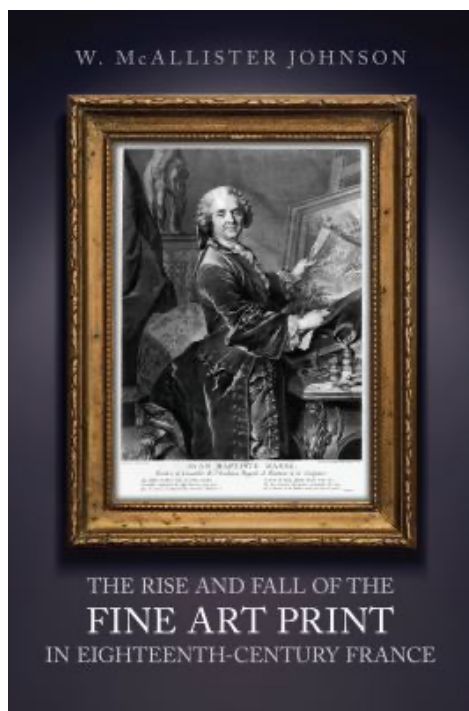


## The Rise and Fall of the Fine Art Print in Eighteenth-Century France

by W. McAllister Johnson. University of Toronto Press, April 2016. 472 p. ill. ISBN 9781442637122 (cl.), \$85.00

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In *The Rise and Fall of the Fine Art Print in Eighteenth-Century France*, W. McAllister Johnson—the late University of Toronto professor emeritus—explores the symbiotic relationship between printmaking and painting.

Copperplate engraving was used to document selected paintings exhibited at the incredibly influential Salon that was organized by the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in Paris, which implies a one-sided relationship. However, Johnson reveals the nuances of a mutually beneficial relationship. Not only does he demonstrate that prints were immensely popular in their own right; he also exposes their functionality as multi-faceted, exceeding mere reproduction. Prints had to rely on black patterns to convey what brushstrokes and a varied color palette communicated in painting. Successful prints—as surrogates—captured the essence or “worthiness” of paintings in a manner that prompted reflection and safeguarded artists’

reputation. This interpretive quality is most interesting in light of the Academy’s fixation on objective copying devoid of inspiration, as a learning strategy for its students.

In examining prints’ value as historical documents, Johnson considers prints themselves and also related materials, like copper plates. He focuses on the pre-revolutionary era once prints had become fairly consistent in terms of format and inclusion of data directly on the print, facilitating comparisons with the proverbial net cast wide. Drawing on myriad examples, he delves into the life cycle of prints, from conception to dedications to word-of-mouth advertising. Every area of investigation seems to yield exceptions to the rule, revealing art

history to be fascinatingly messy.

This monograph is recommended highly for library collections in academic institutions and museums. In terms of the level of writing and the degree of specialization, it is geared to scholars at the graduate level and beyond. Reading knowledge of French is valuable, given the frequent excerpting of untranslated French texts and the heavy use of French terms in the index (albeit with some bilingualism), while familiarity with the structure of the Academy and the fundamentals of printmaking is assumed.

With chapters based on themes, *The Rise and Fall of the Fine Art Print in Eighteenth-Century France* reads well on a chapter-by-chapter basis, and certainly from cover to cover. Point-form lists occasionally break up the prose, which lends an unexpected quality of a reference book; examples include characteristics of a fine art print and categories of annonces, which were newspaper advertisements for prints. Other features include endnotes, a bibliography, the aforementioned index, and images with evaluative captions.