

ments, must have persisted, and in the end the cardinal-archbishop spent his last years ministering to his flock in a catastrophic wave of famine and plague.

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ALBERT BOIME. *The Art of the Macchia and the Risorgimento: Representing Culture and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Italy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1993. Pp. xxi, 338. \$55.00.

The contemporary attack of diverse academic critics on the artistic and literary canon has opened the way for a reevaluation of hitherto marginalized art and literature. Albert Boime approvingly notes in his introduction. He presents the Macchiaioli, a group of nineteenth-century Italian painters based in Florence and known for both their social realism and unconventional artistic techniques, as candidates for the kind of reevaluation that has become possible with the decline of canonical elitism. He obviously has their international reputation in mind because, in Italy, the Macchiaioli are part of the canon and the subject of a voluminous scholarly literature. One of their number, Giovanni Fattori, long has been regarded as the leading Italian painter of the nineteenth century, and several others in the group—Telemaco Signorini, Giuseppe Abbati, Raffaello Sernesi, Odoardo Borrani, and Silvestro Lega—are artists of recognized stature. Named for their theory about the *macchia*, or spot, as the fundamental principle of painterly vision, they sought “to surprise nature,” in the words of one nineteenth-century critic, by evoking it rapidly and synthetically in juxtaposing simple zones of color, giving their finished work a sketch-like appearance in which they took pride as antagonists of still-regnant academic painting in Italy.

Despite their exciting theoretical innovations and momentous achievements as artists, Boime complains, the Macchiaioli generally have been undervalued outside Italy while their great and overwhelmingly successful rivals for the critics' favor, the Impressionists, have been overvalued. His beautifully illustrated book contains various arguments in favor of reversing this verdict on the Macchiaioli, who are portrayed here as typical victims of the “French connection” (p. 2), that is, the strongly pro-French purveyors of art history in the Western academic world.

Although Boime frequently cites the historical theories of Antonio Gramsci and seeks to place his study in the social and cultural context of Risorgimento and post-Risorgimento Italy, the Macchiaioli are commended to our attention largely because of their late-twentieth-century sensibilities on race, gender, and class. In their concern for these issues he finds the paramount reason why the Macchiaioli are incom-

parably more deserving of our study and appreciation than, in his characterization, those conformist celebrants of middle-class pleasures, the Impressionists.

Like many other artists and intellectuals of the Risorgimento generation, the Macchiaioli quickly became disillusioned with their newly unified country. Boime fits them into what is unquestionably the dominant pattern of alienation in Italy's cultural politics from the Risorgimento to fascism. He has a peculiar way of documenting this pattern, however. The precise point at which their disillusionment set in is never adequately explained. To have furnished such an explanation, which is the crucial element in making his thesis work, Boime would have had to examine the careers of the painters in a detailed group biography and to explain in far more depth than he does the complicated relationship they had with the liberal middle-class and aristocratic elites who bought their paintings. Instead of framing the argument historically throughout, at critical junctures he abstractly poses gender, race, and class themes and then illustrates them with impressionistic comments on representative specimens of the movement's art. He produces some affecting passages on the plight of Italy's Jews, women, and workers; it is never quite clear, however, how much of this lamentation is Boime's or that of the Macchiaioli.

For example, to describe a figure in a mid-nineteenth-century painting as disrupting “the conventional designation of feminine social space and [denying] the voyeuristic potential of the male gaze” (p. 255) is to ignore, at the very least, the artist's own language and possible range of expressible sentiments. In Boime's analysis, four middle-class women at work in a genteel parlor sewing a flag for the Risorgimento become “a kind of feminist collective” not “waiting for a male to divert them” (p. 264). This stimulating and passionately written book derives its character from such observations.

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RAFFAELLA GHERARDI. *L'arte del compromesso: La politica della mediazione nell'Italia liberale*. (Saggi, number 397.) Bologna: Mulino. 1993. Pp. 349. L. 38,000.

In this volume Raffaella Gherardi analyzes the political and administrative problems of post-unification Italy and the transition from the “age of poetry” to the “age of prose,” while examining the theoretical models that inspired the moderate-liberals in their search for solutions. Gherardi has touched on these themes elsewhere, including her *Le autonomie locali nel liberalismo italiano, 1861–1900* (1984); *Marco Minghetti statista e pensatore politico* (1988); and more recently her contribution in *I concetti fondamentali delle scienze sociali e dello stato in Italia e in Germania* (1992). The present study represents a synthesis of aspects of her