



The Representation of the Struggling Artist in America, 1800–1865

By Erika Schneider

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The Representation of the Struggling Artist in America, 1800–1865 analyzes how American painters, sculptors, and writers, active between 1800 and 1865, depicted their response to a democratic society that failed to adequately support them financially and intellectually. Without the traditional European forms of patronage from the church or the crown, American artists faced unsympathetic countrymen who were unaccustomed to playing the role of patron and less than generous in rewarding creativity. It was in this unrewarding landscape that American artists in the first half of the nineteenth century employed the “struggling” or “starving artist” image to satirize the country’s lack of patronage and immortalize their own struggles. Through an examination of artists’ journals, letters, and biographies as well as the development of art academies and exhibition venues, this study traces the evolution of a young nation that went from considering artists as mere craftsmen to recognizing them as important members of a civilized society.

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Editorial Review

Review

This is an invaluable study of a key image in American culture before the Civil War: the trope of the starving artist as he was rejected by American society, encouraged by institutions, and represented in the lives of painters, sculptors and novelists, both real and fictional. (Paul Staiti, Professor of Fine Arts on the Alumnae Foundation, Mount Holyoke College)

Schneider's important study fills a gap in American art history scholarship by focusing on a period, the early to mid-nineteenth century, and works of art under addressed in published literature on images of artists. Its greatest strength is the balance of visual and literary perceptions of artists, which enables a richer assessment of artist imagery of this time than has been attempted before. Well-known artist images by Washington Allston, Charles Bird King, and David Gilmour Blythe, along with lesser-known images by John Krimmel and Horatio Greenough, are interrogated in great detail and solidly contextualized within their social, cultural, and political milieus. Those interested in the development of an American artistic identity at a time when many contested the value and role of the arts in the young democracy will find much of relevance here. (Elisabeth L. Roark, Associate Professor of Art History, Chatham University)

This book analyzes how American painters, sculptors, and writers, active between 1800 and 1865, depicted their response to a democratic society that failed to adequately support them financially and intellectually. Through an examination of the development of art academies and exhibition venues, this study traces the evolution of a young nation that went from considering artists as mere craftsmen to recognizing them as important members of a civilized society.

About the Author

Erika Schneider is associate professor of art history at Framingham State University.

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