

The Darker Side of Light: Arts of Privacy, 1850-1900 / Peter Parshall.—Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, in association with Lund Humphries, April 2009.—191 p.: ill.—ISBN 978-1-84822-02-8 (cl., alk. paper): \$70.00.



The exhibition and catalogue, *The Darker Side of Light*, was organized by Peter Parshall, Curator of Old Master Prints at the National Gallery, Washington, D.C. Parshall's participation is unexpected since the show offers no old masters but rather ninety-four late-nineteenth-century prints (along with a few drawings, books, and small sculptures) drawn primarily from the National Gallery's collection. It is only the first of many anomalies with the catalogue that make it both intriguing and confounding. While the period is best-known for light, colorful Impressionist paintings, Parshall has mounted an exhibition of dark, introspective prints organized into thematic sequences, such as abjection, violence, and death.

The catalogue offers four essays complemented by eighty illustrations, predominantly of black and white prints. The object checklist is also in thematic sections, making a search for an individual artist or work of art difficult. A brief index covers only personal names mentioned in the essays and

there is no bibliography. The catalogue is not designed as an easy reference tool.

Parshall's essay looks at the tradition of private (non-institutional) print collecting, which he is able to trace back to the Renaissance. He argues that there is something inherently private in our relationship with prints as an artistic medium; in the way they are collected, stored, and viewed. He also argues that this practice culminated in the late-nineteenth-century with acceptance of an original print as a work of art. "The importance to modernism of the culture that evolved around the original print has been underestimated," writes Parshall.

The next three essays leave this theme and focus on depictions of privacy in the art of the period. Professor S. Hollis Clayson discusses the imagery of women caught at intimate moments and Professor Christiane Hertel focuses on the darker prints of Max Klinger, Max Liebermann, and Käthe Kollwitz. Finally, Nicholas Penny, Director of the National Gallery, London, considers the aesthetics and privacy of collections of small statuettes and reliefs. While these are all interesting essays, there is leap between Parshall and the others that leaves the reader uncertain of the catalogue's intent.

One can imagine the appeal this group of dark and emotionally intimate images would have in a gallery. To its credit, the exhibition brings attention to works of art infrequently seen in public venues and the catalogue offers valuable information on the European print collector's cabinet. The reader is certainly given a variety of intriguing facts and ideas, although we are left without much assistance in forming an overriding hypothesis.

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