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Queer Aesthetics and Its Others: Human Autonomy and Nonhuman Subjugation in the *Passy Cravat* (1864)

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Abstract

In 1864, four French artists—Nathalie Micas, Rosa Bonheur, Isidore Bonheur, and Paul Chardin—gathered at Rosa Bonheur's château in By-Thomery, a hamlet adjacent to the Fontainebleau forest. At the château's main studio, the community members—connected through romance, blood, and friendship—crafted the *Passy Cravat*, or *Parody of By's Inhabitants*, an experimental multi-media work in gouache, ink, and black pencil on canvas. In 1860, Rosa Bonheur, a celebrated animal painter, and Nathalie Micas, an amateur painter, engineer, and medical practitioner, moved to By from Paris with Micas's mother and a menagerie of nonhuman animals used as pets and artist models. Red bands divide the *Passy Cravat* into rhombuses and triangles, each constituting a space on the estate, which the artists filled with irreverent caricatures of By's human and nonhuman residents. This paper argues that the *Passy Cravat*, a work that has thus far been overlooked by art historians, is a prime example of nineteenth-century queer aesthetics because it constitutes a historically specific movement away from institutional classifications of genre and medium by a community that tinkered with the limitations of heteronormative life. The paper contends that queer aesthetics in the *Passy Cravat* are reliant upon the artists' approaches to citizenship and human–animal relations. Ultimately, the *Passy Cravat* reveals By-Thomery to be a messy nexus of human autonomy and nonhuman subjugation bound to conceptions of belonging in the Second Empire (1852–1870).

Keywords: Rosa Bonheur; *Passy Cravat*; *Animalièr*; queerness; queer aesthetics; citizenship; kinship; Second Empire

1. Introduction

On 12 June 1860, Rosa Bonheur (1822–1899), a French animal painter celebrated for her attention to the nonhuman form, penchant for cross-dressing, and lifelong same-sex sexual relationships, relocated from Paris to Thomery, a small village in north-central France.[1] With 50,000 francs, she purchased the château of By, a 7.5-acre estate replete with a seigneurial house and an arboraceous park that bordered the Fontainebleau forest. Bonheur moved to By-Thomery with her partner Nathalie Micas (1824–1889)—an amateur artist, veterinarian, and engineer—Nathalie's mother Henriette Briolle-Micas (1806–1875), and a menagerie of nonhuman animals used as pets and artist models, including oxen, donkeys, cows, dogs, sheep, horses, goats, lambs, and birds. Their move to By was facilitated by Bonheur's success with *The Horse Fair* (Figure 1) (1852–1855) at the Salon of 1853.[2] She sold *The Horse Fair*, a dynamic and large-scale oil painting depicting a horse market on the Boulevard de l'Hôpital in Paris, to her dealer Ernest Gambart (1814–1902) for 40,000 francs in 1855, after which the work was exhibited throughout Britain and was eventually purchased by New

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York's Cornelius Vanderbilt in 1887.[3] The sale of the work to Gambart and its subsequent engraving by British artist Thomas Landseer (1795–1880), made Bonheur a commercial success in France, Britain, and the United States. At the end of her life, she recounted to Anna Klumpke (1856–1942), her biographer and romantic partner after Nathalie Micas's death, "For a long time now my paintings have been well received by art lovers far and wide. That has earned me lots of money and let me live down here at By since 1860" (Klumpke 1997, p. 282).



Figure 1. Rosa Bonheur, *The Horse Fair*, 1852–1855, oil on canvas, 244.5 cm × 506.7 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Cornelius Vanderbilt, 1887. In the Public Domain.

The sapphic lifeworld the women co-created is instantiated in the *Passy Cravat*,[4] or *Parody of By's Inhabitants* (Figure 2) (1864), an experimental work in gouache, ink, and black pencil on canvas that can neither be fully categorized as a painting nor a sketch.[5] Isidore Bonheur (1827–1901), one of Rosa's younger brothers, and Paul Chardin (1833–1918), a friend of the family, collaborated with Rosa Bonheur and Nathalie Micas on the composition. The *Passy Cravat* is named for Antoine Passy (1792–1873), a geologist, botanist, and government official who was a close friend of the By-Thomery community. Chardin shared the genesis of the *Passy Cravat* with Bonheur biographer Theodore Stanton (1851–1925):

In the sixties I often went to By and made long stays in the little village tavern. Every evening after dinner, I would go over to Rosa Bonheur's and finish the evening in her studio. . .I would generally find her smoking a cigarette, with her beagle, Ramoneau, and her Scotch terrier, Wasp, lying on a larger deer-skin at her feet. . .Rosa Bonheur, always so silent and meditative when engaged in painting, now gave free rein to her imagination and generally monopolised the conversation. . .Sometimes she would interrupt the gravest discussion with an unexpected sally or some schoolboy prank. It was in one of these skylarking moods that she gave vent to the idea of the illustrated Passy Cravat. . .M. Antoine Passy was a deputy and a member of the Institute, as is his son, M. Louis Passy. He often wore when in the country cravats covered with flowers. He had sent us a rhyme in commemoration of my night adventure in one of the trees of the Fontainebleau forest. 'Let us give him some nonsense in return,' exclaimed Rosa Bonheur on one of these autumnal evenings of 1864. . .she went to a closet and got a large piece of sheeting which she stretched over a table and marked off in lozenge-shaped spaces. Then, during the following evenings, all those present at the house were invited to fill up the spaces with original caricatures. So

we set to work—Rosa and Isidore Bonheur, Mlle. Micas, and I—to daub the future cravat with pictures in water-colour (Stanton 1910, pp. 388–89).[6]



Figure 2. Rosa Bonheur, Nathalie Micas, Isidore Bonheur, and Paul Chardin, *The Passy Cravat*, or *Parody of By's Inhabitants*, 1864, ink, gouache, and black pencil on canvas, 81.5 cm × 121 cm, Musée d'Orsay, acquired on behalf of the state by the Musée d'Orsay and the Orangerie from the Galerie Talabardon Gautier in 2018 (RF MO AG 2018 9), Photo Credit: © RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY.

Rosa Bonheur divided the 81.5 cm × 121 cm canvas into six diamond-shaped lozenges and nine peripheral triangles with intersecting red bands. I argue that the bands simulate the reddish-brown neo-Gothic accents of the studio ceiling (Figure 3) and building exterior (Figure 4) in which the *Passy Cravat* was created. The studio was designed for Rosa Bonheur by architect Jules Saulnier (1817–1881), and when the eye travels from the building exterior to the studio ceiling to the *Passy Cravat*, the artwork continues the architectural lines of Saulnier's structure and brings the three-dimensional space onto a two-dimensional surface. The *Passy Cravat* also replicates the layout of the By estate because the scenes in the six lozenges—Rosa Bonheur in her studio, Paul Chardin battling with a stag, Nathalie Micas in her laboratory, Henriette Micas in the kitchen, the By community heading to the Fontainebleau forest, and artist Octave Roland as a hen—are each a parallelogram, the same shape as the grounds of By. Stanton writes in his account that the By grounds were "a long parallelogram, and are to all appearances cut out of the very forest itself, the trees at the end of her property and those of the contiguous forest being of the same kind" (Stanton 1910, p. 298). The nine peripheral triangles bordering the lozenges represent areas in the Fontainebleau forest and figures excluded from the By estate.



Figure 3. Ceiling accents in main By-Thomery studio, ca. 1859–1860. Photograph by author, 2024.



Figure 4. Exterior accents on studio, ca. 1859–1860. Photograph by author, 2024.

The friends filled the lozenges with an assemblage of human and nonhuman figures who spent considerable time at By, and Nathalie Micas christened the assembled figures with a rebus around the border of the cravat. The puzzle includes two lines composed of objects like musical notes, a pocket watch, and a salad bowl. Together, they translate to, "Cravat of Honor awarded to M. Antoine Passy, Member of the Institute, by the inhabitants of By, made under the direction of Mlle. Nathalie Micas" (Stanton 1910, p. 389). The rebus

acts as a border between those inside and outside By's network by depicting a group of intimate objects that only those *in the know* would recognize. Ultimately, the illustrations in the *Passy Cravat* are what anthropologist Tania Murray Li calls "inscription devices," material objects that mark the physical and socio-cultural properties of land. Murray Li writes that land, as an unmovable yet mutable thing, is "an assemblage of material substances and social relations" that "carries cultural baggage" (Li 2014, pp. 589–602). The objects and figures depicted in the *Passy Cravat* represent the assemblage of materials and relationships that transformed By-Thomery into an estate with queer aesthetics.

I define queer aesthetics as a historically specific movement away from institutional classifications of genre and medium by artists and communities who tinker with the limitations of heteronormative life. The study of queer aesthetics, writes Hentyle Yapp, encourages scholars to reimagine form "through histories of power" and "rethink how form has been historically considered of and about the provenance of whiteness and men" (Yapp 2024, p. 549). Since 2010, art historians working in a lineage of queer theory have been putting form in conversation with politics, a method historically disavowed by modernists like Clement Greenberg (See Yapp 2024, pp. 547–65). In a seminal conversation on the significance of queer form, David Getsy and Jennifer Doyle identify queer artistry as a practice that embraces "the outright refusal of the rules of convention and medium" (Doyle and Getsy 2013, p. 62).

This paper contends that the *Passy Cravat* exemplifies the queer aesthetics forged at By-Thomery from 12 June 1860 through the autumn of 1864. The paper's first section, "Queer Aesthetics at By-Thomery," elucidates the ways genre and medium were subverted in the *Passy Cravat*'s caricatures. While Rosa Bonheur often produced paintings for wealth accumulation and recognition within cosmopolitan, bourgeois, and aristocratic circles, compositions like the *Passy Cravat* demonstrate her intimate reworkings of artistic categories like sketch, painting, high art, and low art. This section will finish with an analysis of how the queer aesthetics of the *Passy Cravat* were predicated upon Bonheur's affiliations with Napoléon III (1808–1873) and the Second Empire (1852–1870). The subsequent sections will explore two structural conditions of By-Thomery's queer aesthetics. In "Representing Citizenship and Kinship at By-Thomery," I assert that the *Passy Cravat*'s queer aesthetics were reliant on the artists' nonnormative approaches to citizenship and kinship that encompassed the social and economic relationship between Rosa Bonheur and Nathalie Micas. Finally, in "The *Animalièr·e* and Multispecies Violence," I analyze how By-Thomery's queer aesthetics depended on the abjection of nonhuman animals, whose bodies were transmogrified as artist models for Rosa Bonheur's paintings and whose representations enabled Bonheur, the Micas family, and their human coterie to live unencumbered at the estate.

2. Queer Aesthetics at By-Thomery

Scholars influenced by gay and lesbian studies and feminist studies have historically belabored the specificities of Rosa Bonheur's same-sex desires, her preference for wearing pants, and her masculine habits.[7] However, simply because scholars have attended to Rosa Bonheur's hetero-nonnormativity does not mean that their readings have been queer. In fact, queer studies and trans studies have rarely been employed in scholarship on Rosa Bonheur and By-Thomery. Instead, identity-based analyses informed by essentialist gay and lesbian studies from the 1970s–1990s reign supreme in academic and popular writing on the artist. For example, in the 1970s and 1980s, social art historians Linda Nochlin and Albert Boime diagnosed Bonheur with syndromes related to her gender presentation and same-sex attractions, and pathologized her radical gender presentation and sapphic relationships.[8] In addition, in the 1990s, art historians James Saslow and Whitney Chadwick attended to Bonheur's lesbian identity in their studies of *The Horse Fair*

(Saslow 1992; Chadwick 1993), while literary scholar Gretchen van Slyke more convincingly discussed By-Thomery's relations through a lens of matrimonial lineage (Van Slyke 1991, 1994, 1999). A focus on identity, particularly through presentist classifications like "lesbian" for Rosa Bonheur and Nathalie Micas, obscures By-Thomery's potential as a space of domesticity and artistic labor where queer aesthetics were employed to (de)stabilize genres and media. Art historian David Getsy argues that an understanding of queer scholarship as identity-based explorations quashes "feminist and queer attention to certain kinds of labor and attention, ways of working with things—that physicality, that kind of maintenance, sculptural housework" (Doyle and Getsy 2013, p. 65). Scholars do not and should not have to pinpoint Rosa Bonheur's precise identity to explore how her body, the bodies of her nonhuman subjects, and the art generated from her body were materially transformed based on her desires and gendered sense of self.

The *Passy Cravat* enacts a queer aesthetic because it fails to meet the genre and medium conventions expected of Bonheur in her time. In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Jack Halberstam argues that "failing is something queers do and have always done exceptionally well" (Halberstam 2011, p. 3). According to Halberstam's formulation, failure is tethered to capitalism, and a queer art that basks in failure is one that exists outside of markets (Halberstam 2011, p. 88). Failure in the *Passy Cravat* is, on the most basic level, a failure of the artists to produce a market accessible tableau.

If one followed Rosa Bonheur's career during her lifetime, she would have appeared a dutiful adherent to French Academic standards. For example, she relied on sketch work to produce her oil paintings and watercolors but rarely exhibited or sold *esquisses* or "preliminary sketches" as finished products. Leïla Jarbouai, co-curator of the 2022–2023 *Rosa Bonheur* exhibition at the Musée d'Orsay, argues that Bonheur remained loyal to classical sketching methods throughout her career and amassed a collection of sketches that would aid her painting (Jarbouai 2022). Unlike the works Bonheur sold to customers and displayed at Salons, the *Passy Cravat* was not contingent upon the market or the whims of imperial benefactors. As Gretchen van Slyke reminds us in the introduction to her translation of *Rosa Bonheur: The Artist's (Auto)Biography*, Bonheur "had to be a marketable quantity herself. If she ever forgot this, Nathalie Micas and one of her main art dealers, Gambart of London, were quick to remind her" (Klumpke 1997, p. 44). Valérie Simonin (1831–1919), an actor and member of the By network, similarly told Theodore Stanton that dealer Ernest Gambart "monopolised" Rosa Bonheur "both to his own and to her material advantage" (Stanton 1910, p. 99). Bonheur and the other artists of the *Passy Cravat* appropriated the sketching process, which she used for marketable items, to explore how the painterly process of extensive sketching to create final tableaus aligns with heteronormative values of discipline, reproduction, and success. In the *Passy Cravat*, Rosa Bonheur abandons her conditioned approach to sketches in exchange for a more freeing approach to figuration.

The queer aesthetics of By-Thomery were most explicit in works like the *Passy Cravat* because its caricatures fail to individualize human and nonhuman features. The human faces in the work are featureless beyond exaggerated characteristics like long noses and double chins. "Thus, in the Passy Cravat, the caricatures of the persons whom she [Rosa Bonheur] there painted bear no special characterisation. Without being told who they were, it would be difficult to recognize any one of them," recounted Paul Chardin (Stanton 1910, pp. 386–87). The nonhumans, too, are difficult to identify, as they are rendered as stock images of their species instead of the detailed animal portraits that contributed to Rosa Bonheur's success. These figurative failures represent the liberating capacity of intimate artistic practice. The intimacy of the *Passy Cravat* caricatures began in the everyday communication between By-Thomery's inhabitants and their family and friends. The group included irreverent illustrations in personal correspondence leaving and entering

By (mostly with family members in Paris and the Passy family in Gisors). Many of the illustrations poked fun at the senders and recipients or satirized the representation of nonhuman animals by Bonheur. For example, on 3 November 1862, Chardin sent a letter to Antoine Passy from By that included an illustration by Nathalie Micas of three sentient cats gathering around a copy of Montesquieu's *L'esprit des lois* with a mouse chained to its cover (Figure 5).[9] The drawing, rendered in pencil, ink, watercolor, and wash, explored the capacity of art to be more than a socio-political signifier of wealth and status. Since the letters circulated only within the By-Thomery network, they facilitated object-based relationships beyond those Rosa Bonheur had with the market.



Figure 5. Nathalie Micas, Illustration in letter from Paul Chardin to Antoine Passy, 1862, ink, 21 cm × 14 cm, Bywaters Special Collections, Hamon Arts Library, Southern Methodist University (RB.90.170).

Caricatures were not only unmarketable, but politically inexpedient during Bonheur and Micas's early years at By-Thomery due to Napoléon III's crackdowns on the press through censorship and imprisonment. Censorship laws were abolished with the fall of the July Monarchy in 1848, but Napoléon III reinstated them on 17 February 1852 with the *Décret organique sur la presse*, or Organic Decree on the Press. According to political scientist Robert Justin Goldstein, "The result of the 1852 decree and its subsequent extraordinarily harsh enforcement was a virtual total absence of critical political and social caricature in France between 1852–1866" (Goldstein 1989, p. 180).[10] The By-Thomery caricatures, while neither explicitly targeted at Second Empire officials nor published in journals, still subtly questioned Napoleonic efforts to control artistic autonomy through their uncensored circulation.

At the same time, however, the queer aesthetics of the *Passy Cravat* were only made possible by Bonheur's affiliations with Napoléon III and the Second Empire.[11] While Bonheur's initial successes occurred in the years leading up to the Second Empire—she received a third-place medal at the Paris Salon of 1845 for *Ploughing* and a first-place medal at the Paris Salon of 1848 for *Bulls and Oxen*, *Cantal Breed*—it was only during Napoléon III's reign that her celebrity skyrocketed, and she became a preferred artist of the French regime. Asher Miller, a curator at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, argues that the Second Empire's artistic propaganda involved a vision of the calm countryside (Miller 2022), and

Bonheur's emphasis on French agriculture and animal breeds (like the Percheron horse celebrated in *The Horse Fair*) promoted the Napoleonic façade of French progress.

The Horse Fair resulted from a Second Empire commission in 1852 and set the stage for the 40,000 payout from Ernest Gambart and Bonheur's purchase of By. Charles de Morny, Minister of the Interior in charge of the Beaux-Arts, who participated in Napoléon III's coup d'état of December 1851, spearheaded the commission. Valérie Simonin said that Bonheur's political affiliations may have been influenced by the Second Empire's support of her work. She wrote, "Perhaps the marks of favour which the Emperor and especially the Empress showered upon her may have had also their influence" (Stanton 1910, p. 66).[12] The attention of the royal couple was particularly potent from 1861 to 1865. On 14 June 1864, Eugénie visited By for the first time and commissioned a painting, *Sheep by the Sea* (1865), from Bonheur.[13] A year later, on 10 June 1865, Eugénie returned to bestow Bonheur with the *Légion d'honneur*, the first woman artist to become a *Chevalier* of the order. A few weeks later, on 29 June 1865, the Paris correspondent of *The New York Times* contended that the reason Bonheur received the *Légion d'honneur*, but not author George Sand, was because of Sand's opposition to the empire, insinuating that Bonheur's fidelity to the imperial family guaranteed her success (*The New York Times* 1865, p. 1).

3. Representing Citizenship and Kinship at By-Thomery

The artists of the *Passy Cravat* represented the contradictions of By-Thomery as both a heteronormative space sanctioned by the Second Empire and a place where same-sex relationships flourished. The group accomplished this by employing citizenship as a visual metaphor for belonging to the French state *and* the By estate. In the lower left lozenge, designed by Paul Chardin, Henriette Micas stares directly at the viewer while serving soup from a steaming tureen emblazoned with the words *Suffrage Universel*, or Universal Suffrage. A dog, possibly the beagle Ramoneau, pushes up against the picture plane and runs its tongue over the vessel, while in the background Rosa Bonheur wears her favored blue peasant's smock and waits to be fed. Chardin designed the tureen to resemble the ballot urns used in French elections.[14] While urns had been used in elections since the French Revolution of 1789, historians Olivier Ihl and Victor Villette argue that only with the adoption of universal (male) suffrage in 1848 did they symbolize the power of an electoral body to influence democratic processes (Ihl 1993; Villette 2015). In a lithograph from 1850, Alexandre-Auguste Ledru-Rollin—the Minister of Interior who ushered in universal suffrage in 1848—leans against a poplar tree, a decades-old symbol of the French Republic (Figure 6). Ledru-Rollin watches as Marianne—the feminine symbol of French liberty—and a working-class man in a blue peasant's smock (the same type worn by Rosa Bonheur) stand near an ornate electoral urn while French men approach with their ballots. The lithograph portrays the extension of formal citizenship to all French men in 1848, a right not extended to women or communities in French colonies like Algeria. Similarly, in the *Passy Cravat*, the urn signifies the circumscribed inclusion of Rosa Bonheur, Nathalie Micas, and Henriette Micas into the state apparatus. They were simultaneously granted citizenship to Napoléon III's regime through the *Légion d'honneur*, visits with the royal couple, artistic commissions, and property ownership, but were excluded from the actual democratic process signified by the urn. Historians Nimisha Barton and Richard Hopkins have elucidated the ways in which women in post-Revolutionary France practiced social citizenship when denied the legal status to vote and work. Instead of centering women's disenfranchisement, they emphasize how "the social domain nevertheless provided many opportunities for engagement and negotiation with as well as resistance to political, economic, social, cultural, and other structural constraints" (Barton and Hopkins 2019, pp. 6–7). The *Passy Cravat* urn instantiates an alternative metaphorical citizenship on the By-Thomery estate, one

supported by the social and economic relationship between Rosa Bonheur and Nathalie Micas and not conditional upon formal citizenship to the French state. Henriette Micas, known affectionately as "Mother Soup" by Rosa Bonheur,[15] ladles the symbolic citizenship from the pot to the plates of By's residents, illustrating their real-world belonging to the social, familial, and economic life of the estate.



Figure 6. Marie-Cécile Goldsmid, *Universal Suffrage*, *Dedicated to Ledru-Rollin*, 1850, lithograph, 50 cm × 65 cm, Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris. In the Public Domain.

Rosa Bonheur and Paul Chardin illustrate processes of belonging at By-Thomery in the *Tout By*,[16] (pronounced "to be"), or "all of By," lozenge on the top left and the adjacent "Not to Be" triangle. In *Tout By*, Bonheur depicts all the artists of the *Passy Cravat* along with other inhabitants of By and their frequent visitors as they embark on a hunting trip in the Fontainebleau forest. From left to right, we have René Peyrol (Bonheur's nephew), Paul Chardin, Hippolyte Peyrol Jr. (René's brother), Juliette Peyrol Bonheur (a Bonheur sister), Isidore Bonheur, Nathalie Micas, Henriette Micas, Hippolyte Peyrol Sr. (Bonheur's brother-in-law and stepbrother), and Rosa Bonheur. With bold red letters, Bonheur announces these nine figures as the only ones included, at least in the autumn of 1864, as members of the By estate. In the adjacent triangle, *Not to Be*, Chardin represents Nathalie Micas as Hamlet. She holds a skull and stands beside a grave with the words "Not To Be" above her head. *Tout By* and "Not To Be" complete the first lines of Shakespeare's famed "to be or not to be—that is the question" soliloquy from Act 3, scene 1 of *Hamlet* (Shakespeare et al. 1992). Chardin was inspired by the solitary walks Micas would take beyond the walls of the estate whenever she struggled with her mental health. Chardin told Stanton that Micas was "naturally tragic" and when she was on her walks "it was almost impossible for a person meeting her to help bursting into laughter" (Stanton 1910, p. 85). The juxtaposition between the jovial collective in *Tout By* with Micas's melancholic figure displays how her occasional preference for solitude isolated her from the group. Chardin not only caricatures

Micas's depressive episodes but relegates this side of her to a peripheral triangle because it conflicted with the unified front the rest of the estate presented in *Tout By*.

The citizenship at By-Thomery was ultimately dependent upon the same-sex relations between Rosa Bonheur and Nathalie Micas, which Bonheur represents through the center right and center lozenges. Just as the structure of the studio is replicated in the *Passy Cravat*'s intersecting bands, so too is the partnership between Bonheur and Micas inscribed within the lozenges themselves. Bonheur exploits the *Passy Cravat*'s design as a patterned cravat that Antoine Passy would hypothetically fold to wear, thus bringing her and Micas's bodies together on the canvas. If one were to fold the 81.5 cm × 121 cm canvas sheet inward on its vertical axis along the smiling sun illustration, Bonheur's and Micas' bodies and the objects of their daily lives depicted in the lozenges would touch. The *Passy Cravat* holds an intimate and ongoing potential for the couple's forms to embrace in two-dimensional space.

At By-Thomery, Bonheur and Micas could only craft a lifeworld beyond bourgeois heteronormativity, the state-sanctioned process through which couples pursue social and financial stability,[17] by reproducing elements of kinship displayed by Parisian heterosexual couples. Many queer theorists, like Lee Edelman and Leo Bersani, consider kinship antithetical to studies of queer life, but scholar Jennifer V. Evans argues, "Kinship exposes the power and contradictions of queerness. . .as a set of relations produced by and through shifting and unequal dynamics of power" (Evans 2023, p. 3). In nineteenth-century France, bourgeois norms of heteronormative respectability governed how queer people enacted their subversions to remain safe. To understand queerness in this era, kinship is a useful, and arguably essential, paradigm. The routines represented in the *Passy Cravat* lozenges of Bonheur and Micas recreate the heteronormative, yet same-sex kinship in which Bonheur was the breadwinner and Micas the caretaker, a process which created the structural conditions for the queer aesthetics of both By-Thomery and the *Passy Cravat*. In the far-right lozenge of the *Passy Cravat*, Bonheur represents herself in By's main studio, where she spent most of her time when not sketching from nature.[18] She faces an unfinished canvas with a palette and brush in hand, surrounded by her pets and artist models, including Wasp (the Scotch terrier), Ramoneau (the beagle), two cats, and a donkey. Rosa signed the lozenge *une illustre amie*, or an illustrious friend, followed by "R.B., 1861."[19] It is in this studio where her fortune was made, and where the future of By was cemented. In a letter to Hippolyte Peyrol, Sr. in 1877, Rosa Bonheur wrote about how her work schedule was tied to her dealer, "I already owe money to Gambart, I must finish him his stag and his ass's head, in order to ask for a fresh supply of funds" (Stanton 1910, p. 186). The ass's head in the *Passy Cravat* may have been rendered 13 years prior to the letter, but it seems to haunt Bonheur's lozenge. It faces Bonheur as a reminder of her obligations—that without her work as an animal painter and Gambart's funds, By cannot exist. It also references Bonheur's representation of herself as a donkey in letters to family and friends whenever she felt overworked (Stanton, pp. 164, 166–67).

It was Nathalie Micas who created the environment in which Bonheur could financially sustain the household and supply works to Gambart. According to Louis Passy, Antoine Passy's son, Micas "played the lady" of By-Thomery, and Bonheur credited Nathalie Micas and her mother with her freedom to sketch and paint in her studio (Stanton 1910, p. 88). In the central lozenge, titled "Postulant Member of several Agricultural, Medical, Artistic, Culinary, and Hydraulic Societies,"[20] Bonheur represents Micas in her many roles. She is a lover, directing her body towards Bonheur's lozenge as she busies herself with her tasks. She is an artist, clutching dirty paintbrushes and a sketchpad. She is an amateur veterinarian, caring for the animals indispensable to Bonheur's career, pictured with a parrot on her shoulder, a baby bird squawking at her, and a syringe in her pocket. She is an amateur medical practitioner with a jar of her well-known eye ointment. Finally,

she is a gardener and food preparer, reading a large book about yams; cultivating carrots, cabbages, and pumpkins; churning butter; and canning tomatoes. Bonheur paints Micas and her labor in the central lozenge to position her partner as the focal axis around which the estate rotates. Bonheur might represent the definitive split between breadwinner and caretaker at By-Thomery but pushes herself and her studio to the periphery to emphasize the significance of Micas's contributions to their relationship.

4. The Animalièr·e and Multispecies Violence

The queer aesthetics developed at By-Thomery relied upon its human residents subjecting nonhuman animals to domestication, imprisonment, and death; exploiting them as artist models and game; and transmogrifying human and nonhuman bodies. First, I argue that the opaque lines of the *Passy Cravat* mimic the wooden-link fences, chain-link fences, and cages made of vertical mesh lines around the estate. One of Rosa Bonheur's first tasks upon moving to By was setting up cages for her animals. These enclosures represented the conditional love Bonheur and Micas had for the nonhumans in their care. In a letter to Paul Chardin on 4 January 1886, Bonheur writes, "Here at By everything is still the same except the years that pass over our whitened heads. I am still surrounded with my animals. My old Nathalie and I love them more than we do three-fourths of our own species" (Stanton 1910, p. 246). However, Bonheur and Micas demanded that nonhuman animals be docile, because only then were they useful as models for studies. According to artist Virginie Demont-Breton (1859–1935), a friend of Rosa Bonheur, the latter said, "They are friends, don't you see? They have worked with me. I owe them half of what people are pleased to admire in my pictures. So they have to grow dangerous before I can bring myself to kill them" (Stanton, p. 341). A stark example of Bonheur's statement is her treatment of Kiki, her pet boar. In 1872, Bonheur killed Kiki for failing to meet her standards of docility. While at By on 27 December 1872, Chardin sketched Kiki (Figure 7). At first glance, Kiki appears to rest on a patch of grass, his backside to Bonheur as she sketches him at her easel. Yet according to Chardin, Bonheur had Kiki stuffed soon after the murder to utilize his deadened form for sketching (Stanton, pp. xiii, 183). Chardin's sketch represents Kiki postmortem yet expunges the bloody process of death and taxidermy from the record. Similarly, in the *Passy Cravat*, the fragmented donkey head in the center right lozenge and the truncated body of the stag in the bottom right lozenge are figured as taxidermized game trophies anchored to the work's intersecting bands. Their bodies represent their utility as models for Bonheur's artworks, awaiting her easel and brush as she faces their fractured forms.

I suggest the possibility that the deep red of the intersecting bands might also portray the blood, guts, and entrails of the animal models. To become a respected *animalièr·e*, Rosa Bonheur surrounded herself with living animals *and* the material remnants of animal bodies.[21] The *animalièr·e* is a nineteenth-century artistic classification attributed to painters and sculptors who rendered animal forms with meticulous attention to anatomy and movement, similar to the academic attention to human form. This classification rose to prominence due to new opportunities to view non-domestic animals like lions and tigers in public zoos, a transition from the *ancien régime*'s seclusion of these animals in royal menageries. *Animalièr·es* like Bonheur were particularly invested in direct contact with nonhumans and sketched their subjects at the Jardin des Plantes, slaughterhouses, horse fairs, and private menageries.[22] I understand the *animalièr·e* as a fraught category due to its roots in animal captivity and inflexible attention to gender essentialism. The term *animalièr·e* has come to reference Bonheur's final artistic products, and scholars have often disregarded the processes through which Bonheur and the nonhumans she painted were transmogrified through violent encounters in slaughterhouses, the Jardin des Plantes, and

By's menagerie. Bonheur recounted to Klumpke at the end of her life, "Don't forget I used to spend days and days in slaughterhouses. Oh! you've got to be devoted to art to live in pools of blood, surrounded by butchers" (Klumpke 1997, p. 329). To create mirages of liberated animal subjects, Bonheur was transformed by the scents and sights of their blood and rotting flesh. Beginning in 1845, Bonheur frequented slaughterhouses near Paris's Rue de Miromesnil, where she was taken under the wing of Emile Gravel, a slaughterhouse scalder who removed the hair and feathers from animal corpses with hot water. The same year that she entered the slaughterhouses, she joined the newly established *Société protectrice des animaux*, an animal rights group, but this did not prevent her exploitation of the animal form. Just as Gravel made his money selling prepared calves and sheep for butchers, Bonheur sold sketches of these animals' bodies to earn an income and collected studies for her paintings. When considering her time in the slaughterhouses, she found "our species most unfortunate to have to live on blood" (Stanton 1910, p. 37). The context here is the carnivorous nature of humans, but the subtext is the pools of blood that buttressed Bonheur's career and the establishment of the By estate. She had to live *on* blood, and *in* blood to sustain By. I am reminded of this blood in the red bands of the *Passy Cravat*. Although the artists attempted to mitigate its reach through ink black borders, smudges of red paint find their way into the lozenges, a reminder that the *animalièr·e* is forever haunted by the spilt blood of other species.

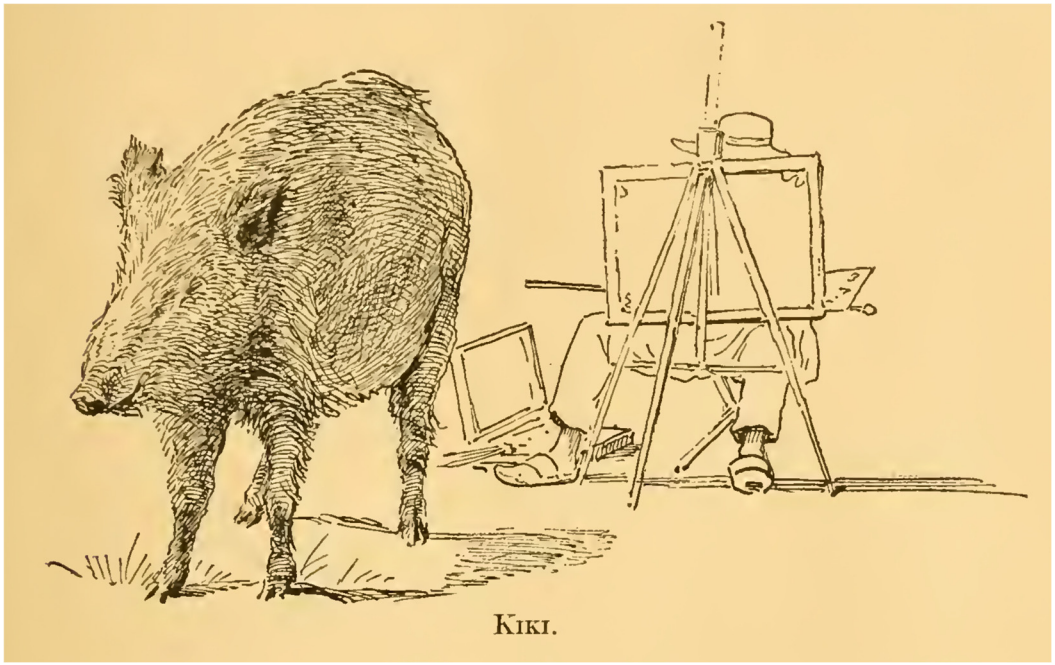


Figure 7. Paul Chardin, *Kiki*, 1872, ink, reproduced in Theodore Stanton, *Reminiscences of Rosa Bonheur*, 1910, p. 183.

The *Passy Cravat* artists represent animals of the nearby Fontainebleau forest in many of the work's peripheral triangles. By-Thomery was connected to the Fontainebleau forest through a gate,[23] and its humans spent a significant amount of time sketching and hunting animals among the oaks and holly, extending their lives beyond the 7.5 acres of their estate. The animals—a long-limbed frog, trio of birds, and rabbits cooking in a pot—are cornered between the cravat's lozenges and its rebus and only exist for the pleasure of By-Thomery's humans. For example, the humans in the *Tout By* lozenge walk from one edge of the thick red band to the other—from the By château to the Fontainebleau forest—on a hunting trip. Bonheur, Micas, and their kin head towards the peripheral triangle on the left, the thick

red band representing the gate that granted access to their hunting grounds. Napoléon III provided the By community with an all-season hunting license from 1861 to 1866.[24] In *Tout By*, Rosa Bonheur and Hippolyte Peyrol Sr. hold guns at the ready and are led by two beagles towards a pot of rabbits in the neighboring triangle. The rabbits frantically hop away from the hunters but are trapped by the triangle's borders. The only place for them to land is the oversized copper pot. Henriette Micas foreshadows their plight as she follows Bonheur and Peyrol into the Fontainebleau forest; a rabbit is already prepared in the copper pot in her right hand.

Lastly, I contend that the artists of the *Passy Cravat* ontologically twisted human and nonhuman forms to create genre- and medium-defying caricatures that were unmarketable, and therefore, queer. Paul Chardin designed two such lozenges, and in both he employed the figurative failures of caricature to extend the power of humans over animals and spotlight his masculinity. The bottom right lozenge, captioned *L'Intrepide Rapin* or The Brazen Dauber,[25] depicts Chardin as a brave explorer fending off an aggressive stag with a flimsy stick. The setting is not made explicit, as only a few small shrubs decorate the background. Chardin presents himself as a man facing injury to protect himself and others. A manufactured scene, the stag neither approached Chardin in the Fontainebleau forest nor attacked the artist unprompted on the By grounds. Instead, Chardin entered the enclosure where Bonheur and Micas kept the stag to sketch the animal without the distraction of the cage—a cage he did not depict in the lozenge. In a letter to Antoine Passy on 30 April 1870, Rosa Bonheur wrote, "The stag, with a meek and mild air, approached, then suddenly reared and began raining blows on the back, belly, and nose of the Rapin who took refuge in the stag's trough. Thereupon, the stag, still more irritated by this invasion of his property, continued to drum on the victim with a vengeance" (Stanton 1910, p. 308). Bonheur and Micas kept wild stags in paddocks at By for as long as they were useful. The small space limited the stag's movements with the intention of transforming the grazing herbivores into domesticated pets and models. Instead of a forest full of berries and plants, the By stags had their trough, which Chardin was infringing upon. In *L'Intrepide Rapin*, Chardin further limits the stag's movements by trapping him between the red bands, so he is unable to move his body. He also depicts the stag's antlers many inches longer than they were. According to Bonheur, the stag was just beginning to regrow his antlers, yet Chardin portrays his so-called opponent in this scenario with grown antlers, unnaturally lengthening the cervidae's bone and cartilage to make himself appear more brazen. The stag's antlers would hardly have reached Chardin's extended torso in *L'Intrepide Rapin* with their accurate length, yet in the lozenge the antlers graze Chardin's jacket to simulate danger and prove Chardin's masculinity.

Chardin renders a human-nonhuman hybrid in the lozenge above *L'Intrepide Rapin*. He depicts the creature with the head and oversized bowtie of painter Octave Roland (1799–1886), an acquaintance of the artists. Roland's head is attached to a hen's body and kicks its foot at a bright green viper flicking its pronged tongue. Captioned *La Vieille Poule*, or The Old Hen,[26] the lozenge references Roland's fear of the vipers in the Fontainebleau forest. Instead of *Le Vieux Coq*, or The Old Rooster, Roland is *La Vieille Poule*, and his phobia of snakes is demeaned as effeminate. Chardin mutates the bodies of Roland and an unnamed hen to discipline the former's cowardice and erase the latter's identity. *La Vieille Poule* subsequently becomes Chardin's foil. The two face each other and their opponents across the sun-stamped intersection, but while Chardin represents his own body as intact and unscathed, he minimizes Roland's humanity with a monstrous form. He emphasizes his own masculinity in the face of perceived danger by feminizing Roland.

5. Conclusions

This paper has argued that the *Passy Cravat* instantiates the queer aesthetics present at By-Thomery from 1860 through 1864, the first four years of Rosa Bonheur and Nathalie Micas's residence at the estate. The queer aesthetics of the *Passy Cravat* are dependent on the relationship between Bonheur and Micas and the mistreatment of nonhuman animals. The one cannot exist without the other, creating a messy nexus of autonomy, subversion, and violence in the cravat that parallels the real-world of By-Thomery. The *Passy Cravat* advances and complicates the study of queerness in nineteenth-century art. Its subversion of genres and media, polysemic structure, and multispecies entanglements present an approach to queer art that does not rely on identity, but relationality and mutability. Queer art history should employ queer aesthetics as an analytic of failure to move towards monstrosities, nonnormative kinships, disruptions, and disorientations. The *Passy Cravat* prompts us to look queerly, not as an exercise in mining the past for scraps of subversive identities, but to locate historical moments when the heteronormative world failed to cohere. Instead of a queer historiography that relies on a moralizing presentism, scholars of queer art can implement what Jack Halberstam calls "perverse presentism," a mode of historical analysis that does not project contemporary definitions and understandings back in history, "but one that can apply insights from the present to conundrums of the past" (Halberstam 2011, pp. 52–53). It is important to remind ourselves that Rosa Bonheur is no lesbian hero. I am not immune to the longing for queer recuperation in studies of nineteenth-century art. I have, like some of my colleagues, been guilty of edifying Bonheur in an attempt to discover gender and sexual subversions in the past. However, historian Jennifer V. Evans warns us that recuperation neutralizes complicated and monstrous studies of queerness that extend beyond "our own longings for connection to this [queer] community" (Evans 2023, pp. 11, 13). While it is enticing to mine the archive for heroes who neatly fit lineages of nonnormative artistry and associations, the search for identity and visibility clouds pertinent insights into the ways queerness takes material form in the nineteenth century.

Finally, in my reading of the *Passy Cravat*, I analyzed the work from one viewing position, but the work is legible when viewed in three positions—one vertical and two horizontal. In the position presented in the article, Nathalie Micas's veterinary and vegetation experimentation and Rosa Bonheur's studio are clearest. If one flips the canvas 90 degrees counterclockwise, Henriette Micas's kitchen, Paul Chardin's stag skirmish, and Octave Roland are in upright positions, and therefore more accessible to the eye. If one flips it another 90 degrees counterclockwise, *Tout By* is most conspicuous. The work invites reorientation and responds to the viewer's body—I urge you to move your heads, phones, tablets, laptops, and printouts to experience the myriad viewing possibilities this enigmatic work offers.

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Notes

1 This essay expands upon my master's thesis. See (Meisels 2023).

2 For scholarship on the creation and impact of *The Horse Fair*, see (Bienvenue 2022; Chadwick 1993; Fowler 2024; Miller 2022; Saslow 1992; Weil 2020).

[3] According to Rosa Bonheur, Nathalie Micas negotiated the sale for *The Horse Fair*. See (Klumpke 1997, pp. 255–56).

[4] The *Passy Cravat* did not reach the public eye until 2012, when Antoine Passy's descendants sold it through Artcurial to the Galerie Talabardon Gautier in Paris. It was eventually acquired by the Musée d'Orsay, which displayed it at the 2022–2023 Rosa Bonheur exhibition in Bordeaux and Paris.

[5] The work is called the *Passy Cravat* by Paul Chardin in Theodore Stanton's *Reminiscences of Rosa Bonheur*. The Musée d'Orsay entitles it *Projet de foulard dit Foulard Passy ou Parodie sur les habitants de By*.

[6] Paul Chardin's quote about his adventure in the Fontainebleau forest is a reference to the night he was left in the *Gorge aux Loups* for many hours after Rosa Bonheur's coachman failed to pick him up. He spent the night in the cavity of a tree until he was found. See (Stanton 1910, pp. 305–6).

[7] Rosa Bonheur was granted a *permission de travestissement*, or a cross-dressing permit, to wear pants when visiting the slaughter-houses.

[8] Albert Boime diagnosed Rosa Bonheur with "butch-femme syndrome," to argue that Bonheur, the butch, treated Nathalie Micas, the femme, as a man would treat a woman, pigeonholing both women into inflexible gendered boxes within a traditional heteronormative marriage structure. Linda Nochlin diagnosed Rosa Bonheur with "frilly-blouse syndrome," a term coined by feminist Betty Friedan to describe women who lean into hyper-femininity to prove that, despite their professional successes, they fit into prescribed categories of womanhood. See (Boime 1981, p. 386) and (Nochlin 1988, p. 173).

[9] See "Rosa Bonheur Correspondence," Bywaters Special Collections, Hamon Arts Library, Southern Methodist University.

[10] For other pertinent scholarship on caricatures and censorship in the Second Empire, see (Childs 2004; Scully 2011).

[11] See (Boime 2007, pp. 604–6) for more, particularly the comparison between Rosa Bonheur and more explicitly radical artists like Gustave Courbet.

[12] Valérie Simonin is referred to as Princess Stirbey in Stanton's text.

[13] The work was displayed at the Salon of 1867 before landing in Empress Eugénie's collection.

[14] Stanton makes this claim and describes the tureen. See (Stanton 1910, pp. 390–91).

[15] In 1861, Rosa Bonheur wrote to her sister Juliette Peyrol-Micas, "We are counting on you for [a visit] Saturday evening. I say we, because Mother Soup is grieved to the soul when she prepares a meal and the visitor does not show up." See (Stanton 1910, p. 158).

[16] Theodore Stanton writes that *Tout By* might be a pun of *Pain Bis* (brown bread) and that the oval shape of the inhabitants' path is itself a loaf of bread. See (Stanton 1910, p. 390).

[17] At By, the couple became executors of each other's wills and passed property to each other as inheritance, which Gretchen van Slyke considers an act of matrimonial connection, since Bonheur and Micas established a marriage through state loopholes. See (Van Slyke 1991).

[18] Oriane Poret explores Bonheur's many studios in her work. See (Poret 2023).

[19] The translation of "an illustrious friend" is from Stanton. See (Stanton 1910, p. 353). In addition, the event referenced by "1861" is unclear. It might refer to the date the animal sculptor Pierre Jules Mène gifted Bonheur a posthumous portrait of Wasp.

[20] The translation is from Stanton. See (Stanton 1910, pp. 389–90). "Hydraulic" references Micas' engineering skills. In the early 1860s, Micas invented a railway brake that she tested on the grounds of By-Thomery. See (Stanton 1910, pp. 88–93).

[21] Scholars refer to Rosa Bonheur as an *animalière*, the feminized version of *animalier*. Instead, this article will employ the term *animalier.e.*, an inclusive linguistic formation that allows for the capaciousness of gender and does not pigeonhole Bonheur's gendered position as an artist. In the francophone world, many people use the *point médian* to create inclusive language. See https://www.epfl.ch/schools/enac/about/diversity-office/inclusive-language/french-inclusive-language-gender/ (accessed on 22 March 2026).

[22] For more information on the *animalièr·e* see (Bienvenue 2022; Mackay 1973; Ritzenthaler 1989; Weil 2020).

[23] Stanton describes the estate's gate; see (Stanton 1910, p. 298).

[24] Bonheur recounts this to Klumpke, see (Klumpke 1997, p. 290).

[25] The translation of *rapin* is from (Stanton 1910, p. 243). The translation of *intrepide* is mine.

[26] Translation from (Stanton 1910, p. 390).

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