

and intellectual milieus in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The richness of the contents is structured in a well-organized text that excels for clarity of style. Besides, the most interesting aspect of this book resides in its methodology. The study of mathematical and scientific achievements is strongly supported by the analysis of the institutional, intellectual, political, social and cultural contexts. A powerful combination that makes of this book a seminal work in the history of science.

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Tom Stammers, *The Purchase of the Past: Collecting Culture in Post-revolutionary Paris c.1790–1890*

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Caitlin Doley

University of York

Of all the various outcomes of the French Revolution, the breakdown and dispersal of aristocratic art collections might initially be understood to rank as rather small change. But in *The Purchase of the Past: Collecting Culture in Post-revolutionary Paris c.1790–1890* Tom Stammers persuasively demonstrates that this transformation of the art market in fact generated vast changes in how French politics, society and culture functioned from day to day, with the author evidencing the Revolution as being directly connected to the throwing of an unprecedented number of artworks into commercial circulation, the generation of the opportunity for private individuals to benefit from posing as saviours and guardians of a gravely endangered cultural inheritance, and the subsequent emergence of ‘the Museum Age’.

In the introduction Stammers makes clear his intent to unpack the idea that ‘[p]rivate collecting simultaneously catalysed and constrained the process of cultural democratisation across the long nineteenth century’ (p. 26). *The Purchase of the Past* features six chapters in total, each of which focuses on different, ‘sometimes eccentric’, collectors who ‘have not been chosen for their representativeness so much as for the richness of the archival documentation, their influence in shaping discourses around collecting and their distillation of some of its fundamental controversies’ (p. 22). The first chapter utilizes the writings of the painter and critic Pierre Gault de Saint-Germain (1754–1842) to explore how tricky it initially was to picture a ‘healthy’ future for art collecting following the ‘death’ of the collecting culture once championed by the French monarchy and the aristocratic *amateur*. Stammers delivers an admirably thorough analysis of the rapidly expanding, yet simultaneously unstable, art market that emerged in Paris at the turn of the nineteenth century, before moving on to consider how a new type of collector – the *amateur* recast, as it were – could make themselves both a name and a fortune on the back of the widespread sociopolitical unrest that dominated post-revolutionary France. Building on this, Chapter 2 explores both how and why Jean-Louis Soulavie (1752–1813) used material and visual culture to create an archive of the Revolution even as its bloody events were still unfolding all around him. By drawing

attention to the often dubious ways Soulavie went about amassing his extensive collection of drawings, prints and books, Stammers shows how the ‘salvage efforts’ of this new type of *amateur* ‘permit today’s cultural historians to still think, witness and feel this world-breaking event’ almost first-hand (p. 115).

The importance of textual sources and book collecting to the would-be contemporary scribes of ‘this world-breaking event’ are the focus of Chapter 3; public and private libraries were entirely transformed in France throughout the 1790s, and the glut of rare editions suddenly available on the open market resulted in both a perplexing marketplace and the dramatic rise of a cluster of collectors keen to possess exclusive ownership of the literary past. Chapter 4 moves on to consider a collector perhaps initially better known for his generosity due to the role he played in the development of public museums in France: Charles Sauvageot (1781–1860) is widely recognized as having dedicated himself to the collecting of so-called *antiquités nationales* – artworks from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance – as part of a broader salvage campaign in post-revolutionary France. However, although Sauvageot did make a crucial foundational donation to the Louvre Museum, in this chapter Stammers draws attention to the idea that the relationship between private collectors and public museums has always tended to be an uneasy one; using Sauvageot as his case in point, Stammers makes a series of thought-provoking observations about how private collectors can employ public museums to prevent their own legacy disintegrating both during their lifetime and once they have died.

Chapters 5 and 6 delve deeper into the public implications of private collecting, with Stammers skilfully encouraging consideration of the idea that, far from being privatized actors closeted away from the rest of society, collectors were at the very forefront of ideological struggles over the shaping of collective memory, the organization of the national heritage, the ever-evolving development of canons of taste, and public access to and ownership of visual and material goods deemed to be valuable. Chapter 5 explores how the collections of Jérôme Pichon (1812–96) and Léopold Double (1812–81) generated a revival in interest in French eighteenth-century decorative arts and, in so doing, presented a distinctly royalist vision of the national heritage. Developing this point further, Chapter 6 analyses the 1893 sale of Frédéric Spitzer’s (1815–90) massive collection of Gothic and Renaissance works of art, an event widely hailed as the sale of the century. This huge sale is used to explore how the boundaries between public state-led and private patronage of the arts had been irreversibly disrupted by the sociopolitical unrest that dominated post-revolutionary France, with Stammers coherently demonstrating that these new circumstances very much played into the hands of the private collector.

The Purchase of the Past thoroughly explores how both private collectors and the general public can be understood to have profited from the disarray generated by the events of the French Revolution, with Stammers doing an excellent job of identifying and interrogating the ways in which the former might have benefited more overall than the latter. Stammers’s chapters are simultaneously expansive and meticulously researched, and his book will serve as a productive resource for historians for many years to come, be they amateur or professional, and irrespective of their central thematic field of study (art, architectural, cultural, economic, military, political, science, social).

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