

accounts of Eastern European exchanges with Paris, such as Ewa Bobrowska's 'Polish Artists in Paris, 1890–1914', which makes an effort to situate the artistic exchanges within the precarious nature of a partitioned Poland. This adds to the work of Janine Ponty on Polish migration to France in the period.³ Nicholas Sawicki's very informative 'Between Montparnasse and Prague: Circulating Cubism in Left Bank Paris' could have offered a little more political and cultural contextualisation of Prague before the First World War, as it was then still firmly integrated in the multinational Austro-Hungarian empire – especially as the artists that he discusses opted to live in France after the establishment of the independent state of Czechoslovakia in 1919.

In their introduction, the editors attempt to map what is today a vast field of research, evidenced by their eighty-six footnotes. But their reliance on data and attempts at establishing what they designate as taxonomies – not to mention their quaint reliance on OED definitions – delivers lists, but ultimately fails to show how the various disciplines come together in this field. They acknowledge their use of Georg Simmel's essay 'The Stranger', which inspired the subtitle to this volume, *Strangers in Paradise*, but do not seem to realise that measurable data – the number of foreigners exhibiting in Paris Salons or the formation and running of institutions – cannot alone provide an explanation for what is essentially an existential problem: whether seen through the eyes of those witnessing the influx of 'the other', or the eyes of those experiencing 'being the other'. And we are left to imagine what they mean by the term 'Paradise' in this context. What is lacking is a sense of historical discourse, an awareness of how the field has emerged using different disciplines, not only sociology but politics, psychology and literature. And it must be said that in the period from 1870 to 1914 wealth and class were still the dominant driving forces. The same international elite owned, controlled and enjoyed every aspect of culture, which is why an impoverished Rosso or a Chagall aspired to enter their environment, and why a Sargent and a James could circulate and create – relatively unconstrained – in the safe enclaves provided by their wealthy patrons. As Pheng Cheah continually reminds us, 'cosmopolitanism precedes the nation state and nationalism in the history of ideas'.⁴

¹ A. Kaspi and A. Marès, eds.: *Le Paris des étrangers depuis un siècle*, Paris 1989.

² *Salonnier* and its rarely seen feminine, *salonnière*, were rather colloquial terms used to describe the critics writing about the annual Salons. Used as an adjective it was rather derogatory, 'une intelligence salonnière' denoting superficiality – at odds with the tone of Sargent's portrait of Reubell.

³ J. Ponty: 'Visite du Paris des Polonais', in Kaspi and Marès, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.45.

⁴ P. Cheah: 'Given Culture: Rethinking Cosmopolitan Freedom in Transnationalism', in *idem* and B. Robbins, eds.: *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation*, Minneapolis and London 1998, p.22.

Louis Michel Eilshemius: Peer of Poet Painters. By Stefan Banz. 768 pp. incl. 476 col. pls. + 53 b. & w. ills. (JRP/Ringier, Zürich, 2015), €80. ISBN 978–3–03764–435–5.

Louis M. Eilshemius (1864–1941): Die Entdeckung der Performativen Malerei/The discovery of performative painting. By Katharina Neuburger. 72 pp. incl. 24 col. pls. + 2 b. & w. ills. (Kunsthalle Göppingen, 2015), €20. ISBN 978–3–927791–88–6.

Reviewed by MERLIN JAMES

THE WORK OF the American painter Louis Michel Eilshemius (1864–1941) has enjoyed periodic revivals of attention since he was 'discovered' by Marcel Duchamp in 1917. He had by then endured three decades or more of neglect, even of growing ridicule. He had begun as a quite conventional gentleman-artist, producing competent touristic watercolours and characterful Corot-cum-Courbet landscapes. Around the turn of the twentieth century he had gone slightly, then spectacularly, off-piste, creating bizarre conversation pieces; quirky *fêtes champêtres*; piquant or melodramatic narrative pictures; outlandish novelty subjects; classical, tropical or orientalist fantasies (Fig.63); moody city- and seascapes; imagined military scenes; goofy vaudeville vignettes; plangent nocturnes. Most typically he contrived groups of cavorting and contorted – and often apparently levitating – nude bathers. His increasingly clumsy-seeming figuration could be summoned amid wild flurries of brushwork, often dashed off on cigar box lids, pieces of millboard, pages of sheet music or magazine covers. All this, plus the artist's increasing personal eccentricity, had utterly disconcerted his audience. He found himself excluded from commercial galleries and official American salons. His almost wilfully gauche efforts at self-advertisement – streams of indignant and opinionated letters to the newspapers, and self-published books, flyers and pamphlets – seemed only to add to his ignominy. He became infamous in New York as the embodiment of quixotic artistic failure.

The more bitter than sweet story of his reputation's redemption is often (and sometimes unreliably) re-told: how the jury-less Society of Independent Artists, based in New York, allows Eilshemius a chink of exposure in 1917; how Duchamp – head of the hanging committee – singles him out for praise; an article on him by Mina Loy follows, in the same edition of the *The Blind Man* that features Duchamp's *Fountain*. Then come two solo shows in the early 1920s at the Société Anonyme Gallery, run by Duchamp and Katherine Dreier. Avant-garde artists in New York adopt Eilshemius as a cause, rather as bohemian Paris had championed Henri Rousseau. He becomes a cult figure, exhibiting at progressive galleries. Perversely, he then announces his retirement from painting,

thereafter producing only ink drawings on his letterhead writing paper – quaint and cartoonish compositions in elaborate cartouche frames bearing cryptic mottos. With his paintings entering museums and prestigious collections across the United States, he devotes his final two decades simply to 'being Eilshemius'. Exhibitions proliferate, including one in Paris, where artists such as Matisse, Picasso and Balthus are said to admire his work. Having been hit by a taxi cab, he is confined to a wheelchair and housebound. He receives admirers, Miss Haversham style, at his mouldering family brownstone on 57th Street, and unscrupulous dealers make off with armfuls of works for derisory sums or on dubious sale-or-return agreements. A minor industry of Eilshemius forgery gets underway. A biography is published in 1937. As he watches his prices rise, Eilshemius himself descends into bankruptcy and dies in 1941 in a pauper's ward of Bellevue Hospital.

Eilshemius's work and career are considered afresh in Katharina Neuburger's essay, centred partly around the artist's pamphlets, notably *Some New Discoveries! In SCIENCE and ART* (1932). Neuburger takes Eilshemius's self-publishing as something more than a deluded diversion, suggesting almost that it is a proto-conceptual dimension of his creative activity. In *Some New Discoveries* he had offered 'directions' for creating paintings, with authorial intention apparently suspended and replaced by process. Certainly Neuburger takes seriously Duchamp's interest in Eilshemius, as more than the perverse or mischievous pose it has often been supposed. She re-examines the whole Eilshemius 'case', exploring his uneasy fit with American late Romanticism and Modernism (Whistler, Ryder, Blakelock, Davies), his individualism and resistance to stylistic consistency or alliance to movements and his half-conscious cultivation of an eccentric artistic persona.

Stefan Banz's expansive monograph goes much further. First of all, he persuasively identifies the broad affinities and many coincidences (even significant contrasts) that can be seen to relate Duchamp to Eilshemius. Banz points out numerous factors that must have interested Duchamp about the American painter, not least Eilshemius's oddly sexualised and proto-Surrealist idylls that anticipate, sometimes closely, the weird eroticism of Duchamp's *Etant donnés*. Eilshemius juxtaposes waterfalls with female nudes repeatedly, presaging Duchamp's use of an image of the Forestay waterfall in Switzerland in the background of *Etant Donnés*. (The site was probably known to Eilshemius, Banz feels, given the artist's Swiss origins and familiarity with the country.) Banz evokes Courbet as a clear source for both artists in the treatment of sexuality through landscape and the unsettling exploration of archetypes of femininity and nature. Other factors such as Eilshemius's distinctive use of a framing device – a window or view-finder effect around many of his motifs – chime strongly with Duchamp's fascination with voyeurism and peep holes.

Beyond his work itself, aspects of Eilshemius's personality and biography are also identified as likely to have piqued Duchamp's interest, starting with the very cultivation of a maverick, contrarian artistic identity. Personal circumstances such as, even, the lack of modern lighting and plumbing in Eilshemius's house and the dust-covered piles of paintings and artefacts amid which he dwelt, or the dramatic vicissitudes of his fortunes, would all resonate with Duchamp's keen sense of the stereotypical characteristics of 'the Artist'. The almost knowingly absurd philosophising, digressing and self-chronicling in Eilshemius's writings; his obsession with the pricing and marketing of art; his interest in intellectual property (copyright and patenting); his dabbling in science, invention and the occult; his endless role playing as ladies' man, musical virtuoso, marksman, mesmerist, multi-linguist, globe-trotter and all-around prodigy – all this would have had huge appeal for Duchamp.

While Banz's interest in Eilshemius begins with the Duchamp association, this book is in the end a celebration of the painter on his own merits. The author is at pains to correct the assumption by so many commentators that Duchamp somehow mocked Eilshemius, or referenced him simply as part of a conceptual strategy in relation to the institutions of art. Banz also refutes the verdict 'kitsch' (under which the artist has often been dismissed, or sometimes perversely celebrated), asserting instead the genuine lyricism and the expressive, symbolic or metaphoric potential of each image. Several are interpreted at some length, often as explorations of the artist's own existential predicament, his social and psychological isolation, his yearning for community and indeed intimacy.

As well as critical interpretation from a notably contemporary perspective (relating Eilshemius to Markus Lüpertz, for example, and to conceptual art), the book offers an impressive density of documentary research and scholarship, although not in conventional form. A large annotated section (a 'Novel of Facts') gives a chronological reprinting of critical reviews and notices on Eilshemius, interspersed with most of his own writings. The latter include polemic, poetry, memoir and anecdote from his numerous pamphlets and books, and his prolific letters to the press on diverse topics. This writing is frequently entertaining even when wrongheaded and fantastical. The verse is mostly doggerel, sometimes rivalling McGonigal in its madness, and Banz does exclude much of it. But what emerges is an urgent seriousness of intent behind the conscious or unconscious absurdity of all the artist's output. In addition, Banz gives a wealth of further information, including a list of collections, a bibliography, a discussion of fakes and forgeries, a timeline of Eilshemius's extensive travels and a list of the fanciful titles with which he styled himself, such as 'Great Transcendent Eagle of Art', 'Supreme Womanologist', 'Mahatma', 'Lord



63. *Untitled*, by Louis Michel Eilshemius. c.1916. Oil on cardboard, 44.5 by 32.5 cm. (Private collection).

Chancellor of the Art World' and 'Supreme Protean Marvel of the Ages'.

Banz's revelatory selection of illustrations, meanwhile, illuminates why Eilshemius, although remaining always a fugitive presence in art history, has cast a spell over many collectors and artists from his own time right up to the present. The reproductions here offer a spectacular range of often unfamiliar images, grouped by genre and period in sections such as 'Samoa Paintings, 1907', 'Seascapes, 1908–1910', 'Nightscapes, 1898–1916', 'Genre Paintings in Painted Frames, 1909–1913' and 'Calamity, Violence and War, 1901–1918'. Captions and commentary suggest the extent of holdings by figures like Hirshhorn or Neuberger (and how far both collections have subsequently de-accessioned), and the interest of recent artists such as Ugo Rondinone or gallerist-collectors such as Michael Werner. Overall, a far clearer impression emerges of Eilshemius's visual *œuvre* than from any other publication on him, including Paul Karlstrom's substantial 1978 monograph, or the excellent catalogue for the 2001 National Academy of Design exhibition curated by Steven Harvey (the most serious re-think of Eilshemius in recent decades).

The plates in this book show Eilshemius developing from a professional artist into an apparently 'outsider' or naif one, in a way that anticipates all kinds of modernist and postmodern deskilling and disturbing of ideas of taste and 'high art'. Coming close sometimes to Ensor, Redon or Munch, he broadly presages Expressionism and Surrealism. But his closest affinities are with very particular artists, themselves often peripheral individuals, such as Armando Reverón in Venezuela or Jack Yeats in Ireland. He can also strikingly predict the tenor of Derain's post-Fauvist landscapes, nudes and figure paintings – works for which, surprisingly to

some, Duchamp also had a certain regard. Like Derain, Eilshemius seems to take apart the conventions of painting and reassemble them in a magically approximate way that redeems them from cliché and reinvests them with fantasy. He creates compelling space and light in his pictures, however small or quirky, and animates his forms with remarkable spontaneity and energy. His alternating of high and lowly genres, his degrees of unfinished, frequently folksy decorativeness, occasionally mad feyness, and synoptic mix of classical, romantic, symbolist, orientalist and modernist tropes – all these make him finally a hyper-conscious explorer of the nature of art – specifically painting – itself. Stefan Banz's resounding volume, packed with encyclopaedic knowledge and evident enthusiasm for the artist, will initiate many new devotees into the Eilshemius cult.

Historical Perspectives in the Conservation of Works of Art on Paper. Edited by Margaret Holben Ellis. 608 pp. incl. 36 col. + 23 b. & w. ills. (Getty Conservation Institute, Los Angeles, 2014), \$70. ISBN 978-1-60606-432-0.

Reviewed by CATHERINE RICKMAN

THIS ANTHOLOGY IS seventh in the Getty Conservation Institute's series of 'Readings in Conservation'. It brings together extracts and independent articles by ninety-six authors as diverse as printmaker Ugo da Carpi, with his 'Petition to the Venetian Senate' in 1516, seeking a patent for a new process, to Vincent Daniels, scientist at the British Museum for many years, reporting on 'The Discolouration of Paper on Aging' (1988), and Jane McAusland, leading independent paper conservator, on 'The Practicalities and Aesthetics of Retouching' (2002).

The book is addressed to 'anyone with a serious interest in prints and drawings' but to this should be added the proviso that the reader must have an appetite for technical information. The collection does not set out to be a textbook or a manual but, nonetheless, an appreciative audience will include conservators and art historians with a particular interest in the materials and techniques of Western works of art on paper.

As a conservator, this reviewer was delighted to be led through these readings by editor Margaret Holben Ellis, Eugene Thaw Professor of Paper Conservation at NYU, whose energy and enthusiasm come right off the page. She and her team have undertaken the huge task of sifting through copious literature to curate a highly enjoyable collection, which will be indispensable to conservators seeking a philosophical perspective on their profession, and to art historians with a desire to sharpen their skills of observation.

The book is divided into eight parts: *The Powers of Paper*, *The Mastery of Drawing*, *Print-*