



## 'And Wot does the Catlog tell me?' Some Social Meanings of Nineteenth-Century Catalogues and Gallery Guides

<http://www.firstlight.cn> 2007-12-31

Of the various interpretative resources on art that were available to the Victorian viewer, the catalogue had a particularly immediate connection to the objects it described and was carried into the gallery for words to be linked directly to images as eyes travelled between page and painting. Casually consulted, pored over, brandished, fumbled with, the catalogue is a ubiquitous element in depictions of nineteenth-century galleries and museums. This essay looks at how behaviour with a catalogue was used to characterise viewers and stratify the gallery crowd. The catalogue could represent the interface between the idea of institutional, printed knowledge and the interpretation of the individual. The image of the visitor who carefully followed his or her catalogue, relying on words to explain images, played into narratives of both educating and limiting the viewer, while responses mediated by a catalogue threw ideas of 'correct' taste into conflict with a concern for integrity. I go on to examine the possibility that annotation allowed gallery visitors to renegotiate this oppressive characterisation of the catalogue. As a case study I analyse a copy of the official catalogue for the 'Art Treasures' exhibition of 1857 that has been extensively written and drawn in.

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