

Another look at the Le Nain (Lens, 5-6 May 17)

Lens, Musée du Louvre-Lens, May 5-06, 2017

Deadline: Feb 15, 2017

olivier BONFAIT

Since its rediscovery more than a century ago, the Le Nain's work has fascinated French art history from Champfleury to Jacques Thuillier through Paul Jamot. If this fascination invited us to go beyond the study of the genre painting and the elaboration of the catalogue raisonné based on the distinction between the three brothers, some dimensions of their work have been left aside: their possible relationships with Northern culture were rapidly neglected, the dialogue with the historians has never been really established.

Taking advantage of the Le Nain's exhibition which will take place in the region Hauts-de-France at the Louvre-Lens from March 22th until June 26th (after a first retrospective exhibition in the US) – an exhibition that gives to its curators the opportunity to attribute the famous Academy of men to a Northern painter – this symposium intends to encourage other looks on the Le Nain and give rise to new questions on their works, in particular by moving them closer to Northern culture, with which they were in contact through the fair of Saint-Germain-des-Prés.

The attention will be mainly given to two fields:

1.) Material culture, social world

If no one believes anymore that genre painting is a photography of the rural world, the Le Nain have built a remarkable inventory of 17th century material culture and daily practices, from clothes to food, which still have to be explored. Likewise, their paintings give a vision of the social and family relationships, urban or rural, which still have to be investigated. Neil MacGregor has proposed to see in their representations of peasants an echo of the division of rural classes in the Laonnois region; Jean-Pierre Cuzin has questioned rightly the figured population in some group portraits, suggesting to see children from urban upper middle classes placed in rural families. Such approaches deserve to be resumed and prolonged.

2.) Symbolic culture, learned world

Most scholars now accept to see in the Peasant Meal (previously called the Drinkers!) an urban act of charity alluding to the Supper at Emmaus. But, by which mental process was this lectura difficilior possible during the 17th century? Likewise, if the Allegory of the Louvre has not found yet its true title, is this because the Le Nain did not master the codes of allegory or is it because they produced these codes?

From the ancient bust laid in the Workshop to the multiple quotations in the Bacchus and Ariadne, are not the Le Nain, in their genre scenes as well as in their history paintings, painters playing with a learned culture?

Following the wish of opening up new approaches, we will keep an open section, in order to stimulate the exploration of new avenues, from the interpretation of the paintings to the elaboration of the corpus. Proposals which concentrate on the Le Nain's work will be however favoured.

This conference will take place from Friday 5th to Saturday 6th of May. The proceedings will be published according to modalities still to be defined (an online edition being probable). The organizers will take in charge the travel costs (within Europe) and the accommodation for two nights.

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Workshop

Musée du Louvre-Lens, 5-6 May 2017

Deadline : 15 feb. 2017

Anyone who would like to participate are invited to send their proposal (400-500 words + one page CV) before February 15th 2017 to Fabien Dufoulon (fabien.dufoulon@louvrelens.fr). They will receive an answer at the beginning of March. In order to facilitate the discussions, it is necessary to send the paper on May 1st at the latest to the organizers and chairs of the sessions. These two study days are conceived more as a discussing workshop than as a succession of papers.

They are organized by the Musée du Louvre-Lens in collaboration with three research centres with different disciplinary approaches, an evidence of this interdisciplinary goal: the Centre Georges Chevrier (CNRS/Université de Bourgogne, Dijon), the Centre for Early Modern Cultural Analysis (GEMCA, Université de Louvain), the Institut de Recherches Historiques du Septentrion (CNRS/Université de Lille).

Scientific committee: Olivier Bonfait (CGC), Ralph Dekoninck (GEMCA), Gaëtane Maës (IRHiS), Nicolas Milovanovic (Musée du Louvre, curator of the exhibition), Luc Piralla (Musée du Louvre-Lens, curator of the exhibition).

Reference:

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