

Editor's introduction

This is the first issue of a new Open Access ejournal devoted exclusively to the study of art historiography. Its central purpose is to understand why the history of art gets written in the way that it does. How has it taken shape as a discipline? What are the grounds of its inclusions and exclusions? What are its modes of writing? How does it relate to and intersect with other disciplines?

Obviously one of its major concerns is with the work of seminal thinkers in the development of the discipline and the journal intends to promote deep critical engagement with their work. 2011 will see the fifth anniversary of Giorgio Vasari's birth and it would be nice to do something to celebrate that occasion. His work is still the subject of great controversy and it is significant that there is no complete English translation of his 1568 *Vite*. The only English scholarly book on Winckelmann presents a highly selective view of his *Geschichte* that needs to be counterbalanced by deeper contextualising study. Despite arguments to the contrary, the work of the great German art historians still needs to be investigated in much greater depth. And what of our contemporaries: why is there still no major study of Svetlana Alpers' work, to name just one important figure?

But historical figures would not be important were it not for the problems that they addressed and the new paradigms they established. To start with basics: how does one construct a corpus of objects for study? By establishing a biographical connection? By creating a chronology, and if one does then how does one do it? Robert Bagley's recent book, *Max Loehr and the study of Chinese bronzes: Style and Classification in the History of Art*, Cornell 2008 could well be missed by historians of Greek art simply because its topic is Chinese bronzes. The study of art history has become so specialized that much valuable work that has general implications for the practice of the discipline gets either lost or ignored. How does one identify a class of object? Students of the 'fetish' might like to take a look in the direction of A.A. Donohue's *Xoana and the origins of Greek sculpture*, published by the American Philological Association in 1988. It is a text sadly missing in art historical literature. Why is it that Peter Lasko's *Ars Sacra: 800-1200*, Harmondsworth 1972 happily included jewellery and ritual objects whilst the same is not done for other periods in history and cultures? Why is there no art historical survey that includes carpets? Why is there so little interest in prints? Why isn't it commonplace that art historians ignore their own specialisms in discussions of matters of common interest? The Warburg Institute discussion of *Iconography without Texts*, London 2008, reviewed in this issue, is refreshingly novel in the material that it brings together.

This issue of the *Journal of Art Historiography* focuses on the two themes of 'Viennese art historiography' and 'German art history and philosophy' because they are the editor's projects in hand. They were the subjects of colloquia organised in Glasgow in 2008 and 2009 and will lead to further publications. In the light of the fact that the journal was only born in October this year, its other contributors are to

be congratulated for the speed with which they prepared their material. Hopefully, when the journal settles into place more themes will be born and the ground covered will widen. There is promise of material on Indian and Chinese art, Baltic and Polish art history, classical archaeology and more. There will be a special project on Australian art historiography later in 2010; it will be the occasion for a special conference in Melbourne. More regional analysis will be very welcome as well as more work on established topics.

The first issue of the journal is dedicated to the memory of Ernst Gombrich, whose centennial anniversary was celebrated in a number of events this year. His work emerged naturally out of the problems discussed by members of the so-called Vienna School of art history and engaged with the German practice of *Kunstwissenschaft*. Ironically, the substantive content of his work has been missed and trivialized, precisely because he engaged in a debate with German language scholarship. As T.J. Clark commented, the questions got lost:

Why are Dvořák, Warburg, even Burckhardt in the role of art historian still locked inside their mother tongue? Because of snobbery and lassitude, I suspect; and an understandable fear of the texts in question.

... how did the past disappear? How was it that those questions, that paradigm, got lost?¹

In 2009 the process of rediscovery is underway. Only last year Julius von Schlosser's 'History of Portraiture in wax' was published in English for the first time.² More translations and commentary are needed. The two translations of German texts by Karl Johns in this issue are likely to become subject to some debate as he was concerned to protect their original idiom. Until very recently Gombrich's work has not attracted the kind of commentary it deserved; the colloquia this year marked a sea change.

With the launch of this journal it is hoped that the fundamental problems of the practice of art history will re-enter the arena to become a central, no longer marginal, activity. Perhaps, as well, art historians will start talking to cultural historians, ethnologists, philologists, archaeologists, museum professionals and other members of the community interested in those artefacts subsumed under the notion of 'the history of art'.

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¹ 'The Conditions of Artistic Creation', 1974', reprinted in Eric Fernie (ed.), *Art history and its methods*, London: Phaidon, 1995, 248-53, 250.

² Roberta Panzanelli (ed.), *Ephemeral Bodies: Wax Sculpture and the Human Figure*, Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2008.