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Richard Taws

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Richard Taws : The Politics of the Provisional: Art and Ephemera in Revolutionary France before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Politics of the Provisional: Art and Ephemera in Revolutionary France:

In revolutionary France the life of things could not be assured. War, shortage of materials, and frequent changes in political authority meant that few large-scale artworks or permanent monuments to the Revolution's memory were completed. On the contrary, visual practice in revolutionary France was characterized by the production and circulation of a range of transitional, provisional, ephemeral, and half-made images and objects, from printed paper money, passports, and almanacs to temporary festival installations and relics of the demolished Bastille. Addressing this mass of images conventionally ignored in art history, *The Politics of the Provisional* contends that they were at the heart of debates on the nature of political authenticity and historical memory during the French Revolution. Thinking about material durability, this book suggests, was one of the key ways in which revolutionaries conceptualized duration, and it was crucial to how they imagined the Revolution's transformative role in history. *The Politics of the Provisional* is the first book in the Art History Publication Initiative (AHPI), a collaborative grant from the Andrew

W. Mellon Foundation. Thanks to the AHPI grant, this book is available on a variety of popular e-book platforms.

“The Politics of the Provisional engages with several historiographies within the sprawling subject of the French Revolution. It is very difficult to find a really original take on just about any aspect of the Revolution, but Richard Taws does. This is quite a feat.”—Katherine Crawford, Vanderbilt University
“What Richard Taws offers is a series of concepts with which to frame French Revolutionary visual culture: to the notion of the provisional, he adds currency, identity, circulation, temporal rupture, media transgression, and mimetic dissimulation. Not only are the arguments and formal analyses moored to original material, but they are so cogently structured that it is hard to see them as anything but convincing. Art historians have much to learn from the approach Taws takes. He renders an entire realm of images and objects foundational to our understanding of the production, status, and meaning of representation in the 1790s—and, in so doing, he develops models for thinking about the relation of the visual to political upheaval more generally. This is one of the most sophisticated accounts of material culture I have read.”—Erika Naginski, Harvard University
“This brilliant and profoundly original book makes us see the French Revolution with new eyes. Richard Taws is emerging as one of the major new voices in writing about the French Revolution and visual politics in general.”—Lynn Hunt, University of California, Los Angeles
“Richard Taws’s *The Politics of the Provisional: Art and Ephemera in Revolutionary France* makes a compellingly original contribution to the study of the visual and material culture of the French Revolution. . . . [It] succeeds in opening up new avenues of inquiry for scholars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries interested in the ways that provisionality was both an effect of the Revolution’s upheaval as much as it was a mode of confronting its contingencies.”—Katie Hornstein, *caa.reviews*
“[Richard Taws’s] book is packed with a wealth of theoretical insights, with borrowings from Benjamin, Bakhtin, Baudrillard, Freud, Taussig, De Certeau and Rancière. But this flexible conceptual apparatus is always grounded in meticulous close analysis and abundant archival research. *The Politics of the Provisional* is not only an exceptionally beautiful book, courtesy of the team at Pennsylvania State University Press; it is also an extremely important one for any scholars inquiring into the historicity and the modernity of the French Revolution.”—Tom Stammers, *French History*
“This book is both extremely well researched and theoretically daring, illuminating careful readings of primary texts with methodologies reaching beyond Taws’s field of art history into revolutionary studies, psychoanalysis, and anthropology. . . . Taws lays the groundwork for a way of doing history that relies neither upon the forced application of theory to a historical period nor upon the simple adoption of a linear progression of time that prevents the contradictions and complexities of a particular moment from emerging. Moreover, *The Politics of the Provisional* will be indispensable for architectural historians seeking to understand how structures of impermanence are equally central to issues of memory, history, and modernity as their more lasting counterparts built in stone, iron, and concrete.”—Iris Moon, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*
“The field of vision of French Revolutionary studies has been greatly expanded by Richard Taws’s pioneering study in *The Politics of the Provisional: Art and Ephemera in Revolutionary France*. . . . Taws’s incisive arguments surrounding the objects of his study are made all the more convincing by a sophisticated command—and articulation—of the technical processes, and the attendant challenges, involved in their production, most especially in the case of printmaking. Not only does this lend veracity to the at times necessarily imagined scenarios of citizens’ encounters with revolutionary ephemera, it also anchors the compelling theorisation of the images and objects at hand.”—Allison Goudie, *Oxford Art Journal*
“Taws does what all great art historians should do—he changes the way we look at objects we already know, and opens our eyes to objects we have overlooked, or indeed that we have never seen before. *The Politics of the Provisional* is a field-changer. Taws’s arguments, moreover, will have implications far outside of the field of art history; his book will also transform the way that historians and political theorists think about images.”—Amy Freund, *Visual Resources: An International Journal of Documentation*
“Provocative and pioneering. . . . In an age when newspapers are giving way to tweets, Taws has written a disquieting meditation on the nature of the modernity bequeathed to us by the eighteenth century.”—Nina L. Dubin, *Critical Inquiry*
“[This] book by Richard Taws is by far the most demanding and ambitious study to date of these diverse Revolutionary objects. . . . Timely and important.”—Philippe Bordes, *Kunstchronik*
“Succeeds as an exposition of the ephemeral art of the Revolution due to Taws’s imaginative choice of objects to be analyzed, his meticulous examination and perceptive analysis of the many, often obscure, features of this art, and his ability to weave his discoveries into a sophisticated and original argument that expands current understanding of the relationship of revolutionary culture to the politics of the Revolution.”—Kenneth Margerison, *American Historical Association*
About the Author
Richard Taws is Lecturer in the History of Art Department, University College London.