

Reviews of Books

RICARDO CENTELLAS SALAMERO, *Francisco Bayeu's Study of a Dog from Life*. Translated by Laura Suffield; Preface by Jonathan Ruffer. Madrid: Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica. 2024. 128 pp.; 50 colour illustrations.

Invariably, the name of Francisco Bayeu (1734–1795) is connected with that of his better-known brother-in-law, Francisco de Goya (1746–1828). Only twelve years his senior, Bayeu comes across as a much older, antiquated artist when compared to the innovative Goya, and yet, their education was similar, their having both gone to the academy of José Luzán Martínez (1710–1785), a local painter who set up in Zaragoza after a time in Naples. Like Goya, Bayeu was later educated in a milieu which admired classical antiquity, and which followed the Neoclassical style of Anton Raphael Mengs.

Ricardo Centellas' short but rich book is a welcome surprise for those interested in eighteenth-century Spanish painting. The book eschews traditional narratives applied to Bayeu that characterized him as a stiff artist, by focusing on a peculiar subject for the painter: the 'portrait' of a dog. Bayeu, who became 'pintor de cámara' and eventually director of the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando in Madrid, is better known for his large narrative frescoes often mythological in subject (at the Palacio Real in Madrid for instance). There, and elsewhere, he showed his panache for multi-figured compositions on a large scale. A contemporary of Bayeu, the art critic and friend of Goya, Juan Agustín Ceán Bermúdez, defined Bayeu's work impassively as correct and simple, featuring well-structured compositions (24). It is therefore refreshing to have a book on the painter solely focused on a single canine figure, a free-standing and signed oil on canvas of a sleeping dog (43.3 x 72.7 cm) which has recently been acquired by the Spanish Gallery, County Durham.

Centellas' book is the fifth volume within the series of 'The Spanish Gallery Collection Studies' published as a collaboration between the Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica and the Spanish Gallery at Bishop Auckland, County Durham. The volume is the only one so far devoted solely to an eighteenth-century work. When seen *in situ*, however, the *Study of a Dog from Life*, surrounded by paintings made in the so-called 'Golden Age' (*Siglo de Oro*), this work blends in perfectly with the rest, as—and this is one of Centella's arguments—Bayeu much admired Velázquez's style (his 'imitation of life' [70]) and his dog is attuned with those painted by the master, including the famous drowsy hound in *Las Meninas* (1656).

The book is divided into four chapters with Chapter 1 introducing the artist to the general reader. Chapter 2 is devoted to the depiction of dogs in the context of contemporary Spain; Chapter 3 is focused on the painting itself and its references; and Chapter 4 focuses on the function of the painting as a *modello*.

Centellas argues that the painting of the dog shows Bayeu's knowledge of the Royal Collection in his double references to old masters: on one side to the old Spanish masters, and on the other, to the work of Italian sixteenth-century painters from the Veneto, specifically Jacopo Tintoretto and Jacopo Bassano, who painted similar dogs within large narrative scenes. In terms of originality, the most interesting chapter within the book is perhaps Chapter 4, where the author takes us on a journey highlighting the function of this painting as a *modello*, identifying the ways the painting was used within his workshop for different projects (a fresco and two oils). Through this process, we learn more about the function of this painting. The canvas remained within the Bayeu's workshop throughout his life. We also learn more about the practicalities of composing large-scale narratives, the use of cartoons for transferring designs (a subject that has been understudied in Spanish art) and the contemporary use of signatures.

Some concepts alluded to in the book deserve more attention. For instance, the author often invokes the concept of *varietà* but does not sufficiently explain how this was absorbed in Spanish art theory and in the pedagogical context of the Academia de San Fernando, for instance. More could also have been said about the Enlightenment belief that dogs had a soul (34). When proposing possible iconographical references for the dog, the author mentions the northern school all too briefly. And yet, all academic artists like Bayeu would have had a large collection of prints (many of which northern) at their disposal, as the author himself tells us on page 53 mentioning the possible influence of the German artist Johann Elias Ridinger (1698–1767) on Bayeu and Goya. Other printmakers could have been mentioned, and indeed illustrated in the book for this purpose, including Rembrandt (1606–1669) who etched a sleeping puppy in 1640, and the lesser-known Dutch artists such as Cornelis Saftleven (1607–1681), who made very similar sleeping dogs, or Jan Van Ossenbeeck (1624–1674).

However, these deficiencies are easily forgiven when considering the efforts made by the author to contextualize the painting: he includes primary sources such as Bayeu's will and Goya's letters and goes as far as consulting veterinarians to stipulate the breed and gender of the dog depicted. This is a valuable focused study on an outstanding eighteenth-century 'portrait' of a dog.

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