

Reviews

edited by
Eva-Maria Müller and Christian Quendler

***Uplift: Visual Culture at the Banff School of Fine Arts.* By PearlAnn Reichwein and Karen Wall (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 352pp.**

Danielle Raad, Yale University Art Gallery

DOI: [10.47060/jaaas.v2.i2.127](https://doi.org/10.47060/jaaas.v2.i2.127)

The Banff School of Fine Arts was envisioned in the 1930s by its founder as the “Salzburg of America.” Salzburg is home to an annual festival of music and drama where visitors flock to the Alps in the summertime to listen to Mozart and participate in the production of Austrian national culture. The Banff School was conceived as a metaphorical Salzburg, a locus of art and culture in the Rocky Mountains linked to notions of cosmopolitan Canadian nationalism. Located within Banff National Park in Alberta, Canada, the Banff School was established by Donald Cameron in 1933 as the Banff School of Drama. The institution has undergone several name changes: in 1936, it was renamed to the Banff School of Fine Arts and today, it is known as the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity. *Uplift: Visual Culture at the Banff School of Fine Arts*, by PearlAnn Reichwein and Karen Wall, is a history of the Banff School during the first four decades of its existence. The book traces the school’s inception and development between the years 1933 and 1974. It considers how, as an institution of arts extension education, the Banff School is intertwined in a web of cultural production, tourism, and conceptions of the mountain landscape in Canada’s first national park. The authors investigate the ways in which the Banff School, a cultural outpost in western Canada, influenced the development of visual culture, public art, adult extension education, and the meaning of citizenship in twentieth-century Canada.

Both authors of this book are professors at public research universities in Alberta. PearlAnn Reichwein is Professor of Kinesiology, Sport, and Recreation at the University of Alberta and studies Canada’s social and environmental history, specifically focusing on the mountains in western Canada. Her research spans environmental history, tourism, recreation, sport, leisure, and public policy. In Reichwein’s previous

book, *Climber's Paradise: Making Canada's Mountain Parks, 1906 to 1974* (2014),¹ she considered the role of the sport of alpinism in the cultural production of national parks and mountain landscapes. *Uplift* is a logical continuation of this scholarship, treating the role of visual art in producing Canada's parks and landscapes. A mountaineering guide and interpreter in Banff National Park, Reichwein possesses intimate, bodily knowledge of the Canadian Rockies. Karen Wall is a Professor of Communication Studies at Athabasca University. Her work centers around the production of community arts and heritage, First Nations culture and reconciliation, and cultural and public arts policy. Wall investigates the ways in which cultural production shapes heritage, space, and power relations. She has studied artist-in-residencies, written about the links between the oil industry, visual art, and democratic cultural development, and published the first comprehensive social history of sports in Alberta. The authors co-wrote earlier iterations of components of their study of the Banff School of Fine Arts, and it is clear that well over a decade of research and writing has gone into producing this book.

Uplift is the first history of the Banff School of Fine Arts. The historical narrative presented therein is comprehensive and investigative. It is a critical history driven by clearly outlined research questions aimed at understanding how the Banff School facilitated interactions between art, tourism, and extension education to inform understandings of modern Canadian citizenship. The book is made up of seven core chapters between the introduction and conclusion. Rather than a chronological structuring, each chapter looks through a different lens at the major questions and themes across the decades under purview. The individual chapters can stand on their own for researchers looking to target their reading. Still, they come together to form a cohesive whole comprised of several different facets to the history of the Banff School.

Chapter 1, "Uplifting the People: Extension Education and the Arts," provides an overview of adult art extension education in twentieth-century Alberta, describing the broader social context within which the Banff School emerged. Community arts education and populist participation in cultural production were considered integral to the development of the economy and a modern democratic society. In Chapter 2, "Branding Banff: Arts Education, Tourism, and Nation Building," an analysis of the print and film media used to market Banff to the postwar middle class is used to show how both the school and park participated in the development of Canadian tourism and national identity within a symbolic mountain landscape. The Banff School was "an educational setting that worked to produce spatial imaginaries of place and tourism" (49). The concept of the spatial imaginary is further explored in Chapter 3, "Building a 'Campus in the Clouds': Space, Design, Modernity." This chapter considers the modernist campus architecture and the ways in which the built environment

urbanized the park and reinforced specific ways of seeing the landscape.

The subsequent two chapters include in-depth treatments of two subjects of visual arts production at the Banff School of Fine Arts: landscape painting and portraiture. Chapter 4, “Wholesome Understandable Pictures³: Practices of Landscape Painting and Production of Landscapes,” explores how artistic representations of the Canadian mountain landscape, driven by economic and political imperatives, were codified and linked to a nationalist iconography. Like the mountain landscape, Indigenous people were subjects for the artists at the Banff School, who acted as “cultural intermediaries in the process of shaping notions of Indigenous identity” (170). Chapter 5, “Presence and Portrait: Indigeneity in the Park,” treats the Euro-Canadian exclusion and erasure of Indigenous people from Banff and their subsequent reinsertion through performances and portrait staging for the benefit of artists and tourists. The final two core chapters of *Uplift* are about the teachers and students of the Banff School. Chapter 6, “Leading Artists of the World³: Teachers as Tourist Attractions and Pedagogues,” explores the role of the teachers, while Chapter 7, “Some Paint, Some Tan³: Students Coming to the Mountains,” considers the students. Artist-teachers are imported to Banff as temporary residents: their movement and instruction contributed to expanding mainstream art networks. The students, both professional and amateur, are also vacationers and cultural producers.

Uplift is richly narrated with quotes from primary source documents including student and teacher correspondence, administrative records, photographs and posters, newspaper and magazine clippings, and instructor curricula. Each chapter includes several grayscale scans of archival photographs and advertisements as well as extensive endnotes. The endnotes and comprehensive bibliography of secondary sources are appropriate for researchers looking to delve further into these topics.

The authors engage deeply with the circuit of culture concept, conceiving of the Banff School as a locus around which was fostered a regional circuit of cultural products, producers, consumers, and attitudes. This circuit was “a social reproduction of aesthetics, practices, and products that flowed from producers to consumers and back, with implications beyond the fine arts” (16). While the school did not produce a unique style of art, it reinforced certain ways of seeing Canadian mountains and nature and produced people who engaged in the circuit on different levels. The characters in the story include administrators, teachers, students, artists, tourists, and residents. These categories are blurry; one major theme throughout the book is the overlapping roles and complex identities of the people who participated in the Banff School in the twentieth century. Teachers and students produce and consume the mountain landscape and, especially the female students, were both tourist-artists and tourist attractions and publicity props themselves. As these themes are revis-

ited and exemplified throughout the book, the reader gains an understanding of the complexity of identity as well as the nodes and interactions at play in the circuit of culture.

Uplift is a history of art that is not art historical. It is a story of art production that does not prioritize style and individual works, nor does it foreground famous artists. It is rather a story about the impact of art education and the contributions of amateurs, women, and Indigenous people. The links between extension education in Alberta, the development of tourism, and post-war Canadian nation-building are deftly teased out from the historical records. The authors, too, successfully convey the argument that the selective production of visual culture at Banff reinforced the construction of the tourist gaze and a dominant, collective way of viewing the Canadian landscape.

In the conclusion, the authors are hopeful about the impact this book can have on discussions about the role of the fine arts and adult education in society. But how can we reconcile this use of the Banff School as a case study for ways to incorporate art and the humanities in public life with its role in developing dominant ways of seeing Canadian nature and identity? One outcome of this is the exclusion of coal mining and environmental exploitation, which tacitly allows these activities to continue by denying their existence in visual representations of the landscape. Omitted, too, is a discussion of the alternative service camps in Banff during the Second World War. Were the administrators, teachers, or students at the Banff School unaware of the forced laborers in the park? Further attention could also be paid to environmental policy in the twentieth century. What role did Canada's first conservation movement play in promoting art production or enrollment at the Banff School? These are some of the questions I was left wondering after reading.

Uplift is appropriate for both scholarly and popular audiences. It is a detailed yet readable case study for anyone interested in learning about the history of the Banff School of Fine Arts in particular, or the impact arts education can have on a nation's politics and ideology. PearlAnn Reichwein and Karen Wall adroitly weave together a wealth of primary source information to show how the Banff School was embedded in a complex network of interactions between national park tourism, art, adult extension education, and cultural policy.

Note

- 1 PearlAnn Reichwein, *Climber's Paradise: Making Canada's Mountain Parks, 1906 to 1974* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2014).

***Peak Pursuits: The Emergence of Mountaineering in the Nineteenth Century.* By Caroline Schaumann (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 365pp.**

Eva-Maria Müller, University of Innsbruck

DOI: [10.47060/jaaas.v2i2.141](https://doi.org/10.47060/jaaas.v2i2.141)

Caroline Schaumann's monograph on the pursuit of peaks in the nineteenth century changes preconceived notions about mountains and mountaineering. Although *Peak Pursuits* highlights tropes familiar to mountain studies and does so via a range of prominent alpinists representative of the era, the book is a deliberate move away from a reading of mountaineering in the widely studied contexts of empire, Romanticism, and scientism. Instead, Schaumann, an avid climber herself, proposes looking at nineteenth-century alpinism through "the embodied experience of the mountaineer" (4). This corporeal awareness allows her to emphasize the ambivalences, incongruities, and paradoxes of the sport. Mountain studies has long established that mountaineering emerged at the nexus of conflicting discourses, but not since David Robbins exposed the sport's inherent contradictions has anyone shown quite such a profound interest in them.¹ *Peak Pursuits* approaches the semantic and affective powers of physical experience with the dedication previously reserved for analyzing scientific, aesthetic, and imperial alpine motivations. Schaumann attempts for the recognition of physical experiences in mountain studies what scholars such as Marjorie Hope Nicolson, Philipp Felsch, and Peter Hansen have done for understanding the aesthetic, scientific, and imperial forces exercised against mountains. She is less interested in solving the discursive mysteries behind the "many inconsistencies and controversies" (154–55) in mountaineering than in describing the materiality of climbs and showing how these physical sensations complicate dominant frameworks.

The book is structured into three parts and moves effortlessly between leading figures and prime sites of European and American mountaineering in the long nineteenth century. Part One follows Alexander von Humboldt's American journeys, traces his departure from "paradigms such as the European sublime and scientific enlightenment," and portrays a language of mountaineering that "oscillates between superlatives and negation, amazement and protest, exaggeration and humility, detailed measurement and silence" (16). Having set the stage for the book's "Humboldtian history" (4), which mediates between discursive contradictions, bodily sen-