
This volume surveys the rich period of French art practice between 1750 and 1850, a period that was marked as much by the variety of genres and media and the numerous cross-currents and points of contact between them, as by the profound change that French society and cultural expression underwent between the twilight of the Ancien Régime and the Second Empire. More specifically, the book follows the rationale of fluid interrelations between the visual and the sonorous as a continuous, interdisciplinary flow of ideas across genres and media. Thus, it convincingly argues for a re-assessment of the period in the light of a more fluid, open dialogue of ideas and aesthetics rather than within the confines of medium-specific histories focusing on art, theatre, or opera alone.

Whereas David Charlton’s chapter on scenography analyses the integration of visual elements as a carrier of meaning in late-eighteenth-century opera and its anticipation of Romantic aesthetics, Mark Darlow links art with the emerging musical discourse by discussing the notion of chiaroscuro as a key term borrowed from the visual arts to describe musical and vocal variety. Mark Ledbury explores the correspondences between visual art and music drama as he retraces the collaboration between the painter Jacques-Louis David and the stage-designer Ignace-Eugène-Marie Degotti as a case of cultural mutualism. Adaptation and transformation are at the core of two chapters by Thomas Grey and Sarah Hibberd respectively. While Grey focuses on the staging of the supernatural via the many operatic, theatrical, and sonorous adaptations of Matthew Lewis’s gothic classic The Monk (1796) and its bleeding nun throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, Hibberd discusses the tableau vivant as an art concept during the July Monarchy by means of analysing the transformation of Rembrandt’s painting Belshazzar’s Feast (1635) into drama and opera. Olivia Voisin’s chapter provides much-needed insight into the connections between painters and costume-designers, arguing that the theatrical stage served as a platform for painters through which they could express their vision of modernity.

Three chapters are dedicated to the work of painter Paul Delaroche who, as Stephen Bann argues, was strongly influenced by the theatre early on in his career. Patricia Smyth investigates Delaroche’s painting style in connection with early-nineteenth-century concepts of authentic acting, while Beth S. Wright analyses the transference of a minimalist acting style into Delaroche’s later paintings of reduced corporeal expressivity. Finally, Céline Frigau Manning’s discussion of Maria Malibran’s acting technique highlights the singer’s unique type of artistic hybridization, whereby she borrowed mannerisms from paintings and popular theatre, thus testing the limits of theatrical representation. In the closing chapter of this study, Richard Wrigley explores the strong echoes between theatrical, operatic, and art criticism of the period. Altogether, this volume convincingly illustrates the varied, rich, and, most importantly, fluid connections and interdependencies between visual and theatrical art forms during the period in question, while also clearly highlighting the need for further scholarship beyond the boundaries of art form and genre.

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If indeed the period from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century was ‘L’Âge de l’inscription’, as signalled by the title of a magisterial volume by Florence Vuilleumier Laurens