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Edouard Vuillard (review)

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the antique and the heroism of modern life were compatible" (192). When Baudelaire's "Le Peintre de la vie moderne" deconstructed that way of thinking, David's late art became hard to understand.

Alexander, Apelles, and Campaspe (1813-23) shows Alexander the Great giving up his mistress to Apelles, who had fallen in love with her. Is this an image about self-control, with Alexander a stand in for Napoleon? The Farewell of Telemachus and Eucharis (1818) shows the moment when Ulysses's son must leave the nymph to rejoin his father. "Because it insisted on the virtues of humanity and moderation," this scene "was interpreted as a veiled critique of monarchical absolutism and often invoked by Enlightenment philosophers" (247). Is this picture a commentary on David's own situation? Unruly desire, that is a frequent theme of this art. David uses traditional subjects in uncannily untraditional ways. Our postmodern skepticism about the legibility of narratives facilitates "a paradoxically open non-reading" of David's "mysterious scenes" (266). As David the radical challenged scholars who lived the upheavals of 1968, so David the post-revolutionary commands attention now when our political and artistic situation has changed

Cogeval, Guy, ed. *Édouard Vuillard*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2003. Pp. 501. ISBN 2-89192-260-3

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Blockbuster exhibitions often celebrate the careers of modern artists, and the earliest retrospective exhibition of Édouard Vuillard's work occurred in 1938 at the end of the painter's life. The most recent retrospective, presented in Washington, Montreal, Paris, and London in 2003 and 2004, was the most thorough ever dedicated to the painter and bequeathed to us a beautiful catalogue. Although a well-know figure, primarily through his work with the Nabis in the late nineteenth century, the catalogue stresses that Vuillard created until the mid-twentieth century and left an enormous variety of work: intimate interiors and large decorative panels, portraits and landscapes, drawings and prints, photographs and stage sets. The catalogue, relying on the artist's photographs and journal, also underscores that many of Vuillard's paintings recount stories from his life as well as allude to his entourage in especially inventive ways. This well-organized book begins with an overview of Vuillard's life and work in the form of a biographical essay and catalogue and concludes with four essays that treat specific aspects of his work: his symbolist period, his photography, his travel, and his relationship to the art of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Guy Cogeval introduces Vuillard's life with a description of the artist's response to his mother's death and weaves throughout his introductory essay the theme of the painter's relationship to women: his mother, sister, and lovers. In Cogeval's account, these women acted as the artist's muses, and some of his most interesting and well-known paintings from the Nabis period refashion the painter's own family life under the inspiration of symbolist theater. Vuillard's work as a stage designer began in 1891 and flowered in 1893 and 1894 with sets for several of Ibsen's dramas. From this experience, Cogeval argues that "*he transposed the principles of his stage sets into his own painting*: sloping planes, transparent screens across the proscenium arch, an obsession with suffocating atmospheres infected by fear, where lamps take forever to go

out" (12). He presents *Interior, Mother and Sister of the Artist* (1893) in the Museum of Modern Art in New York as an example of remaking harmonious domestic life into a tense theatrical confrontation between mother and sister, transforming his family into symbolist drama. Perhaps the most important female artistic influence was his lover Misia Natanson, a gifted musician, whom Vuillard met in the 1890s when the painter embarked on a series of decorative panels, seeking to unite painting and music. Cogeval also treats Vuillard's politics; the painter supported Dreyfus and opposed anti-Semitism. Vuillard, a socialist, rallied to the war effort against the Germans and painted images of a war factory and the interrogation of a German prisoner at the front. Cogeval concludes with a discussion of Vuillard's late portraits and decorative work and suggests that his oeuvre requires assessment as a whole: "His goal was to raise his art to an impeccably classical and above all enduring form, built upon the memories of an inexhaustible culture" (46).

In the first of the catalogue's four essays, Dario Gamboni takes as his subject ambiguity in Vuillard's painting, which he relates to symbolist ideas and art as well as the influence of psychological theories at the turn of the century. Although Gamboni's essay begins opaquely, it presents a good general introduction to Vuillard's symbolism, which gave the spectator new power to discover meaning from the painter's dissolving of "form into a more or less continuous web of repeated elements and motifs," (410) or camouflaging of one image within another. Elizabeth Easton contributes an overview of Vuillard's 2,000 photographs to the catalogue and finds his photographic production more diverse in approach than his paintings. Vuillard used a Kodak roll-film camera intended for hobbyists, never exhibited his photographs, and embraced his family and friends as his primary subject matter. Vuillard's early photographs resemble his tense interiors from the 1890s, framing pictures from unconventional viewpoints, whereas his later photographs embody the spontaneity of the snapshot and have no equivalent in his painted work. Kimberly Jones writes on Vuillard's *villégiatures*: "those extended sojourns in the country-side in the company of friends and family" (440). She presents three distinct periods in Vuillard's lengthy stays in the country, beginning with the period 1896 to 1901 with *La Revue blanche* circle at Misia Natanson's country homes in the environs of Paris. The next two periods, from 1901 to 1914 in Normandy and Brittany and from 1917 to 1940 in the countryside around Paris, centered on Jos and Lucy Hessel's group of friends. These *villégiatures* were often the most productive periods for his art, as they offered rejuvenation, a desire to create, and new subjects. Lastly, Laurence des Cars, in a disjointed essay, positions Vuillard's work in the nineteenth as well as the twentieth centuries, linking his painting with Mallarmean symbolism and "the kind of cultural neo-classicism then flourishing [in the 1920s and 1930s]" (469).

This volume provides an excellent and exhaustive introduction to Vuillard's work and life. The essays refer clearly and productively to the catalog of objects to amplify points of the essayists, and the introductions to the different catalogue sections offer important overviews of different aspects of the artist's work. The book, however, would benefit from clearly marked maps of different sites where Vuillard worked. Finally, the catalogue presents Vuillard's snapshots as the equal of his paintings, but it is doubtful the painter considered his photographs high art, since he followed amateur photographic practices and never exhibited his Kodak images.