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Romantic Paris: Histories of a Cultural Landscape, 1800–1850 **By Michael Marrinan**

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“Some years ago it became clear to me that I would have to write a book about “my” Paris: not the one I actually inhabit from time to time, but the historical environment that I experienced vicariously through the documents, texts, and works of art that have been the object [of] my scholarly efforts in the history of art. ...it is my attempt to give life and voice to a social space whose traces remain part of the city's fabric, but whose actors have long disappeared.”

Between the coups d'état of Napoléon Bonaparte in 1799 and of his nephew Louis-Napoléon fifty years later, Paris weathered extremes of political and economic fortune. Once the shining capital of a pan-European empire, it was overrun and occupied by foreign armies. Ambitious projects for grand public works were delayed and derailed by plague, armed uprisings, and civil war.

In a richly illustrated volume, *Romantic Paris*, Michael Marrinan describes how these unlikely times became the setting for a revolution in the arts that dramatically transformed the city. It was a time of unbridled experimentation. The artists, architects and dramatists of Paris challenged classical culture and the norms of tradition by engaging the vagaries of contemporary life. Urban planners of the period left an architectural legacy that still informs the distinct and world-renowned reputation of Paris as a cultural and artistic center.

The book includes an in-depth discussion of iconic works of the period, including Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* and Courbet's *Burial at Ornans*. These decades were both the setting and inspiration for Hugo's *Les Misérables* and *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*. Meyerbeer's *Robert le Diable* set new standards for operatic productions, and audiences thrilled to the virtuoso performances of Paganini and Liszt, Talma and Taglioni. The cultural legacy of *Romantic Paris* included a museum that sheltered fragments rescued from the rubble of the Revolution alongside the display of masterpieces, open to one and all, that we visit today as the Louvre.

According to Marrinan, the changes that took place impacted not only high culture and artistic life but also changed the habits and spaces of everyday life: the appearance of new urban spaces, new modes of personal mobility, and new forms of public self-presentation. He examines the social practices surrounding the world of art: bohemian lifestyles; literary cenacles and salons; the rise of portraiture; a revolution in drama and staging; the phenomena of virtuosi and stars. The book describes how industrial materials, techniques and architecture affected the

social practices of aesthetic production and consumption in ways that prefigure the modern shopping mall.

Exhaustively researched and teeming with examples of fine art, *Romantic Paris* is a rich synthesis of the history, culture, and spatial practices of a dynamic period in Parisian history. Marrinan plots the zigzag trajectory of the monuments, spaces, and habits of a city that looks both to the past and the future with all the optimism, self-doubts, and creative energy of a culture poised at the threshold of modernity.

Michael Marrinan is Professor of Art History in the Department of Art & Art History at Stanford University. His writings include *Painting Politics for Louis-Philippe: Art and Ideology in Orleanist France, 1830–1848*. He was a John Simon Guggenheim Foundation Fellow in 1989–90, and was awarded a major grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to organize (with John Bender) a year-long seminar entitled *Visualizing Knowledge: From Alberti's Window to Digital Arrays* (2007).

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