

historiography like the Greek one codified, and reflected on, ideas about historical ruptures and continuities.

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Christopher S. Wood, *A History of Art History*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019. Pp. 472. US\$35.00 (cloth).

Of all disciplines in the humanities, with the exception of philosophy, it is probably the history of art that has been most obsessed with writing its own history. In Europe, the first collection of biographies of persons other than saints (or philosophers) was Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* (1550). As early as 1840, the first biography appeared of an art historian (Carl Friedrich von Rumohr), predating the first professorship position by twenty years. In the present day, a scholarly industry has flourished around the likes of Vasari, Karel van Mander, the Vienna School, and Aby Warburg. December 9 continues to be a day of annual celebrations at German universities, marking the birthday of Johann Joachim Winkelmann.

What explains this situation is obviously that the analysis of art—when it extends to artistic theory, transhistorical criticism, and aesthetics—progresses no less than philosophy in dialogue with older writings. More important, perhaps, is that the visual arts themselves have, much more than music, drama, or literature, engaged with their own temporality: from the Egyptian pyramids built to withstand the millennia, through Michelangelo's hands-on reworking of Hellenistic sculpture, to the insistence of postmodern conceptual art on having arrived at the end of a timeline (the "end of art" was declared by Arthur Danto in 1997). French cathedrals took centuries to be completed; artists at Renaissance courts alternated the contemplation of absolute beauty and optical theory with physically digging up shards from the past. As of today, the practice of art restoration remains a constant weighing up of ideals of historical reconstruction against demands of current display and future reversibility.

The intricate interweaving of the historical discipline with criticism, aesthetics, and art's own chronological imperative may be to blame for the fact that "there are only a few synthetic or narrative treatments" of the entirety of the historiography, according to Christopher Wood's magisterial *A History of Art History* (411). Wood holds his main model to be Julius von Schlosser's *Die Kunstliteratur* (Schroll, 1924) and mentions just four other predecessors (Venturi, Kultermann, Bazin, and Locher). His definition is a very narrow one that excludes overviews of the historical development of art theory (e.g., Mosche Barasch, *Theories of Art*, 3 vols. [NYU Press, 1985–90]; Norbert Schneider,

Geschichte der Kunsttheorie [Böhlau, 2011]) and aesthetics (Edgard de Bruyne, *Geschiedenis van de aethetica*, 5 vols. [Standaard-Boekhandel, 1951–55]; Władysław Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, 3 vols. [Mouton, 1970–74]; Monroe Beardsley, *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present* [University of Alabama Press, 1975]; Götz Pochat, *Geschichte der Ästhetik und Kunsttheorie* [DuMont, 1986]). This is not to say that Wood shies away from his discipline's more abstract dimensions: on the contrary, his book often flies high above the empirical. It devotes, for instance, separate chapters to Goethe and Hegel, neither of whom made time for archival nitty-gritty. Essential for his selection of authors, however, is that even when they have engaged with timeless aesthetic forms, they have done so in light of art's relationship to works from earlier periods.

The volume is structured chronologically but distinguishes three enduring trends: writing art history in terms of annals, typology, and fables. Annals, often authored by artists themselves, enumerate artworks and masters in a temporal sequence, holding their qualities against an immutable standard and thus resulting in a narrative of progress and/or decline. Typology is different in that it sees analogies between works from different periods, which may or may not have been intended by the artists. Third, fabulous history—and this phrasing is original for the field—readjusts conventional values, for instance by placing the “primitive” qualities of ancients or foreigners on a pedestal (e.g., extolling art that had previously been dismissed with the pejorative terms “Gothic” or “Romanesque”): an ironical figure of speech may thus lead to fundamental aesthetic relativism. These three lines of argument are only drawn out in the book's first half. The second half is more loosely centered around art historians' engagement with the “disparate ways of thinking about time” that characterize art itself (or at least some of it): “eternity, flows, reversals, and switchbacks. All around art [by contrast] is linear time, directed and convergent, the time of mere experience that governs modernist progressivism” (392).

The author covers a broad array of (predominantly German) texts, from treatises and philosophical writings to museum catalogues and travel guides (the latter, he observes, restored the importance of orality: showing and telling in tour groups reached many more people than the professors ever did). He combines this with an innovative analysis of how artworks themselves have repeated, reworked, replaced, or referenced the past, an approach that was first tested in his 2008 volume on Albrecht Dürer and his contemporaries, *Forgery, Replica, Fiction: Temporalities of German Renaissance Art* (University of Chicago Press).

Wood is the rare humanist who feels equally at home in early modern and modern eras, and the first chapters of *A History of Art History* contain poignant remarks about early Protestant ideas on art as well as a fresh look at Vasari. He does not explain, however, why he has omitted altogether the classical period, from Pliny to Chorikios of Gaza. He discusses the years 800–1400 in a single chapter, in a book of twenty-one chapters

in total. His two-chapter walk through the foundational seventeenth century is so brisk that he does not recognize the aesthetic of ugliness already present in Dutch art theory (by 1700 there certainly was a “a language to justify the deformed” [208]).

By contrast, the decades after 1890 are honored with one chapter *each*, and it is the Austrian and German disciplinary classics that are the volume’s mainstays. From the larger perspective of the history of the humanities, this makes sense, since around 1900 art history (at least in Germany) was the preeminent historical discipline, its impact extending to studies of music and literature and of the “historical sensation” in general. The classic analysis of Alois Riegl and Heinrich Wölfflin focused on form; also, for Wood (who was trained in Vienna, by Konrad Oberhuber), without visual and material form there is no art. With the diminishing attention to form on the part of artists themselves after the 1960s, his interest (and his book’s narrative) ends.

Along the way, we have learned that from the early 1800s on, a few woman historiographers made their appearance (Johanna Schopenhauer, Maria Graham, Sydney Owenson, Anita Brenner). Wood also tries to be more inclusive than his predecessors by extending beyond Europe, chiefly by addressing aspects of Chinese connoisseurship of the Ming and early Qing dynasties. The arts of India and the pre-Columbian Americas art appear in his book solely through the eyes of their European observers (from Ludovico de Varthema to Stella Kramrisch). Long overdue and much needed as these forays may be, they are mere sideroads of Wood’s argument. In particular, the inexplicable absence of the Arabic world (Ibn Khaldun’s views on architecture are not even mentioned) makes this volume in fact a “history of Western art history.”

Despite its title, the book’s character is not that of a reference work or textbook (it would pose quite a challenge for undergraduates). Its prose sometimes moves at the speed of a pinball machine, jumping from practical observations via highly personal criticisms to gnomic declarations. As each page, however, includes little-known factual gems, eloquent witticisms, or unexpected insights, the mental effort required to keep one’s eye on the ball is very rewarding. Undoubtedly, Wood has set the bar high for any future overview in terms of the diversity of his interests and analytic depth. From now on, it is clear that the historiography of art resides in a double helix, of which the written tradition is only one strand. The other is made up of material objects: the reproductions, restorations, illustrations, and displays that mediate the relation between art and time. Only such an integrated approach of words and things can bring us closer to art, which is ultimately “unavailable to reason and not fully involved with history, an unknown external to man even if produced by man” (407).

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