

REVIEWS

The Victorians: British Painting 1837-1901. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 16 February – 11 May 1997.

The Victorians: British Painting 1837-1901 by Malcolm Warner with contributions by Anne Helmreich and Charles Brock. Washington: National Gallery of Art; New York, Abrams, 1997. 255 pp. ISBN 0-8109-6342-6, \$49.50 (cloth); 0-89468-263-6, \$29.95 (paper).

The Victorians: British Painting 1837-1901, held at the National Gallery of Art, Washington--its only venue, was organized by Malcolm Warner, Curator of Paintings, Yale Center for British Art, and Nicolai Cikovsky, Jr., Curator of American and British Paintings at the National Gallery. The exhibition organizers have presented a comprehensive overview of painting in England during the period of Queen Victoria's reign. The show is unabashedly targeted to an "audience of beginners," in the hope of creating new converts to the art of this era. The paintings are divided among eight rooms, grouped by broad themes such as "Modern Life" and "The Aesthetic Sense." The hang is very pleasing, despite what must have been the daunting task of achieving harmony in a compendium of Victorian painting which ranges in style from Winterhalter to Whistler. Many of the "greats" are included: Hubert von Herkomer's *Hard Times*, William Quiller Orchardson's *Mariage de Convenience* (first panel), Millais's *Ophelia*, Frederic Leighton's *Flaming June*, and John Singer Sargent's *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*, to name but a few. This brief list gives an idea of the exhibition's breadth. In fact, the effect of walking from one room, filled with the gem-like colours and pristine detail of the Pre-Raphaelites, to the next, which included such broadly painted, muted-toned works as those by Sickert, Lavery, and others, was somewhat startling. Millais's exquisite but subtle *Dew Drenched Furze* hangs at one end of a large gallery that includes John Lavery's wonderful *The Tennis Match*, Stanhope Forbes's tour de force *A Fish Sale on a Cornish Beach*, and George Clausen's fairy-like *Bird Scaring*. The transition from an exhibition which begins with Landseer's *Coming Events* to such pre-modern works as these was educational at the least. No matter how familiar one is with the paintings produced during Victoria's long reign, one can't help experiencing a moment of astonishment when given this rare opportunity to view the range of styles all at once.

While the stylistic change from early Victorian genre painters to the impressionists at the end of the era is profound, a subtler group of stand outs, one perhaps somewhat unexpected, is that of the foreign artists. The works of painters like James Tissot, Sargent, and even Whistler are conspicuous among the native Englishmen and women (female artists are represented by only one example: Elizabeth Thompson, Lady Butler's *Balaclava*). The reason for the mild discord