



# **Academics, Pompiers, Official Artists and the Arriere-garde: Defining Modern and Traditional in France, 1900-1960**

*Natalie Adamson*

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'Academics, Pompiers, Official Artists and the Arriere-garde: Defining Modern and Traditional in France, 1900-1960' is a collection of eight essays and a scholarly introduction by established and emerging scholars that challenges the continuing modernist slant of twentieth-century art history. The intention is not to perpetuate the vulgar opposition between avant-garde and reactionary art that characterized early-twentieth-century discourse and has marked much subsequent historical writing, but rather to investigate the complex relationship that both innovative and conservative artists had to the concept of tradition. How did artists and art critics conceive of tradition in relation to modernity? What was the role of an artist's institutional positioning in determining expectations for his or her art? What light is thrown on the structure of the French art world by considering artists from abroad who worked in Paris? How did the war alter modernist and avant-garde paradigms and force crucial changes upon art production in the postwar period to 1960? Particular attention is paid to the terms academic, pompier, official, and arriere-garde, originally used to situate the more conservative artists and works as second-rate or as the negative foil to the assumed radicalism of the avant-garde. By re-evaluating the work of artists pushed to the historical margins by such polemical descriptors, and by proposing alternative understandings of the aesthetic, economic, institutional and political factors that drive our ideas of avant-gardism and the modernist narrative in France, this collection of essays offers new routes to explore the terrain of twentieth-century art in France.

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