

Reviews

Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists by Deborah Cherry. London and New York: Routledge, 1993. xv, 275 pp., 47 illus. ISBN 0-4150-06052-4, \$55.00 (cloth); ISBN 0-415-06053-2, \$19.95 (paper).

Since 1984, when Charlotte Yeldham published her pioneering dissertation *Women Artists in Nineteenth-Century France and England*, scholarship in this neglected area has steadily grown. Among book length studies, Pamela Gerrish Nunn's generously annotated *Canvassing: Recollections by Six Victorian Women Artists* (1986) recovered vividly the voices of such painters as Elizabeth Thompson Butler and Louise Jopling, and was followed by her *Victorian Women Artists* (1987), incorporating equally strikingly the voices of the contemporary critics who so frequently devalued them. Nunn's case-history approach likewise informed her collaboration with Jan Marsh on *Women Artists and the Pre-Raphaelite Movement* (1989). Recent exhibitions such as *Ladies of the Brush* at the Forbes Magazine Galleries in New York and *Struggle for Fame: Victorian Women Artists and Authors* at the Yale Center for British Art have also made Victorian women's art more accessible to a larger public. Indeed, the reclamation process has advanced sufficiently to inspire a full-scale resource guide, *Women in Victorian Painting: A Gallery of Her Own* (forthcoming), compiled by Elree Harris and Shirley Scott. A major contributor to this growth has been Deborah Cherry, who in 1987 mounted at the Rochdale Art Gallery the show *Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists*. The 33-page catalogue for this ground-breaking exhibit was a low-budget document--confusingly designed, crudely printed, dotted with tiny, muddy reproductions.

Gratifying evidence of the increasing interest in Victorian women artists is the appearance--literally as well as figuratively--of Cherry's book, an ambitious, elegantly produced expansion of her catalogue, including 47 full-page, high-quality black and white illustrations, plus appendices, extensive notes, and a select bibliography. *Painting Women* is split into two densely developed sections -- almost two books -- of roughly equal length, "Women Painting" and "Women Painting Women," both predicated on the assumption of female difference. But Cherry also insists that neither women artists nor women viewers constituted homogeneous groups; adapting Foucault to her purposes, she proposes a theory of power "as a tense and unstable network of oppositions and resistances" that allows us to "move away" from the standard Victorian patriarchal model and to centre women "in their multiplicities as producers of discourses."

The major strength of Cherry's book is its breadth of scope. Focused on issues of "production, representation, spectatorship and signification," her case depends on generalizing from massive quantities of evidence (198 artists are cited) at the expense of individualizing detail (15). Biographical data, though numerous, are