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*Art History*


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**Thomas J. Tobin, editor**

**WORLDWIDE PRE-RAPHAELITISM**

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The editor of this volume, Thomas J. Tobin, confidently asserts that it “puts to rest the traditional view of Pre-Raphaelitism – a brief, reactionary, and narrowly English artistic movement”. While this “traditional view” has all the characteristics of a straw man, it is possible to argue that recent scholarship has done little to explore the international dimension of Pre-Raphaelitism. This is especially surprising given that one of the movement’s most memorable paintings – “The Last of England” (1855) by Ford Madox Brown – depicts likenesses of the sculptor Thomas Woolner and his wife shivering in a small boat as they contemplate the long and perilous passage to Australia.

The essays collected in *Worldwide Pre-Raphaelitism* explore not only the colonial experience evoked by this and other paintings, but also the reception of Pre-Raphaelitism in Continental Europe. Juliette Peers, in “Pre-Raphaelitism in Colonial Australia”, and David Latham, in an essay devoted to the Canadian experience, demonstrate the complex political significance of this “narrowly English artistic movement” when viewed as an Imperial export. It would seem that Pre-Raphaelite aesthetics

evoked the old country, and a corresponding sense of artistic subjection for those watching from the periphery. One discovers a quite opposite effect in Croatia as discussed by Tatjana Jukić, and Hungary, as detailed by Éva Péteri. Because the myths of nation favoured by Pre-Raphaelite art were comfortably remote, it represented an attractive resource for artists in these countries wishing to bypass the dominant imperial culture. The volume also benefits from contributions by widely published English and North American scholars, foremost among them Florence Boos and David Latham. Boos’s essay is of particular interest, even if her discussion of Lewis Grassie Gibbon’s Morris-influenced modernism seems rather distant from the main theme. *Worldwide Pre-Raphaelitism* is not without flaws. Despite Tobin’s declaration of a new departure, one wonders whether we do not deal partly with a trick of terminology. Even were it customary to consider Pre-Raphaelitism as “brief, reactionary, and narrowly English”, that might simply reflect the fact that the artistic ideas in question are more commonly treated under alternative headings, as “aestheticism”, “Secessionist art”, “primitivism”, or “Arts and Crafts”. Some of the essays are marred by rhetorical excess (Tobin’s and Jukić’s, in particular), while others would have benefited from more editing to iron out awkward phrasing.

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