

Grez-sur-Loing revisited

The international artists' colony in a different light

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Akademisk avhandling för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen
i Konst- och bildvetenskap vid Göteborgs universitet,
som med tillstånd av humanistiska fakultetens dekanus,
kommer att offentligen försvaras
fredagen den 1e november 2013, kl. 10.15,
Torgny Segerstedtsalen, Universitetsbyggnaden,
Vasaparken, Universitetsplatsen 1, Göteborg.



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Abstract:

This thesis examines the rural artists' colony in Grez-sur-Loing and its art from the heyday of the community, 1875–1885, when artists from North America, England, Scotland, Ireland, and Scandinavia were gathering in the French village. The international community has hitherto been viewed separately along national or linguistic lines. This thesis aims to give a broader picture of international artists and associations that converged in Grez.

Examining the historiography on Grez with the help of material published and unpublished in the different nations concurrently represented in Grez, an actor-network in Bruno Latour's sense crystallized out that on several levels, partly unintentionally, has established and consolidated a commonly accepted Swedish notion of the artists' colony in Grez-sur-Loing and its art. This notion originates in the depictions of an early association of artists and writers who have created the Swedish picture of the Grez colony and consolidated it for half a century. The early established picture has subsequently been further consolidated by repeated re-narration, while the nostalgic perspectives transported through first-hand accounts and later literature based on these, have transformed Grez-sur-Loing into a Swedish *lieu de mémoire* in Pierre Nora's sense.

Also the sporadically posed question about the existence of an international Grez Style is part of the historiographic examination. Hitherto, similarities in the works from Grez produced by artists of different nationalities were mainly explained as deriving from local actualities and common predecessors in French art, which was suggested by Swedish colonists and affiliated writers. A style critical analysis of the international works from Grez, as well as the focus on the artists in their socio-historical context, shall give other perspectives on common traits and their emergence.

Explanations for the early association's interest in establishing facts are found in demands of artists and art historians due to the nationalist mindset as well as the rise of cultural geography at the end of the nineteenth century. The international communities and artistic activity on foreign ground were apparently stating a problem for artists and early art historians, which can also be identified in the historiographies of the other nationalities in Grez.

Keywords:

Grez-sur-Loing, French rural artists' colony, international artists' community, the Grez Style, the Grez School, nineteenth century painting, *juste milieu* painting, historiography, factoids, cultural geography, nationalism, *lieu de mémoire*, Swedish art history of the nineteenth century, Opponents' Society ('*Opponentförbundet*'), actor-network,

388 pp. Language: English

Dept. of Cultural Sciences | Göteborg University | P.o. box 100 | SE-405 30 Göteborg

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