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Abstracts

Laurence Terrier Aliferis
Joseph christophore dans la Fuite en Egypte: transmission d’un schéma iconographique spécifique à travers le Moyen Age

In the vast majority of representations of the Flight into Egypt, the child is huddled upon the Virgin’s lap or held in her arms. In addition to this traditional model, some interpretations of the Flight into Egypt show the child riding on Joseph’s shoulders or being held in his arms. The inventory of the representation of Joseph christophore from the fifth century to the mid-fifteenth century in Latin and Greek Christendom provides an insight into the frequency of this iconographic specificity of the Flight into Egypt, its diffusion and regional adaptations, as well as its meanings, via theological and exegetical texts.

Shira Brisman
Nachrichten aus Nürnberg: The Annunciation as an Epistolary Address

When, around the turn of the fifteenth century, the art of northern Europe developed a pictorial motif whereby an angel delivers the news of the Incarnation in the form of a sealed document, the material properties of ink and wax metaphorically evoked the unique properties of the inscription of divine form upon Mary’s virginal body. The social impact of this communication, the dissemination of the message to a community of recipients, could be strengthened by references to the re-transmittable nature of the announcement, as enforced by other indicators of sociability detectable in different portions of the narrative scheme. The Tucher Altarpiece in Nuremberg and Michael Wolgemut’s altarpiece for the cathedral of St. Mary in Zwickau present two examples of uses of the epistolary Annunciation that may have influenced Albrecht Dürer, who employs the motif in his woodcut series The Life of the Virgin, which also contains, along with this pictorial form of broad address, more narrowly articulated messages to his contemporaries in the form of written words.

Irina Chernetsky
The Creation of the World by Virgil Solis

Virgil Solis (1514–1562), a prosperous artist and printmaker from Nuremberg, dedicated his final major work to an illustration of Ovid’s Metamorphoses. Although the designs of most of the woodcuts for this first extensive German series were borrowed from the Metamorphoses series of the French artist Bernard Salomon (c. 1508 – 1561), a closer study reveals several notable differences in the details of individual scenes, among them The Creation of the World. Placing Solis’ work within the tradition of the printed illustrated editions of Ovid’s magnum opus, which had by then crystallized mainly in Italy and France, the article argues that Solis’ illustration drew not only on the earlier Metamorphoses, but also on printed German Bibles, following the parallels taken up at the time between the Creation story in the Metamorphoses and the Creation story in Genesis.
Cordula Grewe
Die Renaissance des Epos im romantischen Fresko

If the nineteenth century is correctly seen as an age when a new and acute historical awareness reshaped the cultural sensibility, then it is no small irony that in the age of history, history painting was in crisis. One reaction to this crisis is the subject of this paper. Focusing on one of the Nazarenes’ most enchanting fresco projects, the decoration of the Casino Massimo in Rome after major epics by Dante, Tasso, and Ariosto, it traces the reworking and redefinition of history in painting by the German Nazarenes. In so doing, it examines the transformation of history painting into symbolic representation, and maps out the narrative structures, aesthetic strategies, and amalgamation of temporalities that carried this process and were produced in the process.

Sophie Junge
Art Is Still Not Enough. Bilder von AIDS im Spannungsfeld zwischen Kunstanspruch und politischer Mobilisierung

The paper examines the reception of HIV/AIDS-related artworks from the 1980s by comparing four New York exhibitions from the early 1990s and 2010s. It argues that to this day artworks dealing with AIDS are bound to political and moral demands of former activists from the AIDS movement in New York. This politicization of historical images of AIDS is striking since the disease has lost its fatal threat in Western countries and political constellations have changed. Yet current exhibitions focus only on activist, politically motivated responses to the epidemic in order to represent an “appropriate” remembrance of AIDS. Thirty years after the climax of the epidemic, images of AIDS are currently integrated in the canon of art history, while they are continuously claiming their political efficacy.

Meredith Parsons Lillich
The So-Called Sainte-Chapelle Windows of Soissons Cathedral: Another Look

The stained glass in the axial chapel of Soissons Cathedral was moved there from the nave in the late eighteenth century. It was made circa 1250 by the “principal atelier” of the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris, and consists of fragments that survived the Huguenot attacks of 1567. This study establishes that these figural fragments glazed the nave aisles, while coeval grisailles – which survive only minimally – glazed the nave clerestories. The grisailles, known chiefly from nineteenth-century drawings, thus provide evidence for the nave glazing in the Lower Chapel of the Sainte-Chapelle, which was lost in 1690.
In recent years, the question “What is art history?” has become increasingly complex. For some, proposals stipulating that the discipline needs to extend its horizons and presence throughout the world’s universities have sparked what feels like a return to the founding moments of the discipline; a re-launch of art history as world art history that entails revisiting the core principles of the discipline’s early years, and applying them to non-Western art objects. Others have experienced a growing anxiety about the doomed future of a historical practice that is inextricably linked to the Western intellectual tradition and that, for some time now, has declared itself to be at its wits’ end; a point from which it should give way to the study of visual cultures. While these and other propositions are being debated, the most frequently stated claim across the board is that art history can no longer be viewed “as a purely Western discipline,” but has come to embrace “the world as a whole.”\(^1\)

To be sure, the growing amount of art-historical writing that is produced and published worldwide, and that selects topics from an unrestricted horizon of material, is beginning to build the corpus of a globally operating art history that dissolves the established positions of “center” and “periphery” in its assessment of the production, exchange, and collection of art objects all over the world. Within this discussion, which expanded from its initial focus on a reframing of colonial art history to the study of the early modern and pre-modern periods in global perspective, Western art history as an intellectual enterprise and academic discipline remains, implicitly or not, the sole point of origin in art-historical thought. This contribution to this journal’s recently started debate on the current state of art history takes issue with such representation of art history as a historiographic practice of exclusively Western genealogy. If we are discussing a globality of art history, should there not also be the question of another history of art history, one that asks for non-Western formations of art historiographies, with its own interpretative methods and techniques of inquiry? What is the role, to point to the most conspicuously absent field in all of these discussions, of the art-historical tradition of the cultures of Imperial China, which possessed a continuous and historiographically self-aware tradition of writing on painting and other objects of visual culture long before any comparable record was created in the West? How do we reconcile the existence of, to name but one example, Zhang Yanyuan’s multivolume
Record of Painters of Renown from Successive Dynasties (Lidai minghua ji), completed by 847 C.E., with our depiction of art history as a Western intellectual concept that emerged with Leon Battista Alberti’s *Della pittura*, begun in 1435?

What comes into focus when we ask these questions is the tension that emerges between, on the one hand, the desire of Western art history for a global perspective capacious to overcome its genuinely Western epistemology of linear thinking, which it believes to have exported all over the globe itself, and, on the other hand, a non-Western artistic culture that possesses a tradition in the historical study of visual art that originated several centuries before the enterprise of Western art history began to write its narrative of progress. Rather than dealing with this contradiction, the customarily invoked critique of the universality of modernism embodied by the Western historical model ultimately maintains the division of the world into two parts: one equipped with a historical structure for the discipline of art history and the other lacking such an institutional history. This view denies any notion of art-historical thinking outside the genealogies of Western academia. Concerned with the history of “the colonized world” to which the discipline of art history arrived under the aegis of colonial modernity, the debate around a globalized art history narrates a meta-history that defines a diachronic geography of art-historical consciousness centering around the West as its point of origin, while turning a blind eye to traditions of art-historical thought that were not launched from a European gateway.

With regard to Chinese art, its history and historiography, this framework has created a particularly odd situation. From a postcolonial perspective, the methods and intellectual concepts established for the study – and production – of the visual arts in China following the New Culture Movement of the mid-1910s and 1920s are criticized as an adaptation of Western categories ultimately foreign to the region’s traditional culture. Here, already, we need to ask whether a postcolonial framework for a history of Chinese art written in the West is ultimately accurate, given that, as recent studies begin to address, postcolonialism presents a concept that for the most part does not grasp the historical relations of Western cultures with those of Imperial China. Implicit in such critiques, furthermore, is the silent – or sometimes not so silent – assumption of a putative incommensurability, which, by pronouncing a concept culturally specific, suggests that there cannot be a comparable concept in another culture. If we were to follow this logic to its end, we would have to agree with James Elkins’ suggestion that all art history is Western.

Equally problematic is the unquestioned deployment of epistemic categories familiar from the history of early modern Western art for the
assimilation of Imperial Chinese art into a diachronic history of civil enlightenment. While notions like antiquarianism, collecting, connoisseurship, and patronage point to cultural practices and intellectual traditions rooted in both cultural hemispheres, their genealogy was not the same – making it imperative to spell out their culturally specific functions and histories. Ironically, such unchallenged transfers of methodologies and frameworks central to the narrative of Western art history to the study of Chinese art causes many scholars to dismiss the study of Chinese art as a re-invocation of the very framework they are anxious to overcome. How else to explain the conspicuous absence of scholars of Chinese art at conferences and roundtables on the globalization of art history, where historians of European art seek exchange with scholars working on the history of South American, Indian, and Islamic art?

If reflections on “the Western-ness” of art history have in the past two decades invoked the growing understanding that we have to recognize multivalent, disjunctive histories and historiographies of art produced in the non-Western world, this should necessarily entail the acknowledgement of equally disjunctive traditions of art history originating in Western and Eastern cultures alike. Accounts historicizing “scientific methods” of Chinese art-historical research as emerging with the formation of a national republic in the first half of the twentieth century must begin to ask to what extent these methods are “scientific” in a Western sense only, while further study of the emergence of painting as a discipline of higher learning at Chinese Imperial academies from the third century onward would illuminate the history of an institutionalized art history of the East. Disjunctive histories of art ultimately call for the consideration of multiple locally specific art-historical traditions. With regard to Imperial China, these genealogies need to be explored in the practices of circulating, copying, and quoting works of art between different cultures and generations, as these histories of pictorial response complement the written corpus of classical Chinese art theory.

3 The first study to address this issue in depth is Ming Dong Gu, Sinologism: An Alternative to Orientalism and Postcolonialism, New York 2013. On the disciplinary emergence of Sinology and its role in the construction of a European

4 See James Elkins (ed.), Canon and Globalization in Art History, in: Anna Brzy- 

ski (ed.), *Partisan Canons*, Durham 2007, 55 – 77, here 73 and 57. Elkins re-em- 

phasized this doubt “about the possibility of a genuinely multicultural, polymor- 

phous art history” in: idem, *Chinese Landscape Painting as Western Art History*, 

Hong Kong 2010. For a critique of Elkins, see also Monica Juneja, Global Art 

History and the “Burden of Representation,” in: Hans Belting, Jakob Birken, and 

Andrea Buddensieg (eds.), *Global Studies: Mapping Contemporary Art and Cul- 

Art History and the Digital Humanities
Invitation to a Debate

With the success of the Internet the so-called digital humanities have solidified their position within the humanities before being properly acknowledged at the core of individual disciplines. This applies particularly to the field of art history in which the diverse range of institutional efforts within the digital humanities is virtually non-existent – and not just in Germany. According to James Cuno, the president of the Getty Trust, this attests to art history’s failure to come to terms with the realities of the Internet.1 This failure is especially unfortunate, first and foremost, because visionary projects within art history such as the work of William Vaughan in London and Lutz Heusinger’s Foto Marburg have made significant early contributions to the field, and second because art history engages with a medium (images) that is particularly suited to digitally based modes of analysis. Accordingly, the following eight arguments discuss the innovative potential of the digital. Art history, in this respect, cannot be viewed in isolation since the field’s own range of problems is commonly shared with other fields in the arts and humanities:

(1) The description of aesthetic and historic characteristics based on measurement is one of the digital domains in art history, which despite its complexity, is in the end nothing more than pure numerical calculation. In the hermeneutically grounded humanities’ quantitative based arguments do not enjoy a very good reputation. The digital humanities inclination toward statistical methods could contribute to the rehabilitation of quantitative approaches. The connoisseur’s perspective would thereby be amended rather than replaced.

(2) Digital methods can reveal correlations between phenomena whose causal connections, in
the end, can only be determined based on deductive intelligence. The digital humanities can not provide answers, but they can offer helpful clues when challenging questions arise. Thus, they offer material to underpin argumentation and can serve as scholarly recommender systems.

(3) Databases in the digital humanities are the dominating organizational structures to gather artistic works, and contain at advanced stages hundreds of thousands, even millions of objects. Research conducted in such databases can inevitably redirect attention away from individual works to the consideration of a broader perspective. Databases produce a decanonizing effect. At the same time, “masterpieces” can be situated within a broader context of production.

(4) The capability to examine an image – or, a digital reproduction – directly on the smallest level of measurement (“Pixel”) enables the analytic penetration of the image. A digital art history that takes seriously its objective of writing history will be faced with the task of discovering historicity on the level of the pixel. That the value of brightness in van Gogh’s later Provençal period is greater than in his earlier works – as examined by Lev Manovich – comes across as trivial even though it confirms the relevance of the empirical method. But could the sparse amount of the color red in images from the GDR imply a political statement under totalitarian conditions or perhaps even suggest a variance in the dependency on region, school, and artist?

(5) Open access in the Internet leads inevitably to a realignment of the relationship between experts and laymen. Crowdsourcing projects – projects that systematically integrate data collection through the “wisdom of many” – have shown how the aggregation of data can generate emergent effects. Common knowledge can be helpful with prestructuring extensive database contents and can facilitate a more targeted access to the material. Thus, even elementary categorizations of art works which can assist in determining their affiliation with specific art
movements can be combined with other types of criteria in ways that allow for a very specific selection that supports the research process. Modest forms like this already exist with annotation systems such as artigo.org.

(6) The growing number of professional options for teaching on the Internet should not be seen as a threat to academic teaching, but instead should be viewed as complementarity to academic endeavors. The emergence of MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) – until now especially dominant in the natural sciences – or resources such as the New York Metropolitan Museum’s Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History provide both extensive as well as verified basic knowledge online, which shifts the role of the university to an even more collaborative examination of research material. Knowledge generation through modes of “gamification” appear particularly promising.

(7) The Internet will trigger a profound change in publishing culture, which is currently becoming more apparent. Digital publications on the Internet will become the leading medium, published as eBook or – preferable from a scholarly perspective – in open access. The printed book will not disappear, but will survive as a secondary medium that has proven to be excellent and reliable in its usage. Studies suggest that the transition to open access can be cost-neutral. As is the case in other fields, this transition will lead to disruptions that publishers will have to deal with. In addition to the relocation of traditional publication formats, new scholarly channels of communication will be pursued in the form of Weblogs and Wikis to strengthen dialogue and interaction. The virulent copyright issues in art-historical publications, however, could severely hinder this development.

(8) Digital publication also encompasses the dissemination of artworks on the Internet, in particular museum holdings and works of architecture. Their digital communication in turn opens up new possibilities of integrating them...
into daily life, cultural consumption, and tourism. Almost everything speaks against the concerns that the presence of art works on the Internet will prevent individuals from seeking them out in their original form. Special funding of the professional digitization could have considerable effect, but in the end digitization itself must first become a natural component in the customary activity of cataloguing. For a digital art history digitization is indispensable and should be categorically organized as open access.

Hubertus Kohle
(translated by Landon Little, Berlin)


1 James Cuno, How Art History is Failing at the Internet, in: The Daily Dot, 19 November 2012, URL: http://www.dailydot.com/opinion/art-history-failing-internet/ (date of last access 1 March 2016).
In his thoughtful – and thought-provoking – invitation to this very welcome “debate” about “Art History and the Digital Humanities,” Hubertus Kohle reminds us that art history has played, at best, a supporting role in the myriad efforts to institutionalize the emerging digital humanities. The irony of the fact that a few lone art historical visionaries anticipated the field of digital art history decades ago is not lost upon Professor Kohle. And one can argue that the duo of art historians he cites were indeed among the John the Baptists of digital art history, prophetic “voices crying in the wilderness.”

In this brief response to Professor Kohle’s characteristically stimulating essay, I wish to sound a more encouraging note. It may be true that art history has not played a leading role in the emergence of the digital humanities. As Kohle acknowledges, he is not the first to lament this fact, citing James Cuno’s provocative 2012 essay How Art History is Failing at the Internet. I would add that Diane Zorich had previously reached a similarly melancholy conclusion in her thoughtful study, Transitioning to a Digital World: Art History, Its Research Centers, and Digital Scholarship, which I would commend to readers of this “debate.” Yet the past few years have seen a growing interest in digital art history. While it would be premature to assert that the tide of digital art history has definitively turned – art history is, after all, a field perfectly capable of institutional regression! – I believe there are encouraging signs on the horizon.

In response to art history’s failure to engage adequately with the digital humanities, Professor Kohle describes eight promising arenas in which the innovative potential of the digital humanities could significantly enrich the study and teaching of the history of art as well art historical research and scholarship. Those eight fronts are: (1) the application of quantitative methods to art historical problems; (2) the discovery of art historical correlations that human intelligence cannot easily identify, but which only human intelligence can confirm; (3) the employment of large image databases to contextualize canonic works of art by situating them within a potentially encyclopedic corpus of images of world art; (4) the ability technology provides to examine images of art works more closely than the unaided human eye can do, opening the prospect of studying “historicity on the level of the pixel”; (5) crowdsourcing and realigning the relationship between expert and layman by defining a new and productive role for the latter; (6) the growing array of professional options for teaching on the Internet, expanding educational opportunities and impacts while also opening the door to new models of university-based research; (7) new avenues for art historical publication (if we can overcome the barriers posed by traditional approaches to intellectual property); (8) digitization in museums, which surely must become an integral and ultimately routine by-product of object cataloging.
Space does not permit me to invoke more than a few of the recent developments that feed my optimism about the fortunes of digital art history. So let me simply point the interested reader to a very few, representative projects that I believe demonstrate an emerging engagement with the eight extremely promising developments Professor Kohle cites. I will focus here upon projects that touch on multiple, complementary and sometimes overlapping approaches.

Professor Kohle cites Lutz Heusinger’s pioneering work at Foto Marburg as among the precursors of digital art history, and it is, I think, no accident that some of the most exciting and promising digital art history initiatives involve traditional photographic archives. The recent announcement that a consortium of key European and North American photo archives (PHAROS) intends to digitize their combined holdings, resulting in an aggregated database of perhaps 31 million art images, will surely open the door to truly innovative projects with profound implications for art historical studies. As an especially promising example of the great potential of digital projects based in photographic archives, I would cite the pioneering work in computer visualization now being undertaken by John Resig, Dean of Computer Science at the Internet-based Khan Academy, working with thousands of photographic images of anonymous Italian paintings in the context of an exemplary partnership between the Frick Art Reference Library and the Fototeca at the Fondazione Zeri in Bologna. This project exemplifies the first two of the new approaches for which Professor Kohle advocates: (1) the application of quantitative methods to art historical problems and (2) the discovery of visual correlations that human intelligence cannot easily identify, but which only human intelligence can verify. By virtue of its very scale, the PHAROS partnership, should it come to even partial fruition, further promises to address Kohle’s third theme: situating canonic works of art within a potentially encyclopedic corpus of images of world art. A kindred, if much more focused effort, Harvard University’s recent digitization of Bernard Berenson’s corpus of roughly 11,000 photographs at the Villa I Tatti devoted to “Homeless Paintings of the Italian Renaissance,” promises to offer an exciting experiment in judicious crowdsourcing (the fifth of Professor Kohle’s promising new approaches to digital art history).

New models of teaching art history on the Internet (Professor Kohle’s sixth new direction) are also emerging in exciting ways. I would single out Smarthistory, the shared vision of two art historians with roots in academe and art museums who have enlisted a cohort of teachers and scholars at all levels of professional accomplishment to create an expanding corpus of online videos on the history of world art. A key aspect of these videos is that they are dialogical in nature, intentionally departing from the traditional single “authoritarian voice” of the lec-
turer in favor of an open-ended, exploratory dialogue about works of art, monuments and sites. Widely adopted by teachers of art history, Smarthistory promises to enable and encourage what Professor Kohle describes as a “shift” in the “role of the university to an even more collaborative examination of research material.”

The subject of new approaches to publishing in art history (Kohle’s seventh topic) was explored precisely a decade ago by Mariët Westermann and Hilary Ballon in their Mellon-sponsored study, *Art History and its Publications in the Electronic Age* (2006). That study identified many of the challenges facing online publishing in art history – challenges which, as Professor Kohle rightly laments, still constitute significant barriers. These include, above all, the abiding “virulent copyright issues” (Kohle) that confront online publishing (and not only online publishing) in art history. These issues, of course, are rooted – turning to Professor Kohle’s eighth and final theme – in a deeply conservative traditional museum culture. That culture seeks to control the circulation of images of art works, reflecting both a curatorial concern about accuracy and authenticity and an economic interest in leveraging the management of rights and reproductions for the sake of museum revenues. Fortunately, that facet of museum culture is beginning to change, with an expanding, international array of distinguished academic and municipal art museums now sharing high resolution images of their public domain collections on an “open access” basis online. Another encouraging development is the recent release on the part of the College Art Association, the principle professional body of North American academic art historians and artists, of an ambitious “fair use code” for the visual arts. While “fair use” exceptions to copyright are specific to U.S. copyright legislation, we may hope that similar provisions for the educational, non-commercial use of digital images of art works will be adopted internationally in the foreseeable future.


3 Diane Zorich, Transitioning to a Digital World: Art History, Its Research Centers, and Digital Scholarship, URL: http://www.kressfoundation.org/uploaded-files/Sponsored_Research/Research/Zorich_TransitioningDigitalWorld.pdf (date of last access 6 May 2016). This study was sponsored by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation and the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media at George Mason University.


5 Ellen Prokop, The Future of Photoarchives, URL: http://www.frick.org/photo-archive/discoveries/future_photoarchives (date of last access 6 May 2016). A prototype of PHAROS may be found at http://images.pharosartresearch.org/ (date of last access 29 June 2016).

6 Louisa Wood Ruby, Kress Foundation Grant for Image Analysis Toolkit, URL: http://www.frick.org/photoarchive/discoveries/kress_foundation_grant_for_image_analysis_toolkit (date of last access 6 May 2016).


8 See the website of Smarthistory, URL: http://smarthistory.org/ (date of last access 6 May 2016). Beth Harris and Steven Zucker started Smarthistory in 2005 to create content for their students. Smarthistory launched its first custom-designed website in 2007 with the support of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation. Since then, Smarthistory has won numerous awards and its audience of undergraduate and graduate students, high school students, instructors, and informal learners has grown significantly. From 2011 – 2015, Smarthistory was supported by Khan Academy, URL: https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-history-basics/beginners-art-history/a/cave-painting-contemporary-art-and-everything-in-between (date of last access 6 May 2016). Smarthistory is now an independent not-for-profit, and remains committed to distributing the highest-quality art history content on multiple platforms, including Smarthistory.org, Khan Academy, YouTube, and Flickr.
