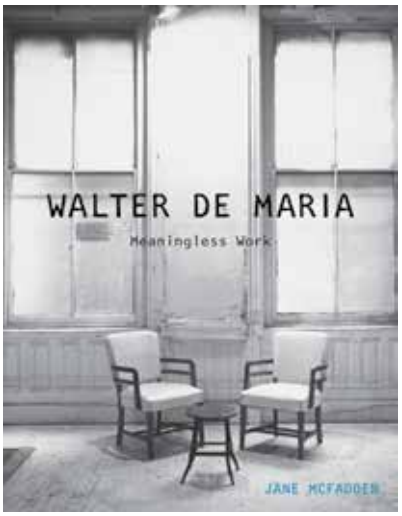
Walter De Maria: Meaningless Work

Jane McFadden

London, Reaktion Books, 2016.
224 pages, 30 color plates,
48 halftones. $40.00 (cloth).
ISBN 978-1780236674

The artist Walter De Maria (1931-2013) is best known for a single work, *The Lightning Field* (1977), which consists of 400 poles arranged in a grid in the New Mexico desert. In the last decade, however, De Maria—whose practice, which stretched over five decades, combined music, drawing, sculpture, site-specific work, film, Happenings, and photography—has garnered a surge of attention as an artist working in the pivotal moment of the 1960s and 1970s in and out of the canonical movements of Minimalism, Conceptualism, and Land Art. Four dissertations, essays in *Art Journal*, *Grey Room*, and *Art Bulletin*, and at least one major museum exhibition (*Ends of the Earth: Land Art to 1974*, at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles) have sought to revise De Maria's position in art history. Scholars have either argued for De Maria's status as an intermedia artist whose practice must be situated outside art historical confines, or placed him as a progenitor in a revisionist history of Land Art.

Since 2004, Jane McFadden has emerged as a key scholar of De Maria's practice. In her monograph *Walter De Maria: Meaningless Work* (2016), McFadden positions De Maria as an intermedia artist who reframed how audiences thought about artistic practice in the 1960s and 1970s. Adopting a socio-historical methodology that privileges material conditions, she looks chronologically at



De Maria's work, from his experimental period in the early 1960s to the publication, in *Artforum*, of images of *The Lightning Field* in 1980. McFadden's book is arranged in six chapters, with the first chapter acting as a shortened introduction and the last chapter acting as an epilogue that considers a work from 2012. The targeted audience is a scholarly one, and it is assumed the reader is acquainted with the scholarship surrounding De Maria and artmaking during this period, especially in relation to Land Art and Minimalism. McFadden's central argument is that "De Maria's work as a whole is deeply engaged with the hierarchies and particularities of experiencing art in multiple media" (9), and moreover, because De Maria explored silence, invisibility, shadows, and meaninglessness, that the artist's invisibility must be the starting point for consideration of his practice.

In the opening chapter, titled "Infamous Photographs," McFadden lays out these arguments by analyzing *The Lightning Field* in relation to later drawings of the work by other artists that were published in *Cabinet* magazine in 2001. These drawings were commissioned to highlight the remote relationship most audiences had to *The Lightning Field*, through photographic reproductions rather than face-to-face encounters. The project was meant to show the iconic nature of these photographs, which have entered into art historical memory. McFadden intentionally draws her analysis in response to these later drawings, rather than the heavily circulated photographs of the work, to argue that the commissioned drawings "provide a distinct and critical alternative to sanctioned images of the work" because they are marked by production and publication (10). But she also argues that *The Lightning Field* is an example of the artist's investigations into photography as a medium, and that this theme appears throughout De Maria's oeuvre. Moreover, the site-specific work highlights the mediated post-war condition of Americans in the '60s and '70s who were affected by images shown, for example, on television.

Music is foregrounded in relationship to De Maria's work in the 1960s in "Towards Site," the second chapter of the book. Before giving up music in 1968, De Maria was an accomplished drummer and had played in several bands in New York. By focusing on his work as a musician (who also performed in Happenings, wrote event scores, and made three-dimensional box sculptures), McFadden establishes De Maria's identity as a multidisciplinary artist doing multiple practices at once, akin to his peers La Monte Young or Henry Flynt. Because De Maria's work used music and blurred an experience that combined "intermedia" (Dick Higgins's term) with "intergenre" (McFadden's term), McFadden argues that De Maria's earliest investigations—for example, *Ball Drop* (1961), which instructed visitors to move a ball—challenged the notion of the singular work of sculpture and emphasized

absurdity, meaninglessness, and the visitor's experience.

In chapter 3, "Sculpture as Stranger," McFadden analyzes four different iterations of a series by De Maria that paid homage to composer John Cage: *Statue of John Cage* (1961), *Portrait of John Cage* (1962), *Portrait of the School of Cage, Caged* (1962), and *Cage II* (1965). These works, according to McFadden, highlight how De Maria moved fluidly between media and time as he translated his ideas into sculpture, drawing, and photography. In this chapter, McFadden also considers the role of the invisible drawings and the shadows that appear in De Maria's two- and three-dimensional works to argue that De Maria's work "exists in duration, iteration, and mediation, a series of shadows" (80). McFadden rightly points out that these works that moved between media proved difficult for art critics of the 1960s to interpret; in their effort to find meaning, several critics looked to Surrealism. Continuing this thread, McFadden interprets these works—and more broadly the artist and his elusive behavior—in relation to the uncanny, which she metaphorically describes as a "stranger (con)" (76) or the other.

In the fourth chapter, "Sites Unseen," McFadden considers De Maria's land-based experiments and the notion of a "time-space jump": a theme explored not just by De Maria but also in television, where distant images were broadcast into people's homes. While Land Art has often been interpreted in relation to site specificity or the environment, McFadden instead argues that De Maria's land-based practice must be seen in light of other categories, including drawing and film. For example, De Maria's film *Hard Core* (1969) uses the genre of the Western in the remote Black Rock Desert of Nevada to investigate the politics of the period, including American policies in Vietnam and the space race. This evocation of current events is important to McFadden, who believes that throughout De Maria's career small clues cued visitors in to the relationship between his work and contemporary events. This is a new way of interpreting De Maria's work and has larger implications because it shows that "'earthworks' [are not] simply neutral forms on new sites, but deeply invested in the complex identities and power structures that these sites bear" (122).

In "There Not Here," the fifth chapter of her study, McFadden offers an analysis of three photo essays that De Maria published in 1972, two works that De Maria contributed to the inaugural exhibition, *Rooms,* at PS1, an unrealized erotic film proposed by De Maria in 1967, and *The Lightning Field*. By considering Land Art in relation to the resurgence of scholarly interest in landscape photography in the 1970s, McFadden shows that a generalized interpretation of experiments with the land, characterized by the travel narrative and glossy photographs, quickly overshadowed its critical reception. However, De Maria critically navigated these representational structures by using the photo essay and what McFadden calls a "politics of refusal" (151). For example, for Gianfranco Gorgoni's *The New Avant-Garde* (1972), rather than providing images of himself or his work, De Maria submitted photographs of his dealers (including Virginia Dwan and Paula Cooper), thereby drawing attention to gender, which was often overlooked in discussions of Land Art. In this chapter, McFadden also considers a recurring theme, which she terms the "genre of pornography," that appears in De Maria's work in select boxes, spike sculptures, invisible drawings, photographs, and films; she interprets this theme as another tactic of resistance.

In the final chapter, titled "History Sculpture," McFadden considers the *Bel Air Trilogy* (2012), which was described by Menil Director Josef Helfenstein as a history sculpture akin to history painting. McFadden asks: "What might history sculpture be, and how does it both serve and transform the idea of a retrospective view of an artist and career?" (183). Considering the work, an altered 1955 Chevrolet, as a historical, consumable object, McFadden sees the Chevy as a trope that alludes to other current events in the '50s: for example, the development of nuclear test sites in Nevada or the circulation of violent images after World War II. Ultimately, the car represents an undoing of linear time and history. For McFadden, De Maria's history is an American history that has far-reaching impact on global and contemporary events because it has the potential to offer new ways of seeing based on an emotional experience.

Throughout her study, McFadden clearly lays out the larger ramifications of her project, with the chief argument that De Maria's practice—with the exception of *The Lightning Field*—has been under-recognized by scholars, and, when it has been recognized, has been analyzed in passing, usually in relationship to static sculpture or environmental art. While she arguably had a valid point when she first started her project, it no longer seems that De Maria can be considered an artist on the margins; the aforementioned scholarship and exhibition attest otherwise. Nevertheless, McFadden's book usefully offers a study of De Maria's work that maintains the artist's interdisciplinary practice and aligns him with Flynt and Young rather than just Michael Heizer and Robert Smithson. Moreover, McFadden's

study makes a contribution to the scholarship on De Maria, Land Art, and the period of the sixties and seventies as she emphasizes drawing rather than site-specificity, extends De Maria's practice into one that is experiential, reconsiders site outside the confines of phenomenology, and draws a connection from land art to historical and political narratives.

Notably, in an effort to illustrate her arguments, McFadden repeatedly turns to metaphors as a literary device. For example, in chapter 3, she uses three metaphors: a "stranger" or a "con" to argue that De Maria and his work should be considered in relation to the other and the uncanny, the surreal, and the elusive; the "hit" as a rupture, shock, or element of danger that cuts through the viewer while also alluding to drug use; and the "rendezvous," which describes, for example, the relationship between a site and an experience or a singular and an expansive view. Sometimes a metaphor is a useful and clever device that brings clarity to the analysis (e.g., the "hit"), while at other times it becomes a distraction (e.g., the "rendezvous").

Absence is another device that is used throughout the book. Here, I am thinking of the absence of photographs of De Maria's work: only six works are accompanied by photographs, and the remaining images of De Maria's work reproduce photographs from print publications or ephemera. It is unclear whether this absence was a choice intended to underscore her thesis concerning invisibility, a creative pun that mimics De Maria's humor, or merely an editorial oversight. For example, images of De Maria's invisible drawings from the 1960s or the land-based projects are not reproduced even though they exist. The absence of photographs mostly seems to be a conscious decision by the author to underscore her assertion that De Maria's work investigated, as she puts it, "sites unseen." Yet in some instances the absence is just strange, as with the lack of still photographs from the film *Hard Core* (1969), which is instead evoked using an image of Humphrey Bogart and Katharine Hepburn and a photograph of the Black Rock Desert taken by Nevada writer Nell Murbarger; these substitutions seem merely illustrative rather than supportive of an analysis of the work. Moreover, would a reader who is only slightly familiar with De Maria's practice know that he did take photographs of his work, or would that reader be led to believe that he mostly abstained from photographing his work? It is unclear.

Notwithstanding these critiques, McFadden's study is important because it is the first published monograph that considers De Maria as an intermedia artist. Looking at the breadth of his work from the pivotal moment of the first two decades of his practice, McFadden places it in relation to the political and social uncertainty of American culture and events of the sixties and seventies.

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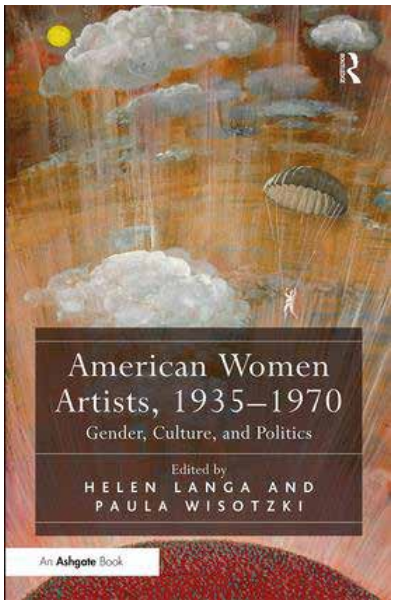
American Women Artists, 1935-1970: Gender, Culture, and Politics

Edited by Helen Langa and Paula Wisotzki

Oxford/New York, Routledge/ Taylor and Francis, 2016. 276 pages, 37 b/w ills. $149.95 (hardback). ISBN 978-1472432827



American Women Artists, 1935-1970: Gender, Culture, and Politics successfully addresses a gender gap in the history of twentieth-century American art. As Helen Langa argues in the introduction to this collection of essays, many of the artists under discussion, often despite their exceptional credentials or professional standing, "are still relatively invisible in mainstream art historical literature" (1). This book is thus a much-needed act of recovery. It also makes various insightful theoretical interventions through its explorations, for example, of the art/craft binary and the complex relationship between Abstract Expressionism, Surrealism, and Social Realism. Finally, it presents critical discussions on class, race, and postcolonialism, as well as sexuality. At its core, however, this book's purpose is to explore how women artists, during a particularly tumultuous period in American history—from

the Depression through World War II, and into the Cold War and rise of second wave feminism—battled both inside and outside the art world to rout entrenched sexism and achieve long overdue cultural recognition. As Langa outlines, women artists during the period were expected to limit themselves to particular genres, media, and contexts in order to fit the highly prescribed gender expectations of contemporary critics, art dealers, and gallerists. Discussion of these roles, as Langa argues, is "particularly important in revealing how gender-biased values shaped art world decisions" at the time under consideration (7). Women expected to receive few solo shows, for instance, because "work by men was both more prestigious and easier to sell" (8) and, though the predominant paradigm of the postwar period was Abstract Expressionism, the "messiness associated with expressive accidents … was viewed as incompatible with cultural ideals that emphasized propriety, sensibility, and orderliness as prized feminine virtues" (10). As such, women were largely denied access to traditional professionalizing routes (i.e., the solo show), as well as the aesthetic approaches or frameworks that would grant them recognition by the avant-garde.

Langa and Paula Wisotzki have organized this anthology into four parts. The first uses exhibitions as a context to explore how women artists confronted discrimination while trying to build their careers in the New York art world. Siobhan Conaty discusses two unprecedented women-only shows organized by Peggy Guggenheim in the early 1940s. While these events bolstered the careers of then largely unknown artists, they also marked a moment of consciousness-raising. The participants, including Louise Nevelson and Virginia Admiral, came to recognize the degree to which men controlled critical recognition of their work and, in the end, how "society's rules of differentiation" spilled over into the art world to position women, definitively, as "the weaker sex" (37). Cynthia Fowler continues this discussion with her analysis of *Indian Art of the United States*, held at the Museum of Modern Art in 1941. Compared to their male peers, who also faced significant bias, Native women artists were here rendered all but invisible—in part because critics reviewing the show described it using anti-modernist concepts like "decoration" and "craft," which also carried "feminine" (and thus pejorative) connotations. In addition, Native women artists often depicted subjects related to their own lives. Their work was consequently perceived as (even) less convincing than that of Native men who ostensibly depicted "more interesting" male experiences. Fowler argues that Native women's work (and Native American work generally) must therefore be analyzed with a clear view of how gender, race, and modernism operate to create marginalizing codes.

The second section of the book explores the lives of four women artists whose careers were complicated by their association with the American left from the late 1930s through the 1960s. Paula Wisotzki discusses the early work of Dorothy Dehner. Dehner's series, "Life on the Farm" (1941-45), ostensibly strikes a bucolic tone, one that seems to ignore her well-known political associations. Yet while one of Dehner's paintings from this set, *Saturday Night Square Dance* (1942), embodies a degree of appropriately "feminine" sentimentality, it also invokes a longstanding tradition (i.e., square dancing) from "Colonial times" (65). As such, it assigns "the legitimate ownership of America's heritage" to the everyday citizens of her own rural community, in Bolton Landing, New York, as opposed to the wealthy oligarchs of neighboring Lake George (65-66). Dehner's politics are therefore rendered visible, at least for those willing to look. Melanie Herzog positions Elizabeth Catlett in a different context. Catlett, the acclaimed African American artist, moved to Mexico in 1946 and eventually married a Mexican national. The socialist political climate of her adopted country meant that she could practice her leftism openly and likewise find a welcoming audience for her work, which explores with sometimes biting acumen "the intersections of gendered, racial, and class identities" (75). Like Dehner, the painter Honoré Sharrer could not proclaim her progressive ideas directly. As Melissa Wolfe outlines, hostility to leftism in the United States during the 1950s forced Sharrer to abandon social realism, the genre upon which she had based her career. She instead adopted Surrealist symbols and metaphors. This was not an effort to conform, however; it was a means to "continue unabated (and sometimes intensify) the social critique found in her early, more explicit social realist work" (94). Joanna Gardner-Huggett, in the final chapter of this section, continues this theme of reclamation as she explores how the painter Julia Thecla re-started her career in the 1960s by linking science fiction with social and political criticism. Gardner-Huggett argues that most critics, however, failed to see Thecla's work as a commentary on the USA-USSR "space race" and instead sought to stereotype her as an eccentric regionalist.

The next section of *American Women Artists* examines how artists investigated experimental media or techniques in bids for professional

recognition. Christina Weyl explores two editions of prints by Louise Nevelson. The first was created in a three-week frenzy of activity at Stanley Hayter's Atelier 17 in 1953. Nevelson deployed non-traditional tools and unexpected materials alongside assertive lines and bold geometries. The resulting prints generated a highly negative response that Weyl attributes to the oppressive social climate of the 1950s. When the work was re-editioned ten years later, it was far more conservative in approach but surprisingly well received by critics and scholars. Clearly, as Weyl argues, the earlier and far more adventurous etchings had "overstretched aesthetic and gender norms for women artists" (137). Second-generation Japanese American artists Ruth Asawa, Kay Sekimachi, and Toshiko Takaezu similarly rejected conventional practices, but did so by conflating the boundaries between high art and craft. As Krystal Hauseur argues, they combined modernist innovation with Japanese craft process to bridge the duality of their experiences as being both "other" and "native born" in postwar America. Finally, Mary Caroline Simpson examines the fiber art career of Claire Zeisler, whose work bridged craft and the burgeoning oppositional aesthetics movements (e.g., process, earth art) in the late 1960s.

In the final section of *American Women Artists*, Helen Langa, Aliza Edelman, Seth Feman, and Mary McGuire explore how women artists either adopted or rejected formalism as a way of engaging modernist debates. Langa investigates work by Berenice Abbott, Ruth Bernhard, and Nell Blaine, who did not describe themselves as lesbians but "whose lives were romantically linked with other women" (183). Each chose to depict generic subjects or use "modernist visual vocabularies"—including formalist patterning, hard geometries, and painterly gesture—in order to silence discussion about their identities, which were at the time "viewed in mainstream society as culturally unacceptable" and thus a threat to their professional survival (183). Yet in some instances, particularly the case of Nell Blaine, this ostensible neutrality also served as code for queer identities. In her essay on Charmion von Wiegand, Edelman shows how this artist introduced Eastern aesthetic values to challenge Western formalist limits. In so doing, von Wiegand complicated modernist tropes with concepts related to the Zen, Tantric, and other traditions of Buddhism. Seth Feman's essay on Alma Thomas confronts various limiting stereotypes regarding how the work of African American artists is historically conceptualized—through the singular frame of race. While Feman does not deny the importance of Thomas's status as an African American woman, he also encourages readers to think about how her local geography, career as a teacher, natural environment, and unique daily experiences in Washington, D. C. contributed to the creation of her abstract designs. In the last essay of *American Women Artists*, Mary McGuire charts Carolee Schneemann's transition from modernist randomness (embodied, for example, in Happenings) to a directorial form in order to reclaim her performances from New York's patriarchal avant-garde. In so doing, she also explicitly incorporated her own study of psychoanalytic theory that she used to positively affirm her explorations of women's sexual pleasure and sexual autonomy. This change is made manifest in one of Schneemann's most famous works, *Interior Scroll*.

There is a clear place for this book among accounts of the history of American art. Indeed, while scholarly interest in Nevelson's or Schneemann's careers has flourished comparatively, comprehensive engagement with figures like Thecla and Thomas, or Asawa, Sekimachi, or Takaezu is scant. The time period covered by Langa and Wisotzki's selections further addresses a glaring need. Over the last three decades, if not longer, most anthologies or monographs exploring the careers of women artists in the United States have covered the rise of modernism from the nineteenth through the early twentieth centuries. Eleanor Tufts' landmark study, *American Women Artists, 1830-1930* (1987), Kristin Swinth's *Painting Professionals: Women Artists and the Development of Modern American Art, 1870-1930* (2001), and Laura R. Prieto's *At Home in the Studio: The Professionalization of Women Artists in America* (2001) are testament to this fact. Lisa E. Farrington's *Creating Their Own Image: The History of African-American Women Artists* (2004) is one of the only relatively recent works that extends beyond the first quarter of the century. It also addresses the racial blindness of many earlier efforts. Langa and Wisotzki's volume actively addresses this same disparity. Avoiding a major critique of conventional reclamation efforts (that tend to focus only on the category of sex and are thus prone to generalization), the contributors to *American Women Artists* are consistent in their exploration of how race, gender, and sexuality intersect in unpredictable ways and thus, explicitly and implicitly, refute the notion of a "typical" female experience in the American art world.

American Women Artists would benefit from the addition of color images. The book does include a great number of black and white reproductions, but in many instances these images cannot support the

arguments being made by contributing authors. When reproduced in black and white, for example, the experimental hues that Weyl references in her discussion of Nevelson's Atelier 17 prints cannot be seen. The strength of her claims about the artist's daring choices is thus diminished. In turn, the bold brilliance of Alma Thomas's color selections that she believed could "enhance the sense of movement in her paintings," and hence define the dancing shapes of *Watusi,* cannot perform in this way when reproduced in monochrome (227). Because many of these women artists used color as a gesture against patriarchal oppression, it is unfortunate not to be able to see and evaluate these gambits here. In addition, since there is very little secondary source material on many of the artists included in this book, some of the arguments made here have the appearance of being tentative. Yet this is not a deficiency. Rather, in this instance, the purpose is to call on other scholarly voices to join the discussion. The bibliography included at the end of the collection is pivotal in encouraging others to take up this task in terms of the information it offers. Although it is select, it appears well rounded, covering a multitude of subjects and themes addressed by the authors of the essays published. In summary, *American Women Artists, 1935-1970: Gender, Culture, and Politics* is an astute study that will continue to influence the field in the foreseeable future.

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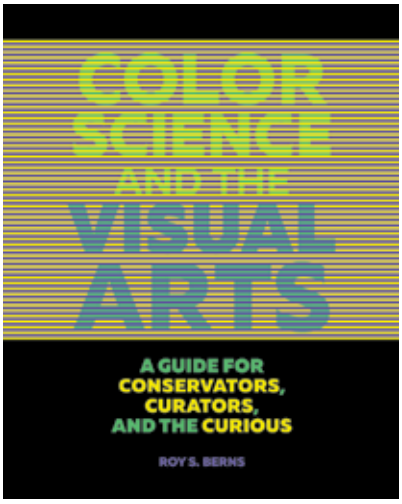
Color Science and the Visual Arts: A Guide for Conservators, Curators, and the Curious

Roy S. Berns

Los Angeles, Getty Conservation Institute, 2016. 208 pages, 325 color ills. $55.00. ISBN 978-606064818



Visual arts professionals and museum visitors are increasingly prompted to engage with the impermanence and subjectivity of color in works of art. Exhibitions such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art's 2015 *Van Gogh: Irises and Roses,* in which the fading of the artist's pigments was a central theme, ask museum audiences to think more critically about color and consider the possibilities of color alteration. Similarly, a relatively recent resurgence of popular theories attributing unusual color combinations in Van Gogh's paintings to vision deficiencies, or lack of color subtlety in Claude Monet's late paintings to cataracts, awakens us to the differences in the way we all perceive color. Public awareness is thus growing with regard to the way a work's condition and the presence of degraded materials—for instance, a discolored natural resin varnish on a painting—may distort an artwork's appearance, and the role of conservators in how works are seen today. It is perhaps more important than ever for museum professionals and the public to be able to communicate about color. In this context, *Color Science and the Visual Arts: A Guide for Conservators, Curators, and the Curious* by Roy S. Berns is a timely contribution.

Berns has a background in textile science and chemistry. Additionally, he spent time as a Visiting Fellow at both the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. and as a guest scholar at the Getty Conservation Institute; he is currently a Professor at the Munsell Color Science Laboratory at the Rochester Institute of Technology. This work is thus the product of Berns' decades of experience and research in colorants and developing imaging tools for the study of cultural heritage.

In this book, Berns establishes a common language that museum staff—including conservators, curators, photographers, and archivists—can use to communicate with one another and with the public regarding the display, conservation, imaging, and reproduction of works of art. However, as the title of this text suggests, curiosity—rather than a background in cultural heritage or the visual arts—is the only prerequisite for understanding and enjoying this book. Indeed, the clarity with which complex scientific concepts are communicated is one of its great strengths.

Appropriately for a book dealing with color, optimum attention to detail was observed in the text's layout and design, and the use of color in chapter headings and captions creates visual interest. Concepts are demonstrated through copious illustrations and graphs. Berns also clearly brings his

teaching experience to the design of the book, as it is organized with summary sections reviewing and reinforcing key concepts at the end of each chapter. As suggested in the preface, the work could certainly serve as an appropriate textbook for conservation and museum studies students. The text is divided into seven chapters that approach color science from different standpoints, with chapters 1 through 4 covering the fundamentals and the last three chapters discussing applications. It must be said that these chapters are ambitious in scope, and each topic could be a different book in its own right. By necessity, the level of detail provided tends to be moderate, but each section also lists additional resources that could be consulted to gain a deeper understanding of each subject. Given the various angles from which Berns explores color, it is worth briefly reviewing the contents of each chapter.

While the subsequent chapters do not necessarily need to be read in order, the first chapter introduces foundational terms and concepts that are built upon in subsequent sections. The author defines the visible spectrum and describes the characteristics of light. He continues by introducing various types of instruments that measure the spectral qualities of light: a spectroradiometer, a spectrophotometer, and a multispectral camera. A spectroradiometer measures radiance as a function of wavelength, and therefore allows comparison of the spectral signatures of light sources, whereas the spectrophotometer measures reflectance or transmittance as a function of wavelength, and allows characterization of the visual properties of materials. As an example of how the latter type of instrumentation may be used, Berns discusses the identification of blue pigments in two versions of *The Bedroom* by Van Gogh (held by the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam and the Art Institute of Chicago), comparing reference spectra of various blues to the spectral measurements from the paintings. This is the sort of valuable, real-life example that the author sprinkles throughout the text. He then briefly presents the principles behind the measurement of materials with multi- or hyper-spectral imaging.

The second chapter considers how we see color and spatial depth, relating various theories of vision and describing the sensory mechanisms of the cone receptors in our eyes. Berns stresses the importance of understanding the physiological and psychological processes involved in seeing color and the limits of our spectral sensitivities with respect to interpreting artwork and successfully reproducing color. Berns also touches on how physiological differences in spectral sensitivity and conditions such as the development of cataracts alter what we see. The latter half of the chapter tackles spatial vision and the law of simultaneous contrast, assimilation, and the impact of spatial frequency, again with effective accompanying illustrations. The law of simultaneous contrast deals with visual illusions caused by adjacent colors: this concept is demonstrated successfully in the associated image consisting of six grey stars against differently colored backgrounds. (Although the stars are identically colored, they appear visually distinct because of the influence of the surrounding colors.) Likewise, assimilation concerns the influence of adjacent colors on one another but describes the effect of colors combining spatially when viewed from a distance. Spatial frequency, meanwhile, refers to the amount of detail that can be discerned across a field of view. A detail of Van Gogh's *Irises* in low, medium, and high spatial frequencies is used as an example. The low spatial frequency corresponds to relatively large areas of color, while high spatial frequency corresponds to the discernment of edges and details. Understanding the limits of the achromatic and chromatic channels—in other words, the black-opposed-to-white channel versus the colored channels—of our vision is also crucial. Humans have higher visual acuity within the achromatic channel: this explains why JPEGs are still visually legible after image-file compression, and how artists direct the gaze and influence our perception of value in the achromatic channel through techniques such as countershading. Berns suggests that for the purposes of a conservator, matching the chromatic content is less important than matching the achromatic content of an area when carrying out imitative inpainting. Although this last observation is specific to conservation professionals, the chapter as a whole is a must-read for anyone interested in human vision and perception. Chapter 3 describes the language we use to describe color—lightness, hue, and chromatic intensity—and discusses how to more precisely quantify color based on physical measurement. Berns introduces the reader to three systems widely used for color specification: the Natural Color system, the Munsell system, and the CIELAB numerical system. The development and advantages of the CIELAB system, and its use in defining tolerances in color manufacture, are discussed in detail. Establishing this sort of standardized terminology is valuable because it allows color specifications to be communicated with greater accuracy.

In chapter 4, "Metamerism and Color Inconstancy," the perception of colors under different conditions is addressed. Significantly, several phrases that are often conflated under the single term "metamerism"—illuminant metamerism, observer metamerism,

and color inconstancy —are defined and distinguished from one another. Metamerism is generally understood to refer to changes in the matching quality of two colors as lighting changes; however, this concept is more specifically characterized as illuminant metamerism. The conservator is most aware of this type of metamerism, since the effect of lighting on color is important to consider when inpainting works of art. Observer metamerism, on the other hand, points to the possibility of perceived color mismatches due to the varied spectral sensitivities of different observers. Berns also makes the crucial point that most materials are color inconstant. A single color may visually alter dramatically under different lighting conditions.

Chapter 5 deals with the conditions that affect the display of artwork, including lighting and the color of the surrounding surfaces in a gallery. Properties of lighting to consider include energy efficiency, spectral radiance, color temperature, color rendering index, and geometry. Viewing comfort and the effects of lighting on mood are also taken into account. Additionally, Berns emphasizes the importance of considering the potential for light-induced damage to cultural heritage and discusses several examples of pigment fading. Except for the restrictions on light levels for objects vulnerable to light damage, this section is not prescriptive; instead, recommendations are qualified and advantages and disadvantages of various lighting conditions are discussed.

Chapter 6 discusses the spectral qualities of traditional painting materials and considers pigments and color mixtures in terms of their absorption and scattering of incident light. This section provides a helpful description of the properties of non-traditional "effect pigments" and interference colorants for anyone who encounters them in modern and contemporary art. Berns also touches on how the application of varnish, the aging of natural resin varnish or paint medium, and the surface roughness of paint influence perception of color. This section concludes with a discussion of the ways in which spatial mixing exploits the imperfect spatial resolution of our vision to produce coherent images from a distance. The theories of pointillism exemplified by George Seurat's *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte* rely upon this concept, and paintings conservators also employ spatial mixing when applying discernible inpainting or *tratteggio,* consisting of tiny strokes of color, so that the presence of damage may be discerned at close viewing. The final chapter, "Color Reproduction," concerns the documentation and reproduction of artwork. The chapter defines the different goals and qualities of preferred, spectral, and colorimetric color reproduction and discusses the limitations encountered, such as issues with metamerism, in achieving high-quality image reproductions. Spectral reproduction, in which the reproduction matches the artwork's spectral properties, would be ideal; however, this type of reproduction is not yet available commercially, and a best-case scenario is generally a colorimetric color reproduction that matches the artwork in specific lighting conditions and for a specific observer. This chapter also gives what is essentially a crash course on the properties of digital images (including resolution, file type, and color mode) and offers examples of different types of image-quality issues. Berns describes the workflow for color managing, viewing, and printing digital images, and offers advice on facilitating communication between cameras, the displays on digital devices, and printers.

Although this book purports to deal with the visual arts generally, most of the examples address paintings, and the sixth chapter is entirely devoted to painting materials. In this sense, a discussion of other media, the evolution of pigments, the invention of synthetic dyes, and the chemical differences between types of colorants would have been welcome. However, this sort of information is arguably beyond the scope of this book, and as aforementioned, ample further resources are listed for consultation.

In any case, *Color Science and the Visual Arts* makes a well-balanced and informative contribution to the literature on color science as it relates to the arts. The reliance on images and real-life examples to illustrate ideas is refreshing, and it is this engaging strategy of relaying information that allows complex concepts to be communicated clearly. From the perspective of a practicing conservator, this book constitutes a useful compilation of the principles of color science and light, the latest imaging techniques, and the most important considerations for color matching and faithful treatment documentation. For museum professionals generally, the text reinforces the benefit of understanding theories of color and vision and emphasizes the value of applying these theories to work within the visual arts. Perhaps the book's greatest strength, though, is its potential to guide museum professionals in communicating about color with the public, and congratulations to Berns are merited for the text's rare and valuable ability to engage directly with a "curious" audience.

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After Caravaggio

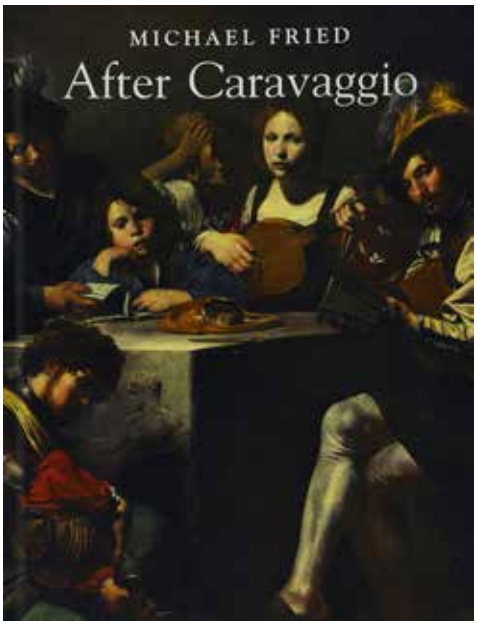
Michael Fried

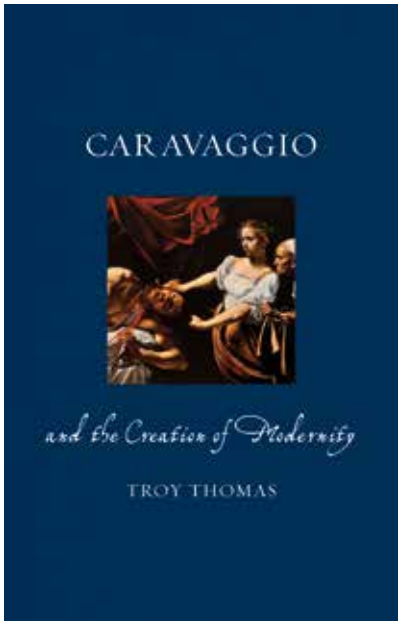
New Haven, Yale University Press, 2016. 234 pages, 150 color ills. $60.00. ISBN 978-0300218640

Caravaggio and the Creation of Modernity

Troy Thomas

London, Reaktion Books, 2016. 256 pages, 67 ills., 63 in color. $22.50. ISBN 978-1780236766





Nearly a generation separated Walter Friedlaender's *Caravaggio Studies* (1955) and Howard Hibbard's monograph on the artist (1984), and by the time Hibbard's book appeared, research on Caravaggio was expanding in many directions, and the monograph format was being largely replaced by exhibition catalogs and studies in more specialized areas. Since then interest in the artist has only increased: previously unknown paintings have been discovered, neglected archives have been explored, and a surprising proliferation of popular biographies have all greatly enlarged the literature devoted to Caravaggio.

It is from fields tilled so assiduously that rarer flowers bloom: in our case, works not strictly of history, but of criticism. Michael Fried's *The Moment of Caravaggio* received particular acclaim on its publication in 2010. That work addressed some of the mechanics of picture-making, or rather the conceiving of images, through a mixture of formal analysis and judicious deconstruction, and many of the results have (or may have) applications in art history proper. For example, Fried draws attention to the consequences of making a self-portrait (or a painting based on a self-portrait) using a mirror situated at a right angle to the right or left of the artist at work; Caravaggio's *Boy Bitten by a Lizard* appears to conform to this practice. Central to Fried's analytics are what he calls "address," in which the subject of the painting confronts the viewer as if aware of the viewer's presence, and "absorption," in which the action of the painting transpires without notice of the viewer, now an unseen or even absent observer. These are indeed stratagems employed in Caravaggio's works, and yet, although he may have intensified these effects to some extent, they can hardly be called his innovations; both have origins in medieval and early Renaissance art. Some of Fried's other notions are even more problematic. The idea, for example, that the frequency of decapitation in Caravaggio's paintings is a sort of attempt to "sever" the painting itself from the discourse is unlikely to find many takers. Beheadings are horrific, and were commonplace in the seventeenth century; one need look no further than to a desire to elicit shock and pity in the works of an artist so inclined towards violence himself. Nevertheless, the book found a widely receptive audience.

Fried's follow-up, *After Caravaggio*, is a natural sequel, as he adapts his critical apparatus to the Caravaggist movement (primarily in Rome), taking advantage of the awareness of Caravaggism brought about by exhibitions (and, of course, the catalogs produced for them).

Much of Fried's discussion of Caravaggio's followers centers on what he calls the "full-blown gallery picture": a painting that may or may not be made on commission, but is not made for a specific locus, and that is of a size that can be moved conveniently by two handlers, allowing it to be readily traded on the art market. (Fried sometimes appears to believe that Caravaggio invented this type of painting, which in fact has been known in art history for many years as the cabinet picture, and whose origins predate Caravaggio by more than half a century.)

Cabinet pictures were important

to the trade among collectors in the Netherlands from the 1520s, and were widespread in Venetian art throughout the sixteenth century. Both religious and secular subjects appear, but they differ strongly from paintings made for public display, such as altarpieces, because, as they were intended for private viewing, much more latitude in subject matter and artistic expression could be granted. Cabinet paintings were widely exchanged in Rome at the time of Caravaggio's arrival there, and Giulio Mancini, his earliest biographer, maintained a nice trade in them at the beginning of the century. It is in these collectors' pieces that Fried finds the best opportunities to elucidate the "density of presence" that gave these works their impact. Painters both Italian and foreign yield observations about the workings of this effect of immediacy, which employs address and absorption in various degrees. But it is the French artist Valentin de Boulogne, who spent practically all of his career in Rome, who emerges as the most successful, at least in these aesthetic terms. Valentin's compositions, especially of genre subjects, are often more complex than those of similar subjects by others, and the interactions of the figures, with each other and with the viewer, provide instance after instance that illustrate the workings of Fried's aesthetic model.

The central focus of Fried's post-Caravaggio analyses, though, is the large painting of the *Resurrection* in Chicago, by the artist Francesco Boneri—now widely identified, with something approaching confidence, with the character Cecco, who appears in documents as a somewhat scurrilous boy companion, employed by Caravaggio as a servant and prone to theft. Cecco has generally also been presumed to be the model for some of what have been seen as the artist's most morally problematic works: the brazen, grinning youth posed lewdly as victorious Cupid, and the naked, hairless young Saint John embracing a sheep in two versions of a distinctly disturbing composition.

Can this possibly be the artist of the Chicago painting? Mancini, who was in a position to know, states that Cecco was one of Caravaggio's most praiseworthy followers. But the impression we get from records, reinforced by the likelihood that he was the painter's model, is of a wanton catamite; and Caravaggio's unsettled life would not appear conducive to teaching an apprentice or anyone else. We do learn from documents, however, that Cecco remained with the artist for years, and so must have served in some capacity as a painter's assistant; he thus might well have witnessed the artist at work and learned something of the craft. But this does not account for what we see, at least tentatively, in the paintings attributed to Cecco. The lone substantial source for Cecco is a short (19 pages of text) volume by Gianni Papi, meant as a beginning for investigation of the "new" artist. It does appear that there is in fact an artist here; but Cecco del Caravaggio, as we see him in these collected works, is a highly accomplished painter who owes as much to Flemish painting as he does to Caravaggio. Fried rightly points out many features of the Chicago *Resurrection* that show a close knowledge of Caravaggio's works. But how to account for the eclecticism of the style of this Cecco, whose works seem to date from, at the earliest, about ten years after Caravaggio's death, remains a significant unknown. This matters. Our perception and evaluation of Cecco is quite different if we see him as a direct (*the* direct) descendant of Caravaggio, instead of a follower of unknown origins adapting ideas from Caravaggio's public paintings to a style acquired from an alien source.

In any event, the subject of Fried's final essay is surprising and welcome. It is a study applying his critical (he says "poetical") apparatus to the works of Francesco Barbieri, called Guercino because of his slightly cross-eyed appearance. Guercino's earliest works clearly show knowledge of Caravaggio, although there is no record of him visiting Rome before 1621; the source of his first training is unknown, but he claimed Ludovico Carracci as his lodestar. Cardinal Alessandro Ludovisi recognized his talent and brought him to Bologna, where Ludovico himself lauded his talent with highest praise. When the cardinal Ludovisi ascended to the papal throne as Gregory XV, Guercino was called to Rome, where he painted the enormous *Burial of Saint Petronilla* for Saint Peter's Basilica, and where he altered his style under the influence of the Bolognese painters already in Rome. Fried selects a group of Guercino's paintings—both cabinet pictures and altarpieces—painted before his departure for Rome for his analysis. He then applies his principles of address and absorption to these paintings, essentially providing a sort of demonstration of how his aesthetic system might be used to evaluate works or groups of works by other artists, including those not directly related to the Caravaggist movement.

A second, more ambitious if less focused, critical assessment of Caravaggio and his works is found in *Caravaggio and the Creation of Modernity* by Troy Thomas. It is noteworthy that Fried's earlier *The Moment of Caravaggio* does not appear in Thomas' select bibliography, because his work seems to want to be just such a book, if on a somewhat smaller scale. The seeds of difficulty, however, appear right away in the

book's title: *the Creation of Modernity*. Exactly what is "modernity"? We need to know. Does it refer to something new, with a prognostication for the future, at the time in which a work of art was created? Or is it rather something that we see as a part of our own contemporary view of the world? If it is the former, then Caravaggio is not (as is implied here) the first "modern" artist by any means; new art had shaped experience and perception in the eyes of an audience from very early times. If it is the latter, however, how can we define "modernity"? Surely Caravaggio ought not to be equated with modernism as it arose after about 1900; and the increments of a post-modern culture must in effect push Caravaggio further still from being any sort of antecedent to our contemporary world.

From almost the beginning, then, we stumble over concepts that are not clearly thought out—and the problems soon multiply. Thomas informs us that we recognize certain aspects of Caravaggio's art as "quintessentially modern: self-consciousness, self-reference, introspection, subjectivity and skepticism." Few of us would relish the task of defining modern art using these terms. And yet his list of terms runs on, also including "social awareness, ambiguity, contradiction, oppositional aspects and loss of certainty." But ambiguity and its correlations are found in Caravaggio's works only by eyes of our own time; indeed, they stand in direct opposition to the expectations of the early seventeenth century, and most particularly in the case of post-Tridentine religious works. The personal characteristics that make Caravaggio a "modern" artist, we read further, include individualism and "a fierce search for equality and higher social status"—a claim that is apparently unaware of the contradiction inherent between "equality" and "higher social status" (7-8).

The most "modern" of Caravaggio's artistic impulses, according to Thomas, is a deliberate undermining of a painting's religious content, intentionally producing ambiguities or conflicting interpretations:

> Caravaggio may have flirted playfully with potentially negative religious ideas… in order to create tension and provocative richness in the mind of the beholder during the interpretive act… The viewer's perception remains dialectical and conflicted; indeed, the deep ambiguity of his art remains one of the most fascinating aspects that draws people to it. (98)

This is ahistorical and wrong. Such conflicts would never have been tolerated in public religious paintings, and Caravaggio would never have intended them. An example to which Thomas returns is the *Calling of Saint Matthew* in the Contarelli chapel (in San Luigi dei Francesi, Rome). The "ambiguity" or "conflict" here arises not from any interpretation contemporary with the painting, but with a preposterous theory (not Thomas' own) that Saint Matthew is not the central figure at the table, who returns Christ's gaze and his gesture, but rather the overdressed bravo with a sword and tight trousers to the right. This reading descends from a willful and perverse refusal to heed the evidence of one's own eyes, and Thomas in the end concludes that "probably" the central figure must be Saint Matthew after all. So what purpose can possibly be served by breathing air into this absurdity in the first place? It sheds no light on the painting's reception, and only illustrates how a critic in the twenty-first century might be prepared to delude himself with such a contrived notion.

To be clear: no ambiguities of interpretation were ever included by Caravaggio in any of his paintings—absolutely none. They were meant to be clear and unequivocally understood by his patrons, even if the patrons often did not approve. They only seem ambiguous today because of our imperfect historical understanding of the intentions of the artist and his clients; and our task should be to recognize the limits of our understanding, and to work to improve them where we can. To arrogantly project manifestations of our ignorance onto history is malpractice.

But then there is also this: light is an obvious issue of importance in Caravaggio's works. Indeed, he once apparently made a hole in the roof of his lodgings to supply illumination for his models (as Thomas duly notes). Light has ever been a metaphor for divine grace and the transformation of the soul. Thomas relates that a Platonist philosopher, Francesco Patrizi, had assumed a chair at the Sapienza in Rome close to the time of Caravaggio's arrival. Patrizi wrote of an almost Manichaean dualism represented by light and darkness, and held that from the time of Creation, darkness was the natural state of the earth, whereas light was a divine emanation from heaven. Moreover light, immaterial and ephemeral, represents an intermediary between the intellect and the senses (music was also said to embody similar characteristics).

Of course Caravaggio never attended university himself, but one can imagine that these notions—so well in keeping with the tenets of the

Counter-Reformation—were discussed in the households of the learned churchmen with whom Caravaggio lodged in the years of his early fame, and that they would surely have been taken up with the brilliant young painter whom they kept in their midst. Thomas also notes that the subject of light had been addressed in the recent past by a leading artist and theorist of the preceding generation. Gian Paolo Lomazzo had written (in 1584) that light existed as a sort of ontology, brightest near to God and fading as it approached the earth (Correggio's *Assumption* in Parma Cathedral, painted fifty years before Lomazzo wrote, illustrates this principle, which ultimately derives from Marsilio Ficino). Patrizi's concept of light could well be seen as a replacement for that expressed by Lomazzo, and as such might mark a point for Caravaggio's artistic departure from what had gone before.

Thomas fails to capitalize on this, but his suggestion of a connection between this new metaphysics of light and Caravaggio's works is a promising, and historically plausible, contribution.

There is more, too, that is commendable in Thomas' book. It must be said that it is a work of considerable erudition, and many of us before him have nursed grand programs that in the end proved to have been doomed from the start. If it is misguided to form Caravaggio into a "modern" artist, the attempt to do so can point us to avenues of value apart from the principal thesis.

The overriding virtue shared by both of these books is the desire to employ criticism to gain a more complete historical understanding of an artist and his works. In the endeavors of Fried and of Thomas—and neither is wholly successful—we do benefit from the exercise as well as from the result. And in both, as in all worthwhile art historical literature, the reader is enriched by both the broad vision and the incidental details provided by the authors' wide learning.

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