

**M. Elizabeth Boone, “The Spanish Element in Our Nationality”:  
Spain and America at the World’s Fairs and Centennial  
Celebrations, 1876–1915, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania  
State University Press, 2019, 239 pp. 20 colour, 80 b&w  
illustrations, \$99.95 US (h/c) ISBN 9780271083315**

Gregg French

Volume 46, Number 1, 2021

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1078076ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1078076ar>

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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

French, G. (2021). Review of [M. Elizabeth Boone, “The Spanish Element in Our Nationality”: *Spain and America at the World’s Fairs and Centennial Celebrations, 1876–1915*, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019, 239 pp. 20 colour, 80 b&w illustrations, \$99.95 US (h/c) ISBN 9780271083315]. *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, 46(1), 119–121. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1078076ar>

M. Elizabeth Boone  
***“The Spanish Element in Our Nationality”: Spain and America at the World’s Fairs and Centennial Celebrations, 1876–1915***

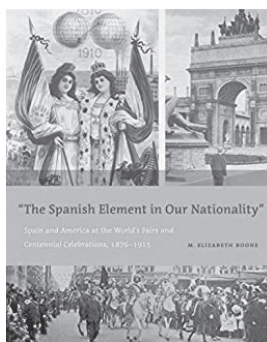
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In the second half of the nineteenth century, world’s fairs and other international expositions became transnational sites of contact for organizers, exhibitors, and attendees. Through the tactical positioning and presentation of exhibits, these elaborately designed events provided organizers with the agency to engineer national narratives and determine collective memories. Thus, world’s fairs form an ideal point of convergence for scholars from a diverse range of disciplines who are interested in exploring conceptualizations of nationhood in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In *“The Spanish Element in Our Nationality”: Spain and America at the World’s Fairs and Centennial Celebrations, 1876–1915*, M. Elizabeth Boone critically analyzes the presentation and reception of Spain at a series of international events in the United States, Europe, and Latin America. More specifically, the work explores how Spanish representatives sought to assert their position on the world stage through their association with the historical narrative that was being promoted by American organizers. Boone claims that, unlike their Latin American counterparts, influential figures in the United States attempted to erase the country’s Spanish past in favour of a dominant Anglo narrative, which reinforced beliefs associated with American exceptionalism. Inspired by Walt Whitman’s 1883 essay, from which the title of this book is taken,



Boone states that the overarching goal of the project is to challenge the existence of this Anglo-dominant narrative in the hopes of creating a “diverse, more just, and multinational future” for the United States that recognizes the country’s Spanish past, which was selectively manipulated and forgotten in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (1).

The book also provides agency to the Spanish exhibitors who attempted to present their country’s historical narrative amid a period of domestic strife and imperial instability. Boone does all of this through an investigation into the nationalist narratives that were created by the art and architecture displayed at world’s fairs, as well as how these narratives were spread through ephemeral publications and official catalogues that communicated knowledge from the organizer to the observer. Of course, these presentations could also offer multiple meanings and result in unexpected consequences. Ultimately, the book presents the reader with a more nuanced understanding of how identities were formed and challenged through the production of visual culture, and the lasting effect that these identities have had on individuals on both sides of the Atlantic.

*“The Spanish Element in Our Nationality”* exists at the forefront of several interconnected historiographies that have far too often been dominated by English-speaking

academics. Cultural production in the United States, much like US domestic history in a more general sense, has taken a selectively isolationist approach. Scholars have traditionally reinforced American exceptionalism by focusing on the differences that existed between individual American artists and their English and French counterparts. More recently, American art and its creators have been positioned in an international context. Despite this re-positioning, Boone accurately believes that the study of how American cultural productions have been influenced by both Spain and the Latin American republics have oftentimes been dominated by the paintings of Francisco Goya and Pablo Picasso and have only recently begun to explore a more expansive range of works.

Boone demonstrates that the influence of the Black Legend narrative has also existed as an impediment to how scholars have understood the influence that Spain had on the creation of the national identity of the United States. This narrative presents Spain and the country’s Catholic, monarchical past as being antithetical to the emerging, Protestant-dominated, American republic. Over the past two decades, my own work, as well as publications from Richard Kagan and Christopher Schmidt-Nowara, have begun to challenge the overwhelming prevalence of this narrative.<sup>1</sup> *“The Spanish Element in Our Nationality”* is an essential contribution to this emerging historiography and undeniably adds contextualization to the larger study of US-Spanish-Latin American relations in the long nineteenth century.

Boone’s publication also draws from a well-established historiography on world’s fairs, which originated with the works of Burton Benedict and Robert Rydell, and has recently been further developed by Peter Hoffenberg, Alexander Gelpert, and Abigail Markwyn. These interdisciplinary works borrow from the fields of history, sociology,

anthropology, and art history. In doing so, they address a wide range of topics, including identity formation, gender, race, colonialism, and commerce. "The Spanish Element in Our Nationality" adds complexity and specificity to the study of world's fairs by focusing on how the goals of host nations both challenged and selectively adopted presentations of Spain and Spanishness at events throughout the transatlantic world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The book is divided into five body chapters, each of which focuses on a particular fair or exhibition. Each considers the multiple ways in which host nations, specifically the United States and the republics of Latin America, sought to use (or ignore) Spain and the Spanish past in their attempts to articulate their national identity. Boone's strategy of stepping outside of the United States and exploring events in Europe and Latin America adds much needed complexity to the study of Spain's understanding of itself and its relationship to other nations. Additionally, the inclusion of the centennial celebrations held in Argentina, Chile, and Mexico in 1910 further informs our understanding of the rise in hispanismo in the early twentieth century, which was a direct response to the Pan-Americanism that the United States was attempting to impose on its southern neighbours. The rapprochement that occurred between Spain and the Latin American republics in the years following the Spanish-American War of 1898 influenced American perspectives of itself, Spain, and those republics. Unfortunately, as Boone points out, these views persisted and continue to result in the "othering" of the fifty-seven million Hispanics that currently reside in the United States.

Chapters One, Three, and Five explore the world's fairs that were held in Philadelphia in 1876, Chicago

in 1893, and both San Francisco and San Diego in 1915, respectively. Boone asserts that Spanish commissioners played an active role in the Philadelphia and Chicago events by presenting Spain as one of the many European nations that contributed to the establishment of the United States. At Philadelphia's Centennial International Exhibition of 1876, however, this approach was poorly received by American organizers who sought to subvert their country's Hispanic past in favour of a unifying Anglo-based historical narrative. Boone goes on to claim that by the time of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, "memory replaced history" (120), and Spain essentially disappeared from the American historical narrative. This argument is reinforced by her description of Spain's near complete official absence from the Panama-Pacific International Exposition held in San Francisco in 1915. That withdrawal was repeated at the Panama-California Exposition in San Diego in the same year, giving American organizers free rein to manipulate the Spanish past. Boone adds nuance to the discussion by arguing that the organizers of the 1915 events positioned Spain's "safely European and racially pure history" in opposition to that of Mexican Americans (186), thus showing both the power of the event organizers and the existence of multiple understandings of Spanishness during the period.

In chapters Two and Four, Boone further contextualizes these competing images of Spain by analyzing the obstacles that event organizers encountered at the *Exposición Universal de Barcelona* in 1888, as well as at the 1889 *Exposition Universelle* in Paris and the centennial celebrations that were held in Argentina, Chile, and Mexico in 1910. The various paintings on display at Barcelona revealed the existence of a geographically and stylistically fragmented Spain in the late nineteenth century. Spain's Restoration

government in Madrid hoped to mask this issue by celebrating the drawings that were produced by Juan Comba García, which presented a unified, nationalistic narrative. During the following year in Paris, Spanish exhibitors found themselves stuck between presenting a fabricated image of the Spanish past, which both organizers and international attendees seemed to expect, and attempting to appear as a modern European nation. In 1910, the Spanish government worked closely with the national governments of Argentina, Chile, and Mexico and actively supported the creation of three separate but connected narratives which ultimately emphasized the European roots of the Latin American republics. This was done by displaying the works of various Spanish artists and sculptors, including Ignacio Zuloaga, Hermenegildo Anglada Camarasa, and Antonio Coll y Pei, as well as photographs that were later distributed in official catalogues that celebrated the Mexico City event. Taken collectively, these chapters highlight the malleability of the collective memory of the Spanish past and inform the reader of the different ways in which it was presented in Europe and Latin America.

"The Spanish Element in Our Nationality" successfully chronicles the selective appropriation, manipulation, and erasure of the Spanish past at world's fairs and international expositions during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This study provides convincing detail concerning the display and production of visual culture at these events in a period when influential members of society were determined to create unifying national narratives, regardless of their authenticity. Although the work undeniably addresses how transnational factors influenced how Americans perceived the Spanish past, both regionally and from a nation-wide perspective, the reader is left wanting to know more about how Spain's

imperial legacy influenced fairs in both the metropole and the periphery of the American Empire in the decades following the Spanish-American War of 1898. With that being said, *The Spanish Element in Our Nationality* is still a beautifully illustrated book—it includes twenty plates and eighty figures. It is also an informative work and a must-read for individuals interested in art history, world's fairs, immigration to the United States, and US-Spanish-Latin American relations at the turn of the twentieth century. ¶

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1. Gregg French, "The Foundations of Empire Building: Spain's Legacy and the American Imperial Identity" (PhD Dissertation: University of Western Ontario, London, Canada, 2017); Richard L. Kagan, *The Spanish Craze: America's Fascination with the Hispanic World, 1776–1939* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2019); Christopher Schmidt-Nowara, "Spanish Origins of the American Empire: Hispanism, History, and Commemoration, 1898–1915," *International History Review* 30, no. 1 (March 2008), 32–51.

Lori Pauli, ed.

**Oscar G. Rejlander: Artist Photographer**

Ottawa: Canadian Photography Institute of the National Gallery of Canada; Distributed by Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 2018

300 pp. 194 illus.  
\$40.00 (hardcover) ISBN 9780300237092.

Katie Oates

*Oscar G. Rejlander: Artist Photographer*, edited by Lori Pauli and with essays by her, Jordan Bear, Karen Hellman, and Phillip Prodger, is an essential text that celebrates the artist's life and work. This catalogue was an accompaniment to, and extension of, the exhibition of the same name organized by the Canadian Photography Institute of the National Gallery of Canada; the exhibition

opened in Ottawa in October 2018 on the 205th anniversary of Rejlander's birth and then travelled to the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles in March 2019. The catalogue constitutes "the most thoroughly published investigation into Rejlander's entire practice" and highlights his contributions to the history of photography (15). He not only mentored famous photographers such as Julia Margaret Cameron, but his elaborate combination prints were unprecedented in their time and set the groundwork for understandings of photographs as malleable and manipulated images, as we know them today. The show, the first Rejlander retrospective, featured a hundred and fifty works, while the catalogue accommodates an extra forty-four images that, in totality, cover the many aspects of his career. The images illustrate the narrative complexity of Rejlander's work, his technical ability as evidenced in anatomical and scientific studies, his playful uses of the camera through visual puns, and his references to Ren-



aissance paintings, all while aligning photography with other modes of representation such as drawing and painting.

The catalogue features four essays, a chronology of Rejlander's life, and a list of images to give readers a sense of the exhibition and to support the authors' visual analyses. Full-page reproductions are featured at the back, with in-text

images dispersed throughout the book for direct reference to the essays. Each contribution focuses on a different facet of Rejlander's career. Pauli's "On Becoming the Father of Art Photography" establishes the book's foundation by guiding readers through his artistic and technical development of photography. Pauli's essay is divided into neat subsections that demarcate Rejlander's work thematically and geographically, from his move from Sweden to England in August 1839 to his death in 1875. It traces Rejlander's career in Wolverhampton, where he lived and worked for nearly twenty years, and in London, where he operated his final studio beginning in 1862. Pauli details his practice as a portraitist before he began experimenting with combination printing (using multiple negatives in a single image) and expanding into diverse subject matter, which included military traditions, anatomical studies to be used by artists, landscapes, architecture, moralizing and humorous scenes from literature, and scientific studies of human expressions. She analyzes his epic allegorical study, *The Two Ways of Life, or Hope in Repentance* (1857), a sensation when first exhibited, and she discusses how its controversial reception afterward defeated him financially and caused him doubt about the legitimacy of "art photographs" (38). Rejlander addressed this in his 1863 publication, "Apology for Art-Photography," in which he vividly recounts his first lesson in the medium, provides methods for combination printing, and articulates the usefulness of photography for artists. Pauli assures readers that he persevered in his studio practice, creating domestic scenes and portraits, and contributing to major exhibitions until his final years. The author bookends each section with in-depth biographical details—his initial training as a painter in Italy and Spain; his 1846 study of photography with William Henry Fox Talbot's assistant Nicolaas Henneman; his exhibiting