

Wingfield, Mary Ann. *Sport and the Artist. Volume 1: Ball Games*. Woodbridge, Suffolk, England: Antique Collector's Club Ltd., 1988. Pp. 359. Artist appendix, illustrations, index. \$59.50.

Mary Ann Wingfield attempts, in this the first of three books on *Sport and the Artist*, to describe how specific ball games evolved, and how the relationship between art and sport grew or did not grow. Her focus is sport in Britain and her work demanded painstaking research.

Her text begins with a short introduction about the emergence of sport in industrial and urban society of England in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. She argues that art and sport parallel the themes of society and that sport as well as sport art was impacted by the growing middle class. While sport flourished, sport art almost ceased to exist. Pre-twentieth century sport art was typically commissioned work. A rich sport patron of either a ball team or sport would commission an artist to paint some aspect of the sport. However, as sport moved from the upper classes to greater participation by the middle classes in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, sport patrons virtually disappeared. Sport art suffered and little was rendered between 1914 and 1940. A public and official call came forward to encourage artists to create new sport art works. A national football painting competition was launched in 1953. Even though 85,000 people viewed the finished touring exhibition, the showing was not considered a critical success. By the late 1960s the tide had turned as sport associations and sport buffs began commissioning art works. About the same time, public demand for eighteenth and nineteenth century British paintings of traditional rural sporting scenes sent prices soaring and rekindled interest in sport art. By the 1980s public demand increased for twentieth century sport art. Wingfield hypothesized that the dearth of sport art and the rekindled interest rests upon several factors such as the commercial success of sport, a gulf between the art establishment and popular sport, or too few patrons to commission sport art works.

Wingfield then describes the growth and development of 29 English sports divided into 19 different categories. Typically, she gives a cursory description of the game and its history. Her text was checked for accuracy by a professional representative of each sport. Each category has beautiful, aesthetic color plates of a specific game's sport art as well as numerous black and white plates. Each plate is labeled as to artist, period painted, titled, whether it is signed, size of painting, type of medium, and where it is now housed. The text describes how artists may have had connection with the

sport, with whom they may have studied, and how they were commissioned to do a sport painting. However, all artists discussed do not have artistic work shown in the text.

Sport and the Artist: Volume 1 demanded years of work and Wingfield is to be commended for attempting such a monumental task. Because Wingfield spent so much energy on this project, it seems blasphemous to be critical. However, the work is limited. Neither the curiosity of the historian nor the artist is satisfied when studying this text. It is doubtful that even a casual reader would enjoy the text for the same reasons.

The historical descriptions of each section read like the fare offered in sport skill textbooks about a sport's historical record, as well they should, because sport associations were Wingfield's accuracy checks. We are told the whos, whats, and whens but Wingfield does nothing to satisfy the whys. Wingfield gives cursory background about the 29 sports but it is doubtful that any reader would remember any of this information longer than turning to the next page. As such, the text is tedious and boring to read.

The art description has the same deadly quality. We are told who the artist is and are given a *brief* description of the work, but nothing about the painting is revealed. That is, why was this work done? Was the style typical of the period or was there anything unusual about the work? Of course, the existential nature of the artist can never be known, but could we know more about why this artist became involved with sport art? Is the style of work typical of the period? Is there anything unusual about the work? Does the work give an accurate portrayal of the sport?

Wingfield does not educate us about art. She only tells us that the art exists. What a marvelous opportunity for us non-artists to learn about why art is or why an artist performs. For example, in her American football section (we are never told why we have American football in the midst of all British sports and art) is a beautiful plate of Joe Theisman done by Larry Carrol. Wingfield does not explain why this work was commissioned, if it was, or what style was used. To an untrained eye, the work seems to have a collage effect. Why was the artist giving this effect? Was there anything unusual about the kneeling pose? Or the look in Joe's eye? Or, the condition of the uniform? Was the artist trying to convey something about Joe to us?

Wingfield also never tells us why she included or excluded work. The appendix does note that specific work was excluded and not everything is portrayed, but WHY? The reader could not know unless some hidden meanings are available to an art connoisseur.

Even if the reader read this text just for enjoyment, the entertaining quality is limited. There is no hook, no enticement to keep the reader interested. The included art is beautiful but leaves the reader imagining what could have been.

In her introduction, Wingfield quotes a curator who was dismayed with the 1953 football sport art exhibition which was to rekindle sport art in Britain. The

quote rings true to her own work, “It irritated those that knew about football [sport] and failed to satisfy those that knew about art.”

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