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Gudrun Danzer. *Das steierische Eisenwesen in der Malerei und Graphik des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts.* Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1995. 290 pp. DM 58,- (cloth), ISBN 978-3-631-48415-9.

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Watercolor and Iron: Industrial Iconography in Styria

This survey of artistic representations of the rise and decline of the iron industry in Styria had its origins in a 1984 state exhibition in Eisenerz, *Erz und Eisen in der Gruenen Mark*. This was accompanied by a parallel art exhibit curated by the author for the Neue Galerie of the Landesmuseum Johanneum in Graz under the title *Erz und Eisen in der Steiermark: Bildmotive seit 1800*. Citing an increasing interest in industrial themes in the modern visual arts, the author has broadened the original catalogue into a short book, enriched with a large list of paintings, drawings, watercolors, and other (mostly non-photographic) representations of mines, foundries, industrial towns, and other subjects connected to the extraction and refining of iron ore.

Forty-three monochrome reproductions give a flavor of the range of art one would encounter if one could visit the public, private, and corporate collections known to the author and view the 462 best pieces catalogued here as well. As the author points out, artistic interest in industrial "subjects" declined as the novelty of industrialization wore off, and with the rise of photography.

The book does not appear to claim any new explanatory ground, but resembles a kind of *explication d'oeuvre* grouped by types of subject matter.

It would be graceless and peevish to take the author to task for what she does *not* deliver in this work, but it might help foster dialogue between traditional art historians and other kinds of historians to mention why a gap exists in their approaches to some of the same source material. One of the seismic shifts in late-nineteenth-century European views of the role of art and the artist led away from the academic canon (with emphasis on subject matter, workmanlike "finish," and the art-work *per se*) to a more individualistic anti-canon (with emphasis on the artist's unique vision, provocative contempt for formal rules, and the career of the artist). This shift might be illustrated by the difference between a work by Winterhalter and one by Klimt, although a more apt parallel would cite a more forgotten "master" than Winterhalter.

This seismic shift was accompanied and furthered by the rise of modern art criticism and new approaches by artists to the "public" through such innovations as the private art gallery and its human manifestation, the art dealer. Traditional mechanisms for controlling and stabilizing the art market, such as monopolies by state art academies, their recurring salons, juries, prizes, and so on began to break down in France as early as the 1860s and in the three main art capitals of the German-speaking world (Munich, Berlin and Vienna) by the 1890s.

Modern art criticism, with its lionization of the artist-genius, is still with us and has often blocked what might be called a social-historical approach to the forgotten masses of *Alltagskuenstler*, the very people the old academy system (with its attendant artists' associations) sought vainly to protect as a professional group. Nevertheless, the social history of art and artists, particularly in Central Europe, has become in recent decades one of the most lively areas of enquiry.

Danzer's book deals mostly with *Alltagskuenstler* and with the very interesting phenomenon of everyday bread-and-butter art, in this case restricted to certain types of subject matter in a specific region of Austria. Yet its approach is very much that of the academic art canon of 150 years ago. The meticulous catalogue of works pays lavish attention to the subject matter, the "finish," and even the current whereabouts of the catalogued items. It tells us next to nothing about the artists, their backgrounds, careers, or relationship to the patrons, viewers, and general society with which they had contact. The text is organized along iconographic lines: "Das Eisenwerk als pittoreskes Bildmotiv," "Eisenwerke und Burgruinen," "Hochofendarstellungen im 20. Jahrhundert."

To be quite fair, paying attention to works of art that

might not have made it over the threshold of a salon because of their mundane and everyday subject-matter does not reflect the academic art canon of 1840. In that sense a "new look" and ordering of works of art around an "industrial" theme reveals a modernist temperament. On the other hand, we cannot learn from this book if any of these works of art actually did make it over that threshold or were ever intended to. Many of the illustrations, viewed from the perspective of nineteenth-century academic jurors, might fit into the accepted categories of "landscape" and "genre" art. Here again, the *objet d'art* as illustrative material, not its physical fate or the intention of its creator, is the sole center of Danzer's concern.

One of the reasons for the seismic shift referred to above must surely have been the explosion in the number of artists in Central Europe starting in the last half of the nineteenth century. One of the reasons for the decline of the old academy-salon system by 1900 was the sheer quantity not only of artworks being excluded from officially sanctioned *Ausstellungen* but also of those being displayed in them. One can scarcely imagine today (generations after the reform of museums and shows to eliminate clutter) the bizarre spectacle, tiring to visitors and frustrating to artists, of thousands of pictures squeezed next to and in endless rows on top of each other common to late-nineteenth-century *Kunstausstellungen.* Yet all of these artists had to find a way to make a living.

It would be very interesting to know more about artists driven into Styria to earn a commission from industrial magnates, managers, or state patrons. Were they Academy graduates eking out a living by doing local commissions? Graduates of *Kunstgewerbeschulen* doing designs for print reproduction and illustration? Sunday artists and amateurs armed with the traditional strong Central European school background in sketching?

From the illustrations in Danzer's book, one can immediately note astonishing adaptations to style and fashion over the decades. This is an important index for social historians of art, needless to say, because a broad agreement about "taste" links artist and patron. Or were these works created with an anonymous "public" in mind?- Unfortunately these questions also remain largely unaddressed.

One can certainly agree with Gudrun Danzer's final sentence, after her hope to have made a contribution to Styrian art history: "Darueber hinaus konnten mit der vorliegenden Arbeit wichtige Grundlagen fuer weitergehende Forschungen zum Eisenwesen und zur Wirtschaftsgeschichte erschlossen werden" (p. 194). It might also provide important starting points for the social history of modern Austrian art. It also shows how heavily the tradition of supposedly outworn nineteenth-century academic aesthetics, with its insistence on the ikon, not the ikon-maker, weighs on so many art historians even today.

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