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IN VIEW

**AMERICANS IN PARIS 1860-1900**

KATHLEEN ADLER, ERICA E. HIRSHLER, H. BARBARA WEINBERG, ET AL.

NATIONAL GALLERY, LONDON  
\$65 (HARVARD \$70.00)

Between the September 11th attacks on the United States and the invasion of Iraq two years later, a space of reflection was opened for French intellectuals to reconsider the anti-Americanism so long an integral thread to their country's cultural fabric. That space was quickly occupied by Jean-François Revel's *L'obsession anti-américaine* and Philippe Roger's *L'ennemi américain* (both 2002),

## French Exchange

two books that analyze the historical preconditions and cultural mythologies that made it possible for condemnation, rather than consolation, to dominate the opinion pages of major French dailies in the weeks after the attacks. It took an American observer – Walter Russell Mead, reviewing the two works in *Foreign Affairs* – to note that, if anything were missing from the thoughtful self-analysis of these French authors, it was recognition that, 'both in France and beyond, new anti-Americanism is simply old Anglophobia writ large.' By which Mead meant to point out that it is not specifically America as a nation, but the fact that she has risen as the most recent shepherd of global capitalist expansion, which draws French ire – and largely because France feels left out of the game.

Mead's opposition between 'new' and 'old' forms of what amounts to French resentment offers a more pertinent, more energetic context in which to consider the essays that have been collected in the catalogue accompanying *Americans in Paris 1860-1900*, an exhibition that opened this

spring at the National Gallery, London, and is travelling to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston before finishing up this fall at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art. For, supposedly, such institutional collaboration, to quote the Director's Foreword, 'enables us to explore in depth the relationship between the Old and New Worlds, the traditions of European painting and the study, practice and ambition of artists from the United States'.

France, it appears, is to be generalized out of existence. Only Paris remains. But from the perspective of the present, this 'capital of the nineteenth century', the birthplace of modernism, could only operate as such by moving a bit slower than its contemporaries. Such is the cost of choosing culture over capital.

The milder pace of Paris served as a welcome refuge for privileged expats seeking to escape the pragmatism and commerce, the increasing sense of acceleration, which characterized life in cities such as London, Boston and New York at the turn of the last century. Yet these are the cities for which *Americans in Paris* is being staged, and thus the

narrative offered by the show's three organizers – Kathleen Adler, Erica E. Hirshler and H. Barbara Weinberg – is largely one of American achievement and French assimilation.

Briefly, the first half of the catalogue tells an untroubled story of institutionalization, domestication and exploration, in which we see roughly the same cast of great American painters – Whistler, Sargent, Cassatt *et al* – make the grade in the *ateliers* and at the salons, settle down to the bohemian or society life, and then set off on forays into the country beyond the urban boulevards, and sometimes abroad, as markets and careers expand and contract. It is left to the second half of the catalogue to address what role power and politics played in this Franco-American two-step, and, even then, it is only Rodolphe Rapetti's essay that offers a French perspective: in detailing the Americans' pronouncements on their own work, and the response of French critics, Rapetti reveals just how fraught was the sensibility of this foreign artistic community, one that wanted affirmation from its host country yet, at the same time, desired to supersede it.

It must be said that the three principle authors do pay a deserved amount of attention to the American women who set off across the Atlantic to dedicate themselves, with the same talent and ambition as exhibited by their male contemporaries, to the enterprise of painting. But, somewhere along the way, the decision to provide quantitatively equal treatment in the essays devolved

to qualitatively equal treatment of the subject matter, which results in some strange misreadings and moments of too cursory examination.

For example, while Adler notes that the salon system prior to 1880 had proven amenable to women, we are told that the subsequent rise of independent dealers and galleries was not – and that's it. One is left wondering which figures suffered and how those who apparently did not, such as Beaux and Cassatt, negotiated the change. With regard to misreadings, Cassatt's scenes of society women attending the Parisian theatre reveal just what these venues were: battlegrounds of the gaze. Yet Hirshler sees only images of 'women actively inspecting their surroundings, comfortable with the knowledge that they too are being observed'. Comfort of this sort, however, comes not from knowledge but its opposites: ignorance or oblivion. If Cassatt's subjects appear wholly unfazed by their surroundings, then might this not offer a sign of the anxiety – from which men were hardly exempt – that pervaded Parisian society?

*Americans in Paris 1860-1900*, while offering a fine introduction for anyone unfamiliar with this moment of artistic cosmopolitanism, ultimately misses the opportunity to ask certain fundamental questions. For example: Why did Americans make up the largest foreign community of artists in Paris at that time? And is this the moment, at least within the cultural sphere, when Anglophobia began to slide into anti-Americanism? What is certain is that the paintings can speak for themselves; nevertheless, the history cannot.

JONATHAN T. D. NEIL

CHARLES-LOUIS NICOLAS (1824-1890), AFTERNOON IN THE CLUNY GARDEN, PARIS, 1889. OIL ON CANVAS, 21 X 31 CM. THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK. COURTESY THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

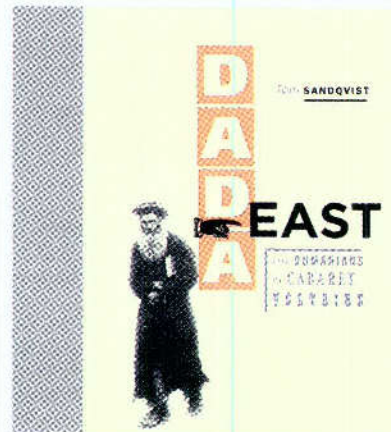


ART HISTORY

**DADA EAST**  
THE ROMANIANS OF CABARET VOLTAIRE

TOM SANDQVIST

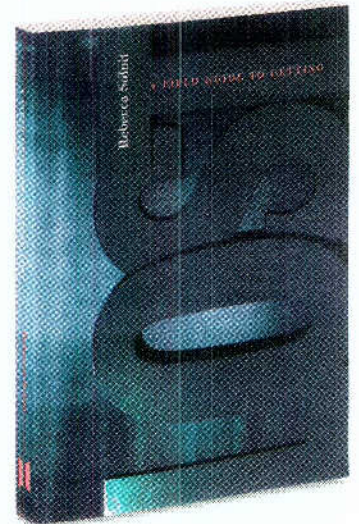
Hb £15.00/E29.95



Dada did not burst fully formed from the foreheads of Tristan Tzara, Marcel Janco, Hugo Ball *et al* onto the tiny stage of Zürich's Café Meierei in February 1916, on the opening night of the Cabaret Voltaire. More than half of the original Dadaists were Romanian, and the roots of their anarchic, confrontational, language-warping aesthetic can be discerned in both the cultural makeup of their homeland – particularly its absurdist variant of Hasidism – and the political pressures attendant upon Eastern Europe in the early twentieth century. That, at least, is the thesis of art historian Tom Sandqvist. By turns sprightly and dauntingly scholarly, *Dada East* takes a leisurely tour through the evidence.

It opens with a sequence of literary flashbacks that jump-cut like a Dada poem. We are in a Romanian village, watching the berserk pageant-ries of the country's Jewry – religious men spouting nonsense, tumbling and hitting each other. We are surveying the whole country and its neighbours, glimpsing the tides of migration that characterised the region at the beginning of the last century. We are in Zürich, that intelligentsia-filled haven of wartime neutrality, watching the earliest Dada performances. And now we're back in an earlier Romania, exploring the greater historical and cultural forces at work in Eastern Europe's *belle époque*, before moving expansively into the richly detailed individual biographies of Dada's leading exponents, which comprise the central heft of the book. Next, we're treated to a lengthy comparative study of Dadaist techniques and regional Jewish culture, before, finally, we retrace the footsteps of the leading Dadaists after the movement's atomization – ending with Marcel Janco's arrival in Tel Aviv in 1941, once more in flight, this time from Nazi pogroms in Bucharest.

Facts fly in all directions. Sandqvist, you sense, does not like mystery;



BOOKMARK

**A FIELD GUIDE TO GETTING LOST**

REBECCA SOLNIT

Hb £21.95/P £7.99

Rebecca Solnit's most accomplished books to date have both been about time and space, covering vast tracts of landscape and history, and the intimate rhythms of the human body. *Wanderlust* (2001) was a suitably vegeant study of walking; *Motion Studies* (2003) a biography of Edward Muijenbridge that was as much about topography as physical movement. In *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*, Solnit reflects on the obscure desire that casts us adrift from ourselves – toward unpredictable encounters with art, sex, drugs and travel – or simply sets us wandering in the woods till dusk obscures the way home and our hearts leap at the slightest sound.

Solnit has an erudite, peregrine mind, and in a series of linked, inter-chapters, all entitled 'The Blue of Distance', she lets it stray with intriguing results in terms of style and thought. The guiding spirit of these essays is Yves Klein, whose blue is the colour of 'distance and disembodiment' (and whose *Leap into the Void* (1960) is the inspiration for Solnit's embrace of flight, error and abandonment) as the way to self-knowledge. 'For it is risky and anything less is already loss'.

CHRISTOPHER BROWN

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