

Katharine Lochnan and Carol Jacobi, eds., *Sin and Salvation: Holman Hunt and the Pre-Raphaelite Vision*. Exhibition catalogue, Toronto, Art Gallery of Ontario, 2008, 224 pp., 66 colour-plates, 41 black-and-white figures, \$97.50, ISBN 9781894243575

John Potvin

Volume 34, Number 2, 2009

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1069494ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1069494ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada)

ISSN

0315-9906 (print)

1918-4778 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Potvin, J. (2009). Review of [Katharine Lochnan and Carol Jacobi, eds., *Sin and Salvation: Holman Hunt and the Pre-Raphaelite Vision*. Exhibition catalogue, Toronto, Art Gallery of Ontario, 2008, 224 pp., 66 colour-plates, 41 black-and-white figures, \$97.50, ISBN 9781894243575]. *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, 34(2), 93–95.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1069494ar>

Katharine Lochnan and Carol Jacobi, eds., *Sin and Salvation: Holman Hunt and the Pre-Raphaelite Vision*. Exhibition catalogue, Toronto, Art Gallery of Ontario, 2008, 224 pp., 66 colour-plates, 41 black-and-white figures, \$97.50, ISBN 9781894243575.

In a cultural moment obsessed with the “now,” it can be quite a challenge to make art from the nineteenth century relevant to students and to the public at large. Founded in 1848 by Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (PRB) broke with academic tradition and social conventions, charting its own territory by challenging through sculpture, writing, and especially painting social mores and what the members perceived as bourgeois sentimentalism and hypocrisy. When one examines the complexity of issues the members of the PRB faced and tackled in their art, such as prostitution, gender politics, and otherness, it becomes clear that their concerns and investments remain salient and deeply relevant today. The challenge, then, at least for this reviewer, is how to translate this relevance to contemporary audiences and readers.

Sin and Salvation: Holman Hunt and the Pre-Raphaelite Vision was organized by the Art Gallery of Ontario in association with the Manchester Art Gallery and was conceived and organized by Katharine Lochnan. To her credit, Lochnan assembled an impressive roster of scholars for the catalogue and amassed Hunt’s most celebrated and beloved pictures for the exhibition. Edited by Lochnan and Carol Jacobi, the catalogue offers, much like the exhibition itself, a mixed purse of riches, obvious choices, and even some small disappointments. I venture to guess, however, that in coming years the catalogue will serve as an intellectually relevant and pedagogically useful text, not only regarding the much-celebrated and yet much-neglected Holman Hunt (1827–1910) but also the controversial and short-lived PRB.

The themes of authenticity and the impulse to elaborate narrative tangibly permeate the entire catalogue in two intersecting ways: first, in the way Hunt sought to provide the most accurate and sensitive depictions of his subjects, particularly those Biblical in nature; and second, in the way the individual authors attempt to pin down an authentic Hunt through documentary evidence. The authors often mirror Hunt’s own conceptual practices, which makes for an interesting, if at times conservative, parallel reading of both the artist’s visual text and the authors’ textual analyses. Nowhere is this made more palpable than in the first two essays of the catalogue. It can surely be argued convincingly that Rossetti has overshadowed his fellow-founding PRB compatriots. As the title of Carole Silver’s

essay suggests, “Visions and Revisions” does much to redress this imbalance. As the inaugural and somewhat foundational essay, Silver’s well-written and thoroughly researched analysis asserts Hunt’s determination in both his accuracy and labour. Here the importance of the legibility of Hunt’s pictures begins to be worked out through the over-determined ideals of narrative and authenticity in our culture and in scholarship. However, Silver negotiates, as did Hunt himself, the fine line marking out narratological authenticity and accuracy on the one hand and the artistic impulse for creative innovation transforming original sources into new, idiosyncratic and particular visions on the other.

The second essay is by co-editor Carol Jacobi on the PRB; together with Silver’s contribution, these two essays are perfectly suited as introductions to Hunt’s world, but do little to push the scholarship into new, exciting and compelling territory. Jacobi systematically charts the evolution and devolution of the brotherhood, but seems reluctant to scrape deeper below the surfaces of what were surely highly complicated, fraught, and ambiguous relationships at best. With good intentions Jacobi explores the intersection of subjectivity and style, without really unpacking either fully enough. Hunt’s work was at once mostly accessible to the “masses” while at the same time provocative and unsettling to most contemporary critics. Perhaps what is most disappointing about this essay, as is the case with a number of the essays in the catalogue, is the lack of a more nuanced engagement with the rich and directional literature on Victorian culture, masculinity, artistic identity, and homosociability. For as Jacobi herself asserts regarding the art of the PRB, “Past and present interweaved, and religious and literary subject matter were always vehicles for current concerns; contemporaneity lay in the subjective immediacy of the scene itself” (p. 52).

The impulse to locate authenticity takes a turn for the worse in the essay by Joyce H. Townsend and Jennifer Poulin examining Hunt’s extant palettes and brushes. It can certainly be argued that their study is at once well conceived, thorough, and convincing, but it appears lost amongst the other essays. I have to ask why is it relevant to “examine surviving paint on a number of Hunt’s palettes, and to compare it to his preferred materials as stated in his letters, articles, lectures and interviews” (p. 162), especially when, in the words of the authors themselves, “the history of an artist’s palette is not always conclusive, even when the palette itself can be linked irrefutably to his studio” (p. 163). The material culture and the chemistry involved in colour selections of an artist do serve a purpose. Nevertheless, this reviewer fails to see their pertinence in the context of a catalogue and exhibition focused on the socially and culturally loaded concepts of *sin* and *salvation*. The effect, in the end, is

a sort of anachronistic reinvestment in the auratic signification of the hand of the artist, a patriarchal ideal overturned some decades ago.

For a lapsed art historian who has defected to the study of fashion, the highlight of both the exhibition and catalogue is the inclusion and discussion of Hunt's Oriental garments and his use of textiles in his pictures. Linda Perry's essay, "Textile Background: Cloth and Costume," is both rich and thoughtful and is also clearly written in the service of authenticating Hunt's narrative visual structure and accuracy, proving in yet another way the artist's desire to convincingly portray his subject matter. Her contribution is directional and moves the scholarship on Hunt in a new and surprisingly rich way. Hunt's own background, in fact, was "dominated by business and the day-to-day activities of the London textile trade" through both his father and grandfather (p. 57). At a very tender age Hunt immersed himself in the world of textiles, an influence clearly legible in his pictures. Hunt used textiles not only to authenticate his narratives, locations, and/or subjects, but also manipulated them in the elaboration of emotional impact, a little-acknowledged aspect of his praxis and success. His enviable textile collection was not only put to good use in his pictures but was also integral to his own dress, identity, and domestic decorative design.

Also noteworthy is Jan Marsh's sophisticated and intricate essay, "Men: Virtue and Valour." Marsh's much-needed contribution to the scholarship on Hunt specifically and the PRB more broadly turns the coin of Victorian gender politics and relationships to the seemingly absent side of its complexities, that is, to analyze the role men performed. While Marsh never refers to or works from any significant literature from gender and masculinity studies, she skillfully exposes how Hunt morally negotiated his own identity as a male artist at a time when artists "enjoyed" a dubiously immoral reputation. The trope of the fallen woman in Victorian visual and textual cultures has been greatly simplified by scholars since the days of Queen Victoria herself. However, Marsh, not unlike Hunt, reveals how the trope spoke more to men's own moral rectitude and ethical conduct than that of women's lack of propriety. Hunt's pictures were problematic to many (of the all-male) critics of the day, precisely because they "raise questions of both male responsibility and masculine complicity in guilt" (p. 107). However, like many artists of the time both in Britain and on the Continent, Hunt turned to the East not simply for inspiration and to provide necessary material accuracy for his religious pictures, but also as a foil to expose the corruption and promiscuity of the modern West. In his view, men and women from the Middle East (namely Palestine) assumed their "rightful" positions in society—roles and identities inherited from and consonant with their biblical ancestors. In "Palestine: Picture of Prophecy," Nicholas Tromans provides a thoughtful and detailed account of Hunt's three independent

journeys to Palestine while contextualizing the artist's work by elucidating the significant role Britain was playing in the region at the time. Tromans's ambitious study is successful precisely because he clearly demonstrates how the competing and intersecting forces of British imperialism and the popularity and relevance of the cultural politics of Restorationism collided with Hunt's own personal and political interests in the region as well as with his conceptions of prophecy.

I think it safe to say that outside of Britain the PRB and Hunt, in particular, have passed relatively unnoticed by scholars and the viewing public. As a result, Lochnan's exhibition and catalogue are significant for a North American audience. Recognizing the (conceptual and physical) distance of the artist from Canada, Lochnan's skillful concluding essay, "The Canadian Diaspora: Last Rights," offers a fascinating and unacknowledged dimension of the artist, that is, Hunt's Canadian connections. These included his relationships with Sir Edmund Walker, founding president of the Art Museum of Toronto (today the AGO), Charles Trick Currelly, the first director of archaeology at the Royal Ontario Museum, and Henry Wentworth Monk, a leader in the non-Jewish Zionist movement, whose portrait by Hunt is included in the exhibition. Her essay at once asserts Hunt's impact (direct or otherwise) in the colonies while demonstrating the vital and ongoing relationships many key Canadian figures had in Britain. One might also suggest that Lochnan's transatlantic study parallels the equally relevant collaboration that engendered this exhibition, that is the partnership between Lochnan and the Manchester Art Gallery and other art institutions noted for their conservative lending policies regarding the PRB.

One of the compelling features of both the exhibition and the catalogue is the elaboration of the visual culture that emerged from Hunt's iconic *The Light of the World* (1851–52), painted for Keble College, Oxford. A second version of the painting, the "most travelled artwork in history," toured throughout the "white" colonies of the British Empire in 1905, stopping in Toronto, while another version was later shown at the Canadian National Exhibition in 1935. The picture not only featured on numerous religious texts, but also inspired stained glass windows in churches throughout Ontario. As Jonathan Mane-Wheoki explains in his essay on the work, the third version of the picture is housed today in the metropolitan cathedral in London, where it services as an iconic object of devotion. Mane-Wheoki convincingly reveals that through its mass consumption throughout the Empire, *The Light of the World*, as an important talisman for nostalgia, operates as a site where religious devotion and the imperial mission eloquently converge.

Among the interesting synergies that exist between the ten discreet essays is the one between Mane-Wheoki's analysis and Brenda Rix's study of Hunt's prolific and profitable career in the

world of prints. In her discussion of the print versions of his paintings, Rix correctly asserts that through the dissemination of prints Hunt was able to carry “his vision to the world,” notably through prints of *The Light of the World*. Thousands of these prints were sold on the replica’s 1905 tour, and, according to Rix, the image’s popularity spoke to its legibility. Hunt made a considerable fortune selling the rights of his pictures to printers, who in turn made large sums of profit, proving without question Hunt’s incredible public appeal, despite having become out of step with avant-garde artistic trends. Rix’s strongest moment is her surprising and inspired conclusion. Perhaps, then, the last

word must go to Rix, who eloquently recalls how thousands of people flocked to pay their respects to Hunt’s cremated remains at St. Paul’s Cathedral. Over Hunt’s casket was an engraving of his celebrated *The Light of the World*. According to Rix, this juxtaposition of print and casket provided “a tangible reminder that Hunt held fast to his Pre-Raphaelite vision to the end, and that he did so by embracing, reinventing, and exploiting the world of prints” (p. 188), thus solidifying his public appeal and cultural relevance.

JOHN POTVIN
University of Guelph

Michael Snodin and Nigel Llewellyn, eds.; assisted by Joanna Norman, *Baroque: Style in the Age of Magnificence, 1620–1800*. Exhibition catalogue, London, V&A Publishing, 2009, 372 pp., 170 colour illust., \$95, ISBN- 978-1-85177-558-3.

The Victoria and Albert Museum’s recent exhibition addressing the Baroque style in fine and decorative art was accompanied by a scholarly, illustrated catalogue. The exhibition, running from April to July 2009, and curated by Michael Snodin and Nigel Llewellyn, was wide-ranging, incorporating architecture and painting together with furniture and the applied arts, theatre design, costume, garden design, and the rise of ephemeral art forms for festivals, beginning in the late seventeenth century. The lavishly illustrated catalogue is organized into five sections. Each section begins with a title article by one of the exhibition’s two curators, followed by individual, themed contributions by specialist scholars and museum curators. This structure adds to the strength of the volume, which is unprecedented in geographical scope, covering many lesser-known regions influenced by the pervasive Baroque style, particularly Goa, Indonesia, and China.

As such, the text is a refreshing new contribution to existing scholarship in a field that has recently seen the publication of interesting accounts covering non-European regions, including China and Japan, such as those by Alden Cavanaugh and Michael E. Yonan.¹ It is noteworthy that the curators’ periodization of the Baroque style includes the end of the eighteenth century, as referred to more than once in the accompanying text. The Baroque style continued to spread globally throughout the eighteenth century via travel by artists and architects and by European colonization to other regions, which is undoubtedly why the curators extended the timeframe for the period.

Especially interesting, with reference to Europe, is the demonstration of how this style reached the Scandinavian courts of Sweden and Norway and spread across the Baltic to Russia. The catalogue contributions for those sections of the exhibition

are counterbalanced by contributions on canonical works and centres of the Baroque, including Rodney Palmer’s account of the role of the *bizzarria* (the bizarre) in Counter-Reformation Rome, Michael Levy’s hefty contributions on Rome and Paris, a multi-authored section discussing Baroque palatial apartment and garden design and its role in immortalizing members of the Baroque elite, and Evonne Levy’s discussion of sculpture by GianLorenzo Bernini. Evonne Levy’s contribution begins with a formal analysis of Bernini’s work *in situ* at the Cornaro chapel in S. Maria della Vittoria, Rome, and effortlessly proceeds to a pan-European analysis of decorative arts in the Baroque style, emphasizing human figures in dramatic and often contorted poses analogous to Bernini’s *St. Teresa of Avila in Ecstasy*. It is noteworthy that she highlights the assimilation of classical mythologies into Baroque schemes of ornamentation and discusses examples of these from the exhibition, including a figure of Hercules featured on King William III’s pier table from his palatial country seat, Het Loo in Holland, and Giovanni Paolo Schor’s design for a state bed ornamented with sea nymphs on horseback, commissioned for Maria Mancini Colonna on the birth of her son. Details of less-celebrated decorative genres of the Baroque, such as the role of grotesques (which also remained crucial in the development of Rococo ornament during the mid-eighteenth century) and flower painting in Baroque ornamentation, further add to the strengths of this essay.

Importantly, the catalogue also demonstrates this style’s influence in India, the Philippines, Peru, Brazil, Indonesia, and China. The Chinese Emperor Quianlong built a European-style palace with a series of pavilions, fountains, and a maze in the grounds of his summer residence. One of the pavilions (ca. 1781), named the *Haiyantang* or “Calm Sea” palace, was constructed in imitation of Versailles Palace outside Paris. Although the pavilion was destroyed in 1860, a drawing by the artist Yi Lantai is preserved in a copperplate engraving at the Victoria and Albert Museum, and accurately conveys the appearance of this architectural copy. This section of the Chinese exhibit and