

Two Other Frenchmen and a Few More Americans

A June rove on the heels of the May rove, this time looking at art served up by Captains of Industry.

Géricault

An exhibit of drawings and gouaches by Théodore Géricault at the Morgan Library (founded by tycoon J.P. and featured in the film "Ragtime"). Gericault started the 19th century by breaking away from the classical mould and presenting spirited horses, athletic nudes and stormy nature, in free drawings and impasto paintings. (Jacques-Louis David was shocked.) He opened the way for a multitude of styles. His pupil was Eugène Delacroix who brought painting to the same Romantic pitch that Byron did in poetry. Though he died young, Géricault left a mark and an influence.

Millet

The painter of peasants, Jean-François Millet, in an exhibit at the IBM Gallery (seems an odd mixture). The bourgeoisie in Millet's day were alarmed at seeing peasants represented on a scale formerly reserved for heroes and the gentry. They were afraid it would signal still another French Revolution. However, the humble peasant stayed with his hoeing, digging and shepherding, so polite society became indulgent and sympathetic. Edwin Markham wondered what would happen when "The Man with a Hoe" rose up to confront the masters of society. What happens is that the peasant becomes more genteel and sits at the bargaining table with the somewhat less awesome masters. Today in France, farmers are the most coddled of all occupations. As for Millet, his solid drawings and colorful paintings are in favor again after a long period of disfavor.

And Some Americans

The Philip Morris building has an annex of the Whitney Museum and has been exhibiting paintings of "The Surreal City, 1930s-1950s." American artists became interested in Surrealism as a way of expressing criticism of modern urban life. They depicted the city as full of traps for the unwary, dehumanizing tendencies and a place of loneliness amid crowds. So it's a modified Surrealism with a social message. Among the artists exhibited are Peter Blume, Philip Evergood, Henry Koerner and George Tooker. A surrealist strain seems to persist in today's art - and has spread to illustration and commercial art. It's a fertile idea. Today's Surrealism seems to bypass the doctrines of André Breton about exploring the unconscious and goes back to the original idea expressed by Poe and Lautréamont of placing unrelated objects in juxtaposition in order to create a new reality. Far from "unconscious", much of it is carefully contrived. A "social message" may or may not be involved.

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1985 is the 100th anniversary of Niagara Falls as a public park. In the magazine New York Alive, a beautiful painting of the Falls by the 19th century artist Frederic Church is featured on the cover. In the back of the magazine is a modern representation of the Falls - a sad contrast - a sketchy caricature next to the fulsome Church painting. Church loved the Niagara Falls and was a great influence in securing it as a park. Another painting by Church, by the way, has fetched the highest price at auction of any American - \$2,500,000.

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And so, we'll go no more a-roving - until the next time.



Niagara Falls by Frederic Church



Centennial Illustration of the Falls