

mehr. Daß an diesem Punkt, an dem Gerndt seine Studie berechtigterweise schließt, für die Kunstgeschichte das noch wenig bekannte Kapitel der historistischen Gartenkunst beginnt, sei hier nur am Rande angemerkt.

Gerndts anschaulich geschriebenes und (fast zu) hübsch gestaltetes Buch, mit vielen seltenen Abbildungen, verzichtet auf ein „abschreckendes“ Register, das seine Nützlichkeit für diejenigen, die es nicht verschenken wollen, allerdings eher noch gesteigert hätte.

Adrian von Buttlar

ANTOINE SCHNAPPER, *J.-L. David und seine Zeit (David — Témoin de son temps)*, Office du Livre Fribourg (Deutsche Ausgabe bei Edition Popp, Würzburg), übers. Guido Meister, 1981, 312 S., 191 Abb., 40 in Farbe.

The time is surely ripe for a new study on David. It is, after all, nearly thirty years since the last standard monograph (that by Louis Hautecoeur) appeared. During that period much new material has been unearthed and new interpretations been proposed. It is a symptom of this ripeness that not one but two full biographical studies have now emerged — the one under review and that by Anita Brookner (London, 1980). Nor have either of these — excellent thought they both are in their different ways — exhausted the full range of current scholarship. For David is at the moment being made the subject of an intense reassessment by a number of newly emerging researchers.

All this activity suggests great changes are under way in our understanding of David. But in one sense this is misleading. For while we now know more than ever about him and are being invited to consider novel ways of interpreting the character of his art, the spectrum of assessments remains virtually unchanged since his lifetime. I do not know if it is generally the case that an artist attracts the commentators that he deserves, but this certainly seems to hold good for David. His art was always opinionated, coming to life in the heat of controversy, sinking to dullness as it moved from the centre of conflict. He was the antithesis of the withdrawn aesthete, and even today he is as celebrated for his involvement with the French Revolution and its consequences as for his achievement as an artist. This is not because there is any doubt about his quality as a painter. He remains by far the most compelling French artist of his generation. (He is, perhaps, the only strict neoclassicist whose images have retained a direct appeal to this day.) It is because the pictures themselves seem to be such clear witnesses to the artist's political obsessions. The *Oath of the Horatii* presents an ineradicable image of the communal resolve that precipitated the Revolution of 1789, the *Death of Marat* the archetypal celebration of a political martyr. No interpretation of his art can avoid these connotations, and the degree to which they are taken to be central to the peculiar character of his achievement tends to depend upon the allegiances of the commentator. As Schnapper himself remarks in the first paragraph of his book

'right up to the most recent times everything that has been written about the artist has been coloured by the political opinion of the respective authors.' Those who have little sympathy with radicalism tend to suggest that politics had little to do with the dramatic upsurge in quality that occurred in David's art in the 1780s. Those who lean in the opposite direction regard David's revolutionary proclivities as being all important in the formation of the artist's mature style.

Schnapper's awareness of this problem has led him to seek to avoid the pitfalls of such partisanship. While giving extensive coverage to the milieu in which David lived and worked he avoids entering into any heady speculations about the relationship between artistic quality and political objectives. At times his scrupulousness leads to a certain blandness, but on the whole it is to be admired, and exploited. His balanced and meticulous account is one that will be drawn upon for a long time to come.

The high standard of scholarship will come as no surprise to those who are familiar with Schnapper's researches into the French art of this period. In the present book this scholarship is presented in a most accessible manner. The book is, indeed, intended to appeal to a general as well as a specialist audience. It is beautifully produced with numerous fine illustrations. With an eye on the 'coffee table' market the pictures have been furnished with captions in which bite-sized sentences provide easily digested information apart from the main text. The dual purpose of the book has, I think, encouraged Schnapper to give it the clearest possible format. It is, in fact, a straightforward chronological account, with each chapter being built around a consecutive period and the artist dying on the last page. It has also encouraged the emphasis on David as a vivid witness on his times — something that the original french title brings out more clearly than the german transposition of it. There is an almost journalistic flavour at times to the way the author stresses the ability of David's pictures to bring to life a vanished age. When discussing *Le Sacre* — David's record of Napoleon's self-coronation as Emperor in 1804 — he comments 'The Empire has long since crumbled to dust, but not 'Le Sacre', whose tangible reality survives before our eyes.' Yet if such sentiments seem to make too much of a concession to popular notions of art, one must on the other hand count the gain. For this is the first time that an authoritative monograph on David has been provided with adequate visual support. It forms the strongest contrast with Hauteceur's book, which only contained one single plate.

Schnapper's concern with David as a historical witness and participant in the stormy events of his age leads him to place greater emphasis on the public rather than the private side of his subject. He is relatively little concerned with psychological motivation, and brings out instead what David shares in common with his contemporaries. One of the great values of the book is the way it draws upon the author's knowledge of the artistic institutions of the day. It presents a vivid picture of the authoritarian and hierarchical nature of the academy before the Revolution. Such details as the fact that, in the academy life classes, precedence was given to those students who happened to be sons of academicians, provide a microcosm of

the *ancien regime*. Such attitudes — coupled with a government sponsored suppression of all rival institutions — certainly provide sufficient reason for David's rabid attack on the academy in the early years of the Revolution. Schnapper moreover makes it clear that it was through the dispute over artistic and corporative matters that David came to be actively involved in revolutionary politics. Yet one cannot help wishing that there had been more discussion about why David, of all the artists who must have felt such grievances, should have been the one to have come to the fore in these matters. It certainly does not seem to have been through natural aptitude. For he was a poor orator and indifferent committee man. It would seem that there was an inner compulsion, a compulsion that accorded well with the high minded vision of the role of the history painter that had been revitalized in the late eighteenth century. David had been saturated with the notion of the reforming and didactic role of great art long before the Revolution provided him with the platform for putting this into practice to an unprecedented degree. Once again one can find a context for this in the development of moralizing art criticism by Diderot and LaFont de Saint-Yenne in France in the late eighteenth century and the move towards a revived classical purity of form that David encountered when a student in Rome. Schnapper covers this ground with great expertise, making full use of the researches into David's early work that have unearthed so much material over the last two decades. Yet, as with the question of David's political involvement, one cannot help wondering why it was David, of all the hundreds of aspirant history painters of the day, who was able to bring together these tendencies to forge a succinct, vivid, and compelling manner that has outlasted the specific concerns that gave birth to it. Schnapper certainly does not avoid this issue, and throughout the book he devotes considerable space to the analysis of individual works. These elegant passages suggest that Schnapper is basically a formalist. He sees David's great aesthetic achievement as the discovery of a clear and logical mode of presentation, one that communicates its message as precisely and vividly as possible. When speaking of the *Oath of the Horatii*, for example, he comments 'never before were the figures so perfectly embedded in their setting as in the 'Oath of the Horatti' — and this has been achieved by quite simple means; For every arch there is a corresponding group or single form. The apparent modesty of the artist — who contents himself with a small number of large figures seen on a single plane in a limited range of colours — communicates the quintessence of the drama: Nothing diverts us from the conflict between duty and feeling which, freed from the dust of centuries, draws us irresistibly under its spell.' The implication is that there is an archetypal situation here that David has unearthed and cleaned up as a conscientious archeologist might do. But it is more the picture's complexity than its clarity that has caused it to remain a potent image. It is this complexity that distinguishes David's work from that of so many of his contemporaries who shared his obsession with classical simplicity. David's successful pictures are always about more than their stated subject. Either consciously or instinctively they bring into play the fears, obsessions and desires that lay beneath the surface of his generation's more explicit concerns.

The formalist view of David's art also leads to modifications in the assessment of the more debatable parts of David's achievement. Schnapper makes a muted plea for reconsideration of David's late subject pictures — the mythological love scenes that he painted after 1815 when in exile in Brussels. He points out that they are of high technical quality and derive in type from themes treated by David in his middle years. On the other hand, he does not make any special claim for the early pre-classical works of David which predate the concern for clarity and simplicity. At times such aesthetic preferences can affect the interpretation of documentary evidence. An interesting example of this occurs in the discussion of the reception of David's early 'Mars and Venus'. Painted in 1771, it was submitted by David in his first attempt to gain the *Prix de Rome*. In his own account David claims that this picture led to him initially being awarded first prize but that, at the insistence of his teacher Vien, he was demoted to second place and the coveted first prize was given to his rival Suvée. David saw this intervention of his teacher as a piece of professional pique — he had neglected to ask Vien's permission before submitting his work. Schnapper is doubtful about this explanation. He points out that we only have David's word for it and suggests that the decision not to award David the first prize was simply a piece of aesthetic common sense. He maintains that David's picture — which is painted in a highly rococo manner — is inferior to Suvée's. Suvée's picture already shows the impact of neoclassical taste and is painted in a more sober style with a clearer and more balanced composition. In contrast to Schnapper, Anita Brookner, in her recent book on David, takes the opposite point of view. She favours David's interpretation and draws attention to what is to her the aesthetic inferiority of Suvée's work. She sees it as timid and lacking the originality and vigour of David's picture; that dramatic sense of conflict which was eventually to reach full expression in the *Oath of the Horatii*.

In a sense, of course, both interpretations of the 'Mars and Venus' could be vindicated. There is nothing contradictory about it being both less 'correct' and more exciting than Suvée's work. Nor is there any reason why Vien should not at the same time both have felt irritation at not being consulted by brilliant but difficult student and misgivings about the impurities of style in the picture. The point is that Schnapper and Brookner favour different readings of the event according to their different preferences, the former leaning to formal purity, the latter to psychological expression. Neither would either book have gained from being written from a more impartial point of view. Rather, it suggests how important it is to have artists studied from a variety of viewpoints, and to avoid a situation where there is simply one standard work. For an artist as problematic and combative as David this is, perhaps especially important.

Within the spectrum of David scholarship, then, Schnapper occupies a middle ground — though, mercifully, he is far from impartial. His account will, I suspect, remain the best starting point for those wishing to find out about the artist for some time to come. Attractive and accessible, it provides a distillation of recent research, while scrupulously avoiding all extreme claims and conclusions. From this point of

view it is tantalizing to see that he felt it useful to include as the last entry in his select bibliography T. Crow's article on the *Oath of the Horatii* that appeared in *Art History* in 1978. Unfortunately he does not discuss any of the claims of this fascinating piece in the text of his book. Perhaps the work was too far advanced for this to be possible.

In any case this is a shame, as it would have been most illuminating to have had Schnapper's views on Crow's reading of the political significance of the *Horatii*. However this is a small matter to hold against a book of such evident value and usefulness.

William Vaughan

BEI DER REDAKTION EINGEGANGENE NEUERSCHEINUNGEN

- Woldemar Winkler zum 80. Geburtstag.* Ausstellungskatalog. Museum Bochum 1982. 42 S., 30 Taf., 12 Farbtaf. ISBN 3-8093-0074-8.
- Jochem Wolters: Der Gold- und Silberschmied.* Werkstoffe und Materialien. Stuttgart, Rühle-Diebener Verlag 1981. 308 S. mit 247 Abb., Zeichnungen und Diagrammen, 42 Tafeln, Register. DM 54,—.
- Bad Homburg vor der Höhe 782—1982. Bilder und Dokumente aus 1200 Jahren.* Ausst. d. Stadtarchivs zur 1200-Jahrfeier der Stadt Bad Homburg v. d. Höhe. Katalog: Hilde Miedel u. Marlies Pessler. Bad Homburg v. d. H., Magistrat der Stadt 1982. 132 S. mit 40 Abb.
- Bilder und Tänze des Todes. Gestalten des Todes in der europäischen Kunst seit dem Mittelalter.* (Ausst. Unna u. Paderborn 1982.) Mit Beiträgen von Rolf H. Schmitz, Karl Bernd Heppel, Christoph Stiegemann, Eckhard Schinkel, Helmut Knirim. Kulturamt Unna 1982. 194 S. mit 127 Abb. auf Taf. sowie Textabb. DM 12,—.
- Der Blaue Reiter im Lenbachhaus München.* Katalog der Sammlung in der Städtischen Galerie. 2. erweiterte u. korrigierte Auflage. Bearb. v. Rosel Gollek. München, Prestel Verlag 1982. 420 S. mit 131 Farbtaf. u. 408 Abb. DM 48,—.
- Courbet et la Suisse.* Exposition documentaire à l'occasion des Fêtes du 700e anniversaire. (Château de la Tour-de-Peilz (Suisse) 24. 7.—26. 9. 1982.) Text: Pierre Chessex. Vevey, Librairie Payot 1982. 103 S., 3 Bl., mit 171 Kat.-Nrn. u. Abb.
- Erfen tuin in Oud-Amsterdam — De ontwikkeling van het omsloten erf en de stadstuinen in de erfen binnenstad.* (Amsterdams Historisch Museum 25. 6.—29. 8. 1982.) Text: Henk Zantkuyl, Cune Hetteema, Pieter Fischer, Arend Jan van der Horst. Amsterdam 1982. 95 S. mit 118 Abb.
- Lyonel Feininger — Gemälde, Aquarelle und Zeichnungen, Druckgraphik.* (Kunsthalle zu Kiel 19. 6.—29. 8. 1982.) Text: Jens Christian Jensen, Ulrich Luckhardt, Eberhard Roters, Johann Schlick. Kiel 1982. 247 S. mit 154 Taf., davon 28 farbig. DM 50,—.
- Mainz in Napoleonischer Zeit. Kultur- und kunstgeschichtliche Aspekte.* (Mittelrheinisches Landesmuseum 15. 7.—19. 9. 1982.) Red. u. Text: Wilhelm Weber. Mainz 1982. 180 S. mit S/w- u. Farbabb.
- Menzel — der Beobachter.* (Hamburger Kunsthalle 22. 5.—25. 7. 1982.) Mit Beiträgen von Werner Hofmann, Carsten Meyer, Elke von Radziewsky, Eckhard Schaar. München, Prestel Verlag und Hamburger Kunsthalle 1982. 316 S. mit 377 Abb., davon 46 in Farbe. DM 42,—. ISBN 3-7913-0587-5.
- Caritas Pirckheimer 1467—1532.* (Kath. Stadtkirche Nürnberg/Kaiserburg Nürnberg 26. 6.—8. 8. 1982. Katalog: Lotte Kurras u. Franz Machilek. München, Prestel Verlag 1982. 164 S. mit 40 Abb.; 8 Farbtaf. ISBN 3-7913-0619-7.