

Zeitschrift: Outlines
Herausgeber: Schweizerisches Institut für Kunstwissenschaft
Band: 2 (2004)

Vorwort: Preface
Autor: Griener, Pascal / Imesch, Kornelia

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 02.07.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

Preface

A conference entitled “Classicism and cosmopolitanism: cultural exchange c.1800” took place in Zurich over a two-day period in 2001 (June 6–7). Based upon an idea developed by the editors of this reader, it was organized by the Swiss Institute for Art Research (SIAR) and the Association of Swiss Art Historians (VKKS).¹ It was an international event, with contributions in several languages; the programme was divided into four sections, with sixteen speakers from Europe and America, including several young art historians. The conference, which closed with a guest lecture given by Thomas W. Gaetgens,² was held under the aegis of the Swiss section of the Comité international d’Histoire de l’Art (CIHA).³ It was generously financed by various private individuals and institutions.⁴

The Graphische Sammlung of the ETH in Zurich hosted, at the same time (16.5.–6.7.2001), an exhibition on a complementary theme, curated by Michael Matile. Entitled “Die publizierte Zeichnung. Zur Ästhetik der Reproduktion im Zeitalter des Klassizismus” (“Published drawings: reproduction aesthetics in the age of Classicism”), it first took shape within and was financed by means of a research project sponsored by the Swiss National Fund and directed by Pascal Griener (University of Neuchâtel).⁵

The colloquium and the exhibition⁶ also provided the motivation for the present publication: selected papers given at the conference discuss the cosmopolitan nature of the Age of Enlightenment and of Sensibility. The historical point of view is determined not by the traditional premisses of art historical thought such as ‘influence’ or ‘revolution’ in terms of their interaction with the art and culture of the time, but rather by a concept of the development, no less marked by political connotations, of artistic and cultural exchange in an age of upheaval which extended across the whole of Europe. Salons, museums and exhibitions, the focal points of an art business which was establishing itself, constituted the new arena for a public art discourse which was governed by Neo-Classicism, and at whose disposal were placed the *instrumentaria* which had until that time been long unknown. Scholars, collectors, connoisseurs, art dealers, art critics and exhibition artists came together through networks that communicated intensively. Art and culture were recognized as being a central concern of society and in their

didactic and democratizing aim were claimed to belong to the public sphere – a phenomenon that was subsequently to be accelerated by the ‘evolution’ of the Revolution of 1789.

Scholars – philosophers and cultural historians – considered themselves to be artists, artists and authors saw themselves as scholars. By means of a consideration of the historical theses and the cultural projects of earlier times, there was now an examination of historicity *per se* and of questions concerning individual identity. By means of the theory and the practice of art, the cosmopolitan society of scholars and artists, the “République des arts”, who (ideally) had an encyclopaedic education, made themselves understood through a common programme relating to cultural policy.

The focus on art and culture of the eighteenth century as it has been sketched out here finds an echo in the present multi-lingual publication not only by means of the title itself, but also by the choice of essays and by their presentation in four chapters: *I. Art history in its texts; II. Visual resources, cognitive systems; III. Engraving as a means of transmission; IV. A figure in course of construction: the artist.*⁷ Mindful of the need to pick up on aspects, themes and questions which have received less attention in earlier research – or to raise awareness of artists, collectors and important engravers or dealers who have suffered a similar fate – this collection of essays concentrates on problems which seem to be promising in terms of a deeper understanding of the period and of its characters. Amongst these, for example, belongs a critical explanation of Winckelmann’s understanding of history and art as this is articulated in his *opus magnum*. An objective analysis of both the structure of the text and of its dissemination allows for the presentation of decisive findings about the reception of the work and its ideas. It also shows that Winckelmann’s conceptions, in which an ‘ethnological art history’ already makes an appearance, clearly led in methodological terms to the formation of a comparative-descriptive and interpretative art history as a discipline. But it also shows that these conceptions were subjected to a fundamental criticism and revision. Karl Philipp Moritz formulated what can be seen as an anti-concept to the method of comparative description as favoured by Winckelmann since he placed the viewers on a level with the artist and equated the descriptive comprehension of an artwork with an artistic, poetic act. This act reached beyond the individual work, aiming at the aural, sacred whole which is indescribable.

In this criticism, which ultimately aimed at finding another science of art, a distancing from the traditional aesthetic canons becomes evident. These had already been broken up by the Sublime, and the distancing helped to propagate the new mimetic concepts and the concurrent changes in the reception of works of art. The modification of the concept of the genres also played a significant part in this new development, and an

example is provided by the works of Johann Heinrich Füssli. This change was marked by the newly discovered pathos of the strange, the hateful, the abnormal and the terrifying, to which a considerable weight was given against the background of the tensions, the antagonisms and the contradictions that were characteristic of this colourful period.

Of very particular interest, furthermore, is the new notion of a scientific character which began to evolve during the eighteenth century, and which is addressed in many essays in this volume in various contexts. Initiated by Newton, it was adopted and made productive for art and cultural history by Voltaire and Diderot. From its very beginnings it was typified by its analytical, experimental and rational, mediating character and it left its mark on the basic conditions of the times. For example, it contributed in a considerable fashion to the development of the fields of art history, of the judgement of art as exercised by connoisseurs and of art criticism. It was articulated in the establishment of new categories of analysis, in the definition of a new relationship between text and image or between the functions of pictorial art, and in the desire to systematize and to render accessible the artistic and cultural objects bequeathed by previous generations. In particular, it was the case that the transmission of images began, thanks to innovative printing techniques, to exercise a greater effect; this led, also because of the use of facsimiles, to a new definition of the concept of the work of art, of the original and of the artistic 'aura'. The multi-purpose 'Ersatz' ('replacement') or the 'second I' could even be seen as rendering obsolete the study of works of art *in situ* and, as a consequence, the Grand Tour. These pieces, by means of their documentary claims and functioning within a new economic and epistemological context, honoured the public demands for access to artistic and educational resources which were at the time a lively subject of discussion.

But another question also came into being as a result of impetuses which were of a scientifico-didactic and meticulously programmatic nature. This was how an author, an ideology or a theory could be communicated to a contemporary audience and also to future generations, be it by means of the illustrations or the frontispiece chosen for an important edition of collected works, or by means of a *recueil* and the reproduction techniques used for it. Rousseau provides a very good of the problems encountered when trying to see how the pretensions of his literary opus could be communicated through images, and how its esteemed author could be presented to the public as a cosmopolitan figure.

Furthermore, the budding art-market advanced intellectual claims; this market already sought during this period closely to associate commercial interests and objective, scientific knowledge, and the know-how of the connoisseurs. One instrument that was developed in order to achieve this was the catalogue raisonné, which opened up a field of conflict between research, the judgement operated by connoisseurs and marketing. To

this very day this tension still has its repercussions, and marks the relationship between the art business and art history.

Finally, other questions such as the self-awareness, the status and the role of the artists and the art public in the cosmopolitan environment of the times are a theme of this reader. These special conditions contributed to the new social and didactic functions which, under the auspices of the Enlightenment, were assigned to art during the eighteenth century. Art was now seen as, on the one hand, aiding the personal development of the individual and, on the other, contributing to the collective education of wider sections of society. Thus it was that processes which had already known a lengthy development, finally arrived at a first conclusive result. This became evident in the creation of new types of building and of institutions such as the museum, and also in the various strategies of important collectors, who at this time emerged into the public sphere. On the other hand, artists increasingly defined their position in terms of a narcissistic cult of the artist, shaped by the theory of art, art criticism, the art market and the public. This cult, whose origins can be traced to the fifteenth century, associated itself with the notion and the myth of the 'artiste' in about 1700. As a result it was not only the eighteenth-century artist – as outlined by Diderot – who was established as the forerunner to the brilliant avant-garde artists of the modern period, but already also the notion of the incomprehensibility of art. Thus it is also the period when the overly great weight attached to the contemporary concept of art begins; this same weight characterizes social and economic dealings with art in the age of Globalism.

Just as every period of upheaval bears within itself its own contradictions, so too do the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. On the one hand, they were marked by a European cosmopolitanism, and on the other, they favoured the advent of nationalistic tendencies at the time and the origin of a strengthened awareness of the homeland. The act of looking back in an attempt to identify the roots of the fatherland led to the 'discovery' of the Middle Ages; from this in turn came the right to occupy oneself with the fascinating question of the so-called 'decadent' ages.

The authors of the individual contributions and the editors hope that this collection of essays will succeed in communicating the vitality of this period which was multifaceted and can still exercise considerable influence on our own times. The typeface of the publication should also provide a further historical reference since the book is set in the so-called Bodoni-Antiqua, designed during the last years of the eighteenth century by Giambattista Bodoni (1740–1813), the brilliant Italian typographer and editor. To this day it has lost none of either its beauty or its functionality.

The present reader could not have been published without the contribution of many colleagues. At the SIAR, Juerg Albrecht accompanied the project with dedication; Franz

Müller, Sabine Felder and Regula Krähenbühl edited the German contributions; in the Antenne Romande of the SIAR, Paul-André Jaccard and Brigitte Gendroz undertook the editing of the French texts. Cecilia Hurley (Musée international d'horlogerie / Musée d'histoire naturelle in La Chaux-de-Fonds) dealt with the English texts and translated the summaries into English. The editors would like to express their hearty thanks to all of them and especially to the authors of the individual contributions.

- 1 We should like to thank the Director of the SIAR, Hans-Jörg Heusser, the head of the department of art research at the SIAR, Juerg Albrecht, the former President of the VKKS, Luc Boissonnas, as well as the members of the committee of the VKKS for their support. The success of the conference owed much to the dedicated work of a number of collaborators: Cecilia Hurley, and, at the SIAR, Berthe Bocha, Marlies Flammer, Brigitte Gendroz, Urs Hobi and Monika Krebs. She – and also Thomas Schmutz (University of Neuchâtel) – were also helping out on behalf of the VKKS.
- 2 I) “Institutions, artists and the art market: relations and tensions”; II) “Artists’ self-awareness and image: models and aims”; III) “Art history / Art theory”; IV) “The Grand Tour and the spread of images: aspects of cultural exchange”. – At this point, we should like to thank very much all of the participants, including the guest lecturer, Thomas W. Gaehtgens, who were presenting the most recent results of their research in Zurich.
- 3 In Zurich the CIHA was represented by its president, Stephen Bann, by the president of the Swiss section, Pascal Griener, and also by Oskar Bächtli, Horst Bredekamp, Nicole Dubreuil, Elisa Fucikova, Arthur Rosenauer and Philippe Sénéchal.
- 4 We should like to thank particularly those whose generous contributions made the event possible: Ursula Kreibich, Riehen, Viktor Bohren, Zurich, the Presidential Department of the town of Zurich, the Swiss Academy of Humanities and of Social Sciences, the Association for the funding of the SIAR, the VKKS and the Service de Coopération et d’Action Culturelle de l’Ambassade de France. The organisers are grateful to the ETH Zurich and to the former Secretary General of the ETH-Commission, Johannes Fulda, who kindly allowed us to use their premises at no cost, and were very generous in their hospitality. – The conference was rounded off by a visit (organized by the VKKS) to four important art institutions in Winterthur on June 8 2001. Ursula Perucchi, Curator of the Villa Flora, Dieter Schwarz, Director of the Kunstmuseum and a member of the committee of the VKKS, and Peter Wegmann, Curator of the Sammlung Oskar Reinhart am Stadtpark and of the Museum Briner and the Museum Kern, presented the artistic and cultural treasures of their collections.
- 5 Those involved in the project and the exhibition were Axel Christoph Gamp (ETH Zurich / University of Lausanne), Karen Junod (Lincoln College, Oxford), Camilla Murgia (Merton College, Oxford) and Cecilia Hurley (Musée international d’horlogerie, La Chaux-de-Fonds / University of Neuchâtel).
- 6 Paul Lang, Musée d’art et d’histoire, Geneva, formerly at the SIAR in Zurich, contributed substantially to the initial planning of the Swiss National Fund project.
- 7 The individual contributions are printed in their original language and are followed by a summary in English which includes the most important points. At the end of the book short biographies of the contributors will be found.