

*English Art 1860-1914: Modern Artists and Identity* edited by David Peters Corbett and Lara Perry. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000; New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2001. xii, 256 pp. + 7 colour, 84 b/w illus. \$60.00. ISBN 0-8135-2901-6. \$60.00 (cloth). ISBN 0-8135-2902-6. \$30.00 (paper).

This volume of twelve essays defines and explores a modernist sensibility in the visual culture of England – as opposed to Britain – from the 1860s through the years of the First World War. But this is not a modernist sensibility as we would traditionally define it. Instead, the authors seek what Paul Barlow calls for in his essay in the volume: that is, “multiple modernities” that no longer rely on that familiar dichotomy of “academic/avant-garde split.” Rather, the anthology seeks a pluralist approach reminiscent of recent work on British art, such as Lynda Nead’s *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in 19th-Century London* (Routledge, 2000) or Deborah Cherry’s *Beyond the Frame: Feminism and Visual Culture, Britain 1850-1900* (Routledge, 2000).

Lisa Tickner in the opening essay quotes Vanessa Bell: “It was as if one might say things one had always felt instead of trying to say things that other people told one to feel.” Bell’s words characterize the passion of these essays in claiming English art for modernism, finally. Forget listening to the voices of the canon (did I say Francophile canon?). This volume is part of a burgeoning literature that addresses the place of modernism in English art; it joins the ranks of recent scholarship which has focused specifically on the Victorian era and the early twentieth century.

Corbett and Perry articulate a working definition of modernism which is *not* concerned with the marching of “isms” towards abstraction, but rather with the definition of modernism that allows “art [to respond] to the evolving conditions of modern life prevalent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.” In this context Tickner’s essay “English modernism in the cultural field” is not meant to be conclusive. Rather, invoking Pierre Bourdieu’s work on the “cultural field,” she opens the “field” for discussion, emphasizing three criteria that make up the main themes of these inquiries: agency, by which she means agents such as art dealers and gallery owners, who act within sites of modernism such as institutions and professional organizations; sexuality, by which she means the on-going responses to a changing gendered climate that female and male artists must navigate; and value, by which she means both the use value, as in monetary negotiations of art dealers, critics and patrons, and the concurrent aesthetic value and meaning of the works themselves. In this sense Tickner calls for a “double vision,” that is, looking broadly at the “cultural field” in order to obtain a close reading of the visual media in question.

The book addresses several themes which revolve around an overarching one of identity. Corbett and Perry define “identity” as “the construction of