

The People's Galleries: Art Museum and Exhibitions in Britain, 1800-1914 by Giles Waterfield. New Haven: Yale UP, 2015. 372 pp. + 70 colour, 215 b/w illus. ISBN 978-030-0209-846. £45.00; \$85.00.

For the last thirty years Museum Studies has been flavoured with ideas concerning the role of power. Drawing on theorists such as Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, writers and historians have explored museums and art galleries as arenas exercising a form of social control; in the nineteenth century particularly, the art gallery was a space that “civilized” the uneducated and allowed the ruling classes to demonstrate their wealth and cement their legacy. Giles Waterfield’s in-depth study of British art museums and galleries between the beginning of the nineteenth century and the First World War is part of a growing body of literature that resists and questions this approach. As the title suggests, Waterfield reads the form and function of the nineteenth-century British art museum as originating in a raft of ideologies that strove for civic order, public education, and general artistic and social progress of the people. Furthermore, he does so without the predisposition to label these ideologies as “oppressive.” Instead, Waterfield investigates the numerous and complicated motives for establishing the public art museum with a vigour and thoroughness that is clearly a celebration of the sense of civic duty that underpins so many of these motives.

After a short introduction in which the author maps out the above approach, the work proceeds in three parts divided into a number of sections. The first part, “Britain and the Visual Arts,” searches for the foundations of the mid- to late-nineteenth-century boom in museum making in the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. The “Justifying the Museum” section is a useful resource for any student of museum and gallery studies as it recounts succinctly the well known sources from this period: the 1835-36 *Report from the Select Committee on Arts and their Connexion with Manufactures*, and the writings of William Dyce (1806-64) and Gustav Friedrich Waagen (1794-1868), for example. Helpfully for the student, Waterfield embeds these discussions in the earlier context of museum debates in the preceding century and, in particular, the influence of Continental writers such as Roger de Piles (1635-1709). The comparison with the museums of continental Europe is perennial throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, so it is judicious of the author to stress the importance of using such early and pan-European sources.

The next section, entitled “Struggling for a Voice,” is critical for introducing what, to this reviewer’s mind, is the most original strand of research within this book: the shifting of focus from the large metropolitan institutions to the many neglected institutions of the country’s regions. Waterfield does