

## Stalcup on Lasc, ed. (2016)

Lasc, Anca I., editor. *Visualizing the Nineteenth-Century Home: Modern Art and the Decorative Impulse*. Routledge, 2016, pp. xxvii + 192, ISBN 978-1-4724-4963-4

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This interdisciplinary volume, based on a set of essays presented at the 2013 meeting of the College Art Association, considers how nineteenth-century domestic interiors and the decoration that adorned them contributed to the evolution of modern art. In her introduction, Anca I. Lasc categorizes the private interiors of nineteenth-century France, England, and Germany as both “visual representations and as three-dimensional spatial units” (xvii). Nineteenth-century stylists, painters, designers, and authors catered to and shaped the tastes of the bourgeois household as they formulated a “modern aesthetic language directly referencing the private world.” The art historians, design specialists, and architects who author this volume investigate how visual artists of various media constructed the nineteenth-century home either as an actual space or an image in accordance with contemporary socio-cultural change. Hollis Clayson remarks in her conclusion that this study “encourages probing reflections on the bond between things arrayed in the modern interior and emerging practices of capitalist consumption and the so-called taste professionals” (182). A departure from scholarship that focuses on modernity and *plein air* paintings, this volume claims to fill a gap in existing literature with its focus on the private world of nineteenth-century homes. For, as Clayson observes, “the domestic interior was a crucial space of modernity, not some degraded periphery” (178).

The first half of the volume, *The Modern Interior as Space*, explores domestic interiors and visual practices throughout the century. Marika Knowles examines Théophile Gautier’s early nineteenth-century description of an apartment inhabited by a collection of male artists. Knowles argues that the Romantic artist’s domestic space is both a microcosm for the artist’s imagination and an influence on the artist’s style. Johanna Ruth Epstein considers how Jean-François Millet’s paintings of rural peasants became a commodity in the homes of wealthy Parisians. According to Epstein, as industrialists invited the image of the French peasant into rich urban spaces, they not only celebrated “the bodies that arose from and returned to French soil” (22), but also the very labor that technological advances had replaced. In his study of a potential replacement for existing housing in London’s working class neighborhoods, Edward Hollis examines a model cottage on display at the Great Exhibition of 1851. The cottage was a prototype for a more sanitary dwelling for the urban working poor; yet, as Hollis suggests, the cottage was also “a moral project” (40) through which the industrialist class hoped to control how workers lived. Kathryn Brown analyzes the place of small-scale sculptures of female subjects by Aimé-Jules Dalou and Pierre-Auguste Renoir in late nineteenth-century French homes. Brown argues that such sculptures not only shaped the appearances of domestic interiors; they also provided tactile pleasure for male collectors. Georgina Downey inspects the decadent interiors described by Rachilde and those depicted by the painter Félix Vallotton, contending that these two artists “troubled space and gender in line with decadent concepts” (68). Alongside her suggestion that “hidden” decadent interiors were “equated with violence rather than cosiness” (72), Downey asserts that the imagined interiors of Rachilde and Vallotton are modern in that they blur the distinction between the “strange” and the “ordinary,” between the “representational” and the “real” (68).

*The Modern Interior as Image*, the second half of this volume, investigates how various two-dimensional media assumed the images of nineteenth-century interiors. Anne Nellis Richter examines Maria Cosway’s *Gallery of the Louvre*, a luxury collection of prints that wealthy Britons comfortably studied at home and ideally hung from their gallery walls. Such a practice domesticated France’s first national art museum and “reprivatized the Louvre by circulating its interiors to [...] subscribers” (99). In her discussion of James Tissot’s portraits of fashionable male subjects, Justine De Young considers modern portraiture, taste, and masculinity in an era of photography. Furthermore, De Young attributes the modernity of Tissot’s portraits to his depiction of casually disarrayed luxury. In contrast to Tissot’s disorderly, comfortable interiors, Gustave Caillebotte produced images of uncluttered, even sparse domestic spaces, as Elizabeth Benjamin demonstrates. Caillebotte’s bare interiors signal a criticism of bourgeois materialism and its impulse to fill private spaces with décor and furniture. According to Benjamin, “by defurnishing the interior, Caillebotte directly engaged with [the] fears that the decorative impulse sought to paper over” (128). Marianne Egger explores a newly unified Imperial Germany’s obsession with “aggressive” décor. As Egger demonstrates, militaristic symbolism became the driving decorative stimulus of a patriarchal culture that was anxious to exert its power, even inside homes. Through its establishment of a national décor and growing imperial strength, Germany positioned itself decoratively and militaristically against France and England. Finally, Cindy Kang explores Édouard Vuillard’s *Interior with Figures*, a suite of painted panels depicting images of a domestic interior. Vuillard’s rendering of this interior, as Kang posits, engages various practices of wall covering in an aesthetic style that allows space and décor to become indistinguishable. Kang closes her chapter with a suggestion that “this binary of the beautiful and the vulgar, historical and modern, elite and mass, tapestry and wallpaper, was for Vuillard the crux of modern art” (174). Such a statement suggests that

the modern interior is an interdisciplinary concept, as this rich volume demonstrates. Yet *Visualizing the Nineteenth-Century Home* places France at the center of interdisciplinary studies on modernity, for eight of the ten essays presented here focus on French artists or French artistic spaces. The work thus positions nineteenth-century French aesthetics as the crux of modern artistic and decorative impulses.

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