



University
of Victoria

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

of

MELISSA BERRY

MA (Courtauld Institute of Art, 2006)

BFA (University of Lethbridge, 2003)

*“The Société des trois: Constructing Artistic Identities in Paris and London
1850–1870”*

Department of Art History and Visual Studies

Wednesday, April 15, 2015

12:00pm

Fine Arts Building

Room 109

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Allan Antliff, Department of Art History and Visual Studies, University of Victoria (Supervisor)

Dr. Carolyn Butler-Palmer, Department of Art History and Visual Studies, UVic (Member)

Dr. Lisa Surridge, Department English, UVic (Outside Member)

External Examiner:

Dr. Joan Greer, Department of Art and Design, University of Alberta

Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. Sandrina de Finney, School of Child and Youth Care, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies

Abstract

In the mid-nineteenth century, Paris served as the epicentre for artistic creation; artists flocked to the French capital in search of training, camaraderie, and, ultimately, success. Henri Fantin-Latour, Alphonse Legros, and James McNeill Whistler were amongst these hopeful artists in the 1850s. While each eventually created a thriving practise for himself, each also fought to establish his artistic career and identity during these early years. Because the narrative of a young, struggling artist is not an uncommon one, this stage is often brushed aside when examining the trajectory of these artists' careers. However, such a dismissal does not allow for a full contextualization of an artist's life and oeuvre. Fantin, Legros, and Whistler evidence this truth, both individually and as a small group.

While attempting to define their maturing artistic identities, these three artists deliberately elected to join forces and become the *Société des trois*. This era bore witness to the birth of the artistic avant-garde, which elevated expression and individualism; with this in mind, the decision to develop a closed artistic society is unique. Fantin, Legros, and Whistler adhered to specific societal tenets and maintained loyalty to each other in an artistic environment that praised the individual. There are many reasons that supported their decision; for example, the *Société* enabled them to transition from the student to professional phases of their careers between 1858 and 1868. Eventually, as the choices the artists made in the formation of their artistic identities diverged, the *Société* was no longer necessary, and each member went his own way. In light of their decisions to unite as a formal society, Fantin, Legros, and Whistler's lives must be understood through the lens of the *Société des trois*.