



HIDDEN  
COLLECTION

BY PETER TRIPPI

# THE RADICHEL COLLECTION OF EUROPEAN NATURALIST AND REALIST PAINTINGS

It's always cause for celebration when a private collection of important artworks is published for the wide world to admire and consult. This is usually done when a museum borrows these treasures for a temporary exhibition, so it's unusual — and impressive — when the private collector creates a book on his or her own steam (and dime).

This is the case with the handsome new 136-page book *Toward a New 19th-Century Art: Selections from the Radichel Collection*. Released this May, the volume opens with an intriguing essay by Brad Radichel (b. 1962), a businessman based in Mankato, Minnesota. Titled "Reflections of a Budding Collector, or, Why I Collect Art," his contribution is both informative and inspiring, which is why key sections from it are excerpted here.

Radichel and his wife, Elizabeth, have spent 20 years acquiring superb 19th-century French and Belgian artists (plus one Dutchman). They have been guided in this effort by the distinguished art historian Gabriel P. Weisberg, until recently a professor at the University of Minnesota, and his wife, Yvonne M.L. Weisberg. The book contains Prof. Weisberg's essay "A New Look: The Later Nineteenth Century Reframed," which leads to a thorough piece by one of Weisberg's former Ph.D. students, Janet L. Whitmore of Chicago, "Building a Cultural Identity: Belgian Realists and the School of Tervueren." The book then presents 17 French and 12 Belgian pictures in depth, offering large, sharp photographs taken by Charles Walbridge and insightful, well-researched commentaries by the Weisbergs, Whitmore, and their New Jersey-based colleague Prof. Petra ten-Doesschate Chu. At the back of the volume are their research notes, bibliography, and acknowledgments, underscoring that this is a serious contribution to scholarship.



MARIE BRAQUEMOND (1840–1916), *Félix Braquemond dans son Atelier* (Félix Braquemond in His Studio), 1886, oil on panel, 21 9/16 x 16 1/2 in.



---

PASCAL-ADOLPHE-JEAN DAGNAN-BOUVERET (1852–1929), *Young Woman with Oranges*, 1891, oil on canvas, 77 1/2 x 49 in.

---





## A JOURNEY THROUGH LIFE AND ART

In his essay — far more than a preface — Brad Radichel explains that his late parents, William and Darlene, traveled widely and filled their home near Mankato with artworks they acquired abroad. Though he ran the family business, William was “a fairly accomplished artist himself” and taught the basics of painting to his son, who took a few art classes while majoring in business administration at the University of Southern California. His parents particularly enjoyed buying contemporary French paintings in Paris, and this fascination with Paris, Brad recalls, “would later transfer to me, when I had the opportunity to live on the boulevard de Montparnasse for a month after my sophomore year of college with a family friend, and paint from an easel historical sites around the city. I was in the center of the cultural world, living a dream come true.”

In 1997, Brad and Elizabeth married, and a year later his family sold their business, an event that “enabled me to begin acquiring paintings. I stand on my forefathers’ shoulders, respectful of what their hard toil has made possible.” But instead of buying one expensive French Impressionist painting, the newlyweds “began investigating periods on either side of Impressionism.” Having ruled out Cubism and Barbizon landscapes, they were on the lookout when Brad returned to Los Angeles for a visit: “I wandered into Galerie Michael in Beverly Hills.... At the time, it predominantly showed Barbizon with smatterings of other late-nineteenth-century French landscape and peasant paintings alongside drawings and prints by great Cubist, Impressionist, and psychedelic artists... [Its proprietor, and now the Radichels’ great friend, Michael Schwartz]... recommended I contact the respected art historians Gabriel and Yvonne Weisberg in Minneapolis, since they were in our ‘backyard,’ to help me focus my future collection.”

Radichel continues, “From there began our intensified exploration of the world of art and my ‘schooling’ in important concepts such as the chain of provenance, the condition of a work, the nature of its imperfections, and the quality of restoration; the period in an artist’s oeuvre and a work’s importance within that context; the number of shows and exhibitions in which the

(ABOVE) JOSEPH-CHARLES FRANÇOIS (1851–1940), *Paysage à la Campine* (Landscape in the Campine), n.d., oil on canvas, 49 3/16 x 79 1/8 in. ■ (BELOW) JULES-ALEXIS MUENIER (1863–1942), *L’Abreuvoir* (The Watering Hole), 1891, oil on canvas, 61 x 61 in.





JULES BASTIEN-LEPAGE (1848–1884), *Portrait de Jeune Garçon à Saint-Gratien* (Portrait of a Young Boy at Saint-Gratien), 1878, oil on canvas, 24 1/2 x 20 1/16 in.





**JULES-ALEXIS MUENIER (1863–1942), *Aux Beaux Jours***  
(Beautiful Days), 1889, oil on canvas, 51 1/2 x 53 7/8 in.

Rather than hoarding their treasures, the Radichels have loaned them to museum exhibitions around the world and have thoroughly enjoyed the resulting experiences of meeting experts and other collectors. In his acknowledgments at the end of the book, Radichel graciously notes the encouragement of the dealers Polly Sartori (New York), Jane Roberts (Paris), and Maurice Tzwern and Patrick Derom (both in Brussels), and also that offered by the Minneapolis Institute of Art, led by director and president Kaywin Feldman. Even those who have so expertly framed his pictures are credited: Jane Westerlund (Minneapolis) and Joe and Frank Gillette (New York).



**LÉON FRÉDÉRIC (1856–1940), *Le Grand-Père*** (The Grandfather), 1883, oil on canvas, 43 3/4 x 36 1/2 in.

work had appeared, references to it in works of literature, and so on. I learned quickly that there was no substitute for scholarly due diligence and the confirmation of claims. A calculated risk can be taken on a relatively unknown artist at the Paris flea market at a bargain-basement price, but buying a major work for major money from a gallery or private owner requires certainty.... The Weisbergs have given us the peace of mind, associated with two lifetimes of experience and knowledge, in buying from the right period of an artist's oeuvre, assessing the importance of a work, and ascertaining of its value and context in the artist's body of work.

"Gabe [Weisberg] has authored numerous books and treatises on late-nineteenth-century art. Topics he has written about include the impact of the opening of Japan to the West and Japan's artistic influence on all media, the invention of photography and its use in composition, the turning of artistic control away from the Salon and back to the artist, Western industrialization and the dislocations it created, and the focus on light and color in the 'New Painting.' While the Impressionists exemplified this movement in the public eye, many other talented and influential artists helped to shape this transformation through incremental evolution and experimentation. ... [This] created an interesting pair of movements for my wife and I to focus on: European Naturalist and Realist painting. They would become the driving force for our collection."

Radichel goes on to address matters often explored in *Fine Art Connoisseur*: "There also was a feeling that these works were being neglected and might pass into oblivion. We felt there was a strong chance that talented artists, impressive compositions, and beautifully executed works of art might be rolled over by the forces of groupthink, Impressionism, modernism, and the PR of the contemporary auction market. The people and forces that inflated this market have brought valuations to previously unseen heights. Is this a bubble? Only time will tell, but the indicators are evident everywhere."

The Radichels decided to take matters into their own hands: "[W]e intended to use personal resources to preserve important works that fall outside the capacity or interest of the 'keepers' of the public domain in order to facilitate the dissemination of knowledge regarding these works. We felt an almost moral imperative to find the best examples of European Naturalist and Realist painting, and to assemble a 'museum quality' selection from the options we could discover. As paintings came to our attention, many spirited discussions have occurred among our 'team' members concerning the merits of a given work and its fit within the collection's theme. What has materialized, we are proud to say, is an impressive array of paintings presented for your review in this catalogue."

It is only right to give Brad Radichel the last word here: "This journey has added immeasurably to the life of our family. What artists are next? Which works by these artists are worthy? How will our collection evolve? While we have many ideas, locating the best available works continues to be the challenge and provides the impetus for the next adventure." ●

**Peter Trippi** is editor-in-chief of *Fine Art Connoisseur* magazine.

**Information:** Produced by Jim Bindas of Books & Projects (Minnesota), *Toward a New 19th-Century Art: Selections from the Radichel Collection* can be ordered via [accpublishinggroup.com](http://accpublishinggroup.com).