

# Books

**Paris 1650–1900. Decorative Arts in the Rijksmuseum.** By Reinier Baarsen. 608 pp. incl. 800 col. ills. (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2013), £175. ISBN 978-0-300-19129-5.

Reviewed by HELEN JACOBSEN

IN CONJUNCTION WITH the opening of the newly refurbished Rijksmuseum, the Museum's senior furniture curator, Reinier Baarsen, has written *Paris 1650–1900*, a companion book that seeks to tell the story of Parisian decorative art of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries through specific objects in the Museum's collection. Despite being set out entry by entry, this is not a catalogue per se, but a more comprehensive volume – more than six hundred pages and eight hundred photographs – incorporating stylistic analysis, information on materials and techniques, patrons, designers, craftsmen and contemporary attitudes to artistic production, from the start of Louis XIV's reign through to the triumph of Art Nouveau. Despite the ambitious scale of the project, Baarsen has succeeded in producing a ravishing, scholarly and eminently readable book that will be enjoyed by anyone interested in the decorative arts. The artists here featured aimed to stimulate both the intellect and the eye, and Baarsen follows in that tradition.

Baarsen acknowledges the debt his work owes to other decorative arts scholars both past and present, but his own significant contributions should not be overlooked. Decades of connoisseurial study lie behind his stylistic analyses, expressed in an admirably concise and readily accessible manner; the chronological structure of the book ensures that these developments can be followed sequentially, while allowing each entry to tell its own stories of production and patronage. Alongside this, archival sources have been mined to add new and fascinating details that enhance our understanding of contemporary practice and of the appeal of Parisian work in the Netherlands and elsewhere in Europe. The human element is evoked in the 1782 correspondence of the young Willem Arend, Baron Torck, advising his parents to sell their old lacquer in Paris where the fashion for luxury lacquer-mounted furniture had boosted prices and depleted supply; we learn how a man of fashion such as Karl, Count Cobenzl (1718–70), plenipotentiary minister of the Austrian Netherlands in Brussels, negotiated the Parisian market through correspondence with trusted

*marchands de mode* and fellow diplomats in the city, his letters showing how often patrons themselves were involved directly in the design of their commissions.

Artists, sculptors and architects, as well as *marchands-merciers*, were also instrumental in producing designs for objects as diverse as tapestry, porcelain, furniture and gilt-bronze, ensuring that the most discerning of patrons would be satisfied. Often, artists such as Jean-Honoré Fragonard, Joseph-Marie Vien or Louis-Simon Boizot signposted the new styles for decorative arts in their paintings and sculptures (nos.88 and 90), and the importance of architects from Jacques-Germain Soufflot to Henri Labrouste across art forms as diverse as tapestry seat covers and porcelain vases (nos.98 and 130) is deservedly highlighted. In the nineteenth century the continued quest for excellence in both design and technical achievement was encouraged by the national and international exhibitions that came to dominate the decorative arts, at which superlative items, such as Ferdinand Barbedienne's bronzes or Maison Vever's works of art were shown. This book is a glowing testament to the outstanding creativity, ingenuity, talent and fecundity of these men and women.

Baarsen rightly makes design sources, influences and inspiration a major theme of his book. The Rijksmuseum's collection allows for illustrations not only of prints, of which there are many, but also of drawings (a design for an embroidered border, or an antique chair by Jacques-Louis David; nos.37 and 111) and of objects themselves (the specific model of the Meissen bowl copied by Vincennes at the early stage of its production; no.70). Our attention is drawn to other visual connections, such as the similarities between the silver-gilt decoration on a mother-of-pearl *carnet* and the metal-thread embroidery on a silk waistcoat, or Indian chintzes and their impact on French textiles. The works of art in this catalogue were never meant to be seen in isolation, and Baarsen's book continually reminds us of the underlying threads running through their creation, binding them together.

Integral to the impact of *Paris 1650–1900* are the hundreds of photographs that it reproduces. Here Frans Pegt and Carola van Wijk must be complimented on some exceptionally fine photography which, for the most part, amplifies the written word (one niggle is the display of marks on the snuffboxes which, without captions, are not easy to identify). Modern photographic techniques allow us to appreciate even more highly the skill of the eighteenth-century artists: to choose but one example, the painting by Charles-Nicolas Dodin in the Chinese style on the Sèvres *vase hollandais nouvelle forme* (no.73; Fig.44) loses none of its supreme delicacy in a full-page detail. Intelligent photography also allows us to see parts that are usually hidden from view for reasons of conservation or practical display, such as the deep-coloured marquetry of the fully



44. Detail of a vase, by Jean Claude Duplessis, painted by Charles-Nicolas Dodin. 1763. Sèvres porcelain, 18.4 by 13 by 11.2 cm. (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam).

extended reading slide of Riesener's *bonheur du jour* or the oblique view of the Sèvres *cuvette Courteille*.

The appeal of French decorative art to Dutch patrons and collectors from the seventeenth to the twentieth century is manifest in the Rijksmuseum's collection, which was boosted considerably in 1952 by the bequest of the connoisseur and banker Fritz Mannheimer. Since then, acquisitions by subsequent curators have ensured that this rich collection, in the Rothschild or even Hertford tradition, offers a coherent and representative display of the very highest quality. Baarsen's book is a worthy companion to the new galleries; more than that, it provides a stimulating review of more than two hundred years of French decorative art. Given that this book should be read by all with an interest in the decorative arts, it is such a shame that the costs of contemporary publishing mean that, at £175, it is out of the reach of many.

**Spanish Drawings in the Princeton University Art Gallery.** By Lisa A. Banner, with contributions by Jonathan Brown, Robert S. Lubar and Pierre Rosenberg. 174 pp. incl. 154 col. + 12 b. & w. ills. (Princeton University Art Museum, Princeton, 2013), £40. ISBN 978-0-300-14931-9.

Reviewed by ZAHIRA VÉLIZ BOMFORD

IN RECENT YEARS the Centro de Estudios de Europa Hispánica (CEEH) has provided support for the study and publication of Spanish drawings. Its most recent project (produced with the assistance of the Center for Spain in America) is the critical catalogue of Spanish drawings in the Princeton University Art Museum. The catalogue contains eighty-six works on paper, ranging in date from the sixteenth to the twentieth century. Lisa A. Banner has produced a skilfully constructed scholarly narrative for each entry, all illustrated in colour, including both well-known drawings by recognised masters such as Murillo, Ribera or Goya, and works by

minor artists or those that are as yet unattributed. A high proportion of the Princeton drawings came from the Mathias Polakovitz collection, prompting the inclusion of a gracious tribute to this important collector by Pierre Rosenberg, while Jonathan Brown provides a brief survey of Spanish drawings and their collection history. Since many of the artists' names will be unfamiliar even to students of Spanish art, biographical comments are included within each entry. It is inevitable, with a collection developed largely through disparate donations, that it will contain drawings that are straightforward to catalogue, especially those closely related to a well-known master, while others may be by hands almost impossible to identify with confidence.

The best-known drawings here are those attributed to Ribera and Murillo, previously published by Jonathan Brown and others. Ribera's *Five men in oriental costume* (cat. no.6), an attractive sheet that merits more attention than it receives in the unexpectedly brief entry, is interpreted as a preliminary study for a painting. However, the drawing's function could also be understood as a study after a completed composition; indeed, the controlled line describing the unfinished figures in the background suggests the careful observation of a fully resolved model rather than the exploratory marks of a preliminary composition study. The reader should be alert to some editorial inconsistencies, such as the omission in this entry of any mention of the inscriptions evident in the photographs both recto and verso, in contrast to Ribera's *Martyrdom of St Sebastian* (no.5) where the inscriptions are fully documented and, where possible, transcribed. Equally, the selection of comparative photographs seems uneven: whereas no.5 is provided with two useful comparative illustrations, Murillo's *Studies of a head and ear* (no.10), in contrast, does not illustrate the drawing cited as a comparison, but a painting related to an unillustrated drawing. An appendix of watermarks for some of the drawings supplements the catalogue.

For well-known, frequently published works, such as those by Ribera and Murillo, quibbles and queries naturally arise in the finessing of scholarly opinion about works firmly rooted in the artist's *œuvre*. It is in the cataloguing of Spanish drawings by lesser-known hands that the scholar encounters a more challenging undertaking, and it is here that Banner has reached the most intriguing conclusions and contributed most to the study of Spanish drawings. Comparative works to aid description and perhaps attribution of unknown sheets may be few or non-existent; often, without the context of an accepted *œuvre* within which to place an unknown sheet, even its function may be difficult to determine. In view of these challenges, there are some understandably tentative attributions. Pains have been taken to ensure careful referencing, and newly researched drawings are illustrated with

useful 'same-size' plates, with additional images within the entries.

Three drawings are of particular interest. *Striding male nude* (no.1) is a rare example of a sixteenth-century Spanish figure drawing. The catalogue entry associates it convincingly with works by the Valencian master Juan de Juanes (1510–79), an important addition to the small *œuvre* of this artist who was one of the most distinctive Spanish draughtsmen of his century. A double-sided drawing of grotesque designs and architectural ornament (no.2) is convincingly attributed to Andrés de Melgar. The thorough, scholarly cataloguing of this sheet fixes it firmly in the sparse population of reliably attributed sixteenth-century Spanish drawings. The astute identification of Luis González Velázquez's hand in the *Apotheosis of St Margaret* (no.21) is another reliable new attribution, crediting the artist with a handsome, fluent sheet.

Nearly half of the drawings catalogued date from the late eighteenth through to the end of the twentieth century. There are fine brush drawings by Goya (no.29r and v), and an array of works by Spanish artists inspired by him, such as Eugenio Lucas Velázquez (no.30), and anonymous followers. Three sheets by Mariano Fortuny and a handful of drawings by Pablo Picasso, Juan Gris, Joan Miró and Salvador Dalí add weight to the representation of twentieth-century artists. Less expected are the sheets by a lesser-known artist of this period, Luis Quintanilla, author of the distinctive, finely rendered pen-and-ink drawings of scenes of the Spanish Civil War (nos.59, 60 and 61).

Some intriguing images are to be found among the twenty works by unknown artists at the end of the catalogue. The charged, nervous energy of the *Assumption of the Virgin* (no.74) and *Cadmus killing the dragon* (no.81; verso: sketches of St Peter and a male saint), for example, reveal the distinctive touch and confident technique of talented, if anonymous artists. Some entries could be more confidently worded – for example, the basis for relating *St Roch* (no.69) and *St Sebastian* (no.70) to the Sevillian artist Pedro Núñez de Villavicencio seems sufficiently strong to place the drawings in his circle or workshop. Elsewhere, drawings such as Vicente Salvador Gómez's *Hercules in a niche* (no.13), Sebastián de Herrera Barnuevo's *St Nicholas of Tolentino* (no.14) or Matías de Arteaga's *Adoration of the shepherds* (no.17) might be more convincingly ascribed to a master's workshop or circle rather than as autograph works.

This scholarly catalogue brings to a wider audience the Princeton collection of Spanish drawings hitherto known only through the occasional appearance of some of them in exhibition catalogues, or, more rarely, in monographic publications. The critical catalogue of the collection is a useful reference work and reflects both the perennial difficulty of identifying authorship and function in Spanish drawings, and shows how stimulating the results can be when careful scholarship is brought to this task.

**Artists and Amateurs: Etching in Eighteenth-Century France.** By Perrin Stein. viii + 230 pp. incl. 175 col. ills. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, distributed by Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2013), \$60. ISBN 978-0-300-19700-6.

Reviewed by ANTONY GRIFFITHS

THIS BEAUTIFULLY PRODUCED and designed book accompanied an exhibition on the subject recently held in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (closed 5th January). It is composed of six long essays by Perrin Stein (who also wrote the introduction and masterminded the entire project), and three fellow-authors. Rena M. Hoisington contributes essays on the practice of etching and on four leading etchers; Elizabeth Rudy writes on the market for these prints; and Charlotte Guichard on the 'amateur' etcher. The whole adds up to an excellent introduction to the subject and the scholarship is admirable and up to date: 183 pages of essays are backed up by twenty-two pages of footnotes in double columns, and at the end are full entries for each of the 111 prints or groups of prints in the exhibition itself. The only flaw is that the catalogue entries do not give the illustration numbers, which have to be found via the index.

The difficulties of turning any exhibition catalogue into a book are by now well recognised. In this case, the two chapters by Stein herself (on etching in Rome, and on the influences on the etchers of the later decades of the century) provide much of the narrative continuity that links the works in the exhibition, which the other four chapters complement. The six chapters add up to a more successful



45. *Andromeda*, by François Boucher. 1734. Etching, 35 by 23.9 cm. (Philadelphia Museum of Art).