

An Important Collection of Nineteenth-Century Art

The Other Nineteenth Century: Paintings and Sculpture in the Collection of Mr and Mrs Joseph M. Tanenbaum. An exhibition held at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, 25 May—9 July 1978, and circulating to other major centres in Canada and the United States

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Catalogue: Louise d'Argencourt and Douglas Druick, organizers, *The Other Nineteenth Century: Paintings and Sculpture in the Collection of Mr and Mrs Joseph M. Tanenbaum*, Ottawa, National Museums of Canada, 1978. 240 pp., 93 illus., \$29.95. Available in French as *Un autre XIX^e siècle: Peintures et sculptures de la collection de M. et M^{me} Joseph M. Tanenbaum*.

Related publication: Michael Pantazzi, 'The Other Nineteenth Century: Paintings and Sculpture in the Collection of Mr and Mrs Joseph M. Tanenbaum/Un autre XIX^e siècle: Peintures et sculptures de la collection de M. et M^{me} Joseph M. Tanenbaum,' *Journal of the National Gallery of Canada/Journal de la Galerie nationale du Canada*, no. 27 (25 May 1978). 8 pp., 14 illus., \$.50 (paper).

Visiting, viewing, studying, and enjoying the exhibition of seventy-one English and French paintings and seventeen French, Belgian, German, and Italian sculptures in the carefully arranged sequence of

rooms, tastefully decorated in rich browns, the visitor discovered new aspects of the richness and complexity of the nineteenth century. The selection from the Tanenbaum collection on view in the National Gallery in Ottawa started with a choice, but limited, group of English painters of the 'Victorian High Renaissance' (Leighton [Fig. 1], Alma-Tadema, and Moore), continued with a richly representative section of French Realists (Fantin-Latour, Ribot [Fig. 3], Bonvin, Vallon, Couture, and Forain), through a small room of Symbolist works (by Carrière, Rosso, and Henner), to one devoted to landscape, both Romantic and Naturalist (with works by Michel, Decamps, Vollon, Isabey, Jongkind, and Doré). The salon that followed displayed the works of the French so-called academic masters: ethnographic genre and landscape by Gérôme, Aublet, and Barye; history painting by Laurens; religious painting and genre by Bouguereau (Fig. 2); and historical genre by Meissonier. In the last part of the exhibition, a fashionable society portrait by Boldini hung in the midst of Tissot's and Stevens's richly detailed images of upper-middle-class society in Victorian England and Second-Empire and Third-Republic France. With Tissot's English works the visitor returned to his or her starting point in High-Victorian England.

FIGURE 1. Frederic Lord Leighton, *Hercules Wrestling with Death for the Body of Alcestis*, ca. 1869-71. Toronto, Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph M. Tanenbaum. Cat. no. 45 (Photo: Brian Merrett and Jennifer Harper, courtesy of National Gallery of Canada).



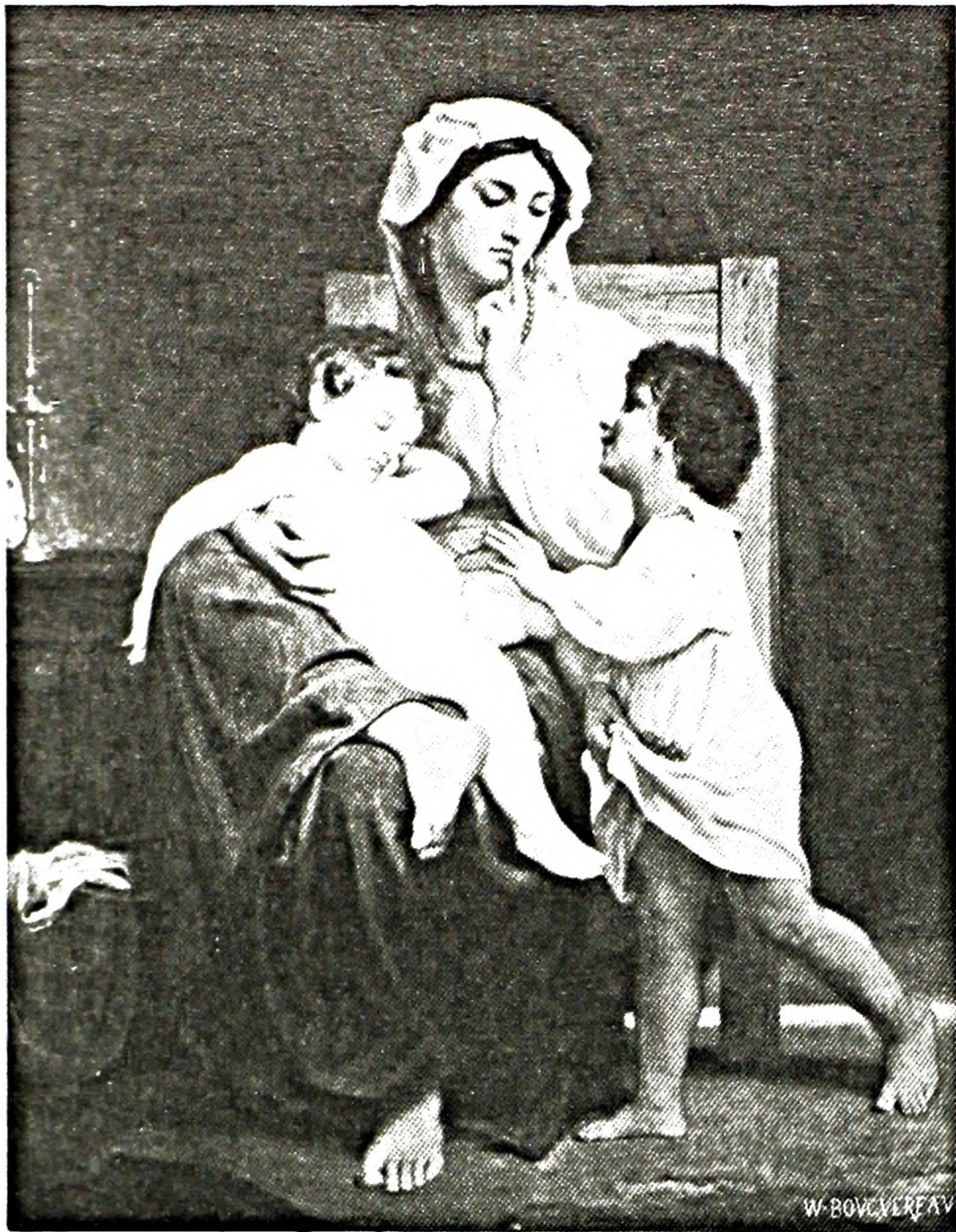


FIGURE 2. William Adolphe Bouguereau, *Slumber (Le Sommeil)*, ca. 1865-70. Toronto, Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph M. Tanenbaum. Cat. no. 11 (Photo: Brian Merrett and Jennifer Harper, courtesy of National Gallery of Canada).

The grouping and sequence of paintings ensured that the viewer had a clear grasp of the various areas of nineteenth-century painting represented while examining the riches on display. The sculpture, placed in most rooms, was less satisfactorily presented. Although the works created a period atmosphere by their presence, they were not chosen for their relation to the adjacent painted works, with the single exception of Rosso's impressionistic *Golden Age*, which related directly to the neighbouring Carrières. The sculpture of Barye, Carpeaux, Rodin, Dalou, Meunier, Bugatti, Fremiet, Klinger, and Minne would have been better displayed in a separate gallery where its variety could have been appreciated and studied more effectively.

The catalogue of the exhibition includes a 'General Introduction' to the history of the collection, brief biographies of the painters, and extensive catalogue entries for each painting. All are by specialists in the field, including such leading international scholars as

¹ See Rudolf Zeitler, *Die Kunst des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Propyläen Kunstgeschichte, XI (Berlin, 1966), for a most persuasive presentation of the new art history. See also Charles Rosen and Henri Zerner, 'The Revival of Official Art,' *The New York Review of Books*, XXIII:4 (18 March 1976), 32-39, for an evaluation of the aesthetic revaluation implicit here.

Gerald Ackerman, Albert Boime, and Marc Sandoz. A separate section for the sculptors has an 'Introduction to Sculpture' written by Horst Janson. The entries are most informative and represent the most up-to-date scholarship on each artist and his work. The catalogue, while undeniably beautifully produced, is much too expensive for the average museum visitor and scholar. This situation is remedied, in part, by Michael Pantazzi's spirited issue of the *Journal*, in which he places the artists and their work in the context of nineteenth-century exhibitions and public taste. He reminds us, too, of the broader, more eclectic taste of late-nineteenth-century collectors, critics, and art historians which allowed them to place 'academic,' 'popular,' and 'avant-garde' artists side by side.

The genesis of the Tanenbaum collection, chronicled by Louise d'Argencourt and Douglas Druick in the 'General Introduction,' shows a fascinating process of personal selection and discovery based on an inherent preference for narrative and descriptive realism, technical skill, and even virtuosity in the works chosen. The Tanenbaums began to collect at a time when the art of the nineteenth century was being reassessed, and the by then traditional image of the history of modern art as the heroic evolution of an embattled avant garde pitted against worthless academicism was being revised.¹ Their collection reflects this revisionist art history in its rich holdings of works by Gérôme, Bouguereau, and Meissonier, Leighton, Alma-Tadema, and Moore. Also at this time a renewed interest in the role of subject matter in painting led to a reassessment of Symbolist art and works by such artists as Carrière, Henner, and Rosso. The rediscovery of the nineteenth century has also included a broadening of our knowledge of movements such as Realism and Naturalism; this is particularly visible in the rich representation of Bonvin, Ribot, Fantin-Latour, and Tissot in the Tanenbaum collection.

The Other Nineteenth Century, as a title, underlines the fact that there were other important artists in the nineteenth century worthy of our attention besides Millet, Daumier, Courbet, Manet, Degas, Whistler, the Impressionists, Cézanne, Seurat, Van Gogh, Gauguin, and the Nabis. The Tanenbaum collection, as shown at Ottawa and as it will tour the country from Victoria to Montreal, is a revelation of major aspects of this 'other' nineteenth century, particularly in French painting.

In the end, however, this viewer could not avoid judging and comparing this 'other' nineteenth century against the works of textbook modernism. Despite their fascination as part of nineteenth-century art history, many of the paintings and sculptures in the exhibition measure up poorly; for example, Ribot against Manet as a painter of street entertainers, Boldini against Degas as a portraitist, Meunier against Rodin as modeller of the human body. For that precise reason they are extremely useful in filling in the artistic context of the nineteenth century. On the other hand, Leighton's *Hercules Wrestling with Death*, 1869-71 (cat. no. 45, Fig. 1), Fantin-Latour's *Self-Portrait*, 1861 (cat.



FIGURE 3. Théodule Augustin Ribot, *The Mandolin Player*, 1862. Toronto, Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph M. Tanenbaum. Cat. no. 53 (Photo: National Gallery of Canada).

no. 27), Bonvin's *Still Life with Lemon and Oysters*, 1858 (cat. no. 8), Forain's *Femme adultère*, before 1908 (cat. no. 28), Carrière's *Grief*, ca. 1903 (cat. no. 18), Bouguereau's *Self-Portrait*, 1886 (cat. no. 13), and Rosso's *Golden Age*, 1886 (cat. no. 88), rank in quality and interest with works by artists such as Whistler, Courbet, Manet, Daumier, Gauguin, and Rodin. We will, it is hoped, be able to make some of these comparisons for ourselves at a future date when the Tanenbaum collection is bequeathed to the nation, as

promised by Mr. Joseph Tanenbaum in his 'Foreword' to the catalogue, and takes its place in the nineteenth-century rooms of the National Gallery. In the meantime we are being given the privilege of seeing this important collection from coast to coast. The catalogue of the Tanenbaum collection will remain an indispensable reference work for scholars of the nineteenth century in the years to come, as well as providing a document of the development of an important national collection.

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