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Slaves Waiting For Sale: Abolitionist Art And The American Slave Trade



Synopsis

In 1853, Eyre Crowe, a young British artist, visited a slave auction in Richmond, Virginia. Harrowed by what he witnessed, he captured the scene in sketches that he would later develop into a series of illustrations and paintings, including the culminating painting, *Slaves Waiting for Sale, Richmond, Virginia*. This innovative book uses Crowe's paintings to explore the texture of the slave trade in Richmond, Charleston, and New Orleans, the evolving iconography of abolitionist art, and the role of visual culture in the transatlantic world of abolitionism. Tracing Crowe's trajectory from Richmond across the American South and back to London—where his paintings were exhibited just a few weeks after the start of the Civil War—Maurie D. McInnis illuminates not only how his abolitionist art was inspired and made, but also how it influenced the international public's grasp of slavery in America. With almost 140 illustrations, *Slaves Waiting for Sale* brings a fresh perspective to the American slave trade and abolitionism as we honor the sesquicentennial of the Civil War.

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Customer Reviews

“*Slaves Waiting for Sale* is a stupendous contribution to the field of nineteenth-century racial representation. It is canny in its structure, astonishing in the depth of its research, and immensely sophisticated in the deployment of research details—all in the service of a deeply rewarding argument. Using Crowe's painting as the backbone of the book is very smart, and the sequence of chapters, as McInnis charts the landscape of slavery from Richmond to Charleston to

New Orleans, and the resulting visual representation of that landscape, is engrossing. It is a book that will speak to readers in many different fields. (E. B. Robertson, University of California, Santa Barbara)

E.B. Robertson, University of California, Santa Barbara) "With this book, Maurie McInnis consolidates the reputation, earned in her prizewinning book about Charleston antebellum architecture, as a forerunner in the integration of art and broader cultural studies. This latest brilliant integration brings a new dimension to our understanding of American slavery." (William W. Freehling, author of *Road to Disunion*) "Slaves Waiting for Sale epitomizes the best of scholarship. Beautifully crafted, compellingly argued, and powerfully original, this book guides us through Crowe's painting in a far-reaching narrative that cuts across the antebellum South and transatlantic debates over the human cost and deeply contested ideologies of slavery. Her analysis brings to bear the evidence of works by other artists, archaeological excavations, literature, and personal accounts in a reading of Crowe's work and its array of contexts that is sophisticated, accessible, and truly exemplary." (Bernard L. Herman, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill) "This book reveals an iconic work of art in remarkable depth and breadth. With ingenious research and imaginative writing, Maurie McInnis unites places and facets of life too seldom joined. No one will be able to see the slave trade or nineteenth-century America and England, for that matter, in the same way after reading this powerful book." (Edward L. Ayers, University of Richmond) "This is an attractive book about an unattractive subject. Author Maurie D. McInnis . . . has produced a splendid art book that looks at the ugly face of slavery in the antebellum south." (Washington Independent Review of Books) "A wealth of information for visual studies and social science scholars looking for a comprehensive overview of the visual language of slavery and abolition." (Visual Studies) "McInnis takes the reader deep into the grim but lucrative workings of antebellum slave commerce through careful study of visual and material culture contextualized by meticulously gathered period descriptions, public records, statistics, photographs, and maps. . . . [Her] exemplary book makes a significant contribution to new scholarship and initiatives that document and share this unvarnished history." (Virginia Magazine) "Maurie McInnis has produced a most significant and sustained piece of work that takes up several neglected aspects of the visual archive generated around the North American slave sale systems in the mid-nineteenth century. In its methodological and formal diversity, the work is nothing short of a triumph. . . . McInnis's close reading of Eyre Crowe's remarkable masterpiece is a triumphant proof of the imaginative realignments that this book insists upon. This author's insights will be working their way

through slavery studies for many years to come. I think Maurie McInnis for producing this morally centered and precisely written contribution to the semiotic study of slave sales. — (Marcus Wood *Slavery & Abolition*) — “As we follow Crowe to the slave auctions he sketched, McInnis vividly reconstructs the geographies and everyday life of the cities that supported the slave trade and that Crowe tried to navigate for his eyewitness accounts. She also . . . thoughtfully compares the slave trade in Charleston and New Orleans, where auctions were staged theatrically in hotels and on city streets, with its less conspicuous, though no less integral, presence in Richmond. — (Journal of American History) — “Chronicling the thematic, topical and aesthetic developments in depictions of transatlantic and domestic slave trading, selling and auctioning, *Slaves Waiting for Sale* provides a nuanced examination of the nexus of visual culture and politics on the eve of the Civil War. . . . Its showcase of new and diverse primary source material, fashioned into a compelling case for the centralization of art in the study of the American slave trade, asserts Maurie D. McInnis — as [book] as a critical and necessary contribution to current scholarship on American slavery. — (Journal of American Studies) — “*Slaves Waiting for Sale* is a welcomed addition to the visual portrait of slavery seen through the vision of nineteenth-century artists and a study that scholars of the domestic slave trade will want to read. — (American Studies) --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Maurie D. McInnis is professor in the McIntire Department of Art and associate dean for the College and Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at the University of Virginia. She is the author of *The Politics of Taste in Antebellum Charleston*.

"*Slaves Waiting For Sale*" is an altogether arresting book. For anyone interested in the African American experience, this book relates the most crucial and essential moments of that experience. More than an art history--although clever and thorough if that were its only purpose--the author provides both detail and context of the slave trade culture. Her narrative flows smoothly even when she peppers it with surprising insights. Depending on the point of view you adopt in reading it, there is plenty to be angry about and continue to be angry about. Or, you can begin to understand why change has taken wars and so much time and feel relief that we have come so far.

You might expect an art historian's book to be full of academic detail, boring even, but this one is fascinating. It evokes the grit, beauty, look, feel--and even smells--of the Antebellum South. In many ways it reads like a novel, unfolding a British artist's first look at a Southern slave auction, and how

his experience affected his career writings and paintings. The gorgeous cover is the British artist's best known painting, depicting a group of slaves awaiting their sale and fate. This cover is an evocative clue to what the reader will find inside. Professor MacInnis' considerable research is presented nicely, both the text and the many line drawings, maps and art reproductions. The best compliment I can pay this book is: I learned a lot and enjoyed that learning word by word.

The material presented in this book is sadly lacking in many of our schools. It's glossed over in generalities...not here. This is a book worth having in your library if you have an interest in learning the good, the bad and the ugly. We cannot fix today if we fail to educate ourselves and our young about yesterday. Denial is the parent of stagnation and this book lays a foundation for critical thinking and a deeper understanding of where we came from as a nation.

An excellent historical book that brings in art as part of the history of the slave trade in the US. We read a lot about slavery but little about the "internal" buying and selling of slaves. This book is an eye opener.

I didn't know what to expect with this, but it was fascinating. It approaches slavery and the slave trade from an entirely new angle I have never seen before. The author points out the symbolism in the paintings which you would miss on a casual look. It really humanizes the poor souls who went through this. If you have any interest in art and/or the slavery issue, this book is for you.

Unfortunately, a very well written book.

"Slaves Waiting for Sale" was a very tragic description of that period of American history. Our 3rd president Thomas Jefferson while decrying slavery owed many on his plantation at Monticello. In this book the pictures on the faces of those waiting were very sad.

This is very readable and insightful book. Mr. MacInnis's description of the slave trade by region gives the reader a tour of slave markets from Alexandria, Virginia to New Orleans. His words are so evocative you can almost feel the pavement beneath your feet and hear the auctioneer. The excellent illustrations are backed up with in depth analysis.

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