based. Composite methods threatened this accepted

⁶⁰ Wall, “Practical Art Hints,” 61.

⁶¹ Jabez Hughes, “Art-Photography,” 4. A similar perspective was presented by George H. Slight in a paper presented to the Edinburgh Photographic Society in 1865. Like Hughes, Slight’s approach to defining art photography centered on a critique of composition photography, by arguing that to achieve “complete satisfaction,” photography needed to bring the “truthfulness of rendering” into relation with the “truthfulness of nature.” George H. Slight, “Concerning Art-Photography,” *British Journal of Photography* 12, no. 275 (August 11, 1865): 414.

dynamic by replacing “artistic skills” with mere “mechanical ingenuity,” thereby rendering the artist-photographer subservient to his printer. For Hughes, this most basic misunderstanding of the values of art was signaled by the very name “composition-photography,” which implied a troubling equivalence between the artist’s idea and the physical construction of the picture. To strengthen the intellectual claims of art photography he de-emphasized the role of the material processes that brought such images into being. “We have an abundance of mechanical ability, it is the artistic we want to cultivate,” Hughes wrote emphatically. “Of two given pictures, equal in merit and design, that one is the best which is secured by the fewest negatives; for he is the higher artist who produces the greatest results with the smallest means.”⁶²

The inclusion of critiques of combination printing within broader discourses of art photography had important consequences for the evaluation of images. Even when critics like Hughes and Wall were disparaging composite processes, their diatribes elevated the relative weight of making in the interpretation of art photography. This approach gained traction and expanded in implication over the course of little more than a year, such that, by early 1861, methods of production could be harnessed to explain not only the appearance but also the moral value of a photograph. As recently as 1859, Alfred Wall had expressed a more or less neutral position on combination printing, encouraging photographers to print from multiple negatives to avoid the appearance of a “white paper sky,” and advising them to apply a little wool to the joins to reduce the appearance of “hard horizon lines.” These darkroom maneuvers were justified, Wall explained, since they

⁶² Hughes, 3-4.

improved the appearance of the picture and offset the technical challenges of capturing an artistic composition in a single shot.⁶³

In the wake of Robinson's 1860 disclosure about his procedures, however, Wall began to change course. He termed combination printing "cruel cutting," and explained that the technique substituted "the hardest, sharpest, and ugliest of outlines for that exquisitely softened and melting boundary which we only meet with in nature and in photographs." At the same time, Wall suggested that a photograph's visual surface was not necessarily a reliable source of meaning. "[T]he more artfully concealed the more mischievous the result," Wall continued, "because the thing is then more likely to be looked upon by the uninitiated as genuine, when the art itself suffers." Calling on artists to be held accountable for their procedures, Wall proclaimed that a photographer who prints from multiple negatives "sins against his conscience;"⁶⁴ even if the practitioner could disguise his composite process, this by no means justified its use. Consistency between the representation and physical production of the photograph was key to Wall's understanding of pictorial truth, and he sought to preserve it in his theory of art photography.

By the end of 1860 Wall extended this argument to its logical conclusion by situating the pictorial surface as a secondary factor in the definition of art. For a talk at the South London Photographic Society, the critic argued that the process of stitching together a photographic composition—and the piecemeal appearance that resulted—was a material symptom of a much more significant artistic problem. "[E]ven when the highest mechanical success has been attained, and no cruel lines cut up the affair into mere patchwork, there are yet other considerations of far higher importance to the real pictorial value and high

⁶³ A.H. Wall, "Photography as One of the Fine Arts," *Photographic News* 3, no. 69 (Dec. 30, 1859): 195.

⁶⁴ Alfred H. Wall, "'Composition' versus 'Patchwork,'" 176.

character of such productions,” Wall wrote.⁶⁵ He returned to the matter of printing a sky from one negative and a landscape from another—a common technique in photography of this period—to explain that even if a photographer could join the two negatives imperceptibly these mismatched pairings were “erroneous in principle” and “repugnant to the distinctive recognition of truth.”⁶⁶ In the wake of combination printing and the visible and invisible threats it posed to the artistic value of a picture, legitimate art photography could only be established and secured through the photographer’s process.

Producing Composite Prints: “A reversal of the order of things”

While Alfred Wall was primarily concerned with the ideological implications of combination printing, he could be swayed by the language that a photographer used to describe his procedures. Robinson’s “On Printing Photographic Pictures from Several Negatives” was particularly objectionable to Wall because it portrayed the photographer as little more than a mechanical laborer, distancing photography even further from the principles of art. Wall preferred the writing of Oscar Rejlander, Robinson’s former teacher and the photographer made famous by his astonishing composite print *The Two Ways of Life*, an allegorical subject depicting two sons choosing between paths of virtue and vice (Fig. 50). Constructed from over thirty separate negatives on two joined sheets of paper, *The Two Ways of Life* caused a sensation when it was exhibited at the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition in 1857. Viewers expressed disbelief that photography could be

⁶⁵ Emphasis mine. Alfred H. Wall, “Hints on ‘Keeping’—In Composition Photography,” *Photographic News* 4, no. 121 (Dec. 28, 1860): 411. On the commonality of double printing skies in Gustave Le Gray’s photographic practice see Sylvie Aubenas, ed. *Gustave Le Gray, 1820-1884* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2002), especially Barthélémy Jobert’s essay “From the Point of View of Painting,” 233-53.

⁶⁶ Wall, “Hints on ‘Keeping,’” 411-12.

manipulated to produce such a complex composition, while less receptive critics questioned the suitability of the camera for constructing allegorical scenes.⁶⁷ The print was seen as deeply controversial on the basis of Rejlander's inclusion of nude models to allegorize themes like "vanity" and "idleness." So shocking were the nudes perceived to be, that the following year the Scottish Photographic Society refused to display *The Two Ways of Life* until the offensive left side of the image had been draped.⁶⁸

Rejlander was invited to describe his remarkable process of "photographic composition" at a meeting of the Photographic Society of London in 1858, and Wall excerpted portions of this paper in "'Composition' versus 'Patchwork'" to draw a contrast with Robinson. When Rejlander explained the process of constructing *The Two Ways of Life*, Wall noted approvingly, he employed abstract and distinctly artistic terminology to characterize the act of printing, relegating the mechanical aspects of picture-making to their proper place. He ordered the rays of the sun to "do his bidding" and directed "pencils of light" to smooth and unite discrete elements of the composition, shrouding his practice in poetics to align it with the imaginative work of the artist.⁶⁹ So obtuse was his explanation, however, that at least one member of the audience demanded clarification, obliging Rejlander to detail the prosaic aspects of his process such as wrinkling black velvet around his negatives to mask the joins, timing the exposure of each figure to imitate

⁶⁷ "The Photographic Exhibition," *Art-Journal* 20 (April 1, 1858): 121.

⁶⁸ The composition of *The Two Ways of Life* was modeled on Raphael's *School of Athens* (Apostolic Palace, Vatican City, 1509-11), with individual poses inspired by Titian, Michelangelo, and Poussin. For a discussion of the iconography and the critical reception of the photograph see Stephanie Spencer, *O.G. Rejlander: Photography as Art* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1985), 100; Edgar Yoxall Jones, *Father of Art Photography: O.G. Rejlander 1813-1875* (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society Ltd., 1973), 23; and Alison Smith, *The Victorian Nude: Sexuality, Morality and Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 60.

⁶⁹ In his preference for language that distanced photography from the realities of physical production, Wall repeated a balancing act that underscored early theorization of painting in France. As Puttfarcken explains, French academic theory aimed to reduce the specifics about painting procedures to distract from the fact that painting was still taught and practiced as it had been under the guild system. Puttfarcken, 231.

perspectival recession, and choosing albumen paper over standard salted varieties to prevent slippage during printing.⁷⁰ Abstract language might appeal to the theorist, but many photographers found it useless.

The growing frustration of photographers with the “art principles” promoted by the press impelled the *Photographic News* to take a new approach. In 1868, the journal invited Robinson to author a weekly series of articles that translated pictorial notions of composition and chiaroscuro into the practice of making photographs.⁷¹ Robinson’s series, “Pictorial Effect in Photography: Being Lessons in Composition and Chiaroscuro [sic] for Photographers,” was published between January and November of 1868, and while the texts professed academic values, Robinson prioritized practical matters of planning and construction—what he termed the “skeleton” of the photograph rather than its “soul.”⁷² Each chapter offered strategies for emulating the compositional devices found in paintings. To produce a picturesque view of a château, Robinson recommended situating the camera at an oblique angle and moving “forty or fifty yards” down the road if necessary. Employing a “point of dark” in the foreground, such as a group of figures or a rock, would improve

⁷⁰ Oscar Rejlander, “On Photographic Composition,” *British Journal of Photography [Liverpool and Manchester Photographic Journal]* 2, no. 8 (Apr. 15, 1858): 92-98.

⁷¹ A number of photographers expressed frustration with the impractical orientation of photographic journalism. One anonymous author, signing himself “a Photographer’s Assistant,” complained in the *Photographic News* that despite the attention given to “art principles” of late, the matter had not been “treated in a style sufficiently clear and comprehensive to meet the requirements of photographers.” See “Jottings for 1865.—No. 4. By a Photographer’s Assistant. Photography versus Fine Art,” *Photographic News* 9, no. 358 (July 14, 1865): 326. In the text introducing Robinson’s series, the editor explained the impetus behind a series that focused on practice: “Some years ago a very excellent series of papers on composition and chiaroscuro [sic], by Mr. Lake Price, appeared in these pages. Admirable, so far as they went, we have since discovered that, for many photographers, they scarcely went far enough, lacking something of the photographic application necessary to give lessons their full value to photographic students.” Anon., “Pictorial Effect in Photography; Being Lessons in Composition and Chiaroscuro for Photographers. Introductory Remarks,” *Photographic News* 12 (Jan. 24, 1868): 41.

⁷² H.P. Robinson, “Pictorial Effect in Photography; Being Lessons in Composition and Chiaroscuro for Photographers. Chapter 1,” *Photographic News* 12 (Jan. 31, 1868): 53.

contrast and balance while establishing gradations of depth.⁷³ If nature didn't provide these elements organically, photographers were free to make an adjustment here or there, adding figures if it would improve the distribution of forms, or removing "obtrusive boughs" when they compromised the pictorial design.⁷⁴ In Robinson's interpretation of art photography, pictorial effect was dependent on the physical arrangement of the scene, and it relied upon the photographer's effort and initiative rather than his or her intrinsic genius.⁷⁵

Throughout these articles, as in earlier writing, Robinson underscored that the photographer's investment of time and labor brought visible and invisible value to his or her work.⁷⁶ By studying the landscape for several days in advance of taking any pictures, photographers would develop knowledge about their subjects, influencing when the picture was taken, and how it was put together in the darkroom. This extra investment in the pictorial process differentiated the artist's practice from that of the ordinary photographer.⁷⁷ As Robinson explained in his twenty-seventh installment, "[i]f

⁷³ H.P. Robinson, "Pictorial Effect in Photography; Being Lessons in Composition and Chiaroscuro for Photographers. Chapter IX," *Photographic News* 12 (Mar. 27, 1868): 150 and "Pictorial Effect in Photography. Chapter IV" (Feb. 21, 1868): 89.

⁷⁴ Robinson, "Pictorial Effect in Photography. Chapter IV" (Feb. 21, 1868): 90.

⁷⁵ See [H.P. Robinson], "Pictorial Effect in Photography. Introductory Remarks," 40 for several definitions of pictorial effect.

⁷⁶ In his earliest writing about his process, Robinson maintained that "art is thoughtful work for earnest men, and until a photographer devotes his time entirely to a few good pictures each year, we shall never know what artistic effects can be produced." Henry P. Robinson, "On Printing Photographic Pictures from Several Negatives," *British Journal of Photography* 7, no. 115 (Apr. 2, 1860): 95. Likewise, in an 1864 article on combination printing he concluded that "...a photographer is not worthy of his art who will not take all the trouble necessary to get the most perfect result." H.P. Robinson, "On Printing from Several Negatives," *Photographic News* 8, no. 317 (Sept. 30, 1864): 473. The following year he made similar points, arguing that "[g]enius in a great measure consists in a desire for work, whatever rhapsodists may say to the contrary" and after describing the work of one of his students, who took the trouble to make changes to the landscape when it was necessary for pictorial effect, wrote "It is by these means—labour added to knowledge—that good work, in painting, sculpture, or photography, is produced." H.P. Robinson, "On the Selection of a Subject, and Its Management," *Photographic News* 9 (Aug. 11, 1865): 378-79.

⁷⁷ Robinson's teachings shaped the ways that art photographers thought about their process going forward. Into the 1880s and 90s, it was common for photographers and critics to emphasize the importance of

photographers would say to themselves, "This scene is as well worthy of my undivided attention and of all my skill as it would be that of a painter who would not hesitate to spend some weeks in painting it, they would probably produce better results."⁷⁸

In his own work, Robinson adhered closely to these principles. Trained as a painter and illustrator before he took up the camera, Robinson integrated aspects of the artist's practice into that of the photographer. He planned his compositions through pencil sketches, working them up into a full-scale preparatory drawing like the one produced for *Carolling* (Figs. 51-53). Before taking any photographs, he collected costumes and props, selected and trained his models, and built the foreground set for the subject in the backyard of his Leamington home. Robinson described these procedures at length in a series of autobiographical articles he published in the *Practical Photographer* at the end of the century. To make *A Holiday in the Wood*, Robinson photographed the figural groups during the "only two fine days" in April, and then had to wait over four months before the weather was sufficiently sunny to photograph the woods at Kenilworth. In the meantime, he produced a collage of the picture that determined the placement of the human subjects using photographs, while approximating the landscape background and other details in pencil and watercolor (Fig. 54). The final print required special paper to accommodate the size of Robinson's design, and each image took several days to produce (spoiling many examples along the way). Instead of using registration marks, which would have greatly

studying a subject well in advance of taking a photograph of it. See George Bankart, "Letter to the Editor: Art and Photography," *Amateur Photographer* 7, no. 175 (Feb. 10, 1888): 82-84 and "Sketching with the Camera," *Photogram* I (1894): 17-18. Robinson was also credited as being the teacher of the next generation of art photographers. Andrew Pringle, "Mr. H.P. Robinson," *Sun Artists* 2 (January 1890): 12.

⁷⁸ Robinson, "Pictorial Effect in Photography. Chapter XXVIII," (Aug. 7, 1868): 379.

simplified his work, Robinson fitted each negative by hand, resulting in a unique print every time.⁷⁹

Robinson's defenders, of which there were many, frequently emphasized the amount of time and effort that the photographer spent in producing his prints to draw attention to the value of labor that might not be perceptible in the images themselves. A writer for the *Photographic News* claimed that *A Holiday in the Wood* had been in the "hatching" stage for three years while the photographer designed and planted a background specifically for the scene. This tidbit was offered as a moral lesson for "impatient" photographers, reminding them of the personal rewards of work for its own sake.⁸⁰

Rather than seeing Robinson's approach as inartistic, the photographer's supporters positioned it as the very source of his creativity and originality. Profiling Robinson for a series of articles on "distinguished" photographers in 1869, a writer for the *Philadelphia Photographer* linked the creative aspects of Robinson's art to his material practice. "Mr. Robinson's vindications of the pictorial power of the art have chiefly taken a practical form," the journalist reported. "[A]iming to meet the painter on his own ground, he has selected and combined the materials presented by nature, so as to exercise something of the creative power in producing a pictorial composition." The author emphasized the value of Robinson's work, relating that he produced just one "picture for the credit of art" per year, which he gave the "devotion of months of thought and much labour, without any view to publication or profit." To further substantiate these points, the writer detailed the

⁷⁹ Henry Peach Robinson, "Autobiographical Sketches, Ch. VI," *The Practical Photographer* 8, no. 96 (Dec. 1897): 353-57 and "Autobiographical Sketches, Ch. VII," *The Practical Photographer* 9, no. 98 (Feb. 1898): 30.

⁸⁰ "The Holiday in the Woods. By H.P. Robinson," *Photographic News* 4 (Nov. 30, 1860): 367.

various steps of Robinson's process, from conceptualizing the subject and sketching the composition, to determining the number of negatives required to produce the scene, identifying the appropriate landscape and background elements, and photographing each figure and accessory at the right time of day for the most effective lighting. All of this was done before Robinson moved on to the "mechanical details" of printing, which might take up to eight days for a single photograph. Given that Robinson could not charge an amount of money that would make his investment of time worthwhile, it was clear that his motivations were honorable, the author concluded, and that this was an artistic rather than commercial undertaking. Robinson's approach "is one worth attention," the journalist explained, "and one which, extensively put into practice, could not fail to advance the art."⁸¹

For less sympathetic critics, however, Robinson's efforts were unnecessary and frankly misplaced. A writer for the *Daily Telegraph* expressed bafflement that Robinson would go to such lengths in service of a mere photograph. "Almost as much trouble must have been expended on the building up of this scene, on the bringing together of all its constituent parts, on the drilling of its actors, on the subordination of its accessories, and on the careful eliminating of all petty 'accidents,' as a practiced draughtsman would have found in placing the whole group on paper and canvas," the author wrote with incredulity. "There is something absurd in all this preparation for a mechanical and instantaneous operation. It is anti-climax—a reversal of the order of things."⁸²

⁸¹ Excerpts of the Philadelphia Photographer article were reprinted in "Mr. Robinson and His Method of Working," *Photographic News* 13, no. 574 (Sept. 3, 1869): 429. The text concluded by emphasizing that Robinson's work attracted much attention from viewers. Similar opinions were expressed earlier in the decade, as when a critic for the *Photographic News* suggested that Robinson should have charged more for his investment of time in making *A Holiday in the Wood*. See "The Photographic Exhibition," *Photographic News* 5, no. 124 (Jan. 18, 1861): 25-26.

⁸² Quoted in A.H.W. [Alfred Wall], "The International Exhibition," *British Journal of Photography* 9 (July 25, 1862): 356. Critics frequently noted that Robinson invested as much time in his work as artists working in

This conception of composite photography as wasted time informed many of Alfred Wall's critiques as well. In a particularly vitriolic description of Robinson's procedures published in 1868, Wall repeatedly underscored the ways that Robinson's technique did not make good use of the photographer's time. The mechanical process of masking out negatives and printing images one by one was both "inefficient" and "tedious," whether Robinson carried out the work himself or simply supervised a printer.⁸³ Expressing relief that Oscar Rejlander seemed to have relinquished combination printing of late, Wall speculated that this more worthy artist must have found that "his time and talent can be, and ought to be, more worthily occupied."⁸⁴ In Wall's characterization of the procedure, combination printing was inherently paradoxical: despite its pretensions to facilitate pictorial composition, "printings of this kind never do combine properly, at an awful cost in valuable time and misdirected effort."⁸⁵

To illustrate these points, Wall referred to the print that Robinson exhibited at the Photographic Society that year, a now-lost photograph of a female figure in a landscape entitled *Returning Home*. In observations that anticipate those addressed to *Carolling* twenty years later, Wall insinuated that *Returning Home* was only installed in the "post of

other media. In the *Art-Journal* a critic describing Robinson's photograph *Bringing Home the May* remarked that "the time and expense indispensable to the production of such a photography, or rather set of photographs, can scarcely be less than what would be necessary to the painting of a picture of the same size." See "Photography," *Art-Journal* 2 (Feb. 1, 1863): 38.

⁸³ Interestingly, these are terms that Robinson himself used to describe the process of combination printing in 1864. I suggest that this critical language was less a disavowal of the importance of process, than a strategy that allowed him to align his approach with accepted standards of art. H.P. Robinson, "On Printing from Several Negatives," *Photographic News* 8, no. 317 (Sept. 30, 1864): 471.

⁸⁴ A.H. Wall, "The Late Conduit-Street Photographic Exhibition," *Illustrated Photographer* 1 (Nov. 27, 1868): 514. A similar sentiment was expressed by Thomas Sutton in 1863. In a discussion of the uses that artists make of photographs as source material, Sutton wrote, "The true artist who has mastered the mechanical difficulties of his profession, and takes a high view of its intellectual dignity, will never attempt to build up pictures by photography; in fact, to an accomplished artist, the method would be much too slow, troublesome, and costly, even if the results were not ridiculous." Thomas Sutton, "On Some of the Uses and Abuses of Photography," *Photographic News* 7 (Jan. 15, 1863): 203.

⁸⁵ A.H. Wall, "The Late Conduit-Street Photographic Exhibition," 555.

honour” because Robinson had been in charge of the hanging committee. He then proceeded to catalogue the errors that resulted from the photographer’s process. The usual “point of dark” in the foreground was formulaic and artificial, while the female figure’s neatly arranged clothing revealed that she had been photographed in the studio rather than outdoors. There was no natural explanation for the abrupt juxtaposition of light and shade on the subject’s face, and the sky seemed to have been painted using “cut-out papers, a brush, and some black-lead,” a style that, as Wall witheringly described it, “once used to be very popular with young ladies.” The photograph had some positive pictorial qualities, Wall admitted, but these evidenced “very ordinary dexterity” rather than intellect.⁸⁶ He compared Robinson’s *Returning Home* to a similar theme entitled *Rest*, taken by a Lincoln-based photographer named Robert Slingsby.⁸⁷ According to Wall, Slingsby offered a completely different impression of his subject. While Robinson sought effect “by all sorts of undisguisable artificial dodges and mechanical contrivances,” Slingsby “aim[ed] at the same end, by using more legitimate means, and trusting to fidelity of representation, and an eye for nature’s real beauties.” “In short,” Wall concluded, “Mr. Slingsby used nature with an artist’s eye, while Mr. Robinson merely endeavoured to put mechanism and ingenuity in the place of nature, as something which he considered much finer and more ‘artistic.’”⁸⁸

Given that Wall based his distinction between the two photographer’s pictures on Slingsby’s more truthful and “natural” approach, it must have given Robinson some pleasure to expose these standards as baseless when he published *Pictorial Effect in*

⁸⁶ Wall, “The Late Conduit-Street Photographic Exhibition,” 515.

⁸⁷ For a short biography of Robert Slingsby see Michael Pritchard, “Slingsby, Robert (d. 1895)” in *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Photography*, ed. John Hannavy (New York: Routledge, 2008): 1271-72. The editor of the *Photographic News*, H. Baden Pritchard, published an article describing Slingsby’s work and studio practice entitled “At Home. Mr. Robert Slingsby at Lincoln,” *Photographic News* 24 (July 9, 1880): 326-28.

⁸⁸ Original emphasis. Wall, “The Late Conduit-Street Photographic Exhibition,” 525.

Photography as a book in 1869. Inserting a paragraph admiring Slingsby's *Rest* and an engraved reproduction of the photograph into a chapter entitled "Truth in Landscape Photography," Robinson announced that *Rest* "could only have been produced by combination printing, a process which is attracting more attention daily from those earnest photographers who desire to give a more distinct art character to their work, and who do not care how much trouble they take to attain their end (Fig. 55)."⁸⁹ Claiming Slingsby's technique to be analogous with his own, Robinson reasserted the artistic possibilities of composite procedures by emphasizing a link between the photographer's time and trouble, and the inherent value of the resulting photograph.

By 1869, it seems to have been common knowledge that Slingsby printed his photographs from multiple negatives. At the Photographic Society display that year—widely acknowledged to include more examples of combination printing than any previous exhibition⁹⁰—Slingsby was positioned as the inheritor of the legacy established by Rejlander and Robinson. His photographs were complimented for their charm and artistic skill, even while critics rehearsed their usual response to combination prints. They pointed to technical flaws in the images, and offered the photographer advice for future printings.⁹¹ The reactions to Slingsby's photographs exemplify the contradictory responses to combination printing. While the technique was shunned as illegitimate, journals like the *Illustrated London News* complimented the "artistic knowledge" and "great ingenuity" of Slingsby's images, even going so far as to honor the photographer's composite print *Early*

⁸⁹ Robinson, *Pictorial Effect in Photography* (1869), 52.

⁹⁰ The exhibition also included an original print of *The Two Ways of Life*, now twelve years old, as an example of "the first serious attempt to introduce photography...into the inner circle of fine art." "The Photographic Exhibition," *Photographic News* 13, no. 587 (Dec. 3, 1869): 578.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

Summer with a full-page reproduction in the journal's subsequent issue (Fig. 56).⁹² The caption that accompanied this illustration repeated the conflicting responses to the procedure. After offering a "general protest" against the process, the author conceded that *Early Summer* appeared natural and unaffected, and he complimented the photographer's "manipulative skill."⁹³

Although Robert Slingsby has fallen into complete obscurity, the responses to his composite photographs offer a useful point of comparison to Robinson and Rejlander. In a biographical profile of Slingsby that appeared in the *Photographic News* in 1880, the journal's editor, H. Baden Pritchard, described Slingsby's process at length, detailing the four distinct negatives that comprised his hugely popular print *Alone*, now lost, as well as the photographer's considerable labor behind the scenes. To create the foreground of *Alone*, an image of a woman walking by herself on the beach, Slingsby required two cart-loads of stones to be added to the scene "in order to break the line of the view."⁹⁴ Time wasted or time well spent? Interpretations of composition photography pivoted on this distinction, even while they were complicated by the difficulty in knowing for certain how a print had been made.

Misinterpretations

In drawing attention to the fact that Slingsby's *Rest* was made from multiple negatives, Robinson asserted the authority of the photographer over that of the critic when it came to identifying and interpreting technical procedures. Although most writers for the

⁹² "Fine Arts. Exhibition of the Photographic Society," *Illustrated London News* 55 (Nov. 27, 1869): 546.

⁹³ "Early Summer," *Illustrated London News* 55 (Dec. 4, 1869): 570.

⁹⁴ Pritchard, "At Home. Mr. Robert Slingsby at Lincoln," 327.

photographic presses were practicing photographers themselves, handwork and other manipulations to the negative could be exceptionally challenging to parse, given that most of the physical evidence remained on the plate, immaterial and often invisible within the print itself. Often it was the photographer alone who could confirm how a print had been made.

Robinson seems to have relished calling out critics when he felt they had misread his work, and he made a point to do so on a number of occasions. He situated misinterpretations of his composite prints the theme of a retrospective of his work that was held at the Camera Club in the fall of 1889. In this text, read aloud by fellow photographer George Davison at the exhibition opening (as was standard procedure), and published in the *Photographic News* the following week, Robinson drew connections between the reception of his work in the 1860s and more recent photographs like *Carolling*. Then and now critics obstinately read his pictures for process, and they often got it wrong. Although Alfred Wall was not named explicitly, Robinson made several cracks about “overknowing” critics in this letter, and he quoted one of Wall’s reviews in its entirety to show how little Wall actually knew about photographic processes. In this republished text, twenty-five years old at the time of Robinson’s retrospective, Wall described Robinson’s 1863 photograph *Autumn* as an “impossible view,” since, according to him, it depicted the four figures on the left from four distinct points of view, resulting in four incompatible horizon lines (Fig. 57). Throughout his assessment of the photograph, Wall used distinctly technical language that communicated his keen eye for analyzing visual evidence. “Judging by the horizontal line of the landscape,” he began,

[T]he camera, when the whole or part of it was taken, stood at about level with the shoulder of the tallest figure. Judging in the same way by the figure on the stile, it

was lower when he was taken, still lower when one of the seated figures was photographed, and was yet lower when the picture of the other figure was obtained. Now, as one operator could not conveniently see, say four horizons at once, we must admit that this picture is merely an impossible view, such as no one person ever saw at one time in nature.⁹⁵

In fact, Robinson wrote with palpable satisfaction, the figural group had been taken on a single plate in one operation.⁹⁶

Although Robinson dismissed the controversy over *Carolling* in his letter, claiming that reviewers' errors of interpretation were "easily demonstrable," he demurred in actually explaining them, claiming that the incident was too recent and he preferred not to embarrass his critics. Yet by consulting the extant glass plate negatives for *Carolling*, it appears that the *Amateur Photographer* critic may not have been entirely off base. These two masked-over plates reveal that *Carolling* was produced from four separate negatives, two of which were joined to form a single plate for the middle ground of the image. One negative supplied the foreground stone and grass (location unknown); a second was employed for the two female figures (Fig. 58); and two final negatives were united to construct the middle ground of the image (Fig. 59).⁹⁷ Robinson camouflaged the seam between the parts by situating it behind the figures of the two women, although the absence of a visible join did not dissuade the *Amateur Photographer* critic from noticing discrepancies in lighting and focus between the left and right halves of the image.

Misinterpretations could go the other way as well. At least one writer had absolutely no idea that *A Holiday in the Wood* was constructed from multiple negatives. In a review

⁹⁵ Wall in "Mr. H.P. Robinson's Photographs at the Camera Club," *Photographic News* 33, no. 1623 (Oct. 11, 1889): 659. Wall's original review was published in "Practical Art-Hints: Elementary Perspective as Applied to Photographs," *British Journal of Photography* 13, no. 305 (Mar. 9, 1866): 116.

⁹⁶ Robinson in "Mr. H.P. Robinson's Photographs at the Camera Club," 658-60.

⁹⁷ One can only speculate about the sky, since no negative remains; it is possible that Robinson simulated the clouds in watercolor as suggested by the critic for the *Builder*. See fn. 5 above.

published in the *Birmingham Post* in 1861, the author complimented the vivacity of the children frolicking in the foreground, and credited the picture's "natural attitude" to the fact that it was taken "complete" using just one camera and lens.⁹⁸ Likewise, experienced critics like Alfred Wall and Jabez Hughes could be fooled by prints they believed to be sourced from a single plate. Wall concluded his diatribe against Robinson in "'Composition' versus 'Patchwork'" with an homage to Rejlander's photograph *John the Baptist*, describing it—in contrast to Robinson's piecemeal process—as "one of the most beautiful art-productions of photography" he had ever seen (Fig. 60).⁹⁹ The critic seemed unaware, the *British Journal of Photography* gleefully reported, that Rejlander's photograph of the beheaded saint must have been fabricated from more than one negative.¹⁰⁰

The potential embarrassment caused by misinterpreting composite procedures suggests that methods of making took on increased importance in the perception of photographs during the second half of the nineteenth century. As photographers and their critics sought ways to distinguish unthinking reproduction from the intellectual endeavor of making art, the legitimacy of an artist's process helped to establish the moral value of his or her work at a moment when the visual surface of a picture was not always a reliable source of meaning. It was, in fact, the illegibility and ambiguity of composite prints that encouraged critics to marshal material evidence to back up their responses. Alfred Wall

⁹⁸ "The Exhibition at Aston Hall," *Birmingham Daily Post* (May 28, 1861) in the Robinson scrapbook, National Media Museum, Bradford, UK.

⁹⁹ Wall, "'Composition' versus 'Patchwork,'" 191.

¹⁰⁰ Introducing the series of exchanges between Wall and Robinson in 1860, the editor of the *British Journal of Photography* referred to Wall's misreading of Rejlander's print as evidence that combination printing does not necessarily detract from the artistic achievement of a photograph: "[I]s it absolutely necessary that by the use of paste and scissors, artistic excellence should be destroyed? Surely not, for even our worthy censor admits its existence in an eminent degree in some of Rejlander's charming productions, especially in that beautiful one, *The Head of John the Baptist in the Charger*...need we say this was produced without preliminary decapitation, and therefore we fear that the obnoxious paste and scissors played an important part in the manipulation, yet there is no hardness of outline to offend the eye." *British Journal of Photography* 7, no. 121 (July 2, 1860): 187.

exemplified this approach when he described the experience of interpreting Robinson's photographs in 1860: "I...find hard, inelegant outlines, an absence of refinement in their execution, no very studious arrangement of light and shade...[and] a neglect of the rules of composition," the critic wrote in "Composition" versus "Patchwork."

"[B]efore I read [Robinson's] paper, I was inclined to attribute [this] to downright carelessness; but, having read it, I now perceive that he has given the scissors and paste-pot credit for qualities properly emanating from the study of art—or, in other words, followed the crowd of photographers in perseveringly or obstinately giving to their tools the credit which should have been won by their brains, and making a boast of qualities really and purely mechanical, instead of such as reside in the higher regions of the intellectual, the poetical, and the artistic.¹⁰¹

It seems it was Robinson's textual revelation that clarified for Wall the mechanical nature of what he was seeing, and what this meant for the status of Robinson's images as art.

Robinson's "On Printing Photographic Pictures from Several Negatives" proved to be so central to Wall's understanding of the work, that he appended a review of the photographer's prints published in 1860 to acknowledge the recent revelation of his process. Following Wall's assertion that there was a sense of "unreality" in one of Robinson's landscapes, an asterisk was inserted to add:

These remarks were written before the publication of Mr. Robinson's Paper on the subject of *composition* printing, in which he explains the ingenious fraud he has been practicing on the public, of manufacturing mountains, rivers, etc., out of the material at hand in "his small back yard." Photographs have been pardoned many faults on the ground of their redeeming merit—*truth*. When it is confessed that this is wanting, what contemptible shams his productions become.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Wall, "Composition' versus 'Patchwork,'" 190.

¹⁰² A.H.W. [Alfred H. Wall], "Photographic Society Exhibition," *Photographic Notes* 5 (April 15, 1860): 112. The same approach was taken in the entry on Robinson's print *Ophelia*, on the following page, in which Wall explained the deficiencies of the head as opposed to the drapery by blaming it on double printing.

As indicated by this addendum, knowing how Robinson worked encouraged Wall to link the appearance of the photograph to its mechanism, and it completely changed the ethical value of his prints, both as photographs and as art.

Rather than waning over time, comparisons between the responses to *A Holiday in the Wood* and *Carolling*, exhibited nearly thirty years apart, indicate that approaches to perceiving composite prints homogenized in the second half of the nineteenth century. As photographer and writer Andrew Pringle explained in his biographical account of Robinson published in 1890, “[p]hotographers conversant with, or at any rate aware of, [Robinson’s] methods, are apt to lose much of this charm from their knowledge of the labour and care required to produce one of these pictures. If Mr. Robinson had not been so candid regarding his methods, we doubt not that he would have found even more numerous admirers of his works.”¹⁰³ Awareness of process was not easy to shake, even while the real and continuous difficulty in perceiving composite procedures left even the most confident of viewers in doubt.

Making a “Mongrel”

Despite the continuous protests against combination printing over the second half of the nineteenth century, manipulated photography of various kinds gained adherents during this period. The Photographic Society of London registered concerns with this disturbing trend as early as 1864, calling for submissions to the annual exhibition to be restricted to “photography proper,” and awarding medals for composition only to

¹⁰³ Andrew Pringle, “Mr. H.P. Robinson,” *Sun Artists* 2 (January 1890): 13.

photographs made from a single negative.¹⁰⁴ The threat posed by official censure appears to have been somewhat disingenuous, however, given that it did not dissuade photographers from submitting such works for consideration, nor the committee from hanging them. As the *Photographic News* reported in a report of the medals, “gratuitous” retouching was evident in many photographs on display, including some of the very best pictures.¹⁰⁵ Reigning over the exhibition, Robinson’s combination print *Autumn* was installed in the usual place of honor despite being ineligible for an official award.¹⁰⁶ If Society rules were intended to dissuade photographers from manipulating their prints and negatives, the committee’s selection and display choices certainly sent mixed messages.¹⁰⁷

The ambiguous status of manipulated photography is reflected in the content of photographic journals as well. Side by side, readers of the major photography publications encountered articles that complained about the appearance of retouched photographs, practical tips for improving upon the negative with pencil or paint, and editorials advocating the employment of “manipulative tricks” to produce artistic prints.¹⁰⁸ In 1868, the year that Robinson published “Pictorial Effect in Photography” in weekly installments

¹⁰⁴ The committee recommended a “sponge test” to ensure that a photograph had not been retouched. See “Photographic Society of London. Ordinary General Meeting,” *Journal of the Photographic Society of London* 9, no. 143 (Mar. 15, 1864): 4. Medals for groups and composition were only awarded to photographs taken from a single negative, although the editor of the *Photographic News* indicated that a separate medal should be awarded for combination printing, given the difficulties and artistic ambitions of the process. See “The Medals in the Exhibition,” *Photographic News* 8, no. 306 (July 15, 1864): 337.

¹⁰⁵ “The Photographic Exhibition,” *Photographic News* 8 (June 24, 1864): 302.

¹⁰⁶ Coleman, 70. The *Photographic News* reported that “Mr. Robinson contributes this year a most charming composition of this kind, which has won from painters of very high rank the encomium of being the most perfect photographic *picture* ever produced; but an express provision is made to cut such a composition from the competition.” “The Medals in the Exhibition,” 337-8.

¹⁰⁷ “Photographic Society of London. Ordinary General Meeting,” 4.

¹⁰⁸ “The Photographic Exhibition I,” *British Journal of Photography* 35, no. 1483 (Oct. 5, 1888): 627. For defenses of manipulated photography see George Bankart, “Letter to the Editor: Art and Photography,” *Amateur Photographer* 7, no. 175 (Feb. 10, 1888): 82-84; Xanthus Smith, “Hints on Composition and Selection of Subject,” *Amateur Photographer* 5 (May 20, 1887): 236-38; W.H. Wheeler, “Artistic Photography,” *Amateur Photographer* 5 (Feb. 25, 1887): 94-96; John A. Hodges, “Negatives, and Some Suggestions Upon Their After Treatment,” *Photographic Quarterly* 3, no. 11 (April 1892): 194-204; Hector Maclean, “Camera Pictures and Their Critics,” *Photographic Quarterly* 3, no. 12 (July 1892): 289-301.

in the *Photographic News*, the journal's pages boasted numerous texts dedicated to combination printing and retouching, from articles outlining new methods of combining negatives on the plate rather than the sheet, to recipes and instructions for painting upon prints and negatives.¹⁰⁹ Some of these articles literally framed Robinson's essays, rendering the distinction between artistic intervention and artificial trickery particularly thin. Moreover, because the *Photographic News* sourced many of its articles from journals and photographic manuals produced elsewhere in Europe and the United States, one is left with the impression that manipulated photography was both routine and widely practiced during the second half of the nineteenth century.

Despite, and indeed because of, the ubiquity of experimentation in the darkroom, techniques of retouching and combination printing engendered controversy in the critical writing about photography, particularly as they intersected with expectations for art. These debates were still very much alive in 1887, the year that Robinson displayed *Carolling* at the annual Society exhibition at Pall Mall Gallery. In March of that year, a Scottish portraitist named Norman Macbeth delivered an address to the Photographic Club in which he drew connections between combination printing and retouching. Arguing that both procedures were equally illegitimate modes of interfering with the photographic medium, Macbeth asserted that contemporary photographic practice was turning the medium into a "mongrel." He entreated photographers to keep their practice "pure," by biding their time

¹⁰⁹ For combination printing see J. Eastham, "Double Printing.—Combination Negatives," *Photographic News* 12 (Feb. 7, 1868): 71; J.B. Middleton, "Combination Negatives," *Photographic News* 12 (June 12, 1868): 282; J.M. Burgess, "Portraits with Landscape Backgrounds—Double Negatives," *Photographic News* 12 (July 10, 1868): 325-26; N.O. Marquand, "A Novel Hint for Double Printing," *Photographic News* 12 (Jan. 10, 1868): 14; and Walter Woodbury, "A Simple Method of Double Printing," *Photographic News* 12 (Jan. 24, 1868): 42. On retouching see William Bell, "Mixture for Retouching Negatives," *Photographic News* 12 (July 10, 1868): 333; Dr. Vogel, "On Retouching Negatives," *Photographic News* 12 (July 31, 1868): 365-66; Dr. W. Reissig, "Remarks Upon the Retouching of Negatives," *Photographic News* 12 (September 4, 1868): 428-29; and Johannes Grasshoff, "Retouching the Negative," *Photographic News* 12 (Nov. 13, 1868): 544-45.

until an artistic composition could be captured whole on a single plate. By denying the lure of manual intervention, photographers would preserve the sanctity of their process.¹¹⁰

Macbeth's paper generated a number of lively responses from fellow photographers, which were published in the *British Journal of Photography* over the course of the month. In these texts, writers offered tweaks or correctives to Macbeth's assessment of the state of the field, revealing the struggle to define the terms of art in photography while retaining the medium's unique identity. One respondent agreed that retouching could not be tolerated, but countered that combination printing was acceptable since it relied on photographic rather than manual processes.¹¹¹ Another declared Macbeth to be a hypocrite for advocating vignetting—the process of softening or shading the periphery of an image—while he disavowed a process as analogous as retouching. The latter passage, authored by photographer Andrew Pringle, advised Macbeth to relax his standards of photographic purity, even while he perpetuated the bias himself. Pringle closed by reassuring readers that he had never engaged in retouching himself, and agreed that photographic exhibitions should limit their displays to photography proper.¹¹²

Even Henry Peach Robinson wished to distance himself from the taint of retouching. In response to the *Builder's* review of *Carolling*, in which the author suggested Robinson's print had been "touched upon" with watercolor, the photographer published a response insisting that his photograph was "absolutely free from any touching or dodging, or falsifying, even to the innocent extent of the removal of a freckle, being in this respect, I

¹¹⁰ Norman Macbeth, R.S.A., "On the Composition of the Pictorial," *British Journal of Photography* 33, no. 1400 (Mar. 4, 1887): 136-38.

¹¹¹ Edward Dunmore, "The Legitimacy of Double Printing," *British Journal of Photography* 33, no. 1402 (Mar. 18, 1887): 165. Henry E. Davis made a similar point in "Artist Photographer—A Claim for Liberty," *Photographic News* 34 no. 1683 (Dec. 5, 1890): 942.

¹¹² Andrew Pringle, "Mr. Macbeth on Legitimate Photography," *British Journal of Photography* 33, no. 1402 (March 18, 1887): 166-67.

fancy, purer than nine-tenths of the pictures exhibited.”¹¹³ While he admitted to printing *Carolling* from multiple negatives, Robinson stressed that his process was photographically and procedurally consistent: each negative had been taken at the same hour of the day and at the same time of year. Any perceived discrepancies in the lighting or shadows of the image were simply the result of the viewer’s imagination.

Debates about the standards for producing artistic photographs continued into the late 1880s and 1890s, although the subject of the conversation shifted to accommodate new questions about photographic lenses and the appropriate degree of focus for truthful-looking images.¹¹⁴ Yet matters of making and the definition of “pure” photography remained important conditions of value in these discourses. The head of the burgeoning naturalist school of photography, Peter Henry Emerson, insisted that all forms of manipulation were a “crude form of art,” and thus distinct from photography. He suggested that the creative contribution of the photographer existed in the process of mental selection alone, and relegated every other aspect of making a photograph to the realm of mechanics.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ H.P. Robinson, “Carolling,” *British Journal of Photography* 33, no. 1435 (Nov. 4, 1887): 703.

¹¹⁴ The standard example is Peter Henry Emerson’s theory of differential focus, in which a long focus lens was used to depict the main subject in sharp focus, while other areas of the image were left blurry to simulate the way the human eye sees the world. Emerson advocated this “scientifically” accurate approach in his book *Naturalistic Photography for Students of the Art* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1889).

¹¹⁵ On retouching, see P.H. Emerson, “Photography not Art,” *Photographic Quarterly* 3, no. 10 (Jan. 1892): 151-52. Emerson’s antagonistic relationship with Robinson has been well documented. See Ellen Handy, *Pictorial Effect, Naturalistic Vision: The Photographs and Theories of Henry Peach Robinson and Peter Henry Emerson* (Norfolk: Chrysler Museum, 1994). Some of this antagonism played out in the pages of the *Amateur Photographer* and the *Photographic News*, after Emerson’s *Naturalistic Photography* received a negative review by an anonymous critic that Emerson believed to be Robinson. Emerson published an angry rebuttal, which commenced a series of terse exchanges in which each photographer accused the other of being anti-naturalistic. See P.H. Emerson, “Correspondence. Dr. Emerson’s ‘Naturalistic Photography,’” *Photographic News* 33, no. 1605 (June 7, 1889): 380-82 and no. 1606, 396-7, as well as Robinson’s response, “Definition,” *Photographic News* 33, no. 1614 (Aug. 9, 1889): 513-14.

Fellow naturalist George Davison did not adhere to all of Emerson's theories, but he similarly sought to pare down photography to its essential element: the action of light alone. By eliminating everything extraneous to the photographic image—even the camera's lens—Davison and likeminded photographers believed that their medium would be released from the “stigma” of mechanism and the visible signs of manual labor.¹¹⁶ This approach is exemplified by Davison's 1890 print *An Old Farmstead* (later titled *The Onion Field*), which was made by piercing a hole in a piece of sheet metal and printing the image on rough paper to enhance the indistinct effect (Fig. 61).¹¹⁷ In his writing about art photography, Davison contrasted this method with the artificial “patchwork” of combination printing, arguing that processes of joining should only happen in the mind of the photographer.¹¹⁸ Once again, composite photography had a useful role to play in articulating the terms and boundaries of the truly artistic image.

The Art Photographer's Intervention

In the second half of the nineteenth century, interpreting a photograph, or indeed any picture, was a negotiation between what could be seen and the kind of looking that was prompted by insights into an artist's method of making. Robinson expressed frustration with the impulse to interpret his photographs in terms of their process, but he did not disavow the importance of the artist's technique. Composite prints were remarkable

¹¹⁶ Alfred Maskell outlines this position in “Artistic Focus and the Suppression of the Lens,” *Photographic Quarterly* 2, no. 5 (Oct. 1890): 17-30 and Alfred Maskell, “The Kinship of the Arts,” *Photographic Quarterly* 3, no. 10 (Jan. 1892): 164-66.

¹¹⁷ Margaret Harker, *The Linked Ring: The Secession Movement in Photography in Britain, 1892-1910* (London: Heinemann, 1979), 31.

¹¹⁸ Davison criticized combination printing in a number of articles in the late 1880s and early 1890s, including “Correspondence: Naturalistic Photography,” *British Journal of Photography* 36, no. 1534 (Sept. 27, 1889): 642 and “The Limits and Possibilities of Art Photography,” *Photographic Quarterly* 1, no. 3 (Apr. 1890): 214.

because of the way they were made, and Robinson expected viewers to take his labor-intensive procedures into account when they looked at his pictures. Indeed for Robinson, the photographer's intervention was requisite in order for the photograph to have a claim to be art at all. Writing in an American journal in 1892, he suggested that those who demanded mimetic truth from photographic images put a cap on the medium's artistic possibilities. "[A] method that will not admit of the modifications of the artist cannot be an art," Robinson maintained. "Photography gives us the means of a nearer imitation of nature than any other art, yet has the sufficient elasticity to show the directing mind, and therefore is the most perfect art of all."¹¹⁹

While the perceived visibility of composite techniques was a constant source of criticism in the press, the disputes generated by combination printing reveal a persistent fascination with making that advanced the photographer's work as a marker of artistic value. These developments presaged transformative changes in the making and meaning of art at the end of the nineteenth century, which reverberated in the realm of painting as well.

¹¹⁹ Henry P. Robinson, "Paradoxes of Art, Science, and Photography," *Wilson's Photographic Magazine* 29 (1892): 242–45, reprinted in *Photographers on Photography: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Nathan Lyons (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall in collaboration with the George Eastman House, 1966), 83–84.

CHAPTER FOUR

Before the “Photographic Eye”: Edgar Degas’s Protracted Process

In books and exhibition catalogues that survey the effect of photography on art, it is common to find a chapter dedicated to Edgar Degas. Analyses of the artist’s paintings often describe his compositional arrangements as “cropping” and “framing,” and explain the seemingly arbitrary inclusions and skewed perspective in paintings like *Place de la Concorde* as a way of translating the quotidian look of photography into a distinctly modern approach to painting (Fig. 62).¹ Degas’s own work as a photographer—albeit brief—is likewise used to substantiate claims that the artist’s way of seeing the world was essentially photographic in nature (Fig. 63).² As Eugenia Parry put it in her chapter for the 1998 exhibition catalogue *Edgar Degas, photographer*: “[t]hat Degas thought like a photographer long before he took up the camera is puzzling but essential in explaining how he taught us to see.”³

This interpretation of Degas’s pictures as owing something to the artist’s “photographic eye” developed over the course of the twentieth century, and bears little

¹ See Harvey Buchanan, “Edgar Degas and Ludovic Lepic: An Impressionist Friendship,” *Cleveland Studies in the History of Art* 2 (1997): 81; Elizabeth C. Childs, “Habits of the Eye: Degas, Photography, and Modes of Vision,” *The Artist and the Camera: Degas to Picasso*, ed. Dorothy Kosinski (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Art, 1999), 70-87; and Elizabeth Anne McCauley, “Degas and Portrait Photography” in *A.A.E. Disdéri and the Carte de Visite Portrait Photograph* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 151-72.

² Dominique de Font-Réaulx, “Painter Photographers,” *Painting and Photography 1839-1914*, trans. David Radzinowicz (Paris: Flammarion, 2012), 281.

³ Eugenia Parry, “Edgar Degas’s Photographic Theatre,” in *Edgar Degas, Photographer*, ed. Malcolm Daniel (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998), 53.

resemblance to the ways that nineteenth-century viewers interpreted his art. Indeed by the 1880s, Degas was seen to represent an *anti*-photographic approach to realist painting, one that was neither instantaneous nor reproductive, but stemmed from the artist's protracted and deeply personal practice. In this chapter I analyze the critical writing about Degas' pictures during and shortly after the Impressionist exhibitions (1874-1886) to recover the interpretations of Degas's realism as resistant to photography, and which have been obscured by the persuasiveness of the "photographic eye" model. I suggest that the years around 1880 were a watershed moment in the conceptualization of pictorial realism, as tensions within a surface-oriented conception of truth spurred art critics to dismiss direct observation and seek meaning in Degas's synthetic practice. For theorists in the 1880s, it was the act of making, both mental and material, that differentiated Degas's seemingly more personal artistic expression from mere instantaneous reproduction.

Degas is an interesting case study within the context of this dissertation, because his art rarely invited comparisons to photography during the late nineteenth century. As a result, the terms in which his pictures were described and interpreted become an important barometer for understanding how artists and art critics negotiated the values of a more "truthful" form of realism so that painting could be distinguished from photography. Even when photography appears absent from the critical discussions of Degas's work, it shaped the understanding of his paintings, and remained an implicit point of comparison for any number of writers who emphasized the artist's process.

The anti-photographic interpretation of Degas's art proved to be short-lived, as the visual qualities associated with photography—and the upwardly mobile status of the medium itself—continuously transformed the dynamic between painted and photographic

pictures during the twentieth century. In the last section of this chapter I offer a point of origin for this shift, by showing how Degas's practice as a photographer was mapped on to his painterly one by critics and memoirists who sought to substantiate the painter's modernity.

Intriguingly, despite transformations in the visual and conceptual standards for "truthful" art during this period, Degas was consistently reconstituted as a legitimate realist, whether his work was distanced from photography, or aligned with it.⁴ This accommodating quality has given Degas's art extraordinary critical longevity—so much so that the same picture could be interpreted as direct and accurate in the nineteenth century, or distorted and photographically mediated in the twentieth. Chapter Four situates the origins of this interpretive mobility in the 1870s and 80s, when the relationships between photography and painting—and conceptions of art and truth—were deeply contested and unsettled. I suggest that, well before the "photographic eye" reading of his work, the continuous critical investment in Degas's mode of realism undergirded a broader imperative to articulate and extend the viability of truthful painting.

Constructing Degas's "Photographic Eye"

In May 1960 French art critic Luce Hoctin published an article entitled "Degas photographe" (Degas photographer) in the Parisian monthly art review *L'Oeil*.⁵ Considering the small number of photographs that Degas is known to have taken himself, as well as

⁴ Douglas W. Druick and Peter Zegers note that "Degas's composition, drawing, and subject matter convinced both champions and opponents of Realism that—even more than the Impressionists—his 'bias towards modernism' firmly placed him among Realism's 'school of thinkers.'" Douglas W. Druick and Peter Zegers, "Scientific Realism: 1873-1881" in *Degas*, ed. Jean Sutherland Boggs (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1988), 203.

⁵ Luce Hoctin, "Degas photographe," *L'Oeil* 39 (May 1960): 36-43.

those in which he may have arranged or orchestrated the scene, Hoctin suggested that Degas's experience as a photographer had directly informed the compositions of his pictures. The decentered layouts in *Woman with a Vase of Flowers* and *At the Milliner's* (Figs. 64 and 65), the vertiginous perspective of *Waiting* (Fig. 66), and the looming foreground figures in *Café concert des ambassadeurs* (Fig. 67) all derived from the artist's "photographic eye," Hoctin explained.⁶ This point of view shaped the appearance of individual pictures, as well as Degas's tendency to work in series. In the sequence of images of rehearsal pictures called the *Répétitions* (Figs. 68 and 69), slight variations in point of view and the poses of the figures transformed Degas's paintings into a proto-film strip, which generated meaning over time and across multiple canvases. The author concluded that Degas's sophisticated deployment of the visual language of photography proved that he was not a "plagiarist of photographers," but rather a pioneer of the cinema.⁷

Hoctin was in good company in her perception of Degas's "photographic" qualities. Throughout the 1960s art historians in Europe and the United States explained the haphazard compositions and sense of spontaneity in Degas's paintings by comparing them to photographs. In his 1964 exhibition catalogue *The Painter and the Photograph from Delacroix to Warhol*, Van Deren Coke suggested that photography taught Degas to "compose his canvases in a new way," and implied that paintings like *At the Races in the*

⁶ Hoctin borrows this expression from Degas' friend and fellow painter Jacques-Émile Blanche. In a passage that will be discussed in the coda of this chapter, Blanche wrote in 1924: "L'œil de Degas était photographique, s'agissait-il d'enregistrer ; son cerveau corrigeait ensuite l'épreuve." See Jacques-Emile Blanche, *Manet* (Paris: Chez F. Rieder et Cie, éditeurs, 1924), 55 in Hoctin, 42. A. Hyatt Mayor utilized the expression as a title in "The Photographic Eye," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 5 (Summer 1946): 15-26.

⁷ "Ainsi, loin d'être un « plagiaire de photographes », comme l'en avait accusé de façon très injurieuse mais surtout très injuste Gustave Coquiote, on voit que Degas en serait plutôt l'inspirateur et le précurseur." Hoctin, 42.

Countryside (Fig. 70) must be based on a photograph.⁸ Two years later, German art historian Otto Stelzer positioned Degas as one of four key artists who were inspired by the technical limitations of the camera in his *Kunst und Photographie*.⁹ By the time that Aaron Scharf published *Art and Photography* at the end of the decade, Degas's debt to the camera was seen as something of a foregone conclusion. In a subsection dedicated to the artist's "photographic eye," Scharf affirmed that Degas's compositions and poses "have their source not in traditional art, nor solely in Japanese prints, nor purely in his imagination but largely in photography."¹⁰ For these authors, writing in the era of pop art when painters commonly referenced or reused photographic images, Degas's exploitation of the visual language of photography signaled that his realism was modern, progressive, and critically engaged.

This broad consensus about the photographic qualities of Degas's pictures simply did not exist in the nineteenth century, when paintings like the *At the Races* and the *Répétitions* were being made and exhibited. In the 1870s and 80s, the years that Degas was organizing and participating in the exhibitions of the Société anonyme (colloquially called the Impressionist exhibitions), his pictures were most often described as truthful and lifelike—qualities that were not seen to stem from photography.¹¹ Quite to the contrary of the twentieth-century interpretations that took hold, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century Degas was associated with a non-photographic approach to realist painting, one

⁸ Van Deren Coke, *The Painter and the Photograph from Delacroix to Warhol* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1972), 81.

⁹ Otto Stelzer, "Mehr über Degas," *Kunst und Photographie: Kontakte, Einflüsse, Wirkungen* (Munich: R. Piper & Co. Verlag, 1966), 132-37.

¹⁰ Aaron Scharf, "Degas and the Instantaneous Image," *Art and Photography* (London: Penguin Books, 1986 [orig. 1968]), 183.

¹¹ See Etienne Carjat, "L'Exposition du boulevard des Capucines," *Le Patriote français* (Apr. 27, 1874): 3 and F. de Gantès, "Courrier artistique: L'Exposition du boulevard," *La Semaine parisienne* (April 23, 1874): 63-64 in Ruth Berson, ed. *The New Painting: Impressionism 1874-1886. Documentation I* (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1996), 14, 23. As I discuss in Chapter One, a shift takes place between the 1850s and 1880s, as associations between photography and lifelike realism give way to increasing awareness of the camera's distortions of a scene.

that was rooted in the artist's personal, private, and technically experimental methods of working.

British artist and art critic Walter Sickert exemplified this point of view when he contrasted Degas to Jules Bastien-Lepage in his 1891 essay "Modern Realism in Painting." As I discuss in Chapter Two, Sickert juxtaposed "photo-realists" like Bastien-Lepage—painters who worked directly from life—with Degas and Jean-François Millet, both of whom "processed" their observations by studying a subject at length before generating a picture from memory.¹² For Sickert, it was this investment of time and intellectual labor that differentiated truthful realism from more superficial approaches, and produced pictures that were more immediate and lifelike than photographs. He emphasized the opposition between Degas's method and photography in an 1889 art review, explaining: "[a]t a time when instantaneous photography was not yet in existence, and under conditions where its use would be impossible, [Degas] has rendered complications of light and movement on shifting groups of figures with an accuracy that would seem miraculous were it not lifted by the breadth of vision of a great poet, and the inspired composition of a great dramatist, into the region of the sublime."¹³ In this grandiloquent account of the artistic potential of realism, it was precisely because Degas's process was *not* instantaneous that it conveyed truth with such conviction.¹⁴

¹² Walter Sickert, "Modern Realism in Painting" in *Jules Bastien-Lepage and His Art. A Memoir*, ed. André Theuriot (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1892), 136-37. Joseph Pennell also cited Degas as one of several artists who were not influenced by photography. See his response to Gleeson White's survey in "Is the Camera the Friend or Foe of Art?" *The Studio* I (Apr. 1893): 102.

¹³ Walter Sickert, "The New English Art Club," *New York Herald* (June 14, 1889) in Anna Gruetzner Robins, ed. *Walter Sickert: Complete Writings on Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 54.

¹⁴ For an overview of Sickert's relationship with Degas see Anna Gruetzner Robins, "Sickert and Degas: Notes on their Friendship," *The Burlington Magazine* 130 (March 1988): 225-29 and Anna Gruetzner Robins, "The Greatest Artist the World Has Ever Seen" in *Degas, Sickert and Toulouse-Lautrec: London and Paris 1870-1910*, ed. Anna Gruetzner Robins and Richard Thomson (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), 52-92.

Beyond the anachronistic aspects of linking Degas's pictures to photography (as Kirk Varnedoe has pointed out, not only do his paintings not look very much like snapshots, such images did not even exist¹⁵), twentieth-century assumptions about a "photographic" aesthetic have flattened a discourse that was far more complex and contradictory in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Between 1874 and 1886, the period when Degas was most actively showing his work at the Impressionist exhibitions, the values associated with realism underwent a substantial reevaluation as artists and art critics sought to distinguish what they saw to be genuinely truthful painting from instantaneous or reproductive picturing—modes that were all too easily aligned with photography.

In her analysis of the reception of Degas's work at the Impressionist exhibitions in *Odd Man Out: Readings of the Work and Reputation of Edgar Degas*, Carol Armstrong has described this period as more of a transformation than a reevaluation, as a "realist" understanding of Degas's art—one concerned with witnessing, resemblance, and truth-to-life—gave way to an "abstractionist" or "symbolist" account that privileged formal characteristics, fragmentation, and interiority.¹⁶ Seen through the lens of the photographic debates that occurred within as well as outside the context of the Impressionist exhibitions,

¹⁵ On the matter of Impressionist paintings looking like photographs, Kirk Varnedoe wrote: "The Impressionists' pictures have been said to look like photographs. In significant ways that merit stressing, they do not. Certainly they do not look like the photographs of their day. No amount of searching has yet produced a photograph from the 1870s or before that looks anything like Degas' *Place de la Concorde (Vicomte Lepic and his Daughters)* of 1875 or Caillebotte's *Boulevard Seen from Above of 1880*. It is extremely unlikely we will ever find such photos...If a photographer had seen the Degas or the Caillebotte composition through his lens, he would not have recorded it; and if he had inadvertently caught something like it, he would have discarded the plate as a useless accident." Kirk Varnedoe, "The Artifice of Candor: Impressionism and Photography Reconsidered," in *Perspectives on Photography: Essays in Honor of Beaumont Newhall*, ed. Peter Walch and Thomas F. Barrow (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986), 105-06. He previously explored these ideas in "The Ideology of Time: Degas and Photography," *Art in America* 68, no. 6 (June 1980): 96-110. Carol Armstrong has also pointed out that "[t]o nineteenth-century critics, Degas's fragmentation and disordering of the human body were not functions of natural, 'photographic' vision, but deliberately disruptive of coherent pictorial structure." See Carol Armstrong, *Odd Man Out: Readings of the Work and Reputation of Edgar Degas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 128.

¹⁶ Armstrong, 1-5, 18.

I suggest that these two phases of interpretation function less as distinct “poles,” as Armstrong would have it, than a reframing of related values. By situating the truth of realist painting in the artist’s intellectual and material processes—rather than the speed or accuracy of observation—proponents of artistic realism protected painting (and painters) from competition with the camera. In the era of photography, realistic art needed to be more than a matter of appearances.

Transparent Picturing and “Natural” Perspective

Photography was the last thing on the minds of critics reviewing the inaugural exhibition of the Société anonyme des artistes peintres, sculpteurs, graveurs in 1874. The “new enterprise” was organized by Degas, Camille Pissarro, Claude Monet, and Pierre-Auguste Renoir as a practical and ideological alternative to the annual Salon exhibition, and it offered participants the opportunity to present their work directly to the public without government approval and its seemingly arbitrary selection process. This newfound artistic independence, explicit in the structure of the exhibition as well as the paintings, prints, drawings, and sculptures on display, ensured that the first point of reference for most reviewers was not new technologies of reproduction, but rather the traditions and limitations of the academic system.¹⁷ As I show in Chapter Two, it was official art, with its conventional formats, shared style, and emphasis on emulation that came to be associated with photography in the late nineteenth century. Thus for critics responding to the work of

¹⁷ On the founding of the Société anonyme and its critique of the Salon see Paul Tucker, “The First Impressionist Exhibition in Context” in *The New Painting: Impressionism 1874-1886*, ed. Charles S. Moffett (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1986), 93-117. Ernest d’Hervilly described the Salon jury and administration as “ces deux grands débilants de l’art français” and emphasized “On ne saurait trop encourager cette entreprise hardie, depuis longtemps conseillée par tous les critiques et par tous les amateurs.” Ernest d’Hervilly, “L’Exposition du boulevard des Capucines,” *Le Rappel* (April 17, 1874): 2 in Berson, 23-24.

Degas and his peers, truthful realism began with a departure from what Philippe Burty described as the formulaic design and “vulgar artifices” of academic art.¹⁸

The ten small-scale paintings of ballet dancers, laundresses, and race courses that Degas selected for his Société anonyme début were not seen to be the most radical offerings in a group that included Monet, Cézanne, and Renoir. However critics recognized and appreciated the artist’s ability to apply academic standards of draftsmanship and painterly finish to new contemporary subjects. In response to paintings like *At the Races in the Countryside* and *The Dancing Class* (Figs. 70 and 71), critics admired the precision of Degas’s drawing, the accuracy of his poses, and his “scholarly” and “faithfully scrupulous” execution, language that conveyed the honesty of depicting what he could see.¹⁹ At this moment, truthfulness originated from the evidence that Degas had observed his subjects from life. In a review in the French weekly *La Semaine parisienne*, for example, the author noted Degas’s attention to banal details and admired his accurate treatment of the dancers’ physiques, “in which the goal is to produce strong legs at the expense of the rest of the body.”²⁰ The writer emphasized that it was Degas’s respect of his source material, and not any deficiencies he possessed as an artist, that guided these pictorial choices. Degas “had to

¹⁸ Ph. Burty, “The Paris Exhibitions: Les Impressionnistes,” *The Academy* [London] (May 30, 1874): 616 in Berson, 10. Even when critics did not approve of the works of art at the Impressionist exhibition—Emile Cardon, for example, asserted that “the Salon des Refusés was a Louvre in comparison to this show”—there was grudging respect for the qualities of individuality and creativity that the pictures represented. Emile Cardon, “Avant le Salon: L’Exposition des révoltés,” *La Press* (April 29, 1874): 2-3 in Tucker, 108.

¹⁹ “M. Degas a l’étrangeté et pousse quelquefois jusqu’à la bizarrerie...Mais quelle justesse dans le dessin et quelle jolie entente de la couleur !” Jules Castagnary, “Exposition du boulevard des Capucines: Les Impressionnistes,” *La Siècle* (April 29, 1874): 3 in Berson, 17. Ernest Chesneau described Degas’s drawing as “d’une façon précise, exacte, sans autre parti-pris que celui d’une fidélité scrupuleuse” in “A côté du Salon: II. Le Plein Air: Exposition du boulevard des Capucines,” *Paris-Journal* (May 7, 1874): 2 in Berson, 19. See also Burty in Berson, 10.

²⁰ “Il a pris un grand souci des habitudes de la scène, de l’éclairage factice de la rampe et des difformités ou des défauts de construction qui résultent souvent de cette profession, dont la propriété est de rendre les jambes fortes, au détriment du reste du corps.” F. de Gantès, “Courrier artistique: L’Exposition du boulevard,” *La Semaine parisienne* (April 23, 1874): 63-64 in Berson, 23.

reproduce his models a little gangly,” the reviewer explained. “[N]ature wanted it that way.”²¹

Other critics conveyed the effectiveness of Degas’s pictures by describing his scenes as if they were unfolding in real time, sometimes projecting the action forward to envision the continuity of the narrative.²² Describing an unidentified ballet subject, similar to the *Répétition d’un ballet sur la scène* (Fig. 72), Jean Prouvaire noted the dancers who “wait to make their entrance, while on stage the prima ballerina, standing on pointe, lifts one of her legs and relaxes her long thin arms before arching them in a curtsy at the sound of the final chord.”²³ Degas’s nuanced treatment of gesture enabled Prouvaire to pinpoint the exact moment in the performance, a pause just before the grand finale when the dancer was about to lower her arms. For this critic, the painting was so “incontestably true” that frequenters of the *Opéra* would sigh and smile knowingly as they passed by the picture, recognizing a sight they had witnessed many times before.²⁴

Degas’s realist strategy gained a new theoretical framework at the second Impressionist exhibition in 1876, when the artist exhibited twenty paintings and drawings in a wide range of formats and techniques. Critics poked fun at what was quickly becoming a trope of Impressionist painting: the cropped margins and irregular perspective of

²¹ “...il a du reproduire ses modèles un peu dégingandés : la nature le voulait ainsi.” De Gantés in Berson, 23.

²² Armstrong makes a similar observation about critics’ fascination with the world beyond the painting, what she terms “thresholds of ‘real life.’” Armstrong, 5.

²³ “...des figurantes...attendant le moment de leur entrée, tandis que la première danseuse, en scène, droite sur la pointe d’un pied, élève une de ses jambes, et détend ses bras maigres et longs avant de les arrondir dans la révérence de l’accord final.” This translation is provided by Howard Lay. Carol Armstrong cites the passage as an example of a typical “realist” interpretation of Degas’s work in the 1870s. She also suggests that Prouvaire may be (inadvertently) conflating multiple paintings in his description of this dance subject. Jean Prouvaire, “L’Exposition du boulevard des Capucines,” *Le Rappel* (April 20, 1874): 3 in Berson, 34-35 and Armstrong, 1, 9-10.

²⁴ “L’ensemble, vu le soir,—car le tableau de M. Degas gagne singulièrement à être éclairé d’un jour factice,—est d’une vérité incontestable, et les anciens habitués du foyer de l’Opéra, en passant devant cette toile, souriront, avec un soupir.” Prouvaire in Berson, 34-35.

pictures like the *Yellow Dancers in the Wings* (Fig. 73), in which clusters of ballerinas appeared haphazardly distributed on canvas and partially cut off from view. In his review in *Le Soleil*, Emile Porcheron portrayed the *Yellow Dancers* as a kind of visual puzzle, in which the missing legs of the dancers in the foreground miraculously reappeared in the upper left corner, peeking out from beneath the half-lowered curtain.²⁵ Degas's scene was clearly constructed, but it suggested the artist's awareness of the idiosyncrasies of seeing and perceiving in everyday life, and his compositional solutions for communicating this experience in pictorial form.

A number of writers took up the matter of composition in their reviews of the 1876 exhibition, and offered explanations for the ways that apparently haphazard layouts and arbitrary framing could actually convey the truthfulness of the depicted scene. In his well-known essay "The Impressionists and Édouard Manet," Stéphane Mallarmé situated cropped margins as more "natural" and "artistic" than the conventions of pictorial perspective promoted by the Academy. It might appear irrational to depict partial figures or fragmentary views—aspects of the scene that were properly "exterior" to the picture—but these inclusions corroborated the veracity of the scene. In real life, Mallarmé pointed out, it was impossible to segregate an object within one's field of vision, and by portraying these seemingly extraneous details artists like Degas offered the experience of seeing directly.²⁶ The author encouraged his readers to interpret the margins of the canvas as a "merely fanciful boundary" that could be "embraced at one glance" and "framed in by the

²⁵ "Ensuite vient une *Vue de coulisses* : trois ou quatre danseuses du premier plan sont coupées par le cadre au-dessus du genou ; en troisième plan, on voit une toile de fond qui ne descend pas jusqu'à terre et laisse voir les jambes et les pieds dont on regrette l'absence au premier plan." Emile Porcheron, "Promenades d'un flâneur: Les Impressionnistes," *Le Soleil* (4 Apr 1876): 2-3 in Berson, 103.

²⁶ This concept belongs to Roland Barthes, and while it is anachronistic I find it usefully characterizes the interpretations of Degas's compositional strategy in the 1870s. See Roland Barthes, "The Reality Effect" in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989): 141-48.

hands.”²⁷ Pictures like these were barely distinguishable from real life, such that the viewer, “whilst recognizing that he is before a painting, half believes he sees the mirage of some natural scene.”²⁸ Mallarmé’s ambition in this essay was nothing less than to recalibrate viewers’ expectations for the standards and communicative possibilities of pictorial rhetoric.

Edmond Duranty offered an analogous explanation of “natural” perspective in his thirty-eight page pamphlet “The New Painting: Concerning the Group of Artists Exhibiting at the Durand-Ruel Galleries,” which was published at the time of the second exhibition.²⁹ In a section that referred to Degas specifically, Duranty suggested that the artist employed cropped margins to break down the strict divisions between art and life.³⁰ “In real life views of things and people are manifested in a thousand unexpected ways,” the author explained.

Our vantage point is not always located in the center of a room whose two side walls converge toward the back wall; the lines of sight and angles of cornices do not always join with mathematical regularity and symmetry. Nor does our point of view always exclude the large expanse of ground or floor in the immediate foreground...if in turn one considers a figure, either in a room or on the street, it is not always in a straight line with two parallel objects or at an equal distance from them. It is confined on one side more than on the other by space. In a word, it is never in the

²⁷ Stéphane Mallarmé, “The Impressionists and Edouard Manet” in Moffet, 31. According to Jeanne Raunay, Degas utilized a similar pictorial device: a wooden frame with wires that when held up to a landscape allowed him to see a scene that was already framed and squared up for transfer. Richard Kendall suggests that this system was used by Degas’s traveling companion, Braquaval, and not Degas himself. Richard Kendall, “The Paintings of Saint-Valéry-sur-Somme,” *Edgar Degas: The Last Landscapes* (Columbus: Columbus Museum of Art, 2006), 34-38, 61.

²⁸ Mallarmé in Moffet, 31.

²⁹ Carol Armstrong offers an astute analysis of this text in her chapter “Duranty on Degas: A Theory of Modern Painting” in *Odd Man Out*, 73-100. Here Armstrong suggests that while Duranty emphasized the legibility of Degas’s paintings—what he called *images textuelles*—the author seems fascinated by their narrational ambiguities. On natural perspective, Douglas W. Druick and Peter Zegers argue that Duranty viewed the realism of the new painting as one of “precise observation based on solid foundations of science.” See Druick and Zegers, 198.

³⁰ Duranty delivered an annotated copy of this pamphlet to the Italian painter Diego Martelli in 1878, in which Degas’s name was appended to the sections discussed here. See Berson, 72.

center of the canvas or the center of the scene. It is not shown whole, but often appears cut off at the knee or mid-torso, or cropped lengthwise.³¹

In this description of the dislocated condition of seeing, unusual vantage points like those of Degas came closer to suggesting real life than traditional pictorial organization that aimed to control or organize the scene. The conceit of the “new” painting was to simulate the look of direct vision, even if the actual process of making such pictures required just as much mediation. It was by bringing painting into closer alignment with the experience of sight that it seemed more immediate, and therefore more truthful, than academic art.

Photography entered Duranty’s theory of realist painting, but not as an aesthetic ideal or visual source for paintings. Instead, the author presented photographic instantaneity as a way of conceptualizing the harmonious appearance of place at a given moment in time. As he explained,

Suppose, for example, that at a given moment we could take a colored photograph of an interior. We would have a perfect match, a truthful and real representation with every element sharing the same feeling. Suppose then that we waited, and when a cloud covered the sun, we immediately took another picture. We would have a result analogous to the first. It is up to observation to compensate for these instantaneous means of execution that we do not possess, and to preserve intact the memory of the images they would have rendered. But what if we were to take some details from the first photograph and combine them with some of the detail from the second, and create a painting? Then homogeneity, harmony, and the truth of the impression will have disappeared and have been replaced by a false and inexpressive note. Every day, however, that is what painters do who do not look but instead rely on ready-made formulae provided by paintings already done.³²

Duranty’s passage offered photography as a model for the artist’s observation and memory.

By capturing the look of a scene at a specific time, painters could—in theory—make

³¹ Louis Emile Edmond Duranty, “The New Painting: Concerning the Group of Artists Exhibiting at the Durand-Ruel Galleries” in Moffet, 45. John Rewald cites a passage from one of the artist’s notebooks, in which he jotted down the following observation: “Never yet have monuments or houses been done from below, from close to, as one sees them passing by in the street.” Rewald also notes that Degas drew objects while he moved around, above, or below them to explore different points of view. See John Rewald, “The Realism of Degas,” *Magazine of Art* 39, no. 1 (January 1946): 15.

³² Duranty in Moffet, 44.

temporally unified and “truthful” images. By reading Duranty’s text in this way, I offer a slightly different interpretation of the passage from that of Hollis Clayson, who understands the author to mean that “painting that imitates a rapidly-exposed (imaginary) color photograph would be ideal.”³³ For Duranty, it was not the look of a photograph, but the seemingly direct and unified visual experience it provided that appealed to the author’s artistic sensibilities. By seizing the look of a place at a given moment in time, painters like Degas provided an alternative to academic artists who did not “look,” Durnaty complained, but instead replicated images and conventions they had seen elsewhere. To characterize the blatant artifice of this way of working, the author related it to composite photography. Like a print made from multiple disparate negatives, the process of combining individual fragments in painting could never be assimilated into a convincing visual whole.

Debating Truthful Methods

Duranty’s and Mallarmé’s interpretations of “natural” perspective were shared by a faction of critics who defined truthful painting in terms of the absence of pictorial conventions. Marius Chaumelin, for example, suggested that Degas’s *Portraits in an Office (New Orleans)* was directly reproduced from nature such that it lacked pictorial composition altogether (Fig. 74). “On the matter of composition there’s nothing to say,” Chaumelin wrote, “since it’s just figures not posing: they are grouped, or rather dispersed,

³³ See Hollis Clayson, “A Failed Attempt” in Moffett, 148. In his recent analysis of this passage, Michael Marrinan dismisses the specific resonance of photography here, writing that “a picture passes [Duranty’s] reality test when it exhibits a uniformity of feeling and experience, regardless of how it is achieved.” See Michael Marrinan, *Gustave Caillebotte: Painting the Paris of Naturalism, 1872-1887* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2016), 72.

absolutely as you would see them in real life in a store on the rue du Sentier.”³⁴ At the same time, however, critics recognized a range of styles and methods that painters employed to suggest directness of observation or experience, making it clear that the artist was very much mediating the depiction. Given that pictorial realism could take any number of forms, by what visual standard could painting substantiate its claims for representational truth?

American art critic Henry James Jr. pointed out the inherent contradictions in painterly realism in his tongue-in-cheek review of the 1876 exhibition. James drew a comparison between the French Impressionists and the English Pre-Raphaelites, both of whom claimed to be “partisans of unadorned reality and absolute foes to arrangement, embellishment, [and] selection,” despite making stylistically disparate pictures. The Pre-Raphaelites translated the visible world through “exquisite, patient, virtuous manipulation,” James wrote, and emphasized their work ethic “by being above all things laborious.” In contrast, the French “abjure virtue altogether, and declare that a subject which has been crudely chosen shall be loosely treated.” Both groups maintained that the “painter’s proper field is simply the actual,” without elaboration or interpretation, yet this dictate could be approached in startlingly diverse ways. Ultimately James found fault with both methods, labeling the English “pedants” and the French “cynics,” but his flippant

³⁴ “De la composition, il n’y a rien à dire, si ce n’est que les figures ne posent pas : elles sont groupées, ou plutôt dispersées, absolument comme vous pourriez les voir dans un magasin de vente en gros, rue du Sentier.” Marius Chaumelin, “Actualités: L’Exposition des intransigeants,” *La Gazette des étrangers* (Apr. 8, 1876): 1-2 in Berson, 68. Arthur Baignères made a similar point in *L’Echo universel*, explaining that Degas and his peers aimed to make pictures that looked as though the artist had reflexively recorded the scene. “Il ne faut pas avoir l’air de composer ; le peintre est passif, ne l’oublions pas.” Arthur Baignères, “Exposition de peinture par un groupe d’artistes, rue Le Peletier, II,” *L’Echo universel* (Apr. 13, 1876): 3 in Berson, 55.

critique of avant-garde painting practices articulated genuine uncertainties about a realist aesthetic, and what it communicated about the artist's labor that produced it.³⁵

Analogous debates about method emerged in the responses to Degas's paintings and drawings at the 1876 Impressionist exhibition, as critics registered two distinct technical modes in the pictures on view. On the one hand, there was the large-scale, meticulously finished *Portraits in an Office (New Orleans)*, with its individuated (and identifiable) figures and conspicuous perspectival recession. For some reviewers, it was this careful rendering of space and the figures within it that communicated the reality of the scene and Degas's skill in translating it. Pierre Dax described *Portraits in an Office* as nothing short of astonishing in his review in *L'Artiste*, in which the author detailed the stifling atmosphere of the office and the particularly persuasive poses that Degas employed for the principle figures.³⁶ Marius Chaumelin likewise insisted that no painting of an interior exhibited at the Salon evidenced such achievement in technique. "Academicians might laugh at it," Chaumelin admitted, referencing the painting's unconventional perspective, "but it doesn't offend those who like accurate and frankly modern painting, and who think that the expression of life and finesse of execution should count for something."³⁷ For these critics, truthful realism required a certain degree of painterly finish.

³⁵ Henry James, Jr. "Parisian Festivity: Letter from Henry James, Jr...Cynical Artists," *New-York Daily Tribune* (May 13, 1876): 2 in Berson, 86. A similar comparison was made by Marion Hepworth Dixon fifteen years later. In an 1892 article in *Art Journal*, Dixon compared the Pre-Raphaelites to the "school of Bastien-Lepage," arguing that each group sought a more direct realism by refusing to "focus" on a central object and subordinate the rest of the composition to it. See Marion Hepworth Dixon, "Recent Fashions in French Art 1," *Art Journal* 54 (1892): 326-30.

³⁶ "Son tableau des *Cotonniers* est très-étonnant. On y sent circuler l'atmosphère étouffante du bureau. Et son ensemble résume toute la civilisation américaine. Le vieux monsieur examinant le coton, au premier plan l'employé penché sur les livres, le jeune homme accoudé près de la caisse sont très-remarquables d'attitude." Pierre Dax, "Chronique," *L'Artiste* (May 1, 1876): 347-49 in Berson, 70.

³⁷ "Je ne crois pas que le Salon de 1876 nous offre beaucoup d'intérieurs aussi remarquablement peints que le tableau de M. Degas, intitulé : *Portraits dans un bureau, à la Nouvelle-Orléans*...Le personnage principal...vit. Son attitude est d'une vérité qui fait illusion...Les académiciens pourront en rire ; mais il ne déplaira pas aux

For others, however, *Portraits in an Office* was an outlier within an exhibition that touted its anti-conventionality.³⁸ “If one judged M. Degas only by [*Portraits in an Office*] you’d be astonished to find him amongst this company,” Arthur Baignères wrote in *L’Echo universel*. “But with his paintings of dancers and ironers he holds his own with the Impressionists.”³⁹ According to Baignères it was not *Portraits in an Office* but rather *Woman Ironing* (Fig. 75) that revealed Degas’s achievement as a realist. Though the painter treated form in a cursory manner, his lively brushwork conveyed movement and life with palpable immediacy. “How, in effect, has a man who has articulated nothing, modeled nothing, who mixes everything together in a vague whiteness, been able to depict an arm with indications of bones and muscles?” Baignères asked with admiration. “One could call it a miracle.”⁴⁰ Not everyone was impressed with Degas’s loose brushwork: Chaumelin felt that Degas’s arbitrary mixture of browns and grays made the laundry look “dirty,” while a writer for the *Journal amusant* likened the scene to a rock covered in snow or a forest blanketed with stalactites.⁴¹ Yet these “sketches thrown on canvas” conveyed Degas’s spirited engagement with his subjects, and were seen by many critics as expressing the

gens qui aiment la peinture exacte et franchement moderne, qui pensent que l’expression de la vie et la finesse de l’exécution doivent être comptées pour quelques chose.” Chaumelin in Berson, 68.

³⁸ A. De. L. “L’Exposition de la rue Le Peletier,” *La Chronique des arts et de la curiosité* (Apr. 1, 1876): 119-20 in Berson, 86-87.

³⁹ “Si on ne jugeait M. Degas que d’après cette toile, on s’étonnerait fort de le voir en pareille compagnie, mais, avec ses tableaux de danseuses et de repasseuses, il tient son rang au milieu des impressionnistes.” Arthur Baignères, “Exposition de peinture par un groupe d’artistes, rue Le Peletier, II,” *L’Echo universel* (Apr. 13, 1876): 3 in Berson, 54.

⁴⁰ “Comment, en effet, un homme qui n’a rien écrit, rien modelé, qui mêle tout dans une vague blancheur, a-t-il pu faire un bras avec des indications d’os et de muscles ? On peut crier au miracle.” Baignères in Berson, 54-55.

⁴¹ Chaumelin in Berson, 68 and Louis Leroy, “Choses et autres,” *Le Journal amusant* (Apr. 15, 1876): 3, 6-7 in Berson, 88.

qualities of life far more vividly than the painstaking precision of *Portraits in an Office*.⁴² Finish, for these reviewers, stifled the communicative potential of paint itself.

Émile Zola positioned this binary within Degas's painting practice as the fundamental paradox of realism. While the loosely handled and simplified forms in *Women Ironing* were "striking in their artistic truth," they could not claim to be complete works of art.⁴³ But when Degas did finish a picture, all the liveliness and energy of his handling drained away. *Portraits in an Office* was banal and boring, Zola grumbled, something "halfway between a seascape and a plate from an illustrated journal." Degas's gift was his sensitive perception—this is why the artist excelled at sketching—but he consistently struggled to develop the originality of his vision into worthy material form. As Zola put it, "I fear his brush will never become a creator."⁴⁴

Zola did not explicitly connect the banal and illustrative qualities of Degas's *Portraits in an Office* to photography, but the association could not have been far from his mind. In the immediately preceding paragraph, the author complained about the mimetic qualities of paintings exhibited by Degas's realist colleague, Gustave Caillebotte, and compared them to photographic reproduction. Caillebotte's large-scale, highly-finished scenes of domestic life and labor, such as the *Floor Scrapers* (Fig. 76) and *Young Man by the Window* (Fig. 77), appeared painstakingly copied from life, Zola wrote. The artist's meticulous paint handling

⁴² Ph. Burty, "Fine Art: The Exhibition of the 'Intransigeants,'" *The Academy* [London] (Apr. 15, 1876): 363-64; see also Emile Blémont, "Les Impressionistes," *Le Rappel* (Apr. 9, 1876): 2-3 in Berson, 63; and E.F. "Le Groupe d'artistes de la rue Le Peletier," *Moniteur des arts* (Apr. 21, 1876): 1-2 in Berson, 83.

⁴³ "Ses *Blanchisseuses* sont surtout frappantes par leur vérité artistique : je parle non de la vérité banale, mais de cette grande et belle vérité de l'art qui simplifie et élargit tout." Emile Zola, "Deux Expositions d'art au mois de mai," *Le Messager de L'Europe* [St. Petersburg, in Russian] reprinted in *Le Bon Combat. De Courbet aux impressionistes. Anthologie d'écrits sur l'art*, Gaëton Picon. Paris: Collection Savoir/Hermann, 1974: 182-86 in Berson, 112-13.

⁴⁴ "Ses meilleurs tableaux sont des esquisses. En parachevant, son dessin devient flou and lamentable ; il peint des tableaux comme ses *Portraits dans un bureau (Nouvelle-Orleans)*, à mi-chemin entre une marine et le polytype d'un journal illustré. Ses aperçus artistiques sont excellents, mais j'ai peur que son pinceau ne devienne jamais créateur." Zola in Berson, 113.

and particularizing details did little to convey any freshness of vision. Caillebotte was adept at conveying three-dimensional form, the French critic conceded, but his painterly technique lacked evidence of personal interpretation entirely. This is “completely anti-artistic painting, painting clear as glass, bourgeois in its exactitude,” Zola underscored, concluding that “the photography of reality, when it is not heightened by the original imprint of artistic talent, is a pitiful thing.”⁴⁵ Without evidence of the painter’s intervention in the representation—that is, visibly expressive brushwork—painted pictures functioned as little more than photographs.

Comparisons to Caillebotte

Zola’s characterization of Caillebotte’s painting practice was the first flicker of what would become a widespread tendency to interpret this artist in relation to photography in the late 1870s and early 80s.⁴⁶ In contrast to Jules Bastien-Lepage, however, for whom such critiques consistently targeted the artist’s technique, writers did not employ photography uniformly in their descriptions of Caillebotte’s work. In some instances, the medium was cited to articulate the reproductive aspects of Caillebotte’s finish, as in Zola’s review in *Le*

⁴⁵ “...c’est une peinture tout à fait anti-artistique, une peinture claire comme le verre, bourgeoise, à force d’exactitude. La photographie de la réalité, lorsqu’elle n’est pas rehaussée par l’empreinte originale du talent artistique, est une chose pitoyable.” Zola in Berson, 112. In a variation of this article that appeared in *Le Sémaphore de Marseille* in the April 30-May 1 issue, Zola used the word *décalque* (transfer) instead of *photographie*. According to Ruth Berson, the version of the article using *photographie* originally appeared in Russian, and while it is unclear when it was translated into French, the word “photography” is being used to express the idea of reproduction, and thus serves as a synonym for “tracing.” See Berson, 108, 111-12. Michael Marrinan suggests that Zola meant to characterize Caillebotte’s facture in terms of the “mechanical clarity of a photograph” and an overarching interest in documentary detail, an approach he distinguishes from Degas’s fascination with photographic instantaneity. Marrinan, 59, 72.

⁴⁶ Zola’s review of the 1876 Impressionist exhibition was not the first time the author had described painting in terms of photography. As I discuss in Chapter Two, Zola’s Salon review of 1866 asserted that without evidence of the artist’s temperament, “all paintings must necessarily be simple photographs,” a binary between art and reproduction that was pervasive in art criticism in the late nineteenth century. “...si le tempérament n’existait pas, tous les tableaux devraient être forcément de simples photographies.” Zola, “Mon Salon (1866),” *Le Bon Combat*, 62.

Messenger de L'Europe. In others, it characterized the artist's haphazard and seemingly arbitrary approach to compositional layout. In still others, he was criticized for perspectival distortions that invited a comparison to photographic lenses, even if the point was to contrast the painter's idiosyncratic depiction of depth with the automatic image produced by a camera. Together, this rich array of references in the years around 1880 suggests that this is a key moment in the theorization of pictorial realism, as writers struggled to define and distinguish the qualities associated with painterly and photographic practices and aesthetics.

The reception of Caillebotte's paintings also offers important context for readings of Degas's art at the same moment. A comparison between the critical responses to each artist's work highlights the absence of photographic analogies that were directed at Degas at this moment, even during a period of heightened awareness of photography's relationship to painting. Seen in tandem with Caillebotte, reviews of Degas's pictures provide a way of understanding the shift in language and interpretive strategies of realist painting in the late 1870s and early 80s. If Caillebotte practiced a form of realism that invited instinctive associations with photography, Degas's supporters were keen to demonstrate that his art offered something different, by encouraging awareness of the painter's pictorial practice.

In hindsight, Zola's critique of Caillebotte's painting in 1876 was something of an outlier amongst reviews of the second Impressionist exhibition, though it proved to be prescient. That year, Caillebotte's debut with the Impressionists, critics largely responded with enthusiasm to the artist's work, interpreting his technique as similar—and even

superior—to that of Degas.⁴⁷ Émile Blémont, for example, described Caillebotte’s *Floor Scrapers*, *Young Man at the Window*, and *Young Man Playing the Piano* (Fig. 78) in terms of their “striking modernity,” which he found to be “astonishing in truthfulness, life, and simple and direct intimacy.”⁴⁸ In comparison, Degas’s *Yellow Dancers* and *Women Ironing* were “excellent *exquisses*,” but Blémont, like Zola, felt that the artist had not yet produced a “really finished picture.”⁴⁹ Even when writers expressed aversion to the bodies of Caillebotte’s unidealized workers, this representational approach was seen to be integral to the artist’s realist strategy, and what qualified him to exhibit with the Impressionists.⁵⁰

These widespread affirmations of Caillebotte’s art underwent a stark reversal the following year, when the artist exhibited his two ambitious cityscapes, *Paris Street, Rainy Day* (Fig. 79) and *Pont de l’Europe* (Fig. 80), at the 1877 Impressionist exhibition. Rather than seeing Caillebotte’s pictures as truthful and lifelike, now reviewers found them to be uniformly gray, monotonous, and tedious to behold—more like the work of an engineer than an artist.⁵¹ Foreshadowing complaints that would be directed at Bastien-Lepage a few

⁴⁷ Pierre Dax suggested that Caillebotte was a student of Degas. See Dax in Berson, 70.

⁴⁸ “Son « Jeune homme à la fenêtre », son « Jeune homme jouant du piano », ses « Raboteurs de parquet » sont d’une modernité frappante, et contiennent des parties fermement modelées. C’est étonnant de vérité, de vie, d’intimité simple et franche.” Blémont in Berson, 63. See also Simon Boubée, “Beaux-Arts: Exposition des impressionnistes, chez Durand-Ruel,” *Gazette de France* (Apr. 5, 1876): 2 in Berson, 64 and [Anon.], “L’Exposition des intransigeants,” *L’Audience* (Apr. 9, 1876): 3 in Berson, 53.

⁴⁹ “Ses Repasseuses ne sont pas inférieures à ses Danseuses. Mais si nous rencontrons là d’excellentes esquisses, nous n’avons pas vu un tableau vraiment fini de Degas, dont l’envoi du reste est encore incomplet.” Blémont in Berson, 63.

⁵⁰ “Je regrette seulement que l’artiste n’ait pas mieux choisi ses types, ou que, du moment où il acceptait ce que la réalité lui offrait, il ne se soit pas attribué le droit contre lequel je puis l’assurer que personne n’eût protesté, de les interpréter plus largement.” Louis Enault, “Mouvement artistique: L’Exposition des intransigeants dans la galerie de Durand-Ruelle [sic],” *Le Constitutionnel* (Apr. 10, 1876): 2 in Berson, 81-82. See also Ph. Burty, “Fine Art: The Exhibition of the ‘Intransigeants,’” *The Academy* [London] (Apr. 15, 1876): 363-64 in Berson, 65.

⁵¹ Roger Ballu described the umbrellas in *Paris Street, Rainy Day* as of “une teinte uniformément argentée” while the rest of the painter’s pictures were “froides, grises, monotones ! L’éclat manque partout ; la teinte générale de cette peinture est celle de l’ardoise.” Roger Ballu, “L’Exposition des peintres impressionnistes,” *La Chronique des arts et de la curiosité* (Apr. 14, 1877): 147-48 in Berson, 125. In an otherwise positive review, the critic for *La Press* noted that “Le plus grand tort de M. Caillebotte est que ses

years later, critics grumbled about Caillebotte's emphasis on insignificant details, noting that every paving stone could be "counted, measured, and studied," and characterizing his pictures as more "trompe l'oeil than impression."⁵² Caillebotte's methodical elaboration of the surface was combined with a seemingly haphazard compositional layout, an approach that only reinforced the perception that his paintings were unthinking and superficial. Pointing to the street lamp that awkwardly bisects *Paris Street, Rainy Day* and the gentleman in the right corner who is vertically cropped down the middle, Paul Sébillot characterized Caillebotte's method as "disdain for composition." This technique might titillate the eye, the author acquiesced, but it failed to stir the senses. "It gives the idea of what photography will be when the means have been found to reproduce it in color with all its intensity and delicacy," Sébillot concluded. Degas, by comparison, was a "true artist," one whose paintings were "imperfect," but conveyed the confidence and knowledge of a master.⁵³

tableaux se ressemblent trop et que sa palette accuse une sécheresse et une monotonie fâcheuse." L.G., "Le Salon des 'impressionnistes,'" *La Presse* (Apr. 6, 1877): 2 in Berson, 147. See also Ernest Fillonneau, "Les Impressionnistes," *Moniteur des arts* (Apr. 20, 1877): 1 in Berson 145-46, and Paul Mantz, "L'Exposition des peintres impressionnistes," *Le Temps* (Apr. 22, 1877): 3 in Berson 166-67.

⁵² "Chaque pavé se détache avec une précision inouïe. On peut les compter, les mesurer, les étudier en géologue, en chimiste, en géomètre et en paveur. Du premier coup, le défaut, le vice plutôt de l'impressionnisme, nous saute aux yeux. C'est l'exagération du détail, c'est le soin, le toucher, la lumière, le talent de l'artiste concentrés sur les objets secondaires, c'est l'œil du spectateur tiraillé en tous les sens par les choses de seconde importance et de troisième plan traitées et mises en avant comme les masses principales et les points capitaux de la composition. Le talent de l'artiste et l'attention du spectateur s'éparpillent également dans cette diffusion." E. Lepelletier, "Les Impressionnistes," *Le Radical* (Apr. 8, 1877): 2-3 in Berson, 158-59. "Revenons à la place de l'Europe, qui a fourni à M. Caillebotte le motif d'un tableau important auquel ce travail d'ingénieur donne un aspect peu pittoresque. Tout le monde remarquera aussi un autre ouvrage de grande dimension,—plutôt un trompe l'œil qu'une impression,—qui représente une rue de Paris par un temps de pluie..." Ernest Fillonneau, "Les Impressionnistes," *Moniteur des arts* (Apr. 20, 1877): 1 in Berson 146.

⁵³ "[P]ourquoi ce réverbère qui étale juste au milieu du tableau sa désagréable perpendiculaire ? pourquoi ce monsieur en gâteuse coupé juste par le milieu du corps par le cadre ? Avec ce dédain de la composition et de la mise en toile, ce tableau, malgré d'incontestables qualités, étonne et n'émeut pas ; cela donne l'idée de ce que sera la photographie quand on aura trouvé le moyen de reproduire les couleurs avec leur intensité et leur finesse." Paul Sébillot, "Exposition des impressionnistes," *Le Bien public* (Apr. 7, 1877): 2 in Berson, 190.

Mario Proth offered a similar triangulation between Caillebotte, Degas, and photography that reinforced the differences between the two painters. While Degas had the “temperament of an artist,” Proth felt that Caillebotte was indistinguishable from the rest of the Impressionists who cropped the margins of their canvases and indiscriminately sliced their figures in two. “That’s all it takes for M. Caillebotte’s elaborations to look like instantaneous photographs,” the critic wrote dismissively, “or like chromolithographs that pretend, rather skillfully, to be paintings.”⁵⁴ Proth did not offer an account of the other qualities that linked Caillebotte’s paintings to reproductive prints, but the offhand nature of his remark suggests that the opinion was familiar and broadly shared. For both Proth and Sébillot, it was the uniformity, undifferentiated detail, and look of arbitrary framing in Caillebotte’s paintings that linked them to photography, but these flaws were blamed—like those of Bastien-Lepage—on the artist’s way of working. Caillebotte’s practice was unthinking and reproductive, in this interpretation. All hand, without heart or mind. Despite its imposing size, *Paris Street, Rainy Day* evidenced a mechanical mode of picturing that had more in common with a photograph or commercial printed imagery than a painted work of art.

In *Realism in the Age of Impressionism: Painting and the Politics of Time*, Marnin Young draws attention to the frequency with which Caillebotte was compared to photography in the late 1870s, and concludes, on the basis of Zola’s review, that the artist’s “bourgeois exactitude and lack of overt artistic stylization made his painting equivalent to a

⁵⁴ “Il ne manquait plus que cela aux élaborations de M. Caillebotte, pour les faire ressembler à des photographies instantanées, à des photochromies jouant assez adroitement la peinture.” Mario Proth, *Voyage au Pays des Peintres. Salon de 1877* (Paris: Henri Vaton, 1877), 8. I would like to thank Howard Lay for providing this translation.

photographic document.”⁵⁵ To corroborate this interpretation, Young cites an 1878 review of the Exposition universelle written by the Belgian art critic Camille Lemonnier, in which Lemonnier characterizes Caillebotte’s paintings as “unretouched photographs.”⁵⁶ In the longer text from which Lemonnier’s quotation derives, however, the Belgian critic employed photography in a much less literal way to describe the precision of Caillebotte’s pictures. Writing in the Belgian periodical *L’Artiste*, Lemonnier described Caillebotte (along with fellow realist Jean-Louis Forain) as possessing “a subtle and very modern method of communication (*télégraphie*), since [their pictures] are life taken in the moment.” He continued by explaining:

One sees there, in addition to surprising oversights, a gift for feeling which grows weary at times in its search for the extreme and acute side of sensation, to the point of being irritating, biting qualities of photography before retouching, intimacies excessively excavated, a notation scribbled more than engraved, but very truthful of the nervous life manifested externally by *gestures of intention*.⁵⁷

In this passage, “biting accents of photography before retouching” do not describe the appearance of Caillebotte’s paintings per se, but rather the artist’s precise expression of sentiment, which acts on the viewer in “extreme” and almost “irritating” ways. Caillebotte’s paintings sting the viewer’s emotional sensibilities the way that unretouched photographs “bite” the eye. In this positivist account of painterly realism, Caillebotte’s paintings are seen to be effective precisely because they do not operate solely on the surface. For Lemonnier,

⁵⁵ Marnin Young, *Realism in the Age of Impressionism: Painting and the Politics of Time* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 78.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ “[MM. Caillebotte et Forain] ont une télégraphie subtile et très moderne puisque c’est la vie prise sur le fait qui la donne. On eût vu, à côté de surprenantes ignorances, un don de sentir qui se fatigue par moments à chercher le côté extrême et aigu de la sensation au point de paraître irritant, des accents mordants de la photographie avant les retouches, des intimités excessivement fouillées, une notation griffonnée plutôt que burinée, mais très véridique de la vie nerveuse manifestée au-dehors par des *gestes d’intention*.” Camille Lemonnier, “L’Art à l’Exposition universelle. Ceux qui n’exposent pas,” *L’Artiste* (Aug. 31, 1878): 266-67 in Denys Riout, ed. *Les Écrivains devant L’Impressionisme* (Paris: Macula, 1989): 205.

the artist successfully negotiated the relationship between inside and outside by employing “gestures of intention” to convey deeper truths about his subjects. Photography offered a convenient visual analogy for the analytic process of making and perceiving paintings.

Rather than contrasting Caillebotte and Degas, like many of his peers, Lemonnier aligned the two artists on the basis of their shared fascination with gesture and the ways that it could communicate emotional states or personality traits. The author began by characterizing Degas’s work in terms of its nuance and perceptiveness, writing that “[t]he oddities of certain evolutions of the human form have been noted by him with photographic accuracy.” He continued by defining these qualities in terms of expressive, visual characteristics: “[Degas] possesses a particular sixth sense,” Lemonnier explained, “which allows him to identify unconscious attitudes that appear by chance through the operations of the body or the ideas that direct the spirit.” In this assessment, Degas’s intuitive navigation between external appearance and abstract ideas was his particular strength as an artist. “The gestures that he lends his figures have the feeling of continuing interior thoughts,” Lemonnier wrote, while “[a]t other times they are the beginning of an action that is not yet indicated but which one feels beginning to dawn.” The critic termed this approach the “stenography of humanity,” a method that enabled Degas to simplify his forms while translating emotions and perceptions with the exactitude of a camera.⁵⁸

These two distinct ways of comparing paintings and painters to photography were joined by a third in the early 1880s, when critics began to employ photographic images as a

⁵⁸ “Degas est un curieux des intimités profondes. La bizarrerie de certaines évolutions de la forme humaine a été notée par lui avec une rectitude photographique. Il possède un sixième sens particulier qui lui fait trouver des attitudes inconscientes, venues au hasard de la fonction qu’opère le corps ou de l’idée qui maîtrise l’esprit. Les gestes qu’il prête à ses figures ont l’air de continuer une pensée intérieure. D’autres fois, ils sont le commencement d’une action qui n’est pas indiquée mais qu’on voit poindre sourdement. C’est une sténographie de l’humanité, avec des procédés simplifiés, assez complets toutefois pour indiquer le permanent à travers le transitoire.” Lemonnier in Riout, 205.

corrective for Caillebotte's unorthodox perspectival conceits.⁵⁹ Reviewers had been suspicious about Caillebotte's representation of depth and foreshortening since his debut in 1876, when *Young Man Playing the Piano* raised eyebrows for its "bird's-eye perspective" and imbalanced piano which appeared poised to topple over on the innocent musician.⁶⁰ But while in 1876 this strategy was folded in to a positive assessment of Caillebotte and his "intransigence," a quality that justified his inclusion amongst the Impressionists, critics in 1880 seemed to have lost patience with the approach.⁶¹ Responding to *Interior: Woman Reading* (Fig. 81), Charles Ephrussi suggested that Caillebotte had thrown out the art historical rule book altogether. *Interior: Woman Reading* utilized a radical juxtaposition of scale that made the female figure appear to dwarf her companion. Caillebotte had forgotten the meaning of perspective altogether, Ephrussi complained, writing that "successive planes do not exist for him" and "distances are suppressed."⁶² It was not just the conventions of painting that the artist disregarded, but any respect for reality as well. Paul

⁵⁹ For a representative example of this criticism see Aug. Dallery, "L'Exposition de la rue des Pyramides," *Le Journal des arts* (Apr. 16, 1880): 1 in Berson, 274.

⁶⁰ "Une des missions que l'impressionnisme semble s'être imposée, c'est de martyriser la perspective...Un monsieur touche du piano sur un Erard vu à vol d'oiseau, mais l'un des pieds de l'instrument manque et l'empêche d'être d'aplomb." Emile Porcheron, "Promenades d'un flâneur: Les Impressionnistes," *Le Soleil* (Apr. 4, 1876): 2-3 in Berson, 103. "Le jeune homme jouant du piano m'inspire des craintes sérieuses. Cet élève de Marmontel est assis devant un magnifique Erard de grandes dimensions, mais, soit que ce beau meuble en palissandre ne soit pas suffisamment calé, soit que les lois de la perspective auxquelles j'ai hâte de le dire, M. Caillebotte se montre ordinairement plus fidèle, n'aient pas été aussi strictement observées, l'instrument de musique menace de devenir un instrument de torture ; on craint à chaque instant de le voir tomber sur ce bon jeune homme, qui va être infailliblement écrasé. Il ne faut pas faire aux gens de ces peurs-là !" Louis Enault, "Mouvement artistique: L'Exposition des intransigeants dans la galerie de Durand-Ruelle [sic]," *Le Constitutionnel* (Apr. 10, 1876): 2 in Berson, 81-82.

⁶¹ "M. Caillebotte, si remarquable par son profond mépris de la perspective, saurait très-bien, s'il le voulait, faire de la perspective comme le premier venu. Mais son originalité y perdrait." Bertall, "Exposition des impressionnistes [sic], rue Lepeletier," *Paris-Journal* (Apr.15, 1876): 1-2 in Berson, 58. "Toute l'intransigeance de M. Caillebotte consiste à voir les scènes qu'il représente sous une perspective bizarre; comme peintre et comme dessinateur, il rentre sans vergogne dans les rangs des conservateurs de la bonne école, celle du savoir, où il recevra certainement le meilleur accueil." A. De. L. "L'Exposition de la rue Le Peletier," *La Chronique des arts et de la curiosité* (Apr. 1, 1876): 119-20 in Berson, 86-87

⁶² "M. Caillebotte, en outre, oublie volontiers que Vitruve, Piero della Francesca, Léonard, Albert [sic] Dürer et autres ont fixé les lois de la perspective ; les plans successifs n'existent pas pour lui ; les distances sont supprimées." Charles Ephrussi, "Exposition des artistes indépendants," *Gazette des beaux-arts* (May 1, 1880): 485-88 in Berson, 278.

Mantz described Caillebotte as a fantasist who showed his “disdain for quotidian realities by the truly courageous fashion with which he forgets the recession and relative distance of planes.” Divorce was inevitable for the couple in *Interior: Woman Reading*, the author joked, since the enormous woman could not possibly find happiness with the tiny, doll-like man behind her.⁶³

Eugène Véron proposed an alternative reading of the painting, suggesting that Caillebotte was not willfully ignorant but instead operated with strict fidelity to what he could see. “Obviously when he made his picture the narrowness of the space forced him to be too close to the woman, and he did not want to correct the distortion that truth imposed on him,” Véron offered, pointing out that a “willow leaf can conceal the world if you bring it sufficiently close to your eye.”⁶⁴ For others, such explanations were not particularly convincing, given that the man was not even in proportion with the cushions on which he was propped. “Perspective is neither pure convention nor purely objective,” Henry Trianon asserted in *Le Constitutionnel*, reminding his readers that “objects do not diminish because they are far from us, but rather appear diminished in our field of vision.” The author offered photography as an example of this logic, since photographic images were obtained through procedures analogous to those of the human eye. Rather than demoting Caillebotte’s painting as art, Trianon positioned photography as a pictorial enterprise to aspire to, since the medium confirmed the illogic of his painted perspective. For Trianon, Caillebotte

⁶³ “M. Caillebotte montre encore mieux son dédain pour les réalités quotidiennes par la façon vraiment courageuse avec laquelle il oublie la succession et l’éloignement relatif des plans...Pour des gens qui ne sont pas à la même échelle, le divorce est inévitable. Pendant que la femme est énorme, le mari lointain se rapetisse et il a l’air d’une poupée oubliée sur un meuble.” Paul Mantz, “Exposition des oeuvres des artistes indépendants,” *Le Temps* (Apr. 14, 1880): 3 in Berson, 297.

⁶⁴ “Évidemment, quand il a fait son tableau, l’exiguïté du local l’a forcé à se placer trop près de la femme, et il n’a pas voulu corriger le défaut apparent que lui imposait la vérité des choses. Une feuille de saule peut cacher le monde, si on la rapproche suffisamment de l’œil.” Eugène Véron, “Cinquième Exposition des indépendants,” *L’Art* 21 (1880): 92-94 in Berson, 317.

seemed trapped between a scientific mode of vision and the desire to represent the world on his own terms. “Where it was necessary, in the absence of science, to use artistic skill, the artist preferred to battle against the impossible,” Trianon pronounced, “and he lost.”⁶⁵

Similar critiques continued through 1882, when Caillebotte exhibited *Boulevard Seen From Above* (Fig. 82) at the seventh and penultimate Impressionist exhibition. A scene that depicted the sidewalk below Caillebotte’s apartment on the boulevard Haussmann—perhaps the view taken in by the gentleman in *Man on a Balcony* (Fig. 83), as Michael Marrinan has suggested⁶⁶—*Boulevard Seen From Above* disturbed reviewers of the exhibition. Describing the painting as the most bizarre of Caillebotte’s pictures by far, a critic for *Le Gaulois* claimed that the artist was evidently drunk when he made this picture. “M. Caillebotte must have been seeing double that night!” the critic chortled. “All the figures are seen in foreshortening: on a green bank, at an incline, a poor man...contorts himself to hold his position. If he doesn’t hasten to withdraw, the trees beside him will fall on his head. A few zig zagging pedestrians complete the scene. It’s very gay.”⁶⁷

⁶⁵ “Quant au mari, même en tenant compte du puissant effet de recul et de rapetissement causé par le contact apparent de sa tête avec la main de sa femme, il ressemble à une poupée, à un jouet d’enfant. Il n’est pas même en rapport de proportion avec les coussins sur lesquels il s’appuie. Relativement à lui, ces coussins sont comme 3 est 1. Où il fallait, à défaut de science, user d’adresse, l’artiste a préféré lutter contre l’impossible et il a échoué. La perspective n’est pas une pure convention. Elle n’est pas objective, assurément, et les objets ne diminuent pas parce qu’ils s’éloignent de nous ; mais ils diminuent dans le champ de notre vision. Les images que nous donne la photographie s’obtiennent par les mêmes procédés que les images perçues par notre organisme visuel, et elles attestent l’existence scientifique des deux perspectives, celle des formes et celle des couleurs.” Henry Trianon, “Cinquième Exposition par un groupe d’artistes indépendants (10, rue des Pyramides.),” *Le Constitutionnel* (Apr. 8, 1880): 2-3 in Berson, 313-14.

⁶⁶ Marrinan, 224.

⁶⁷ “Mais le Boulevard vu d’en haut est un boulevard en ribotte. M. Caillebotte devait voir double ce jour-là ! Tous les personnages sont en raccourci : sur un banc vert en pente, un pauvre,—noir, naturellement,—fait des contorsion pour se tenir en biais ; s’il ne se dépêche de se retirer, un arbre, placé à côté, va lui tomber sur la tête. Quelques rares promeneurs en zigzags complètent le tout. C’est très gai.” La Fare, “Exposition des impressionnistes,” *Le Gaulois* (Mar. 2, 1882): 2 in Berson, 401.

Recent scholars have interpreted Caillebotte's *Boulevard Seen From Above* as if it anticipates the point of view in André Kertész's aerial photographs of the 1920s.⁶⁸ But as compelling as the similarities between Kertész's *Avenue de l'opéra* (Fig. 84) and Caillebotte's *Boulevard* appear today, nineteenth-century critics clearly felt the opposite. A writer for *L'Europe artiste* encouraged Caillebotte to look to photography to adjust his point of view. "Why has [Caillebotte] neglected the most elementary rules of perspective?" the author wondered. "In the name of independence he may have wanted to change these rules, but if he looks at a photograph he will be forced to reconsider."⁶⁹ Caillebotte's interpretation of perspective had moved so far beyond the expectations for pictorial representation that the artist seemed to require a photographic corrective, a critique that suggests how closely painterly and photographic modes of picturing were seen to be. If Caillebotte had been trying to reinterpret pictorial perspective, thereby avoiding critiques that his painting was simply imitative, now he found himself subject to the opposite reproach. The truth of photographic reproduction seemed to be just what was needed to render *Boulevard Seen From Above* credible or convincing. Too much like photography or not nearly photographic enough? Caillebotte's paintings seemed not to be able to exist

⁶⁸ As Karin Sagner wrote in the catalogue for the 2012 exhibition *Gustave Caillebotte: An Impressionist and Photography*, "...Caillebotte's paintings, by dint of their radical and today very modern-looking compositions, reveal the close connection between painting and photography in the formation of a new way of seeing; their special perspective and the thematisation of movement and abstraction anticipate a photographic view that only later emerged in photography itself. With views from above, with oblique views, with close-ups, and the fragmentation of objects, Caillebotte deployed stylistic means that in a disconcerting manner resemble those of the 'realist medium' of photography. Sometimes he comes amazingly close to the works of New Photography of the 1920s as exemplified by the works of Kertész." Karin Sagner and Max Hollein, eds. *Gustave Caillebotte: An Impressionist and Photography* (Frankfurt: Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, 2012), 17. See also Marrinan, 221-22.

⁶⁹ "Pourquoi dans son tableau, le boulevard vu d'en haut où un banc à l'air de voler dans les airs, a-t-il négligé les principes les plus élémentaire de la perspective ? Au nom de l'indépendance, il a voulu peut-être changer ces règles; mais qu'il regarde une photographie; et il s'inclinera par force." Nélesque, F. "Chronique: Les Exposition artistique," *L'Europe artiste* (Mar. 19, 1882): 1 in Berson, 405.

independently from comparisons to the camera, as long as the standard for truth involved representing the appearance of the real world.

Fixing Fugitive Images

While Caillebotte was being compared to photography on the basis of the cropped margins and “bourgeois” finish of his paintings, a second, seemingly opposing strain of interpretation emerged in the criticism of Impressionism more broadly. Impressionist painting—usually generalized in terms of loose facture and swiftness of execution—was frequently linked to photography on the basis of the speed of the painter’s process. Like the associations between Caillebotte and photography, however, there were contradictions in this discourse, as critics compared and sometimes contrasted Impressionist painting to the instantaneous photograph. What this body of writing shared with the criticisms directed at Caillebotte was the desire to communicate overarching dissatisfaction with the superficiality of contemporary painting practices, which appeared reproductive in the case of Caillebotte, or too quickly painted in the case of Impressionism. In the writing of detractors, neither method was equipped to express the deeper values of art that distinguished it from photography. Together, these two seemingly distinct bodies of criticism point to a crisis in the interpretation of realist painting, as photography adulterated the critical language and conceptual understanding of a range of painting practices in the years around 1880.

In the late 1870s and early 1880s, Impressionist painting was understood as an immediate and summary response to the visual world. The language for characterizing the

technique often drew from the terminology of photography—a pictorial mode that clearly conveyed the swift capturing of an image. Take Roger Ballu’s description of the Impressionist artist as one who “seeks to render the first and instantaneous aspect under which an object presents itself to the gaze.” Or that of Paul Mantz, who compared Impressionist painting to the development of a negative in the darkroom, writing that “[t]hree or four touches must suffice for fixing the fugitive image.”⁷⁰ Some writers drew a contrast between the looseness of Impressionist facture and photography, as when Victor Fournel emphasized that Impressionists “do not attach themselves to representing objects with the strict and servile fidelity of photography.”⁷¹ For Thomas Grimm, a critic for *Le Petit Journal*, however, the discrepancy between Impressionist finish and photographic focus did not reflect well on painting. By defining their practice in terms of speed, he argued, Impressionists put themselves in direct “competition with the accuracy of cameras,” since the device could provide a clearer image more quickly.⁷²

⁷⁰ See, for example, Roger Ballu’s description of Impressionism in *La Chronique des arts et de la curiosité*: “...l’impressionniste est l’artiste qui cherche à rendre l’aspect premier et comme instantané sous lequel un objet se présente au regard.—La forme n’est plus qu’une silhouette un peu vague, les couleurs sont des taches posées les unes à côté des autres, et comme fondues dans une teinte générale ; l’œil semble n’avoir pas eu le temps d’analyser le spectacle qui est devant lui ; il n’embrasse que l’ensemble, et c’est cet ensemble qu’on se propose de reproduire dans sa confusion complète. Une telle recherche, bien évidemment, ne constitue pas l’art, mais elle ne lui est pas contraire.” Roger Ballu, “L’Exposition des peintres impressionnistes,” *La Chronique des arts et de la curiosité* (Apr. 14, 1877): 147-48 in Berson, 125. “Trois ou quatre touches devront suffire pour en fixer la fuyante image...et s’il a le talent prime-sautier, la vue saine, la main prompte, ses abréviations contiendront de l’éloquence.” Paul Mantz, “L’Exposition des peintres impressionnistes,” *Le Temps* (Apr. 22, 1877): 3 in Berson, 166.

⁷¹ “Le nom des impressionnistes est toute une déclaration de principes. Il veut dire qu’ils ne s’attachent pas à représenter les objets avec l’étroite et servile fidélité de la photographie, mais qu’ils se contentent, et que, suivant eux, la peinture doit avoir pour but unique de donner l’impression des choses.” Victor Fournel, “Les Oeuvres et les hommes: Courrier du théâtre, de la littérature & des arts: Exposition des impressionnistes,” *Le Correspondant* (Apr. 25, 1877): 323-25 in Berson, 146.

⁷² “Les Impressionnistes veulent rendre ce qu’ils voient et comme ils le voient, sans étudier le modèle, sans demander à l’âme d’illuminer la figure; à l’air ambiant d’animer le paysage. L’Impressionnisme serait donc le décalque de l’extérieur des êtres et des choses, et les Impressionnistes lutteraient d’exactitude avec les appareils photographiques.” Thomas Grimm, “Les Impressionnistes,” *Le Petit Journal* (Apr. 7, 1877): 1 in Berson, 151.

In Grimm's article, the implicit comparison between the speed of Impressionist painting and that of the camera threw into relief these painters' basic misunderstanding of the role of rapidity in an artist's process. Ingres had famously advised his students to draw so quickly that they would be able to sketch a bricklayer falling before he hit the ground, but these sketches were only studies—what Grimm termed the *rognure* (stuff or detritus) of the studio. Impressionists seemed to think that art had no grander purpose than this, he asserted, a position that left them vulnerable to contrasts with the camera.⁷³ It was the process of painting Impressionist pictures, rather than the pictorial results themselves, that seemed to bother most critics (it is no coincidence that individual artists and works of art were not named in this discourse). The premise that a superficial *coup d'œil* was all that was required to produce a picture undermined the values on which the fine art of painting was based.

No one argued for the flawed logic of Impressionism more ardently than *L'Art* editor Eugène Véron, who dedicated his review of the fifth Impressionist exhibition to this perspective. In this lengthy text, Véron asserted that Impressionists eschewed the intellectual aspects of art-making for what was quick and easy. "They limit themselves to throwing a hasty and superficial glance at things," he wrote,

[D]oubtlessly to escape the danger of noticing details and complexities that don't fit in the program, and have the grave mistake of having been seen and rendered by artists less 'independent.' So they make some more or less pretentious sketches (*pochades*) that are little more than skin-deep impressions, necessarily mediocre and banal, as is everything that stops at the surface. What is missing the most in these works is precisely personality, that is to say what is truly art. They only have the quality of poorly developed photographs.⁷⁴

⁷³ Grimm in Berson, 151-52.

⁷⁴ "Ils suppriment de l'art l'étude et l'observation et se contentent de prendre de la nature et des choses ce qu'on en peut saisir quand on ne se donne pas la peine de les regarder. Ils se bornent à leur jeter un coup d'œil rapide et superficiel, sans doute pour échapper au danger d'y apercevoir des finesses et des complexités

Véron's assessment of Impressionism utilized photography to highlight the superficiality of the approach. The visual relationship between the two pictorial formats was less important; a poorly developed photograph, one that had not been exposed long enough to bring the image into sufficient clarity, offered a suitable analogy for a manner of painting that was too hasty to bring the picture to a state of completion. In this way, Véron's frustrations with Impressionism offer a way of correlating a number of distinct usages of photography to describe painting that are discussed elsewhere in this dissertation. Bastien-Lepage, Caillebotte, and the "Impressionists" were criticized for the shallowness and insignificance of their work, whether the artist was perceived as mechanical and laborious or speedy and unstudied. In all cases, to be labeled photographic meant that the artist was overly preoccupied with the painting's surface, while neglecting the personal and analytical work required to produce pictorial art. Their paintings were "empty" as a result.⁷⁵

Mind Over Matter

As photography pervaded the reception of art at the Impressionist exhibitions in the late 1870s and early 1880s, artists and art critics began to seek new ways to articulate the truths of realist painting. To be clear, realism remained an important ambition of pictorial

qui ne rentrent pas dans le programme et qui d'ailleurs ont le tort grave d'avoir été déjà vues et rendues par des artistes moins indépendants. Ils font ainsi des pochades plus ou moins prétentieuses qui ne sont en somme que des impressions d'épiderme, nécessairement médiocres et banales, comme tout ce qui s'arrête aux surfaces. Aussi, ce qui manque le plus à ces œuvres, est-ce précisément la personnalité, c'est-à-dire ce qui est vraiment l'art. Elles ont justement la valeur de photographies mal venues." Eugène Véron, "Cinquième Exposition des indépendants," *L'Art* 21 (1880): 92-94 in Berson, 316.

⁷⁵ Bertall made a similar point in 1881, describing the Impressionists as indistinguishable from one another in terms of palette, uniformly lacking in perspective or drawing, and depicting "empty" figures that lacked modeling and which were "dispersed by luck across the canvas...with no care for light, shadow, or values." "Pour les figures, les mêmes tons rosés, plaqués et vides, sans modelé, répandus au hasard sur la toile, entre des contours incohérents..." Bertall, "Exposition: Des peintres intransigeants et nihilistes: 36, boulevard des Capucines," *Paris-Journal* (Apr. 21, 1881): 1-2 in Berson, 330.

practice, and the language to communicate it appears unchanged from earlier usages.

Writers reviewing Degas's work in the latter half of the Impressionist exhibitions continued to register the "vitality" and "perfect realism" of his dancers, and the "absolute justice" of his poses.⁷⁶ But now there were notable shifts in the ways that these qualities were connected to and explained in terms of the artist's material processes of painting. F.C. de Syène, for example, reviewing the fourth Impressionist exhibition in *L'Artiste*, suggested that it was Degas's manipulation of his colors that animated his pictures and made them more palpably real. "Mr. Degas looks for mysterious and fierce effects," de Syène wrote. "[N]o one knows better than he how to exploit silvery sparkles, pale opalines, incandescent reds, coppery illumination, [and] twilight half-tones. That is why his gouaches and his capricious pastels have such powerful charm, and bring [his particular subjects] to life."⁷⁷ Henry Havard characterized this way of working as chemical more than artistic, and described Degas's brain as a "furnace, where a completely new manner of painting is simmering." This consisted of "unexpected combinations of [compositional] framing, pastels, tempera and essence."⁷⁸ Rather than focusing on the speed of the artist's memory,

⁷⁶ See Jules Claretie, "La Vie à Paris: M. de Nittis et les impressionists," *Le Temps* (Apr. 6, 1880): 3 in Berson, 273; Paul de Charry, "Le Salon de 1880: Préface: Les Impressionistes," *Le Pays* (Apr. 10, 1880): 3 in Berson, 273; and Armand Silvestre, "Le Monde des arts: Exposition de la rue des Pyramides (premier article)," *La Vie moderne* (Apr. 24, 1880): 262 in Berson, 306. Carol Armstrong discusses the continuity of realist language in art criticism of the 1880s in *Odd Man Out*, 5 and 167.

⁷⁷ "M. Degas recherche les effets mystérieux et farouches ; nul mieux que lui ne sait mettre en jeu les scintillements argentés, les pâleurs opalines, les rougeurs incandescentes, les irradiations cuivrées, les demi-teintes crépusculaires. C'est pourquoi ses gouaches et ses pastels capricieux ont un charme puissant et font vivre d'une vie étrange des prime-donne la bouche ouverte, des coryphées au sourire de rigueur et des jockeys pénétrés de l'importance de leur mission." F.C. de Syène, "Salon de 1879," *L'Artiste* (May 1, 1879): 289-93 in Berson, 243.

⁷⁸ "Son cerveau semble être une fournaise où bouillonne toute une nouvelle peinture encore en parturition...Il semble être à la poursuite d'un idéal mal défini, dont il espère trouver la formule dans des combinaisons inattendues de cadres, de pastels, de détrempe et d'essence. Tout cela peut conduire à l'expression de la pensée ; et Degas ne nous en voudra pas de considérer son exposition simplement comme une réunion curieuse de tâtonnements et d'essais." Henry Havard, "L'Exposition des artistes indépendants," *Le Siècle* (Apr. 27, 1879): 3 in Berson, 223.

or his pictures as cognates for real scenes, these reviews situated the lifelike qualities of Degas's work in his mental process and material experimentation. The mind of the artist and matter of paint could not be confused with photography, and distinguished them from the monotonous and "gray" pictures recently exhibited by Caillebotte.

Degas's increasingly unusual methods played an important role in this emerging emphasis on process. Of the twenty-five paintings and drawings he exhibited at the 1879 exhibition, many were produced in unfamiliar, mixed-media techniques, such *Portrait of Duranty* (Fig. 85), made from a combination of pastel, tempera, watercolor and charcoal, and *Jockeys before the Race* (Fig. 86), painted in *peinture à l'essence* (paint drained of oil) with touches of gouache and pastel. While viewers may not have been aware of the full complexity of Degas's processes, given that he tended to work in successive layers and often concealed one material beneath the surface of another, Degas ensured that his mélange of media was not completely overlooked.⁷⁹ As Douglas W. Druick and Peter Zegers have pointed out, the artist's catalogue entries at the 1879 exhibition were unusually specific in their identification of his materials, making it difficult to ignore Degas's processes when assessing his work.⁸⁰

Even in paintings that were less materially hybrid than *Portrait of Duranty* or the *Jockeys before the Race*, Degas situated paint, and the artist's methods of applying it, as

⁷⁹ For a thorough analysis of Degas's techniques, see David Bomford, Sarah Herring, Jo Kirby, Christopher Riopelle and Ashok Roy, *Art in the Making: Degas* (London: National Gallery, 2004).

⁸⁰ Druick and Zegers, 202. On the 1870s as the most technically adventurous period in Degas's career, see Kendall, *Beyond Impressionism*, 60 and Bomford, et. al., 35. Richard Kendall has recently pointed out that Degas's emphasis on technique can be traced to the 1874 exhibition, when he worked in the unorthodox *dessin à l'essence* and labeled it as such. Richard Kendall, "Degas and Difficulty," *Facture* 3 (2017): 11. Jodi Hauptman discusses a related phenomenon in the realm of printmaking, in which artist-etchers aimed to distinguish their work from reproductive media like photography by emphasizing handwork. See Jodi Hauptman, *Edgar Degas: A Strange New Beauty* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2016): 14.

worthy subjects for contemplation.⁸¹ In *Laundresses Carrying Laundry* (Fig. 87), the two working women bent in unison under the weight of their baskets are unapologetically upstaged by the broad passages of color that Degas mixed freely with turpentine and applied in irregular patches to constitute a backdrop. The artist clearly took pleasure in the visual qualities of his materials: vigorous strokes of deep maroon, bright yellow, creamy white, and peachy pink claim attention as the most dynamic aspects of the picture, clustering around and towards the laundresses and threatening to usher the figure on the left out of the picture altogether. Havard was unsure if such pictorial “experiments” (*essais*) qualified as works of art, but he expressed hope that the artist was directing his material procedures to express personal thoughts.⁸²

A hierarchical relationship between the artist’s mind and the physical processes of painting had been central to traditional definitions of *beaux arts* in France since the foundation of the Academy in the mid-seventeenth century. The authority of this system came under threat in a range of contexts in the second half of the nineteenth century, as photography put pressure on the intellectual aspects of picturing, and how they related to the manual act of making art. Artists and critics, whether of painting or photography, endeavored to secure art as an essentially intellectual process, but in the case of realist painting this required a complex negotiation between the mental and the material, as it was the physical act of painting that definitively distinguished these works of art from photographs.

⁸¹ Richard Thomson makes a similar observation in relation to Degas’s interest in exhibiting and publishing preparatory drawings, revealing that the “processes of studying form by draftsmanship were central to his work.” Richard Thomson, *Edgar Degas: Waiting* (Malibu: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 1995): 6.

⁸² Havard in Berson, 223.

Many critics in the 1880s, such as *L'Art* editor Eugène Véron, encouraged painters to return to a traditional definition of art by adopting a multi-step artistic process that ensured that the intellectual and manual aspects of art-making played their appropriate parts. Rather than passively replicating the images that were left behind on the retina—the penchant of Impressionists—artists should reclaim their roles as interpreters. The job of the artist was to “receive impressions that are more alive, more profound, and more complete than those of ordinary people,” Véron explained, “to seize by the eye and the spirit the nuances and finesse that escape others, and to reproduce this personal view of things by marking them with the personal imprint that distinguished the work of this artist from anyone else...”⁸³ Artistic painting, in other words, could not be instantaneous. It began when the artist selected a subject, extended through the stages of perception and interpretation, and culminated in the creation of a new picture based on the artist’s personal point of view. By adopting this protracted process, artists could navigate the interdependence of observation and creation inherent to the production of art.

Novelist J.K. Huysmans, one of Degas’s staunchest supporters in the 1880s, provided a theoretical structure that connected the mental and material aspects of artist’s work. In his review of the Impressionist exhibition of 1880, Huysmans argued that it was Degas’s personal and intellectual desire for expression that drove his technical experimentation.⁸⁴ Like the Goncourt brothers, who had developed a new written vocabulary for describing

⁸³ “Qui donc a dit que le caractère propre de l’artiste est de recevoir des spectacles de la nature des impressions plus vives, plus profondes, plus complètes que le reste des hommes, de saisir par l’œil et par l’esprit des nuances et des finesses qui échappent aux autres, et de reproduire cette vue personnelle des choses en les marquant d’une empreinte individuelle qui les distingue à jamais de tout ce qui n’est pas elles ?” Véron, “Cinquième Exposition,” 316.

⁸⁴ J.-K. Huysmans, “L’Exposition des indépendants en 1880,” *L’Art moderne* (Paris: G. Charpentier, 1883): 85-123 in Berson, 290-92. It appears this review did not appear in print until 1883, when Huysmans published *L’Art moderne*. See Fronia E. Wissman, “Realists among the Impressionists” in Moffett, 345 and Armstrong, 276, n.15.

the fugitive sensations of contemporary life, Degas devised innovative pictorial techniques for conveying effects and gestures “judged impossible to paint.” Degas’s studio was a kind of pictorial laboratory in Huysmans’ account, where the artist “borrow[ed] from all the vocabularies of painting, combining diverse elements of essence and oil, watercolor and pastel, tempera and gouache, forging neologisms of color, [and] breaking with the accepted composition [*ordonnance*] of his subjects.”⁸⁵ Yet the author did not lose sight of the ways that this hands-on, investigative relationship with his materials related to the artist’s temperament. Degas’s particular eye was drawn to gaslight and to figures in motion, Huysmans explained. By consistently pursuing the subjects he was personally suited to paint, Degas was able to translate them into pictures as convincingly as possible. The *Dance Examination* (Fig. 88) that Degas displayed that year offered extraordinary fidelity to life, Huysmans maintained, not only because of its depiction of light and space or the expressions and physiognomic details of the figures, but also because of the artist’s capacity to express the “excruciating ennui of mechanical work” or the indifference of the dancers to their own weariness.⁸⁶ The truth of Degas’s work stemmed from his intellectual analysis and personal point of view, but these qualities were made legible through an

⁸⁵ “...pour traduire des effets incompris ou jugés impossibles à peindre jusqu’alors, M. Degas a dû se fabriquer un instrument tout à la fois tenu et large, flexible et ferme. Lui aussi a dû emprunter à tous les vocabulaires de la peinture, combiner les divers éléments de l’essence et de l’huile, de l’aquarelle et du pastel, de la détrempe et de la gouache, forger des néologismes de couleurs, briser l’ordonnance acceptée des sujets.” Huysmans in Berson, 292.

⁸⁶ “Quelle vérité ! quelle vie ! comme toutes ces figures sont dans l’air, comme la lumière baigne justement la scène, comme l’expression de ces physionomies, l’ennui d’un travail mécanique pénible, le regard scrutant de la mère dont les espoirs s’aiguisent quand le corps de sa fille se décarcasse, l’indifférence des camarades pour des lassitudes qu’elles connaissent, sont accusés, notés avec une perspicacité d’analyse tout à la fois cruelle et subtile.” Huysmans in Berson, 291.

emphasis on the expressive potential of material procedures.⁸⁷ A gulf separated this modern way of working from that of Jules Bastien-Lepage, Huysmans concluded.⁸⁸

Degas's material experimentation arguably took its fullest form in the Impressionist exhibition of 1881, when he displayed his long-anticipated sculpture *Little Dancer, Aged Fourteen* (Fig. 89).⁸⁹ Made from wax tinted to resemble human flesh, and dressed in a silk tutu and linen slippers with a wig made from human hair, the dancer was broadly seen to take realism too far, although it was the figure's physiognomic features that troubled critics as much as the mixture of materials Degas that used to construct it.⁹⁰ Degas showed few canvases that year, and he did not participate in the Impressionist exhibition of 1882 at all, owing to ongoing conflicts with fellow organizers of the exhibitions.⁹¹ Thus it was not until 1886, at the eighth and final Impressionist exhibition, that discussions of Degas's pictorial practice took center stage once more.

In many ways, these later responses to Degas's work renewed and extended interpretations that emerged in 1879 and 1880, as writers sought to situate the truthfulness of Degas's work in relation to his intellectual and material processes of expression. In 1886, however, after several years' absence from exhibiting his work, Degas's methods of working were also linked to his physical withdrawal from the public

⁸⁷ As Huysmans summed up: "Un peintre de la vie moderne était né, et un peintre qui ne dérivait de personne, qui ne ressemblait à aucun, qui apportait une saveur d'art toute nouvelle, des procédés d'exécution tout nouveaux." Huysmans in Berson, 290.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 292.

⁸⁹ Degas intended to exhibit the sculpture in 1880, as it appeared on the original exhibition checklist, but he seems not to have finished it in time. The sculpture was finally exhibited in 1881, but not until mid-April. See Berson, 147-48 and 180. Jules Claretie described the empty pedestal as "mocking" viewers in "La Vie à Paris: Les Artistes indépendants," *Le Temps* (Apr. 5, 1881): 3 in Berson, 334-35.

⁹⁰ For a representative sampling of reviews see Paul Mantz, "Exposition des oeuvres des artistes indépendants," *Le Temps* (Apr. 23, 1881): 3 in Berson, 358; C.E. "Exposition des artistes indépendants," *La Chronique des arts et de la curiosité* (Apr. 16, 1881): 126-27 in Berson, 336-37; and Victor Champier, "La société des artistes indépendants," *L'Année artistique: 1881* (Paris: A. Quantin, 1882): 167-69 in Berson 332-33.

⁹¹ For an overview of these conflicts see Joel Isaacson, "The Painters Called Impressionists" in Moffet, 373-76.

sphere, and the intellectual and creative freedoms that such retreat enabled.⁹² In the writing of this period, the studio was envisaged as a laboratory, where creative experimentation took place, and as an extension of the artist himself. It served a metaphor for the painter's mind and the source of art's material manifestation. In the privacy of the studio, Degas was shielded from public pressures and could develop truthful realism on his own terms.⁹³

Degas has “voluntarily exiled himself and doesn't exhibit publicly,” J.K. Huysmans announced in 1886, asserting that the artist's self-imposed isolation had facilitated his most “personal” and “penetrating” work yet. While other painters relied upon public opinion, Huysmans wrote dismissively, Degas has “completed incomparable works in silence.”⁹⁴ The suite of nudes that the artist exhibited that year—ten pastels depicting women bathing, drying themselves, and tending to their *toilettes*—underscored this theme of privacy. Through these subjects, Degas had removed himself from the public world of performance and entertainment to explore intimate views of women who did not seem to know they were being watched. Each pastel depicted a single figure in the act of cleaning or

⁹² Over the course of the early 1880s Degas made enemies with many fellow exhibitors at the Impressionist exhibitions, resulting in the dissolution of the group after the 1886 exhibition. Armstrong, 25, 159. After the 1886 exhibition the artist exhibited less and less; the only other significant display of his work was the series of landscape monotypes he showed at the Durand-Ruel Gallery in 1892. On this exhibition see *Odd Man Out*, 205-09; Ann Dumas, Richard Kendall, Flemming Friberg, and Line Clausen Pedersen, *Edgar Degas: The Last Landscapes* (Columbus: Columbus Museum of Art, 2006); and Howard G. Lay, “Degas at Durand-Ruel, 1892: The Landscape Monotypes,” *The Print Collector's Newsletter* 9, no. 5 (Nov.-Dec. 1978): 142-47. Richard Kendall reports that Degas turned down “a room of his own” at the 1889 Exposition universelle, but suggests that the notion of Degas as isolated and reclusive in the 1880s and 90s is largely exaggerated. See Richard Kendall, *Degas: Beyond Impressionism* (London: National Gallery, 1996): 40-41.

⁹³ Armstrong points out that the positive associations with interiority and retreat were part of a broader trend in literature and art criticism in the 1880s, which was visible in J.K. Huysmans' novel *A Rebours* (1884) as well as in responses to the work of Gustave Moreau and Paul Cézanne, and which was essentially aristocratic in sensibility. Armstrong, 174-75.

⁹⁴ “Ce peintre, le plus personnel, le plus térébrant de tous ceux que possède, sans même le soupçonner, ce malheureux pays, s'est volontairement exilé des exhibitions particulières et des lieux publics. Dans un temps où tous les peintres se ventrouillent dans l'auge des foules, il a, loin d'elle, parachevé en silence, d'inégalables œuvres.” J.K. Huysmans, “Certains,” *Oeuvres complètes* 10 (Paris, 1929) in Berson, 458.

caring for herself, but rather than posing provocatively, Degas's nudes squat, stretch, and bend over, inelegant gestures that heighten the voyeuristic implications of the images.⁹⁵ In *The Tub* (Fig. 90), for example, the viewer looks straight down on a woman crouched inside a shallow metal basin sponging her back, a view that is partly blocked by the top of the dressing table at right. The inclusion of this flat surface complicates the perception of depth, compressing and abstracting the space while reinforcing the conditions in which the woman is seen. Images like *The Tub* project the realism of the theme outward, as the orientation and compositional framing of the picture directly implicates the viewer in the scene, while reflecting back on and heightening associations with the artist's secluded and deeply personal process of creation.

Many reviewers of the 1886 exhibition interpreted Degas's art in precisely this manner. Degas "locks the door" and "display[s] absolute disdain for public discussion," Gustave Geoffroy wrote in *La Justice*. The artist's two-step manner of working was essentially solitary, Geoffroy explained, whether he was in public or private.⁹⁶ First Degas circumnavigated the city, where he gathered thoughts and observations; then he cloistered himself in his studio, living like a "recluse" with his models and sketches and "relentlessly

⁹⁵ As Gustave Geoffroy suggested, the viewer is ostensibly positioned behind a curtain or as if peering through a keyhole, lending the act of seeing a voyeuristic valence. Gustave Geoffroy, "Salon de 1886: VIII. Hors du Salon: Les Impressionnistes," *La Justice* (May 26, 1886): 1-2 in Berson 452. Both George Moore and Walter Sickert credited Degas himself for characterizing the point of view in his pictures in these terms. See George Moore, "Degas: The Painter of Modern Life," *Magazine of Art* 13 (1890): 425 and Walter Sickert, "Degas," *Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 31, no. 176 (Nov. 1917): 185. Armstrong observes that voyeurism is an ongoing thematic in Degas's paintings. Armstrong, 2, 166. For one critic, the explicit nudity of Degas's bathers encouraged an association with photography. As Jules Desclozeaux wrote in *L'Opinion*, "On ne peut pas appeler du nu ces violentes photographies. C'est du déshabillé, un déshabillé qui n'est point égayé par la moindre note grivoise; un déshabillé grave et morne, une indécence taciturne, une bestialité triste." Jules Desclozeaux, "Chronique: Les Impressionnistes," *L'Opinion* (May 27, 1886): 2-3 in Berson, 439.

⁹⁶ "L'homme est mystérieux et narquois, verrouille sa porte, affiche un dédain absolu pour la discussion publique." Geoffroy in Berson, 451. Belgian art critic Octave Maus also described Degas's studio practice as "hermétiquement clos" and "entouré de mystères" the artist only having "entrebâillé sa porte" to allow the public to see his work. Octave Maus, "Les Vingtistes parisiens," *L'Art moderne* (Brussels) (June 27, 1886): 201-04 in Berson, 462.

pursuing juxtapositions of tone and unexpected combinations of line.”⁹⁷ Through these two methods of accumulation, the visual and the material, Degas “piles up an enormity of documentation,” Geoffroy wrote, a “dictionary of details” that served as the source for “perhaps the most original, the most personal [art] of the second half of the nineteenth century.”⁹⁸ This isolated way of working was drastically different from the one that Walter Sickert associated with photography in “Modern Realism in Painting.” As I discuss in Chapter Two, Sickert believed it was the desire for external manifestations of success that encouraged artists to ape popular styles, transforming their painterly enterprise into a photographic one. By operating in private, and even refusing to open his door to the public, Degas’s work was more honest and authentic—beholden to nothing but the artist’s personal vision.

It was an unlikely critic that connected Degas’s private, accumulative way of working to pictorial truth. Félix Fénéon, anarchist art critic and champion of Neo-Impressionism, interpreted Degas’s nudes specifically in terms of their realism, crediting this quality to the artist’s prolonged process of observation and synthesis. In a longer passage that began by detailing the complicated poses and gestures of the nudes, Fénéon wrote:

In the work of M. Degas—and who else?—bodies hum with expressive life. The lines of this cruel and sagacious observer elucidate—across all the difficulties of crazy elliptical foreshortening—the mechanism of all movement...[an] art of realism that nevertheless does not proceed from direct vision, for when a being knows he is being observed he loses his naïve spontaneity of functioning. Degas does not copy

⁹⁷ “Il s’est fait deux existences :—l’une est l’existence d’un passant très fureteur et très gai, circulant, avec des sourires qui illusionnent et des mots qui déconcertent, au milieu des manifestations sociales et artistiques ; — l’autre est l’existence d’un reclus, enfermé avec des modèles et des croquis, et s’acharnant aux conjonctions des tons et aux combinaisons imprévues des lignes.” Geoffroy in Berson, 451.

⁹⁸ “Il accumule ainsi les matériaux, entasse une énorme documentation, compose un dictionnaire de détails qui fournirait, à la première évocation, l’ensemble d’une œuvre décorative, peut-être la plus originale, la plus personnelle de cette seconde moitié du XIXe siècle.” Ibid.

from nature but instead accumulates a multitude of sketches on the same subject from which he draws the unquestionable truth that he confers on his work. Never have paintings evoked less the painful image of the “model” who “poses.”⁹⁹

In Fénéon’s review, realism remained a relevant and indeed unifying goal for modern painting, but it could not be achieved through direct transcription. It was only by internalizing his subjects and producing many drawings in advance of initiating a picture that Degas distilled “direct vision” into a truthful image, one that preserved the particular action of the subject and the creative endeavor of the painter who recreated it.

Fénéon was fascinated by the formal qualities of Degas’s pastels, but I suggest that his description of Degas’s process as an “art of realism” should be taken at face value. In this way I differ from Carol Armstrong who positions Fénéon as emblematic of the symbolist turn in art criticism of the mid-1880s. As Armstrong writes in *Odd Man Out*, “Fénéon’s language is a little more abstractionist than that of earlier critics... [h]is orientation is a little less towards the ‘real’... rather, Fénéon takes Degas’s pictures as visual arrangements.”¹⁰⁰ Instead of positioning the “real” and appreciation for the formal qualities of Degas’s pictures on either side of the spectrum, I propose that Fénéon’s understanding of truthful realism was based on the artist’s personal way of working, a method that rejected direct copying after nature in order to generate new pictures from within.

⁹⁹ “Dans l’œuvre de M. Degas,—et de quel autres ?—les peaux humaines vivent d’une vie expressive. Les lignes de ce cruel et sagace observateur élucident, à travers les difficultés de raccourcis follement elliptiques, la mécanique de tous les mouvements ; d’un être qui bouge, elles n’enregistrent pas seulement le geste essentiel, mais ses plus minimes et lointaines répercussions myologiques : d’où cette définitive unité du dessin. Art de réalisme et qui cependant ne procède pas d’une vision directe :—dès qu’un être se sait observé, il perd sa naïve spontanéité de fonctionnement ; Degas ne copie donc pas d’après nature : il accumule sur un même sujet une multitude de croquis, où il puisera l’irréfragable véracité qu’il confère à son œuvre ; jamais tableaux n’ont moins évoqué la pénible image du « modèle » qui « pose ».” Félix Fénéon, “Les Impressionnistes,” *La Vogue* (June 13-20, 1886): 261-75 in Berson, 441.

¹⁰⁰ Armstrong, 4.

In this way, Fénéon shares much with Walter Sickert's theory of photo-realism that appeared in print six years later. In Chapter Two, I show how Sickert distinguished Degas's method from the "sterile ideal of the instantaneous camera" by emphasizing that he processed his observations.¹⁰¹ Degas understood that "action cannot be studied from a fatigued and posturing model, but must be observed and remembered," Sickert argued.¹⁰² There was little difference between painting from a model and painting from a photograph in Sickert's account, because both practices were essentially duplicative. It was only by working from memory that an artist developed visual intelligence and learned to cultivate personal style.¹⁰³ The resulting paintings might lack the technical exactitude of a closely studied copy, but they were resonant of the artist him- or herself, and therefore fulfilled Sickert's requirements of truthful art.

Although Sickert's use of the term photo-realism is unique in criticism of this period, his emphasis on the importance of processing one's observations was not. The following year, fellow English art critic George Moore described Degas's way of working in much in the same way, writing in the *Magazine of Art* that the artist "will watch the sitter until he learns all her or his tricks of expression and movement, and then will reproduce all of them and with such exactitude and sympathetic insight that the very inner life of the man is laid

¹⁰¹ Sickert, "Modern Realism in Painting," 135.

¹⁰² "Drawing. Messrs Dowdeswell's Galleries," *New York Herald* (Apr. 1, 1889) in Robins, *Complete Writings on Art*, 26.

¹⁰³ Sickert's description of this method derived in large part from the teachings of French drawing instructor Horace Lecoq de Boisbaudran, whose mid-century theories about the efficacy of working from memory remained influential in Sickert's circle through the 1890s. As Susan Sidlauskas has written, Lecoq constituted memory as a form of mediation between the realms of imagination and experience. Susan Sidlauskas, "Body into Space: Lecoq de Boisbaudran and the Rhetoric of Embodiment," *Body, Place, and Self in Nineteenth-Century Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 6-19.

bare.”¹⁰⁴ Rather than working directly from the model, Degas “makes numerous sketches and paints from them; but never paints direct from life.” Instead, the painter occupied himself with legitimately artistic matters, Moore explained, such as the search for new technical means to articulate his original vision.¹⁰⁵ Similar assessments appear in a review published in the *National Observer* the same year, in which Degas was differentiated from a “mere realist” because of his investment of time in his work. Degas observed his subject until it took on its “proper aspect,” the anonymous author wrote, before he returned to the studio to make his picture. “[W]hy demand of a painter that he shall possess the gift of instantaneous selection?” the reviewer inquired rhetorically. The object of art was to “seize the essentials.”¹⁰⁶

Degas’s own writing about his process expresses a similar attitude about the importance of memory, and the length of time that was required to make truthful works of art. In an oft-cited letter from 1872, and a rare reference to photography, Degas intimated that an artist could not simply show up in a place and expect to render an informed representation on the spot. Knowledgeable art required that the artist learn his subject before undertaking a picture. “[N]othing but a really long stay can reveal the customs of a

¹⁰⁴ Moore, 422. For a brief biography of Moore, see Robert Stephen Becker, “George Moore: Artist and Art Critic,” *Irish Arts Review* 2, no. 3 (Autumn 1985): 49-55.

¹⁰⁵ Moore, 423. Moore excerpted this text in a memorial article published the year after the artist’s death. See George Moore, “Memories of Degas,” *Burlington Magazine* 32, no. 178 (Jan. 1918): 28. John Rewald reiterated this interpretation of Degas’s process in 1946, asserting that Degas rarely made sketches in preparation for a specific work, and did not work directly from life. According to Rewald, Degas felt that “the best way to work from a model was to study her on the ground floor and then rush up to the attic, where the actual drawing ought to be executed. Undisturbed by the particular features of the model, he could then focus his attention on the elements which especially interested him.” Rewald, 16.

¹⁰⁶ Probably Charles Whibley, “Modern Men: Degas,” *National Observer* (Oct. 31, 1891): 603-04 in *Impressionists in England: The Critical Reception*, ed. Kate Flint (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984): 276. Ewa Lajer-Burcharth discusses this issue in the context of Watteau’s work, pointing out that the “time it took to produce a painting continued to serve as a measure of its value, even for academic artists eager to divorce their creations from the idea of manual labor.” See Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, “Drawing Time,” *October* 151 (Winter 2015): 38.

people,” Degas explained. “Instantaneousness is photography, nothing more.”¹⁰⁷ His advice to fellow artists followed suit, consistently stressing the importance of duration in the physical act of making art, as when he encouraged his friend Albert Bartholomé “to do the same subject over again, ten times, a hundred times. Nothing in art must seem to be chance, not even movement.”¹⁰⁸ Similar interests were expressed in private as well. In a notebook dated to c. 1878-1883, Degas listed some useful methods to incorporate into his practice, which included posing the sitter for a portrait on a different floor than the one on which he worked “to get used to retaining forms and expressions and never draw or paint *immediately*.”¹⁰⁹

Sickert and Degas were friendly, and Degas’s perspectives on art clearly shaped the younger artist’s notions of artistic value and meaning. Well into the 1930s, Sickert continued to quote Degas as an authority on painterly practice, and his theory of photo-realism speaks to Degas’s method of working specifically.¹¹⁰ Yet as the criticism of Degas’s pictures and methods at the Impressionist exhibitions suggests, an understanding of the artist as anti-photographic was part of a broader imperative of realism, and its aim to

¹⁰⁷ Letter to Frölich, dated Nov. 27, 1872 in Marcel Guérin, ed. *Degas Letters*, trans. Marguerite Kay (Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1947): 22.

¹⁰⁸ Letter to Bartholomé, dated Jan. 17, 1886, in *ibid.*, 117. In another oft-cited quotation on this subject, Degas stated: “No art was ever less spontaneous than mine. What I do is the result of reflection and of the study of the great masters; of inspiration, spontaneity, temperament, I know nothing. Nothing in art should resemble an accident, even movement.” Armstrong, *Odd Man Out*, 22.

¹⁰⁹ “Pour un portrait, faire poser au rez de chaussée et faire travailler au 1^{er}, pour habituer à retenir les formes et les expressions et à ne jamais dessiner ou peindre immédiatement.” Notebook 30, p. 210 in Theodore Reff, *The Notebooks of Edgar Degas*, vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 134. Degas made a similar recommendation to Georges Jeannot, asserting, “[i]t’s very well to copy what one sees; it’s much better to draw what one only sees in one’s memory.” G. Jeannot, “Souvenirs sur Degas,” *Revue universelle* 55, no. 14 (1933): 158 in Thomson, *Waiting*, 34.

¹¹⁰ In an editorial published in the *Sunday Times* in 1935, Sickert wrote in response to Monet’s *Waterlilies*: “Sir,—It may interest your readers to hear a criticism made by probably the greatest critic of the last century on Monet’s large series of water-lilies. I went with Degas to Durand-Ruel’s first exhibition of the famous ‘Nymphaeas.’ There were about six large ottomans, on which reposed some ladies in a state of hushed ecstasy. We entered, somewhat intimidated, on tiptoe, and I left discreetly and silently. ‘Je n’éprouve pas le besoin de perorer [sic: perdre] connaissance devant un étang.’” Sickert, *Sunday Times* (July 14, 1935) in Robins, *Complete Writings on Art*, 680.

preserve a form of painterly truth that could be distinguished from superficial picturing, and from photography. Emphasizing truthful realism as a durational process was central to the theories of Fénéon and Sickert, and to Degas himself, as this protracted process of picturing was believed to differentiate “authentic” art from reproductive imaging. For a brief period of time, it was crucially important to defend realism from instantaneous reproduction. In Degas, these critics found a method that suited their model.

Coda: Degas Photographer

In August 1895, Edgar Degas bought a camera.¹¹¹ It was not his first; at sixty-one years old the artist had been taking his own photographs for at least six months, and he approached the practice like other men and women of the Kodak era.¹¹² He posed his friends and family in their parlors and living rooms after dinner (Fig. 91). He staged playful *tableaux vivants* of fellow artists in which they recreated historical and mythological

¹¹¹ In a letter to his printer and equipment supplier Guillaume Tasset, Degas requested a new camera of the type he had recently sent to his sister Marguerite in Buenos Aires: “un appareil de photographie, faisant à la fois la pose et l’instantané, avec accessoires, produits, etc.” See Jeanne Fevre, *Mon Oncle Degas* (Genève: Pierre Cailler, 1949), 93 and the letter to Tasset dated Aug. 18, 1895 in Beaumont Newhall, “Degas: Amateur Photographer,” *Image* 5, no. 6 (June 1956): 126.

¹¹² The earliest mention of Degas taking photographs occurs in letters written by the Italian artist Frederico Zandomenighi to his friend Diego Martelli. In August 1895, Zandomenighi mentions “four little [photographic] portraits that Degas made of me one dreadful day last winter in his studio.” A second letter mentions “a portrait of me that I had enlarged from a small negative made again by the same Degas last March in his studio...You will think you are looking at a Velasquez.” Letters from Zandomenighi to Martelli, dated August 31, 1895 and November 1895 in Francesca Dini, *Frederico Zandomenighi, la vita et le opera* (Florence: Il Torchio, 1989), 511 and 513, as cited and translated in Malcolm Daniel, “The Atmosphere of Lamps or Moonlight” *Edgar Degas, Photographer* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998), 20. Daniel Halévy mentions Degas’s year-long engagement with photography in a journal entry dated November 4, 1895, in which the author notes that Degas “a adopté cette année la photographie, et comme ses journées sont toute prises, il photographie le soir. Daniel Halévy, *Degas parle* (Paris: Éditions de Fallois, 1995 [orig. 1960]): 140. Degas’s friends, the Halévy family, approached photography in much the same way. Ludovic Halévy describes his own zeal for the camera in his journal, September 29, 1895. See Jean-Pierre Halévy, “Ludovic Halévy par lui-même,” *Entre le théâtre et l’histoire: La famille Halévy (1760-1960)*, ed. Henri Loyrette (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1996), 157. For other examples of photographs taken by artists in this period see Elizabeth W. Easton, ed. *Snapshot: Painters and Photography, Bonnard to Vuillard* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

themes from great masterworks (Fig. 92).¹¹³ The camera accompanied Degas on his travels, where he used it to depict the landscapes of Saint-Valéry-sur-Somme and the people he encountered there (Fig. 93).¹¹⁴ He experimented with the incalculable technology, trying (and failing) to take photographs at night, and seeking solutions for damaged or poorly developed prints.¹¹⁵ Sometimes he made mistakes. Images turned black in the chemical bath; his delicate negative holder broke; and, on at least two occasions, he forgot to change his plate holders, double exposing two of his negatives and producing what his amused friend Ludovic Halévy termed a *salade* of interlocking heads and bodies (Figs. 94-95).¹¹⁶

Like most amateur photographers in the late nineteenth century, Degas tended not to print his photographs himself. Instead he relied on the services of Guillaume Tasset, a supplier of artists' materials and photographic equipment, and his daughter Delphine to produce prints to his specifications.¹¹⁷ Degas spent many evenings in the Tassets' company

¹¹³ Frederico Zandomenighi describes a photograph, now lost, in which Degas posed some friends as "reclining river gods" in front of a château in Dampierre. Letter from Zandomenighi to Diego Martelli, November 1895, in Daniel, 25. This illustration relates to a photography session that occurred ten years earlier, when Degas staged a tableau vivant recreating Ingres' *Apotheosis of Homer*. This image was photographed by the Dieppe-based photographer Walter Barnes. See Maureen C. O'Brien, *Edgar Degas: Six Friends at Dieppe* (Providence: Rhode Island School of Design, 2005), 6.

¹¹⁴ Daniel, "The Atmosphere of Lamps or Moonlight," 17, 23.

¹¹⁵ Writing to Tasset, Degas described trying to photograph at night, as well as a negative of an old couple seated in a garden which had not been developed long enough. "All is there but very weak. Would it be possible to intensify it, and intensify very lightly, to keep the somewhat gray appearance?" Letter from Degas to Tasset, August 11, 1895, in Newhall, 125 and August 17, 1895, Newhall, 126.

¹¹⁶ While in Mont-Dore, Degas experimented with Lumière panchromatic plates, a new format that produced negatives equally sensitive to all colors of the spectrum. It seems, however, that the plates were exposed to light and ruined before Degas could appreciate them. As he wrote to his printer in Paris, "nothing comes out, dear M. Tasset, on those cursed panchromatics...After just a moment in the [developing] bath, everything becomes black and nothing." A few days earlier, he mentioned breaking the negative holder, which he described as "too delicate, too light, too pretty." Letters from Degas to Tasset, Aug. 15, 17 and 18, 1895 in Newhall, 126. Ludovic Halévy was the husband of Degas's childhood friend, Louise Halévy (née Breguet). See Daniel, 26-27 for a description of this relationship, and Halévy, *Degas parle*, 254-55 in Daniel, 32-33 for a description of the double exposure. Julie Manet also notes Degas spoiling his negatives in a journal entry dated Nov. 29, 1895 in her *Journal (1893-1899): Sa jeunesse parmi les peintres impressionnistes et les hommes de lettres* (Paris: C. Klincksieck, 1979), 73.

¹¹⁷ There are exceptions. In a letter to his sister Marguerite, sent from Mont-Dore, Degas mentions a negative "que j'ai développé hier soir et que je viens de tirer et virer l'épreuve." Letter from Degas to Marguerite, August 18, 1895, in Fevre, 99.

during the summer of 1895, and he dispatched letters of instruction to them when he was out of town to order new supplies or to direct the enlargement and printing of his negatives.¹¹⁸ Degas was clearly proud of his photographs; he made his prints available for viewing at Tasset's shop, and gave copies of his best pictures to his friends and family members.¹¹⁹ For a short time—little more than a year—photography was Degas's frequent pastime and fervent pleasure.¹²⁰

Degas's photographic practice has been explained as a convenient replacement for painting at a time when the artist was becoming increasingly frail, and as a technique that allowed him to expand his pictorial repertoire.¹²¹ Both interpretations propose an easy equivalence between painting and photography that was more a product of the twentieth century than the period in which Degas was taking his photographs. Photography's status as a modern, and eventually fine art form significantly changed the ways that artists and critics conceived of the relationships between media, and encouraged retrospective

¹¹⁸ In these letters, Degas specified the type of print he wanted (one matte, one glossy), and asked Delphine to correct a tear in the emulsion. Newhall, "Amateur Photographer," 124-26. According to Jeanne Fevre, Degas spent evenings in the shops of Tasset et Lhote supervising the enlargement of his prints. Fevre, 140.

¹¹⁹ In a letter from Julie Manet to Stéphane Mallarmé, dated January 1, 1896, Manet notes, "We learned from M. Renoir that the photographs by M. Degas came out well and can be seen at Tasset's." See Stéphane Mallarmé, *Correspondance*, vol. 8, eds. Henri Mondor and Lloyd James Austin (Paris: Gallimard, 1959-1985), 29, no. 2. Daniel suggests that rather than being a public display, the photographs were probably "a small selection of prints, casually available for Degas's friends to see, rather than a true exhibition." The prints preserved by the Halévy family, presumably given to them by Degas, now comprise the majority of the extant images by Degas. Halévy also sent some of Degas's prints to Albert Boulanger-Cavé. See Daniel, 26, 32, 37.

¹²⁰ As Julie Manet recalled in her journal: "M. Degas ne pense plus qu'à la photographie." See Manet, 71.

¹²¹ Childs, "Habits of the Eye," 75. Malcolm Daniel has suggested that Degas treated photography as a "step in the creative process," akin to modeling in wax in its private function, and that he approached photography as the inverse of how he worked in pastel: rather than building up the picture he pared down by cropping and enlarging to identify the "picture" within the frame. Daniel, "Preface," 11 and "The Atmosphere of Lamps or Moonlight," 28.

reappraisals of both painting and photography that glossed over the contentious aspects of their shared history.¹²²

In the mid-twentieth century, recollections of Degas's life as a photographer found an eager audience, and one that was receptive to viewing photography as an extension of the artist's pictorial practice. The most vivid accounts of Degas's photography sessions derive from the journal entries of Daniel Halévy, the son of Degas's close friend Ludovic and a frequent companion of the artist in the 1880s and 90s. In his 1960 memoir *Degas parle*, Daniel described the photography sittings that took place in his family's home after dinner, in which Degas is presented as a cheerful taskmaster who took his photographic work seriously. In a frequently-cited entry dating to December 28, 1895, Daniel recounted the evening's events after Degas and his friend Jules Taschereau retrieved the artist's camera from his studio:

They returned together and from then on the *pleasure* part of the evening was over. Degas raised his voice, became dictatorial, gave orders that a lamp be brought into the little salon and that anyone who wasn't going to pose should leave. The *duty* part of the evening began. We had to obey Degas's fierce will, his artist's ferocity. At the moment all his friends speak of him with terror. If you invite him for the evening you know what to expect: two hours of military obedience.

Daniel continued by providing a first-hand account of the session from start to finish:

In spite of the command to leave if one did not want to pose, I slid into the parlor and silently in the dark I watched Degas. He had seated Uncle Jules, Mathilde, and Henriette on the small sofa in front of the piano. He went back and forth in front of them running from one end of the room to the other with an expression of infinite happiness. He moved lamps, changed the reflectors, tried to light their legs by putting a lamp on the floor—to light Uncle Jules' legs, those famous legs, the slenderest, most supple legs in Paris which Degas always talks about ecstatically.

¹²² The acquisition of photographs at institutions such as The Museum of Modern Art in New York, which began exhibiting photographs as art in 1932 and established a department dedicated to the medium in 1940-41, offers one way of identifying the acceptance of photography as fine art. See the museum's interactive timeline, accessed July 28, 2017: <https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2009/momastarts/>.

“Taschereau,” he said, “hold onto that leg with your right arm, and pull it that way, that way. And now look at that young lady beside you. More affectionately—still more—come on—come on! You can smile so nicely when you want to. And you, Mademoiselle Henriette, bend your head—more—still more. Really bend it. Rest it on your neighbor’s shoulder.”

And when she didn’t follow his orders to suit him, he grabbed her by the nape of the neck and posed her as he wished. He seized hold of Mathilde and turned her face toward her uncle. Then he stepped back and exclaimed happily, “Let’s go.”

The pose was held for two minutes—and then everything was repeated. We’ll see the photographs tonight or tomorrow morning, I think. He will display them here looking happy—and at times like that he is truly happy.

At half-past eleven everybody left; Degas, surrounded by three laughing girls, carried his camera as proudly as a child carrying a rifle.¹²³

In this unsparing but affectionate chronicle of Degas’s process of arranging and taking photographs, Halévy presents the practice as a creative and carefully-conceived endeavor—the opposite of an instantaneous snapshot. Unfazed by the technical intransigence of the medium (it was, in fact, this particular session that resulted in the double exposed images), the artist-photographer remained committed to his pictorial vision.

Attempts to assimilate Degas’s photographic practice with his painterly one also appear in the writing of Degas’s niece, Jeanne Fevre. In her 1949 memoir *Mon Oncle Degas*, Fevre described photography as little more than a “mechanical eye,” but one that Degas, as artist, managed to enlighten. Drawing a comparison between the compositional treatment and lighting in Degas’s photograph *Louise Halévy Reading to Degas* (Fig. 96), and a painting by Rembrandt, Fevre asserted that Degas was the point of origin for photography being taken seriously as an artistic form. “It could be said that Degas, photographer, helped [the

¹²³ Daniel Halévy in his journal, Dec. 29, 1895, in Daniel, 31-32.

mechanical eye] to understand,” Fevre claimed. “[S]urpassing all other photographers, he rendered photography *intelligent*.”¹²⁴

Degas’s practice as a photographer also encouraged the ease with which photography was employed to explain aspects of his painterly practice, beginning at the turn of the twentieth century and with increasing frequency in the years after the artist’s 1917 death.¹²⁵ Photography seemed to offer a way of explaining what was modern, immediate, and intuitive about Degas’s pictorial vision, legitimizing and renewing the critical edge of his realism for viewers in the era of abstraction. Jacques-Émile Blanche, who met Degas as a child and sat for a number of the artist’s photographs as an adult in 1895, offered one of the earliest interpretations of Degas’s art in terms of photography.¹²⁶ In a long essay first published in the *Revue de Paris* in 1913, Blanche described Degas’s compositional layouts and framing in terms of deformations that he linked to the visual language of photography: “[Degas’s] system of composition is perhaps the most precious novelty with which he endowed modern art,” Blanche wrote.

¹²⁴ Fevre mistakenly identifies Louise Halévy as Zoé, Degas’s maid. See Daniel, 50, note 65 and Fevre, 139-40.

¹²⁵ One of the first texts to characterize Degas’s painting by way of photography appears considerably earlier, in Max Liebermann’s 1899 essay on Degas. There, the German painter described the seemingly unposed quality of Degas’s compositions in terms of instantaneous photography: “Degas’ Bilder dagegen Machen zuerst den Eindruck einer Momentaufnahme. Er weiß so zu komponieren, das es nicht mehr komponiert aussieht. Er scheint das ganze Bild in der Natur gesehen, die Scene, die er darstellt, unmittelbar belauscht zu haben. Man sehe z. B. den Pédicure: die Scene ist so drastisch wie möglich, ebenso die Pose, wie der Mann dem Mädchen die Hühneraugen schneidet. Das Arrangement der beiden Figuren so ungesucht und ungekünstelt, als wären sie nach der Natur photographiert, zufällig, wie sie so da zusammen sitzen. Bei genauerer Betrachtung aber entdecken wir unter der Scheinbaren Momentaufnahme die höchste Kunst in der Komposition.” Max Liebermann, *Degas* (Berlin: B.U.P. Cassirer, 1899): 16. This text is in keeping with a broader tendency to describe haphazard framing in terms of a snapshot aesthetic in the 1890s, which I discuss in Chapter Two. Within the context of writing about Degas’s work, it appears to be something of an outlier at this date.

¹²⁶ On Jacques-Émile Blanche’s life and relationship with Degas see *Portraits of a Lifetime, The Late Victorian Era, The Edwardian Pageant 1870-1914*, trans. and ed. Walter Clement (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1937), 40, 72; Georges-Paule Collet, *Jacques-Émile Blanche: Le Peintre-Écrivain* (Paris: Éditions Bartillat, 2006), 20; François Bergot, “Les Tours du monde de Jacques-Émile Blanche” in *Jacques-Émile Blanche: Peintre, écrivain, homme du monde* (Evian: Palais Lumière, 2015), 13-14; and Michel Winock, “Un Homme de droite,” *Jacques-Émile Blanche: Peintre, écrivain, homme du monde* (Evian: Palais Lumière, 2015), 26.

The instantaneous photograph, with its unexpected cropping, its shocking differences in proportion, has become so familiar that the easel paintings of this period no longer astonish us, but the *Foyers de la danse* (Fig. 68), the *Ballet of Robert le Diable* (Fig. 97), and other composed scenes, the racetracks, the laundresses, the gymnasiarchs...no one before [Degas] dreamed of making them, and no one since has given them the style and the gravity that derives only from his drawing.¹²⁷

When Blanche edited this essay for inclusion in his 1919 compilation of essays *Propos de peintres: de David à Degas*, the role of drawing in Degas's creative practice dropped out of the equation altogether. "The system of composition in his work was *the novelty*," Blanche now declared.

He will perhaps be reproached one day for having anticipated the cinema and the snapshot...The instantaneous photograph, with its unexpected cropping, its shocking differences in proportion, has become so familiar that the easel paintings of that time no longer astonish us; but the *Foyers de la danse*, the *Ballet of Robert le Diable*, and other composed scenes, the racetracks, the laundresses, the gymnasiarchs...no one before him, and no one since, thought to put this "gravity" ...in the type of composition that exploits the random accidents of the Kodak camera.¹²⁸

Quite to the contrary of Fénéon and Sickert, Blanche felt little obligation to substantiate the the mental and physical work of making art. Simply by citing Degas's deployment of snapshot effects (in advance of their development in photography itself), Blanche could

¹²⁷ "Le système de composition, chez lui, est peut-être la plus précieuse nouveauté dont il ait doté l'art moderne. Si l'on devait lui faire un reproche, ce serait d'avoir—surtout entre 1870 et 1885—côtoyé le genre de l'illustration. La photographie instantanée, avec ses coupes inattendues, ses différences choquantes dans les proportions, nous est devenue si familière, que les toiles de chevalet de cette époque-là, ne nous étonnent plus, mais les *Foyers de la danse*, le *Ballet de Robert le Diable*, et autres scènes chorégraphiques, les courses, les blanchisseuses, les gymniasarques, enfin tant de tableaux que se disputent aujourd'hui les collectionneurs, personne n'avait songé avant lui à les faire; personne depuis ne leur a donné le style, et cette gravité qui ne tient qu'au dessin. Toulouse-Lautrec, Forain marchèrent sur les traces de leur maître; mais leurs ouvrages demeurent toujours plus amusants que solides et presque de l'illustration, n'ayant pris de l'original que ce qu'un œil éveillé pouvait lui emprunter: le côté « amusant »." Jacques-Emile Blanche, "Notes sur la peinture moderne (à propos de la collection Rouart)," *Revue de Paris* 20 (Jan. 15, 1913): 385.

¹²⁸ "Le système de composition, chez lui, fut *la nouveauté*. On lui reprochera peut-être un jour d'avoir anticipé le cinéma et l'instantané—et d'avoir, surtout entre 1870 et 1885—côtoyé « le tableau de genre ». La photographie instantanée, avec ses coupes inattendues, ses différences choquantes dans les proportions, nous est devenue si familière, que les toiles de chevalet de cette époque-là ne nous étonnent plus ; mais les *Foyers de la Danse*, le *Ballet de Robert le Diable*, et autres scènes chorégraphiques, les courses, les blanchisseuses, les gymniasarques, enfin tant de tableaux que se disputent aujourd'hui les collectionneurs, personne n'avait songé avant lui à les faire, personne, depuis, ne mit cette « gravité »—(encore une fois !)—dans une sorte de composition qui profite des hasards du kodak." Jacques-Emile Blanche, *Propos de peintre. De David à Degas*, 4th edition (Paris: Émile-Paul Frères, Éditeurs, 1919), 297-98.

demonstrate that the artist's paintings were intellectual and avant-garde in their sensibility.

This emphatic connection between Degas and photography continued, such that Blanche characterized Degas as an extension of the camera himself just a few years later. In a monograph dedicated to Manet published in 1924, Blanche positioned Degas in a passive relationship to photography. Rather than anticipating the snapshot, as the author suggested in 1919, now Degas's insights were linked to his recognition of the compositional cues that it offered. It was Degas, Blanche explained, who taught his colleagues "the advantages that may be drawn from the unexpected 'cropping' that accidents of instantaneous photography sometimes give."¹²⁹ In addition to absorbing photography's "advantages," Degas's pictorial procedures themselves could be understood in terms of photography: "Degas's eye was photographic," the author asserted, "it served to register [the scene in front of him], his mind then corrected the proof."¹³⁰ In Blanche's account, Degas's synthesis of the camera's way of seeing with the act of making paintings enabled him to mobilize the impression of instantaneity in his pictures without compromising his role as artist-creator. Collapsing together Degas's painterly and photographic practices renewed the modern cachet of realist painting.

For a sense of how far the pendulum had swung by the late 1930s, Paul Valéry's essay "Degas, Danse, Dessin" managed to synthesize photography with an interpretation that was once associated with an anti-photographic understanding of the artist's work. In a series of passages describing Degas's artistic practice, Valéry presented the painter's

¹²⁹ "Contrairement à ce que l'on s'est plu depuis sa mort à écrire, c'est lui qui démontra, pour tous ses successeurs, y compris Lautrec, les avantages à tirer des 'coupes' inattendues que le hasard de la photographie instantanée donne parfois." Jacques-Émile Blanche, *Manet* (Paris: Rieder, 1924), 45.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

experience as a photographer as evidence of his forward-looking and open-minded approach to art. Degas “had a liking and appreciation for photography at a time when artists still despised, or dared not admit they made use of it,” Valéry explained.¹³¹ He then continued by positioning Degas’s photographic prints as works of art in their own right: “[Degas] took some very fine [photographs] himself,” the author asserted, “and I still treasure one particular enlargement he gave me. It shows Mallarmé leaning against the wall, close by a mirror, with Renoir sitting opposite on a divan (Fig. 98). In the mirror you can just make out, like phantoms, Degas and the camera, Mme and Mlle Mallarmé.” Valéry described Degas’s achievement in photography by emphasizing his investment of time and labor, writing: “This masterpiece of its kind involved the use of nine oil lamps, and a fearful quarter-hour of immobility for the subjects. It has the finest likeness of Mallarmé I have ever seen, apart from Whistler’s admirable lithograph...”¹³² Valéry went far in his characterization of Degas’s hybrid practice, characterizing the artist as a camera who “approaches, withdraws, leans over, screws his eyes up, his whole body behaving like an instrument of the eye, becoming entirely a means for aiming, pointing, controlling, reducing to focus.”¹³³

Rather than giving over the values of Degas’s painterly practice completely, however, Valéry offered a way of assimilating the two so that the work of making photographs was compatible with the repetitive labor of Degas’s studio practice. He emphasized that Degas “tried, he dared try to combine the snapshot with the endless labor of the studio, enshrining his impression of it in prolonged study—the instantaneous given

¹³¹ Paul Valéry, *Degas, Manet and Morisot*. Trans. David Paul (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), 40.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 38.

enduring quality by the patience of intense meditation.”¹³⁴ This interpretation offers an intriguing way of making sense of two seemingly contradictory aspects of Degas’s work: the sense of spontaneity and immediacy of his images, and the reality of his pictorial practice, which was by all accounts long and labor-intensive regardless of the medium in which he worked. It is only by recovering the anti-photographic understanding of Degas’s work in the 1870s and 80s that we can appreciate the substantial shifts in pictorial practice and theory that persuaded Degas to pick up the camera a decade later.

¹³⁴ Valéry, 55.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has argued that photographic forms of making and standards of picturing had profound effects on the interpretation of painterly practice during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. It has shown that over a relatively short period of time—little more than five years between the mid-1870s and early-1880s—techniques once associated with “truthful” representation, such as working directly from the motif or rapidly sketching an impression could now be dismissed as false and “photographic” based on analogies between these seemingly mimetic methods and the function of a camera. In response, artists and art critics emphasized the importance of creative labor, maintaining that it was the painter’s intellectual processing of his or her subject matter that distinguished truthful pictorial *art* from superficial and instantaneous reproduction.

British artist and art critic Walter Sickert plays an important role in this history. As one of the most outspoken and dedicated opponents to photography’s influence on painting, Sickert’s numerous art reviews and essays on the state of modern realism offer insights into the range of ways that late-nineteenth century writers harnessed photographic language and theories to criticize pictorial procedures. For Sickert, an accomplished painter in his own right, it was critically important that the truths of painterly realism could be distinguished from those of photography, and he employed

several rhetorical strategies to reinforce the boundaries between the two media. In many of the texts surveyed here, Sickert juxtaposed methods he associated with “artistic” and “inartistic” realism. Thus Jules Bastien-Lepage was Sickert’s standard bearer for photo-realism, a form of painting concerned solely with the reproduction of surface appearances, and Edgar Degas was his opposite, as the author of well-worked pictures that Sickert deeply admired.

The differences between Bastien-Lepage and Degas helped Sickert to shape and articulate his notion of a “truthful” realist painting, one that was based on the artist’s intellectual labor and personal processing of observations, rather than the superficial work of directly copying what one could see. Well into the twentieth century Sickert continued to cite Degas as a model for best practices in art: in a memorial article in the *Burlington Magazine* published shortly after Degas’s death, Sickert quoted the elder artist as recommending that one “give the idea of truth with the false.” While Sickert claimed not to understand this advice “until a week ago,” Degas’s understanding of the importance of painterly interference in a picture encapsulates the approach to realism that Sickert and like-minded critics urgently advocated.¹³⁵ In the era of the snapshot, artistic truth needed to be located in the artist’s intellectual and material work, lest the procedures of painting be indistinguishable from the operations of a camera.

Degas’s aphorism was directed to painters, but his approach to realist painting practice has points of overlap with the theories espoused by British photographer Henry Peach Robinson. Robinson had no relationship with the painters under consideration here, yet his pursuit of photographic art was based on a set of principles and methods that

¹³⁵ “On donne l’idée du vrai avec le faux.” Walter Sickert, “Degas,” *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 31, no. 176 (Nov. 1917): 185.

dovetails in significant ways with those of Sickert, Degas, and Bastien-Lepage. Like Sickert, Robinson felt the acute need to distinguish his process from utilitarian photography, and he employed “false” means to do so. Robinson practiced what Degas preached by making physical alterations to his scenes and manipulating his negatives in the darkroom to produce pictures that were, he claimed, more “truthful” as a result. Like Bastien-Lepage, however, Robinson found himself under scrutiny for prioritizing manual techniques over intellectual ones, and for drawing attention to these inartistic procedures in ways that fragmented his compositions both visually and conceptually. The contradictions between practice and theory in Robinson’s photographic work parallel those in painting at the end of the nineteenth century, even while the contexts in which each artist worked—and the expectations and limitations to which they were subjected—were distinct.

Photography’s ever-changing technical and visual forms have meant that its function as a descriptor will never be stable. In the period under consideration here, this resulted in the continuous reevaluation of realist painting so that it was aligned more and more closely with photography. Even Sickert’s own pictures were subject to this type of posthumous reappraisal. Writing in 1955, abstract painter Patrick Heron characterized Sickert’s process in terms that come astonishingly close to those that Sickert once directed towards Bastien-Lepage. In a passage comparing the British painter to illustrator Charles Keene, Heron described both Sickert and Keene as possessing a “camera-eye” that enabled them to “*record*—and to record with mechanical truth—the exact position of each object in the field of vision.” Heron continued by asserting that the two artists “behave[d] like photosensitized plates in that they registered the lights and darks of the visual field without interpreting them. They didn’t risk distorting the photographic tones by feeling the forms

which underlie appearances: they simply captured appearances as such.”¹³⁶ He concluded that Sickert lacked “empathy” for his subjects because he was focused solely on exteriors, a perspective that has shifted more recently as Sickert’s exploitation of photography and photographic effects have come to be appreciated as alternatives to self-consciously “expressive” modes of modernist depiction.¹³⁷

Aside from the historical irony that Sickert’s “truthful” technique could be reduced to mere photography in the mid-twentieth century, the ease with which Heron dismissed the artist’s procedures as camera-like demonstrates the persistence of the problems that emerged in the 1880s and 90s. After photography, painting would never be the same again. Not because painters veered towards abstraction or consciously imitated photographic effects, but because photography became an implicit point of comparison for the very act of representation itself. It did not matter that Sickert’s paintings do not *look* like very much like photographs; the artist’s ambition to “capture appearances” was all it took for Heron to reconceive the painterly intention to render a momentary, unposed scene as little more than passive registration on a photographic plate.

¹³⁶ Patrick Heron, *The Changing Forms of Art* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1955), 251.

¹³⁷ See, for example, Rebecca Daniels, “Sickert and Photography,” *Tate, etc.* 37 (Summer 2016), accessed Oct. 9, 2017: <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/sickert-and-photography>.

FIGURES

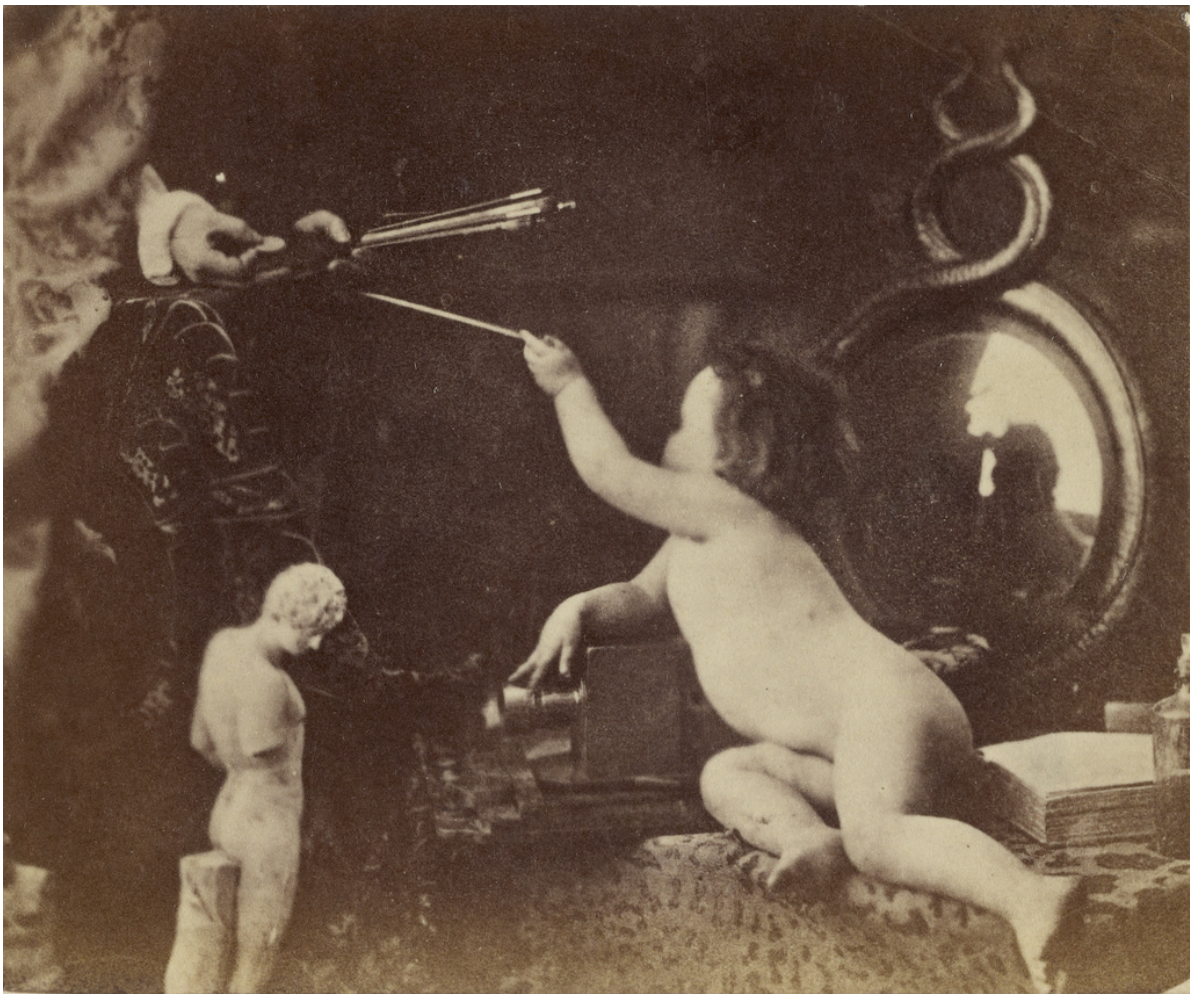


FIG. 1
Oscar Rejlander, *The Infant Photography Giving the Painter an Additional Brush*, c. 1856. Albumen silver print, Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum



FIG. 2
Statue of Nicéphore Niépce. Chalon-sur-Saône, Musée Nicéphore Niépce

ÉLECTRO-PHYSIOLOGIE PHOTOGRAPHIQUE.

PL. 7.



DUCHENNE (de Boulogne), phot.

FIG. 3
Guillaume-Benjamin Duchenne de Boulogne, Plate 7 in *Mécanisme de la physiognomie humaine*
(Paris: Chez Veuve Jules Renouard 1862). Canberra, National Gallery of Australia

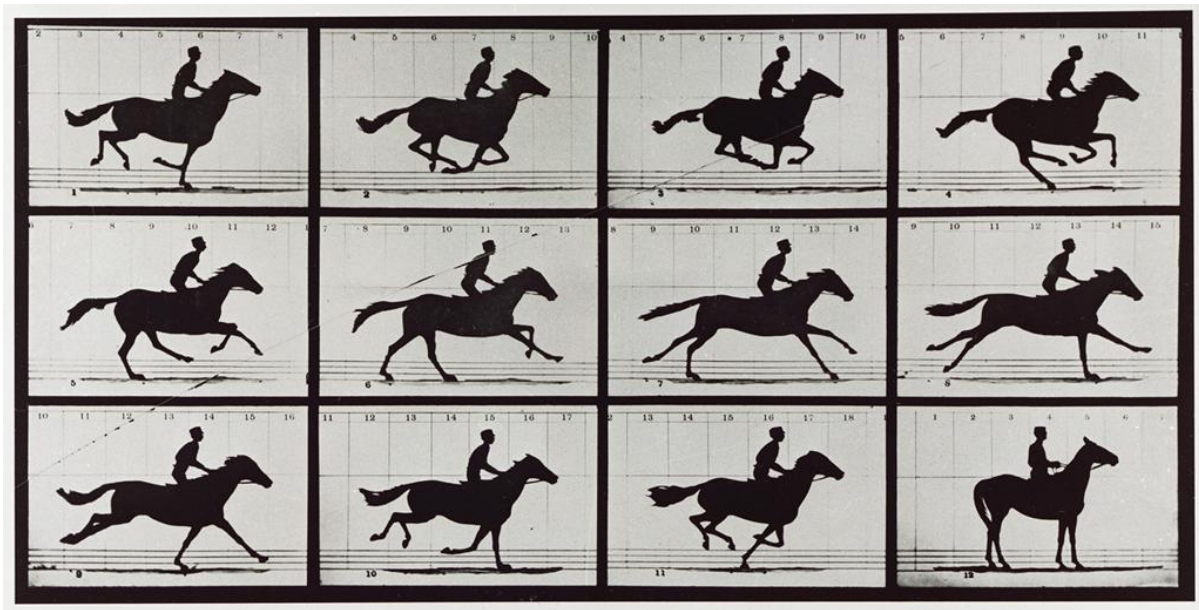


FIG. 4

Eadweard Muybridge, *Galloping Horse (Sallie Gardner Running)*, 1878. Rochester, George Eastman House



FIG. 5

George Townly Stubbs after George Stubb, *Baronet*, 1794. Hand colored stipple with etching, New Haven, Yale Center for British Art



FIG. 6

Thomas Eakins, *A May Morning in the Park (The Fairman Rogers Four-in-Hand)*, 1879-80. Oil on canvas, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art



FIG. 7
William Logsdail, *Bank and Royal Exchange*, 1887. Oil on canvas,
Private Collection (Sold Sotheby's July 13, 2010)



FIG. 8

Charles Nègre, *Le Joueur d'orgue*, before 1853. Oil paint on salted paper print, Private Collection



FIG. 9

Charles Nègre, *Le joueur d'orgue de barbarie et deux enfants qui l'écotent*, 1853. Salted paper print, Paris, Musée d'Orsay



FIG. 10
Jean-Léon Gérôme, *The Prisoner*, 1861. Oil on panel, Nantes, Musée des beaux-arts



FIG. 11
Auguste Bartholdi, *View of Luxor from the Nile*, 1855-6. Salt print, Colmar, Musée Bartholdi

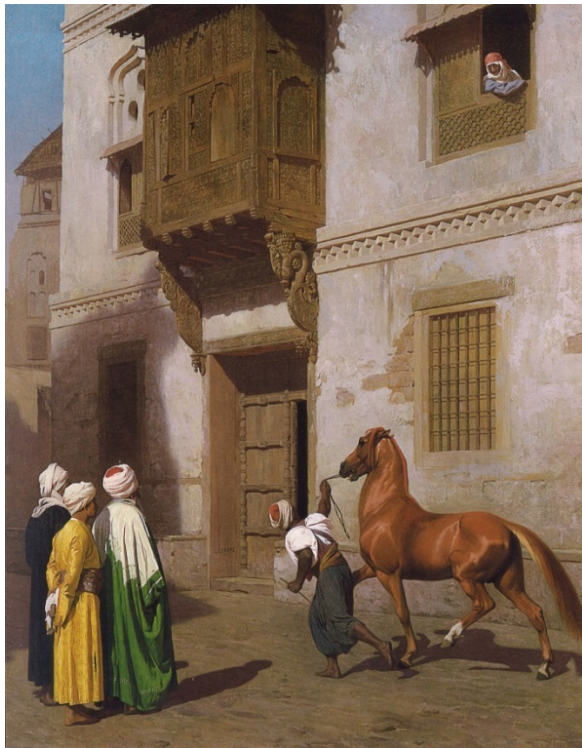


FIG. 12
Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Cairene Horse Dealer (The Horse Market)*, c. 1867. Oil on panel,
Stockton, The Haggin Museum

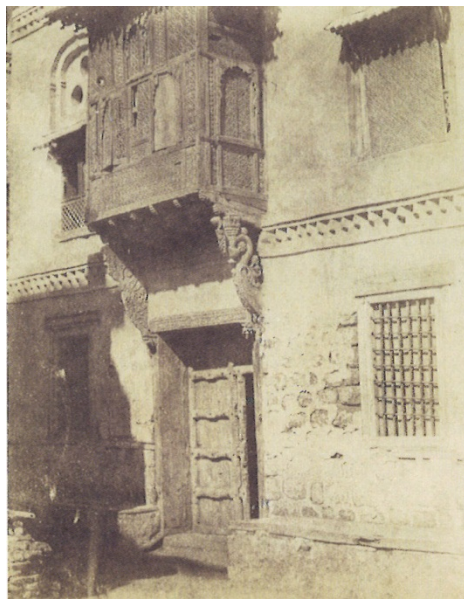


FIG. 13
Auguste Bartholdi, *Mashrabiya, Moka (Yemen)*, 1856.
Salt print, Colmar, Musée Bartholdi



FIG. 14
Jean-Léon Gérôme, *The Death of Caesar*, 1867. Oil on canvas,
Baltimore, The Walters Art Museum



FIG. 15

Thomas Eakins, *Shad Fishing at Gloucester on the Delaware River*, 1881. Oil on canvas, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art



FIG. 16
Jules-Alexis Muenier, *Aux Beaux Jours*, 1889. Oil on canvas,
Collection of Bradley P. Radichel



FIG. 17
Jules-Alexis Muenier, Preparatory photograph for *Aux Beaux Jours*, c. 1889.
Collection of the family of the artist

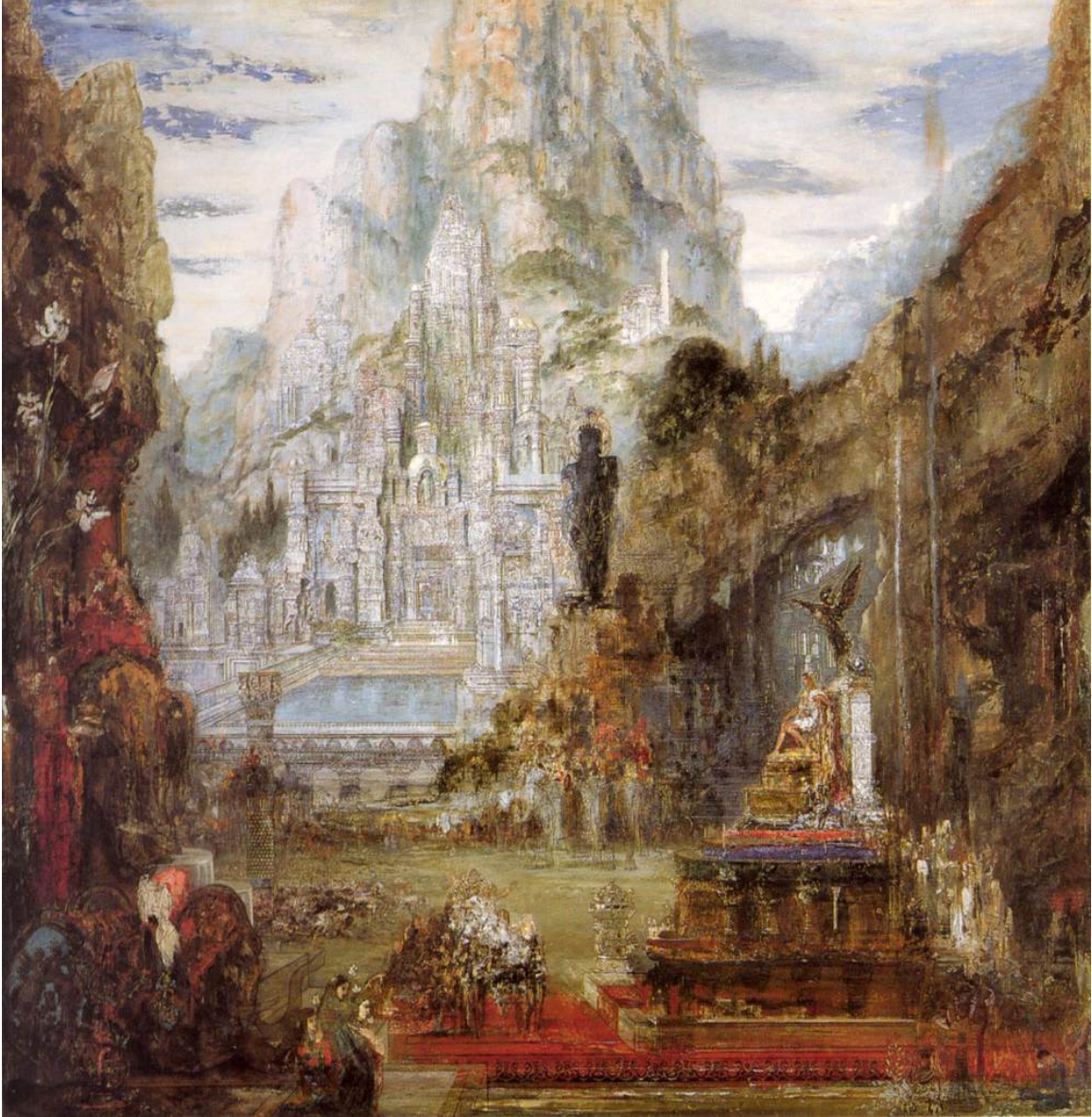


FIG. 18

Gustave Moreau, *The Triumph of Alexander the Great in India*, c. 1874, c. 1882, and c. 1890.
Oil on canvas, Paris, Musée Gustave Moreau



FIG. 19
Gustave Moreau, *Hesiod and the Muse*, 1891. Oil on canvas, Paris, Musée d'Orsay



FIG. 20
Gustave Moreau, Study for *Hesiod and the Muse*, c. 1891. Pencil on tracing paper,
Paris, Musée Gustave Moreau



FIG. 21
Henri Rupp (attr.), Model posing for *Hesiod and the Muse*, c. 1891.
Paris, Musée Gustave Moreau



FIG. 22

Charles Spitz, *Rock Spring in the Samoan Islands*, by 1887. Sydney, Collection of the Mitchell Library at the State Library of New South Wales



FIG. 23
Paul Gauguin, *Pape Moe (Mysterious Waters)*, 1893. Oil on canvas,
Zurich, Private Collection



FIG. 24
John La Farge, *After the Bath, South Seas, Tahiti*, ca. 1895-1908. New Haven, Beinecke Rare Book and
Manuscript Library, Yale University



FIG. 25

Ad. Braun et Cie, Photograph of *Le Yacht La Sirène* by Jan Van Beers, c. 1881. Antwerp, Archief en Museum voor het Vlaamse Cultuurleven

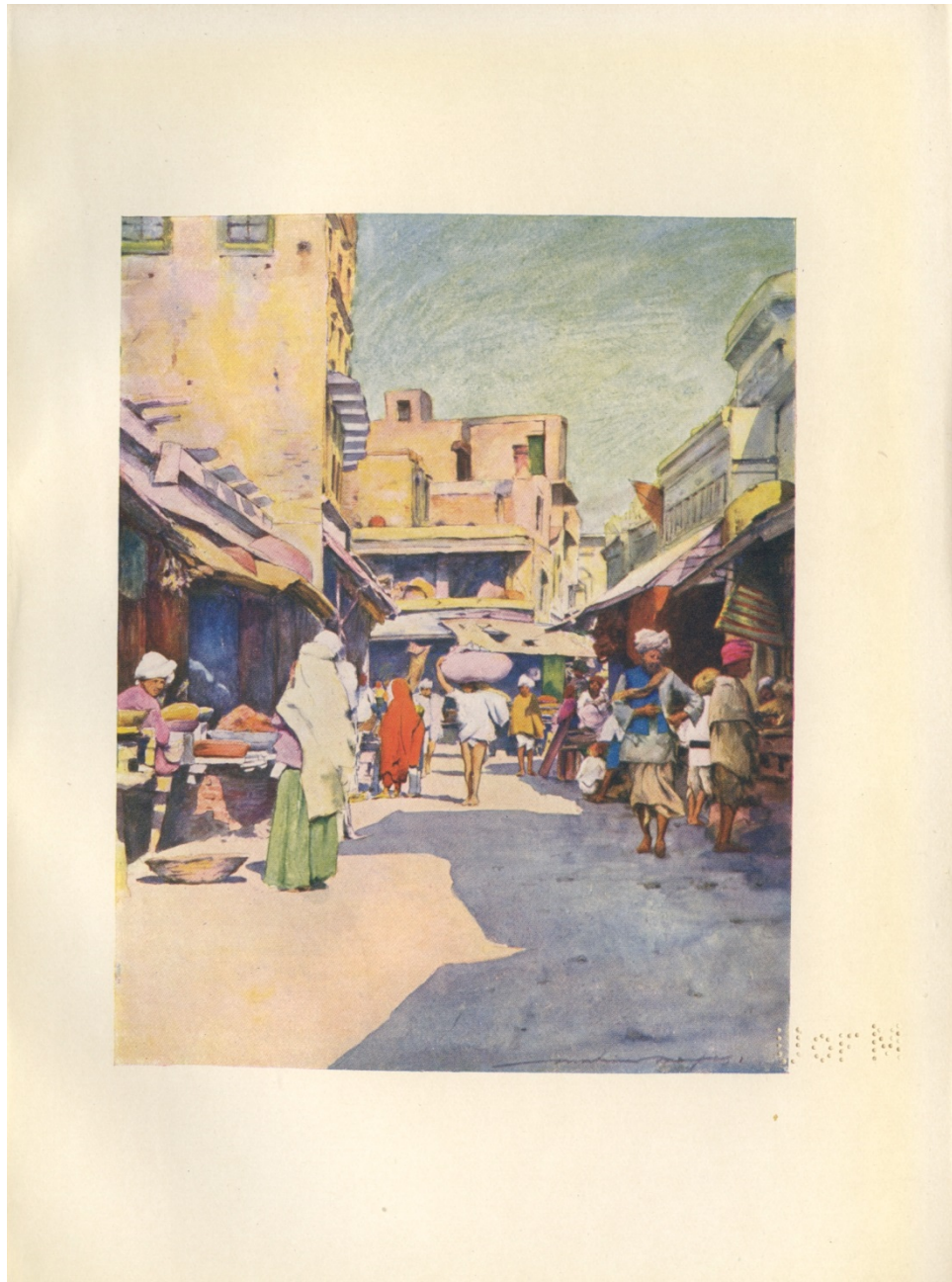


FIG. 26
Mortimer Menpes, *A Bazaar in Amritsar*, published in *India*, November 1905.
Color halftone print after a watercolor drawing.
Ann Arbor, Fine Arts Library, University of Michigan



FIG. 27
Walter Sickert, *Mrs. Swinton*, 1905. Oil on canvas,
Cambridge, The Fitzwilliam Museum

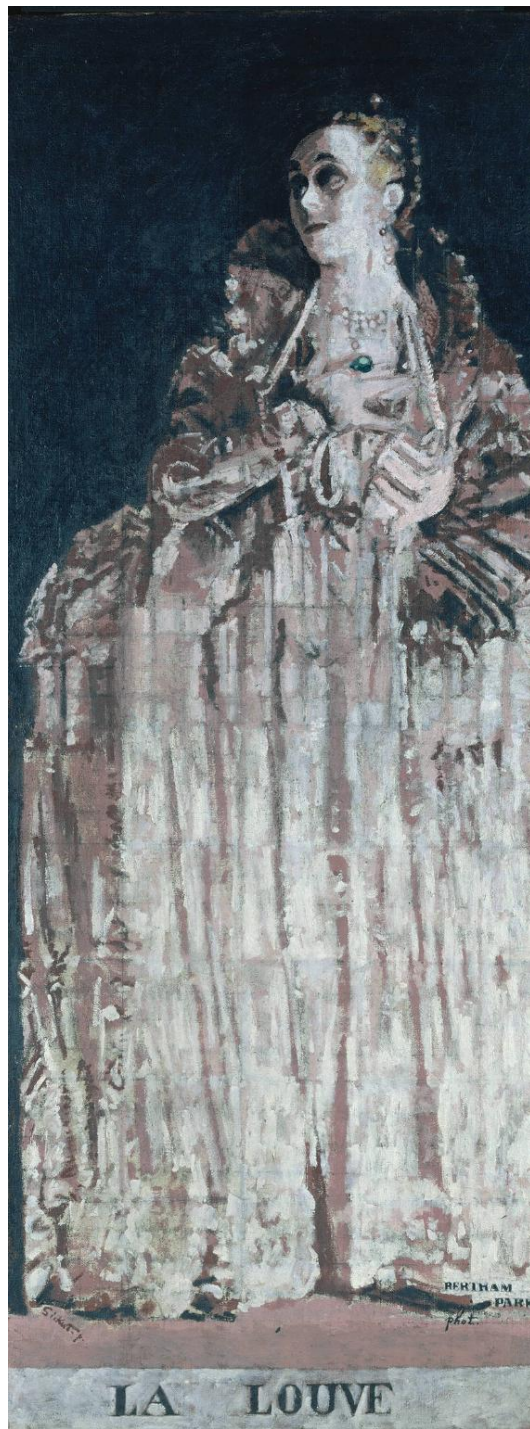


FIG. 28
Walter Sickert, *Miss Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies as Isabella of France*, 1932.
Oil on canvas, London, Tate Britain

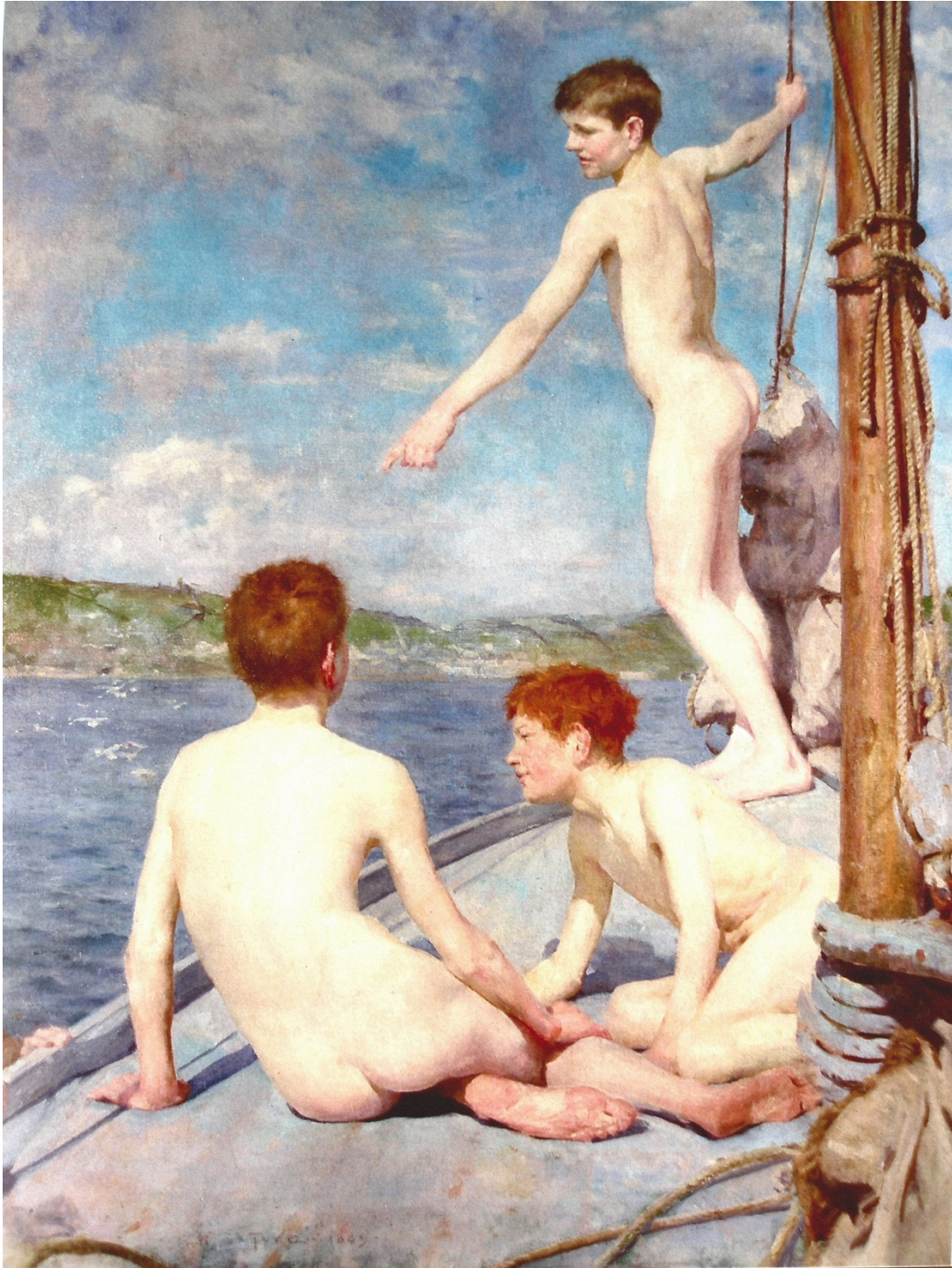


FIG. 29
Henry Scott Tuke, *The Bathers*, 1889. Oil on canvas, Leeds, Leeds City Art Galleries



FIG. 30
Jules Bastien-Lepage, *October: The Potato Harvest*, 1878. Oil on canvas,
Melbourne, National Gallery of Victoria



FIG. 31
Jules Bastien-Lepage, *Joan of Arc*, 1879. Oil on canvas, New York,
Metropolitan Museum of Art



FIG. 32
Jules Bastien-Lepage, *Portrait of "My Grandfather,"* c. 1874. Oil on canvas, Nice, Musée Jules Chéret



FIG. 33

Jules Bastien-Lepage, *Portrait of Sarah Bernhardt*, 1878-9. Oil on canvas, Collection of Ann and Gordon Getty



FIG. 34
Jules Bastien-Lepage, *The Annunciation to the Shepherds*, 1875. Oil on canvas,
Melbourne, National Gallery of Victoria



FIG. 35
Jules Bastien-Lepage, *Les Foins*, 1877. Oil on canvas, Paris, Musée d'Orsay



FIG. 36
Jules Bastien-Lepage, *Portrait of Simon Hayem*, 1875. Oil on canvas,
Hazebrouck, Musée Municipal



FIG. 37

Image of a hysteric under hypnosis at Salpêtrière, from D.M. Bourneville and P. Régnerd, *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière (service de M. Charcot)* Paris: aux bureau du "Progrès médical," 1876-1880. Washington, D.C. Library of Congress



FIG. 38

Jules Bastien-Lepage, *Le Mendiant*, 1880. Oil on canvas, Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek



FIG. 39
Jules Bastien-Lepage, *Le Père Jacques*, 1881. Oil on canvas, Milwaukee, Milwaukee Museum of Art

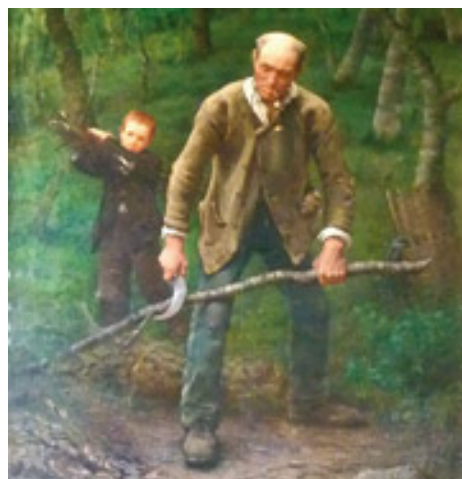


FIG. 40
Honoré Umbricht, *Au bois, en Lorraine*, 1883. Oil on canvas, Hôtel de Ville d'Obernai



FIG. 41

Henri Gervex, *Memory of the Night of the 4th*, 1880. Oil on canvas, St. Etienne, Musée d'Art Moderne



FIG. 42
Jules Bastien-Lepage, *Pauvre Fauvette*, 1881. Oil on canvas, Glasgow, Kelvingrove Art Gallery



FIG. 43

George Clausen, *The Stone Pickers*, 1887. Oil on canvas, Newcastle upon Tyne, Laing Art Gallery



FIG. 44
Émile Friant, *La Toussaint*, 1888. Oil on canvas, Nancy, Musée des beaux-arts



— l'as accéléré... arche! Ran, plan plan, p'an p'an, p'an p'an...

FIG. 45

Caricature of *La Toussaint* from *Journal amusant*, 1889. Nancy, Musée des beaux-arts, Salle de documentation



FIG. 46
Henry Peach Robinson, *Carolling*, 1887. Platinum print from four negatives,
Bradford, National Media Museum



FIG. 47

Henry Peach Robinson, *A Holiday in the Wood*, 1860. Albumen print from seven negatives, Rochester, George Eastman Museum



FIG. 48
Henry Peach Robinson, "*Here They Come!*," 1859. Albumen print,
Collection of Margaret Harker

necessitate elevation of sentiment, or which (as photography) will not allow him to depict motion, &c.—prevent him from forming his standard of taste and his knowledge of the true principles of general art by the careful study of the most refined and exalted examples. “*Facilis est descensus;*” and he will find that his due appreciation of the beauties of a

shows the superiority of Italian art over every other in the intellectual treatment of such a subject.

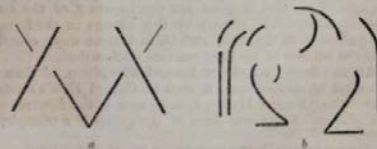
The reader applying to this composition the method of analysis which we have illustrated, will observe that the *lines* of the ministering priest, holding the consecrated wafer, are immediately opposed by the bold sweep of the



“*Madonna and Child,*” by Raffaello, will make its chastening influence felt, and only heighten the qualities which a mere study from a female peasant may be made to possess.

The above illustration is from “*The Last Communion of St. Jerome,*” by Domenichino. This is esteemed to be the second picture of the world; “*The Transfiguration,*” by Raffaello, immediately opposite to which it is placed in the Vatican, being considered the first. Nor does it at all suffer from its proximity to that great work, its high qualities enabling it well to sustain the trying comparison. In this fine picture we have an example of circular composition, carried through with perfect regularity in all its lines, whilst the pathos and elevation with which the delineation of the last moments of the dying recluse is treated by the painter,

retiring ones beneath, *σ*, into whose mass the figures on either side are merged, and that the very folds of his drapery are made subservient to the unity and simplicity of the com-



position; that the equilibrium of base of the central figure is restored by the upturned head of the young man, which

FIG. 49

Reproduction after Domenichino, *The Last Communion of St. Jerome* in William Lake Price, “*On Composition and Chiar’oscuro,*” *Photographic News* III (Mar. 16, 1860): 333



FIG. 50

Oscar Rejlander, *The Two Ways of Life*, 1857 (printed 1930s). Carbon print after an albumen original, Bradford, National Media Museum

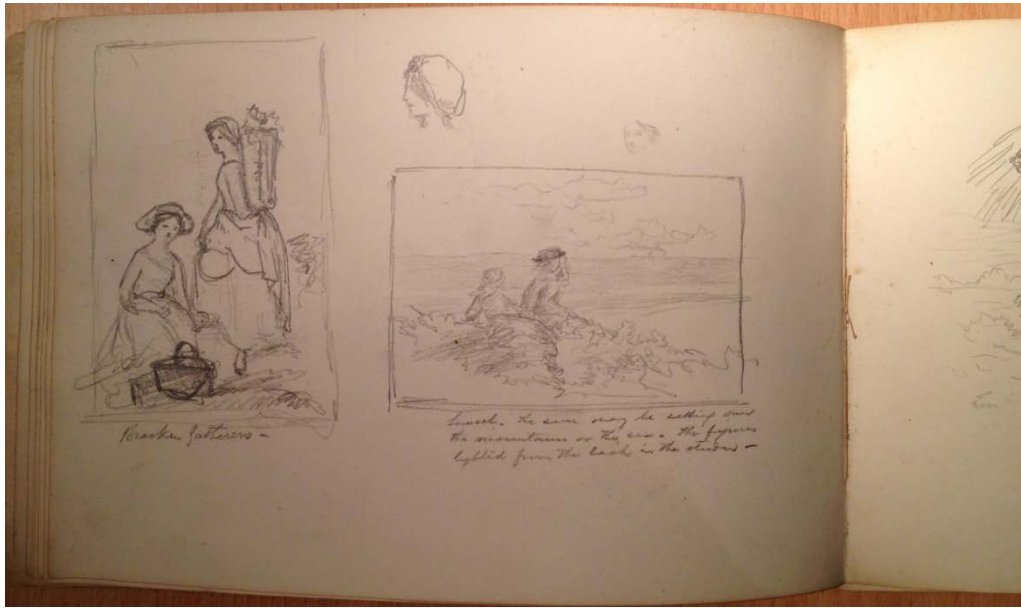


FIG. 51 (top) and FIG. 52 (bottom)
Henry Peach Robinson, two pages from a sketchbook, c. 1860s. Pencil on paper,
Bradford, National Media Museum



FIG. 53
Henry Peach Robinson, preparatory drawing for *Carolling*, 1887. Pencil on paper,
Bradford, National Media Museum



FIG. 54

Henry Peach Robinson, Study for *A Holiday in the Wood*, May 1860. Salted paper print with applied graphite and watercolor, Austin, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas

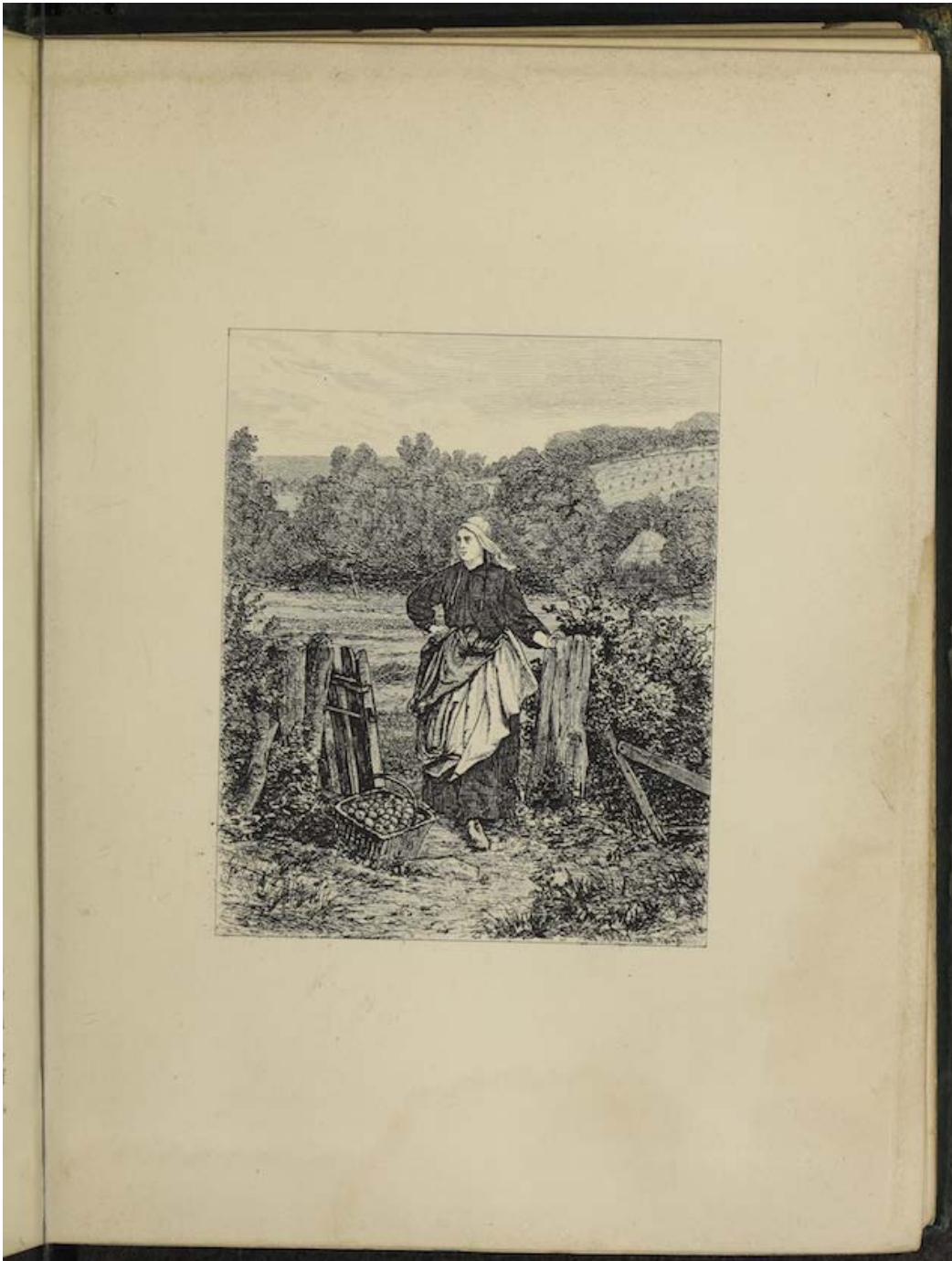


FIG. 55

After Mr. Slingsby, *Rest*, 1869. Wood engraving, published in Henry Peach Robinson, *Pictorial Effect in Photography: Being Hints on Composition and Chiaroscuro for Photographers*, London: Piper & Carter 1869, after p. 52. Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute



FIG. 56
After Mr. Slingsby, *Early Summer*, 1869. Wood engraving, published in the
Illustrated London News, 55 (Dec. 4, 1869): 568



FIG. 57

Henry Peach Robinson, *Autumn*, 1864. Albumen print from four negatives, Bradford, National Media Museum



FIG. 58
Henry Peach Robinson, detail of negative for *Carolling*, 1887. Glass plate negative
with ink and paper additions, Bradford, National Media Museum

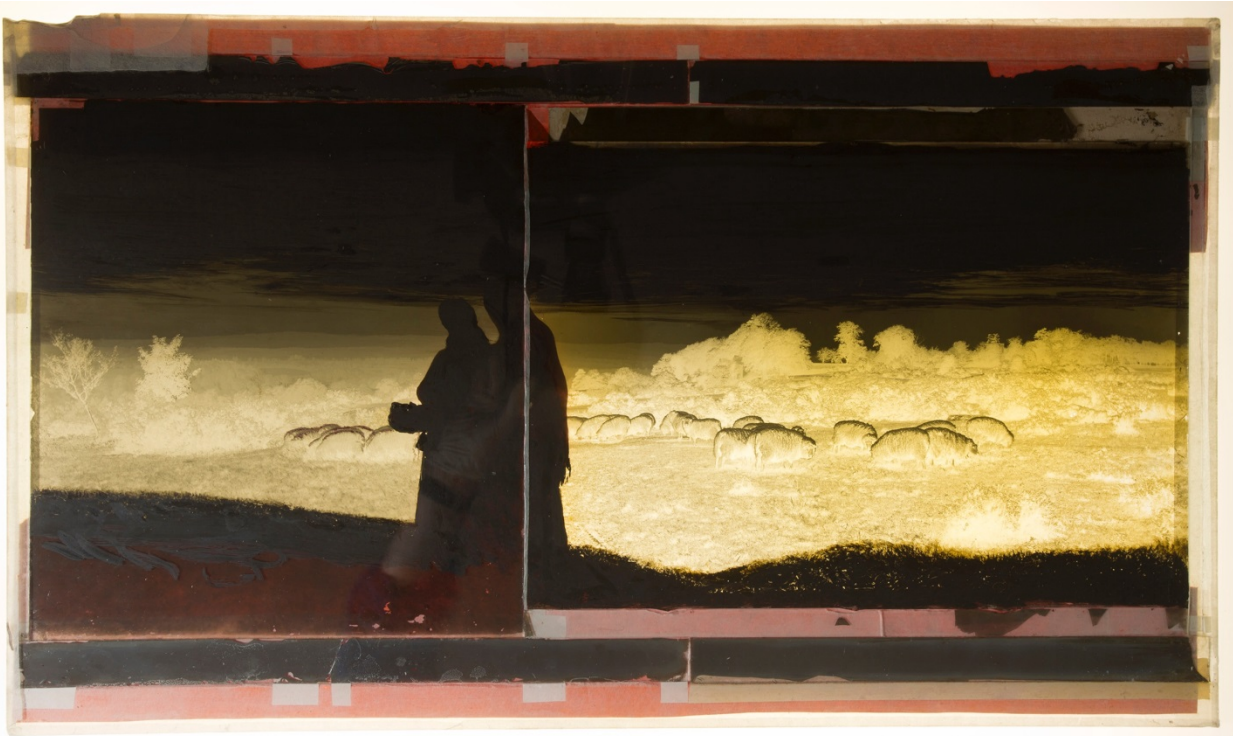


FIG. 59

Henry Peach Robinson, background negatives for *Carolling*, 1887. Two glass plate negatives with ink and paper additions, Bradford, National Media Museum



FIG. 60
Oscar Rejlander, *Head of John the Baptist*, 1858. Albumen print, Rochester, George Eastman House



FIG. 61

George Davison, *The Onion Field*, 1890 (printed 1907). Photogravure, Bradford, National Media Museum



FIG. 62

Edgar Degas, *Place de la Concorde (Vicomte Ludovic Lepic and his Daughters)*, 1875.
Oil on canvas, St. Petersburg State Hermitage Museum



FIG. 63

Edgar Degas, *Street Scene*, c. 1895. Gelatin silver print, New York, The Museum of Modern Art



FIG. 64

Edgar Degas, *A Woman Seated beside a Vase of Flowers (Madame Paul Valpinçon?)*, 1865.
Oil on canvas, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art



FIG. 65
Edgar Degas, *At the Milliner's*, 1882. Pastel on pale gray wove paper, laid down on silk bolting,
New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art



FIG. 66

Edgar Degas, *Waiting*, c. 1882. Pastel on paper, Owned jointly by the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, and the Norton Simon Art Foundation, Pasadena



FIG. 67

Edgar Degas, *Café concert des ambassadeurs*, 1876-7. Pastel on monotype, Lyon, Musée des beaux-arts



FIG. 68

Edgar Degas, *La Répétition au foyer de la danse*, c. 1870-1872. Oil on canvas, Washington, D.C., Phillips Collection



FIG. 69

Edgar Degas, *The Rehearsal*, c. 1873-1878. Oil on canvas, Cambridge, Harvard Art Museums



FIG. 70
Edgar Degas, *At the Races in the Countryside*, 1869. Oil on canvas, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts



FIG. 71
Edgar Degas, *The Dancing Class*, c. 1870. Oil on wood, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



FIG. 72

Edgar Degas, *Répétition d'un ballet sur la scène*, 1874. Oil on canvas, Paris, Musée d'Orsay



FIG. 73

Edgar Degas, *Yellow Dancers in the Wings*, 1874-6. Oil on canvas, Chicago, Art Institute of Chicago



FIG. 74

Edgar Degas, *Portraits in an Office (New Orleans)*, 1873. Oil on canvas, Pau, Musée des Beaux-Arts



FIG. 75

Edgar Degas, *Woman Ironing*, 1873. Oil on canvas, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art



FIG. 76
Gustave Caillebotte, *Floor Scrapers*, 1875. Oil on canvas, Paris, Musée d'Orsay



FIG. 77

Gustave Caillebotte, *Young Man by the Window*, 1875. Oil on canvas, Dallas, Edwin L. Cox Collection



FIG. 78
Gustave Caillebotte, *Young Man Playing the Piano*, 1876. Oil on canvas, Private Collection



FIG. 79
Gustave Caillebotte, *Paris Street, Rainy Day*, 1877. Oil on canvas, Chicago, Art Institute of Chicago



FIG. 80
Gustave Caillebotte, *Pont de l'Europe*, 1876. Oil on canvas, Geneva, Musée du Petit Palais



FIG. 81

Gustave Caillebotte, *Interior: Woman Reading*, 1880. Oil on canvas, Private Collection



FIG. 82

Gustave Caillebotte, *Boulevard Seen from Above*, 1880. Oil on canvas, Private Collection



FIG. 83

Gustave Caillebotte, *Man on a Balcony*, 1880. Oil on canvas, Private Collection



FIG. 84

André Kertész, *Avenue de l'opéra vue de haut, Paris, 1929*. Gelatin silver print, Charenton-le-Pont, Médiathèque de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine



FIG. 85

Edgar Degas, *Portrait of M. Duranty*, 1879. Pastel tempera, watercolor, and charcoal on linen, Glasgow, The Burrell Collection, Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum



FIG. 86

Edgar Degas, *Jockeys Before the Race*, 1879. *Peinture à l'essence*, gouache, and pastel on paper, Birmingham, The Barber Institute of Fine Arts, The University of Birmingham



FIG. 87
Edgar Degas, *Laundresses Carrying Laundry*, 1876-8. Oil colors mixed with turpentine on paper, mounted on canvas, Private Collection



FIG. 88

Edgar Degas, *Dance Examination*, 1880. Pastel on paper, Denver, Denver Art Museum



FIG. 89

Edgar Degas, *Little Dancer, Aged Fourteen*, 1878-81. Pigmented beeswax, clay, metal armature, rope, paintbrushes, human hair, silk and linen ribbon, cotton and silk tutu, linen slippers, on wooden base, Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art

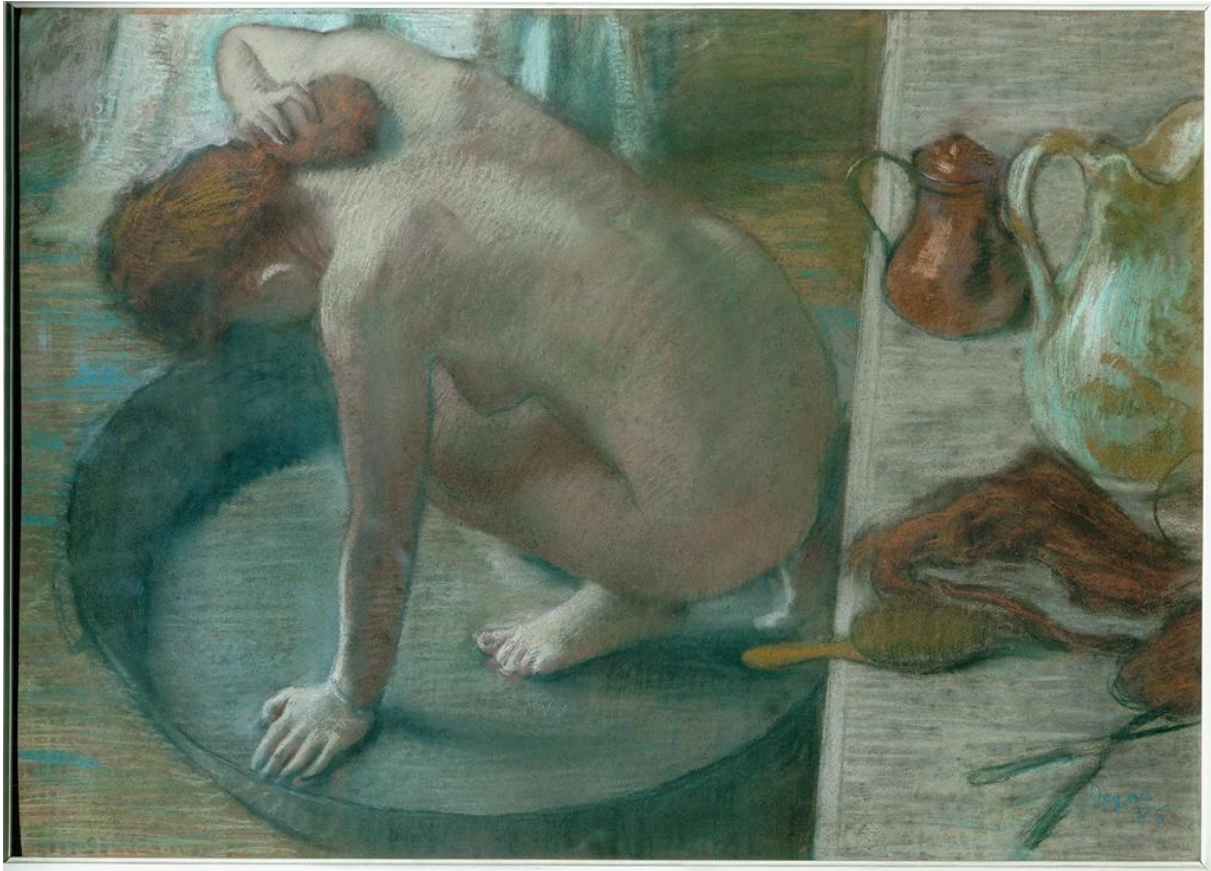


FIG. 90
Edgar Degas, *The Tub*, 1886. Pastel on card, Paris, Musée d'Orsay



FIG. 91

Edgar Degas, *Paule Gobillard, Jeannie Gobillard, Julie Manet, and Geneviève Mallarmé*, 1895.
Gelatin silver print, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art



FIG. 92
Edgar Degas and Walter Barnes, *Apotheosis of Degas*, 1885. Albumen silver print,
Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum



FIG. 93

Edgar Degas, *The Hourdel Road, near Saint-Valéry-sur-Somme*, 1895. Gelatin silver print, Cambridge, Harvard Art Museums



FIG. 94

Edgar Degas, *Henriette Taschereau, Mathilde Niaudet, and Jules Taschereau; Sophie Taschereau-Niaudet and Jeanne Niaudet*, December 28, 1895. Gelatin silver printing out print, Private Collection



FIG. 95

Edgar Degas, *Mathilde and Jeanne Niaudet, Daniel Halévy, and Henriette Taschereau; Ludovic and Élie Halévy*, December 28, 1895. Gelatin silver printing out print, Private Collection



FIG. 96
Edgar Degas, *Louise Halévy Reading to Degas*, c. 1895. Gelatin silver print,
Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum



FIG. 97

Edgar Degas, *The Ballet from "Robert le Diable"*, 1871. Oil on canvas, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art



FIG. 98

Edgar Degas, *Auguste Renoir and Stéphane Mallarmé*, 1895. Gelatin silver print, New York, The Museum of Modern Art

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