
Accompanying the exhibition at the Yale Center for British Art and The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge that coincides with the bicentenary of the British naturalist Charles Darwin’s birth (1809–1882) and the 150th anniversary of the publication of his seminal On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection (1859), this book is one of the first to link Darwin to artistic traditions and to explore his considerable impact on the visual arts in Europe and the Americas during the nineteenth century. Here Donald (former Head, Dept. of History of Art and Design, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, England) and Munro (Senior Assistant Curator, Paintings, Drawings, and Prints, The Fitzwilliam Museum) compile twelve essays by distinguished university scholars and museum professionals, most of whom were trained as art historians, that cover three main subject areas: Darwinian theory and the picturing of the natural world, the descent of humankind, and Darwin, aesthetic theory, and nineteenth-century art movements.

In her introduction, Donald briefly describes the scientific and artistic influences on the young Darwin as well as his tastes in art. She also covers many of the main themes of the catalog, highlighting the work of her colleagues. Julius Bryant (Keeper of Word and Image, Victoria & Albert Museum), formerly Chief Curator at English Heritage, examines Darwin’s home life at Down House, in Downe, Kent, outside of London. Other contributors explore Darwinistic and Darwinian ideas in the European and American visual arts including how they relate to the struggle for existence, color, beauty, the visual re-ordering of the natural world, mankind’s relationships to various animals and races, photography, evolutionary aesthetics, sexual selection, and more. In their original studies, essayists feature illustrations and reproductions from scientific treatises and popular media, as well as photographs. They reference masterpieces by countless major artists, not limited to those by John James Audubon, Albert Bierstadt, Paul Cézanne, Frederic Edwin Church, Thomas Cole, Edgar Degas, Paul Gaugin, Martin Johnson Heade, Edwin Landseer, Claude Monet, Thomas Moran, Odilon Redon, James Tissot, and Joseph Mallord William Turner.

Consisting of a checklist of exhibits, a select bibliography, and more, this expertly-presented, lavishly-illustrated (100 black-and-white and 150 color reproductions), and significant publication belongs in many academic, large public, and special library research collections where museum professionals, scholars, graduate students, and others will be able to consult it. Strongly recommended.

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