



Smithsonian American Art Museum

Transatlantic Encounters: Franco-American Artistic Exchanges during the Civil War and Reconstruction Era

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The period from 1857 through 1876 saw a rise in the prominence of French art and artifacts in New York City, which was the artistic center of the country as well as a hub of international exchange. Michael Knoedler's 1857 purchase of the New York branch of the Parisian art publisher and dealer Goupil and Company was the catalyst for disseminating French visual culture to the New York art world. By the end of the Reconstruction era in 1876, French paintings, reproductive prints, and artifacts had become a major presence in New York. Thus, the dominant position of the French school of painting was clearly established.

Moving art historical attention away from artists' expatriation in Paris, this dissertation seeks to analyze the multifaceted influence of French art in New York during the Civil War and Reconstruction era. In so doing, this research proposes a new model for the analysis of artistic exchange in a transatlantic context and provides an international perspective on the visual culture of the Civil War and Reconstruction. While scholars have formerly been concerned with artistic training and formal influence, this project outlines an approach to artistic exchange which results from a complex combination of economic, social, political, and cultural forces.