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Women Readers in French Painting 1870-1890: A Space for the Imagination

Kathryn Brown

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The first monograph to examine the depiction of reading women in French art of the early Third Republic, *Women Readers in French Painting 1870-1890* evaluates the pictorial significance of this imagery, its critical reception, and its impact on notions of femininity and social relations. Covering a broad range of paintings, prints, and sculptures, this book shows how the liseuse was subjected to unprecedented levels of pictorial innovation by artists with widely differing aesthetic aims and styles. Depictions of readers are interpreted as contributions to changing notions of public and private life, female agency, and women's participation in cultural and political debates beyond the domestic household. This highly original book explores images of women readers from a range of social classes in both urban and rural settings. Such images are shown to have articulated concerns about the impact of female literacy on labour environments and family life while, in many cases, challenging conventions of gendered reading. Kathryn Brown also presents an alternative way of conceiving of modernity in relation to nineteenth-century art, a methodological departure from much recent art historical literature. Artists discussed range from Manet, Cassatt and Degas, to less familiar figures such as Lavieille, Carrière, Toulmouche and Tissot.

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