

# dis: connec- ted objects - finds and findings: the first of a series

## ***French painting and the Nineteenth Century with a Postscript by Alfred Flechtheim*** Burcu Dogramaci

I acquired the book *French Painting And The Nineteenth Century*, published in London in September 1937, from an online antiquarian bookshop a few months ago. The background to this is an ongoing inquiry into artistic exile in London after 1933 conducted in the course of a research project I have been leading since 2017.<sup>1</sup> I was interested in the volume because it contained the last text by the gallery owner Alfred Flechtheim, who, as a German Jew facing persecution at home, sought refuge in London. This text has received little attention, yet it relates how intensively Flechtheim tried to re-establish his livelihood in the British capital. Perhaps even more striking is how it documents his momentous work for the recognition of nineteenth-century French art.

*French Painting And The Nineteenth Century* is also a dis:connective object: it is connected with and results from Flechtheim's life in exile, but it also points to the fissures of exile and thus to an existence marked by voids and upheavals. At the same time, the book recalls an incomplete memory, one that is also related to exile. For Flechtheim's disenfranchisement and persecution, the financial decline and destruction of his successful galleries, as well as his emigration, banished his work to oblivion decades. Only with the major exhibition and publication *Alfred Flechtheim. Sammler. Kunsthändler* in the Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf in 1987 did Flechtheim return to art history. A major provenance research project in 2014, which involved 15 museums,

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<sup>1</sup> Specifically, the ERC Consolidator Grant research project 'Relocating Modernism: Global Metropolises, Modern Art and Exile (METROMOD)'.  
<https://metromod.net>

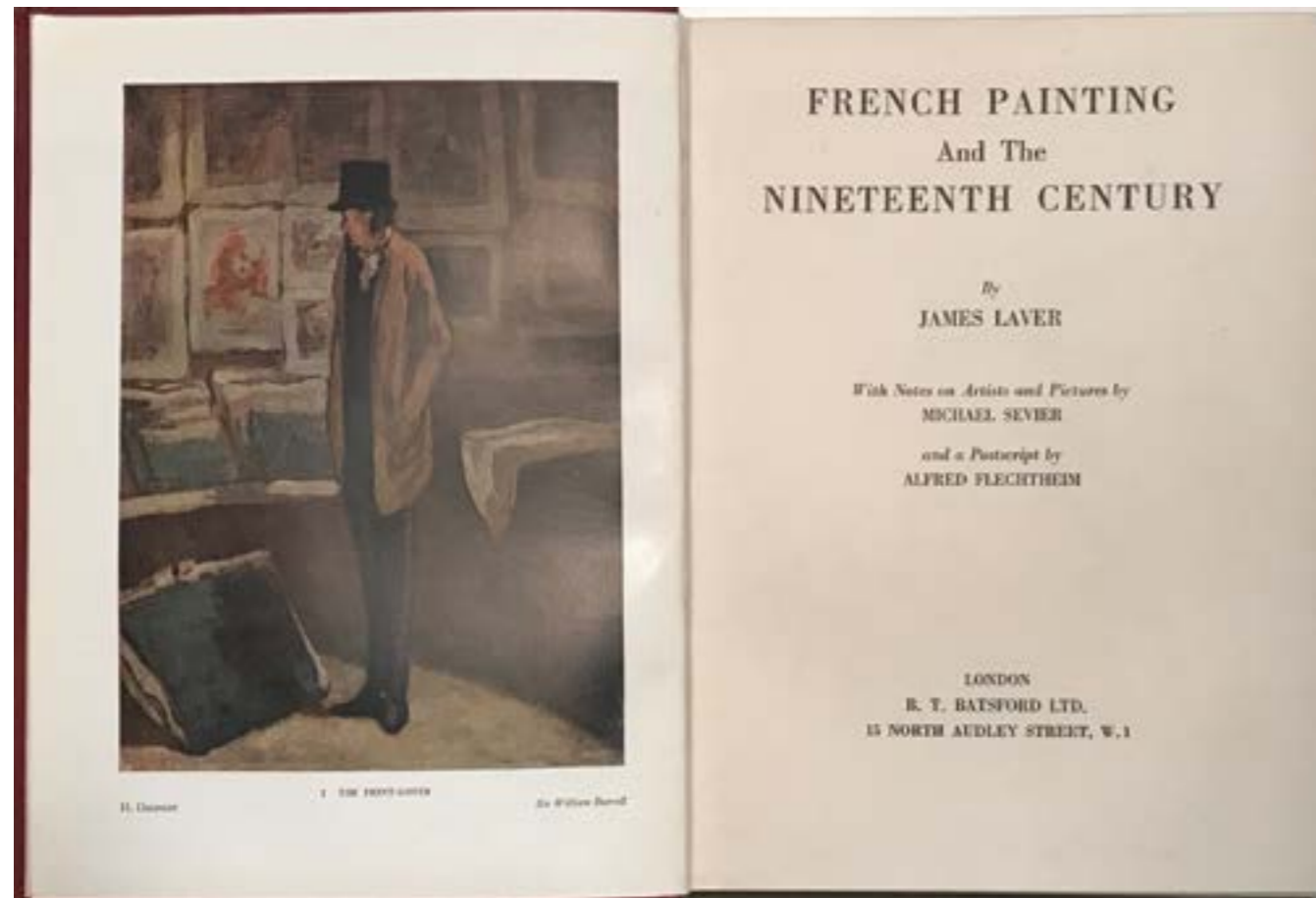


Fig. 01  
James Laver, *French Painting And The Nineteenth Century*. B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1937, with Alfred Flechtheim's "Postscript", pp. 101-114

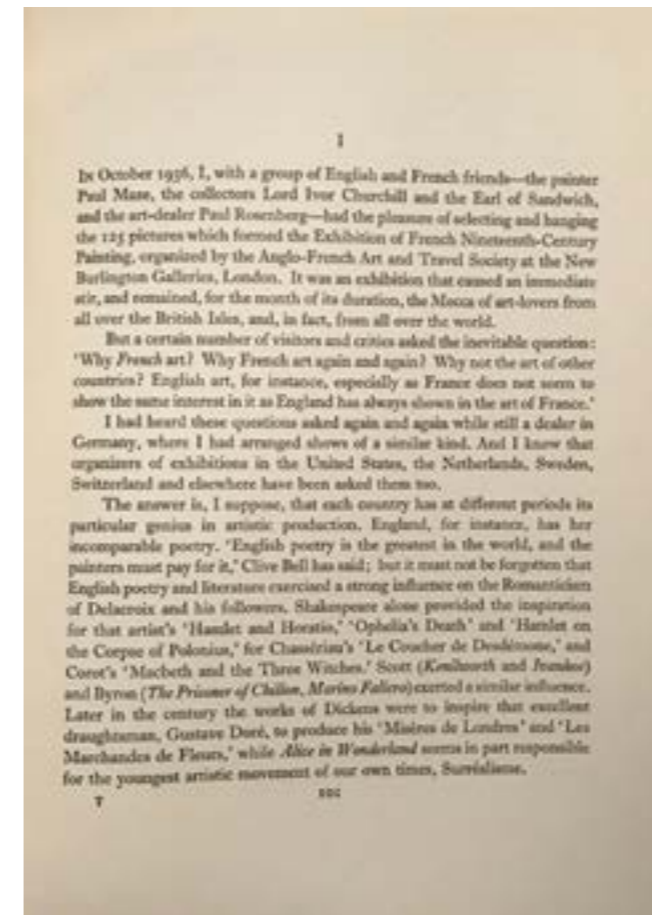
followed the links between items in the collection and the gallerist Alfred Flechtheim.<sup>2</sup>

Flechtheim was a successful gallerist, with art spaces in Berlin and Düsseldorf, as well as the publisher of *Der Querschnitt* magazine. Flechtheim exhibited the most important modern artists of his time, including Rudolf Belling, George Grosz, Oskar Kokoschka, Georg Kolbe, Pablo Picasso, Renée Sintenis and many more. When the National Socialists seized power, Alfred Flechtheim and his company, which was already struggling in the Great Depression, became the target of racist attacks in which he was targeted as a Jew, a cultural Bolshevik and an outstanding patron of the artistic avant-garde.<sup>3</sup> In 1937, the *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate Art) exhibition in Munich not only defamed many of the artists whom Flechtheim represented but also attacked the gallery owner himself in texts displayed throughout the exhibition.<sup>4</sup>

2 Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, 'Alfred Flechtheim. Kunsthändler der Avantgarde', *Alfred Flechtheim. Kunsthändler der Avantgarde*, 29 March 2022, <http://alfredflechtheim.com>.

3 Cordula Frowein, 'Alfred Flechtheim im Exil in England', in *Alfred Flechtheim. Sammler. Kunsthändler. Verleger* (Duesseldorf: Kunstmuseum Duesseldorf, 1987), 59.

4 Ottfried Dascher, "Es ist was Wahnsinniges mit der Kunst". *Alfred Flechtheim. Sammler, Kunsthändler, Verleger, Quellenstudie zur Kunst* 6 (Waedenswil: Nimbus. Kunst und Buecher AG, 2011), 394.



Flechtheim had been living abroad since 1933 and worked for the Mayor Gallery at 18 Cork Street in London. Later, he was also the official representative of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler's Paris gallery. Flechtheim's aim was to introduce French and German modernism to the London art market and to raise its profile. *Paintings by Paul Klee* opened in January 1934, and an exhibition on George Grosz followed in June the same year.<sup>5</sup> Although Flechtheim greatly influenced these and other exhibitions at the Mayor Gallery and provided loans, his name remained largely unmentioned.<sup>6</sup> Flechtheim also worked with the Agnew Gallery and was responsible for its new focus on French Impressionism.<sup>7</sup> Other collaborations included the Alex Reid & Lefevre Gallery and The Leicester Galleries. However, his contribution to the acceptance of continental modernism barely registered with the public. In London, Flechtheim – unlike in Düsseldorf and Berlin – could not conduct his business under his gallery name.

In October 1936, Flechtheim organised the *Exhibition of Nineteenth Century French Painting* at the New Burlington Galleries, which brought together work by Manet, van Gogh and Cézanne.

5 Frowein, 'Alfred Flechtheim im Exil in England', 60.

6 Dascher, "Es ist was Wahnsinniges mit der Kunst". *Alfred Flechtheim. Sammler, Kunsthändler, Verleger*, 331.

7 Frowein, 'Alfred Flechtheim im Exil in England', 61.

Fig. 02  
First page of Alfred Flechtheim's "Postscript" (p. 101) in James Laver's *French Painting And The Nineteenth Century*. B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1937

Alfred Flechtheim died in 1937. His body was cremated at Golders Green Crematory in London. Posthumously, the final text he authored appeared in James Laver's *French Painting and The Nineteenth Century*.<sup>8</sup> The book is dedicated to Flechtheim: 'In Memory of ALFRED FLECHTHEIM who died 9th March 1937 "Marchand de Tableaux Créateur"'. The book brings together many of the paintings shown at the *Exhibition of Nineteenth Century French Painting*. Flechtheim himself selected many of the images and edited the texts. In his postscript, he describes how he organised the exhibition at the New Burlington Galleries and why he always championed French art. His text formulates a credo that can be read as a reflection of his situation as an exiled art dealer and as a pacifist statement on the political situation:

*'Art need be none the worse for being national or provincial, but really great art soars above racial frontiers and belongs to the world. [...] Such an art, to borrow J.B. Manson's words, 'can be understood with few exceptions by the whole world. It affords a common meeting ground, and transcends all those considerations of imperialism and politics which are the cause of international strife and ill will.'*<sup>9</sup>

From the book *French Painting And The Nineteenth Century*, further connections lead, for example, to the exhibition *20th Century German Art*, which also took place in 1938 at the New Burlington Galleries in London and was organised in reaction to the National Socialist *Entartete Kunst* exhibition. Another connection points to the photographer Gerty Simon, for whom Flechtheim curated a solo exhibition at the Camera Club. This exhibition *Camera Portraits* featured 58 portraits. The exhibition also included a portrait of Flechtheim. Simon photographed Flechtheim around 1935, during the period of his professional re-emergence in London, which brought him into contact with leading galleries in the city.

The portrait continues a traditional convention. As early as the 1920s, Flechtheim was portrayed in severe profile by Hugo Erfurth and Frieda Riess. Flechtheim's striking features, with his distinctive nose and hair combed back severely from his face, were similarly emphasised in Rudolf Belling's *Portrait Alfred Flechtheim* (1927). Gerty Simon's photograph shows the art dealer in the approved side view. The face is brightly lit and stands out against the dark background. The picture is tightly cropped and focused entirely on the head. The dark circles around the eyes and the clouded eyelids give the subject a melancholy expression.

<sup>8</sup> Alfred Flechtheim, 'Postscript', in *French Painting and the Nineteenth Century*, ed. James Laver (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1937), 101–14.

<sup>9</sup> Flechtheim, 114.



Simon's photograph of Flechtheim and the book *French Painting And The Nineteenth Century* are important sources for reconstructing the gallery owner's activities and professional networks in London. *French Painting And The Nineteenth Century* provides insights into the artistic taste, aesthetic preferences and persuasions of the gallerist: 'The final choice of the illustrations, and much of the editorial work on the book were undertaken by the late Alfred Flechtheim, whose enthusiasm was a stimulus to all concerned in its production'. Flechtheim selected what was available to him from English and other private collectors and museums; in this respect, one can speak of an immediate reaction to the available opportunities or of a canon in the sign of exile.

Fig. 03  
Gerty Simon, Portrait of Alfred Flechtheim, London, c. 1935 (The Bernard Simon Estate, Wiener Holocaust Library Collections)

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