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The Paris Fine Art Salon / Le Salon, 1791–1881

FRENCH STUDIES of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

eter Lang

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DIANA SEAVE GREENWALD

The Demand for Peasants: A Statistical Analysis of Rural Imagery at the Paris Salon

In nineteenth-century France, two histories – one economic and social and one cultural – ran parallel to one another. France was modernising; more cities appeared, the railroad network grew and a larger share of the French population was employed in industry. Around the same time, pictures of everyday rural life – rural genre paintings – were displayed and attracted attention at the Salon. The existing scholarly literature asserts that these two histories are in fact not parallel, but intersecting, and that the artistic phenomenon is a reaction to the social and economic one. This essay presents parts of a project that aimed to verify that assertion using rigorous quantitative analysis and an original dataset.[1]

From 1831 to 1881, approximately 115,000 paintings and other graphic works were exhibited at the Salon and recorded in the *livrets*.[2] Over the course of twenty years, Dr Jon Whiteley of the Ashmolean Museum assembled an index to every Salon catalogue, the *Subject Index to Paintings Exhibited at the Paris Salon, 1673–1881*.[3] Based on its title, each painting is tagged with one or more keywords, or 'subject headings' as Whiteley calls them. These keywords are specific, ranging from 'Plowing' to 'Thieves and Bandits' to 'Jealousy' to the specific geographic location a painting depicts. Digitising portions of this index yielded a new dataset describing

1 Diana Seave Greenwald, *Painting the Provincial: A Statistical Analysis of Rural Imagery at the Paris Salons 1831–81* (MPhil dissertation, University of Oxford, 2013).

2 Specifically 114,455 as counted in *Catalogues of the Paris Salon* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1977).

3 Jon Whiteley, *Subject Index to Paintings Exhibited at the Paris Salon, 1673–1881* (1993) [Unpublished, deposited at Sackler Library, Oxford].

the development of the content of paintings at the Salon, many of which have since been lost, destroyed or buried in obscure collections.

Using this data, one can track how the quantity and quality of rural imagery at the Salon developed from the July Monarchy to the first decade of the Third Republic. In turn, these artistic trends can be analysed alongside information about the social and economic development of France during the same time period. This analysis can indicate whether or not there is a causal – and not just coincidental – relationship between the art history and economic and social history of nineteenth-century France. Furthermore, adopting the explanatory economic framework of supply and demand helps to disentangle the complicated channels by which the forces of modernisation affected the cultural output on display at the Salon. This framework allows one to better understand how diverse changes like the growth of cities and the occurrence of civil unrest had varying effects both on the suppliers of art at the Salon – painters themselves – and the complex constellation of public audiences, critics, experts and collectors who were its consumers.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, France transformed from a collection of isolated and largely autarkic localities into an integrated nation with a shared economy and, increasingly, shared social customs. The primary agent of this change was a growing national transport network.[4] Most communes were neither linked to nor affected by national transport until the July Monarchy, when an 1836 law made maintenance of local roads compulsory. There was, however, a lag in the improvement and increased use of these routes. Only from the 1850s onwards was the isolation of most rural communes substantially reduced. By 1870, a network

4 See e.g. Fernand Braudel, et al., *Histoire économique et sociale de la France* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1970); Colin Heywood, *The Development of the French Economy, 1750–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Hugh Clout, *Agriculture in France on the Eve of the Railway Age* (London: Croom Helm, 1980).

of around 370,000 kilometres of maintained local road existed – about 28 times more than in 1840.[5]

Roads were not the only form of transport; there were also waterways and railways. The railroad was particularly important to French integration. Railroads appeared in France in the late 1820s, but became more common only after an 1842 law allocated money and outlined private partnerships for creating and managing a network radiating from Paris. Under the Second Empire, rail construction accelerated and in 1870 an integrated network of 17,466 kilometres of railway crisscrossed the country. (ibid. 21–7). By 1913, it was 40,770 kilometres.[6] Though many rural communes did not have a railway station in the nineteenth century, the success of the railroad fostered larger and more integrated regional, national and international markets for goods and services. People could circulate or emigrate with greater ease and activity on the rails translated into a need for more and better maintained local roads leading to the trains. These local roads ultimately linked small villages to a network leading well beyond the boundaries of a commune.[7]

Peasants – people living and working in small rural communities economically dependent on agricultural production[8] – inhabited this changing world. The peasantry was an important social and economic entity in nineteenth-century France and is central to the history of the country's modernisation. In 1846, 76% of the population (27 million people) was rural – even in 1872, this share was 69%.[9] Prior to the late nineteenth century, the life of this majority was difficult, precarious and inescapable. However, by the late nineteenth century the growing transport network

5 Roger Price, *The Economic Modernization of France, 1730–1880* (London: Croom Helm, 1975), 8–11.

6 Stephen Broadberry et al., 'Sectoral Developments, 1870–1914' in Stephen Broadberry and Kevin H. O'Rourke, eds, *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 80.

7 Price, 12.

8 Scholars dispute the definition of 'peasant'; see Teodor Shanin, 'Peasantry: Delineation of a Sociological Concept,' *Peasant Studies Newsletter*, 2 (January 1973), 1–8; Michael Kearney, *Reconceptualizing the Peasantry* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996).

9 Price, 214.

allowed peasants to move from community to community, and often from the countryside to the city.[10] By the dawn of the twentieth century, 'the era of isolation and semi-closed social and economic systems was over.'[11]

This end of isolation is the focus of the cultural histories that aim to explain how educated, urban and cosmopolitan Frenchmen 'typically placed country dwellers in the category of "peasants," an ambivalent category different from themselves.'[12] In art history, the most important of these theorists of cosmopolitan conceptions of the countryside are T. J. Clark and Robert Herbert.

In 1973, Clark published two books about rural genre painting and Realism: *The Absolute Bourgeois: Artists and Politics in France 1848–1851* and *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution*. These two books cover the same time period – the Second Republic – and investigate the social, political and ideological impact of the revolutions of 1848 on art created during the new republic. The *Absolute Bourgeois* focuses on political readings of the paintings studied while *Image of the People* is Clark's attempt to create a 'social History of Art.'[13] However, the social and political readings are ultimately intertwined – Clark argues that concern about the People's social wellbeing was central to the political discourse of the period.

The Absolute Bourgeois analyses the work of Jean-François Millet among other artists and poets through the lens of one question that Clark says the bourgeoisie asked themselves repeatedly during and in the wake of 1848: 'Were the People savages or heroes? When they manned the barricades,

10 E.g Laurence Wylie, *Village in the Vaucluse* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974); Harriet G. Rosenberg, *A Negotiated World: Three Centuries of Change in a French Alpine Community* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988); Roger Thabault, *Education and Change in a Village Community*, trans. Peter Tregear (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971); André Burguière, *Bretons de Plozevet* (Paris: Flammarion, 1975).

11 Price, 12

12 James Lehning, *Peasant and French: Cultural Contact in Rural France during the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1–34.

13 T.J. Clark, *Image of the* People (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), 9.

were they serfs fighting their masters' battles [...] or were they Barbarians storming the city?'[14] In the context of these politically charged questions about the role of the People, Clark asserts that depictions of common men and women took on strong political meanings. *Image of the People* complements this assertion with a particular focus on Courbet's *Burial at Ornans* (1849–50) and the strong and diverse critical reactions it provoked.[15] Clark uses the discussion of the presence of class division in the countryside funeral to conclude: 'the [proper] painter of rural life portrays precisely and only what is alien to the town [...] Millet's peasant is acceptable because he is distinctly other; his primitive grossness will not be altered by his stay in Paris and we, it is implied, have little to fear from it. He will stay a countryman, even in the city [...] he will not become a proletarian.' (ibid. 127–9; 145). This conclusion – that acceptable images of the countryside portray rural life as wholly distinct from city life and immune from the class conflict, politics and violence of an urban setting – has become a cornerstone of the study of rural genre painting. Though Clark only makes his argument for the very specific time period of the Second Republic, his analysis has since been broadly applied to rural genre painting at a series of different time periods and across different geographies.[16]

14 T.J. Clark, *The Absolute Bourgeois* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), 11.

15 Clark, *Image of the People*, 133.

16 A work contemporary to Clark's that expresses similar views about Realism (but less specifically about Millet and rural genre painting) is Linda Nochlin's *Realism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971). Griselda Pollock's *Jean-François Millet, 1814–1875* (London: Oresko Books, 1977) is also roughly contemporary and similar in spirit to Clark's book – it also deserves mention, although as a monograph it is less theoretical than Clark's work. There have been many people who have continued to repeat and build on Clark, Nochlin, and Pollock's work. See, for example, Albert Boime, *Art in an Age of Civil Struggle, 1848–1871* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007); Gabriel Weisberg, *The European Realist Tradition* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982); Holister Sturges, *Jules Breton and the French Rural Tradition* (Omaha, Neb.: Joslyn Art Museum and Arts Publisher Inc., New York, 1982); Alexandra Murphy, *Jean-François Millet, Drawn into the Light* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999).

Around the same time that Clark wrote his two books, Herbert explored the underlying demographic and economic reasons for the popularity of rural genre painting in the mid-nineteenth century. While it is shorter and less carefully researched than Clark's books, 'City vs. Country: The Rural Image in French Painting from Millet to Gauguin' has been just as influential and frequently cited.[17] Herbert begins his article with the assertion that 'latent or indirect imagery [...] themes of urban entertainment, suburban relaxation and rural nature dominate French art of the nineteenth century, to the near exclusion of the machine and worker, those basic constituents of the cataclysmic changes taking place.' (ibid. 44). Herbert argues that rural images are a reaction to what he terms the 'urban-industrial revolution' going on in France.

This conclusion is not so distinct from Clark's, although it is not bound to just a four-year period. Rather than use extensive quotations from a chronologically narrow sampling of art criticism, Hebert supports his conclusion by citing broad socio-economic and demographic trends – primarily urbanisation rates and internal migration. (ibid.) The growth of the cities was, according to Herbert, achieved at the expense of rural depopulation – a phenomenon that he argues contemporary cosmopolitan Frenchmen were aware of and concerned about. He believes this depopulation and geographical transition were the driving forces behind the taste for rural imagery in paintings and in literature. (ibid. 45)

Whether these authors make their arguments as primarily economic, social or political, they are in sync. Both arguments arrive at the conclusion that rural genre painting was seen as the anti-city. Furthermore, both believe that the popularity of rural genre painting is symptomatic of systematic nostalgia among audiences, painters and collectors for a simpler pre-industrial era – something Clark calls the 'rural myth.'[18] Though this nostalgic atmosphere has been demonstrated to be (at least in part) the creation of

17 *Artforum*, 8 (February 1970), 44–55.

18 Ibid. 49–50; Clark, *Image of the People*, 142.

dealers and agents managing the careers of 'peasant-painters,'[19] scholars continue to explain the popularity of rural genre painting as Frenchmen grasping for the pre-industrial past. In Michaël Vottero's *La peinture de genre en France, après 1850* (2013) – the most recent scholarly work to include several chapters dedicated to rural genre – the belief that images of rural life are an expression of nostalgia and a reaction against modernisation is repeated. The first sentence of Vottero's chapter dedicated to peasants in genre painting reads: 'La campagne et le paysan sont un véritable phénomène de société dans la seconde moitié du XIXe siècle. Face à la ville qui effraie de plus en plus, le paysan rassure.'[20] The arguments and theories about rural genre painting have not changed nor been reevaluated for forty years.

There are three particular flaws in these long-standing theories that must be addressed. These are sample bias, rushed conclusions about social and economic causation based on incomplete evidence, and inability to disaggregate supply and demand effects on cultural production.

The first weakness is one that is endemic to art history. Art historians' primary sources are works of art that exist – that have survived the wars, fires, floods and revolutions of taste that have happened between the time of creation and the present day. There are obvious advantages to basing the study of art history on works of art that are visible and that one can interact with and subject to formal analysis. It is, however, important to remember that extant artworks in known and accessible locations are the minority of works created during the nineteenth century.

19 See Alfred Sensier, *Jean-François Millet, Peasant and Painter* [Paris: A. Quantin, 1881], trans. H. de Kay (Macmillan, 1881), 3–22; Christopher Parsons, *Patrons and Collectors of Jean-François Millet* (MLitt. thesis, University of Oxford, 1980), 42; Julia Cartwright, 'Jules Bastien-Lepage,' *The Portfolio* (London: Seeley and Co, 1894), 11; Jules Breton, *Un peintre paysan* (Paris: A. Lemerre, 1896), 30; Christopher Parsons and Neil McWilliam, '"Le Paysan de Paris": Alfred Sensier and the Myth of Rural France,' 6, 2, *Oxford Art Journal* (1983), 38–58; Robert Herbert, 'Millet Revisited – I,' *Burlington Magazine* (July 1962), 295.

20 Michaël Vottero, *La peinture de genre en France, après 1850* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2012), 229.

This sample bias is a particular handicap when art historians are attempting to generalise about the relationship between a nebulous group of paintings and broad social and economic change. There is a mismatch between the two bodies of evidence being compared: the general change in a society is being analysed alongside a small group of paintings that may not even be representative of the whole population of relevant works. To place this problem in the specific context of nineteenth-century rural genre painting, Herbert, Clark and their followers base their theories on a comparison between a handful of paintings by well-known artists like Millet, Courbet and Breton (and a selection of critical reactions to these paintings) and modernising changes that affected millions of French men and women and their environment.

The second problem is linked to how art historians evaluate social history. Herbert quotes a few statistics in 'City vs. Country'. These include comparing a national subsidy for royal theatres and agriculture nation-wide, comparing the rate of population growth in Paris between 1790 and 1831 and between 1831 and 1851, and quoting the absolute population loss in the northeast of the country between 1851 and 1856.[21] Such piecemeal statistics covering varying time periods may succeed at sketching an atmosphere of urban-industrial revolution but they do not provide sufficient information about the complexities of modernisation. Sample bias is present not only in which artistic evidence is evaluated, but also in which social evidence is considered. These statistics are not enough evidence to support arguments that certain social and economic phenomena had a causal effect on the output of rural genre and were not simply coincident with it.

The final problem builds on this failure to evaluate and describe modernisation as completely as possible. Existing theories do not discuss how a complex process like modernisation may have had different effects on the different actors in the art world. Did these changes primarily affect the opinions and processes of artists or those of collectors and audiences? How did they affect each of these distinct groups? These and linked questions are not answered by existing theories, despite quotations from rural

21 Herbert, 44–50.

genre painters' publicity-conscious biographies. Instead, modernisation is presented as a monolithic block that affects the art world by provoking largely uniform nostalgia in both artists and in audiences.

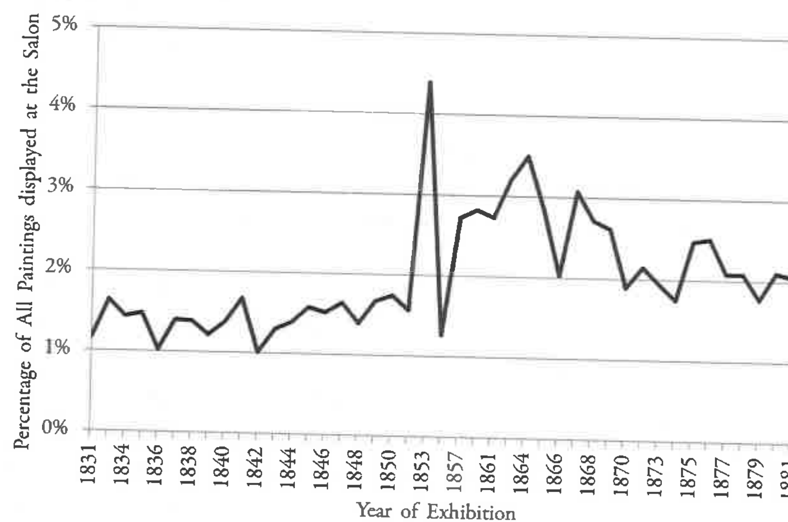

Chart 21: Percentage of all Salon paintings displayed that are rural genre painting, 1831–1881 (N = 114,455).

Digitising and making use of Whiteley's sprawling *Subject Index* corrects the first weakness – rather than studying the select extant paintings, the entire population of paintings exhibited at the Salon can be analysed. Chart 21 makes use of this population-wide information.[22] It is a graph depicting the percentage of paintings displayed at the Salon that were rural genre paintings. Rural genre painting represented a small share of painting displayed at the Salon between 1831 and 1881. Even as each Salon included more total works over time, the percentage of those works that

22 Sources: Jon Whiteley, *Subject Index to Paintings Exhibited at the Paris Salon, 1673–1881*, vol. 2; Garland Publishing, *Catalogues of the Paris Salons* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1977).

was rural genre painting hovered around 2%. There is a notable spike in the amount of rural genre painting at the Salon in the early years of the Second Empire – it more than doubles from just under 2% in the exhibition of 1850–51 to over 4% in 1853. Over the next twenty years it declines unevenly back to the 2% level. Paintings from this sub-period – notably of the 1850s – are the paintings that provide the supporting evidence for generalised theories applied to rural genre painting. However, as the graph demonstrates, these paintings are not – at least in terms of their relative quantity – representative of general trends.

Combining the full sample of rural genre paintings summarised in Chart 21 with census and other data about nineteenth-century France allows one to test and trace social and economic causation in the art world. Using statistical tests to analyse these data alongside each other allows for the correction of existing theories' second weakness – the failure to disentangle coincident and causation.

The third problem – better understanding the many channels by which the complex and vast process of modernisation affects cultural output – is more difficult to correct for. Increases and decreases in the output of any good can be explained by the interaction of supply and demand. This holds for art; changes in the number of paintings produced should be attributable to supply and demand effects. Of course, the Salon data is not price data from contemporary auctions or dealers' records – it is not a market of buyers and sellers. Instead, the exhibition stood at the centre of a constellation of commercial, political, intellectual and aesthetic pressures. How can one identify supply and demand in this complex system? Suppliers were the artists who had submitted their works for exhibition. The constituents of demand are more difficult to identify. Who were the consumers of art displayed at the Salon? They were of course patrons and collectors, but also the critics, juries and audiences who judged the supply to be good or not. With respect to the relationship between rural genre painting and social and economic change, can the forces inspiring the production of these paintings be identified in any useful way with this complicated interaction of supply and demand?

There are some variables that are easily characterised as either supply- or demand-side. For example, the increasing number of artists' colonies is

clearly supply-side. These communities providing a creative infrastructure in the countryside had a direct effect on artists and an extremely limited (if any) effect on the Parisian crowds at the Salon. However, in the context of nineteenth-century France, most social and economic variables could affect cultural production from both sides of the interaction between supply and demand.

Consider the growth of the railways – which in this project was measured by the cumulative number of railway stations throughout France in a given year.[23] The most basic assumption is that the railway is a supply-side variable, because it allows artists to access and paint the countryside. However, an argument can also be made that the railway shapes demand. First, in an abstract way, the growth of the railway may influence the public and jury members' feelings – either positive or negative – about the modernisation of France. Second, more concretely, if the railway connects a rural region to Paris or another major city, it is not only artists who can travel to that newly connected region, but art audiences as well. People may demand images of where they have travelled to or, perhaps, the places from which they emigrated. Finally, returning briefly to the supply side, a number of peasant painters – including Millet, Breton and Courbet – were among the emigrants moving from newly connected regions to cities. Using just this thought experiment, it is difficult to determine which ways the railway may be having an effect on cultural output and the strength of that effect. How can one escape this puzzle? The method in the existing literature was by fiat: scholars simply declared that the urban-industrial revolution generally and wholly affected the creators and consumers to arrive at the end result of more rural genre painting.

Running a correlation – a statistical test that aims to test this assumption without distinguishing between supply and demand effects – demonstrates the problems with this approach. A technical definition of correlation

23 Railroad data from François Palau, et al. *Le rail en France: les 80 premières lignes, 1828–1851* (Paris, 1995); François Palau, et al. *Le rail en France: le Second Empire*, 3 vols (Paris, 1998–2004); Karl Baedeker, *Paris and its Environs*, 6th ed. (Leipzig, 1878).

is that it is a measure of the extent to which two variables move in tandem. This tandem movement can be either positive – meaning the variables move together in the same direction – or negative – meaning they move in opposite directions. In addition to knowing the direction of correlation, one can also gauge how often two variables move in tandem by looking at the *correlation coefficient*. Correlation coefficients fall on a scale between 1 and −1. Two variables that always move in the same direction at the same time have a correlation coefficient of 1; they are perfectly positively correlated. Consider thunder and lightning, which almost always appear and disappear together – they are two variables that would have a correlation coefficient very close to 1. Two variables that always move in the opposite direction at the same time are perfectly negatively correlated. Sunshine and rain can provide an illustrative example. Sunshine almost always disappears as rain appears and vice versa. They are highly negatively correlated. Finally, variables that are *not at all correlated* have a correlation coefficient of 0. To break down this scale a bit further, there are certain benchmarks in interpreting correlation coefficients. These are presented below:

Interpreting Correlation Coefficients

Strength of Correlation	*Range of Correlation Coefficient*
Weak	0 to 0.2 (or 0 to −0.2)
Moderate	0.2 to 0.4 (or −0.2 to −0.4)
Strong	0.4 to 0.7 (or −0.4 to −0.7)
Very Strong	0.7 to 1 (or −0.7 to −1)

See Charles H. Feinstein and Mark Thomas, *Making History Count: A Primer in Quantitative Methods for Historians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 71–92 for further explanation of these benchmarks and correlation in general.

A correlation between urbanisation rates and the frequency with which rural genre painting was displayed at the Salon between 1846 (the first year for which urbanisation rates from a census are available) and 1881

is 0.0771.[24] That is an extremely weak correlation. In fact, this number supports the statement that there is no correlation between urbanisation rates and the display of rural genre painting. One of the central assertions about rural genre painting and its apparent intimate links to the 'urban-industrial revolution' appears not to be true. Evidence of correlation is indicative of whether or not there is even a possibility that a causal relationship exists between two variables. If there is no correlation, it is unlikely that there will be causation. If one were to test the relationship between modernisation and rural genre painting in this way, it would be necessary to wholly reject the hypothesis that these two variables are related to one another. This rejection would, however, be premature.

Using a more targeted form of statistical test for causation (called regression analysis) and time lags, one can test hypotheses about the relationship between art and social and economic change more precisely.[25] The time lags are the necessary step that allows one to disaggregate supply and demand. A lag means that rather than analyse the share of rural genre painting in 1867 (to choose a year at random) alongside the urbanisation, railway and other data from 1867, one compares the 1867 paintings to the social data from 1866. Why create this mismatch? Artists frequently do not paint and display paintings in the same year; instead it can take several years to complete a work. The lag better recreates the environment in which the artist was working. If the lagged social variables help to recreate the artists' creative context, what does analysing the variables without lags accomplish? It recreates the context in which the admissions jury and audience – which *did* make their decisions within one year – accepted paintings or judged those on display. Using lags, one can disaggregate the effects of social variables on supply (artists) and demand (jurors, audiences, collectors). One of the most telling examples of this difference is when one tests the effects

24 This is not statistically significant at the $\alpha = 0.05$ level. Paintings' data compiled from Whiteley's *Salon Index*; urbanisation data from Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, 'Social, Demographic, and Educational Data for France, 1801–1897' (Ann Arbor, MI, 2009).

25 See Feinstein and Thomas, 93–114 and 231–99 for an explanation of bivariate and multivariate regression analysis.

of civil unrest and strikes on the share of rural genre paintings at the Salon. When the social variable is lagged, it has no effect – this means that artists' decisions to paint peasants or not were not sensitive to discontent among the People. However, when no lag is used, the effect of civil unrest on the share of rural genre painting is consistently positive. This means that in a more turbulent year the jury appears to have accepted greater numbers of rural genre painting to be displayed at the Salon.[26] To refine Clark and Herbert's intuitions about rural genre painting, one of the perceived ills of urbanisation and industrialisation – increasing civil unrest – did have an effect on rural genre painting, but apparently more on the gatekeepers to its display than the artists creating it themselves.

This is not a refutation of the literature, but a refinement of it that speaks to the value of incorporating quantitative analysis and an economic framework into the study of art. The ability to overcome sample bias and systematically test relationships between cultural output and broad changes in society offer breadth and objectivity in ways previously beyond the scope of art history. However, these advantages should not be mistaken for replacements of existing methodologies used to study art. First of all, the data set central to this analysis is based on titles – an imperfect way to identify paintings that cannot rival the experience of seeing a painting with one's own eyes.[27] Instead, a data set like this complements the close analyses, intellectual histories and biographic studies that are already the constituent pieces of art history. Grasping the larger social, economic and cultural scope and drivers of a phenomenon like the demand for rural genre painting does not supplant the study of masterpieces, but rather improves it.

26 Greenwald, 75–99; Charles Tilly et al., 'Strikes and Labour Activity in France, 1830–1968' (Cambridge MA.: Cambridge University Press, 1974) accessed 15 August 2012 at Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (Ann Arbor, MI).

27 See Greg Petersen, 'Titles, Labels and Names: A House of Mirrors,' *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 40/2 (Summer 2006), 29–44; Jerrold Levinson, 'Titles,' *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 44/1 (Autumn 1985), 29–39.

ALISON MCQUEEN

Shifting Institutional Practices during the Second Empire: The Salon Lottery of 1859

An unusual event occurred during the Salon of 1859 when a committee organised and sanctioned by the state mounted a lottery of works of art within the government-run exhibition. My essay investigates the elaboration and meaning of this new enterprise. I will examine how and why a lottery came into being in 1859 and its significance for our understanding of Salon exhibitions, particularly during the Second Empire (1852–70). In the spring of 1859, the Salon became a public event in unprecedented ways as citizens had an opportunity to interact with the exhibition in a manner that had not previously been possible – they could buy lottery tickets for what evolved into a draw for over 125 artworks. The response was such that a broader cross-section of French citizens engaged with the visual arts than had occurred to date, including artists, members of the press, citizens in Paris and the provinces, people outside France, and many of the state employees and ministers responsible for organising the Salons. The lottery of 1859 is significant, I will argue, because it suggests how developments in democratic practices intersected with the visual arts during the 1850s and 1860s, and thus offers us new perspectives that challenge dominant views of the period.

The Salon of 1859 took place during the first decade of the Second Empire when the exhibitions were held biennially; with 3,483 works listed in the catalogue, it was around 10% larger than the previous exhibition of 1857.[1] It was the second Salon to be held at the Palais des Champs-

1 The catalogue for 1857 lists 3,483 items. While there were 3,894 items in the catalogue for the Salon of 1859, many group together works under one number. Pastels, drawings, miniatures, medallions and prints were regularly listed under one item