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Review of The Paintings of George Caleb Bingham: A Catalogue Raisonne.

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The Paintings of George Caleb Bingham: A Catalogue Raisonné. By E. Maurice Bloch. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986. Table of contents, preface, color illustrations, catalogue of paintings, selected bibliography, index. xxxii + 296 pp. \$64.00.

The appearance of this volume by E. Maurice Bloch, the dean of Bingham studies, is a most significant event. Superseding Bloch's preliminary catalogue of 1967, this impressive new volume constitutes the definitive catalogue of Bingham's paintings. With more than 350 illustrations, including 23 in color, it provides a guide to both Bingham's familiar works and his lesser-known subjects, documenting the artist's development both as portraitist and as recorder of Western American subject matter. An insightful introductory essay of twenty-eight large, double-column pages presents Bingham as man and artist, exploring the events and influences that shaped his art and effectively locating the artist within the broad context of American art. The essay furnishes the general reader with an eminently readable overview of Bingham's career. For the reader who wants to learn about Bingham and his art, this is—and will long remain—the place to begin.

Bloch's volume is, nevertheless, primarily a reference book, and it is in this capacity that it particularly excels. The complete, detailed catalogue entries are supplemented in virtually every case by the author's additional commentary. Importantly, Bloch has included not only the extant paintings but also those which are merely "recorded," as well as paintings attributed to Bingham, copies after him, and paintings known only through fragmentary references. This comprehensive catalogue—a model of completeness and accessibility—testifies to the author's meticulous scholarship.

The catalogue's black-and-white photographs record the evolution of both Bingham's portrait style and his interest in Western subjects and provide the pictorial archive one seeks in a *catalogue raisonné*. The color plates are, regrettably, often on the muddy side, with

some unfortunate color shifts that lend some of the pictures a misleading blue or blue-green cast. Too, their flat-tone printing belies the warm, luminescent quality that marks Bingham's finest efforts. Of course, a certain amount of infidelity in color and texture is endemic to art books generally, and while one laments these failings, one is never entirely unprepared for them. Thus, while the general reader will still gain a reasonable sense of Bingham's work from the images in this volume, she or he will undoubtedly be struck, upon encountering an original in a gallery or collection, by that original's significantly greater beauty and luster.

Bingham's place as an important American artist seems at last to be generally acknowledged. Bloch's superb catalogue cannot but contribute in significant fashion to the growing regard for Bingham's art and to its increasing accessibility for a variety of readers and viewers.

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