

Seminars in the History of Collecting

Paris over London: Victorian curator J.C. Robinson's collection at auction

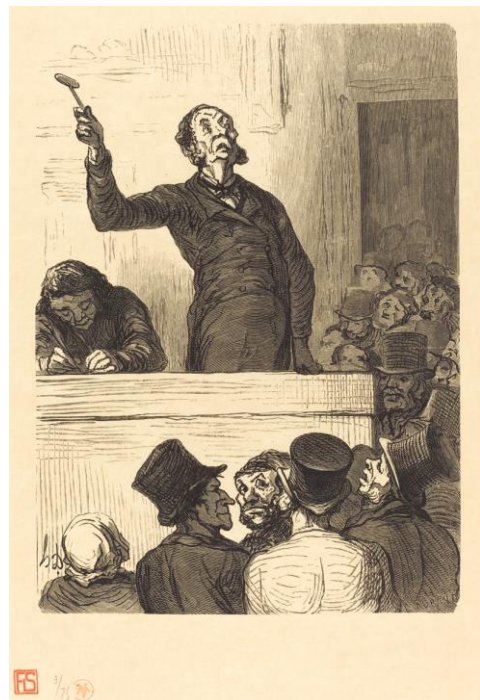
Dr Elizabeth Pergam (Lecturer, Sotheby's Institute of Art, New York, NY)

Monday, 30 July 2018, 5.30pm

The Wallace Collection Lecture Theatre

This paper will explore the circumstances that led John Charles Robinson (1824-1913) to sell his early collection of old master paintings and drawings in Paris in May 1868. Following my discovery of the register of the sale in the Archives de la Ville de Paris, I have been able to clarify what was sold, to whom, and for what price. By holding the sale in Paris, the recently unemployed, former curator of the South Kensington Museum (SKM) attracted buyers who were both active collectors—primarily French, but also British. More broadly, however, Robinson's decision to choose Paris over London reflects his knowledge of the art market in the mid-Victorian/late Second Empire period, a study that was becoming an essential responsibility of the newly-emerging professional class of curators. This lecture will contextualize the May 7-8 auction, taking as a starting point Robinson's own analysis of the art market in London and Paris in the 1860s.

Although the art market is attracting increasing scholarly attention, the middle of the nineteenth century has been surprisingly understudied in comparison with the Napoleonic period and the rise of Impressionism. This period saw the rise of blockbuster exhibitions, such as the first of its kind, the Manchester Art Treasures of 1857 to which the fourth Marquess of Hertford lent more than forty paintings. These temporary displays—held in purpose-built spaces, as well as under the auspices of museums—brought wider attention to works of art in private collections, as well as a greater understanding of the new discipline of the history of art. Through his collecting, scholarship, and selling works of art, Robinson exemplifies how the connections between British and French curators, dealers, commissaires-priseurs, and collectors, impacted the development of museums and collections well into the twentieth century.



Charles Maurand after Honoré Daumier, *L'Hotel des ventes: le Commissaire-priseur*, 1863, wood engraving, NGA 1978.82.19

Admission is free and booking is not required

More information and details of future seminars can now be found at

<http://www.wallacecollection.org/thecollection/seminarsinthehistoryofcollecting>