

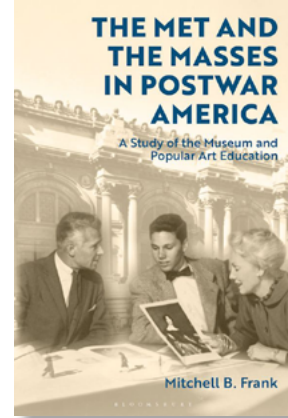
this piece. Andrew Gayed's essay, "Coming Out a l'Oriental," offers an analysis of beautiful and startling works by multidisciplinary artist 2fik, elaborating diasporic Islamicate queer identity and provincializing Western white queer cultures on these lands, within a broad argument "that there exists a strong relation between the historical construction of colonial sexualities and contemporary expressions of diasporic sexualities." Gayed uses "histories of gender, sexuality, colonialism, and their triangulation in the Middle East as a foundation for outlining a cause-and-affect dynamic that reverberates in contemporary queer diasporic subjects" (242). Shaista Patel's chapter "Indian Americans Engulfing 'American Indian': Marking the 'Dot Indians' Indianness Through Geocide and Casteism in the Diaspora" critiques a photography project by artist Annu Palakunnathu Matthew. Patel's discussion of South Asian complicities in settler colonialism, with citation of Dalit scholars regarding caste and its continued influence in South Asian Canadian communities, feels painful and humbling. The final lines of Patel's chapter, in which she quotes Tuck, end the book with her endorsement of a stance of separation, suggesting that non-Indigenous people remain "at an arm's length," "staying away" from Indigenous people (289). This point merits or opens on to a broader discussion. From my white settler standpoint, this articulation speaks to Decter and Taunton's advocacy for "productive discomfort": "the capacity and commitment to accept, embrace, and ply discomfort as an unsettling state of tensile counterbalance is, we suggest, an essential component of unsettling or engaging decolonially from a dominant position" (108).

In Fraser, Huard, and Danger's essay, they cite Nishnaabeg scholar, writer and artist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, who "invites her readers to imagine reconciliation as a consensual practice that must be embodied and practised with enthusiastic agreement by all Canadian settlers" (220). After reading this collection, I wonder, what practices would invite these styles of relation, of embodiment? Could they be kinship practices, as in the Anishinaabe interpretation of Treaty 1? What capacities do such practices rely on? This anthology inspires me to attune to how its authors enact shifting subjectivity and embodiment through the generative restaging of relationship.

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- 1 Katherine McKittrick, *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 23.
- 2 Aimee Craft, *Breathing Life into the Stone Fort Treaty: An Anishinaabe Perspective on Treaty One* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2013).



Mitchell B. Frank

The Met and the Masses in Postwar America: A Study of the Museum and Popular Art Education

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/ *Andrea Korda* /

The Met and the Masses in Postwar America: A Study of the Museum and Popular Art Education examines the mid-twentieth-century collaboration between the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Book-of-the-Month Club (BOMC). Even if you have never heard of this collaboration before, you've likely seen the *Metropolitan Seminars in Art* books that resulted. Author Mitchell Frank recounts how he got started on this project when a neighbour gifted him some of these books, and he admits that he wasn't at all sure he wanted them. I also have a collection of these volumes in my office, passed down from a retired colleague who

was offloading old art books. This series' ubiquity in homes, offices, and thrift shops can tell us something about the continued pervasiveness of the mid-twentieth-century values it promotes, which include ideas about the role of art, museums, and so-called "high culture." In his book, Frank unpacks these values, carefully considering the assumptions undergirding them as well as the ways in which they circulated. As he explains, the Met's series of mass-produced *Art Miniatures and Seminars in Art* "raise questions museum officials continue to ask today about the social role of museums, especially in terms of their accessibility to ever more diverse audiences" (2).

The Met's collaboration with the BOMC resulted in three different projects that are covered by Frank's book. The first project, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Miniatures*, was a series of stamps that reproduced works of art and circulated along with an accompanying series of albums, published between 1948 and 1957. Subscribers to the *Miniatures* were tasked with affixing the stamps into the appropriate blank spaces in the albums, which provided information about the history and significance of the artworks featured in the stamps. While the first five albums had no particular organizational logic beyond presenting works from the Met's collection, subsequent albums and their stamps were organized by theme (such as "Great European Portraits" or "Great Landscapes"), by period (e.g., "Arts of ancient Greece," "Art in the Middle Ages"), or artist (e.g., "Leonardo da Vinci," "Matisse"), and also drew on works from collections other than the Met. The second project, *Metropolitan Seminars in Art*, comprised two series of twelve art books each, published from 1958 to 1960. The first series covered art appreciation, beginning with a volume titled "What is Painting?" and concluding with "The Artist as Visionary"; the second series covered "Great Periods in Painting," according to the series subtitle, beginning with "The Classical Background" and concluding with "Art in the Contemporary World." The third project, which took shape in 1962, was a standalone print of a Rembrandt painting that had been recently acquired for the Met's collection. All of these projects shared the common goals of achieving a wide circulation for art while also educating a wider public about art and art history.

At the heart of these three projects is what we today call accessibility, and throughout his thoughtful analyses, Frank

calls attention to the changing meanings of accessibility in museum contexts and art education. Frank explains that Francis Taylor, the Met's director from 1940 to 1955 when the collaboration with the BOMC took shape, was "at the forefront of efforts to make the museum more accessible to the general public" (7). Accessibility is, of course, a key concept in discussions of museums today, as seen in the recent report published by the Reconsidering Museums project, the most recent updates to the definition of the museum put forward by the International Council of Museums (ICOM), and other museum studies texts such as the edited collection *Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion in Museums* (2019).¹ While today we think of an accessible museum as one that, according to the *Reconsidering Museums* report, "is inclusive, and a place where people see themselves reflected in exhibits, collections, and programs" (11), the midcentury Met and BOMC initiatives sought to improve accessibility by expanding access to a predetermined canon of high culture, and by inviting more of the apparently uninitiated into the fold. In this midcentury version of accessibility, high culture remained intact, inviting people in without questioning the hierarchies of value that left people out in the first place. Additionally, that "these pedagogical programs were taken up mostly by a white, middle-class audience suggests that there were limitations on who was included in the Met's postwar notion of accessibility"; this form of accessibility "was thus less a coming together of diverse subjectivities than a recognition of sameness" (127). In other words, accessibility at the midcentury Met (and, by extension, other midcentury North American institutions) was focused on giving more people access to "the shared values and experiences of those in authority" (155); *what* would be accessed and *how* it would circulate was not necessarily up for discussion.

The societal fault lines that these projects reveal—between culture and commerce, high art and mass culture, autonomy and instrumentalism—are described in detail in chapter three, where Frank contextualizes the *Miniatures* and the *Seminars* within the field of art education. Here, the ideals that informed the projects come to the fore as Frank discusses postwar art education and the belief that it would provide "a corrective to the modern age of machine and technology" (95). For its proponents, art education was understood to improve the nation,

making citizens “less conformist, healthier mentally, sharper in perception, and more articulate and empathetic,” as well as “better prepared for a democratic life of freedom” (95–96). But, as Frank points out, bringing these ideals into conversation with the Met’s *Miniatures* and *Seminars* brings out contradictions that are impossible to resolve. First, how were subscribers to achieve freedom and autonomy while also following the prescribed path of the stamp albums and the Seminars, which cultivated a particular type of visual literacy rooted in conventional art history and traditional notions of high culture? Second, how could these projects provide an antidote to mass, commercial culture when they were also mass-produced, consumer products? Frank does not attempt the impossible task of resolving these questions, but reminds us that artworks and aesthetic experiences can hold varied types of value simultaneously.

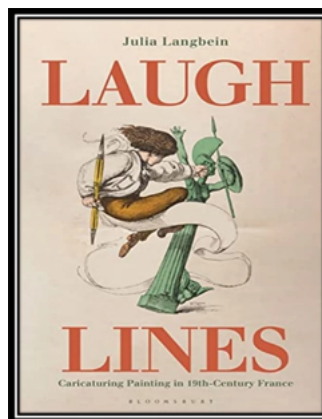
The *Miniatures* and *Seminars* reached a wide audience, demonstrating that the Met and its BOMC subscribers took a flexible approach to distinctions between culture and commerce, high and mass culture, and autonomy and utility during the 1940s and 1950s. But their next joint initiative was not as successful in achieving this flexibility. When the Met and the BOMC teamed up to reproduce a Rembrandt painting acquired by the Met in 1961 for a record-setting price, the venture fell apart when the Met rejected the BOMC’s print as an inferior reproduction and proceeded to sell their own version. In this case, as Frank explains, a need to assert the Met’s authority, autonomy, and its difference from commercial mass culture took precedence over a form of access that relied on broad circulation. As Frank describes in the concluding chapter, Abstract Expressionism also challenged the flexibility of the Met’s approach by privileging personal symbolism and subjective interpretation over supposedly universal meanings that could be defined by Met-approved experts.

While focusing on specific historical episodes within a single institution, Frank’s study also offers a reconsideration of the history of art history. The book provides a nuanced analysis of a form of art history that has often been taken for granted in museums and art history textbooks, and with which we are currently grappling as we work towards new models of teaching and learning art history. For years, art historians in Canada have been working to reassess this form of art

history and its canon with attention to inclusivity and accessibility, which often involves taking into account the diversity of experiences that our students bring into the classroom. Frank puts these efforts into historical context, explaining that inclusivity and accessibility are not new concepts, but that their definitions have changed over time. *The Met and the Masses in Postwar America* provides a clear and compelling account of the assumptions that informed twentieth-century definitions of these terms, and the text is a valuable contribution to the study of art history’s history, museum studies, and art education.

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- 1 “A New Vision for Museums: Anticipating and Activating Change in the Canadian Museum Sector,” *Reconsidering Museums*, 2023, https://reconsideringmuseums.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Report_Reconsidering-Museums.pdf; “Museum Definition,” International Council of Museums, <https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/>; Johnnetta Betsch Cole and Laura L. Lott, eds., *Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion in Museums* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019).



Julia Langbein
Laugh Lines: Caricaturing Painting in Nineteenth-Century France

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44 illus. couleur
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/Marie-Lise Poirier/

Œuvre phare de la production d'Édouard Manet, *Olympia* est exposée au Salon de 1865 où elle fait aussitôt scandale en raison du prosaïsme avec lequel y est