

H. Wayne Morgan, *New Muses: Art in American Culture, 1865-1920*. Norman, Oklahoma, University of Oklahoma Press, 1978. 232 + xiv pp., 17 illus., \$14.95

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il n'est pas moins sage de recourir à une technique complexe dans les cas où celle-ci procure des bénéfices. Et l'on conçoit mal que cette technique avancée détourne les masses populaires de l'architecture plus qu'elle ne les détourne de l'automobile et de l'équipement domestique modernes. Le grand public est fasciné par les exploits technologiques, même s'il ne les comprend pas, et en face de l'architecture contemporaine, c'est souvent le seul aspect qui retient son attention. Les constructions techniquement audacieuses sont encore celles qu'il remarque le plus.

Personne ne mettra en doute la nécessité d'un langage architectural plus riche et expressif, voire d'une architecture plus « parlante » que celle du style international, et Anthony Jackson est tout à fait justifié de proposer que cet enrichissement se fasse en s'inspirant aux sources populaires. Ses deux essais d'une lecture agréable proposent, sous une forme compacte et facilement accessible, un ensemble de principes sur lesquels toute personne préoccupée de l'avenir de l'architecture se doit de réfléchir. Le lecteur devra toutefois garder présent à la mémoire que ce ne sont pas les seules sources possibles et permises, comme le lui aura appris l'histoire de l'architecture. Il devra surtout comprendre que l'architecture ne s'enrichit pas nécessairement en substituant un ensemble de valeurs à un autre. Cela est peut-être inévitable au moment d'une révolution, mais il n'est pas encore prouvé que nous avons besoin d'une autre révolution en architecture.

C. B.

H. WAYNE MORGAN *New Muses: Art in American Culture, 1865-1920*. Norman, Oklahoma, University of Oklahoma Press, 1978. 232 + xiv pp., 17 illus., \$14.95.

Considerable interest in American art between the end of the Civil War and World War I has been generated of late, and H. Wayne Morgan's volume *New Muses* attempts to put into perspective the many diverse factors which shaped the period. Two branches of the Smithsonian, the Hirshhorn

Museum and Sculpture Garden and the National Collection of Fine Arts, have examined in recent exhibitions the role of the avant-garde collector, John Quinn, and the work of a symbolist painter Elihu Vedder. In addition the Detroit Institute of Art's full-fledged show of John Singer Sargent's painting is indicative of a rejuvenated interest in late-nineteenth-century portraiture. An even more comprehensive undertaking and one which is more closely aligned with Morgan's book is the National Collection of Fine Arts's exhibition entitled *American Renaissance: 1876-1917*.

As stated in the book's preface, Morgan's subject is the evolving and changing role of art (read painting) in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth: 'the context of art activities during a transitional period of intense debate on the role, meaning and forms of art in national life' (p. vii). The author relies on the written statements of key figures – artists, critics, and connoisseurs – instead of the works of art themselves, and thus reveals his bias as a cultural historian rather than an art historian.

The extensive use of primary source material makes for stimulating reading, and Morgan has attempted to let original statements stand on their own, without elaboration from him. Regrettably this interrupts the flow of the text, with voluminous footnotes and the necessary digressions to identify the speakers. Since the author takes for granted a familiarity with American art and art movements of the period, his readers must be well informed in order to follow the substance of his ideas. The plethora of characters – artists as well as critics – at times becomes confusing and a mental juggling act is required to keep the individual personalities straight.

The book is divided into five chapters of approximately equal length, arranged in a roughly chronological order. In each Morgan sets forth a series of interrelated themes, and one which recurs throughout is the interaction between Americans and Europeans. The first chapter, 'A New Art World,' deals with the status of art immediately following the Civil

War. The opening of the National Academy of Design's new building in 1865 is analyzed as a turning point: on the one hand it symbolizes establishment (the classically derived structure), while on the other its purpose is to promote the art of the future. Morgan sees the conflict here between nationalism and individualism: 'The desire to order art clashed with the new generation's rising interest in diversity. Focus on American nationalism ran counter to cosmopolitan trends' (p. 9).

Collectors, dealers, museums, and journalists all helped to shape the new role of artists in the post-Civil War era. 'Art entered the homes and affected the lives of the growing middle class who were community opinion makers' (p. 10). The primacy of New York as a trend-setter was undisputed; it even came to rival Paris as an art centre. A whole cultural milieu emerged – bridging the gap between the bohemian lifestyle of the artists and the elegance of their aristocratic patrons.

While the author admits that his volume is a 'sample [of] themes' there are many seemingly critical areas which are either neglected or which remain undeveloped. For instance, the significance of the founding of two major museums, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in 1870 is only alluded to. The educational mission of the latter as espoused in its dedication ('the diffusion of a knowledge of art in its higher forms ... to humanize, to educate and refine a practical and laborious people') is of utmost importance in understanding the attempted popularization and democratization of art. In much the same vein the critical role of the national and international expositions in defining a nationalistic art and making it available to a large cross-section of the populace is not sufficiently discussed.

In his second chapter Morgan enumerates the countless conflicts and contradictions of American art, and it becomes increasingly apparent how difficult it is to generalize about this dynamic period. Not only was the United States lacking an artistic heritage, but the great diversity of its regions also contributed to its artistic disunity. Only a

deep-seated preference for realism ('Realistic treatment and finished details satisfied an old American concern for hard and special labor. Its apparent simplicity also complemented the democratic ideal of art comprehensible to everyone,' p. 59), and a respect for the individual artist worked to bring the disparate forces together.

Morgan sees the resurgence in mural painting as one creative outgrowth of these conflicts: 'These parallel ambitions for art to affect both the individual and society helped inspire a major effort to make mural painting part of the American scene' (p. 50). In turn 'muralism' had its own inherent contradictions: a self-conscious awareness of historical prototypes and a compelling need both to create an appropriate imagery and satisfy the decorative demands of large expanses of wall. 'The most effective murals thus emphasized both abstract form and abstract thought' (p. 54).

The chapter concludes with a discussion of the American reaction to international trends, which forms a nice transition to the third chapter, 'At Home and Abroad.' Increased communications and greater availability of foreign art heightened Americans' perceptions. For instance, they 'found in Japanese art solutions to many puzzling problems of both purpose and technique. Japanese art seemed most important in expressing mystery and undefined feeling' (p. 66).

Gradually shifts in art education occurred: a desire to know how to paint superseded a concern for what to paint; a growing interest in individual painterly expression and an emphasis on motion and variety began to emerge. Many artists were frustrated by the apparently slow progress in American art schools and headed for Munich and Paris. 'The Munich style seemed to satisfy many of the generation's artistic desires. Its hallmark was the broad brushstroke, heavily applied, designed to create an impression rather than depict literal reality. The colors tend to richness, emphasizing reds and browns, with suitable highlights' (p. 94).

France's capital was the other great centre for art, and there the lifestyle had its appeal. 'Parisian

student life epitomized for Americans the effort to broaden the artist's role, clarify his social status as a seeker after special truths, and intensify his individual life. The Parisian ideal was a vivid, working example of art as part of 'normal' existence, offering both harmony of purpose and a strong sense of individual adventure and expression that seemed impossible in any other career' (p. 108). The benefits of study abroad were extensive, and not limited purely to technical accomplishments. A greater sense of confidence emerged – not only regarding the artists' own worth, but also in the United States's potential for culture.

The final two chapters, 'Impressionism' and 'Modernism and a New Century', deal with the American reaction to and adaptation of primarily European movements. The former, the more familiar, is handled more cohesively. On the other hand, Morgan uses modernism as a catch-all for several different movements which were often in conflict with one another: Post-Impressionism, Cubism, Futurism, Fauvism, Art Nouveau, a style which pervaded architecture and design as well as painting and sculpture, is given little attention.

Morgan convincingly argues that the groundwork for Impressionism had already been laid. A greater emphasis on the personal expression of the artist and a dissatisfaction with literal realism characterized the 1870s. Even the Munich school's penchant for broad brushstroke was in tune with Impressionist painterliness. Nevertheless, acceptance was not swift in coming, 'but by the turn of the century impressionism was a major influence in the art world. In retrospect its appeals were obvious. Subject matter drawn from daily life seemed egalitarian and personal. Motion and change were consistent aspects of American taste. Impressionism was rapidly identified with progress and modernization' (p. 134). Yet American painters consistently modified the style promulgated by the French, preferring not to dissolve design and form and avoiding raw colour. In turn, however, even Impressionism was considered outmoded and academic, and innovation became all important.

The modernist trends had even greater difficulty winning acceptance and at times were seen as 'threatening to social order and dangerous to the artist's hard-won social respectability' (p. 152). The flirtation with abstraction and the primitivism of the new art were most discomfiting and were coupled with a general loss of optimism. The critics' concerns were brought to a head with the Armory Show of 1913 'which was important precisely because it focused modernism for Americans and demonstrated the new art's variety and momentum' (p. 163). It also led to the viewpoint that Europe was decadent. The chapter concludes with a lengthy discussion of individual European artists, but their impact on American art is not sufficiently considered. 'Modernism's legacy was unclear. It had obviously fractured whatever unity prevailed in American art in 1900. Impressionism, post-impressionism, and varieties of abstractionism seemed preeminent. But strong interest in social realism, landscape, anecdote, and genre unrelated to modernism remained' (p. 180).

Morgan deserves credit for organizing and analyzing great quantities of original material, but perhaps it is too ambitious an undertaking given the length of the book (the text runs to 182 pages). By necessity there are serious omissions, including a lack of concern for the impact of photography, an insufficient interest in the individual painters, and perfunctory investigations into such factors as industrialization, Freudian psychoanalysis, and the theory of relativity.

The volume, however, is eminently readable and the copious footnotes, extensive bibliography, and index make it a valuable addition to the literature on this period. The format is attractive, although the use of illustrations is limited and not always well integrated with the text. Additional photographs, particularly of the modernist exhibitions, would have enhanced the latter part of the book. Certainly Morgan succeeds in convincing the reader 'of the great vitality of American painting, and of the fact that many significant people and works do not ultimately find their

way into the most familiar historical treatments' (p. x).

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RAFFAELLA FARIOLI *Pavimenti musivi di Ravenna paleocristiana*. Collection « Antichità Archeologia Storia dell'arte ». Ravenna, Longo editore, 1975. 228 p., 111 illus., 8500 lire.

NOËL DUVAL *La mosaïque funéraire dans l'art paléochrétien*. Même collection. Ravenna, Longo editore, 1976. 133 p., 50 illus., 10 000 lire.

Deux publications de la nouvelle collection « Antichità Archeologia Storia dell'arte » invitent le public cultivé et même les spécialistes à s'intéresser à un domaine de l'art, considéré souvent comme mineur, mais dont les valeurs artistiques, sémiologiques et historico-religieuses, une fois découvertes, ne cessent de nous séduire. Les deux ouvrages traitent des mosaïques de revêtement de sol aux v^e et vi^e siècles de notre ère : mosaïques pavimentales à Ravenne, promu capitale politique et culturelle dans une période de crise, mosaïques funéraires en Afrique du Nord, région qui a joué un rôle important dans le développement de l'art de la mosaïque dans le monde romain et paléochrétien. Les auteurs, tous deux archéologues de formation, n'ont pas perdu une occasion pour essayer de replacer les monuments dans leur contexte original ou de retracer des données stratigraphiques. Car plusieurs de ces mosaïques sont fragmentaires ou ont été déplacées, ce qui ne facilite d'emblée ni la datation, ni la reconstitution de l'état originel. À partir du iv^e siècle, des édifices chrétiens étaient décorés de mosaïques murales et pavimentales. Les monuments étudiés dans ces deux ouvrages appartiennent à une époque politiquement très troublée (chute de l'Empire romain d'Occident, installation des royaumes « barbares » en Afrique du Nord comme à Ravenne, reconquête de l'Empire par l'empereur Justinien), mais culturellement très riche, car on assistait à l'enchevêtrement de plusieurs

courants artistiques et idéologiques (fin de l'art romain tardif, éclosion et apogée de l'art byzantin, embryon de l'art médiéval en Occident, survivance du symbolisme païen, consolidation de nouveaux symboles chrétiens...)

Raffaella Farioli concentre ses recherches sur un aspect longtemps négligé de l'art de Ravenne : les mosaïques pavimentales des édifices culturels aux v^e et vi^e siècles. En effet, la beauté et la richesse des mosaïques murales des basiliques et baptistères de cette ville a relégué dans l'oubli le décor plus humble des planchers de ces bâtiments. L'ouvrage nous rappelle que pour les Anciens, l'architecture, le décor des parois, des voûtes et celui du sol formaient un tout harmonieux qui conduit le chrétien de la vie terrestre à la béatitude céleste. Un des cas les plus intéressants analysés par l'auteur est celui de l'église S. Vitale, consacrée par l'évêque Maximien le 17 mai 548 (p. 120-168). Les vestiges archéologiques mis au jour ont permis à l'auteur de souligner l'articulation parfaite entre la structure architecturale et le complexe décoratif de l'ensemble : sous l'éblouissante coupole dont le médaillon de l'Agneau au centre est soutenu par quatre anges sortis de volutes florales, se déployait un tapis de mosaïques rayonnant à huit tranches; dans la nef annulaire de l'octogone, des sections trapézoïdales de mosaïques (plus ou moins fragmentaires au moment de la découverte) ont suggéré aussi une articulation compartimentée, tandis que la décoration pavimentale des absides (dont une seule subsiste) s'harmonisait avec l'ambiance paradisiaque illustrée par le décor semi-sphérique du cul-de-four.

À Ravenne, pendant deux siècles, les mosaïques pavimentales sont surtout géométriques, même si à S. Vitale l'influence iconique, naturaliste de Byzance se faisait sentir. Cependant dans les rares cas où l'on constate la présence du décor végétal « peuplé » d'oiseaux comme dans les tranches rayonnantes de l'espace central de S. Vitale (fig. 11, 51, 52) ou dans le décor semi-circulaire d'une abside (fig. 18), on voit que ces feuillages, ces oiseaux s'expriment dans un langage non naturaliste. C'est à S. Vitale qu'on peut remarquer la rencontre

de deux courants artistiques : en haut, sur la voûte, l'éblouissante mosaïque d'influence byzantine, en bas, belles mosaïques géométriques, bidimensionnelles de tradition romaine.

Non seulement à S. Vitale, mais tout l'art de la mosaïque pavimentale de Ravenne semblait rester à l'écart du courant naturaliste où la faune et la flore faisaient irruption dans le décor des mosaïques chrétiennes en Orient (p. ex. : basilique justinienne de Sabratha, chapelle de Mysis en Cilicie...). Dans les rares cas où les motifs floraux ou animaliers sont présents, ils ne sont que des silhouettes sans mouvement, des figures stylisées et n'évoquent aucune réalité de profondeur ou de nature. On peut affirmer avec l'auteur que les mosaïques pavimentales de Ravenne, contrastant avec le développement iconique dans l'Est, sont restées fondamentalement géométriques, donc romaines.

Non contente de le constater, l'auteur essaie de démontrer la symbolique du géométrique (p. 49-59), le « rapport infini » entre la géométrie et la sensibilité qui rend l'espace de même nature que la couleur, qui traduit le mouvement des formes sur une surface plane à deux dimensions. Sur un espace fuyant, non défini, le déploiement des motifs géométriques, le flot continu des formes analogues, opposées, symétriques, alternées qui se succèdent sans début ni fin, constituent un rythme. Et ce rythme, de par sa nature, est réglé par des rapports musicaux, numériques. Le rythme des tapis de mosaïques géométriques qui s'étendent ou qui sont censés de s'étendre potentiellement à l'infini semblait répondre à des contemplations abstraites, à la recherche de l'infini des hommes en Occident.

Le décor géométrique est donc un choix culturel plutôt que le résultat des restrictions économiques ou techniques. À Ravenne même, malgré l'influence incontestable de Byzance après la reconquête de l'Empire par Justinien, les mosaïques chrétiennes restent simplement géométriques dans leur composition et dans leur agencement des formes, aniconiques et antinaturalistes dans leur conception thématique et bidimensionnelles dans leur utilisation de l'espace.