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Rethinking Art Historical Canons

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Cover Photo: A renewed *gákti* for Maarit Magga's son. Image: Johanna Labba,

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Rethinking Art History

Accidental Canons, Failed Canons, Counter Canons

Marja Lahelma

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In recent decades, the established canons and narratives of art history have faced significant challenges. Conventional methods of defining periods and genres – often rooted in notions of national specificity and linear progress – have become highly questionable amid evolving political, societal, and cultural landscapes. Global and transnational perspectives not only question national canons but also challenge supposedly universal narratives, such as the progression towards modernism. Yet, notions like nationalism and progress remain central and extremely powerful aspects of contemporary political culture. Hence, the greatest challenge presented to art historical scholarship in these turbulent times is to find ways of engaging with these issues in a manner that is sensitive, productive, and societally relevant.

In November 2023, Helsinki served as the venue for an international gathering of over one hundred scholars, aimed at exploring these themes through diverse art historical and contemporary lenses. The conference, titled *Rethinking Art Historical Narratives and Canons*, was a collaborative initiative between the Society for Art History in Finland and the University of Helsinki's Department of Cultures, discipline of Art History. Discussions at the conference encompassed a broad array of topics, including global and postcolonial perspectives, queer and gender issues, marginalisation, cultural memory and forgetting, as well as the dynamics of nationalism and transnationalism.

The special issue "Rethinking Art Historical Canons" extends the dialogue initiated at the conference, presenting a collection of articles that engage with an extensive variety of materials and viewpoints to cultivate critical insights into art historiography. For instance, Margot Renard's article suggests an art historical approach to comics, a medium that has traditionally received scant attention within art historical scholarship. Karolina Łabowicz-Dymanus, on the other hand, delves into a politically charged field in

her article on Polish art history, explaining how entrenched conservative paradigms, influenced by socio-political dynamics and the rise of populist politics, have hindered the adoption of critical methodologies.

The contributors to this issue examine concepts such as "accidental canons," "failed canons," and "counter canons," which reveal the often-overlooked narratives that exist alongside established art historical accounts. Kaija Kaitavuori's exploration of a "counter canon" highlights the reciprocal influences between Western and non-Western art that have been largely neglected in mainstream art history. While it is widely acknowledged that Picasso and his contemporaries were inspired by African and Oceanic art, the reciprocal impact of Western art on Nigerian artist Aina Onabolu has remained marginal within art historical discourse. The prevailing narrative often celebrates Picasso's engagement with "tribal art" as a pivotal moment in modernism while interpreting Onabolu's assimilation of Western influences as passive or even detrimental.

Kaitavuori's examination of this complex and multifaceted issue underscores the necessity for art historians to reflect critically on their own training and on the potential perpetuation of distorted views. The difficulties of engaging with marginalised perspectives and materials do not necessarily stem from a conscious desire for dominance but rather from the uncritical repetition of learned narratives. Recognising this tendency is a crucial first step; thereafter, scholars can engage in a process of unlearning and relearning, which, as Kaitavuori suggests, necessitates not only the augmentation of knowledge but also a fundamental restructuring of perceptions.

Charlotte Ashby and Bente Aass Solbakken also explore topics connected to the colonial histories of Europe. Ashby discusses the emergence of new art professions and the evolving roles of collectors and critics in response to the influx of Chinese artefacts in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Britain. Her analysis reveals how these objects challenged and enriched British art discourse while also examining the intricate networks of individuals and institutions that shaped the appreciation of Chinese art within Britain.

Solbakken's article on the Norwegian architect Kjell Borgen opens with a question: "What defines Sámi architecture?" The article presents an exploration of Borgen's works in Sápmi and his engagement with these issues in his role as a scholar of traditional Sámi architecture. Borgen strove to integrate traditional Sámi elements into modern architectural practices, thus significantly contributing to the conceptualisation of Sámi architecture. However, it is also indisputable that his efforts exist within a broader historical context of Norwegian dominance over Sámi cultural expressions. Solbakken's analysis of Borgen's work as an architect and scholar exemplifies the immense complexities of colonial power dynamics.

The significance of Sámi heritage is further illuminated in Maarit Magga's lectio praecursoria, which discusses the historical and cultural importance of Sámi *duodji* (crafts). Magga's research examines the multisensory visuality and aesthetics of Sámi crafts within ecclesiastical settings, thereby emphasizing the integration of indigenous knowledge and the cultural dimensions of Sámi craftsmanship.

Maija Koskinen and Patricia G. Berman address the role of exhibition history within art historical inquiry. Koskinen critiques the overlooked impact of international art exhibitions in Finland during the Cold War era, arguing that these events have been marginalised within the Finnish art historical canon due to political and cultural biases. By reassessing significant exhibitions from Eastern Europe and the United States exhibitions, Koskinen's article advocates for a

broader understanding of Finnish art history and its transnational influences.

Berman's case study of the 1982–1983 exhibition "Northern Light: Realism and Symbolism in Scandinavian Painting, 1880–1910" illustrates how this exhibition inadvertently established a canonical framework for understanding Nordic art in the Anglophone world. A young graduate student at the time, Berman was present at the birth of this exhibition in the role of a research assistant. Her analysis constructs an insider view of the process, describing the exhibition's rapid organization which was influenced by national and cultural diplomacy. Even though the initial aim was not to create a definitive art-historical canon, the exhibition has had a lasting impact on academic and museum practices regarding Nordic art. The article emphasizes the role of canon formation as a contingent and dynamic process shaped by institutional, cultural, and political forces, demonstrating how an ephemeral exhibition can influence enduring narratives and stereotypes in art history.

While Berman explores the formation of an "accidental canon," Jane Boddy's article examines a "failed canon." She reflects on the power struggle between two influential art critics at the beginning of the twentieth century, Ferdinand Avenarius and Julius Meier-Graefe. Boddy argues that their conflicting visions of modern art contributed to the marginalisation of the artist Katherine Schäffner who, despite Avenarius's efforts, remains absent from broader art history. The term "failed canons" refers here to artists or artistic movements that, despite being promoted or having potential significance, did not become part of the widely accepted art historical narrative or canon.

The articles presented in this issue collectively illuminate the intricate complexities of art historical narratives within a transnational and global framework. By questioning established canons and embracing alternative viewpoints, the authors enrich our understanding of art history, reflecting its diverse and multifaceted nature. The vibrant dialogue sparked at the conference and carried forward in this special issue is crucial for advancing art historical scholarship and ensuring its relevance in today's rapidly evolving cultural landscape.

As museums and art galleries draw larger audiences than ever before, it is imperative for art historians to recognize the profound influence and opportunities we possess to make a meaningful impact. We bear a responsibility to harness this power for positive change, using our insights to shape more inclusive, enriching, and transformative narratives.

Marja Lahelma (PhD) is a Chief Curator at the Ateneum Art Museum, Finnish National Gallery. Her main field of expertise is in late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century Finnish and Nordic art. She has a special interest in the ideological dimension of art historiography and the intersections of art and esotericism.

The Accidental Canon

Reverse Engineering *Northern Light*

Patricia G. Berman

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This case study in decanonization examines the making of the exhibition *Northern Light: Realism and Symbolism in Scandinavian Painting, 1880–1910* (US and Sweden, 1982–1983). The exhibition became established in the Anglophone world, and internationally, as a framework for understanding Nordic art. It has become a canon that has shaped – and continues to effect – academic and museum practice. The article examines the institutional apparatus and the contingency of circumstances that shaped the contours of the exhibition and thus the canonical model it generated. Among them are the national exigencies in the US (and the five Nordic nations), the scholarly vision of curator Kirk Varnedoe, the exceptional rapidity with which the exhibition was realized, the relatively few Anglophone scholarly sources available in English, and the various pressures placed on the project. The article questions the process of canonization through which an ephemeral exhibition, created for a manifest national purpose in the U.S., generated an enduring art-historical model, even a stereotype. Through a close study of the planning process, the contingent nature of the canon is examined.

Keywords: *Northern Light, canonization, Kirk Varnedoe, exhibition practice, national identity*

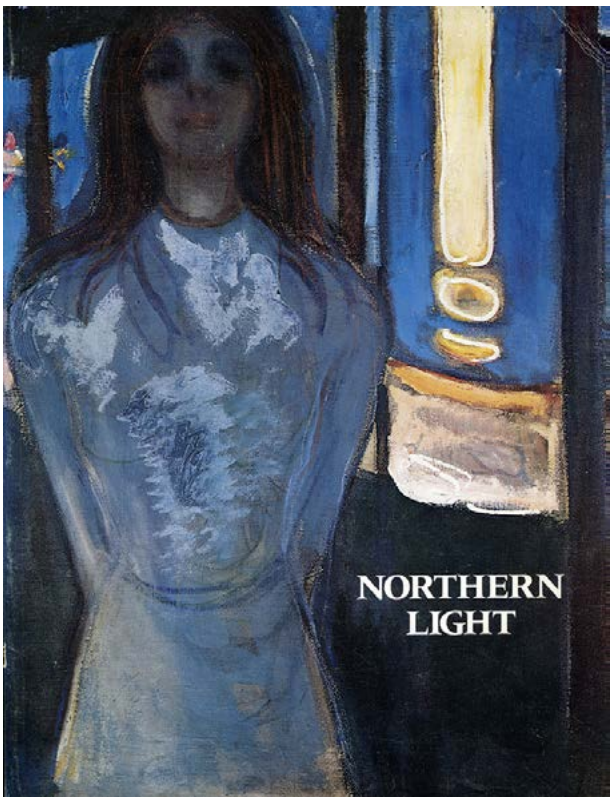

Image 1. Cover, *Northern Light: Realism and Symbolism in Scandinavian Painting, 1880-1910,* exhibition catalogue, The Brooklyn Museum, 1982. Image: author's collection, all rights reserved.

Literary critic Gregor Langfeld states that "canonisation practices represent an area of research that deserves more attention," since art historians have traditionally studied "*art* as such and have in the process themselves contributed to the establishment of *this* art as worthy of study and therefore participated in its canonisation." He contends that the critical study of canonization processes and practices uncovers the mechanisms at play in determining value and taste.[1] The retrospective "process study" of *Northern Light: Realism and Symbolism in Scandinavian Painting, 1880-1910*, an exhibition that toured the United States in 1982 and 1983, offers such an opportunity. Opening at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.; traveling to The Brooklyn Museum and the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, it was then held under the title *Nordiskt Ljus* at the Gothenburg Art Museum in the summer of 1983. *Northern Light* represents a canonization process or rather several nested canonization processes.

Art-historical canonization is not a "one-and-done" phenomenon, but a process entailing an accrual of acknowledgements. Occasionally an intervention in the art-historical imaginary, such as an exhibition, will have sufficient weight to concretize a selected group of works as exemplary. Alfred H. Barr, Jr.'s "Cubism and Abstract Art" at New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1936, for example, had such an effect. Unlike the MoMA exhibition, which was part of a longer-term institutional strategy,[2] *Northern Light* offers a fascinating case study as a kind of "accidental canon" in that it was curated in immense haste and was created in the service of a larger American cultural diplomacy project. While in no way as embedded in the history of modernism as Barr's exhibition, *Northern Light*, and its aftermath, provide a case study in the shaping of national and international narrative histories. To recount the process of organizing *Northern Light* is to consider the contingency of canon formation and its ripple effects over time and geography. Some of the dynamics and actors shaping the 1982 exhibition included the competition among nationalisms in the five Nordic countries, the personal tastes of an American curator, the responsibilities of directors and curators at the five national museums

1 Gregor Langfeld, "The Canon in Art History: Concepts and Approaches," *Journal of Art Historiography* 19 (December 2018), 2, https://pure.uva.nl/ws/files/32456294/langfeld.pdf

2 Susan Noyes Platt argued that the organization, rationalizing structure, travel, and promotion of Alfred H. Barr, Jr.'s 1936 exhibition "Cubism and Abstract Art" decontextualized Cubism from its historical moment and so successfully inserted it into a teleology of modernism that, despite numerous critical revisions, the movement has been hard to decouple from Barr's structure. The 1936 exhibition became its own canon, based on preexisting sub-canonical critical discernment. See Platt, "Modernism, Formalism, and Politics: The 'Cubism and Abstract Art' Exhibition of 1936 at the Museum of Modern Art," *Art Journal*, 47, no. 4 (Winter 1988): 284–295.

Image 2. Installation shot, *Northern Light: Realism and Symbolism in Scandinavian Painting, 1880-1910*, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., September 8–October 17, 1982. Image: courtesy of the Archives of the American-Scandinavian Foundation, New York, all rights reserved

Image 3. Installation shot, *Northern Light: Realism and Symbolism in Scandinavian Painting, 1880-1910*, The Brooklyn Museum, November 10, 1982–January 6, 1983. Image: courtesy of the Archives of the American-Scandinavian Foundation, New York, all rights reserved.

and other Nordic museums, cultural exchange organizations, the U.S. government, diplomats, and corporations.

This article is an attempt to "reverse engineer" the exhibition because, although it is over forty years since it opened, the "Northern Light" thesis and its catalogue had immediate international impact and continue to find purchase in university pedagogy and museum display.[3] I write in the first-person voice, something I do not usually practice, because, as a graduate student, I was the research assistant on the exhibition and followed or engaged in its planning step by step. Based on archival materials, notes, my memory of events, and an excellent article by American scholar Michelle Facos,[4] I here consider some of the forces and actors that formulated the exhibition as a case study in the canonization process.

"A new and interesting legacy"

> Pretty dismal, to say it immediately and without beating around the bush at all: it is certainly not thrilling now that this American exhibition of our Nordic painting has appeared on our home ground. [...] At home at the Gothenburg Art Museum, it will be met with more reservation, with criticism of incomprehensible choices, real errors, and unforgivable omissions… [5]

With those words, Danish art critic Pierre Lübecker (1921–90) reviewed *Northern Light: Realism and Symbolism in Scandinavian Painting, 1880–1990*. The exhibition was unique at the time in its strategy of blending and seeking consonance among fin-de-siècle paintings from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. *Northern Light* was curated by Kirk Varnedoe (1946–2003), a professor at the New York University Institute Fine Arts (and later Chair of Painting and Sculpture at New York's Museum of Modern Art), at whom Lübecker directed particular disparagement: Varnedoe "is the man in the center; he is the one we should focus on," a scholar who only had "eyes for Munch" and whose selections sensationalized "loneliness, sickness, fear of death, alienation, religious fanaticism, bigoted egotism, ravings, and mysticism," with an emphasis on the stereotyping "magic of the Nordic summer nights or [...] a special melancholy feeling for nature."

Despite Lübecker's condemnation, *Nordisk Ljus* attracted the largest crowds in the history of the

3 A version of this essay was presented as a keynote at Helsinki in November 2023 at the conference "Rethinking Art Historical Narratives and Canons" and as the introduction to Nasjonalmuseet (Oslo) and University Oslo's collaborative project "Firing the Canon." As I contemplated the call for papers for the conference, I considered three of its suggestions: the role of art historical canons in the networks of cultural memory and forgetting; the meaning of national canons in a global world; and the role of art-historical scholarship in shaping and challenging nationalist narratives. Representing the "Firing the Norwegian Canon," a project that involved the University of Oslo and the Nasjonalmuseet, Oslo, were Mai Britt Guleng, Bente Solbakken, Eilif Salemonsen, and Talette Simonsen, National Museum, Oslo; MaryClaire Pappas, Savannah College of Art, US; and Tonje Haugland Sørensen and Ingrid Halland, University of Bergen, Norway. I thank Marja Lahelma for the invitation to speak and also to submit this paper. For research help, I thank Janice Bell, National Endowment for the Humanities; Alexander Ross, Los Angeles; and especially Lynn Carter, American-Scandinavian Foundation, and for editorial advice, I am grateful to Mai Britt Guleng, Michelle Facos, MaryClaire Pappas, Øystein Sjåstad, Lynn Carter, and Edward Gallagher, and I am indebted to the Feldberg Chair at Wellesley College for research support.

4 Michelle Facos, "The Dawning of Northern Light: An Exhibition and its Influence," in *A Fine Regard: Essays in Honor of Kirk Varnedoe*, ed. Patricia G. Berman and Gertje R. Utley (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Press, 2008).

5 Pierre Lübecker, "In a Mirror of Sorrow: Nordic Art Seen with American Lens," *Politiken*, May 12, 1983 (translated into English), Telefax from Carl Tomas Edam to Kirk Varnedoe, Archives of the American Scandinavian Foundation, New York.

Gothenburg Art Museum.[6] Björn Fredlund, at the time the director, and Per Bjurström, Curator of Prints and Drawings at Stockholm's National Museum, called *Northern Light* "an international breakthrough for Nordic painting" in an essay they published in the *Nordiskt Ljus* catalogue. The exhibition, they wrote, presented:

> …a new and interesting legacy for us. [...] The American organizers also approached the material in a creative, interpretive and, as some opinions have it, self-inflicted manner [...] The exhibition's strength is also due to the fact that they dared to refrain from diffusing the art of the period. Thus, history painting, biblical or mythological scenes, Saga motifs, depictions of folk life, and Vitalism, as well as several artists who may seem obvious to us – with claims to representativeness – are missing.[7]

Rather than represent each nation's imagined teleology, or its late nineteenth-century eclecticism, the American exhibition "allowed Nordic distinctiveness to emerge more clearly." In a 1991 article in the newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet*, Swedish art historian Hans-Olof Boström (Chief Curator of the Gothenburg Art Museum from 1983–1987) acknowledged that the American curator "taught we northerners to completely understand the value of our own turn-of-the-century art."[8] The exhibition quickly became canonical, in that its organization, checklist, and general thesis became the standard by, or against, which other studies were organized. The exhibition initially occasioned a series of similarly configured exhibitions in Oslo, Copenhagen, Stockholm, and Helsinki, and then in Paris and London,[9] which attempted

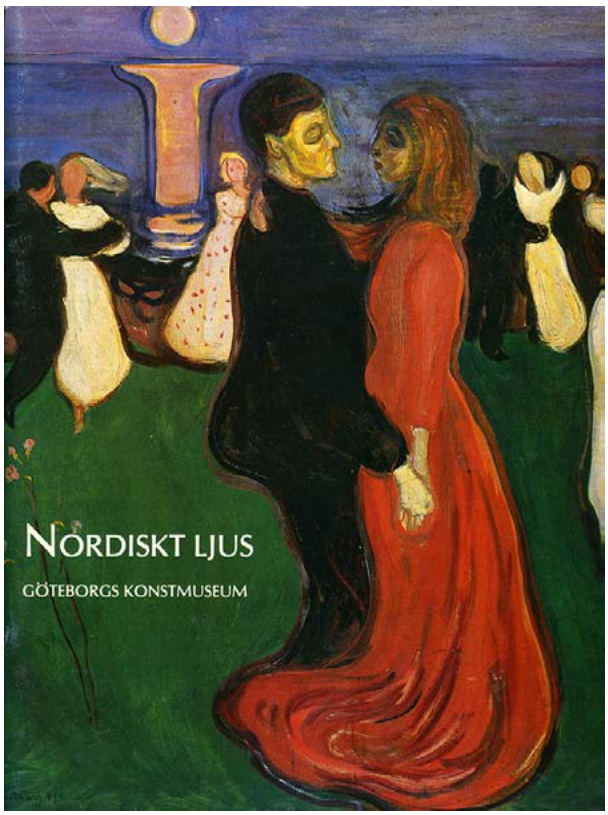

Image 4. Cover, *Nordiskt Ljus: Realism och Symbolism i Skandinavisk Måleri 1880-1920*, exhibition catalogue, Göteborgs Konstmuseum, May 7–3 July 3, 1983. Image: author's collection, all rights reserved.

6 A telegram sent to the American-Scandinavian Foundation confirmed, "When the museum doors closed yesterday in Gothenburg 82.000 visitors had been registered, an all-time record of the Gothenburg Art Gallery. Their ticket machine broke down yesterday so not all were registered at the end." Undated telegram from Carl Tomas Edam, Archives of the American-Scandinavian Foundation, New York. Also mentioned by Edam was the exceptional promotional material: Nationwide television reminded the public not to miss the exhibition and a colour spread had appeared in *Dagens Nyheter*, the newspaper of record. See also Göteborgs Konstmuseum, "En hunderaårlig historia," https://goteborgskonstmuseum.se/100ar/.

7 Per Bjurström & Björn Fredlund, "Nordiskt sekelskifte i amerikansk belysning," in *Nordiskt Ljus: Realism och Symbolism i Skandinaviskt Måleri 1880–1910*, ed. Lena Boëthius & Håkan Wettre, ex. cat., Göteborgs Konstmuseum, 7 May – 3 June, 1983, 2.

8 As quoted in Facos, "Dawning of Northern Light," 66.

9 *1880-årene i nordisk maleri* (Nasjonalgalleriet, Oslo; Nationalmuseum, Stockholm; Amos Andersons Konstmuseum, Helsinki; and Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen, 1985-1986); *Dreams of a Summer Night: Scandinavian Painting at the Turn of the Century* (Hayward Gallery, London and co-organized by the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Arts Council of Great Britain, 1986); and *Lumières Du Nord: La Peinture Scandinave 1885-1905* (Musée Du Petit Palais, Paris, 1987). Michelle Facos observes that these exhibitions share many of the same authors, none of them from the *Northern Light* project, in "Dawning of Northern Light," 64.

to push back against perceived misunderstandings of the American curator and fill in some of the exclusions of the exhibition. Yet they were still organized on its paradigm,[10] reifying a "Northern Light" phenomenon.

In fact, the "light of the north" generated its own force field as a trope and even a stereotype. In the wake of the exhibition were others that seemed to ascribe artistic agency to light itself, rather than to the artists: *Northern Light* (Madrid and Barcelona, 1995); *Baltic Light: Early Open-Air Painting in Denmark and North Germany* (Ottawa, 1999); *Now the Light Comes from the North: Jugendstil in Finland* (Berlin, 2002); *Christen Købke: Danish Master of Light* (London, 2010); *Northern Light* (Paris, 2021); and *Beyond the Light: Identity and Place in Nineteenth Century Danish Art* (New York, 2023); And the list continues, including an exhibition provisionally entitled "Northern Lights" currently being organized by the Fondation Beyeler in Basel.[11] I also must admit to being a party to such viral illumination through a book entitled *In Another Light* and an exhibition entitled *Luminous Modernism* in New York.[12]

Broadly speaking, an art-historical canon can be defined as a body of work determined to be authoritative and of indisputable quality, a reference point, a standard against which others are measured. Art-historical canons are organizing mechanisms often intertwined with national or regional identities and that may provide the visual and material confirmation of identity itself.[13] As such, canons are configured from ideas as much as they are of material objects.[14] Canons are shaped by generational need and the political and social circumstances that give rise to a selection of materials that seem to represent or embody a culture both in a moment and over time, works that, taken together seem indexical of a place or a space or a people. Their contours change with shifting political and cultural needs and considerations, particularly when national canons interact with international understandings and reception.[15] What constitutes a canon and the durability of that configuration is constantly challenged by competing ways of thinking and by competing tastes. To canonize is to declare a set of objects, producers, or texts as the highest order of their kind, and to stabilize or confirm group identity at a given moment. Consequently, as norms change, canons are always under construction.[16]

Objects that enter the permanent collections of museums, particularly national museums, for example, receive the imprimatur as established entities, accessible candidates for reproduction

10 Facos, "Dawning of Northern Light," 62.

11 *Northern Light* (Museo National Centro de'Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, and Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona, 1995); *Baltic Light: Early Open-Air Painting in Denmark and North Germany* (National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, 1999); *Now the Light Comes from the North: Art Nouveau in Finland (Das Licht kommt jetzt von Norden: Jugendstil in Finnland*; Bröhan-Museum, Berlin, 2002); *Christen Købke: Danish Master of Light* (National Gallery, London, 2010); *La lumière du nord*, (Bendama/Pinel Art Contemporain, Paris, 2021); and *Beyond the Light: Identity and Place in Nineteenth Century Danish Art* (Metropolitan Museum, New York, 2023).

12 Patricia G. Berman, *In Another Light: Danish Painting in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Vendome Press; London: Thames & Hudson; Copenhagen: Aschehoug Forlag, 2007; paperback edition Thames & Hudson, 2013); and *Luminous Modernism: Scandinavian Art Comes to America: A Centennial Retrospective 1912 | 2012*, ex. cat. (New York: The American-Scandinavian Foundation and SNAP Editions, 2011).

13 See Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *Toward a Geography of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

14 Hubert Locher, "The Idea of the Canon and Canon Formation in Art History," in *Art History and Visual Studies in Europe*, ed. Matthew Rampley, et. al. (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 37.

15 See for example Martha Langford, ed., *Narratives Unfolding. National Art Histories in an Unfinished World* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017).

16 Locher, "Idea of the Canon," 31, 33–34.

and other modes of diffusion.[17] Through their appearance in loan shows, analyses in scholarly tracts, reproductions as postcards and calendars, and other means of circulation, certain works become the "always already" designees as canonical or agreed-upon reference works. The convergence of museum display and organization, survey books, and the diffusion of particular images into the common culture create the circumstances through which certain kinds of work become valorized and the stickiness of valorization attaches to our turns of thought. Gregor Langfeld reminds us that scholars should be critically engaged in parsing such a process of repetition or "parrot[ing] out" as it has "led and still lead to some artists being included in the canon and entering history, and others being excluded."[18]

Comprising ninety-four paintings representing thirty-six artists, *Northern Light* proposed a commonality among the five Nordic nations in terms of their embrace and practice of modernism embedded in national identity and in a convergence of Realism and Naturalism commingled with nature mysticism. It was never curator Kirk Varnedoe's intention to create a definitive new canon or cohesive survey. He prefaced the *Northern Light* exhibition catalogue with the statement that:

> The paintings in Northern Light were selected to encourage comparison and contrast between the Realism and Symbolism that shaped a generation of Scandinavian artists in the 1880s and '90s and linked them in important ways to the formation of early modern art. They were not intended to form an inclusive or evenhanded survey of all the developments in Scandinavian painting in the late nineteenth century. Given the problem of representing five nations over more than two decades, the works were chosen with the intent of strengthening the thematic and visual coherence of the exhibition as a whole, as well as with the idea of effectively demonstrating a limited number of key aspects of the art of the five nations. The selection was determined by the quality and interest of individual paintings, rather than by a predetermined list of artists required to be represented.[19]

Yet once this selection of works was set into motion and became the virtually unique introduction of Nordic works of the 1880s and 1890s to the Anglophone world, it was received as definitive and instructional.

Varnedoe had long held an interest in modern painting in Northern Europe, material that was generally absent from the study of modern art in the United States. He had published a book on the German artist Max Klinger in 1977,[20] and a much-admired 1979 article on Norwegian painter Christian Krohg and his influence on the work of Edvard Munch.[21] In the following year, he advocated for a broader geographic, and therefore conceptually complex, understanding of modernisms outside of Paris (at that time seen as the model for avant-garde modern art). He twice cited Robert Rosenblum's 1975 book *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition* for its reevaluation of Caspar David Friedrich as an example of how northern European painting had been so little studied in the Anglophone world.[22] He also argued against "simple teleologies" of modernism,

17 Bruce Robertson, "The Tipping Point: Museum Collecting and the Canon," *American Art* 17, no. 3 (Autumn 2003): 2.

18 Langfeld, "Canon in Art History," 1.

19 Kirk Varnedoe, "Author's Note," *Northern Light: Realism and Symbolism in Scandinavian Painting 1880–1910*, ex. cat. (New York: The Brooklyn Museum, 1982), 12.

20 Kirk Varnedoe, *The Graphic Works of Max Klinger*, with Elizabeth Streicher (New York: Dover, 1977).

21 Kirk Varnedoe, "Christian Krohg and Edvard Munch," *Arts Magazine*, Vol. 53, no. 8 (April 1979): 88–95.

22 Kirk Varnedoe, "Revision Revisited," *Art Journal*, Autumn-Winter, Vol. 40, nos. 1 and 2 (1980): 348–349.

such as the orthodoxy that painting progressed from Naturalism to Impressionism to Post-Impressionism/Symbolism in a linear manner, and he castigated American Francophilia as a form of "intellectual provincialism" and insularity. Instead, he argued for "expanded understandings" of nineteenth-century studies that could usher in "the paradigms for powerful revisions within the central territory of modernism."[23] He struggled with the problem of the "additive approach" to nineteenth-century art history[24] – to expand but not to shift fundamentally – by tentatively considering the very different cultural dynamics at play within and among nation states. To be invited to organize *Northern Light* was therefore an opportunity to put his ways of seeing into motion. In particular, he was interested in reconsidering late nineteenth-century Realism not as retrograde, but as part of a more complicated dialogue with anti-naturalistic art.[25] However, he was not the original curator to be offered the curatorship of the exhibition. The exhibition itself, furthermore, was not a standalone scholarly and aesthetic enterprise, but in part a United States government-sponsored project in cultural diplomacy.[26]

International cooperation

Northern Light was organized by "Scandinavia Today," a U.S. celebration of contemporary cultures in the Nordic Countries, the final in a series of six year-long cultural projects that had included "Mexico Today" in 1978, followed by Canada, Japan, Belgium, Egypt, and Scandinavia. The overall project was designed at the time of the U.S. Bicentennial celebrations in 1976 to educate Americans about other nations "with an eye to North|South and East|West axes."[27] The Scandinavia Today initiative was unique in that it incorporated five countries into one project, a gesture that in the first instance emphasized regional collaboration and Nordic unity and similitude. All of these projects were generated by the National Endowment for the Arts and National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH).

The Scandinavian Today initiative was organized by the American-Scandinavian Foundation (ASF), based in New York City, the first multi-country cultural exchange organization in the U.S., founded in 1910.[28] The pan-Nordic

23 Ibid., 351.

24 Saloni Mathur, "Response: Belonging to Modernism," *The Art Bulletin* 90, no. 4 (December 2008): 559. Responding to a very different dynamic within art-historical study and valuation, Mathur nonetheless addresses the challenge of adding cultural materials to a pre-conceived Eurocentric canon without providing a new framework for, and making visible, shifting criteria and power imbalances. Griselda Pollock's *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories* (London: Routledge, 1999) is a classic contribution to the persistent challenge of the Western canon of genius.

25 Kirk Varnedoe, "Northern Light: The History of an Exhibition," *Scandinavian Review* 72 (Spring 1984): 14.

26 I use the term "cultural diplomacy" here not to signify the propagandistic dimensions often associated with it, but, following the U.S. State Department's definition, to encourage cultural relations: "'the direct and enduring contact between peoples of different nations' designed to 'help create a better climate of international trust and understanding in which official relations can operate,'" as cited in Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht & Mark C. Donfried, "The Model of Cultural Diplomacy: Power, Distance, and the Promise of the Civil Society," in Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht, *Searching for a Cultural Diplomacy* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010), 13.

27 *National Endowment for the Humanities, Seventeenth Annual Report* (1982), 74; and Patricia McFate, "Introduction," *Scandinavia Today National Calendar* (1982), 8. Archives of the American-Scandinavian Foundation, New York.

28 The arrangements are outlined in "Informationsblad. 'Scandinavia Today' Efteråret 1982," dated January 1980. Archives of Nasjonalmuseet, Eb-0015, file N6, 1980–82, 2.

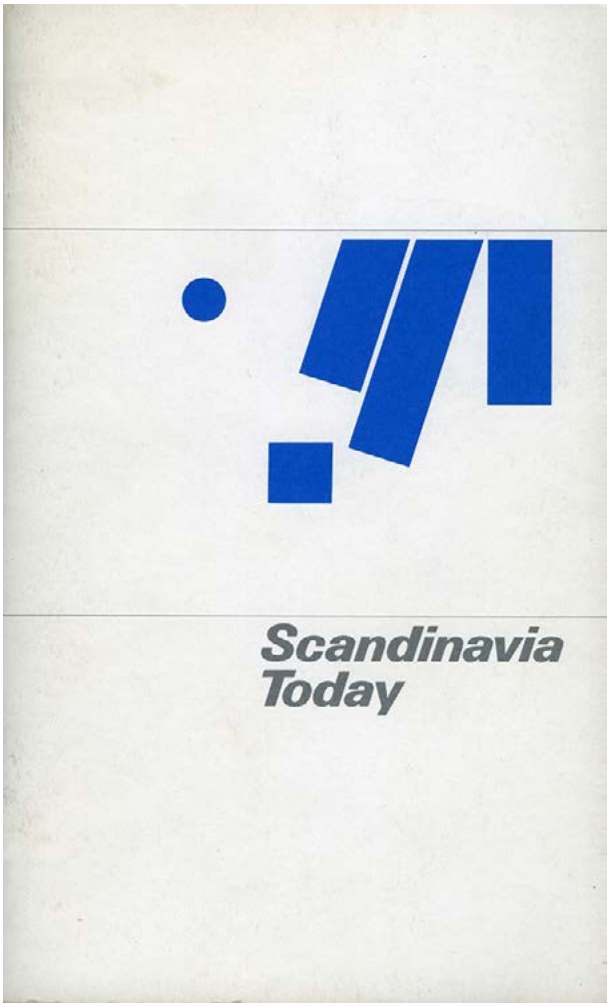

Image 5. Cover, *Scandinavia Today National Calendar*, New York, 1982. Courtesy of the Archives of the American-Scandinavian Foundation, New York, all rights reserved.

foundation worked with the five national governments, a Steering Committee established by The Nordic Council of Ministers and the Secretariat for Nordic Cultural Cooperation, with major funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). The foundation had been designated as the organizer of Scandinavia Today and Patricia McFate (d. 2014), who had served as Deputy Chairman of the NEH, was appointed to oversee the project. She became Executive Vice President of ASF in June 1981, and was elected President in May 1982.[29] Brooke Lappin, a renowned vanguard theater producer who had overseen the previous "Today" initiatives, was appointed as National Program Director for Scandinavia Today and Danish art historian Carl Tomas Edam, Secretary General of Scandinavia Today, served as a European facilitator. In addition, corporate sponsorship (literally) fueled the project with Volvo and Atlantic Richfield as the major sponsors, along with other entities.[30] All of these actors contributed to the contours and promotion of the exhibition and to its reputation.

Between 1982 and 1983, Scandinavia Today coordinated other major exhibitions in the US including *Sleeping Beauty – Art Now: Scandinavia Today*, an exhibition of contemporary art at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in N.Y.; *The Frozen Image*, an exhibition of Nordic photography; *The Scandinavian Touch*, a textile exhibition that went on to be displayed in Helsinki; and *Scandinavian Modern 1880–1980,* a survey of modernist design. These ambitious exhibitions were among over 500 cultural programs presented year-long throughout the U.S., with five cities selected as central hubs – Washington, D.C; New York; Seattle, Washington; Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota; and Los Angeles, California, along with supporting regional cities Chicago, Illinois and Tacoma, Washington – and a host of other local organizing locations. Each city had a special planning committee coordinating lectures, films, TV broadcasts, concerts, and

29 Telex dated February 2, 1981, from David A. Swickard, President of the American-Scandinavian Foundation, to Niels Toft, Secretary General, Scandinavia Today, Nordisk Ministerråd. Archives of Nasjonalmuseet, Box Eb-0015, folder A6, 1980–82. I also thank Edward P. Gallagher, President and Chief Executive Officer of the American-Scandinavian Foundation, for an email message dated September 30, 2024, and Lynn Carter, Senior Advisor and Secretary to the Board, American-Scandinavian Foundation, for email messages dated of September 30 and October 7, 2024.

30 As noted in Varnedoe, *Northern Light: Realism and Symbolism in Scandinavian Painting*, frontmatter, unpaginated colophon page.

performances that, taken together, strategically and successfully created a U.S. consciousness about various forms of Northern European visual and performative cultures.[31] One target audience was the Nordic émigré community, the members of which "care deeply about who will write the history of our times, who will recall their languages and dialects, and who will understand and remember what their parents and grandparents thought wise, beautiful, and significant."[32] Scandinavia Today was also conceived in light of contemporary cultural politics, with an emphasis on Norden's social democratic principles as articulated by Patricia McFate, the then-President of the American Scandinavian Foundation: "But the Northern light of Scandinavia may also be seen as a metaphor, an expression of humanitarianism which is central to society in the Nordic countries … the Scandinavian concern for human welfare."[33]

Generated at the beginning of the U.S. presidency of Jimmy Carter, the six planned "Today" partnerships mirrored that administration's late Cold-War view of America in the world as peacemaker. Scandinavia Today, held under the aegis of the newly elected administration of Ronald Reagan, with its cut-backs in social programs, was both a celebration of expressive culture and of social democratic values. McFate writes,

> It is no longer possible to live in isolation. We are all members of a single community [...]. We all know our world to be a complex and troubling one, one in which understanding is devoutly to be sought [...] And the Scandinavian countries know more than most about international friendship: the unique phenomenon known as Nordic cooperation will be a central theme of Scandinavia Today.[34]

Northern Light was therefore generated as much a cultural intermediary as a scholarly endeavor.

The Accidental Canon

Northern Light, organized with exceptional haste, was a last-minute replacement idea: At its start in 1979–1980, the exhibition was planned as a survey of *contemporary* art, hosted by the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. and curated by Jane Livingston (Associate Director and Chief Curator) and Pontus Hultén (Pompidou Center, Paris and then appointed Director, Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles).[35] For two intensive weeks in June 1980, Livingston and John Beardsley (Adjunct Curator) visited collections and artists' studios in the five Nordic countries, in consultation with Hultén. After their trip, Livingston and Beardsley recommended a change of plan:

> …neither of us has unqualified enthusiasm for presenting an exhibition of current Scandinavian art. The avant-garde aesthetic in the Nordic countries is still nascent [...] We also wonder if it is appropriate to present the work of contemporary Nordic artists in the U.S. before their regional antecedents are known here. There are many marvelous turn of the century Nordic painters who are unknown to the American art public, but who are respon-

31 In 1982, the American-Scandinavian Foundation reported that within three months of the opening of Scandinavia Today, over 1300 pages of newspaper clippings had been collected. *1982 Annual Report for the American-Scandinavian Foundation*, (New York, 1982), 4. Archives of the American-Scandinavian Foundation, New York.

32 Patricia McFate, President, 1983 *Annual Report, American-Scandinavian Foundation*, New York, 1983, 4, Archives of the American-Scandinavian Foundation, New York.

33 Patricia McFate, "President's Introduction," *1982 Annual Report, American-Scandinavian Foundation* (New York, 1982) 2. Archives of the American-Scandinavian Foundation, New York.

34 Ibid., 8.

35 "Informationsblad. 'Scandinavia Today' Efteråret 1982," 3. Archives of Nasjonalmuseet, Eb-0015, folder N6, 1980-82.

> sible for introducing modernism to Scandinavia. [...] Perhaps the greatest service we could render to the American art public would be to exhibit Munch in the context of his excellent contemporaries. This would be a revelation to American audiences.[36]

The new concept – to focus on the years around 1900 – required a complete turn-around in orientation that led to major institutional and personnel changes.[37] For various reasons, the Corcoran Gallery relinquished its role as organizing institution, Jane Livingston left the project, and the newly conceived turn-of-the-century exhibition was assumed by The Brooklyn Museum in early summer 1981 (the agreement was signed on July 2 of that year).[38] Its working title was "Contemporaries of Edvard Munch."[39]

As late as May 22, 1981, the curatorship of the new turn-of-the-century exhibition was still undecided. However, Knut Berg, Director of the National Gallery in Oslo, who had met and admired Kirk Varnedoe while the latter had researched his Krohg article in Norway, recommended him.[40] Varnedoe was brought onto the project in the summer of 1981, signing his contract as late as July 26. The contract read in part, "While it is the intention of all concerned that the project deal with paintings from approximately 1880–1905 and focus on Realism and Symbolism, it is not intended to be an encyclopaedic overview of the period."[41] Sarah Faunce (1929–2018), Senior Curator at The Brooklyn Museum, was appointed institutional partner. She managed the processes at the museum, travelled with Varnedoe to collaborate on the selections, and she worked as the anchoring in-house co-curator with the caveat, as noted in Varnedoe's contract, that if there was any disagreement, Varnedoe would have the "final word." A checklist was to be completed by September 15, 1981, meaning that the exhibition theme and contents had to be constituted in under six weeks.

Nested Canons

Varnedoe travelled to the five countries between late July and September 8, 1981 and made nearly all the selections during that period.[42] His strategy was to make two "sweeps" of the museum collections in one trip, the first with a "naïve eye,"

36 Report on inter-Scandinavian travel by Jane Livingston and John Beardsley, June 12 – June 28, 1980 [Corcoran Gallery of Art letterhead], Archives of Nasjonalmuseet, Oslo, Eb-0015, folder N6 1980-1982. The proposal was also made to hold both exhibitions as "Contemporaries of Edvard Munch" and "Modern Art of Scandinavia," but the cost was prohibitive. Letter from Peter C. Marzio, Director of the Corcoran Gallery and School of Art to Brooke Lappin, dated August 19, 1980. Archives of Nasjonalmuseet, Eb-0015, folder N6, 1980–82.

37 Contemporary Nordic art was instead represented by *Sleeping Beauty – Art Now: Scandinavia Toda*y, one of three exhibitions held in 1982 under the title "Northern Visions" at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

38 Michael Botwinick, Letter of Agreement dated July 2, 1981. Archives of the American-Scandinavian Foundation, New York.

39 Niels Toft, General Secretary, The Nordic Steering Committee, Scandinavia Today, Nordisk Ministerråd, to Knut Berg, Nasjonalgalleriet, dated September 15, 1980. The titles "Turn of the Century Nordic Painters" and "Early Modernist Painters in Scandinavia" were listed as alternatives.

40 After learning that Dr. Livingston withdrew from the project, Michael Botwinick wrote to Knut Berg stating that the Corcoran Gallery of Art was still enthusiastic about hosting the exhibition (April 29, 1981). Three names were proposed as potential curators: Varnedoe, Carlton Overland (Elvejem Museum, Madison, Wisconsin), and Marion Nelson (University of Minnesota), which Knut Berg was requested to rank. Telex, from Brooke Lappin to Knut Berg dated May 18, 1981. Archives of Nasjonalmuseet, Oslo, Box Eb-0015, folder N6, 1980-82. On May 22, 1981, Berg recommended Varnedoe as his top candidate. Telex delivered via the U.N. Norwegian, Archives of the American-Scandinavian Foundation, New York.

41 Contract dated July 26, 1981, signed by David A. Swickard, President of the American-Scandinavian Foundation on that date and by Kirk Varnedoe on July 27, 1981. Archives of the American-Scandinavian Foundation, New York.

42 Undated telegram. Archives of the American Scandinavian Foundation, New York.

armed with reproductions of works sent to him by Nordic museum professionals. He then retraced his steps, accompanied by Sarah Faunce to review the collections with Nordic museum professionals and finalize the requests.[43] Knut Berg and Pontus Grate, Chief Curator of the National Swedish Art Museums in Stockholm, were instrumental in making introductions and securing loans.[44] Arrangements were made in haste: A letter of introduction from the Icelandic Embassy in Washington, D.C. requesting access for Varnedoe, for example, was dated July 21, 1981, citing Berg as a contact and the Nordic Council of Ministers and Secretariat for Nordic Cooperation as facilitators.[45] Berg's reputation, and his political authority with the cultural, economic, and political entities, ensured institutional cooperation with the American curator. Varnedoe arrived on July 28, assisted by rapidly prepared agendas of museum visits.[46]

43 Kirk Varnedoe, "History of an Exhibition," 15. Also see Telex from Varnedoe to Knut Berg, dated July 13, 1981. Archives of Nasjonalmuseet, Oslo, Box Eb-0015, folder A6, 1981–82.

44 For example, Pontus Grate was instrumental in securing the loan of Richard Bergh's *Nordisk Sommerkväll* (1899–1900) from the Gothenburg Art Museum. In a letter to Varnedoe dated March 16, 1982, he reported on the progress of the discussions, suggesting that the loan would hinge on the appointment of Björn Fredlund as the incoming museum director. Archives of the Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Collection 2008.M.60. That painting was among the most reproduced images in the promotion and reviews of the exhibition.

45 Blanket letter of introduction addressed "To whom it may concern," signed Hans G. Andersen, Ambassador to the US, Embassy of Iceland, Washington, D.C., dated July 21, 1981. Archives of the Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Collection 2008.M.60.

46 "Programme for the visit of Mr. K. Varnedoe to Iceland July 28-August 1' 1981," dated July 24, 1981, Archives of the Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Collection 2008.M.60.

By his own admission, Varnedoe initially knew very little about Nordic art and quickly developed his organizing structure while in transit, shaped by his instinct or insight that modernism had taken a unique path in the north. His idea, however, was one that has endured: that Nordic painting did not follow a normative "Parisian" teleology and expressed a particular set of tensions between cosmopolitanism and regional identity; that formal experimentation in the north, conditioned by local nationalisms, gave rise to a form of modernism in dialogue with but outside the circuit of Parisian vanguard production; and that Realism and Naturalism (as both social and aesthetic categories) merged with the *innerlichkeit* of Symbolist practice. He was interested in the ways in which locality – including social democracy, varying registers of industrialization, and emerging and contested forms of national and regional autonomy – intersected with internationalism. He also noted a particular aesthetic that emerged from the infusion of nature mysticism into the careful scrutiny of the local topography. Of course, the exhibition was full of blind spots – some – but not many – women were included – Greenland, Åland, and the Faroe Islands were invisible. Sápmi was not a consideration. Media outside of painting, other than one textile by Gustaf Fjæstad, were not included. In this, Varnedoe followed the path of long valorized material-based hierarchies and canons.

Varnedoe met with curators from the five national museums as well as from other museums in the Nordic countries, who, in turn, introduced him to private collectors and signaled other collections to visit. The Nordic curators saw particular works in their home countries as essential to national self-definition, importance, and communication – paintings that had been canonized for decades as representative of their nation's particularism from the latter nineteenth century. One initial list of suggested works, prepared by the National Museum in Oslo, offered an embarrassment of riches including four works by Harriet Backer,

five each by by Halfdan Egedius and Harald Sohlberg, and six by Edvard Munch, paintings held in the collections of the National Museum, Munch Museum, Bergen Art Museums, and private collections.[47] And in this way, during his visits to the five countries, Varnedoe assembled five separate checklists of potential works, compiled on the recommendation of each nation's scholar-curators. In short, as he had alerted his hosts at the outset, he began to reach into five separate national canons as determined by local experts to assemble them into what he considered an integrative theme and unified exhibition.[48] Knut Berg later commented on Varnedoe's singular, lightning-speed capacity for decision making as he moved through galleries and storage rooms.[49]

While examining the works recommended by the local experts, the American curator also noted paintings that were seen to be of secondary importance to some of the curators, such as *The Daughter on the Farm* (1902) by the Swede Carl Wilhelmson. He did not include some "representative" works for the exhibition, such as those by the Norwegian Erik Werenskiold or the Swede Helmer Osslund. Varnedoe also rejected Saga and history painting as being anachronistic. Some of the paintings he might have wished to borrow could not travel, such as those by Jens Ferdinand Willumsen. As the checklist assumed firm contours, and loan letters went out, Varnedoe was occasionally invited to rethink the inclusions. Particular concern was expressed by Danish professionals that the selections from their nation were not comparable to those of the other countries.[50] While the other countries had agreed to the loan requests, Denmark's museums were the last to commit works to the exhibition for conservation or other reasons, a dynamic that became a controversy and was briefly perceived as a potential boycott.[51] This is all to say that while presented with five assemblies of what had been considered each nation's canonical works, the American curator at times "misunderstood" local signaling and instead was seen as assembling a non-canonical selection from the five national recommendations. Some of the museums offered diachronic selections in parallel, national teleologies of the later nineteenth century for the purposes of cohesion and international edification; Varnedoe opted

47 Typed list, Nasjonalgalleriet, Oslo, n.d., Archives of the Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Collection 2008.M.60.

48 Varnedoe, "History of an Exhibition," 15.

49 Knut Berg, Personal communication, based on the author's dissertation notes from 1984.

50 Draft Minutes of the Nordic Steering Committee, Nordic Council of Ministers, March 26, 1982. Ref. no. 359-1-4, 1. Archives of Nasjonalmuseet, Box Eb-0015, file Ng, 1980-82. Lars Rostrap Bøyesen, Director of the Statens Museum for Kunst, also voiced concern about The Brooklyn Museum as a venue, considering it to be peripheral to the main museum culture in New York. Letter from Rostrap Bøyesen to Knut Berg, Salme Sarajas-Korte, Pontus Grate, and Karl Kristjonsdottir, dated July 17, 1981. Archives of Nasjonalmuseet, Box Eb-005, folder N6, 1980–82.

51 A letter from Lars Rostrup-Bøyesen assures Carl Tomas Edam that the lateness of his and other Danish correspondence did not signal a boycott of the exhibition, but rather reflected the sum total of institutional complexities within the museums as well as larger concerns of conservation (Letter dated January 28, 1982). Archives of Nasjonalgalleriet, Oslo, Box Eb-0016, folder N6 "Northern Light" Scandinavia Today, 1981–83. Rostrup-Bøyesen was responding to a particularly contentious article for which he had been interviewed, published in *Politiken,* that castigated Varnedoe for requesting loans without first inquiring about their ability to travel, in which the author characterized him as "an extremely determined and picky man" who refused to accept substitutes. Henrik Bach, "Museer afviser at udlåne kostbarheder: Nordisk udstilling i USA kommer i klemme," *Politiken*, 9 September 1982. Rostrup-Bøyesen offered to substitute works from the Statens Museum for those that could not travel from the Hirschsprung Collection and other museums in several missives, including the above letter to Carl Tomas Edam dated January 28, 1982.

for a synchronic and integrative theme.[52] In the creation of a cohesive theme, the exhibition interrupted and bent the trajectories of the five national stories into a multi-country narrative of "Realism into Symbolism," based on taste and scholarly conviction, precisely Pierre Lübecker's criticism.

Border Disputes

An initial checklist was produced in September 1981. It underwent some modification as Varnedoe did further research, and as conservation or other logistical issues arose.[53] This assembly of works was also affected to some small extent by cultural diplomacy: In the months following his research trip, Varnedoe made several pitches to diplomats and to the corporate sponsors. As his assistant and slide projectionist, I was present when queries and national disagreements were aired. To be honest, I do not remember precisely who was in the room at each turn, but I do recall the outlines of some diplomatic conversations regarding numerical inclusion: Representatives of Denmark wanted the same number of paintings in the exhibition as Sweden. Norway wanted as many paintings as the other two. Finland wanted the same number of paintings as the other three. Iceland, given its later emergence as a so-called national school in the period 1880–1910, seemed more or less in agreement with its inclusions. A manifest purpose of the exhibition was to examine cross-fertilization and intercultural relations among the artists and institutions of the turn of the last century, and to secondarily demonstrate the reflexivity of Nordic art with French and German fin-de-siècle painting, in other words, to suggest both regionalisms and cosmopolitanism. Instead, one event that I remember well was a political negotiation about primacy and representation: Which country had the oldest academies? Who had the deepest collections? Who deserved to be on the posters, on the catalogue cover, on the landing wall, etc. Given that it was the task of the cultural representatives to see after the best interests of their five home countries, the diplomatic session seemed as much a border dispute by proxy than a collaboration. At another of Varnedoe's presentations, to the potential funders, a parallel set of concerns about visibility ensued among national business interests. Consequently, Varnedoe negotiated the contours of the exhibition to a very small extent within the competing interests in the name of diplomatic harmony.

To summarize so far, *Northern Light* only came into being when the previous idea for Scandinavia Today, a pan-Nordic contemporary survey exhibition, was set aside. The research for the *Northern Light* exhibition activated five national collections and thus five national canons, five national projects as implicated in painting. The Nordic curators, with a view to their nations' patrimony, offered what they believed to be both important and typical. Representatives of the consular and economic interests were concerned with their international visibility vis-a-vis one another and put some minor pressure on the contents of the show. In the end, the checklist

52 Varnedoe, "History of an Exhibition," 15. Varnedoe later also reflected that "the Nordic Council more or less gave me free hand, and you had these five different nations, all of whom had an academic canon of who their local heroes were, and whose national identities were built up in sort of fierce opposition to Sweden's to Norway's, Norway's to Sweden, Denmark's to – so to get them all together on one thing was odd – it was against the grain – and to allow me to demote some of their heroes and raise some people they didn't think so much of, in order to produce a coherent show [...] [that] rode a particular hobby horse I was riding, actually, at the moment; which was, that the American vision of progress in modern art is so Francocentric, and so Parisocentric, that you feel the baton being passed from Manet, to the broken brushwork of Monet and Impressionism, and then, after that, to [Georges] Seurat and Cézanne. Then comes symbolism, then comes Munch." Kirk Varnedoe in conversation with Sharon Zane, The Museum of Modern Art Oral History Program (28 November 2001): 38. https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/learn/archives/transcript_varnedoe.pdf

53 Early checklists with hand modifications are in the Archives of the Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Collection 2008.M.60.

represented a negotiation among nations, aesthetics, and global prestige. One government office, quoted by Varnedoe in the Gothenburg catalogue stated, "When we try to sell a product abroad, we don't send out something that foreigners should want, but instead we send out what they say they want. Business is better that way."[54] In other words, the business interests were concerned with satisfying American tastes.

The Horizon of Expectation

What this unnamed business person said – to send out what customers say they want – constitutes what literary critic Hans Robert Jauss termed the "horizon of expectation," the pre-supposition of the rightness of a body of work, the framework of a generational understanding.[55] But what could Americans understand of Nordic art in 1982? Norden was itself, from the popular U.S. perspective, already steeped in exotic borealism, was a place of ice, forests, and polar bears. Prior to 1982, if North American art audiences thought about historical Nordic art at all, other than Vikings or Munch (the manifest focus of Scandinavia Today's "turn-of-the-century" concept), it was in part in the wake of the large and much-lauded Munch exhibition entitled "Edvard Munch: Symbols and Images," held at the National Gallery in Washington, D.C. in 1978 and that traveled as a smaller exhibition, "The Masterworks of Edvard Munch," to New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1979.[56] But it was also due to the primary English-language text available, *Scandinavian Art Illustrated*, a joint venture published in 1922 by the American Scandinavian Foundation. Organized into three separate sections – Norway, Sweden and Denmark – the book traced the parallel national genealogies of art and architecture. There were other English language publications prior to the early 1980s, but very few. Consequently, this book served as the authority.

This 600-page survey was a greatly elaborated version of an exhibition that had toured the U.S. in 1912. In that year, the American Scandinavian Foundation, newly founded as an organization facilitating educational and cultural exchange, organized an exhibition of art from Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. The "Exhibition of Contemporary Scandinavian Art," a survey of Post-Impressionist, Symbolist, and early Expressionist works by living artists, opened in New York City and traveled to Buffalo, N.Y.; Toledo, Ohio; Chicago, Illinois; and Boston, Massachusetts. The exhibition was anchored by Christian Brinton (1870–1942), one of New York City's more prominent art critics. In turn, Brinton tasked three curators, each representing one of the Scandinavian nations, to make their internal selections.[57] Each curator bore the responsibility to reflect his national contemporary art scene and provide an explanatory essay for the catalogue. But each one interpreted "contemporary" in a different manner, impelled by aesthetics, ideology, and social and cultural affinity.

Karl Madsen (1855–1938), director of Denmark's Statens Museum for Kunst, himself a painter, critic, and art historian, painstakingly wove an intricate story of triumph over Danish academic constraints in genre and facture. Madsen's short essay in the exhibition catalogue identified modesty and honesty as virtues embedded in the Danish character and in its art, and he

54 Varnedoe, "Northern Light – historien om en utställning," in *Nordiskt Ljus*, 8.

55 The term is a central concept in reception theory as articulated in Hans Robert Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," in *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 28.

56 *Edvard Munch: Symbols and Images*, curated by Reinhold Heller, created its own canon of Munch's works, as well as a new canonical catalogue format in the Munch literature. See Patricia G. Berman & Reinhold Heller, "Munch utenfor Norges Grenser," in *Exit! Historier fra Munchmuseet 1963-2019*, ed. Elisabeth Byre (Oslo: Munchmuseet, 2019), 153–179.

57 On the exhibition and its structure and rhetoric, see Berman, as in footnote 12.

emphasized cultural coherence and continuity and not modernist radicalism. The Swede Carl Laurin (1868–1940), the author of several books about Swedish painting and a player in the building of Sweden's art infrastructure, exclusively put forward artists from the 1880s and 1890s generation and excluded the "Frenchified" younger artists. These cosmopolitan Swedish painters associated with the Artists' Union in turn boycotted the exhibition. The resulting Swedish section favored panoramic views of the deep forests and luminous twilit skies associated with National Romanticism. Laurin, in fact, branded Sweden through his selections as a mystical realm of belonging, of rootedness. He wrote in the catalogue "The Swedish people are [...] the true children who have refreshed themselves, with almost religious ardour, at the maternal breasts of nature."[58]

In contrast, the Norwegian Jens Thiis (1870–1942), who was allied with internationalist tendencies in his native Norway, favored works that intertwined with continental vanguard art, locally interpreted. Narrating Norway's endurance of its integrity through four centuries of cultural affiliation with Denmark and then Sweden, Thiis wrote an evolutionary history in the catalogue emphasizing the cultural roots within Norway's youthful art world, and he used Edvard Munch as a dividing line between optically inspired art and " a purely personal interpretation" of the world that left its mark on the younger artists.[59] Taken together, the three sections of the exhibition catalogue asserted distinctive national characteristics.

Brinton wrote the introductory essay to the catalogue narrating instead an essentializing and troubling organic attachment to nature inherent in the Scandinavian body and spirit, characterizing his subjects with a marked degree of hyperbole that clashed with the restrained, scholarly, historical voices of the three Scandinavian curators.[60] Stating that the Scandinavian artists had an "inalienable racial heritage," he emphasized the "virility," and "the possession of a spontaneous, unspoiled esthetic patrimony," that they were "intrepid sea rovers" and "rugged sons of mountain and fjord." [61] His characterizations were significantly toned down in the 1922 book, but the sturdiness, isolation, and elemental "aesthetic physiognomy" of Scandinavians, their "virile, organic nationalism," remained.[62] As art historian Andrew J. Walker has emphasized, central to Christian Brinton's understanding of art was the imbrication of individual endeavor into a national and racial inheritance, an idea that Brinton deployed in all of his curatorial endeavors.[63]

Such characterizations framed the art of such people as original, authentic, spontaneous, and atavistic expressions of a modern spirit distinctly different from, and "purer" than, that of America. In fact, the exhibition, and later the book, constituted, for him, an opportunity to educate American tastes, and to push back against America's supposed degeneration: "It is the typical expression of a race whose civilization is young, yet whose roots lie deep-anchored in

58 Carl G. Laurin, "The Art of Sweden," in *Exhibition of Contemporary Scandinavian Art* (New York: The American Art Gallery and the American-Scandinavian Foundation, 1912), 30.

59 Jens Thiis, "The Art of Norway," in *Exhibition of Contemporary Scandinavian Art* (New York: The American Art Gallery and the American-Scandinavian Foundation, 1912), 51.

60 Christian Brinton, "Introduction," in Carl Laurin, Emil Hannover & Jens Thiis, *Scandinavian Art Illustrated* (New York: The American-Scandinavian Foundation; London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1922), 16, 21ff.

61 Christian Brinton, "Introduction," in *Exhibition of Contemporary Scandinavian Art*, 18, 12, 22, 12, and 16.

62 Brinton, *Scandinavian Art Illustrated* 14, 34.

63 Andrew J. Walker, "Critic, Curator, Collector: Christian Brinton and the Exhibition of National Modernism in America, 1910-1945," PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1999, 7.

the past, and whose present is the direct product of certain definite, pre-natal conditions. And not only does the racial factor enter largely into this work, but back of it looms a still more sovereign source of strength. The marked unity of tone – that blond clarity so characteristic of the North."[64]

The notion of the northern atavist as a "pure" human spirit, was, of course, embedded in the distortions of nineteenth-century racist sciences and social theory.[65] In the 1850s, the French anthropologist Arthur de Gobineau (1816–1882) had posited separate human races with "Aryans" at the top of his proposed racial hierarchy, a category that Russian-French anthropologist Joseph Deniker (1852–1918) later recast as "la race nordique."[66] In the U.S., Madison Grant's scurrilous and highly influential book *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916) adopted Deniker's term "Nordicism" as the pinnacle of a racialized population hierarchy and the apogee of human endeavor. According to Grant, both in his book, and in his articles of the earlier 1910s, "the Nordic race [...] is the white man par excellance," and is "all over the world, a race of soldiers, sailors, adventurers, and explorers, but above all, of rulers, organizers, and aristocrats [...]"[67] This hierarchical racialization, associated with the Scandinavian peninsula and other parts of northern Europe, was a response in the U.S. to the large wave of Irish, Italian, and Eastern Europeans who had emigrated to the United States in the prior three decades.[68]

When the Scandinavian exhibition opened in New York in 1912, its reception had already been inflected by scientific racism, and by the growing body of Nordicist social theorists. The horizon of expectations at that time implicated Nordic art in the Nordic body and, reaching back to Tacitus and citing Hippolyte Taine, to an organic and mystical oneness with nature. As Brinton wrote in the 1912 catalogue and in the 1922 book, "You will fail to grasp the spirit of Northern painting if you are not in some degree familiar with the conformation of the country and the composition of the light that slants obliquely upon shimmering fjord or sparse upland pasture [...] and it should be apparent to any observant persons that these divergences are in large part due to circumstances of race, clime, and climate."[69]

In the U.S., in the second half of the twentieth century, the term "Nordic" carried the shameful and horrific associations with this body of pseudoscience and its Nazi appropriation. At the time of Varnedoe's travels, the title of the exhibition, *Northern Light: Realism and Symbolism in Scandinavian Painting, 1880–1910,* had yet to be determined, identified only by the descriptor "turn of the century";[70] the title was established only after the selections were made and was determined by Varnedoe upon his fascination with the luminous summer nights, in consultation with

64 Ibid., 25.

65 Two excellent books trace the history of this fictive notion both of purity and superiority: Jon Røyne Kyllingstad, *Rase – En Vitenskapshistorie* (Oslo: Cappelin Damm, 2023); and his *Measuring the Master Race: Physical Anthropology in Norway, 1890–1945* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2014), https://www.openbookpublishers.com/books/10.11647/obp.0051. On the construction and embeddedness in the United States of the notion of European northernness as an embodiment of racial purity, see Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010).

66 Arthur de Gobineau, *An Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races* [1853–55], (London: William Heinemann, 1915).

67 Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race, or the Racial Basis of European History*, [1916], (New York: Scribners, 1923), 27 and 228, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/68185/68185-h/68185-h.htm#Page_167.

68 Hamilton Cravens, "Scientific Racism in Modern America, 1870s–1990s," *Prospects* 21 (1996), 471, as cited in Walker, "Critic, Curator, Collector: Christian Brinton and the Exhibition of National Modernism in America, 1910–1945," 6.

69 Brinton, *Scandinavian Art Illustrated*, 11.

70 Typed list, Nasjonalgalleriet, Oslo, n.d., Archives of the Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Collection 2008.M.60.

his Nordic museum colleagues.[71] "Scandinavia" refers to the Scandinavian peninsula, constituting Norway, Sweden, and northern Finland. "Nordic" or "Norden" is a geographic designation for Denmark, Finland, Iceland, the Faroe Islands, Åland, Norway, Iceland, and Sweden. Although "Nordic" would have been a more accurate geographic and cultural moniker than "Scandinavian" in the title and marketing of *Northern Light,* "Scandinavia" carried positive associations in contrast to the tainted "Nordicism" of Deniker's and Grant's (and Nazi) theories.[72] The Swedish exhibition title *Nordiskt ljus* or "Nordic Light" was not subject to the same American racializing associations.

I reach back to the 1912 exhibition catalogue and the elaborated book of 1922 to suggest that the title of *Northern Light* was itself the subject of negotiation and cultural translation from the naming of geography to the avoidance of white nativist ideology. I also make the case that prior to 1981, in the U.S. and the Anglophone world, Brinton's volume was among the very few primary survey resources in English.

"If only we could read Finnish/ Swedish/Danish/Norwegian/ Icelandic"

Initially, following a meeting of representatives of the five national museums, it was determined that "[N]o need was seen to make a prestigious catalogue."[73] Yet when a catalogue was planned for the exhibition, based in part on the model of the "Belgium Today" catalogue, *Belgian Art: 1880–1914* (The Brooklyn Museum, 1980).[74] Returning from his whirlwind trip to the Nordic countries in autumn 1981, Varnedoe taught a seminar on "Scandinavian Painting" at New York University to accomplish the ambitious plan for the catalogue, a quick switch from a planned course on Auguste Rodin. Selecting eight of us to populate the seminar, Varnedoe tasked us to write exhibition catalogue entries for the paintings. None of us knew one thing *at all* about Nordic art, culture, or politics at the outset. He asked me to prepare a preliminary bibliography of political, literary, and social history readings to be assembled for the seminar; this we studied and expanded. Varnedoe later prepared for the catalogue research by contacting George C. Schoolfield, Professor of Germanic and Scandinavian Studies at Yale University, at the time the leading literary scholar of Nordic literature in North America, who shared his reading lists.[75] We, the graduate students, reached for the comprehensive 1922 book, which seemed to be the canon.

One of the challenges we all face when working with material largely published in local languages is the translation wall that precludes deep international scholarship. A lack of robust work in translation, or the inability of international audiences to read one language or another, inevitably privileges whichever few sources are readily available and turns them – good or bad – into the canon. If local scholarship has not made it into hegemonic language circulation, the subjects of that language, and the geographies outside of agreed-upon canonical spaces

71 Kirk Varnedoe, telefax to Carl Tomas Edam in response to Lübecker's review in *Politiken*, May 20, 1983, Archives of the American-Scandinavian Foundation, New York.

72 See for example Johannes Hendrikus Burgers, "Max Nordau, Madison Grant, and Racialized Theories of Ideology," in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 72, no. 1 (January 2011), 119-140.

73 Telegram from the Det Kgl. Utenriksdepartement, Norway, to Uffe Himmelstrup, Danish Embassy, Washington, dated October 8, 1980. Archives of Nasjonalgalleriet, Oslo, Box Eb-0015, folder E6, 1980–82.

74 Letter from Brooke Lappin, Scandinavia Today, to H. E. Knut Hedemann, Norwegian Ambassador to the United States, July 6, 1981. Archives of Nasjonalmuseet, Oslo, Box Eb-0015, folder E6, 1980–82.

75 George C. Schoolfield to Jeffrey Weiss, November 11, 1982, included reading lists for Scandinavian 462a, and Scandinavian 151, "Decadence in the North," Yale University, Archives of the Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Collection 2008.M.60.

of study (such as Parisian modernism), are of course invisible. What *is* available frames the horizon of expectation among scholars outside the national circuits, extending the selections, tastes, and ideologies of the published authors.

And this was surely the case with that 1922 book by Brinton, Thiis, Laurin, and Emil Hannover (1864–1923), now a co-author in place of Karl Madsen's earlier participation in the 1912 exhibition.[76] While the absolute spuriousness of Brinton's writings was clear to us graduate students who wrote for Varnedoe's catalogue, the overall emphasis on wild nature, light as a psychic force, and even the discourse of endurance, entered our naïve consciousness. We all had to unlearn some of what the available literature stated, and to parse the personal tastes of Thiis, Laurin, and Hannover. Varnedoe was assertive in calling out the racializing discourses in the earlier writings, adding to our reading lists such studies as Fritz Stern's *The Politics of Cultural Despair* (1974). The curators and scholars in the five Nordic countries patiently wrote and forwarded short catalogue entries to use as the bases for our own admittedly nascent interpretive work,[77] and they forwarded publications in the Nordic languages as well as French and German. Several culturally sophisticated translators in New York corrected some of our misunderstandings. Nonetheless, certain areas of determinism and all of the blind spots from the English publications became ours.

And this is surely the case, now, with *Northern Light*. Bolstered by the English-language books, articles, and exhibition catalogues in its wake or that cite it as an authority – the exhibition catalogue and subsequent expansion into books continue to be much-used references in the Anglophone art world. The *Northern Light* model has been consequential to the ways in which Nordic art has entered American museums as well as to the display of that art, creating its own "horizon of expectation." This is not at all to say that the contents of *Northern Lights* lacked authority. Varnedoe's scholarly voice and aesthetic choices have continued integrity. Only that it is worth contexualizing the circumstances of its production and its authors' frames of reference, to recognize the strengths and limitations of an "outsider" view, and to note the mutual effects of textual availability, museumification, and canonization.

Rapid Canonization

All of this is to say that the contents of *Northern Light* were first and foremost the result of Kirk Varnedoe's taste and intellectual lenses. Varnedoe's frame of reference had been arbitrated in part by local scholars, each of whom had

76 A hand-written reserve list (by the author in 1981) for the seminar includes seven books about Nordic painting, with the Laurin, Thiis, Hannover, and Brinton volume at its top. The others were *The Art of Norway, 1750–1914* (Elvehjem Museum of Art, University of Wisconsin, 1978); *L'art Suedois depuis 1880* (Musée de Jeu de Paume, Paris,1929); Vagn Paulsen, *Danish Painting and Sculpture* (Copenhagen: Det Danske Selskab, 1979); *Post-Impressionism: Crossroads in European Painting* (London, Royal Academy of Arts, 1979); *Edvard Munch: Symbols and Images* (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1978); *The Masterworks of Edvard Munch* (MoMA, 1979), and Franz Servaes, *Anders Zorn* (Berlin: Verlag von Velhagen & Klasing, 1910). Archives of the Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Collection 2008.M.60. *Edvard Munch*, ex. cat. (Museum of Modern Art, 1951) was also available for our research. Anyone reading this footnote recognizes how spotty it was, even in 1981.

77 The scholars who provided significant research direction, provided texts, and shared writing credits for the catalogue entries with the graduate students at New York University were: Görel Cavalli-Björkman and Pontus Grate (National Swedish Art Museums, Stockholm); Björn Fredlund (Gothenburg Art Museum); Salme Sarajas-Korte (Fine Arts Academy, Finland); Kasper Monrad (Statens Museum, Copenhagen); Bera Nordal (National Gallery of Iceland); and Magne Malmanger, Tone Skedsmo, and Oscar Thue (Nasjonalgaleriet, Oslo).

in mind the most representative works of their respective nations; each offered a personal and national canon. The national endowments and the consular representatives participated in the realization of the exhibition as a form of public diplomacy and the exercise of soft power. The American-Scandinavian Foundation embraced the exhibition as a culturally instructive endeavor. Nordic corporations saw the exhibition as a form of nation branding. The public information department of The Brooklyn Museum, which published the *Northern Light* catalogue, as well as the promotions staff at the other American museums centered works by Munch as a touchstone (such as on the cover of the original *Northern Light* catalogue), emphasized the biomystical dimension of the exhibition's works.[78] Members of the press corps invoked the pervasive stereotype of those large, sturdy denizens of the far north, playing out their lives in the mystical light of the north. Consequently, the genesis and realization of the exhibition was a collective affair.

The reception of *Northern Light* was beyond any of our expectations. A reviewer in the *Washington Post* wrote that:

> Nothing has prepared us for the astonishing exhibit that goes on view tomorrow at the Corcoran Gallery of Art. "Northern Light: Realism and Symbolism in Scandinavian Painting 1880–1910," is so good that it is scary. It will leave the viewer shaken. It will shake his insular, comfortable assumptions about early modern painting. It will expand his list of masters. It will also show him ghosts.[79]

The rapid canonization of the *Northern Light* model can be attributed to a number of factors, including the timing of the exhibition: At a moment when historians of nineteenth-century art were emerging to consider the possibility of multiple modernisms (which is to say at the time within Europe), the exhibition offered an alternative voice to a French teleology of modernism. Canonization also always has implications for the marketplace,[80] and the overheated art market of the 1980s embraced the "new" material.[81] In no way did *Northern Light* single-handedly open new vistas for collecting, but within the Anglophone world, it presented works not so much seen outside of their home countries: Michelle Facos noted that Sotheby's and Christie's held their first auctions of Nordic art in the late 1980s in the wake of *Northern Light* and its 1980s European progeny, the leading edge of a boom that lasted until the early 1990s, and that continues today:[82] The initially modest prices of Nordic works, such as those by Vilhelm Hammershøi, have literally skyrocketed: In 1981, an indemnification estimate for Hammershøi's *Interior with Piano and Woman in Black* (1901, Ordrupgaardsamlingen, Copenhagen) for *Northern Light's* tour was $21,135.[83] In 1990,

78 The Press Release for the exhibition emphasizes the summer night, nature mysticism, and the intertwining notions of melancholy and sensitivity to climate that were emphasized in the general press coverage, such as that cited in footnote 78.

79 Paul Richard, "Spirits from the Dark: Scandinavia's Haunting Art at the Corcoran," *The Washington Post* (September 8, 1982). https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1982/09/10/spirits-from-the-dark/fc15dab8-73e6-4bcd-b220-93f151eb55f8/

80 Anna Brzyski, "Introduction: Canons and Art History," in *Partisan Canons*, ed. Anna Brzyski (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007), 1–26.

81 The "Editors of *ARTnews*" offer a quick glimpse of the 1980s art market in "115 Years: The Manic Market of the Go-Go '80s," January 9, 2018, https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/115-years-manic-market-go-go-80s-9614/

82 Facos, "Dawning of Northern Light," 55.

83 Telex from Carl Tomas Edam to Brooke Lappin, "List of Works to Lend," dated September 29, 1981, Archives of the American Scandinavian Foundation, New York.

a similar motif by the same artist, *The Music Room, 30 Strandgate* (minus the image of his wife, Ida Ilsted), sold at Christie's, London, for $130,720.[84] That painting, now in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago, achieved the price of $9,124,350 in 2023 at Sotheby's, New York.[85] The echo effect among these sales, exhibitions, and projects has established an audience for Nordic cultural production that had heretofore been nascent in North America and that can still be gauged by exhibitions in the U.S. and the growing number of museums that endeavor to collect modern Nordic art. Exhibited in permanent public collections and on loan to traveling exhibitions, appearing in important sales, and reproduced in art catalogues and survey books, works allied with paintings introduced in *Northern Light* have developed their own forcefields.

In the Nordic countries, the syncretic model likewise began to reshape national art histories, making the painting of the 1890s legible to scholars who had not interrogated it with any conviction for some decades. As Facos has also observed, the art of the 1890s, paintings associated with National Romanticism, had become a mild embarrassment among Nordic intellectuals, especially Swedes, by the 1920s. Viewed as retrograde in comparison with the later waves of Expressionist and other modernist works, they appeared as too local and provincial.[86] In the wake of World War II, the notion of rootedness in the soil, Facos observed, had become strongly associated with Fascism for post-war scholars to emphasize. With a view from outside, Varnedoe was, in Facos's words, "liberated from the assumptions of the local scholars and institutions."[87] Bringing late romantic imagery into focus, *Northern Light* began to rehabilitate National Romanticism or New Romanticism for a reassessment and offered them as essential pathways to modernism. Although it is hard to see from the perspective of the 2020s, Varnedoe reached into an archive of material awaiting reactivation.

German Cultural historian Aleida Assmann has observed differences between a canon – which actively circulates memory through repetition and thus keeps the past present – and an archive – which "passively stored cultural memory, preserving the past as the past […] dispersed and largely disregarded."[88] Objects in a canon, she writes, are in motion; objects in an archive are "silent and forgotten, but always hold the potential for activation." The acts of curating, collecting, reproduction, and display are active forms of animating cultural memory. Michael Camille emphasized, too, that a canon is not so much composed of objects *per se*, but of representations. Reproductions are important elements

84 March 29, 1990. Lot 78, Christie's, London, 80,000 pounds ($130,720).

85 May 16, 2023, Lot 106, Sotheby's, New York, U.S. $9,124,350: Price as cited on Artsy.net : https://www.artsy.net/auction-result/7119061 (read January 20, 2024). It is currently in the permanent collection the Art Institute of Chicago.

86 Facos, "Dawning of Northern Light," 61, writes: "Nordic intellectuals from the 1910s until the 1980s viewed most of their turn-of-the-century art as embarrassingly provincial, with the notable exceptions of Edvard Munch in Norway, Helene Schjerfbeck in Finland, and Vilhelm Hammershøi in Denmark. Considering the popularity in Sweden of artists like Carl Larsson, Bruno Liljefors, and Anders Zorn, this may seem hard to believe. Nonetheless, for decades Swedish intellectuals avoided the National Romantic era because it seemed tainted by chauvinistic parochialism, a judgment that has been revised only in the past two decades."

87 Ibid., 60.

88 Aleida Assmann, "Canon and Archive," in Cultural *Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. Astrid Erll & Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 103.

in the processes of canonicity.[89] Assmann notes that the constituents of a canon are marked by three qualities:

> …selection, value, and duration. (Selection presupposes decisions and power struggles; ascription of values endows these objects with an aura and a sacrosanct status; duration in cultural memory is [...] instead independent of historical change and immune to the ups and downs of social taste [...]). This constant interaction with the small selection of artifacts keeps them in active circulation and maintains for this small segment of the past a continuous presence.[90]

She also notes that cultural forgetting marks the dynamics of the canon and the archive, and that the continuous process of forgetting is part of "social normality."[91] Through action, such as the destruction of objects and images, or through passive means, such as changes in taste or use, objects, images, and texts fall "out of frames of attention," and become nascent.[92]

The paintings of the Nordic countries, actively collected and displayed in museums and collections largely in those nations prior to 1982, can hardly be considered to constitute an archive of the forgotten. However, to the scholarly community in the U.S., Nordic art was, in a sense, unclaimed marginalia on the periphery of Europe. That began to change quickly in the 1980s and 1990s: As noted, several exhibitions were assembled in the years just after *Northern Light,* each one setting the record straight yet mirroring most of Varnedoe's selections. Varnedoe issued an expanded Norwegian-language version of his catalogue as a book in 1987, published by Stenersen Forlag in Oslo under the title *Nordisk Gullalder-Kunst*, this time including a few artists and works either previously overlooked or unavailable, such as those by Willumsen.[93] In the following year, Yale University Press published an English version of the Stenersen volume entitled *Northern Light: Nordic Art at the Turn of the Century*. Reviewing the Yale volume in *The New York Times*, the American Munch scholar Reinhold Heller noted that it introduced unknown artists and works to international audiences, but that Varnedoe's "binding aesthetic" at times suppressed national differences. However, particularly salutary was the curator's "effort to weigh and balance what he calls 'progressive' artistic manifestations with the 'regressive' ideological implications of the adulation of Nordicness, primitive life, vitalism, emotion and a vague mysticism tinged with revived Northern paganism is highly commendable and deserves further, more detailed study."[94] In this way, *Northern Light* provided an important, and at the time updated, corrective to the 1922 book that we (the graduate students) all needed to digest and from which we had to seek critical distance.

89 Michael Camille, "Prophets, Canons, and Promising Monsters," in "Rethinking the Canon," *The Art Bulletin*, 78, no. 2 (June 1996), 198.

90 Assmann, "Canon and Archive," 100.

91 Ibid., 97.

92 Ibid., 98.

93 *Gullalde*r, or the "Golden Age," like "Northern Light" is another arena of myth making. The moniker "Golden Age" is always granted retrospectively, nostalgically, to a time and a place deemed to be more authentic, exemplary, and coherent than the present moment, articulating the desire for a "past perfect" in a period of instability. A Golden Age is therefore a device for both amplifying desired antecedents to the present moment and forgetting disturbing circumstances. In Denmark, the term was applied to early nineteenth-century Danish poetry by a literary critic and it increasingly came, in the 1960s, to signify, and even brand, nineteenth-century Danish painting. Finnish art of the late nineteenth century constitutes its "Golden Age," a term that was applied across the Nordic countries in Varnedoe's expansion of the *Northern Ligh*t catalogue, *Nordisk Gullalderkunst* (Northern Light), trans. Ingrid Askeland (Oslo: JM Stenersens Forlag, 1987).

94 Reinhold Heller, "Painters from the Midnight Sun," *The New York Times*, Section 7 (August 21, 1988), 13. https://www.nytimes.com/1988/08/21/books/painters-from-the-midnight-sun.html (read February 15, 2024).

More exhibitions ensued in the Nordic nations, especially monographic exhibitions of artists from the 1880s and 1890s long overlooked,[95] survey books were rewritten, international curators took interest, and even now, according to a few Nordic scholars, the interpretive frame that *Northern Light* built more or less still stands. In fact, the forty-year focus on the 1890s, with all of that real and rhetorical light, has blinded art historians to Nordic art produced in the decades that followed.[96]

Upon reading Pierre Lübecker's review of, and his scepticism about, the American curator, Varnedoe responded:

> The exhibition's purpose was to reflect the unity of the five nations who sponsored it, the specific mandate given to the organizers was to select groups of works which spoke of the cultural currents shared by those countries – rather than simply assembling five separate national schools as had been customary [...] Might he admit the possibility that there are disadvantages inherent in local politics, and problems having to do with conventional ways of understanding the art of one's own nation, that might obscure and impede a clear vision of some aspects of Scandinavian art?[97]

How quickly a project can become canonized, can become a frame of reference, can become viral. With its origins as an exercise in cultural diplomacy and an ambitious component of a vast network of Nordic activities in the U.S., its birth as an abandoned contemporary survey, and its assembly remarkably accomplished in months, *Northern Light* was offered to the curator as he queried the narrative of nineteenth-century art. Reaching into national collections that had been "outside of the frame of attention," the exhibition animated materials that have since become part of the larger nineteenth-century canon. The organizers of Scandinavia Today, the Nordic Council of Ministers, the consular representatives, the American-Scandinavian Foundation, the graduate students, and the Nordic and American curators engaged in a task that they could not have predicted would serve as the starting point for their, and later, scholarly interventions. Through critique, emulation, reproduction, and its outsized presence in the English-language literature, *Northern Light* became an accidental canon. Its durability has prompted scholars worldwide to query and trouble the Nordic contribution to the larger European canon.[98] The process of reverse engineering enables us to look back at how and why we hold the beliefs we do and whose taste and ideas, whose assertions of soft power, whose marketing, and whose texts form the membrane through which our research flows.

95 See Facos, Dawning of Northern Light, 63–64.

96 See for example MaryClaire Pappas, "Making Modern Viewers: Painting in Norway and Sweden, 1908–1918," PhD diss., Indiana University, 2022, 23–24.

97 Kirk Varnedoe to *Politiken*, telefax dated May 20, 1983. Archives of the American Scandinavian Foundation, New York.

98 See for example recent projects generated by Nordic institutions: "The Art of Nordic Colonialism: Writing Transcultural Art Histories" (University of Copenhagen); "Cultural Amnesia and the 'Golden Age' of Finnish Art: Unravelling the Narratives of Finnish Art History, c. 1880s–1910s" (University of Helsinki); "Norwhite: How Norway Made the World Whiter" (University of Bergen and LODE); and the proposal for "Firing the Norwegian Canon: Reframing National Narratives of Art" (University of Oslo and Nasjonalmuseet).

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Chinese Art and British Art Journalism 1870–1920

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This article considers British engagement with Chinese art, particularly ceramics, through a survey of the art press between 1870 and 1920. Chinese art objects were prominently discussed across this period and propelled British art discourse in new directions. Analysis of the representation of Chinese art across these publications allows for investigation into the interlocking mechanisms of new art professions, new sites of publication and new sites of exhibition, including museums, private galleries and department stores. The rapid proliferation of available objects and the comparative sparseness of knowledge about them created a stimulating vacuum of expertise that drew in a range of cultural actors. This reveals the enmeshed relationships between the emerging professions of art writers, dealers, curators and scholars, as well as the evolving identities of the art lover, art collector and philanthropist. The close study of Chinese art in British publications gives us an opportunity to trace the hidden-in-plain-sight mechanisms of art history: the actors and networks of individuals, institutions, objects, images and texts that reveal British art history in the making and the formative role played in this process by Chinese art.

Keywords: *Chinese art, British art history, art writing, collecting, ceramics*

Introduction

This article considers British engagement with Chinese art, particularly ceramics, through a survey of the art press between 1870 and 1920. From the eighteenth century onwards, Chinese art objects became an increasingly ubiquitous feature of British collections and both middle-class and elite homes.[1] Understanding of these objects as "Art" (this capitalization was prevalent in nineteenth century discourse signifying the elevated status of the idea) arrived somewhat later. Printed texts and images had a key role to play in this process. Through the second half of the nineteenth century the expanding art press began to emerge to inform the literate public as to the nature of the objects in circulation around them. Analysis of the representation and discussion of Chinese art in British art publications allows me to investigate the interlocking mechanisms of new art professions, new sites of publication and new sites of exhibition, including museums, private galleries and department stores. Chinese art objects were prominently discussed across this period and propelled British art discourse in new directions.

The rapid proliferation of available objects and the comparative sparseness of knowledge about them created a stimulating vacuum of expertise that drew in a range of cultural actors. This revealed the enmeshed relationships between the emerging professions of art writers, dealers, curators and scholars, as well as the evolving identities of the art lover, art collector and philanthropist. My study so far is based on a survey of *The Art Journal* (1839–1912), *Burlington Magazine* (1903–), *The Art Magazine* (1878–1904) and *The Studio* (1893–1964) and books on Chinese art aimed at the readers of such journals. This period was marked by the avaricious collecting and rapid reappraisal of a wide range of Chinese objects as well as the shifting of boundaries between art, decoration, antiquities and curios.

I wish to begin to trace, not simply the presence of these objects, but, using actor-network theory, how they "acted" within the British art world.[2] What were these objects and images of them doing in the hands and minds of the critics who mediated culture and middleclass taste in Britain? My contention is that they did something largely as-yet unacknowledged to British understanding of what art was and could be. Specialist scholarship grew up around Chinese art, imposing newly-invented typologies and meanings based on European cultural hegemony. But, at the same time, the ways these objects did not fit Eurocentric art-historical narratives propelled shifts in the narrative, splits and counter-narratives. These deviations could be tolerated and tested with the context of the peripheral position of Chinese art to the European canon, but such deviations did not remain hermetically sealed. Instead, they bled out through the practices of a range of writers to facilitate alternative ways of thinking about art more generally.

As art historians, we have long been aware of the presence in Europe of objects of non-European manufacture, which reflected the collecting

1 In relation to the collecting of Chinese art, see in particular the work of Stacey Pierson, including *Collectors, Collections and Museums: The Field of Chinese Ceramics in Britain, 1560–1960* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007); Elizabeth Hope Chang, *Britain's Chinese Eye: Literature, Empire, and Aesthetics in Nineteenth-century Britain* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2010); Stacey Sloboda, *Chinoiserie: Commerce and Critical Ornament in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014); Helen Glaister, *Chinese Art Objects, Collecting, and Interior Design in Twentieth-Century Britain* (New York: Routledge, 2022).

2 Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: OUP, 2005).

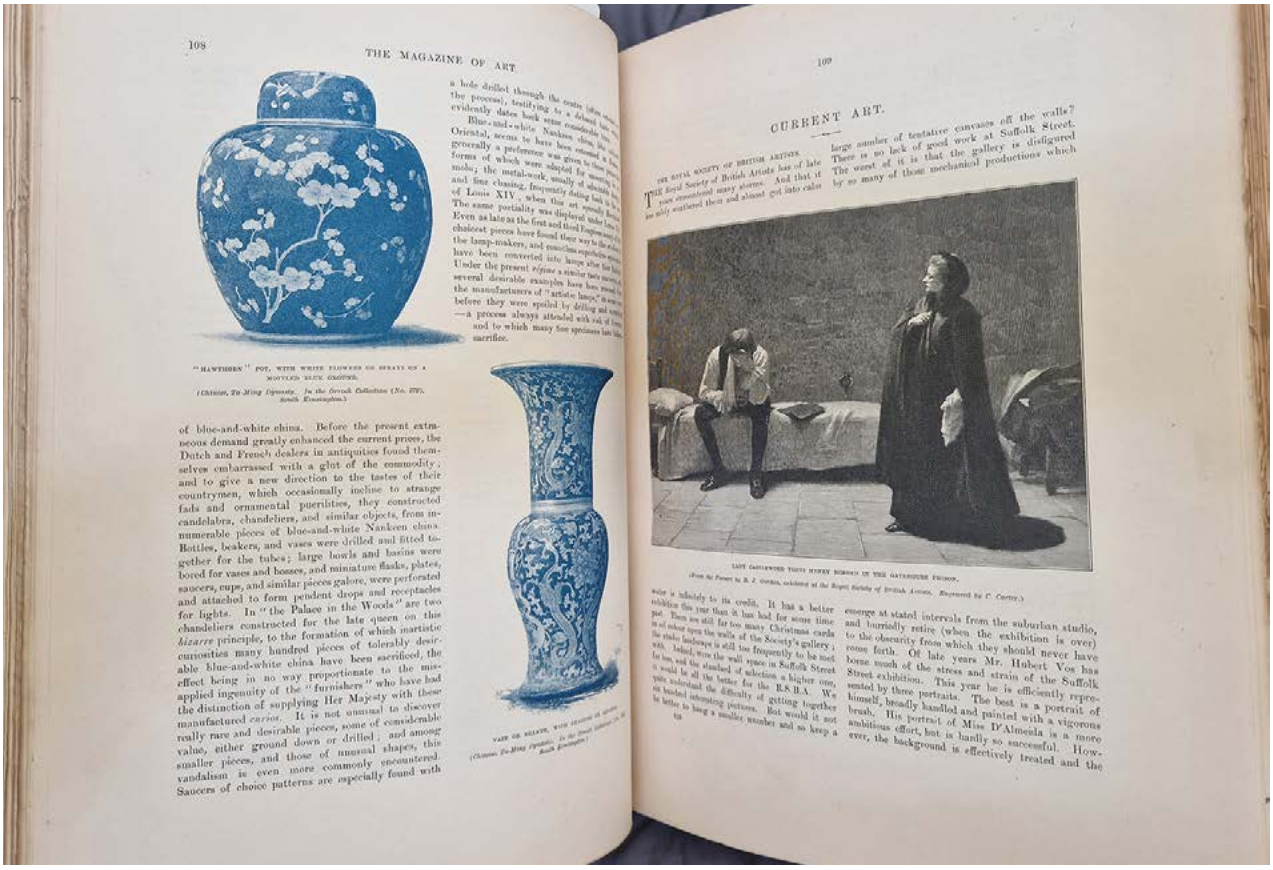


Image 1. Double-page spread showing end of an article entitled "Old Blue-and-White Nankeen China" and beginning of a review of the Society of British Artists annual exhibition in the *Magazine of Art*, Jan. 1889. Image source: *Magazine of Art.* Photo: C. Ashby, all rights reserved.

mania of the Imperial archive.[3] Though a number of scholars have undertaken work on the practices and power dynamics behind the collecting of such objects, consideration of the impact these objects had on wider British art culture and practice has been more limited.[4] Some facets of this have received more attention than others, such as the way Japanese art was used by a range of actors in the late-nineteenth century as a route to challenging European canons of art.[5] It is my contention that there is more work to be done to understand the transformative impact of attempts to assimilate the volume of art objects acquired within the context of imperial and economic assaults on Asia in particular. This article will explore the role of the Chinese art, itself an evolving category of objects, within the British

3 See for example Lara Kriegel, "After the Exhibitionary Complex: Museum Histories and the Future of the Victorian Past," *Victorian Studies* 48, no. 4 (2006): 681-704; Sarah Longair and John McAleer, eds. *Curating Empire: Museums and the British Imperial Experience* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012) and John McAleer and John M. MacKenzie, eds. *Exhibiting the Empire: Cultures of Display and the British Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015).

4 For example Annie E. Coombes, *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture, and Popular Imagination in late Victorian and Edwardian England* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1994).

5 Ayako Ono, *Japonisme in Britain: Whistler, Menpes, Henry, Hornel and Nineteenth-Century Japan* (London: Routledge, 2013); Gabriel P. Weisberg, "Reflecting on Japonisme: The State of the Discipline in the Visual Arts," *Journal of Japonisme* 1.1 (2016): 3–16; Christopher Reed, *Bachelor Japanists: Japanese Aesthetics and Western Masculinities* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017); Grace Elisabeth Lavery, *Quaint, Exquisite: Victorian Aesthetics and the Idea of Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

art world, along with its entwined relationship to the emerging professions and institutions of British art history. The art press and its voracious demand for content put new fields of art historical scholarship before a wider audience, stimulating interest and broadening definitions of the category of "Art" it was built around.

Lastly, a word on my source material. Art journals are obviously self-conscious manifestations of art culture.[6] They have agendas of their own as well as distinct, though often overlapping audiences. The voices in them speak to and about the British art establishment as it began to develop its modern institutions, expectations and practices. Around the turn-of-the-century we can trace the emerging features of the professional art critic as they sought to profitably insert themselves between art and its audiences. Both the writers and the readers of these journals were participating in a process of laying claim to new fields of expertise and understanding of art.

Art journalism flourished as a profession in the latter decades of the nineteenth century.[7] As the absolute authority of the Royal Academy declined, art journals stepped in to act as guides to the increasingly diverse realms in which art could be encountered. Their readerships were self-selecting and diverse in their motivations but extended well beyond those professionally involved in the art world to encompass a body of interested persons. Chinese art objects were consistently represented alongside the dominant subject matter: contemporary British art and old masters. This is part of the process of its integration within the development of British art history, until by the 1890s it was established as a branch of art knowledge and institutionalised as such in public museums.

Chinese Ceramics in Britain

To make this discussion manageable, I will focus this article primarily on Chinese ceramics, which received the broadest and most consistent coverage across the period. Alongside dedicated articles, Chinese ceramics were also referred to in a range of other contexts. They were often held up as a historical and technical model of excellence, aimed at and then surpassed in the modern era, by other porcelain manufacturers in Britain, Europe and Japan. They also appeared regularly as a ubiquitous decorative art object in descriptions of grand houses, both historic and contemporary, British and international, which was another recurring topic in British art journals. In the same manner, they regularly appeared in auction listings after paintings.

Though discussions of Chinese ceramics are frequently concluded with lamentations as to the sad state of decline into which modern Chinese manufacture was supposed to have fallen, the *idea* of Chinese ceramics was secured in its consistent identification as an attribute of the homes of the wealthy, cultured and artistic. It was also an object-type that manifested at various levels of the art market, making it relevant to diverse readers. Dedicated articles on Chinese ceramics often referred to the presumed desire of readers to successfully identify the pieces of china they had at home. Similarly, advice was geared towards building up one's own collection. In this way, Chinese ceramics functioned as a gateway to art collecting for the middle-classes.

6 Katherine Haskins, *The Art-Journal and Fine Art Publishing in Victorian England, 1850–1880* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012); Julie Codell, "Art Periodicals," in *The Routledge Handbook to Nineteenth-Century British Periodicals and Newspapers*, eds. Andrew King, et al. (London: Routledge, 2016), 377–89

7 Meghan Clark, *Critical Voices: Women and Art Criticism in Britain 1880–1905* (London: Routledge, 2005), 11–44; Julie Codell, ''Marion Harry Spielmann and the Role of the Press in the Professionalization of Artists,'' *Victorian Periodicals Review* 22, no.1 (1989): 7–15; Julie Codell, ''The Aura of Mechanical Reproduction: Victorian Art and the Press,'' *Victorian Periodicals Review* 24, no.1 (Spring 1991): 4–10; Julie Codell "Introduction: Domesticity, Culture, and the Victorian Press," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 51, no. 2, Summer (2018): 215–229.

Image 2. Photograph of the Chinese Bedroom of Claydon House by S. G. Payne & son, illustration for R. S. Clouston's article "Claydon House, Bucks, the Seat of Sir Edmund Verney, Bart. Part I" in *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, vol. 5, no. 13, 1904. Image source: *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, all rights reserved.

In "Hints to Collectors" by Cosmo Monkhouse in the *Art Journal* 1881, for example, he encouraged the would-be collector:

> The beginning of the collection is generally a difficulty, but in the case of china the first step has usually been taken by the presence of more or less specimens in the house, if they are only cups and saucers; and it therefore has this merit — that most persons can begin to study at home.[8]

For much of this period, professional lines between dealers, writers, scholars and collectors remained blurred. Analysis of the representation of Chinese art in British journals can give us a glimpse of the nature of these underlying networks that formed the backbone of the British art world.

In Cosmo Monkhouse, we have an example of a writer who held down a day job at the Board of Trade throughout his career as an art journalist and a poet. He was a regular contributor to a number of art journals. Though he primarily wrote on painting and biographies of artists, later in life he developed a personal interest in Chinese ceramics which led to the building up of his own collection and new expertise.[9] This

8 Cosmo Monkhouse, "Hints to Collectors: China," *Art Journal* (1881): 197.

9 Dana Garvey, "Cosmo Monkhouse: A Conservative Reconsidered," *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 14, no. 2 (2015): 69-84.

manifested in a series of articles ceramics and collecting. He wrote the introductions to the catalogues of the Burlington Fine Arts Club exhibitions on *Blue and White Oriental Porcelain* in 1895 and *Coloured Chinese Porcelain* in 1896.[10] He was a club member and was on the exhibition committee as well as a contributor of objects to both exhibitions.

His monograph, *A History and Description of Chinese Porcelain*, was published after his death in 1901.[11] The preface and final corrections were undertaken by his friend, one of the leading British experts on Chinese art, Stephen Bushell. He wrote:

> No pen has ever painted more vividly the charm of the changes which the Chinese ring with varied tones of cobalt blue pulsing from the depths of a pellucid glaze; the brilliant ruby-like depth of the *sang-de-bœuf* and the soft sheen of the *peau-de-pêche*, in which they have ennobled the copper silicates.[12]

Bushell thanks, on Monkhouse's behalf, the collector, George Salting, for making his collection available for study and the ceramicist, Louis Marc Solon, for reviewing the proofs from a technical perspective.[13] The prefaces and acknowledgements within publications on Chinese ceramics reveal the relationships between a network of individuals which can also be traced across the art journals, reviewing one another's publications and referencing one another's work. In this instance, Solon also wrote and published on British and French ceramics as well as working as a potter for Minton until 1904 and then privately. He was on the consultative committee of the *Burlington Magazine* as well as a regular contributor. Monkhouse wrote a monographic article on Solon as an art potter for *The Magazine of Art* in 1890.[14]

Bushell was a medical doctor stationed in China, where alongside his medical practice he developed his expertise in Chinese ceramics and bronzes.[15] His proficiency in Chinese and extensive personal network among local dealers and Chinese society put him in an unparalleled position. He was instrumental in collecting for Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks, the curator who built up the British Museum collection of Chinese art, as well as for the Victoria and Albert Museum and private collectors in Britain and America, including Salting. He published a series of influential books, including translations of historical Chinese texts on ceramics. These books were all reviewed and frequently referenced in the art journals, establishing his authority. His two-volume handbook to the collections of Chinese art in the Victoria and Albert Museum, *Chinese Art* (1904–06) was the go-to reference work in English for Chinese art for many decades.[16]

As well as individuals, there were network relations running between texts. Liu Yu-jen has shown how portions of Bushell's handbook were

10 Burlington Fine Arts Club, Cosmo Monkhouse and Richard Mills, *Catalogue of Blue & White Oriental Porcelain Exhibited in 1895* (London: Printed for the Burlington Fine Arts Club, 1895); Burlington Fine Arts Club, Cosmo Monkhouse and Richard Mills, *Catalogue of Coloured Chinese Porcelain Exhibited in 1896* (London: Printed for the Burlington Fine Arts Club, 1896).

11 Cosmo Monkhouse, *History and Description of Chinese Porcelain* (London: Cassell and Co, 1901).

12 Monkhouse, *History and Description*, ix.

13 Sometimes Marc Louis. The order of the initials seem to vary even across his own authored publications.

14 Cosmo Monkhouse, "M. L. Solon," *Magazine of Art* (Jan 1890): 173–180.

15 Nick Pearce, "Collecting, Connoisseurship and Commerce: An Examination of the Life and Career of Stephen Wootton Bushell (1844–1908)," *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society*, 70 (2005): 17–25.

16 Stephen Wootton Bushell, *Chinese Art. Vol. 1* and *Vol 2*. (London: Victoria and Albert Museum Board of Education, 1904 and 1906).

borrowed, almost wholesale, from the French book, *L'Art Chinois*, by Maurice Paléologue, published in 1887.[17] Liu has also, in the same article, traced the way Chinese translations of Bushell's book fed back into the development of Chinese art history in the early twentieth century.[18] This sort of recycling of texts was far from uncommon. Monkhouse's monograph was indebted to his reading of Bushell's work and Stanislas Julien's 1856 *Histoire et fabrication de la porcelaine chinoise,* which was foundational to the European study of Chinese ceramics.[19] In fact, various historical anecdotes and supposed quotes from Chinese sources are repeated with marked regularity across both scholarly and popular texts throughout this period. It is thus clear that, with sparse access to primary research or historical documents, English-language writing on Chinese art was substantially based on the regurgitation and reframing of pre-existing, primarily English or French, texts.

New Objects: Knowledge-creation and Networks

In the absence of new research, what was it then that drove the market for new publications? Chinese art objects had been traded in significant quantities into Europe since the sixteenth century. The Opium Wars (1839–1842; 1856–1860), the Taiping Civil War (1850–1864) and the anti-colonial Boxer Uprising (1899–1901) had a devastating effect on the Chinese economy and social stability. Extensive looting by European forces and Chinese collectors forced to dissolve their collections for funds released hitherto unavailable objects onto the world market.[20] New museums and new collectors were attracted to an area of art with such ready availability, compared to old European masters. The long association with European high culture meant that such objects had both novelty and credibility.

Substantially, it was the flood of Chinese objects onto the market that produced an arena in which a vacuum of knowledge created opportunities for European writers and dealers who could develop sufficient expertise to establish themselves to advantage. Alongside this, the needs of a growing European readership, anxious to better themselves and access new knowledge, could be met by publishers trying to tap into new markets. From expensive, beautifully bound and illustrated catalogues of private collections and academic papers given to learned societies to cheap, cloth-bound guidebooks, cobbled together out of hastily acquired second-hand knowledge by non-specialist writers, the market operated at a range of levels, all, though, promising readers valuable access to arcane knowledge.[21]

Art journals give glimpses onto the workings of these relationships. If we consider, for example, the previously mentioned George Salting, wealthy heir of an Australian shipping and wool merchant, we can trace a range of interactions across the journals. There are notices of his lodging of his growing collection of Chinese and Japanese ceramics with the South Kensington

17 Maurice Paléologue, *L'art Chinois* (Paris: Maison Quantin, 1887).

18 Liu Yu-jen, "Stealing Words, Transplanting Images: Stephen Bushell and the Intercultural Articulation of 'Chinese Art' in the Early Twentieth Century," *Archives of Asian Art* 68, no.2 (2018): 191–214.

19 Stanislas Julien, *Histoire et Fabrication de la Porcelaine Chinoise* (Paris: Mallet-Bachelier, 1856); Garvey, "Cosmo Monkhouse," 69-84.

20 Greg M. Thomas, "The Looting of Yuanming and the Translation of Chinese Art in Europe," Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide 7.2 (2008): 1–40.

21 For example, at one end of the market lies John Pierpont Morgan's, *Catalogue of the Morgan Collection of Chinese Porcelains*. [with an historical introduction by S.W. Bushell] 2 vols (New York: privately printed, 500 copies, 1904) and at the other end lie works like Mrs Willoughby Hodgson, *How to Identify Old China* (London: G. Bell, 1905); James F. Blacker, *Chats on Oriental China*, (London: Unwin, 1911), part of the 'Chats on' series.

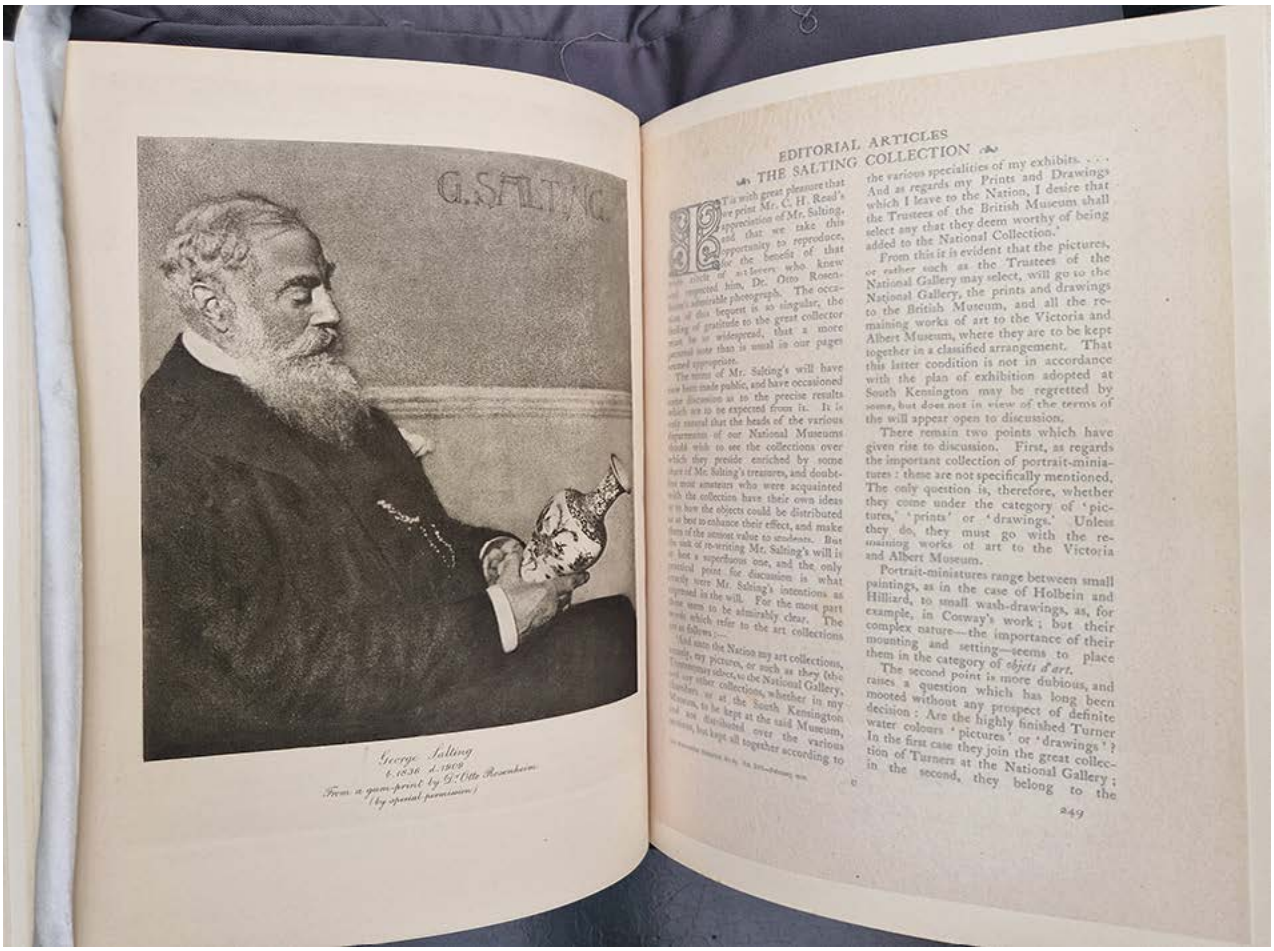


Image 3. Dr. Otto Rosenheim's gum-print George Salting, illustration for the article "The Salting Collection", in *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, Vol. 16, No. 83 (Feb., 1910). The article was published under the editorship of Roger Fry and Lionel Cust. Image source: *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*. Photo: C. Ashby, all rights reserved.

Museum from 1874. There was also the occasional appearance of his name in brackets after auction house sales, indicating his purchases. By the 1890s the 'Salting collection' becomes a benchmark against which other collections might be measured and begins to attract profile articles of its own.[22]

We have already seen him mentioned by Bushell in Monkhouse's book and he was similarly name-checked in William Gulland's, two-volume *Chinese Porcelain*, 1898–1902.[23] He, Monkhouse and many other important collectors and writers on Chinese art were all members of the Burlington Fine Arts Club.[24] The club excluded from membership women and those, like Bushell, who were commercially involved in the sale of art, but art writing was more

22 Lindo S. Myers, "The Salting Collection of Oriental Porcelain," *Magazine of Art*, (Jan 1891): 31–36; C. H. W., "Mr. George Salting's Chinese Porcelain Figures in the Victoria and Albert Museum," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 6, no. 24 (1905): 486–487; "The Salting Collection," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 16, no. 83 (Feb., 1910): 249–250; R. E. D. Sketchley, "English Art Collectors III," *Art Journal*, (Sep 1911): 313–317.

23 W. G. Gulland, *Chinese Porcelain* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1898), vii.

24 Stacey Pierson, *Private Collecting, Exhibitions, and the Shaping of Art History in London: The Burlington Fine Arts* Club (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017).

accessible.[25] Knowledge of Chinese art could open doors and promoted social mobility, as was the case with Solon, a craftsman, and Arthur Morrison, the son of a London dockworker, who became a journalist and novelist and latterly an art collector and art writer, specialising in Chinese and Japanese art and who also sat on the consultative committee of the *Burlington Magazine*.[26]

Reflecting the growing availability of antique Chinese ceramics in British collections, from the 1880s onwards, there is also a noticeable trend within British ceramics for art pottery inspired by single-glaze Chinese wares. The term single-glaze signified that the work had been finished in a single firing, without the under-painting of blue-and-white, or the secondary firing required by enamels. Various more or less synonymous terms were in circulation, such as "flambé" and signified decorative effects achieved through the chemical action of the glaze in firing, rather than the painted details of chinoiserie. Just as British scholarship on Chinese ceramics depended substantially on French writings, the French potteries were key rivals in both commerce and the international exhibitions and French ceramicists, such as Clement Massier and Ernst Chaplet had been working to emulate Chinese single-glazes since the 1870s. Examples of their work were reviewed in the art journals and purchased by the V&A. Starting with the Linthorpe Pottery (est. 1879), by the end of the century a number of British art potters such as William Burton, who was also a writer on ceramics, William Howson Taylor and Bernand Moore all specialised in such glazes on

Image 4. William Howson Taylor, V*ase of white stoneware covered with streaked green and blue leadless glaze*, Ruskin Pottery, West Smethwick, ca. 1901, acquired 1902. Image: © Victoria and Albert Museum, London, all rights reserved.

archetypal Chinese bowl, bottle and jar forms.[27] This makes Bernhard Leech far from the first British ceramicist to "discover" East Asian ceramics.

It is only possible here to give the briefest sketch of some of the individuals involved in the integration of Chinese art into the British art world. But what we have glimpsed here is the network of art writers, collectors, dealers and ceramicists. They were instrumental in the parallel formation of the collections of Chinese art in Britain at the V&A and British Museum. They were also instrumental in the diffusion of textual and illustrated knowledge of Chinese art out to a wider audience. The Burlington Club was significant,

25 Pierson, *Collectors, Collections and Museums*, 19.

26 Simon Joyce, "Disconnecting and Reconnecting Morrison: Professional and Specialist Authorship," in *Critical Essays on Arthur Morrison and the East End*, edited by Diana Maltz (London: Routledge, 2022), 197–219; Noboru Koyama, "Arthur Morrison (1863–1945): Writer, Novelist and Connoisseur of Japanese Art," *Britain and Japan: Biographical Portraits, Vol. VII*, edited by Hugh Cortazzi (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 540–552.

27 John A. Service, "British Pottery," *Art Journal* (May and Aug 1908): 129–137, 237–244.

but this network received solid form with the founding of the Oriental Ceramics Society in 1921. This was, an even more highly select group. Until 1933 membership was restricted to fifteen gentlemen, made up primarily of the next generation of eminent collectors like George Eumorfopoulos and Oscar Charles Raphael and museum professionals like Robert Lockhart Hobson, keeper of the Department of Ceramics and Ethnography at the British Museum and Bernard Rackham, Keeper of Ceramics at the V&A.[28]

Chinese Objects and British Art Criticism

Alongside the network of actors who shaped the reception of Chinese art, I wish also to give consideration to the ways in which these objects, translated into text and illustration, contributed to the mechanisms of British art history and criticism. Efforts to undertake original primary research into Chinese contexts of patronage, making and reception were limited to a small group of sinologists, such as Bushell. For most writers the objects themselves formed the main source of data.

Close looking was frequently presented as the only way of really understanding Chinese ceramics. Even Bushell's preface for Monkhouse's book states:

> A particular piece of porcelain must be examined as carefully as an old picture, the quality of the paste, texture of the glaze, and technique of colouring being severally considered, as well as the form and style of decoration. The Chinese say that to be a connoisseur "one must see with seeing eyes."[29]

Collectors like Salting and Monkhouse were particularly praised for "their eye".[30] In Monkhouse's case this extended, as evidenced in his advice to would-be collectors, to touch and even taste:

> Nor is it only the eye to be trained; there are subtle differences of surface that can only be detected by touch.[31]
>
> … He can test the texture, hardness, and porousness of the paste with eye, knife, and tongue…[32]

The presentation of both contemporary art and European art history in the art press placed an increasing emphasis on artist biographies.[33] It was beyond the reach of most European writers to treat Chinese art in this way. Attention was thus propelled onto the objects themselves, a challenge to which many writers rose with creative enthusiasm. Ekphrastic description played a key role in art writing, particularly as up to the 1890s illustrations were sparse and, even after the increased use of photomechanical reproductions, visual representation of objects was largely limited to black-and-white and often grainy reproductions.

In the absence of iconography to describe, descriptions of ceramics focused on the evocation

28 Frances Wood & Jean Martin, "Towards a New History of the Oriental Ceramic Society: Narrative and Chronology," *The Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society* 76 (2011–12): 95–116.

29 Monkhouse, *History and Description of Chinese Porcelain*, xii.

30 Stephen Coppel, "Salting, George (1835–1909), Art Collector and Benefactor," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/35920

31 Monkhouse, *A History and Description of Chinese Porcelain*, 12

32 Monkhouse, "Hints to Collectors: China," 197.

33 Pamela M. Fletcher and Anne Helmreich, "The Periodical and the Art Market: Investigating the Dealer-Critic System in Victorian England," *Victorian Periodicals Reviews*, 41, no.4, Winter 2008: 334.

of physical form and visual effects. This quote from a notice about "Mortuary Pottery of the Han Dynasty" in the *Burlington Magazine*:

> In all these examples the wear is of hard reddish body covered with a leaf-green glaze of fine crackled texture. The prolonged action upon this of the earth in which they were buried has produced a peculiar gold and silver iridescence. […] The dignity and classical austerity of contour and the virile workmanship of these jars show beyond contradiction to what a high level both the proficiency and taste Chinese potters had arrived at this remote epoche.[34]

Through photography and description, the writer tried to convey the nature of the response these objects should excite in the viewer/reader. The decidedly masculine qualities ascribed to the object (dignity, austerity, virility, proficiency and taste) were all human qualities to which the reader might aspire. These ceramics bodies conjured a strong affective response, which writers sought to give voice to through their prose.

Though Chinese ceramics featured prominently among those artworks selected for chromolithographic colour inserts, writers wanting to convey the lustrous subtleties of the objects they presented continued to supplement this with highly sensual description. Quoting from the series of articles on Song and Yuan dynasty ceramics by Hobson, in the *Burlington Magazine* from 1909–10:

> … the glazes are indescribably rich, and glow with every variety of hue which that Protean medium, copper oxide, is capable of infusing. Opaque grey-green, pale and dark lavender, turquoise, dove colour, bluish grey and purple crimson, they are laid on with a lavish hand; and, though thin enough on the upper edges of the vessel to be translucent, they acquired depth both of substance and colour as they flow thickly down the sides until, growing too sluggish for further movement, they stop in a billowy line often before the base is reached.[35]

Knowledge and knowing, appreciation and affect, all depend on the viewer's sensitive perception. This was fenced about with the reassurance of scientific knowledge, oxides and silicates, dynasties and reign marks, but ultimately depended at least as much on the conjuring of affect and visual pleasure, not to say desire.

An article on the Richard Bennett Collection on exhibition at the Gorer Gallery in Bond Street in the *Art Journal* in 1911 reflects the author's passion for single-glaze Chinese ceramics:

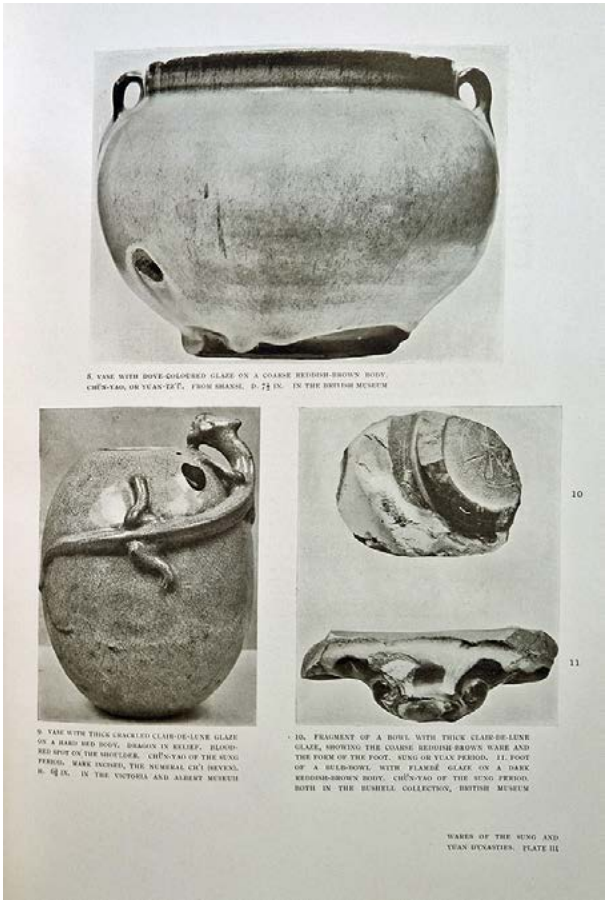
> For those whose taste inclines to single colours there is a case with choice examples of *clair de lune*, celadon, *sang de boeuf*, apple-green (a transparent green enamel over a grey crackle glaze) in various shades and a wonderful series of peach blooms in which the green of the young peach struggles with the ripening red. These are the sleek and highly finished productions of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries; while on a lower shelf are a few fine examples of Song and Yuan wares. Those who, like the writer, have a special affection for these strong old wares whose thick uneven glazes and subtle gradations of colour contrast sharply with the finish and uniformity of the K'ang Hsi [Kāng xī] porcelains above them, may feel aggrieved at the obscure position to which their favourites have been relegated.[36]

It was the visual and material qualities which excite admiration and endow the objects with

34 "Mortuary Pottery of the Han Dynasty," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 17, no. 85 (1910): 46.

35 R. L. Hobson, "Wares of the Sung and Yuan Dynasties-V," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 16, no. 80 (1909): 74.

36 Lu-Tzŭ, "The Richard Bennett Collection of Chinese Porcelain," *Art Journal* (Jul 1911): 220.



8. VASE WITH DOVE-COLOURED GLAZE ON A COARSE REDDISH-BROWN BODY, CHÜN-YAO, OR YUAN-TZU. FROM SHANSI. D. 7½ IN. IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM

9. VASE WITH THICK CRACKLED CLAIR-DE-LUNE GLAZE ON A HARD RED BODY. DRAGON IN RELIEF. BLOOD-RED SPOT ON THE SHOULDER. CHÜN-YAO OF THE SUNG PERIOD. MARK INCISED, THE NUMERAL CH'I (SEVEN). H. 9¾ IN. IN THE VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM

10. FRAGMENT OF A BOWL WITH THICK CLAIR-DE-LUNE GLAZE, SHOWING THE COARSE REDDISH-BROWN WARE AND THE FORM OF THE FOOT. SUNG OR YUAN PERIOD. 11. FOOT OF A BULB-BOWL WITH FLAMBÉ GLAZE ON A DARK REDDISH-BROWN BODY. CHÜN-YAO OF THE SUNG PERIOD. BOTH IN THE BUSHELL COLLECTION, BRITISH MUSEUM

WARES OF THE SUNG AND YUAN DYNASTIES. PLATE III

Image 5. Illustration for R. L. Hobson's article "Wares of the Sung and Yuan Dynasties-V", *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, Vol. 16, No. 80 (Nov., 1909). Image source: T*he Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*. Photo: C. Ashby, all rights reserved.]

Image 6. *Jun glazed stoneware jar*, Yuan dynasty. Donated by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks, 1909. Image: © The Trustees of the British Museum, license **CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.**

value and meaning, divorced from narrative or context.

This attention form was in part a necessary corrective to the troubling unknowablity of Chinese ceramics in European hands. The collecting of Chinese ceramics was fraught throughout this period, as it still is, by problems of identification. This was visible all over the discourse. As late as 1898, Gulland in *Chinese Porcelain* stated: "We are very much in the dark as yet on many points, and cannot determine with certainty the age of much of the china we possess."[37] The perceived impossibility of conclusively understanding Chinese ceramics was a recurrent theme, as indicated by this review of Gulland's book in *The Studio*:

> A reliable history of Chinese porcelain, in which the technical qualities of each class and period of work is fully discussed, never has been, and probably never will be, written. The difficulty of obtaining precise information upon the conditions of manufacture is so great, and such information that may be in obtained in China itself so unreliable, that the enquirer is continually baffled in his search for exact data.[38]

Gulland's book was arranged instead by means of the descriptive taxonomy established by Julien in 1856, *sang-de-boeuf*, *peachblow* and *famille-verte* etc., which depended upon the visual characteristics of the objects in the manner of the biological sciences. These

37 Gulland, *Chinese Porcelain*, vii.

38 "Reviews of Recent Publications: *Chinese Porcelain* by W. G. Gulland," *The Studio*, 16, no. 72 (March 1899): 141.

descriptive classifications persisted, as we see, up into the twentieth century, with European scholars having had no expectation of reliably organising wares by date or region. This was despite the competing Chinese taxonomy based on reign dates being made available by Bushell's partial translation in 1886 of the 1774 *Tao Shou* by Zhu Yan.[39]

Mechanics of Expertise: Forgeries and Taste

In addition to these difficulties were the problems associated with the copy or imitation ware. Chinese antiquarian interest in their own heritage had made the manufacture of historic reproductions of ceramics in earlier styles a common practice for many centuries. Added to this were commercial forgeries made in China, Japan and by manufacturers across Europe to meet growing market demands. Fakes and mis-identifications were also frequently alluded to by writers:

Image 7. Photograph with the caption "Belgian imitation of a Chinese porcelain plate, made about 1899", illustration for M. H. Spielmanns article "Art Forgeries and Counterfeits: A General Survey" in the *Magazine of Art* (Jan 1903). Image source: *Magazine of Art* (Jan 1903), all rights reserved.

In a series of articles on art forgeries in *The Art Magazine* in 1903, the editor M. H. Spielmann discussed and illustrated the following example (image 7):

> One the most remarkable imitations I have come across is reproduced (see page 447). It is a Belgian achievement, made about the year 1899. It is of the beautiful egg-shell porcelain, in all respects like the genuine object and material, with the little accidents of surface, especially at the back; the material is "right," the borders, colours, the elaborate geometric decorations, the subjects, the drawing, in face and draperies, in line and expression — all is perfect. There are very few who would not be deceived, and those who detect the cheat would do so rather from the indescribable conviction that something is wrong — in this case, probably, the sentiment of an over decorated piece — than from any actual defect in either material or decoration.[40]

This sort of thing created anxiety among potential collectors. The regular repetition of the ease of making an expensive mistake served to drive up the value of the expert advice and the publications which might save you from error.

At the same time, the text also underlines that it was only through close-looking and understanding of the material nature of the objects that you could hope to distinguish between them. The

39 Stephen W. Bushell and Peking Oriental Society, *Chinese Porcelain Before the Present Dynasty* (Peking [Beijing]: Pei-T'ang Press, 1886).

40 M. H. Spielmann, "Art Forgeries and Counterfeits: A General Survey," *Magazine of Art*, 1 (Jan 1903): 444.

expert eye and innate knowledge that comes from long familiarity was alluded to. Art journalism frequently offered tips and insights to help the reader gain such understanding. For example, in his discussion of the difficulties of telling historic reproduction apart from original Song dynasty Yixing ware, Hobson noted that newer pieces were often made of the same Yixing clay and so the body colour was not a reliable guide. (Image 8.) Instead, he pointed out what to look for.

> But the texture of the ware will assist in many cases, and the non-resistance to wear and tear at once recalls such excellent copies as No. 14, which has a red body and pale crackled lavender glaze, with a tendency to scale off and leave bear patches on the rim and prominent parts. The glaze on these pieces is opaque and drier than on the originals, and it does not float away from the mouth or allow the brown paste to shine through.

He concludes his discussion of reproductions with the following comment:

> It is a formidable array of obstacles, but the collector, if he fails to surmount them, can console himself that good examples of these imitative wares are well worth securing for their own sake.[41]

These few examples reveal the way in which the simultaneous attractions and difficulties of Chinese ceramics fed into the art historical mechanism of art journals, books and collections. Provenance from one of the famous European or Chinese collections conferred more confidence in the authenticity of the object. Stacey Pierson has noted how inclusion of objects in the Burlington exhibitions, for example, was prominently noted in the subsequent sale of these objects and thus how such exhibitions and

Image 8. *Jun glazed, crackled stoneware vase*, Yuan dynasty. Donated by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks, 1891. Image: © The Trustees of the British Museum, license **CC BY-NC-SA 4.0**.

catalogues "came to be part of the art historical infrastructure of the art market, a notable seal of approval for the works sold."[42]

Chinese ceramics were elusive to understand but desirable, and, depending on antiquity, comparatively available. Art writers secured their professional positions by means of newly acquired expertise which the unwary collector could not well do without. They also gave guides on the material newly appearing in public collections in Britain and a privileged insight into important private collections, a number of which went on to feed into public collections. There were also notices regarding collections in France and elsewhere in Europe and America,

41 Hobson, "Wares of the Sung and Yuan Dynasties-V," 84.

42 Pierson, *Collectors, Collections*, 55.

reflecting the transnational nature of the art market and art scholarship. In a newly emerging art historical field, the general public could, via these relatively cheap publications, unlock the latest understanding.

Just as design history has explored the way women's magazines constructed new norms of femininity and consumption, the art magazines played a role in constructing the new identity of an art lover, collector or connoisseur, to which the reader might aspire.[43] Texts assured readers that those who knew a good thing, knew a good thing, and one could vicariously laugh at mistakes made by the ignorant and uncultured. This, in turn, played into the market mechanism of the art magazines because if you did not subscribe you would no longer be in the know.

The rich American art collector was frequently alluded to from the 1870s onwards as having a particular appreciation for Chinese ceramics, but also with a note of caution regarding the triumph of purchasing-power over taste. Leonore Metrick-Chen has explored the significance of the abundance of Chinese things in the formation of public art museums in America and American definitions of art.[44] Though there are some differences in the American context, there are also parallels in the way in which the formal qualities and antiquity of Chinese objects drove a shift in public perceptions of art from the mid- to the late-nineteenth century.

The rapaciousness of American collecting runs as a thread of anxiety within the British art discourse. In *The Burlington Magazine* in 1903, in an article on the Veitch Collection of Chinese Porcelain that was currently on exhibition, the American collector and the "average collector" were both set up as antagonists:

> It [the collection] does not pretend in any way to rival in size or quality those collections which are bought *en bloc* by means of unlimited banking accounts and the Atlantic cable, and, no doubt, much of the collection is not of the fashionable decorative type now in vogue. Mr. Veitch's is essentially a "collectors collection," which has been formed out of regard for the decorative quality or intrinsic beauty of the objects themselves. In this country and in America the average collector who revels in brilliant blue and white ginger jars, famille rose, and famille verte, might not consider the loan exhibition at Birmingham supremely attractive; but those whose eyes are captivated by wealth of colour and superlatively fine glazes will find, as the greatest and best of native Chinese collectors have found, a series of objects which in many respects are unrivalled.[45]

This quote also serves to illustrate a number of the points I have made above. The *Burlington Magazine*, in particular, sought to distinguish itself from more middle-class competitors and establish itself as a magazine for the serious connoisseur and against the bad taste and crass commercialism of the "tyrant Bourgeoisie".[46] We can see here the way the text constructs an "us-versus-them" complicity of superior taste between the magazine and the reader. If the reader experienced a flash of anxiety as to whether they really knew "intrinsic beauty" from mere brilliance, then they have only to continue to follow the guidance of the magazine.

43 Christopher Breward, "Femininity and Consumption: The Problem of the Late Nineteenth-Century Fashion Journal," *Journal of Design History* 7, no. 2 (1994): 71–89.

44 Lenore Metrick-Chen, *Collecting Objects/Excluding People: Chinese Subjects and American Visual Culture, 1830–1900* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 73–120.

45 W. [C. H. Wylde], "Notes on the Veitch Collection of Chinese Porcelain in the Birmingham Art Gallery," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 4, no. 12 (1904), 232–233.

46 "Editorial Article," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 1, no. 1 (1903): 3–5.

Chinese collectors are set up, in contrast to American collectors, as a cultural authority. This reveals the cachet associated with access to original Chinese sources of knowledge and to art from Chinese collections, in contrast to export ceramics fabricated for the European market. Over the course of the period surveyed, there was a gradual but steady shift in preference towards older and older ceramics. The profusion of guides to collecting china suggest a "trickle down" of consumption patterns from the top of the social hierarchy.[47] This increased accessibility, in turn, drove those at the top to turn to rarer objects in search of social distinction.[48]

European knowledge of Chinese art was in a state of rapid expansion and development over this period, making it all the more important to keep up-to-date. More direct understanding of Chinese scholarship was gradually becoming available in translation. In addition, indirect knowledge via Japanese art historians and critics was also increasingly available, particularly after the publication of the Japanese art magazine, *Kokka*, published from 1889 onwards, with summaries in English and, from 1905, an English-language edition.[49] This state of affairs was indicated in this *Studio* review of Lawrence Binyon's book *Painting in the Far East* (1908):

> It is true that numerous examples bearing the names of great artists find their way into the hands of the Western collector, but these are too commonly either absolutely spurious, or, at best, but inferior specimens of the painter's brushwork. The European writer is therefore severely handicapped in dealing with this subject and is frequently driven to wrong conclusions in his criticisms. On the other hand, the important illustrated works which have in recent years been published in Japan concerning its art and that of China — and we mention in this respect our excellent contemporary "The Kokka" —are of great service in enabling their readers to obtain a glimpse, even if only through the medium of a photograph, of the notable examples existing in private collections in the Far East.[50]

As ever, the guidance of experts was rendered indispensable through the allusion to the prevalence of fakes and inferior examples. The still-hidden wealth of Chinese collections also continued to exercise its allure.

Conclusion

In the context of late-nineteenth-century Britain, "Art" was an unstable category and the art journals were key sites in testing new meanings. Moving into the twentieth century, a number of scholars have sought to unpick how slightly later encounters with African and Oceanic art have been framed as catalytic in the development of modernism.[51] A few writers have also suggested that the longer history of engagement with Asian art was in some way seminal in this process, particularly in relation to the writings of Roger

47 Thorsten Veblen, "The Theory of the Leisure Class," in *The Collected Works of Thorstein Veblen*. Vol. 1. 1899. Re-print. (London: Routledge, 1994).

48 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984).

49 Takematsu Haruyama, "Seventy Years of 'Kokka'," *Japan Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (1959): 234; William S. Rodner, *Edwardian London through Japanese Eyes: The Art and Writings of Yoshio Markino, 1897–1915* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 23–4; Michelle Ying Ling Huang, "The Influence of Japanese Expertise on the British Reception of Chinese Painting," in *Beyond Boundaries: East and West Cross-Cultural Encounters*, edited by Michelle Ying Ling Huang (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 88–111.

50 "Painting in the Far East. By Laurence Binyon," *The Studio* 46, no.191 (1909): 83.

51 Carole Sweeney, *From Fetish to Subject: Race, Modernism, and Primitivism, 1919–1935* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2004); Colin Rhodes, "Burlington Primitive: Non-European Art in the Burlington Magazine before 1930," *The Burlington Magazine* 146 no.1211 (2004): 98–104; Ruth B. Phillips, "Aesthetic Primitivism Revisited: The Global Diaspora of 'Primitive Art' and the Rise of Indigenous Modernisms," *Journal of Art Historiography* 12 (2015): 1–25.

Fry.[52] Ralph Parfect has drawn attention to the intersection of parallel discourses on Chinese art within the *Burlington Magazine*, which segued between scientific, aesthetic and commercial concerns, and to the use of Chinese art to set out the parameters for a formalist appreciation of the expressive qualities of modern art.[53] In parallel to this, Sam Rose has discussed the impact of Indian art on Fry's theories of modernism and Sarah Victoria Turner has similarly illuminated some of the paths of connection between collectors and critics of Indian art and the development of the New Sculpture movement in Britain in the 1910s.[54] But the earlier, foundational importance of Chinese art in the nineteenth century in the long history of framing artistic modernism has not yet been analysed.

Chinese art objects in a European context were resistant to biographical or iconographic analysis in the face of limited grasp of the relevant Chinese literature, particularly in terms of presentations to the wider public. In the context of European art writing, the qualities of the objects themselves inspired and acclimated their critics and readers to a new form of criticism based on close looking and sensual description. Chinese objects were engaged with in a way that minimized the requirement to appeal to external, contextual factors. Instead, the critic confidently asserted that what they saw (in eye and hand and heart) was to some extent sufficient unto itself, the ultimate authority for understanding this elusive category of art.[55] This position, reasserted across multiple issues of all the leading art journals and dedicated books, accustomed the art world to the validity of this approach.

By the 1910s, certain critics were increasingly presenting this approach as the correct way to think about art more generally. Building on appreciation of ceramics, Chinese painting was held up as embodying qualities of value that would allow art to resist the degrading effects of industrial modernity and break the stranglehold of classical mimesis. What repeats was an emphasis on art, not as specific and representational, but as universal, expressive and transportative. In this review of newly acquired Chinese paintings in the British Museum from 1910 we can read:

> It is not possible to translate into money-terms the value of, say, the picture of the two geese, by an unknown painter of the eleventh century. This is less an example of Oriental art than of an art informed by a fathoming universality. Hardly could the image of a god be more hieratic than the lovely image of these two birds, whose grandly simplified contours, embracing suggestions so rich and mobile, reconcile in one pervading rhythm the seemingly opposed demands of verisimilitude and expression, of analysis and synthesis.[56]

What proponents of modern art in the twentieth century wanted was this sort of expression of immediacy and universality, with which they

52 Christopher Green, *Art Made Modern: Roger Fry's Vision of Art* (London: Courtauld Institute of Art, 1999), 119–132; Rachel Teukolsky, *The Literate Eye: Victorian Art Writing and Modernist Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 220–231; Ira Nadel, "Oriental Bloomsbury," *Modernist Cultures* 13, no.1 (2018): 14–32.

53 Ralph Parfect, "Roger Fry, Chinese Art and The Burlington Magazine," in *British Modernism and Chinoiserie*, ed. Anne Witchard (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015): 53–71.

54 Sam Rose, *Art and Form: From Roger Fry to Global Modernism* (University Park: Penn State Press, 2019), 129–139; Sarah Victoria Turner, "The 'Essential Quality of Things': E. B. Havell, Ananda Coomaraswamy, Indian Art and Sculpture in Britain, c. 1910–14," *Visual Culture in Britain* 11 no.2 (2010): 239–264.

55 Sam Rose, "Close Looking and Conviction," *Art History* 40, no.1 (2017): 156–177.

56 "Oriental Paintings at the British Museum," *Art Journal* (Sep 1910): 286–288.

Image 9. *Hanging scroll, two geese, ink and colours on silk.* Qing dynasty. Purchased from Olga Julia Wegener 1910. Image: © The Trustees of the British Museum, license **CC BY-NC-SA 4.0**.

hoped to revitalise modern European art.[57] They saw it in Chinese art because they had, over preceding decades, been empowered through the existing body of criticism to privilege what they saw or felt in relation to these otherwise unknowable objects.

The ignorance surrounding original context rendered these objects resistant to European classification systems, but this vacuum created new possibilities and licence to grope for values beyond the rational. The pure sensation of form and finish can be seen as a gateway to the universal and numinous and was embraced as such by British art theorists. Its role in the evolution of the "significant form" of Roger Fry and Clive Bell remain to be fully established. But, with further work, it will be possible to uncover the important role Chinese art played in the development of a language of modern art criticism in Britain. The close study of Chinese art in British art publications gives us an opportunity to trace the hidden-in-plain-sight mechanisms of art history: the actors and networks of individuals, institutions, objects, images and texts that reveal British art history in the making. Chinese art objects were powerful actors in British art discourse because of the way they were able to act as floating signifiers: as beautiful and desirable objects from distant lands and the distant past; markers of aristocratic taste; markers of imperial modernity; of cosmopolitan sophistication; of spiritual depth and of the growing body of scholarship surrounding them. They were bearers of a thousand years of history, but as this history and its culture remained largely opaque to British audiences, they were thrust back onto the objects themselves, reframed as examples of timeless, universal beauty.

57 Michelle Ying-Ling Huang, "Binyon and Nash: British Modernists' Conception of Chinese Landscape Painting," in *The Reception of Chinese Art Across Cultures*, ed. Michelle Ying-Ling Huang (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, 2014), 88–114.

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Failed Canons

Ferdinand Avenarius and Katharine Schäffner

Jane Boddy

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In the early twentieth century, critics writing about European modern art vied to categorize increasingly diverse artistic positions, name emerging artists, and define future directions. One such critic was Ferdinand Avenarius, who promoted Katharine Schäffner as the first artist to probe the possibilities of non-imitative art. Yet, despite his efforts, Schäffner finds herself conspicuously absent from the broader art-historical narratives today. This paper aims to explore the reasons behind this comparative neglect by examining a power struggle between Avenarius and Julius Meier-Graefe, influential critics who harbored conflicting visions of modern art.

Keywords: *modern art, abstraction, canon formation, Ferdinand Avenarius, Katharine Schäffner, Julius Meier-Graefe, Arnold Böcklin*

The art critic and poet Ferdinand Avenarius wrote in 1908 that drawings by Katharine Schäffner forebode an impending "new language" of forms.[1] He urged his readers not to assess these drawings on naturalistic accuracy but to sensitize instead to their ability to transmit affective states using "visual impressions" only.[2] In fact, as Avenarius had it, Schäffner was the first to probe the possibilities of non-imitative art, being at the forefront of contemporary artistic developments.

During the days of Wilhelmine Germany (1890–1918), critics vied to categorize and canonize new artists from an increasingly diverse range of artistic positions. Ferdinand Avenarius was an influential figure within this arena. Born in 1856, he was the younger brother of philosopher Richard Avenarius and the nephew of the composer Richard Wagner. He became a leading figure in the German cultural reform movements of his time. In 1887, he founded the widely read cultural review, *Der Kunstwart*, which emerged as a central node within a network of organizations and publications dedicated to creating a unified culture. The journal's focus spanned from reforming household consumer goods to art objects and their viewers.[3] Between 1908 and 1914, Avenarius actively promoted Schäffner's work as essential for the future of modern art. This advocacy started with the publication of a portfolio featuring forty-two of her black-and-white charcoal drawings, intriguingly titled *Eine neue Sprache?* (a new language?).

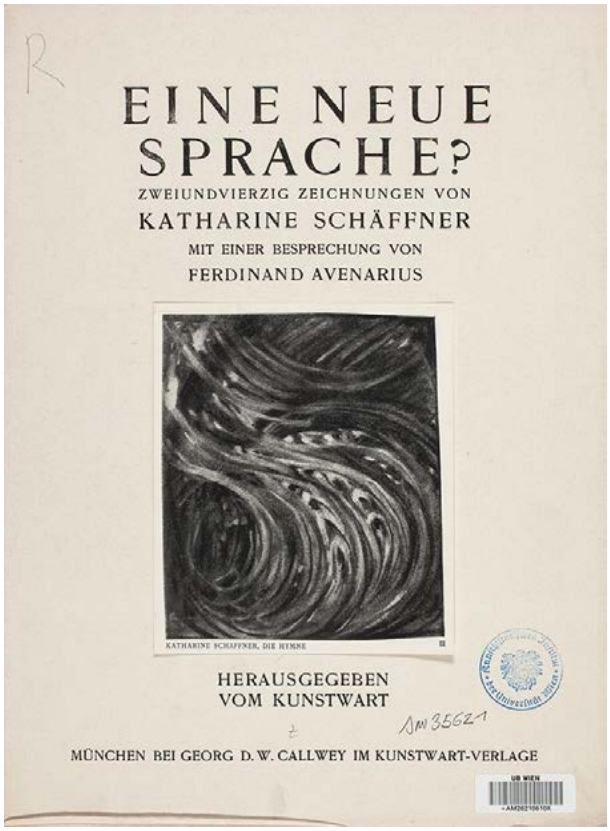


Image 1. Ferdinand Avenarius, Eine neue Sprache? Zweiundvierzig Zeichnungen von Katharine Schäffner. München 1908. University of Vienna, Art History Library. Image: Courtesy of Universität Wien, Institut für Kunstgeschichte, all rights reserved.

Katharine Schäffner's work was not unknown in the Bohemian fin-de-siècle art scene at this point: She regularly participated in the annual exhibitions of the Krasoumná jednota pro Čechy (*Künstverein für Böhmen*, or art union for Bohemia) in Prague with paintings, drawings, and design objects.[4] Born 1863 in Zbrazslav (near Prague), she studied in Munich and Berlin before training with Hermína Laukotová at the German art school for women (*Deutsche*

1 Ferdinand Avenarius, *Eine neue Sprache? Zweiundvierzig Zeichnungen von Katharine Schäffner* (München: Georg D.W. Callwey, 1908). The pages of Avenarius's text are not numbered; to aid the reader, I have here numbered them 1 to 5.

2 Ibid., [3].

3 Centrally among these organizations was the Dürerbund, founded by Avenarius in 1902. The main work on *Der Kunstwart* is still Gerhard Kratzsch, *Kunstwart und Dürerbund: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Gebildeten im Zeitalter des Imperialismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck/Ruprecht, 1969).

4 This is verifiable in the catalogues of the Krasoumná jednota exhibitions for at least 1889–90, 1896–1906, and 1914–15.

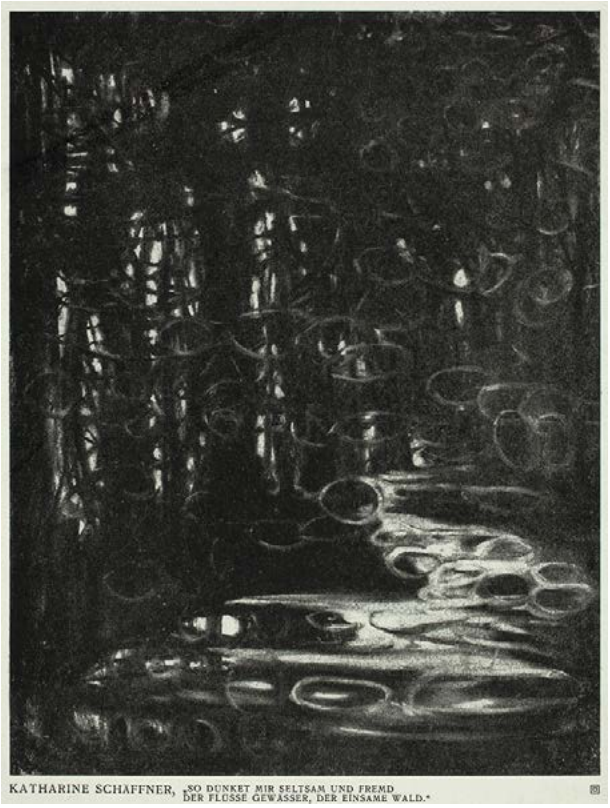


Image 2. Katharine Schäffner, "So dünket mir seltsam und fremd der Flüsse Gewässer, der einsame Wald," autotype, 201 × 154 mm, in: Ferdinand Avenarius, Eine neue Sprache? Zweiundvierzig Zeichnungen von Katharine Schäffner, München 1908. University of Vienna, Art History Library. Image: Courtesy of Universität Wien, Institut für Kunstgeschichte, all rights reserved.

Kunstübungsstätte für Frauen) in Prague.[5] Schäffner's choice of motifs and tendency towards Symbolism, exemplified by the drawing *Der Schlaf* (1900), connected her aesthetic to that of her teacher Laukotová, known today for her inclination towards "allegorical or mythological scenes and Symbolist expressivity," as Petr Šámal recently described it.[6] However, Schäffner's work was being framed differently in 1908, when Avenarius published forty-two of her black-and-white charcoal drawings, one dating from 1906 and another from 1907, under the title "a new language."[7]

Avenarius advocacy of Schäffner's "new language" has resonated in art historical literature, particularly since the 1960s, as scholars have explored the historical foundations of modernist abstraction.[8] However, despite Avenarius's efforts, attention shifted and Schäffner's place in the broader narrative of modern art remains contested. This paper aims to explore the reasons

5 For Schäffner's biography, see Graham Dry, "Die Darstellung von Seelenzuständen führt in die Abstraktion," in *Ab nach München! Künstlerinnen um 1900*, ed. Antonia Voit, ex. cat. Münchener Stadtmuseum (München: Süddeutsche Zeitung Edition, 2014), 117–19; see also Hana Rousová, ed., *Lücken in der Geschichte, 1890–1938: Polemischer Geist Mitteleuropas. Deutsche, Juden, Tschechen,* ex. cat. Praha: Městská Knihovna, 1994; Eisenstadt: Museum der Österr. Kultur, 1994 / Regensburg: Ostdt. Galerie, 1995 ([Prague]: Městská Knihovna et al. [1994]), 127. Schäffner's latest work, at least to my knowledge, is in the collection of the City Gallery Prague: Katharina Schäffnerová, *Hlava muže*, 1938, charcoal on paper, 136 x 228 mm, inv. K-0537.

6 For an illustration of *Der Schlaf*, see *Illustrierter Katalog der 61. Jahres-Ausstellung des Kunstvereins für Böhmen in Prag 1900* (Prag: Carl Bellmann's Verlag, 1900), cat. nr. 71; for the citation Petr Šámal, "Hermína Laukotová's *Evaporations," Ars Linearis* 11 (2021): 64–77, here 72.

7 The drawing from 1906, *Leidenschaft*, is kept in the collection of the Drawings and Prints department of the MoMA, object nr. 222.2023. With gratitude to MaryClaire Pappas. Today, four drawings from the 1908 portfolio are kept in the Collection of Prints and Drawings of the National Gallery in Prague. These are *Das gelobte Land, Leiden* (1907, possibly 1904), *Seufzer, and Zu Prometheus und Epimetheus*. The Modern Gallery – a precursor of the National Gallery – purchased them in 1925. I would like to thank Petra Kolářová, Markéta Dlábková, and Lenka Babická for allowing access to this material and help in clarifying its provenance. Prior to the acquisition, the works were exhibited at the Rudolfinum; see *Tři výstavy, I. Obrazy a plastiky Karla Holana, M. Holého, P. Kotíka a K. Kotrby, II. Výstava Kateřiny Schäffnerové, III. Daumier*, exh. cat. Výstava Krasoumné jednoty pro Čechy v Praze, Rudolfinum, 25.3.–13.4.1925 ([Prague]: [Krasoumná jednota pro Čechy], 1925).

8 See, for example, Arnold Gehlen, *Zeit-Bilder: Zur Soziologie und Ästhetik der modernen Malerei* (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum Verlag, 1960), 115–116; Otto Stelzer, *Die Vorgeschichte der abstrakten Kunst* (München: R. Piper, 1964), 115; Peg Weiss, *Kandinsky in Munich: The Formative Jugendstil Years* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 113–15; Susan Compton, "The Spread of Information Leading to the Rise of Abstract Art in Europe," in *Towards a New Art: Essays on the Background to Abstract Art 1910–20*, ed. Michael Compton (London: Tate Gallery, 1980), 180.

behind this inconsistency and comparative neglect. It seeks to understand why Schäffner's work has remained in the margins of European modern art history, considering the dynamics of canon formation during a pivotal moment for modern art.

To further this analysis, a third figure must be introduced into the discussion: Julius Meier-Graefe. He, like Avenarius, was an influential figure on the terrain of art and cultural critique. Born in 1867 in Reșița (then part of the Hungarian region of the Austrian Empire, now Romania), he was a "transgressor of boundaries" in many respects.[9] He navigated between Germany and France, across various art forms, and from the nineteenth century to the twentieth. He was a conflicted defender of Art Nouveau and Jugendstil,[10] and among the earliest to seek to convince the German public of Impressionism and Neo-impressionism.[11] His magnum opus, the book *Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst* (1904), is foundational for the narrative of the familiar canon of modernism, and it remains one of the most influential books in the early history and historiography of European modern art.

At this point in the early twentieth century, the trajectory of modern art was not yet clear, with alternative, competing visions for its direction. Indeed, both Avenarius and Meier-Graefe were competing to shape the contemporary art scene but had markedly different views of its developmental trajectory.[12] In the following, I intend to demonstrate that Schäffner was caught in the crossfire of their power struggle, receiving blows that turned out to be fatal.[13] Surprisingly, Schäffner involvement in their dispute has been overlooked, although its analysis is necessary if we are to understand the difficulty in situating her work in today's narratives of modern art. By reconstructing Schäffner's entanglement, I want to offer a new perspective on a crucial episode in the canon formation of modern art.[14] This perspective considers "failed" canons, emphasizing the role of art and cultural critique in establishing historical narratives, and questioning how to disentangle artists from the powerful pull of these narratives. The analysis unfolds in four steps: beginning with an examination of Avenarius's reading of Schäffner, followed by an exploration of his concept of modern art, attention then shifts to Meier-Graefe's polemical reaction and ends with a discussion of the functionality and limitations of categories, particularly the opposition of form versus feeling, in evaluating Schäffner's artistic position and significance today.

9 For this characterization, see Ingeborg Becker & Stephanie Marchal, ed., *Julius Meier-Graefe: Grenzgänger der Künste* (Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2017).

10 Cf. Christian Freigang, "Julius Meier-Graefes Zeitschrift *L'art décoratif*: Kontinuität und Subversion des Art Nouveau," in Becker & Marchal, *Julius Meier-Graefe*, 214–27.

11 Meier-Graefe co-edited the journal *Dekorative Kunst* and owned a boutique in Paris, *La Maison Moderne*. For Meier-Graefe's biography, see Kenworth Moffett, *Meier-Graefe as Art Critic* (München: Prestel-Verlag, 1973); and, more recently, Catherine Krahmer, *Julius Meier-Graefe: Ein Leben für die Kunst* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2021).

12 For a discussion of the broader concern within art criticism at this time – specifically, the effort to identify and solidify cultural development through visual art, see Stephanie Marchal, Andreas Zeising & Andreas Degner, "Kunstschriftstellerei – die kunstkritische Praxis der Moderne: Eine Einführung," in *Kunstschriftstellerei: Konturen einer kunstkritischen Praxis*, ed. Stephanie Marchal, Andreas Zeising & Andreas Degner (München: Edition Metzel, 2020), 13–63.

13 For the role of "power struggles in the art field" in the formation of canons, see Gregor Langfeld, "The Canon in Art History: Concepts and Approaches," *Journal of Art Historiography* 19 (2018): 1–18, here 8–9.

14 This research significantly expands a chapter from my doctoral thesis, "Hypersensitivity: Universalist Strategies in Endell, Avenarius, and Kandinsky, 1890–1920" (University of Vienna, 2020). I am grateful to my supervisors, Raphael Rosenberg and Helmut Leder, for their support of this work.

Avenarius's Reading of Schäffner

In the following passage, Avenarius describes his encounter with Schäffner's work in his typical art critical style:

> Water and forest and the moonlight in between, we know them, but where in any depiction of reality are there fog rings like these, which vibrate through the whole picture? We feel their magic as soon as we immerse ourselves in the work, which gradually becomes a dream experience for us. Awakened, we are certain that a completely subjective poetry was involved here, one which took as primal forms moods from the impressions of reality.[15]

Before the readers' internal eye Avenarius unfolds a scene, evoking a dream experience. He performs his contemplation as a process of viewing, exposing himself as a feeling subject receptive to Schäffner's impulses. He attempts to relate what captures his attention and describes how this unfolds a process of imagination—picturing to his readers something not immediately present to the senses.

Avenarius's monologue is not meant to digress from the work, however, with the work merely providing an occasion for imagination; rather, the work allows a specific experience of emotional immersion.[16] Yet, rather than explicitly stating this and describing it in terms of concepts and theory, Avenarius demonstrates the necessary

Image 3. Katharine Schäffner, Leidenschaft, 1906. Charcoal on paper, 27.6 × 21.3 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Jack Shear in honor of Agnes Gund, acc. no.: 222.2023. Image: Digital image, The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence, all rights reserved.

mode of reception.[17] He is himself the viewer who is caried away by the play of lines and light. In his empathetic participation, he becomes fully immersed, not able to reflect what he is experiencing. By showing his work in the process of immersion, the poetic description results in an aesthetic judgement; thus, what Avenarius tries to demonstrate is the work's capacity to stimulate imagination.

Avenarius was not the first to address the topic of imagination in connection with Schäffner's work. In 1904, one critic described her graphic

15 Avenarius, *Eine neue Sprache?*, [3]: "Wasser und Wald und den Mondschein dazwischen, die kennen wir, aber wo sind in irgendeinem Wirklichkeitsbilde Lichtnebelringe gleich diesen, die durch das ganze Bild schwingen? Wir empfinden ihrer Zauber, sobald wir uns nun in das Werk versenken, das uns allmählich zu einem Traumerlebnis wird. Erwacht wissen wir nun bestimmt, hier war ein ganz subjektives Dichten dabei, das aus den Wirklichkeitseindrücken die Stimmungen als Urformen nahm." Translated by the author unless indicated otherwise.

16 See A [Ferdinand Avenarius], "Unsre Bilder und Noten," *Der Kunstwart* 24, no. 9 (1911): 229–31, here 230.

17 On this, see Jane Boddy, "Imagination as Evidence: Avenarius's Proposal for a *New Language* for Forms," in *Dialogical Imaginations: Aisthesis as Social Perceptions and New Ideas of Humanism*, ed. Michael Zimmermann (Zürich: Diaphanes, forthcoming).

work as assuming the form of "imaginative ornament"—the qualities that critic admired hovered between figuration and abstraction.[18] This promotion occurred within the context of formal experimentation characteristic of the widespread decorative arts movements in Europe.[19] Avenarius however framed Schäffner's work differently. When he published forty-two of her black-and-white charcoal drawings, he presented them as a "new language" for the communication of feelings and was at pains to convey its historical significance to his readers.[20] The drawings encompassed a range of subjects, from small animal caricatures to larger landscape scenes; each image is suggestively titled, such as *Schlummer* (slumber) or *Leidenschaft* (passion). Although Schäffner's drawings were not fully devoid of naturalistic reference, and while their titles gave them a particular meaning in place and time, Avenarius saw no reason why a non-imitative art could not be possible soon. His effort to position Schäffner's work as the newest phenomenon not only highlighted its current relevance but also its future direction in modern art. This emphasis on development must be seen in conjuncture with Meier-Graefe's polemic against *Phantasiemalerei* and the Böcklin cult, which will be the topic of the next two sections.

Painting of the Imagination

Avenarius's reading of Schäffner was based on a specific conception of modern art, labelled *Phantasiemalerei* (painting of the imagination).[21] Although this term is hardly ever used today, it was widely theorized and employed by critics in *Der Kunstwart* (as well as other journals) in the late nineteenth century to advance a particular cultural political agenda in discussions about the place of art in society. This agenda promoted a strong, indigenous art, separate from French Impressionism and Neo-impressionism, which were perceived as something of a threat to German art. Despite the complex relationship between French and German art, they were often framed in simple opposition. As Meier-Graefe noted, "French art eo ipso is called that which is opposed to German art."[22] This opposition extended to the critics themselves, making the choice between French and German art seem like an existential decision. For every attempt to raise German readers' awareness of French modernism—notably by Meier-Graefe—there were rebuttals and counterclaims. *Phantasiemalerei* was conceived as the distinctively German version of modern art, used to describe the work of Max Klinger, Hans Thoma, Franz von Stuck, and, centrally, Arnold Böcklin.[23]

18 K.H.O., "Freie Ornament Motive von Katharine Schäffner – Prag," *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* 14 (1904): 468; on which, see Lada Hubatová-Vacková, *Silent Revolutions in Ornament: Studies in applied arts and crafts from 1880–1930* (Prague: AAAD, 2011), 51–52.

19 For discussions of Schäffner within this context, which has been recognized as canonical moment for modernism, see Italo Cremona, *Die Zeit des Jugendstils* (München: Langen Müller, 1966), 153–54; or, more recently, Lada Hubatová-Vacková, "The Silent Revolutions in Ornament (1880–1920)," *Umění/Art* 58 (2010): 403–23, here 412–13.

20 Avenarius, *Eine neue Sprache?*, [2].

21 Also *Phantasiekunst, Neuromantik, Neuidealismus.*

22 Julius Meier-Graefe, *Impressionisten: Guys – Manet – Van Gogh – Pissarro – Cezanne* (München: R. Piper & Co, 1907), 11: "Mann nennt französische Kunst eo ipso das, was der deutschen entgegengesetzt ist."

23 See Ingrid Koszinowski, "Böcklin und seine Kritiker: Zu Ideologie und Kunstbegriff um 1900," in *Ideengeschichte und Kunstwissenschaft im Kaiserreich*, ed. Ekkehard Mai, Stephan Waetzoldt & Gerd Wolandt (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1983), 279–92; Ingrid Koszinowski, *Von der Poesie des Kunstwerks* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1985), 68–85; Elisabeth Mylarch, *Akademiekritik und moderne Kunstbewegungen in Deutschland um 1900: zum Verständnis der ideengeschichtlichen, kulturideologischen und kunstmarktpolitischen Implikationen des Kunsturteils über moderne Malerei in den Kunst- und Kulturzeitschriften Gesellschaft, Kunstwart und Freie Bühne* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1994); Beth Irwin Lewis, *Art for All? The Collision of Modern Art and the Public in Late-Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 78–82; Annie Bourneuf, *Paul Klee: The Visible and the Legible* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 95–104.

Within these broader contemporary debates, Avenarius used the term *Phantasiemalerei* in a way that promoted his own concerns. Since founding *Der Kunstwart* in 1887, he had been committed to raising awareness among readers about the imperative need for a modern style of art that would be "true to its time"—a style he felt was conspicuously absent.[24] He articulated this concern in his very first article for the journal, stating, "every style grows, ages, and dies; but we have no style that has grown out of our being."[25] The absence of style, he believed, posed a serious problem, because he saw style as a resonance phenomenon, an integral and indispensable part of emotional culture. What was urgently needed to create a foundation for individual and national emotional-spiritual renewal was art facilitating the "awakening of some content of consciousness in the viewer […] by stimulating their imagination."[26] Thus, the question becomes how Avenarius' conceived *Phantasiemalerei* as providing the foundation for a new style, setting a definitive trajectory for modern art.

We might advance this discussion with three interrelated observations about *Phantasiemalerei* as espoused by Avenarius. The first relates to the topic of a modern mythology. For instance, in Böcklin's 1883 painting *Im Spiel der Wellen*, Avenarius suggests the artist does not merely depict a mythological scene; rather, he creates a *new* mythology that penetrates the depths of the modern mind, unleashing imagination "beyond the limits of what is naturally real and possible."[27] Avenarius explains how ancestral sentiments, deeply ingrained in our subconscious, resurface through Böcklin, "as if, from the darkest depths of the Indo-Germanic race, the ancient myth-forming power once again bursts forth."[28] Many other critics echo this notion of a new mythology in Böcklin's work, linking past and present, emerging from the depths of cultural imagination.[29] The point was not Böcklin's portrayal of fantastic creatures, like centaurs and nymphs; what mattered was that his work facilitated imagination.

Second, critics writing within the framework of *Phantasiemalerei* tended to write narrative scenes based on the paintings, emphasizing their literary or anecdotal side. In doing so, their analysis tended to prioritize "content" over "form." This opposition was much debated within late nineteenth-century aesthetics and art criticism. While formalist critics emphasized the importance of visual structure in evaluating art, critics of Böcklin contended that content, or the "idea," held primacy. It stood for a focus on poetic content translatable across media, transcending the pictorial surface to evoke a multisensory experience. Avenarius, for instance, discussed Böcklin's *Heiliger Hain* (1886), asking: "Do we hear the mystical song [of the train of priests]? Or does the picture only seem to sound like a symphony of shadow and light?"[30] Notably, this description pertains not to the actual painting but to a black-and-white photomechanical reproduction of it, highlighting the effect of

24 Lewis, *Art for All?*, 69.

25 [Ferdinand Avenarius], "Unsere Künste: Zum Überblick," *Der Kunstwart* 1, no. 1 (1887): 1–4, here 2: "Ein jeder Stil wächst, altert und stirbt; wir aber haben keinen Stil, der aus unserem Wesen erwachsen wäre."

26 Ibid., 1: "irgend einen Bewusstseinsinhalt [...] durch Anregung seiner Phantasie zu erwecken."

27 A. [Ferdinand Avenarius], "Die Malerei auf der Münchner Ausstellung. III," *Der Kunstwart* 2, no. 2 (1888), 21–23, here 22: "über die Grenzen des naturgemäss Wirklichen und Möglichen hinaus."

28 [Ferdinand Avenarius], "Zu Böcklins Heimgang," *Der Kunstwart* 14, no. 9 (1901): 393–96, here 394: "Bei ihm [Böcklin] ist es, als bräche aus den dunkelsten Tiefen der indogermanischen Rasse noch einmal die uralte mythenbildende Kraft heraus."

29 For a psychological reading of Böcklin's mythmaking, see Wilhelm Wundt, *Völkerpsychologie: Eine Untersuchung der Entwicklungsgesetze von Sprache, Mythus und Sitte,* vol. 2, *Mythus und Religion*, part 1 (Leipzig: Wilhelm Engelmann, 1905), 282.

30 [Ferdinand Avenarius], "Zum Geleit," *Böcklin-Mappe* (München: D.W. Callwey, [1901]), n.p.: "Hören wir ihren [der Zug der Priester] mystischen Gesang? Oder scheint das Bild nur zu tönen wie eine Symphonie von Schatten und Licht."

Image 4. Arnold Böcklin, *Heiliger Hain*, 1886, in: *Böcklin-Mappe*, München, [1901]. Image: Courtesy of Universität Wien, Institut für Kunstgeschichte, all rights reserved.

"a non-medium-specific content accessible through imagination," to borrow from Annie Bourneuf.[31]

Third, a glance in the pages of *Der Kunstwart* soon reveals Avenarius's belief that "the true painting of the imagination" epitomized "the most German painting."[32] He attributes this quality to Böcklin, whom he regards as the embodiment of "true *Germanic* spirit."[33] Avenarius's words about Böcklin are unequivocal: "German art is all that he created."[34] This emphasis on national character should be understood against the backdrop of the art politics of the 1880s and 1890s, particularly as a reaction to the growing influence of French Impressionism in Germany's museums, galleries, and accompanying discourses. "The means of expression for the means of expression's sake—what nonsense!"[35] declared Avenarius in 1899, using the French slogan to dismiss Impressionist painting. Instead, he advocated for art to serve emotional culture through "the mediation of organized

31 Bourneuf, *Paul Klee*, 100.

32 [Ferdinand Avenarius], "Unsere Künste: Schluss des Überblicks," *Der Kunstwart* 6, no. 2 (1892): 17–20, here 18.

33 Ibid., 17.

34 Avenarius, "Böcklins Heimgang," 396: "Was Böcklin anrührte, das ward Geist, Kunst in diesem Sinne, nordische, germanische, deutsche Kunst ist alles was er geschaffen hat."

35 [Ferdinand Avenarius], "Was wir wünschen," *Der Kunstwart* 13, no. 1 (1899): 1–7, here 2.

feeling."[36] Such statements unmistakably echo the perceived dichotomy between "German feeling" and "French form," a persistent, clichéd idea of national rivalry.[37]

For Avenarius, Böcklin's paintings express deep emotional experience. The "how"—the mode of mediation—is crucial: Böcklin's work opens a space for imagination and emotional participation, similar to the way Avenarius later described Schäffner's work. By narrativizing the imagination inspired by the paintings, Avenarius not only presents his perspective but also seeks to create a relatable reference point. Understood in this sense, modern art functions as a shared reference point—potentially before everyone's eyes—for creating emotional community. This is also what Böcklin's work does for Avenarius; it creates an imaginative space for emotional connectivity.[38] And, writing in 1892, he saw great potential: "Unless all appearances deceive, we are now entering a flourishing period of the most German of all painting – *Phantasiemalere*i".[39]

While Avenarius did not write a full-scale history of modern art, he did attempt to canonize specific artists under the heading *Phantasiemalerei*, using art to gauge the condition of German society and to orient worldviews amidst national rivalries. Böcklin became pivotal for indexing *Phantasiemalerei*, with critics placing his work among the greatest achievements of the nineteenth century. Max Lehrs, director of Dresden's Kupferstich-Kabinett, even went so far as to say that "the fifteenth [century] gifted us with a Lionardo [*sic.*], the sixteenth Albrecht Dürer, the seventeenth the great Rembrandt. […] and the nineteenth gave us Arnold Böcklin."[40] However, admiration for Böcklin changed markedly from 1904.[41] This shift was catalyzed by Meier-Graefe's publication of *Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst*, a developmental history of modern art, followed by *Der Fall Böcklin*, which aimed to shift readers' appreciation and alter critical coverage, ultimately seeking to vanquish *Phantasiemalerei* from the domain of modern art.

The Case of Böcklin

Meier-Graefe had been one of Böcklin's admirers at first, but after 1900 he revised his attitude towards the artist. In his 1904 *Entwicklungsgeschichte*, Meier-Graefe had already written critically of Böcklin. Understanding art as a historical continuum, he complained that the artist obstructed its development, blocking the way to the future.[42] In the book that followed, *Der Fall Böcklin*, Meier-Graefe repeated this claim, now condemning Böcklin's works for disrupting the "only beneficial stream of art."[43] The argument of this polemical book is complex but, in essence, it revolves around the idea of medium-specificity as the kernel of modern art: Böcklin's work, after promising beginnings, progressively came to lack aesthetic unity, with compositions based on narrative and anecdotal ideas.

36 Ibid., 1.

37 For contemporary discussion on national rivalry as a dimension within art criticism, see Karl Scheffler, *Der Deutsche und seine Kunst: Eine notgedrungene Streitschrift* (München: Piper, 1907).

38 Ingrid Koszinowski noted that Böcklin and other proponents of *Phantasiemalerei* appealed not only for their contributions to modern art but, more importantly, for their role in the emotional education of the viewing public. Koszinowski, "Böcklin und seine Kritiker," 287–88.

39 Avenarius, "Unsere Künste," 18.

40 Max Lehrs, *Arnold Böcklin: Ein Leitfaden zum Verständnis seiner Kunst* (München: Photographische Union, 1897), 14–15.

41 See Elizabeth Tumasonis, "Böcklin's Reputation: Its Rise and Fall," *Art Criticism* 6, no. 2 (1990): 48–71.

42 Julius Meier-Graefe, *Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst: Vergleichende Betrachtung der bildenden Künste, als Beitrag zu einer neuen Aesthetik*, vol. 2 (Stuttgart: Engelmann, 1904), 452: "Wie ein Block liegt Böcklin vor der Zukunft."

43 Alfred Julius Meier-Graefe, *Der Fall Böcklin und die Lehre von den Einheiten* (Stuttgart: Julius Hoffmann, 1905), 170: "Böcklin unterbricht den einzigen segensreichen Strom der Kunst."

Within the framework of *Phantasiemalerei*, poetics was the model for the arts, as well as their critique, which was precisely not medium specific but centered on narrative scenes translatable across media via imagination. Using this idea as a negative foil, Meier-Graefe underlined that the effects of Böcklin's works were not specific to painting; in fact, what Böcklin painted could be said with words.[44] For instance, writing about *Self-Portrait with Death Playing the Fiddle* (1872), Meier-Graefe argued that "if one demands from the picture a closed, harmonious cosmos that […] gives a legitimate reflection of the artist's perception, then the self-portait with death is infinitely weak art."[45] He further explained how the painting appeals to the viewer's imagination, leading them to drift away from the work itself into the realm of speculation and thinking:

> the viewer mixes himself up in the matter; and one cannot blame him, for nothing in this picture but the symbolic really stands out. […] Is it not rather a fantasy (*Phantasie*) that is enticed here, a game whose flexibility makes one forget its aimlessness? Can this fantastic vein of the viewer not open up an infinite number of other things that are just as bizarre and just as little art?[46]

Meier-Graefe concluded that Böcklin's self-portrait simulates thought, but "the enjoyment of art has nothing to do with thinking."[47] Böcklin was not a real painter, as his work lacked painterly qualities; in fact, it did not fit into the category *art*.[48]

Image 5. Arnold Böcklin, Self-Portrait with Death Playing the Fiddle, 1872. Oil on canvas, 75 × 61 cm, Alte Nationalgalerie Berlin. Image: Courtesy Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie / Andres Kilger, Public Domain Mark 1.0.

Böcklin's alleged mistakes were not only aesthetic, however, but also of a fundamentally historical nature. "Every consideration," Meier-Graefe stated, "that is not satisfied with fantasies, always causes intimate connection with our great artists and warns against arbitrary changes to the course. But this is what Böcklin demands."[49]

44 Julius Meier-Graefe, "Der Fall Böcklin," *Die Zukunft* 52 (1905): 137–48, here 145.

45 Meier-Graefe, *Der Fall Böcklin*, 96–97: "Solange man vom Bilde einen geschlossenen, harmonischen Kosmos verlangt, der [...] ein gesetzmäßiges Abbild der Anschauung des Künstlers gibt, ist das Selbstporträt mit dem Tod unendlich schwache Kunst."

46 Ibid., 97–99: "der Betrachter mischt sich in die Sache; und man kann es ihm nicht verdenken, denn nichts anderes außer dem Sinnbildlichen tritt entscheidend in dem Bilde hervor. [...] Ist es nicht mehr eine Phantasie, was hier gelockt wird, ein Spiel, über dessen tatsächlicher Beweglichkeit man das mangelnde Ziel vergißt? Kann sich diese phantastische Ader des Betrachters nicht bei unendlich vielen anderen Dingen öffnen, die ebenso merkwürdig und ebensowenig Kunst sind?"

47 Ibid., 99: "denn Kunstgenuß hat nichts mit Denken zu tun."

48 Ibid., 91.

49 Ibid., 179–80: "Jede Überlegung also, die nicht mit Phantastereien genug hat, treibt immer wieder zu innigem Anschluß an unsere Großen und warnt vor willkürlichen Änderungen der Bahn. Das aber verlangt Böcklin."

Here, Meier-Graefe refers to the idea of the singularity of art's tradition, which Böcklin is accused of obstructing—his work "contradicts all history."[50] Within this conception, whether artworks belonged to the one historically significant tradition was verifiable.

In his *Entwicklungsgeschichte*, Meier-Graefe explained the history of art with the help of the metaphor of a colossal tree: Peter Paul Rubens stood at its base, which branched off in various directions.[51] Moving in one direction, there was a branch of French art that ran from Rubens via Antoine Watteau and Eugène Delacroix to Impressionism.[52] Moving in another direction, Rubens's stem led to Anthony van Dyck and Joshua Reynolds.[53] The image of a tree, also found in the Bible, was commonly used in evolutionary theory. The "genealogical tree of men" famously features in Ernst Haeckel's *Anthropogenie* of 1874, where the author argued that the history of the embryo is a condensed form of the history of the species and thus the development of the species entailed the reproduction of heritage and renewal.[54] In the hands of Meier-Graefe, the metaphor of the tree offered a framework for reconstructing the history of art via the idea of "aesthetic unities," which he understood as the non-changing essences or "molecules" of art.[55] What justified the historical connection from Rubens to Delacroix, for example, was the continuous development of these unities. They formed the common denominator that was reproduced in artworks and, moreover, certain artworks displayed evolutionary changes. In this manner, Meier-Graefe stipulated that the "evolutionary history" of art was organized around aesthetic unity.

Now, according to Meier-Graefe, aesthetic unity was perceptibly lacking in Böcklin's work. Thus, the logical conclusion was that it did not belong to modern art because it could not be accommodated within its historic narrative, in which artworks either contribute to or exemplify art's development.[56] If anything, Böcklin could showcase what is *not* art. Meier-Graefe was unapologetic in his judgement, writing that "Böcklin unites in one person all sins of the Germans against the logic of art."[57] In making such statements, he seems to suggest that the terms "art" and "*Phantasiemalerei*" are mutually exclusive, proposing a historical tradition for the former, while placing the latter outside its purview.[58] Within this reasoning, modern art is not a particular form of art practice, one among multiple synchronic types; it is the only historically significant form of art practice.[59] Meier-Graefe's attack drew numerous counter-attacks,

50 Ibid., 259: "aller Geschichte wiedersprechende Entwicklung."

51 Meier-Graefe, *Entwicklungsgeschichte*, 51.

52 Ibid., 51.

53 Ibid.

54 Ernst Haeckel, *Anthropogenie, oder Entwickelungsgeschichte des Menschen: Gemeinverständliche wissenschaftliche Vorträge über die Grundzüge der menschlichen Keimes-und Stammes-Geschichte* (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1874).

55 Meier-Graefe, *Der Fall Böcklin*, 28. For a discussion of Meier-Graefe's ideas on the struggle to define a modern style, see Stephanie Marchal, "Julius Meier-Graefe: Vom 'Kampf um' zur 'Sehnsucht nach' dem Stil," *kritische berichte* 42, no. 1 (2014): 35–46.

56 On Meier-Graefe's idea of development, see also Catherine Krahmer, "Julius Meier-Graefes Denkweise: Entwicklung – Geschichte – Ästhetik," in Becker & Marschal*, Julius Meier-Graefe,* 34.

57 Meier-Graefe, *Der Fall Böcklin*, 197: "Böcklin vereint in einer Person alle Sünden der Deutschen gegen die Logik der Kunst."

58 Ibid., 270.

59 Markus Bernauer, "Der Klang als Vorgang des Bildes: Die Diskussion über Modernität und Konservatismus in der Kunstkritik seit Meier-Graefes *Der Fall Böcklin*," in "*Nichts als die Schönheit": Ästhetischer Konservatismus um 1900*, ed. Jan Andres, Wolfgang Braungart & Kai Kauffmann (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag 2007), 298.

famously by Henry Thode.[60] In fact, it sparked broad discussion within the German art discourse, which there is no need to rehearse here.[61] Suffice it to say that while Meier-Graefe received severe blows, his argument against Böcklin proved effective. He offered another art-historical present and his formalist view of modern art quickly became canonical, even continuing to shape how European art history is narrated today.

Meier-Graefe's polemic against *Phantasiemalerei* and the Böcklin cult paved the way to exclude Schäffner from narratives of modern art. In his own words, the "eternal value" of specific artists is "foreshadowed by the developments they have instigated."[62] Following this line of thinking, relevance is predicated on relations and influence within developmental history.[63] It is probably no coincidence, then, that at precisely this historical juncture, Avenarius began to propagate Schäffner as the first artist to explore the possibilities of non-imitative art. Although Avenarius's interest in her work may not be self-evident, I would suggest it was motivated by the realization that he had to salvage *Phantasiemalerei* (without emphasizing that term). Thus, in his subsequent texts on Schäffner, he emphasized her non-imitative visual idiom as a "new language," employing a tree metaphor to illustrate the developments in modern art as the "branching off" of artistic strands from a shared base.[64] This metaphor allowed him to position Schäffner in relation to other artists and to place her at the forefront of the historical development. Even before Wassily Kandinsky, Avenarius emphasizes, Schäffner had "long anticipated the psychological possibilities" inherent in the qualities of line and light, independently of function or naturalistic depiction.[65]

As Avenarius turned against avant-gardist positions in a series of articles, he alienated himself from those who saw themselves as defenders of

60 This refers to Henry Thode, *Böcklin und Thoma: Acht Vorträge über neudeutsche Malerei, gehalten für ein Gesamtpublikum an der Universität zu Heidelberg im Sommer 1905* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1905). Avenarius responded too: "Meier und manch andere fühlen den Seelengehalt der größten Böcklinschen Werke nicht." Apparently, Avenarius did not need to give the title or even Meier-Graefe's full name for readers to understand which book was meant, see A. [Ferdinand Avenarius], "Worauf kommt's an?", *Der Kunstwart* 19, no. 1, 1905: 1–5, here 3.

61 Contemporary discussions are numerous, see, for example, A. H. Schmid, "Meier-Graefe contra Böcklin," *Die Kunst für Alle* 20 (1904–5): 432–36; Max Déri, "1. Julius Meier-Graefe, Der Fall Böcklin. 2. Adolf Grabowsky, Der Kampf um Böcklin," *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaf*t 2 (1907): 128–42. For discussions of the reception of the case of Böcklin, see, for example, Tumasonis, "Böcklin's reputation"; Krahmer, *Julius Meier-Graefe*, 122–23.

62 Meier-Graefe, *Impressionisten*, 23: "Den Ewigkeitswert aber lässt die Entwicklung ahnen, die sie [Genies] zur Folge gehabt haben."

63 Cf. ibid., 19: "Und wie diese Meister, so hängen alle anderen, soweit sie Bedeutung verdienen, eng mit diesen und anderen Vorgängern und Nachfolgern zusammen, vermehren die Grade der Verwandtschaft und bestärken unseren Eindruck, in der französischen Kunst eine Familie vor uns zu haben."

64 Avenarius, *Eine neue Sprache?*, [2].

65 For the view that Kandinsky was the first to deliberately exhibit works of "abstract art," see Raphael Rosenberg, "Was There a First Abstract Painter? Af Klint's Amimetic Images and Kandinsky's Abstract Art," in *Hilma af Klint: The Art of Seeing the Invisible,* ed. Kurt Almqvist & Louise Belfrage (Stockholm: Axel/Margaret Ax:son Johnson Foundation, 2015), 99. For the view that others actually exhibited abstract pictures prior to Kandinsky, see Raphael Rosenberg, "Ornamentale Buntpapiere und die Bildexperimente der Wiener Secessionisten / Ornamental decorated papers and the Vienna Secessionists' picture experiments," in *EPHEMERA. Die Gebrauchsgrafik der MAK-Bibliothek und Kunstblättersammlung / The Graphik Design of the MAK Library and Works on Paper Collection*, ed. Christoph Thun-Hohenstein & Kathrin Pokorny-Nagel (Vienna: Verlag für moderne Kunst, 2017), 49. For the Avenarius quotation: *Der Kunstwart und Kulturwart* 26, no. 8 (1913): appendix: "Bei Katharine Schäffner, die man ignoriert, die aber die psychologischen Möglichkeiten der 'Ultramalerei' längst vorweggenommen hat."

"modern art."[66] Lines were being drawn, with Schäffner pulled firmly on the side of Avenarius. The consequences of his positioning of Schäffner should not be underestimated: this stance meant opposing modern art positions, such as those of Impressionism and Neo-impressionism, championed by Meier-Graefe specifically, as well as those of Kandinsky, the Expressionists, Cubists, Futurists, and others.[67] As Avenarius fell on the "wrong" side of the modern art debate, Schäffner also ended up outside the art historical narrative of European modern art.

Repetition and Dissolution

This paper began with the observation that the work of Katharine Schäffner tends to be absent from wider narratives of modern art. My point was not to rehabilitate Schäffner's work, even though it is richer than the art historical neglect would suggest. My aim was instead to examine reasons for her absence by reconstructing her entanglement in the dispute between Avenarius and Meier-Graefe. In Avenarius's eyes, what mattered was not partisan camps or -isms, but art's role in the wider scheme of things, which entailed the development of spiritual-affective community and, more drastically, culture's survival. While the prominence of his notion of *Phantasiemalerei* has long faded, its association has cast a long shadow over Schäffner's work.[68] For her, too, attention soon fell away, while other artists with similar visual idioms, like František Kupka, have been recognized within the history of Modernist abstraction.[69] To try to position Schäffner among the historical avant-gardes now would be perverse.

Schäffner's visual idiom had become highly abstract around 1908–10. And as Meier-Graefe continued to rework his developmental history, adjusting his perspective and adding new artists, it prompts the question of whether Schäffner's work could, after all, be incorporated into his formalist version of modernism—a version that emphasizes Impressionism, and constructs an opposition between the imaginative and non-imaginative.[70] The opposition between a medium-specific aesthetic focused on visual structure, on the one hand, and elements of imagination and narrative, on the other, has been central to discussions of modern art. This was an important issue for a great many artists and critics, and it mattered to Schäffner's interpreters. Kurt Schwitters, for instance, developed his view of abstraction along the lines of this highly charged opposition. Not yet subscribing to any party line, Schwitters assessed Schäffner's visual idiom in 1910 for its potential as abstract art, contending that "she had dared [...] to emerge, first and alone, with

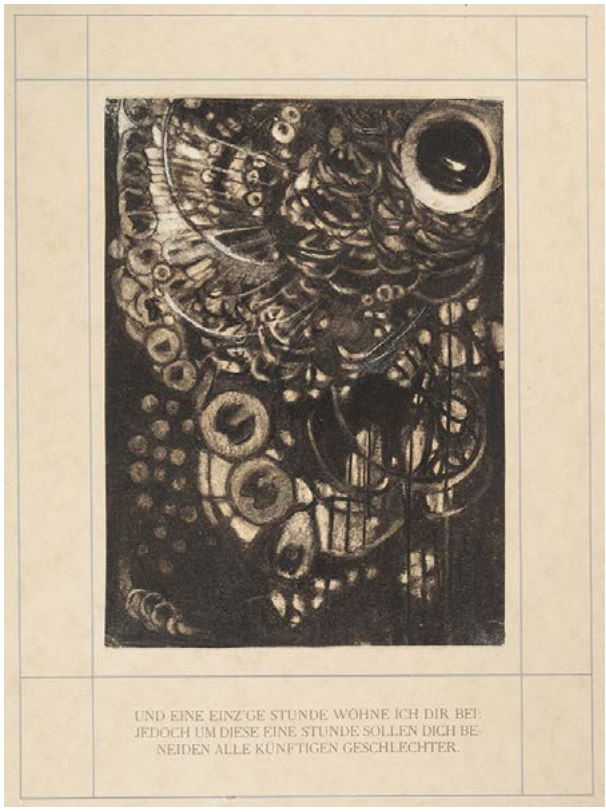
66 See A [Ferdinand Avenarius], "Futuristen," *Der Kunstwart* 25, no. 17 (1912): 278–81; A [Ferdinand Avenarius], "Des Kaisers neue Kleider," *Der Kunstwart und Kulturwart* 26, no. 8 (1913): 81–88; and A [Ferdinand Avenarius], "Chaos? An die Besucher der Kunstausstellungen," *Der Kunstwart und Kulturwart* 27, no. 20 (1914): 77–81.

67 On this, see Jane Boddy, "Ultra-Painting: The Polemics against Art Theory," in *Judgement Practices in the Artistic Field*, ed. Elisabeth Heymer, Hubert Locher, Stephanie Marchal, Melanie Sachs-Resch & Beate Söntgen (München: Edition Metzel, 2023), 109–24.

68 *Phantasiemalerei* was not part of the art historical trajectory of -isms proposed by Alfred Barr for the MoMA exhibition *Cubism and Abstract Art* (New York, 1936).

69 Art historians have remarked that Schäffner's "abstract" visual idiom has not received the attention it deserves, unlike some of her peers such as František Kupka; see Dry, "Die Darstellung von Seelenzuständen," 119; Elke Frietsch, review of "Ab nach München! Künstlerinnen um 1900 (Münchener Stadtmuseum)," *kritische berichte* 43, no. 2 (2015): 127–29, here 128.

70 For a discussion of the repeated reworkings of Meier-Graefe's canon, see Jenny Anger, "Courbet, the Decorative, and the Canon: Rewriting and Rereading Meier-Graefe's *Modern Art*," in *Partisan Canons*, ed. Anna Bryzski (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Marchal, Zeising & Degner, "Kunstschriftstellerei," 35.



Images 6–8. Katharine Schäffner, Zeichnungen zu Prometheus u. Epimetheus, 1. Teil, v. Karl Spitteler. Charcoal on paper, sheet 1, 222 × 190 mm; sheet 10, 200 × 145 mm; sheet 15, 110 × 168 mm and 35 × 56, National Gallery Prague. Image: National Gallery Prague 2024, all rights reserved.

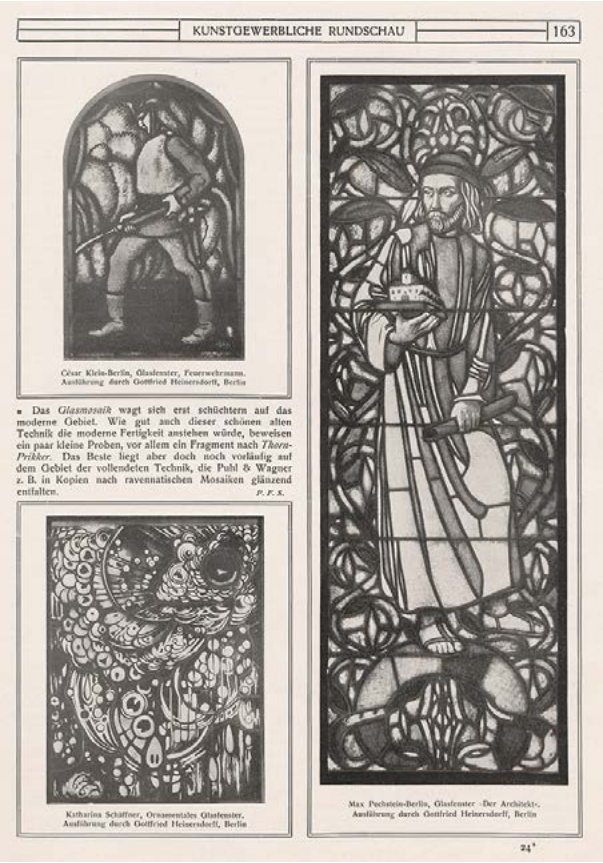


Image 9. Katharine Schäffner, ornamental stained-glass window, reproduced in Kunstgewerbeblatt NF 23 (1912): 163. Image: Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg / https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.4421#0170 / CC-BY-SA 4.0

abstract drawings."[71] His judgement nevertheless relegated her work to a subordinate position, as he deemed her treatment of form derivative, writing that she seeks forms "to capture 'feelings' more sharply," rather than using forms without reference to external signification.[72] For him, they were not sufficiently "visual" but were too much "thought." Later appraisals continued to position Schäffer's work as subordinate to artists like Kandinsky.[73] While we can only speculate on Meier-Graefe's interpretation, it seems likely that within the opposition between imaginative and non-imaginative art, Schäffner was seen as falling on the "wrong" side—her work was characterized by too much thought, association, and imagination. This opposition, however, does not seem to have been particularly pressing for Schäffner.

In a written statement published by August Brömse in 1909, presumably citing Schäffner, she referred specifically to her intention to convey emotions, observing how she began distilling emotive elements from her surroundings, employing, for example, circular shapes to symbolize "dissolution."[74] The metaphor of dissolution is revealing for probing a representation problem: in its figurative elusiveness, it meant a liberation from the constraints of old forms and prepackaged categories, opening to new affective and spiritual worlds. Schäffner's repertoire of predominantly spiraling forms seems to hover on the edge of signifying by resemblance and signifying by graphic expression. This can be observed—beyond Avenarius's 1908 selection

71 Kurt Schwitters, *Das literarische Werk*, ed. Friedhelm Lach, vol. 5, *Manifeste und kritische Prosa* (Cologne: DuMont, 1981), 35: "sie hat das Große gewagt, zuerst und allein mit abstrakten Zeichnungen hervorzutreten." Schwitters documented a visit to Galerie Arnold on December 11, 1910, where he saw the exhibition *Kath. Schäffner – Aug. Brömse*; on which, see Jane Boddy, "Empathie zur Überwindung der Einsamkeit bei Ferdinand Avenarius und Katharine Schäffner," *Dresdener Kunstblätter* 2 (2021): 32–39.

72 Schwitters, *Das literarische Werk*, 399: "[sucht] sie doch gerade durch die Körper die 'Gefühle' schärfer zu bestimmen."

73 Looking back in 1957, Johannes Eichner describes Schäffner's work as being "artig und zivilisiert". Johannes Eichner, *Kandinsky und Gabriele Münter: Von Ursprüngen moderner Kunst* (München, no date [1957]), 106. Or, for the view that Avenarius made a mistake by preferring Schäffner over Kandinsky, see Leopold Reidemeister, "Die 'Brücke' im Spiegel der Zeitschriftenkritik," *Brücke-Archiv* 1, no date [1967]: 41–54, here 50.

74 A. B. [August Brömse], "Katharine Schäffner," *Deutsche Arbeit* 8, no. 12 (1909): 843. For Brömse's relationship to Schäffner, see Gabriela Kašková, *Schattenseiten: August Brömse und Kathrin Brömse* (Regensburg: Kunstforum Ostdeutsche Galerie Regensburg, 2011), 77–78.

Image 10. Katharine Schäffner, ornamental decorated paper, circa 1910. Linocut, 650 × 455 mm, Kupferstich-Kabinett, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden. Image: Kupferstich-Kabinett, SKD / Andreas Diesend, all rights reserved.

of drawings—in portfolios like *Zeichnungen zu Prometheus und Epimetheus* (circa 1909; images 6–8) and *Sechs Zeichnungen in dekorativem Stil* (1910).[75] These dynamic, spiraling forms must have been important to her, as she repeated and translated them across media. For example, they reoccur in stained-glass compositions (image 9) or undergo reinterpretation in ornamental decorated papers produced around 1910 (image 10).[76] Through repetition, these forms seem to construct a visual world of affectivity and feeling, reflecting the darker depths of human experience, and drawing on personal perceptions, emotions, and memories of death, suffering, or mourning, for example.[77]

Given the importance of media relations and the stimulation of associations and thoughts in Schäffner's work, do Schäffner's works, indeed, truly represent *Phantasiemalerei*? Her work, I would argue, embodies central elements of *Phantasiemalerei*, even though she does not explicitly thematize this concept. For example, the importance of the relationship between image and literature can be seen in her drawings to Carl Spitteler's *Prometheus und Epimetheus. Ein Gleichnis* (1880–81), a symbolist interpretation of the Greek mythical epic.[78] Spitteler's literary

75 The original drawings for the ensemble *Zeichnungen zu Prometheus und Epimetheus* are in Prague, see fn. 13; Katharine Schäffner, *Sechs Zeichnungen in dekorativem Stil* (München: Georg D.W. Callwey, [1910]).

76 Examples of ornamental decorated papers are kept in the Kupferstich-Kabinett, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden.

77 Brömse described Schäffner's work as "demonic", a predicate often linked to women in the context of Symbolist art.

78 Carl Spitteler, *Prometheus und Epimetheus: Ein Gleichnis* (Jena: Eugen Diederichs, [1880–1881] 1911).

work is highly evocative, allegorical, and imaginative, which Schäffner translates into concrete visual form. Thus, we might see her drawings as exemplary of *Phantasiemalerei*, as they engage in media translations and involve imagination.[79] However, while I do not wish to suggest that such an interpretation is necessarily wrong, by promoting Schäffner's work as such, Avenarius pulled her into a polemic that ultimately harmed the critical reception of her work.

Schäffner's output (as far as it is available today) suggests that she worked on a type of graphic abstraction to convey feelings.[80] Historically, this aspect of her work has been largely overshadowed by the classification *Phantasiemalerei*—the antithesis of modern art. Even when critics considered her graphical expression of affective states, Avenarius's 1908 text remained the primary reference point. In fact, in the 1920s, Schäffner's work was re-examined on the borderline between art and psychiatry, with psychiatrists drawing parallels between Expressionism and schizophrenia and affirming its presence in her work.[81] Such dubious interpretations have not only further obscured her voice as an artist but also perpetuated the dominance of men speaking on her behalf, disregarding her own perspective. Equally, her recognition as an early proponent of non-imitative art has occluded the specifics of her graphic work, deeming it derivative when compared to other, mostly painterly, forms of abstraction.

To reassess Schäffner's place within the history of modern European art, I believe it is crucial that we shift our attention to practices and theories of graphic art centered on the transmission of affective states and other "invisible" felt subjects and consider its local Czech-German contexts.[82] Resurfacing this intellectual and artistic history of supposedly "minor" or occluded figures like Schäffner may help to establish broader intellectual genealogies in Modernist art.

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79 It should by no means be assumed that critical support of *Phantasiemalerei* disappeared after 1910. Avenarius continued to engage with the concept, and imagination (*Phantasie*) remained a topic of interest for artists, as seen in Max Liebermann, *Die Phantasie in der Malerei* (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1916). Liebermann's essay, "Die Phantasie in der Malerei", was originally published in 1904.

80 For example, the 1925 exhibition at Prague's Rudolfinum had a section dedicated to Schäffner, listing 56 numbers: *Tři výstavy*, 7–10. Today, only a few of these works are still identifiable; see ft. 13.

81 An examination of Schäffner's reception in the 1920s goes beyond the scope of this paper; for discussion of her work by psychiatrists, see for example R.A. Pfeifer, *Der Geisteskranke und sein Werk: Eine Studie über schizophrene Kunst* (Leipzig: Alfred Kröner, 1923), 9; or, Hans Prinzhorn, "Die künstlerische Gestaltungsvorgang in psychiatrischer Beleuchtung," *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 19 (1925): 154–69, here 167.

82 For a discussion on the functionality of the categories of modern European art in the context of East-Central Europe, see Matthew Rampley, "Networks, Horizons, Centres and Hierarchies: On the Challenges of Writing on Modernism in Central Europe," *Umění/Art* 69, no. 2 (2021): 145–62.

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Place and Presence

Kjell Borgen's works in Sápmi

Bente Aass Solbakken

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The Norwegian architect Kjell Borgen enjoyed a successful career in the second half of the twentieth century as a partner in the Oslo architectural practice Borgen & Bing Lorentzen. Although he was based in Oslo, he also completed commissions in Sápmi throughout his career, from surveying vernacular Sámi architecture to designing works for Sámi clients. By focusing both on Borgen's works both as a scholar of traditional Sámi architecture and as an architect working for Sámi clients, this text sheds light on his attempts to define what Sámi architecture is.

Keywords: *Kjell Borgen, Christian Norberg-Schulz, vernacular Sámi architecture, modern Sámi architecture, Indigenous architecture, architectural phenomenology*

What defines Sámi architecture? The Norwegian architect Kjell Borgen (1928–2015) spent several decades attempting to answer this question, both as a scholar and as a designer, starting in his student years around 1950 and continuing as a distinguished architect until the 1990s. He was one of very few people in Norway with an in-depth knowledge of vernacular Sámi architecture, and probably the first architect (at least on the Norwegian side of Sápmi) to endeavour, when designing for Sámi clients, to create designs that were truly rooted in Sámi culture. Nonetheless, his work in Sápmi, both as an architect and as a scholar of traditional Sámi architecture, has mostly escaped the attention of historians of art and architecture.

In the following text, I present Kjell Borgen's scholarly and architectural work in Sápmi and discuss the influence of Sámi building traditions and, later on, contemporary architectural theory, on his architectural designs in Sápmi. In particular, I investigate how Borgen's scholarly endeavours enabled him to identify what he thought of as typical Sámi architectural signifiers and how he applied these in his own designs.

Borgen's work in Sápmi was diverse. As a young man, he made survey drawings and took photographs to document traditional architecture. Later in his career, he undertook architectural and scholarly projects. He studied Sámi culture and worked with Sámi clients throughout his career. The foundation for all his work was the surveys he completed in the 1950s. As well as introducing him to a vernacular architecture that he found endlessly fascinating, his work on these surveys gained him lifelong friends and connections and, as time went on, a range of commissions on very different scales.[1] Borgen's decades spent working with Sámi culture and Sámi clients are inextricably tangled with events in Sámi history, from the inclusion of Sámi culture at the Norwegian Folk Museum to the self-confident Sámi cultural revival of the 1970s and onwards. There is no comprehensive list of Borgen's work for Sámi clients. Indeed, it is likely that some works are now lost, as the fragment of his archive that has survived (now at the National Museum of Norway) contains very little. For example, he completed a commission from the Sámi Reindeer Herders' Association of Norway to produce standard designs for summer dwellings, but whether these templates were ever used, or even still exist, is currently unknown.[2] In the early 1990s, Borgen conducted a research project funded by the Norwegian Research Council, for which he revisited some of the farms and settlements he had documented forty years earlier. He recorded changes that had occurred during the intervening years, while also developing a theoretical explanation for differences between traditional North Sámi farmsteads in Finnmark County and neighbouring farms that were characteristic of Norwegian and Finnish cultures.[3]

None of Borgen's architectural works in Sápmi has been discussed previously in the context of his scholarly writings. In fact, these works have not been discussed much at all. This probably reflects the lack of interest, at least until recently, that art and architectural historians have displayed in Sámi architecture, including historical, modern and contemporary Sámi architecture. The same is true of modern and contemporary Indigenous architecture more broadly; it is only in very recent decades that this field has received academic attention.[4]

1 Ole Magnus Rapp, "Gamme-arkitekten," *Finnmark Dagblad*, 22 February, 1991.

2 "Sekundærboliger i reindrifta," *Reindriftsnytt/ Boazodoallu-ođđasa* 14, no. 1 (1980): 19; Rapp, "Gamme-arkitekten".

3 Kjell Borgen, *Samenes gårder i indre Finnmark: Naturtilpasning, form og kulturelle konvensjoner fra 1900 til 1990*, FOK-programmets skriftserie (Oslo: Norges forskningsråd, 1995).

4 Elizabeth Grant, Kelly Greenop, Albert L. Refiti & Daniel J. Glenn, "Introduction," in *The Handbook of Contemporary Indigenous Architecture*, eds. Elizabeth Grant et.al (Singapore: Springer, 2018), 1–22.

Lávvu, Goahti, Giants

In Norway, an ongoing critical discussion about what contemporary Indigenous architecture in Sápmi can be was initiated by the architect and artist Joar Nango (b. 1979) in his diploma project, *Sami huksendáidda: The FANzine* (2007–2008). He has described how as an architecture student, he "gradually became aware of the lack of conversations, not only around Sámi architecture, but about Sámi culture in general."[5] In the zine, and also in Nango's subsequent practice up until today, one observation has recurred: "Almost without exception [- -] official Sámi institutions were designed by Norwegian architects without the input of Sámi people."[6] Nango was not the first to note the tendency of non-Sámi architects, when commissioned to design official buildings such as museums, churches or even a parliament, to turn to the *lavvú* as an obvious symbolic motif. But it was Nango who dubbed this phenomenon *Giant Lavvú Syndrome,* neatly encapsulating the result of attempts to design Sámi-looking buildings by imitating the distinctive conical lávvu form.[7] By far the most famous giant lávvu is the Sámi Parliament in Kárášjohka (Karasjok).[8]

The traditional lávvu is a lightweight portable tent that was used by nomadic herders when travelling with their reindeer. In today's reindeer husbandry, the *gumpi*, a small hut on runners that can be towed by snowmobiles, has long since replaced the tent. The use of lávvu motifs by non-Sámi architects in modern and contemporary architecture can constitute a form of architectural ethnographic present. As Nango explains:

> We are still a colonised people – a minority that is often neglected. If we're represented, it is through an essentially folkloristic lens, which presents us as a culture that belongs in a museum. As with other Indigenous cultures, that is not the case at all. Sámi society is a contemporary one that we have managed to build politically and culturally, despite the state's historic – and often violent – efforts to 'assimilate' us.[9]

Traditional Sámi architecture encompasses a multitude of different building types, some permanent and some portable. The idea that the lávvu is *the* traditional Sámi dwelling is a common misunderstanding. The larger, more robust tents as well as the semi-permanent turf huts, have mostly escaped attention, as social anthropologist Ivar Bjørklund points out in an article exploring dwelling types associated with Sámi reindeer husbandry.[10] In a method unique to Sámi culture, larger tents are constructed using beams sourced from birch trees with naturally bent trunks. Two of these curved beams are joined to form an arch, which is then joined to a second arch using a ridge pole. The resulting structure is known as a *bealljegoahti*.

5 Joar Nango, "In Practice," *The Architectural Review*, no. 1494 (2022): 93.

6 Nango, "In Practice," 93.

7 For a further discussion of Nango's notion see: Martin Braathen, "Apropos the Giant Lávvu," in *Huksendaidda: Architecture in Sápmi*, ed. Bente Aass Solbakken (Stamsund: Orkana, 2022). The earliest discussion of the lavvú as a motif for contemporary architecture was probably in Sunniva Skålnes, "Det bygde landskapet i Sápmi – folkearkitekturen som mønster, minne og markør," in *Samiske landskapsstudier: rapport fra et arbeidsseminar*, ed. Lars Magne Andreassen (Guovdageaidnu: Sámi instituhta, 2004).

8 Designed by Stein Halvorsen (b. 1953) and Christoffer Sundby (b. 1957) 1996–2000. For a thorough discussion of this modern monument, see Elin Haugdal, "Strategies of Monumentality in Contemporary Sámi Architecture," in *Sami Arts and Aesthetics: Contemporary Perspectives*, eds. Svein Aamold, Elin Haugdal & Ulla Angkjær Jørgensen (Århus: Aarhus University Press, 2017).

9 Nango, "In Practice," 93.

10 Ivar Bjørklund, "The Mobile Sámi Dwelling: From Pastoral Necessity to Ethno-political Master Paradigm," in *About the Hearth: Perspectives on the Home, Hearth and Household in the Circumpolar North*, ed. David G. Anderson, Robert P. Wishart & Virginie Vaté (New York: Berghain, 2013), 69.

Image 1. Joar Nango, Bealljegoahti structure, 2021. Installation shot from "Girjegumpi: Sámi Architectural Library", The National Museum – Architecture, September 15, 2021–February 6, 2022. Photo: The National Museum / Ina Wesenberg, CC-BY.

The term bealljegoahti also denotes a turf hut built using the same type of structure. The structure needs to be able to support the weight of poles and turf, however, so the arched beams (*bealljit*) must be thicker and studier than those used for the cloth-covered tent.[11] *Goahti* can be used to refer to both a tent and a turf hut (*darfegoahti*). Björklund asserts that unlike the lávvu, the architectural potential of the bealljegoahti remains untapped.[12] But exploring the architectural possibilities of this unique Sámi structure was what Kjell Borgen did.

Sámi and Norwegian Vernacular

Kjell Borgen is by no means an unknown name in Norwegian architectural history, even if his works have been little discussed. He established a practice with Ragnvald Bing-Lorentzen (1929–2022) in 1957; they had both finished training in 1953. They did well for themselves and even had branch offices in both Vadsø and Alta for a long time, as the practice had several clients in the northernmost part of Norway. The two founders stayed based in Oslo, however. They maintained their partnership throughout their long careers, but the practice's Sámi architectural projects were Borgen's alone.[13] In 1983, Borgen and Bing-Lorenzen achieved a milestone when they were awarded the highly prestigious Timber Prize in recognition of their innovative wooden architecture. Prominent examples included buildings

11 The bealljegoahti is an ancient structure, but there are numerous other ways to construct a darfegoahti. Randi Sjølie, "Fra gamme til trehus," in *Arkitektur i Nord-Norge*, ed. Ingeborg Hage et al. (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2008).

12 Bjørklund, "The Mobile Sámi Dwelling," 78.

13 Information provided by Ragnvald Bing-Lorentzen during an interview with the author, 14 September 2022.

Image 2. Borgen and Bing-Lorentzen, *Eengerdaelie Community House*, 1971. Photo: Teigens Fotoatelier. The National Museum of Norway, CC-BY.

for the tourism sector, such as Gaustablikk Hotel (1971) and Kárášjohka Hotel (1975–1983). Another main work is Eengerdaelie (Engerdal) Community House (1965–1970). These buildings are characterised by features found in most of the practice's other designs from this period, such as the use of local materials (wood) and sensitive adaptions to the site.

Typical of their time, the practice's designs can easily be described as critical regionalism, as defined by Kenneth Frampton in 1980: an architecture that "may find its governing inspiration in such things as the range and quality of the local light, or in a *tectonic* derived from a peculiar structural mode, or in the topography of a given site."[14] Borgen and Bing-Lorentzen's tectonic understanding of wood as a material was praised by the Timber Prize jury:

> Norway is a country characterized by its wooden houses, and we gladly encourage this image abroad: The sprawling farm with its warm, inviting wood buildings. Through reinstating wood as a dominate [sic] building material under credible technical conditions, these architects have given many tourist buildings a Norwegian climate and regional character in

14 Kenneth Frampton, "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (New York: The New Press, [1983] 1998), 23.

> an area where an amorphous internationalism reigns.[15]

Untangling this jury statement, Borgen and Bing-Lorentzen's work was perceived as embodying a Norwegian tradition, even as preserving the tradition from threatening alien (international) impulses. The trope of foreign fashions compromising Norwegian architecture is an old one, dating back to at least the 1860s. Fears of corruption of the national tradition seem to have emerged soon after that tradition was identified in the first place (or, to phrase it with Eric Hobsbawm, "invented").[16]

The Timber Prize was established in 1961 to recognize architects who championed and further developed what was perceived to be a national tradition of building in wood. A book about the award and its recipients was published in 1988. It also included three essays on vernacular architecture. After essays on "The Norwegian tradition" and "The Western tradition", the book presented Borgen's essay: "The Polar tradition".[17] His text stresses how architecture and landscape can work together to create unique experiences of being:

> A tent in a landscape without end. Here we find the simplest room of all: Man forms a ring of canvas around himself. The experience of this room is strong. When one sits around the fire, the room is given an atmosphere. The light plays through the smoke. When the fire flares up the room changes its character.
>
> Or … Morning's darkness givens [sic] way to dawn's gray light.[18]

In the 1980s and 1990s, Norwegian architects placed significant emphasis on subjective experience, based on the powerful influence of the phenomenological theories of Christian Norberg-Schulz (1926–2000). As I show in this article, Borgen's reading of Norberg-Schulz's texts would come to shape his interpretation of Sámi architecture.

Borgen published his first text on Sámi architecture as early as 1954.[19] Although he had barely completed his training, he was already an authority on the subject. Using his own photographs and drawings as illustrations, he described different vernacular traditions through the ages with impressive efficiency. Published in *Byggekunst* (The Norwegian Review of Architecture), this pioneering feature was the first example in Norway of a richly illustrated piece exploring building traditions in Sápmi within an explicitly architectural context. It marked a significant departure from the previous derogatory treatment of these traditions as primitive and more suited to ethnographic and ethnological study.[20]

In Norway, the concept of a unified "folk" and the incompatibility of the nation-state model with the need to accommodate two distinct populations within a single entity exacerbated the marginalisation of Sámi culture during the nineteenth century.[21] In the first scholarly

15 Dag Rognlien ed., *Treprisen, Thirteen Norwegian Prize-Winning Architects* (Oslo: Arkitektnytt, 1988), 193.

16 For the formation of a 'national' architecture in Norway, see Bente Aass Solbakken, "A True Norwegian Style," in *Dragons and Logs*, ed. Bente Aass Solbakken (Oslo: Nasjonalmuseet, 2023).

17 Kjell Borgen, "The Polar Tradition," in *Treprisen: Thirteen Norwegian Prize-Winning Architects*, ed. Dag Rognlien (Oslo: Arkitektnytt, 1988).

18 Borgen, "The Polar Tradition," 171.

19 Kjell Borgen, "Samenes bygningskultur," *Byggekunst* 36, no. 4 (1954).

20 Bente Aass Solbakken, "An Unnational Architectural Tradition," in *Huksendáidda: Architecture in Sápmi*, ed. Bente Aass Solbakken (Stamsund: Orkana, 2022).

21 Astri Andresen, Bjørg Evjen, & Teemu Ryymin, eds., *Samenes historie fra 1751 til 2010* (Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk, 2021), 131–137, 154–155.

account of Norwegian history published in 1852, two sentences were all it took to deny the presence of the Sámi people and the existence of their distinct building culture:

> Norway has no historical presence without Norwegians, and the Norwegians have none without Norway. [- -] If there were perhaps some Finns or Lapps roaming the mountain plateaux with their reindeer, that cannot be described as any kind of settlement.[22]

Assertions that Indigenous peoples lack any architectural culture have been common, and are yet another legacy of colonisation, as is the denigration of Indigenous architecture as not "true" architecture.[23] The inclusion of Sámi architecture in *Byggekunst* and the book about the Timber Prize is significant because Sámi architecture had been (and to a large degree still is) more or less invisible in architectural culture in Norway, including in texts about architectural history. Art history was established as a discipline in Norway in the latter part of the nineteenth century, during a period when scholarly output was strongly influenced by nationalism. The art historian Monica Grini has vividly demonstrated the impact of nationalism on the development of Norwegian art history and its continued structural influence.[24] Recently, the law professor Kirsti Strøm Bull highlighted how scholars from the 1850s onwards contributed to shaping an image of Sámi culture as primitive and inferior, and called for academia to acknowledge the substantial part it played in this process.[25]

The general exclusion of the Sámi people from the national narrative during the nineteenth century led to the segregation of Sámi culture from Norwegian culture in museum collections. In Oslo, Sámi artefacts were displayed at the Ethnographic Museum, alongside artefacts from non-European cultures.[26] In 1951, a proposal to transfer the Sámi collections from the Ethnographic Museum to the Norwegian Folk Museum received official approval. The transfer was a strong political statement by both institutions and had the express aim of representing Norway's Sámi and ethnic Norwegian populations on an equal footing.[27] The initiative came from the ethnographer Guttorm Gjessing (1906–1979), who had taken over as the director of the Ethnographic Museum in 1947. Gjessing's radical politics and in-depth knowledge of Sámi culture led him to conclude that the Sámi collection belonged elsewhere and the director of the Folk Museum agreed.[28] The years around 1950 have been seen as a period of breakthrough for Sámi organisations, whose demands for recognition and justice were received more sympathetically in the aftermath of World War II.[29] The Folk Museum established a Sámi Department in 1951 and appointed the

22 P. A. Munch, *Det norske Folks Historie. Deel 1*, vol. 1 (Christiania: Chr. Tønsbergs forlag, 1852), 1. Original: "Norge har ingen historisk Tilværelse uden ved Nordmændene, og Nordmændene ingen uden ved Norge. [- -] Thi at der oppe paa Fjeldslettene maaske vandrede nogle Finner eller Lapper med deres Reenhjorder, kan man ikke kalde nogen Bebyggelse".

23 Grant et al., *The Handbook of Contemporary Indigenous Architecture*, Introduction, 2–4.

24 Monica Grini, *Samisk kunst og norsk kunsthistorie: delvise forbindelser* (Stockholm: Stockholm University Press, 2021).

25 By analysing the celebratory and opulent two-volume work, *Norge i det nittende århundre* (1900) (Norway in the Nineteenth Century), authored by the nation's most distinguished and renowned scholars, scientists, and artists of the time, she effectively demonstrates the presence of systemic racism. Kirsti Strøm Bull, "Vitenskapens rolle i fornorskningstiden," *Nytt norsk tidsskrift* 41, no. 2 (2024), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.18261/nnt.41.2.1.

26 Grini, *Samisk kunst og norsk kunsthistorie*, 44–56.

27 Leif Pareli, "'Stilt på likefot' Om samisk kultur ved Norsk Folkemuseum," in *Forskning og fornyelse: By og bygd 70 år*, eds. Inger Jensen, Kari Telste & Jon Birger Østby (Oslo: Norsk Folkemuseum, 2013), 90.

28 Pareli, "'Stilt på likefot'," 93.

29 Andresen, Evjen & Ryymin, *Samenes historie fra 1751 til 2010*, chapter 8.

linguist Asbjørn Nesheim (1906–1989) as keeper. Nesheim had ambitious plans for an outdoor North Sámi exhibit, and dreamt of creating a "sametun" alongside all the other *tuns*[30] that already showcased the vernacular architecture of different regions of Norway.[31] Ideally, the "sametun" would include several turf huts, each intended for a different use (dwelling, cooking, livestock shelter, hunting, fishing), as well as a River Sámi farm, a Coastal Sámi farm, a lávvu …[32] As Nesheim explained to the Norwegian press, the materials for the new exhibits were to be collected on field trips; the task was urgent, as so much was rapidly disappearing, not least the turf-hut dwellings.[33]

In the summer of 1950, even before the official relocation of the Sámi collections, the Ethnographic and Folk Museums collaborated to send four students north to survey Sámi architecture. The expedition was led by architecture student Kjell Borgen, who was making his very first trip to Finnmark.[34] The group sent accounts of their activities to the national newspaper *Aftenposten*, but these tended to be more about high-spirited canoeing adventures than building traditions.[35] Borgen did report, however, that their main task was to map whatever turf huts they could find. They did not expect to find much. When the Nazi regime that had occupied Norway during World War II was forced to retreat from Finnmark in 1944, it adopted a scorched earth policy. As a result, the students expected pretty much everything to have been burnt to the ground. In rural areas, however, the military patrols had tended to target dwellings, probably for reasons of efficiency. Consequently, many turf huts on farmsteads, such as livestock shelters, had survived.[36] Borgen and his companions managed to survey about 40 turf huts in the areas around Kárášjohka and Deatnu (Tana) that summer.[37] Their success, however, does not diminish the devastation caused by the burning of Finnmark and Nord-Troms. Almost everything was in ruins, infrastructure was destroyed, and people were left homeless. As post-war reconstruction in Finnmark proceeded, the massive rebuilding projects also resulted in architectural Norwegianisation: the plethora of multicultural buildings that had gone up in smoke were for the most part replaced by monocultural Norwegian houses.[38]

During the 1950s, the Folk Museum despatched Borgen on several field trips to survey and document traditional Sámi buildings. There was a sense of urgency, as the surviving Sámi structures were rapidly disappearing. In the summer of 1952, Borgen and Nesheim collected buildings and other artefacts for the planned outdoor exhibit in Oslo. In July, the local newspaper in Finnmark reported that they already had shipped south a turf hut used for cooking animal feed from the village of Ánnejohka (Vestre Jacobselv) and were now travelling towards

30 Farmyards surrounded by clusters of farm buildings.

31 B. F., "Bort fra vidderomantikk og eksotiske naboer," VG, 24 December 1952.

32 Pareli, "'Stilt på likefot'," 97.

33 B. F., "Bort fra vidderomantikk og eksotiske naboer."

34 The three others were Borgen's classmates Einar Arnborg (1925–1995) and Kåre Strandskogen, and the artist Finn Strømsted (1925–2003), whose role was to study Sámi ornamentation. "Det er moro å se seg om i verda," *Stavanger Aftenblad*, 21 June, 1950.

35 Kjell Borgen, "I kamp med mygg og gjenstridige stryk," *Aftenposten*, 28 October, 1950.

36 Einar Niemi, "Byggeskikk og arkitektur i Finnmark," in *Årbok for Foreningen til norske Fortidsminnesmerkers Bevaring* (Oslo: Foreningen til norske Fortidsminnesmerkers Bevaring, 1983), 57.

37 "Samenes bosetting i Finnmark studeres nærmere," *Lofotposten*, 16 February 1951.

38 Ivar Bjørklund, "Reconstructon and Norwegianization," in *Huksendáidda: Architecture in Sápmi*, ed. Bente Aass Solbakken (Stamsund: Orkana, 2020). There were exceptions to this rule, however: some rebuilt dwellings were customised to meet Sami needs, see Ingeborg Hage, *Som fugl føniks av asken? Gjenreisingshus i Nord-Troms og Finnmark* (Oslo: Ad Notam Gyldendal, 1999), 255–260; Elin Haugdal, "Home: Learning from Sápmi," in *Towards Home: Inuit & Sami Placemaking*, ed. Joar Nango et al. (Canadian Centre for Architecture / Váliz / Mondo Books, 2024), 96–97.

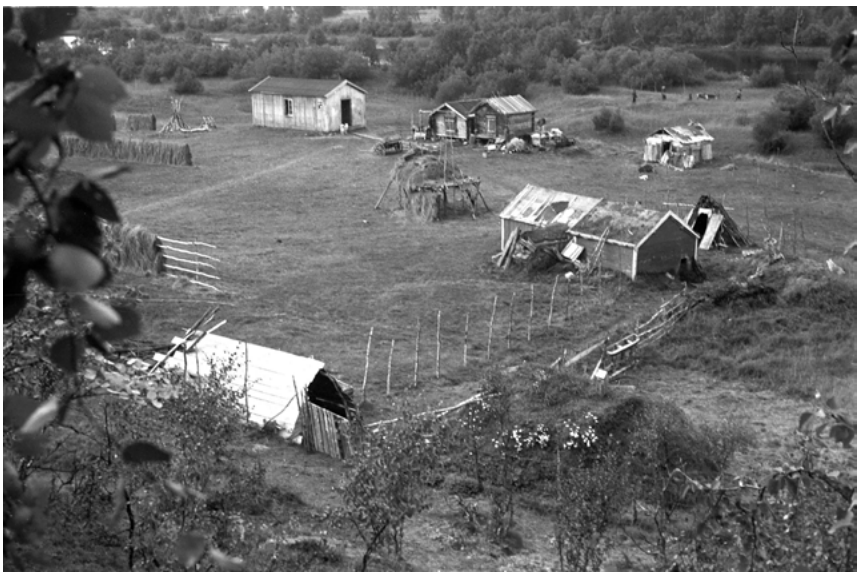

Image 3. Nils Mathis Gaup's farm in Máze. Photo: Kjell Borgen, 1953. Norsk Folkemuseum, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Kárášjohka and Guovdageaidnu (Kautokeino).[39] A historical account of the Sàmi Department at the Folk Museum states that the ambitious plans for an outdoor Sámi exhibit failed for unclear reasons (an indoor exhibit opened in 1958.) The buildings dismantled and moved from Sápmi, "probably ended up amongst the museum's disorderly heaps of materials and must be considered lost".[40] This loss becomes even more problematic given the contemporaneous discussions about establishing an open-air museum in Finnmark. These discussions were initiated by the newly established Guovdageaidnu Museum Society, chaired by duojár and politician Lauri Keskitalo (1914–1989).[41] These endeavours to found a Sámi museum in Sápmi coincided with the Folk Museum's exports of Sámi heritage to Oslo, only to misplace it.[42] The buildings were not the only loss: Kjell Borgen's many detailed survey drawings have been missing from the museum for more than 20 years.[43] All of Borgen's photographs, however, are digitised and accessible.[44]

Borgen gained a large network of contacts during his summers spent surveying vernacular architecture, laying the foundations for his later works in Sápmi.[45] Borgen's final assignment for the Folk Museum seems to have been completed in 1958, as this is the date of the most recent photographs in the collection, which include several from Finnish Sápmi. There is little information about any work by Borgen that related to Sámi culture in the following decade. Perhaps he concentrated on establishing his practice with Bing-Lorentzen during the 1960s, or perhaps he had assignments I have not been able to trace. He

39 "Samisk avdeling ved Norsk folkemuseum på Bygdøy," *Finnmarken*, 8 July, 1952.

40 Pareli, "'Stilt på likefot' Om samisk kultur ved Norsk Folkemuseum," 97 (author's translation). Original: "havnet trolig blant museets uoversiktelige maetrialstabler og må i dag anses tapt".

41 "Samisk landsmuseum til Kautokeino?," *Vestfinnmark Arbeiderblad*, 10 February, 1954; "Den samiske kulturarven må bli reddet. Kautokeino muséforening søker om statsmidler til en fast utstilling," *Nordlys*, 16 December, 1954.

42 Since 2012, the Folk Museum has been working with Sámi institutions on a repatriation program, "Bååstede", see Káren Elle Gaup, Inger Jensen & Leif Pareli eds., *Bååstede: The Return of Sámi Cultural Heritage* (Trondheim: Museumsforlaget, 2021).

43 Archivist at Norsk Folkemuseum Else Rosenqvist, email, 14 June, 2021.

44 The photographs are available at www.digitaltmuseum.no, searchable by Borgen's name.

45 Ole Magnus Rapp, "Gammearkitekten," *Finnmark Dagblad*, 22 March, 1991.

supposedly studied the North Sámi language at the University of Oslo in around 1959.[46] In a 1973 interview in the Sámi newspaper *Ságat*, however, he is described as having followed planning policy in Inner Finnmark in both a professional and personal capacity for the past ten years.[47] For now, this period remains obscure.

Sijti Jarnge, experimenting

In the early 1970s, Borgen was engaged as the architect for several projects in Sápmi. Then in 1976, Borgen & Bing Lorenzen won the competition to design a hotel in Kárášjohka. At the same time, they were working on designs for a primary school in Láhpoluoppal. Neither of these designs aspires to be Sámi architecture, however. Rather, their aesthetic is typical of the practice's designs: relatively modest wooden structures that adapt well to the site and surrounding landscape.

Further south, Borgen was operating in a more experimental mode. He had been engaged to design Sijti Jarnge, a South Sámi language and cultural centre, in Aarborte (Hattfjelldal) in Nordland County. Although the building was not inaugurated until 1987, it was more-or-less completed by 1984, with the design having been finalised many years previously. Borgen had already been involved in the project when financing for preliminary work was secured in 1975.[48] The project-planning committee consisted of duojár Lars Dunfjeld (1916–1980), language specialist Anna Jacobsen (1924–2004), and politician Odd Kappfjeld (1942–2011). Borgen worked with all three of them very closely while developing his drawings. Sijti Jange was probably the first attempt to design a building with architecture that would hold meaning for a Sámi community.

Very few buildings for Sámi clients had been designed in Norway at this time. The first had been completed in Kárášjohka a year earlier, the Sámiid Vuorká-Dávvirat / The Sámi Collections, designed by Vidar Corn Jessen (1937–2013) and Magda Eide Jessen (b. 1938). This low, square building of wood and concrete features integrated artworks and exhibition design by Iver Jåks (1932–2007). As the art historian Elin Haugdal has argued, the inclusion of integrated artworks has been an important strategy throughout Sápmi to help Sámi people gain a sense of ownership over what could otherwise be perceived as alien architecture.[49] The Sámiid Vuorká-Dávvirat building is an acknowledged milestone in Sámi architecture. (Yet, in an unbelievably short-sighted decision, it is now slated for demolition in favour of a new building. The modern buildings created in the 1970s for Sámi cultural institutions are acquiring an unwelcome new status: buildings at risk.)

By 1976, the design concept for Sijti Jarnge was completed. The wooden building is shaped like a low square block, capped by a somewhat unexpected pyramid. The design was inspired by the South Sami *gåetie*, a traditional turf hut that is more conical than the northern goahti.[50] The exterior is subordinate to the interior, however, where the gåetie has inspired a layout centred around what Borgen called the 'heart' of the building: a large assembly room with skylights. The room aims to convey the feeling of being inside a turf hut. A sunken hearth occupies the centre of the space, with large circular steps providing three tiers of seating around it. The seating facilitates gatherings around the fireplace, which

46 Information obtained from Liv Borgen, Kjell Borgen's widow, in an interview by the author, 24 August 2022.

47 Johs Kalveino, "De samiske organisasjoner må få ressurser til å styre utviklingen, sier en samfunnsplanlegger for Indre Finnmark, arkitekt Kjell Borgen," *Ságat*, 17 October, 1973.

48 Sigbjørn Dunfjeld, "Samisk kultursenter i Hallfjelldal," *Kultur-kontakt* 21, no. 4 (1985): 207.

49 Elin Haugdal, "Å ta eierskap: Samisk bygningsrelatert kunst," *Kunst og Kultur* 105, no. 2–3 (2022), https://doi.org/10.18261/kk.105.2.9.

50 Leif Pareli, "Sørsamenes byggeskikk," in *Foreningen til norske Fortdsminnesmerkers Bevaring Årbok* (Oslo: FNFB, 1984), 117.

Image 4. Kjell Borgen, Sijti Jarnge, 1975–84. Photo: Rana blad, 1984, all rights reserved.

Image 5. Interior of Siji Jarnge, Photo: Ságat / Torstein Simonsen, 2021, all rights reserved.

is positioned below a skylight that resembles a smoke hole. A large glass painting by Oddmund Kristiansen (1920–1997), ingeniously mounted with birch trunks on the innermost wall, adds to the ambience of the space.

When financing for a preliminary project was secured in 1975, Borgen took the opportunity to advocate for a broad discussion on Sámi architecture.[51] He even suggested that Sijti Jarnge could facilitate such a discussion, but as far as I know this never happened. I have not been able to trace any public debates about Sámi architecture at that time. Still, a dialogue took place between Borgen and the committee during the project-planning process, and the ground-breaking aspects of the design were

51 "Applaus for støtte til samisk kultur," *Bygd og by,* 2 April, 1975.

acknowledged at the time.[52] The committee stated that the design "uniquely embodied a harmonious combination of a Sámi-inspired interior and modern architecture".[53] The question of a contemporary Sámi architecture had suddenly become pertinent, and it is perhaps odd that there are so few traces of any broader discussion. This is especially true because it was in this decade that Sámi organisations and institutions started to build, or to look at it another way, it was in this decade that Norwegian architects started to encounter Sámi clients.

Sijti Jarnge was never presented in *Byggekunst*, a professional journal that remains one of the most important sources of texts about architectural history in Norway. Given the journal's status, absence from its pages is a surefire path to obscurity. The significance of Borgen's work in Aarborte seems to have escaped scholarly authors writing about Sámi architecture in Norway. What is unique about Sijti Jarnge is its explicit ambition and Borgen's close collaboration with his clients. A central problem with modern Sámi architecture is the extremely small number of practising Sámi architects.[54] In Norway at that time, it seems there were none at all, making the efforts of the project-planning committee and Borgen even more important in the history of Sámi architecture, as the project was designed and built in collaboration with the Indigenous community.

Authentic and symbolic ruins

The new building for Guovdageainnu gilišillju / Kautokeino Museum was inaugurated in December 1987, the same year as Sitji Jarnge, but the building itself had been finished the year before.[55] Borgen's first sketches were probably made in 1983 and were well received by the local community.[56] The museum complex is located in the village centre and occupies a large riverside site. The complex consists of an open-air exhibit of traditional buildings, showcasing the diversity of Sámi inland culture, and a museum building.

Both the exhibit and the museum building itself were designed by Borgen, who seized the opportunity to create links between the landscape and the two modes of architecture in play. The open-air exhibit consists of structures that were moved to the museum site and reconstructions based on Borgen's earlier surveys: "These are simple structures made from birch logs and peat, or timber and board walls. They illustrate the Sami people's traditional relationship with nature when they need to build something".[57] The museum building is adapted to the scale of the open-air complex. Designed using the same palette of materials, it has a large, hipped roof of tarred wood that extends far down towards the ground.[58] Inside, in the exhibition space, the colour of the sloping ceiling shifts from light grey to a darker grey at the top, evoking the colouring

52 Bjørn Aarseth, "Kulturbygg for sørsamene," *Ottar*, no. 116–117 (1979): 98.

53 Lars Dunfjell, Anna Jacobsen, Odd Kappfjell: "Samisk kultursenter i Hattfelldal," *Elgposten* 8, no. 5 (1978): 9 (author's translation). Original: "Utvalget er av den oppfatning at det foreliggende utkast på en enestående måte rommer en harmonisk kombinasjon mellom et samisk inspirert interiør og moderne arkitektur".

54 According to Nango, there are currently nine Sámi architects, plus some students. Nango, "In Practice," 93.

55 Kjell Borgen, "Gouvdageaninnu gilisillju – Kautokeino bygdetun," *Byggekunst* 72, no. 7 (1990).

56 Ellen Pollestad, "Enestående historisk anlegg skal reises i Kautokeino," *Nordlys*, 26 March, 1983.

57 Borgen, "Gouvdageaninnu gilisillju – Kautokeino bygdetun," 392 (author's translation). Original: "Det er enkle byginger utført av bjerkestokker og torv eller tømmer og sheltervegger. De viser samenes tradisjonelle forhold til naturen når en trenger å bygge noe".

58 For more on the meaning of materials in this context, see Elin Haugdal, "'It's Meant to Decay': Contemporary Sami Architecture and the Rhetoric of Materials," in *The Handbook of Contemporary Indigenous Architecture*, ed. Elizabeth Grant et al. (Singapore: Springer, 2018).

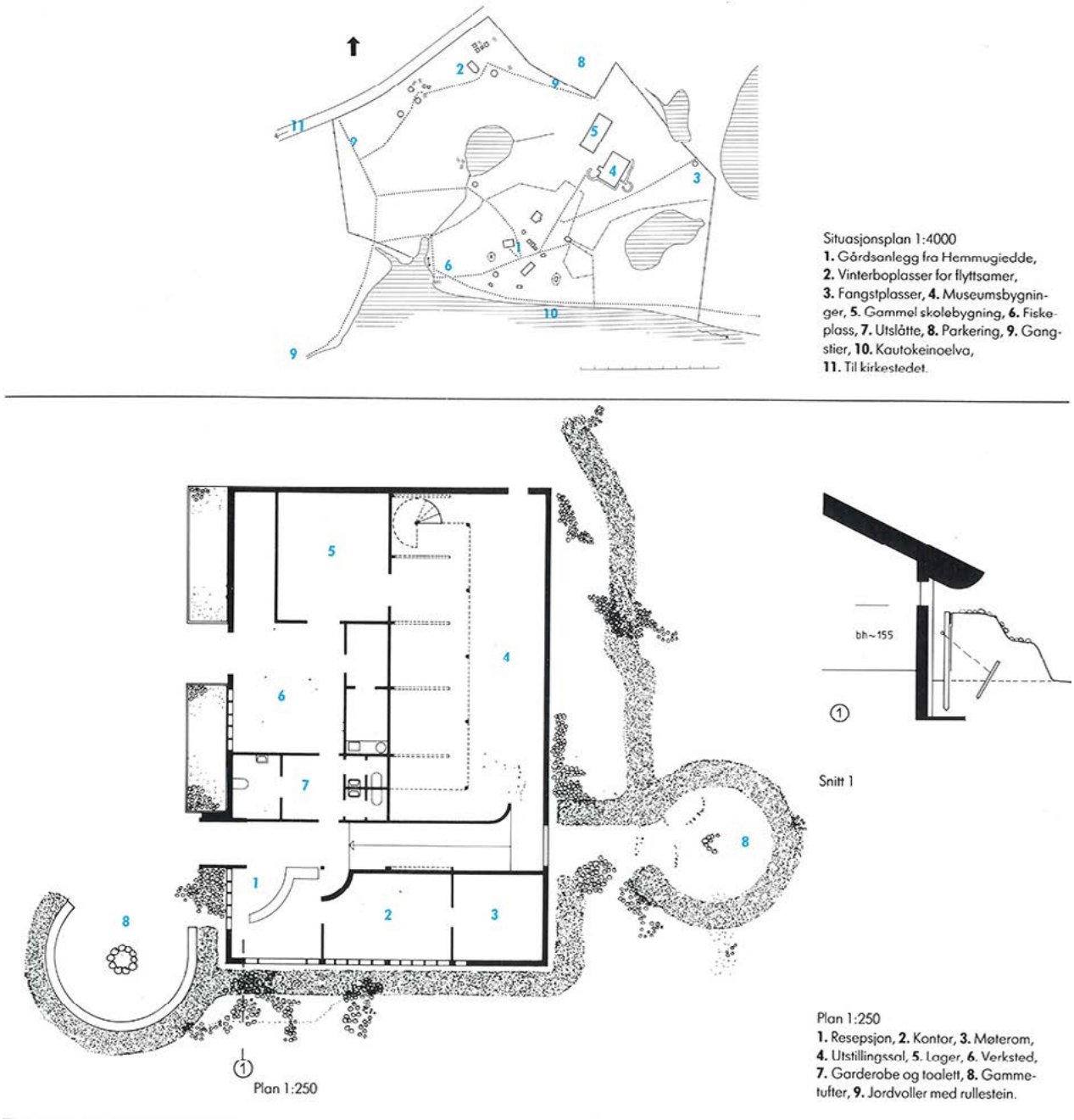

Image 6. Kjell Borgen, Plan of Guovdageainnu gilišillju / Kautokeino Museum. *From Byggekunst The Norwegian Review of Architecture*, 1990. ©Kjell Borgen / Arkitektur.

Image 7. Guovdageainnu gilišillju / Kautokeino Museum. Photo: Arvid Sveen, 1990. The National Museum of Norway, all rights reserved.

smoke rising from a fireplace eventually marks the inside of a goahti.[59]

Outside, by the path to the entrance to the museum building, there is a mound in which one can trace the outline of a fire pit. This mound is all that remains of a goahti, which like all turf huts has collapsed due to age and disuse. Made of natural materials, these structures decay and eventually vanish. Circles that mark where the walls once stood and the residues of firepits can be discerned (by a trained eye) for a long time, however, and read like ruins in the landscape. On entering the museum building, one finds a ramp leading down towards the exhibition space. Just on the other side of a window at the end of the ramp, another ruined goahti is visible, with the river in the background. Borgen deliberately nestled the museum building between the two ruined goahtis, linking them to the building and drawing attention to their presence. The distinction between old and new becomes blurred, not least by the grassy mounds surrounding the museum, which "are laid out to symbolize the mounds of old turf huts".[60] Actual ruins and symbols of ruins coexist in the landscaping around the museum.

Borgen employed the same strategy in his largest museum building in Sápmi: Várjjat Sámi Musea in Vuonnabahta (Varangerbotn). Completed in 1994, the museum had its official opening the year after. The museum is dedicated to the local Coastal Sámi culture. Years of project planning had preceded the start of construction. Initially, it was thought that a museum in the municipality of Unjárga (Nesseby) should be located at Ceavccageađge (Mortensnes), a site that is infinitely rich in cultural heritage. However, political manoeuvring resulted in the main museum building being located in Vuonnabahta, necessitating the construction of a separate visitor centre at Ceavccageađge. Borgen was asked to design both, and the first drawings were probably completed during 1991.[61] Later the site for the museum was moved again, still within

59 Anne-Lise Langfeldt, "Nytt museumsbygg," *Altaposten*, 9 December, 1986.

60 Borgen, "Gouvdageaninnu gilisillju – Kautokeino bygdetun," 392 (author's translation). Original: "[- -] er lagt opp for å symbolisere torvgammetufter og trekke linjer tilbake til fortiden".

61 Nils-Martin Pedersen: "Varanger Samiske Museum i Varangerbotn: Planer om storbygg til 23 millioner kroner," *Ságat*, 30 October, 1991.

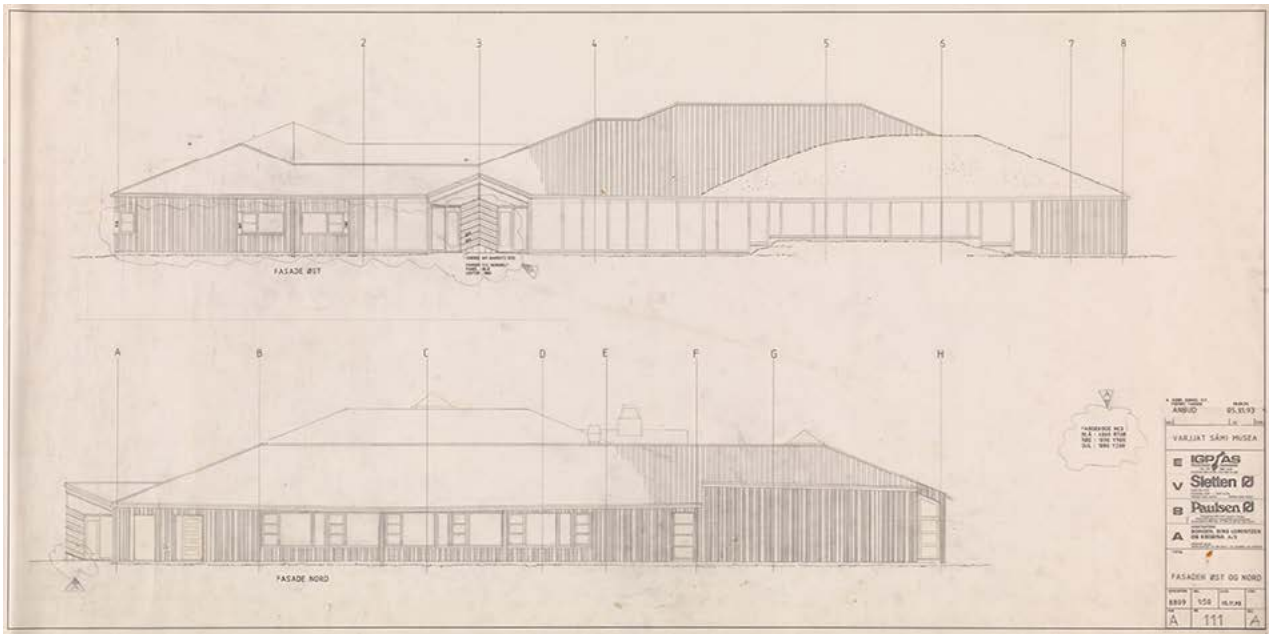

Image 8. Kjell Borgen, *Várjjat Sámi Musea*, East and North Elevations, 1994. Pencil on plastic, 599 x 1189 mm. The National Museum of Norway. Photo: Andreas Harvik, ©Kjell Borgen.

Image 9. Kjell Borgen, *Várjjat Sámi Musea*, 1994. Photo: Várjjat Sámi Musea / Bjarne Riesto, all rights reserved.

Vuonnabahta but now in the village centre, along the coastline at the head of the bay. The museum building has its back turned to the village, while its front faces the open-air complex that extends towards the beach. A hipped roof resembles Borgen's design for Gouvdageainnu, but here the boards are partly covered by grass. The complex was never presented in an architectural journal. Borgen's declaration of his intent is available though, as he gave several interviews to the local press on the opening day. The *Finnmarken* journalist explained how "the architect Borgen's idea was that [the building] should contain elements of the landscape. He has used the traditional goahti, built of wood, turf, and stone, as a model. The same materials have been used in the museum building, and the building lies low in the terrain, without protruding from it."[62]

62 "Storstua i Varangerbotn," *Finnmarken*, 25 April, 1995 (author's translation). Original: "Ideen arkitekt Borgen hadde, var at det skulle inneholde elementer av landskapet. Som forbilde har han brukt den tradisjonelle torvgammen, bygd av tre, torv og stein. De samme materialene er brukt i museumsbygget, og bygget ligger lavt i terrenget, uten å stikke seg fram".

Another newspaper explained that Borgen was inspired by the darfegoahti, and only a part of the roof was covered in grass in an allusion to very old huts, where the turf is slowly sliding off the poles. Once again, Borgen positioned mounds of grass-covered earth around the museum. These mounds were both practical (shielding the museum from traffic) and symbolic: "The grassy heaps surrounding the museum symbolize turf huts that have fallen down and have returned to nature".[63]

Fleeting, remembered

At the same time as Borgen was designing Várjjat Sámi Musea, he was also working on a scholarly project. He obtained funding from the Norwegian Research Council in 1992 and 1993 as part of a larger programme on cultural heritage management.[64] The programme had started earlier in 1987, but I have not been able to trace Borgen's application or find out when he first applied. One focus of the programme was Sámi heritage and how to identify built heritage as Sámi. Borgen thus returned to his scholarly work on traditional Sámi architecture while simultaneously experimenting with designs for contemporary Sámi architecture. Borgen's scholarly work is important, as there were precious few studies of Sámi building culture at the time.[65] When he first started his work in the 1950s, he started nearly from scratch. And as I pointed out above, Indigenous building cultures were for a long time not accepted as architecture.

Borgen published his final report in 1995. Translated into English, the title is *Sámi farms in Inner Finnmark: Adaption to nature, form, and cultural conventions from 1900 to 1990*.[66] Taking 1950 as his starting point, he proceeded both backwards and forwards in time. Going back into the past, he identified a Sámi architecture that had developed independently, without interference from official bodies. Going forwards from 1950, he declared that:

> The period is characterised by Norwegianisation and a sharp decline in Sámi architecture. The Sámi was contrasted with the Norwegian through the use of terms such as "Norwegian wooden architecture" and "Norwegian wooden building traditions."[67]

Borgen did not expand much on the precise nature of the "sharp decline", instead concentrating his efforts on defining what was distinctly Sámi. With a few exceptions, the farms he had surveyed in the 1950s had disappeared by the 1990s. To identify traditional Sámi elements, he had to rely on his old surveys.[68] The one finding most often referenced is that the Sámi farms "are *organized* in a 'topological/organic' arrangement, in contrast to the neighbouring agrarian cultures which organize their farms in 'geometric' or other patterns."[69] Another important overarching observation he did was:

> The design of the Sami farm must also be viewed in the light of Sami tradition in which the concept of land ownership is different from that of agrarian cultures: for the Sami, their land is *the entire area of land used*, whereas in

63 "En stor veldighet!," *Finnmarken*, 30 June 1995. Original: "Grasvollene symboliserer nedfalne gammer, som har gått tilbake til naturen".

64 Programmet for forskning om kulturminnevern (Research on Cultural Resource Management – FOK).

65 Another important study on Sámi vernacular architecture produced by this program was Randi Sjølie, *Samisk byggeskikk* (Oslo, Norges forskningsråd, 1995).

66 Borgen, *Samenes gårder i indre Finnmark*.

67 Ibid., 10 (author's translation). Original: "Perioden preges av fornorsking og et sterkt forfall av samisk arkitektur. Det samiske ble stilt opp mot det norske med begrep som 'norsk trearkitektur' og 'norsk trebyggingskunst'".

68 Borgen, *Samenes gårder i indre Finnmark*, 10.

69 Ibid., 65.

> agrarian cultures the farm *is a limited area of land which is inherited*.[70]

Borgen's accounts of Sámi vernacular differ from traditional ethnographic accounts, as he acknowledged and admired Sámi building customs as a fine example of folk architecture. The first product of his scholarly work in the 1990s is a short essay that ends with a quote from Heidegger, translated into Norwegian.[71] There is no reference, but it can be traced. The architectural historian and theorist Christian Norberg-Schulz had published his essay "Heidegger's Thinking on Architecture" in 1983.[72] The text was to become vastly influential and a few years later it was published in a Norwegian translation made by Norberg-Schulz himself. Borgen's quote from Heidegger is taken verbatim from this translated text.[73] In the original English it reads: "The buildings bring the earth as the inhabited landscape close to man and at the same time place the nearness of neighbourly dwelling under the expanse of the sky".[74] It is evident that Borgen's reading of Heidegger was through Norberg-Schulz, rather than the original Heidegger text, as the Norwegian translation of Heidegger's original text differs from Norberg-Schulz's translation.[75]

When reading Norberg-Schulz's Heidegger essay alongside Borgen's final report on Sámi farmsteads, it seems likely that Norberg-Schulz greatly influenced Borgen's theory about Sámi architecture. Norberg-Schulz emphasises how buildings *gather* the inhabited landscape. "The landscape is brought close to us by the buildings."[76] Further, he explains the nature of a landscape:

> A landscape is a space where human life takes place. [--] Thus the building defines a precinct, or a space in the narrower sense of the world, at the same time as it discloses the nature of this space by standing there.[77]

Nearing his conclusion, Norberg-Schulz claims that "The primary purpose of architecture is hence to make the world visible. It does this as a thing, and the world it brings into presence consists of what it gathers".[78] These (somewhat opaque) notions and the emphasis on landscape and place can be recognised in Borgen's writings as when he states that the vaster the land, the stronger the symbols that mark the place, and presents the vertical form of the shadoof as an example.[79]

Borgen identified four specific elements that define place in Sámi culture: characteristic natural forms; myths; traces of use / the fleeting; and current use / the thing-like. "The fleeting" and "the thing-like" are Borgen's own notions that he seems to have evolved from the thinking of Norberg-Schulz. Examples of "the fleeting" were structures "which completely or partially connect with nature, but which in the process leave behind traces of great importance", such as a *stáhkká*, a characteristic rack used for hay

70 Ibid., 66.

71 Kjell Borgen, "Den samiske gård," *Fortidsvern* 19, no. 3 (1993): 30. "Bygningene bringer jorden som det bebodde landskap i menneskets nærhet og stiller samtidig naboskapets nærhet under himmelens vidde".

72 Christian Norberg-Schulz, "Heidegger's Thinking on Architecture," *Perspecta* 20 (1983).

73 Christian Norberg-Schulz, "Heideggers tenkning om arkitektur," in *Et sted å være: essays og artikler*, ed. Gordon Hølmebakk (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1986), 284.

74 Norberg-Schulz, "Heidegger's Thinking on Architecture," 65.

75 I am indebted to Gustav Jørgen Pedersen for first identifying this quote as from "Hebel, der Hausfreund" (1957), and also for pointing out that it differs from the Norwegian translation: Martin Heidegger, *Oikos og techne: 'Spørsmålet om teknikken' og andre essay*s, ed. and trans. Arnfinn Bø-Rygg (Oslo: Tanum, 1973), 42.

76 Norberg-Schulz, "Heidegger's Thinking on Architecture," 65.

77 Ibid., 65.

78 Ibid., 67.

79 Borgen, *Samenes gårder i indre Finnmark*, 16.

Image 10. From Johan Mikkelsen Utsi's farm in Heammujavvi. Photo: Kjell Borgen, 1953. Norsk Folkemuseum / CC BY-SA 4.0.

storage.[80] The "thing-like" is "That which has the same property and symbolic value as a thing and is treated as such, such as a *giisa* (travel chest)."[81] A timbered house is thing-like, a goahti or a stáhkká is fleeting. In Sámi farms, Borgen found these categories coexisting side by side.

There are two types of landscapes, Borgen explained, the remembered and the inhabited. It seems he was trying to make Sámi culture and architecture fit into Norberg-Schulz' theory of place and architecture. Since many Sámi structures vanish, instead of becoming noble ruins that will stand forever and gather the place, he needed to find an alternative notion. He found it in the idea of a hidden, secretive landscape that exists in the shadows of its inhabited counterpart: "A stranger walking in the Sámi landscape must ask those who use the land about the traces of the fleeting architecture".[82] This remembered landscape is as important as the inhabited landscape; the two convey meaning together.

To make the Place come into Presence

Borgen's theories of the fleeting and the thing-like, of remembered and inhabited landscapes, gave him categories to work with in his own designs. Norberg-Schulz believed his theory to be universal, but in Borgen's writings, the reading of place developed into a very specific and concrete theory on Sámi culture and architecture that applied in architectural practice. For the visitor centre at Ceavccageađge he designed a simple structure, a building with large panoramic windows that rises like a natural elevation in the landscape. Once again, Borgen appears to have drawn inspiration from traditional building techniques: wooden beams placed rhythmically along the window wall resemble the bent birch trunks used in a bealljegoahti. The windows offer stunning views of the cultural heritage site, or as Borgen probably would have described it, the remembered landscape. The new building and the ancient landscape form a unified whole: the fleeting and the thing-like, the inhabited and the remembered.

80 Ibid., 13 (author's translation). Original: "som helt eller delvis forbinder seg med naturen, men som under prosessen etterlater seg spor av stor betydning".

81 Ibid., 13 (author's translation). Original: "Det som har den samme egenskapen og symbolverdi som ting og behandles som det, som giisa (reisekiste)".

82 Borgen, *Samenes gårder i indre Finnmark*, 13 (author's translation). Original: "Den som går som fremmed i det samiske landskapet må spørre dem som bruker landet om sporene etter den flyktige arkitekturen".

Image 11. Kjell Borgen, *Information Hall at Ceavccageađge*, 1992. Photo: Probably Kjell Borgen. The National Museum of Norway, all rights reserved.

Várjjat Sámi Musea, with its partly grass-covered roof resembling the exterior of a decaying darfegoahti, seems to be a strange case of a thing-like building symbolising a fleeting one. Perhaps Borgen intended to fuse the two categories. The site finally chosen for the museum was, according to a former director, scandalously inappropriate, in that it was almost the only area in the whole municipality with no relevance to Sámi cultural history.[83] Borgen's response was for his design to integrate history and traces of use, as is evident in the drawing of the outdoor plan. He designed a goahti ruin, with traces of the fireplace and a ring of sunken walls. But he also designed less literal ruins – symbolic ruins, as in the mounds surrounding the museum building. Both kinds were adding a remembered landscape to the inhabited landscape, aiming to make the place come into presence.

Borgen's work with Sámi architecture spanned decades. He aimed constantly to find specific characteristics that could identify Sámi architecture, even though this quest took on different forms at different stages in his career. As a young architect, he worked solely with traditional Sámi architecture and seems not to have thought much about what would constitute a contemporary Sámi building. This is a question he may have pondered for the first time while designing Sijti Jarnge. In the 1990s, his work as a scholar and as an architect finally merged as he developed a theory of what constituted Sámi architecture at the same time as he applied this theory in his own designs. The influence of Norberg-Schulz is

83 Audhild Schanche, "Lokalisering av Varanger Samiske Museum," *Ságat*, 21 November, 1992.

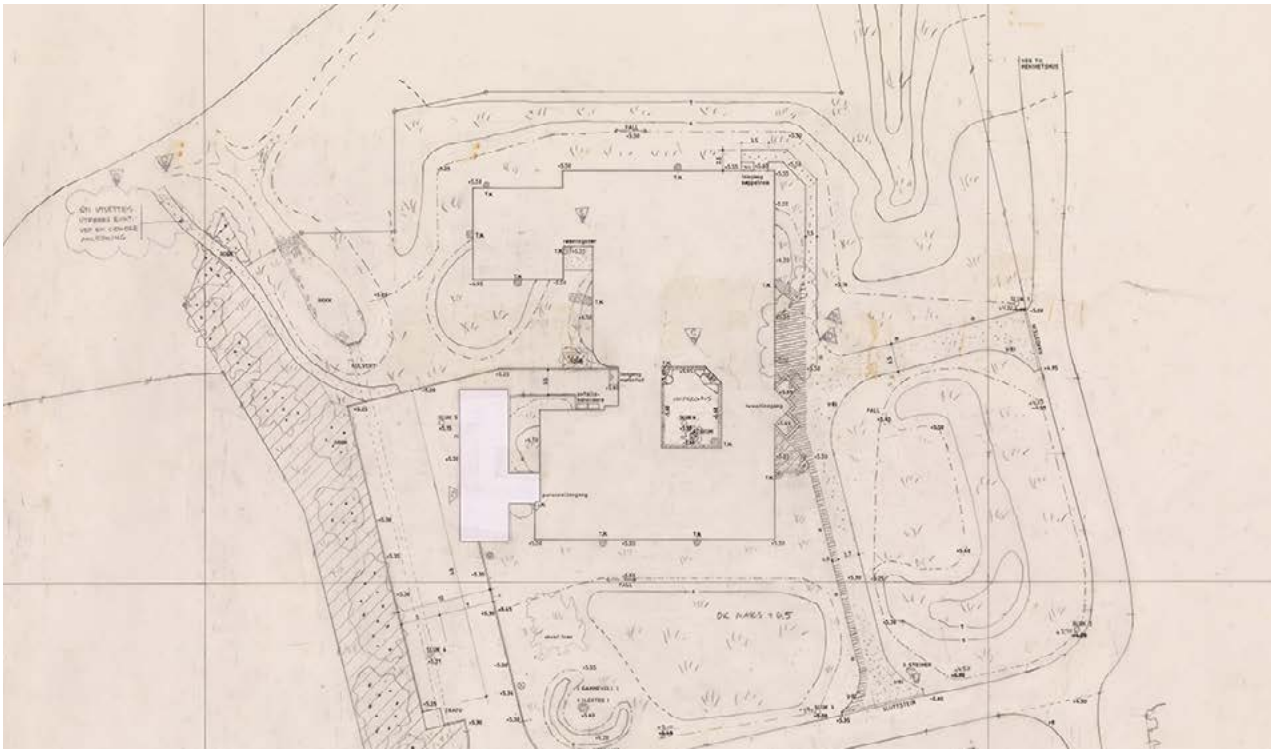

Image 12. Kjell Borgen, *Várjjat Sámi Musea*, Outdoor Plan, 1994. Pencil on plastic, 842 x 1189 mm (the image is cropped). The National Museum of Norway. Photo: Andreas Harvik, ©Kjell Borgen.

certainly apparent in his language and phrasings as he ended his report as follows:

> And we see the architecture in the light of the seasons. The Nordic sun is different from the sun of classical cultures: in summer, the nights take on another dimension, the night is not there but *is* nonetheless. Backlit, the architecture is outlined and the hills, wooden racks, shadoofs, rows of storehouses, and the house stand in silhouette. In winter, everything flows together in the faint light from the sky, moonlight or the Northern Lights reflected by the snow. Here is the work of man, the built Sami. [84]

84 Borgen, *Samenes gårder i indre Finnmark*, 64 (author's translation). Original: "Og arkitekturen ser vi i årstidenes lys. Nordens sol er en annen enn den klassiske kultur sol: Om sommeren får nettene en annen dimensjon, natten er ikke der men er likevel. I motlys tegnes arkitketuren, i silhuett står åsene, vedreiset, brønnvippen, rekker at stabbur og huset. Om vinteren flyter alt sammen in det svake hinmmellyset, månelyset eller nordlyset som sneen reflekterer. Her er menneskeverket, det byggede samisk".

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Reassessing International Art Exhibitions in Finland

A New Perspective into Exhibition History of the Second Half of the 20th Century

Maija Koskinen

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Cold War politics accelerated artistic exchange and the transnational circulation of art. Within state-run cultural diplomacy, hundreds of art exhibitions traveled to Finland opening a rich and varied perspective on international art. Only a few of them have though made their way into the canon of exhibitions and consequently, into the Finnish history of art.

Using a few Cold War art exhibitions as an example, the article challenges the established Finnish art historical canon of significant exhibitions. It demonstrates that many interesting exhibitions have been ignored or marginalized without a good reason due to prejudices or because they have been considered awkward, for instance, for political reasons. The formation of the art canon and exhibition histories are interrelated. Thus, the article suggests that Finnish art history of the second half of the 1900s would look different if more attention had been paid to a greater variety of art exhibitions. It argues that a more profound and detailed knowledge of exhibition histories would provide new perspectives into the transnational circulation of artistic influences and the impact of international art on Finnish art, artists, and the art scene.

Keywords: *exhibition history, exhibition canon, cultural diplomacy, Cold War, Finland*

In the introduction to the book *Harald Szeemann: Individual Methodology* (2007), Florence Derieux stated: "It is now widely accepted that the art history of the second half of the twentieth century is no longer a history of artworks, but a history of exhibitions".[1] Indeed, today art history is shaped by exhibitions. Since the 1990s, the focus has shifted from art and artists to exhibitions and curating.[2] The profession of curating, curatorial studies, academic programs on curatorial practice, journals and publications on exhibitions and curating, as well as the expansion of global art worlds, have contributed to this paradigm shift.[3] This means that exhibitions are written into art history not only through artists, artist groups, artistic breakthroughs, or episodes of turning points within more expansive art historical narratives: an exhibition is now also a subject of its own, and the history of exhibitions is a discourse within art history.[4] However, in Finnish (academic) art history, exhibitions only began to gain more attention in the 2000s.[5] Encouragingly, new Finnish research is underway on exhibitions and their histories, and a research-based non-fiction book about exhibitions as a medium will come out shortly.[6]

Why should we be interested in the history of exhibitions? What can exhibitions tell us? An exhibition combines different agents, objects, and institutions as well as economic, political, and social conditions with the system of artistic practices. In the 'nodes' of this network can be found the interlocking elements of art, power and politics, individual positions, histories, geographies, and spaces. An exhibition is also a medium; it can reveal interesting, hidden aspects, map art historical blind spots, or over-emphasized events in specific histories.[7] As a contextual element, an exhibition can provide a useful framework to construct explanatory accounts and structures of a more general art historical understanding. Exhibitions are also crucial spaces where ruling canons and narratives of art history can be diversified and questioned. Considering these perspectives, an exhibition is not just a subject, but a methodological package.[8]

1 Florence Derieux, "Introduction," in *Harald Szeemann: Individual Methodology* (Zürich: JRP/Ringier, 2007), 8.

2 A classic in exhibition history/studies is the multi-disciplinary anthology, Bruce W. Ferguson, Reesa Greenberg & Sandy Nairne, eds. *Thinking About Exhibitions* (London: Routledge, 1996), of writings on contemporary exhibition practices by curators, critics, artists, sociologists, and historians.

3 The number of publications about curating and exhibitions has grown exponentially since 2007: Bruce Altshuler, *Salon to Biennal: Exhibitions That Made Art History* (London: Phaidon, 2008); Hans Ulrich Obrist, *A Brief History of Curating* (Geneva: JRP|Ringier/ECART Publications, 2010); Glenn Adamson et al., *What Makes a Great Exhibition* (Philadelphia: Reaktion Books, 2007); Paul O'Neill, *Curating Subjects* (Amsterdam: De Appel, 2007); Solveig Øvstebø, Elena Filipovic, Marieke Van Hal, eds. *The Biennial Reader* (Bergen: Bergen Kunsthall & Hatje Gantz, 2010), et cetera.

4 Maria-Kristiina Soomre, "Art, Politics and Exhibitions: (Re)writing the History of (Re)presentations," *Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi / Studies on Art and Architecture*, 21 (2012): 107–108; Julian Myers & Joanna Szupinska, "The Prehistory of Exhibition History: An Annotated Bibliography," *Art Journal*, Vol. 76, No. 1, (2017): 206; Julian Myers, "On the Value of History of Exhibitions," *The Exhibitionist* 4 (2011): 24–25.

5 Maria Hirvi-Ijäs, *"Den framställande gesten: Om konstverkets presentation i den moderna konstutställningen"* (PhD diss., University of Helsinki, 2007); Hanna-Leena Paloposki, *"Taidenäyttelyt Suomen ja Italian julkisissa kuvataidesuhteissa 1920-luvulta toisen maailmansodan loppuun"* (PhD diss., University of Helsinki, 2012); Maija Koskinen, *"Taiteellisesti elvyttävää ja poliittisesti ajankohtaista: Helsingin Taidehallin näyttelyt 1928–1968"* (PhD diss., University of Helsinki, 2018).

6 *The Culture of Display: History of Modern Exhibition Media*, forthcoming 2025 (Helsinki: Gaudeamus). My article in the book deals with art exhibitions and their histories outside the museum context.

7 Soomre, "Art, Politics and Exhibitions," 108.

8 Bruce Altshuler, "A Canon of Exhibitions," *Manifesta Journal* 11 (2010): 5–12; Saloni Mathur, "Why Exhibition Histories? Conversation Piece," *British Art Studies* 13 (2019). https://britishartstudies.ac.uk/index/article-index/why-exhibition-histories/search/keywords:why-exhibition-histories-24986

In this article, I discuss the possibilities that exhibition research can offer, especially for writing the history of Finnish art in the second half of the 20th century. The case studies I deal with here are international art exhibitions shown in Finland during the Cold War. As indicated by my previous research, most of these exhibitions were organised in the context of cultural diplomacy and connected to the ideological East-West cultural conflict.[9] At the time, many of these 'Cold War art exhibitions' attracted a lot of attention and interest from the public and artists, considerably internationalising the Finnish post-war art scene. However, only a small fraction of them have become part of the canon of Finnish art history of the late 20th century. Most of these exhibitions have been forgotten, ignored, or marginalized for various reasons. Consequently, the number of 'significant international exhibitions' – i.e. exhibitions that have been referred to and discussed in general surveys of Finnish art history and are considered relevant for the development of Finnish art and the art scene – has remained almost unchanged.[10] Using as examples two lesser-known or forgotten and one over-exposed art exhibition from the East and West, I challenge this established art historical canon of important exhibitions. By expanding and diversifying the canon, which has had a strong Western emphasis, I aim to update the prevailing perceptions of the influence of international art on Finnish art and artists in the second half of the 20th century. Finally, I call for a more comprehensive and diversified inclusion of exhibition history into Finnish art historiography.

Cold War Politics as a Catalyst for International Art Exchange

During the Cold War, Finland was geopolitically located in the grey zone between East and West. As a west-facing liberal democracy, neutral Finland aimed to have good relations with both East and West and to stay outside the disputes of the superpowers. However, Finland's leeway in international relations was limited by the Finno-Soviet Treaty of 1948, which tied Finland under the influence of the Soviet Union.[11] This meant, among other things, that the Soviet cultural presence in Finland was strong, especially in the 1970s.[12] As a countermeasure, the United States and Western countries extensively invested in cultural operations in Finland as part of their cultural diplomacy efforts.[13] Boosted by this competition, hundreds of art exhibitions made their way to Finland, the northeastern corner

9 In *The Mission Finland – Cold War Cultural Diplomacy at the Crossroads of East and West 1945–1991* project, focusing on Finland as a target of cultural diplomacy, I have studied international art exhibitions in Finland during the Cold War (University of Turku/ Research Council of Finland, 2021–2024). https://missionfinland.utu.fi/

10 For instance, Salme Sarajas-Korte, ed. *Ars: Suomen taide 6* (Espoo: Weilin+Göös, 1990); Helena Sederholm et al., eds. *Pinx: Maalaustaide Suomessa. Sivel-timen vetoja* (Espoo: Weilin + Göös, 2003); Helena Sederholm et al., eds. *Pinx: Maalaustaide Suomessa. Tarninankertojia* (Helsinki: Weilin + Göös, 2003). The Pinx book series focuses on the most significant painters and their work in various periods' artistic and social contexts. Outside general surveys, the most researched exhibitions are the ARS exhibitions of current international contemporary art organised by the State Art Museum (the National Gallery) since 1961. See Helena Erkkilä & Maritta Mellais, *ARS 50 vuotta: muistoja, historiaa, näkökulmia 1961–2011* (Helsinki: Valtion taidemuseo, 2010); Heikki Kastemaa, *Nykyaikojen kampanjat: Ars-näyttelyt ja niiden vastaanotto 1961–2006* (Helsinki: Valtion taidemuseo, kuvataiteen keskusarkisto, 2009).

11 Johanna Rainio-Niemi, *The Ideological Cold War: The Politics of Neutrality in Austria and Finland* (New York: Routledge, 2014). The Treaty of 1948 is also known as the "Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance of 1948".

12 I am writing an article *Art Mattered: Art Exhibition Diplomacy of the Cold War Superpowers in Finland in the 1970s* in which I discuss in detail the 1970s Soviet art exhibitions in Finland (London: Palgrave 2026). See also Simo Mikkonen, *"Te olette valloittaneet meidät!" Taide Suomen ja Neuvostoliiton suhteissa 1944–1960.* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuen Seura, 2009). Mikkonen does not write about art exhibitions.

13 Marek Fields, *Defending Democracy in Cold War Finland. British and American Propaganda and Cultural Diplomacy in Finland 1944–1970* (Brill, 2020).

of Europe, opening an unexpectedly versatile perspective into international art. The cultural rivalry between the blocs was not only reflected in Finland's lively international art exchange.[14] The Cold War politics fostered the circulation of art exhibitions globally.

In the frame of Cold War cultural diplomacy, cultural products, such as art exhibitions, were used to distribute geopolitical and symbolic power. Art exhibitions were a soft power resource in the service of state-run political-ideological influencing.[15] The general idea behind these exhibitions was to promote a positive image of the country, emphasise its values and demonstrate the superiority of its culture and social system in the inter-bloc competition.[16] However, the art exhibitions are first and foremost important places for transmitting artistic exchanges and influences. In addition to the political-propagandist value of art, it has an innate artistic-aesthetic value. The intertwining of these values made art an elusive and complex political tool at the service of Cold War cultural diplomacy. The art exhibited may have contributed to the objectives of the organising state, but paradoxically it may have also pursued its own artistic agenda – as the reception of art was not in the hands of politicians.[17]

In the following, I have chosen three Cold War exhibition cases from the early 1950s to 1970s to give an idea of the diversity of international art and its reception in Finland. The exhibitions presenting visual art from the USA (1950), socialist Poland (1967) and the Soviet Union (1974) received a lot of attention in the Finnish media, sparked a debate about art making as well as the relationship between art and society, and transmitted diverse influences on the local art scene. I question why the first two exhibitions have been marginalized and excluded from Finnish art history and argue that they deserve a place in the Finnish canon of significant exhibitions. Respectively, I examine why the Soviet exhibition of 1974 has often been considered important without a thorough analysis of its content or impact. I also discuss how these exhibitions are related to the official art canon of their respective countries. After all, the state-run diplomatic art exhibitions epitomised the official national art canons.

A New 'American' Technique to Finnish Graphic Art

The first case is the *American Serigraphy* exhibition in 1950. The exhibition was the first ever to present American visual art in Finland. It was shown at Galerie Hörhammer, one of the main private galleries in Helsinki, the Turku Art

14 Finland also actively participated in international art exchanges by sending Finnish exhibitions to other countries, often on a reciprocal basis.

15 David Caute, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); John J. Curley, *Global Art and the Cold War* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2018); Myroslava Halushka, *"Trojan Horses in a Cold War. Art Exhibitions as an Instrument of Cultural Diplomacy, 1945–1985"* (MPhil, University of Oxford, 2014).

16 Motivations for cultural activities in smaller and non-aligned countries often differed from those of the superpowers and other leading countries. Sari Autio-Sarasmo & Katalin Miklóssy, "Introduction: The Cold War from a New Perspective," in *Reassessing Cold War Europe*, eds. Sari Autio-Sarasmo & Katalin Miklóssy (Oxon: Routledge, 2011), 1–15.; Kristian Handberg & Yulia Karpova, "Exhibiting Across the Iron Curtain. The Forgotten Trail of Danish Artists Exhibiting in the Context of State Socialism, ca. 1955–1985," *Artl@s Bulletin* 11, no. 2 (2022): Article 11.

17 Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells. Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London, New York: Verso, 2012); Boris Groys, *The Power of Art* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2008); Grant H. Kester, *The Sovereign Self: Aesthetic Autonomy from the Enlightenment to the Avant-Garde* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2023); Mitchell, W. J. T. *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Image*s (Chicago (Ill.): University of Chicago Press, 2005); Joes Segal, *Art and Politics: Between Purity and Propaganda* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016).

Image 1. Robert Gwathmey, *Watching the Parade*, 1947. Colour serigraph on paper, 60,5 x 50,5 cm. Donation to the Turku Art Museum from the US Legation 1950. The *American Serigraphy* Exhibition in 1950. Photo: Turku Art Museum / Vesa Aaltonen, all rights reserved.

Museum, and later in four other Finnish towns.[18] The exhibition, organized by the US Information Service and the Finnish American Society, was a typical circulating Cold War art exhibition that the US produced for the needs of cultural influencing as part of its foreign policy. An exhibition presenting graphic art using serigraphy was most suitable for this purpose because the technique was considered particularly American and distinct from European art graphics.[19] It presented *the* American art canon abroad. From the political perspective of the US, which had renewed its interest in Finland after the Second World War, the objective of the exhibition was to introduce Finns to American culture beyond Hollywood films and to strengthen the Western orientation of the Finnish cultural field as a countermeasure to extensive exposure to Soviet culture in Finland after the war.[20] As part of the exhibition's concept, the US Embassy donated some of the exhibited serigraphs to local art museums that hosted the exhibition. For example, In Finland, the Turku Art Museum received a donation of five prints, and the Moderna Museet in Sweden received a few prints as well.[21]

In Finland, *American Serigraphy* with its 50 colourful prints from 19 artists was received with enthusiasm and astonishment but also with a slight suspicion because it introduced a new art-making technique to Finland. The serigraphy technique had only been used to a negligible extent for commercial use in Finland, whereas in the US it had been adopted as a tool for making art graphics already in the early 1930s. There it was intentionally named "serigraphy"

18 The exhibition also circulated in Jyväskylä, Lappeenranta, Hämeenlinna and Lahti by the subdivisions of the Finnish American Society. This enabled the new technique to reach artists working outside the capital. Koskinen, *"Taiteellisesti elvyttävää ja poliittisesti ajankohtaista,"* 300.

19 In the 1940s and early 1950s, the US government organized in collaboration with the National Serigraphic Society (est. 1940 in New York) several art serigraphy exhibitions that circulated internationally. Ari Latvi, "Serigrafian eli silkkipainon historiaa," in *Monipuolinen serigrafia: työvaiheet, välineet, materiaali*, eds. Jukka Lehtinen, Reijo Mörö, & Olli Reijonen. (Helsinki: Taideteollinen korkeakoulu, 2002), 17.

20 Koskinen, *"Taiteellisesti elvyttävää ja poliittisesti ajankohtaista,"* 263–271, 293–315.

21 In 1951, Moderna Museet received at least works by Robert Gwathmey and Edvard Landon. The donation by the US Embassy was linked to Edvard Landon's Fulbright Research Fellowship to Norway and Sweden (1950–1951). During his fellowship, Landon taught serigraphy to Norwegian and Swedish artists. Landon was the president of the National Serigraph Society (US). "Moderna Museet: Search the Collection", accessed April 3, 2024, https://sis.modernamuseet.se/en/objects/18036/nonfiction?ctx=dcadef9253942f43459f55c27b821deea615316d&idx=0; "Edvard Landon", accessed April 3, 2024, https://www.edwardlandon.com/about-the-artist

Image 2. Tuomas von Boehm, *Lippuja*, woodcut, 1951. *Viiva ja väri*, Exhibition catalogue 1951. Photo: Maija Koskinen, all rights reserved.

to make a clear distinction from comparable printing techniques used in advertising.[22] The new word "serigrafia" was also appropriated into the Finnish language along with the exhibition, and soon after, the technique began to spread among Finnish artists.

The Finnish reviewers of the exhibition gave a detailed account of the new American technique comparing it with other techniques in graphic art. The painterly artworks with bright, juicy colours and unconventional colour combinations opened the Finnish eyes wide. Some reviewers even considered the artworks to be paintings or drawings instead of printed graphics.[23] Serigraphy, enabling painterly, colour-rich expression, was alien to Finnish (graphic) artists and it divided opinions. Among the sympathizers were young artists Lars-Gunnar Nordström (1924–2014) and Tuomas von Boehm (1916–2000). In 1951, a year after the *American Serigraphy* exhibition, they exhibited the very first serigraphic artworks by Finnish artists in the *Viiva ja väri (Line and Colour)* exhibition in Kunsthalle Helsinki. In addition to the serigraphs on display, the artists printed the entire exhibition catalogue using the new technique.[24] It is most likely that both Nordström and von Boehm attended the American exhibition. Nordström adopted serigraphy as one of his main techniques,[25] and von Boehm, in addition to the new technique, was also influenced by the form, composition, and motif of Edward Landon's serigraphy "*Regatta*" which can be seen in von Boehm's woodcut "*Lippuja*" (1951). Gradually, the serigraph technique spread among Finnish artists. On the initiative of graphic artist Tuulikki Pietilä, it was taught at the Academy of Fine Arts from 1957 onwards. By the end of the 1960s serigraphy had established its position in the Finnish art graphic.[26]

22 Latvi, "Serigrafian eli silkkipainon historiaa," 15–17, 21.

23 "Tammikuun taidenäyttelyt," *Suomen Kuvalehti* 4, 28.1.1950, 20–21; Osmo Laine, "Taidemuseon Serigrafian näyttely," *Turun Sanomat* 12.2.1950; T.S., "Amerikansk serigrafi i Konstmuseet," Åbo Underrättelser 18.2.1950; Joanna, "Amerikkalaista serigrafiaa," *Iltasanomat* 14.1.1950; K. N., "Amerikkalaista serigrafiaa," *Uusi Suomi* 15.1.1950; V. A-nen, "Amerikkalainen serigrafianäyttely," *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* 26.10.1950.

24 The exhibition presented prints and drawings of a younger Finnish generation of artists. Latvi, "Serigrafian eli silkkipainon historiaa," 23–25; "Viiva ja väri/Konst på papper," Helsingin Taidehalli, exhibition catalogue, 1951.

25 L-G Nordström exhibited a series of constructivist serigraphs in Galerie Artek in 1952. He was awarded a Henry Ford grant in 1954, and his works were shown at the Serigraphic Society, New York in 1958. He made his first study trip to the USA in 1960. "L-G Nordström foundation", accessed April 10, 2024, https://lgn.fi/en/home/

26 Latvi, "Silkkipainon eli serigrafian historiaa," 25–31.

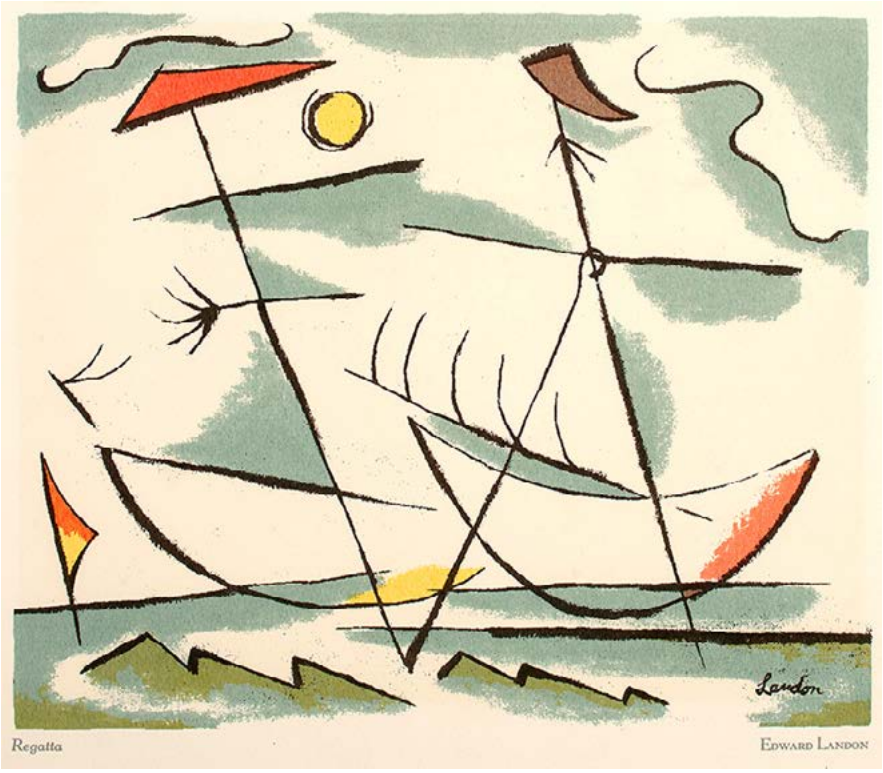

Image 3. Edward Landon, *Regatta*, 1940s. Colour serigraph on paper, 22,5 x 30 cm. Donation to the Turku Art Museum from the US Legation 1950. The *American Serigraphy* Exhibition in 1950. Photo: Turku Art Museum / Vesa Aaltonen, all rights reserved.

Despite the inspirational impact of *American Serigraphy*, it has not been included in the history of Finnish (graphic) art. Leena Peltola who wrote about postwar Finnish graphic art in the *Ars*, the multi-volume work of Finnish art history, mentions the *British Graphic Art* from 1945 as the only influential international graphic art exhibition of the era. Indeed, the British exhibition presenting prewar graphics with traditional techniques in a detailed realistic style offered a great lesson in high-quality printing. Erkki Anttonen, a specialist in the history of Finnish graphic art, also omits to mention the American exhibition in his research.[27] Instead, he highlights the Nordic Art Association's exhibition, organised in Helsinki two months after the *American Serigraphy*, as an inspiration to the Finnish colour art graphics in the early 1950s – as was no doubt the case.[28] I have found only two brief references to the American exhibition. Ari Latvi briefly mentions the exhibition when writing about the history of serigraphy in Finland.[29] Ulla Vihanta refers to it in an article about "the Americanness" in Finnish visual art from 1945 to 1965. Although Vihanta had not studied *American Serigraphy* and its reception in-depth, she thought it was encouraging and anticipated the development of Finnish art in the 1950s. According to her, the experiments in art graphics, the role of which significantly strengthened in the 1950s, played their part in the transition of Finnish visual art towards greater freedom of expression.[30]

27 Erkki Anttonen, e-mail to the author, October 28, 2023.

28 Erkki Anttonen, "Taidegrafiikka 1950-luvulla," in *1950s – The Time of Liberation*, eds. Pirkko Tuukkanen & Timo Valjakka (Helsinki: Suomen Taideyhdistys, 2001), 124–128.

29 Latvi, "Serigrafian eli silkkipainon historiaa," 23.

30 Vihanta's article was published in connection to the exhibition *Happy Days Are Here Again: American Phenomena in Lahti 1945–1965* organised by the City Museum of Lahti in 1990. Ulla Vihanta, "Amerikkalaisuudesta suomalaisessa kuvataiteessa 1945–1965," in *Happy Days Are Here Again: Amerikan ilmiöitä ja ajankuvaa Lahdessa 1945–1965*, ed. Päivi Siikaniemi (Lahti: Lahden kaupunginmuseo, 1990), 39.

Why then has the *American Serigraphy* not found its place in Finnish art history? American art was new and almost unknown in Finland in the early 1950s. The art scene at the time was still strongly French-oriented, although new influences, for instance from Italy, were beginning to be received after the isolation of the war years. From the Finnish perspective, the 'awkward looking' American art, which had begun to grow out of European influences and developed a language of its own, was not easy to receive. It took a long time for American art to absorb, and this unfamiliarity was one of the reasons why the first American art exhibitions have gone unnoticed in Finnish art history writing.[31] Another reason is that, even though Finnish art history has focused on Western art influences, art historians have often forgotten to look across the Atlantic before the influences of American pop art.

As I have shown, *American Serigraphy* should be included in the canon of significant exhibitions as it contributed to the development of Finnish (graphic) art. The exhibition both introduced a new artistic technique and inspired the use of colour in art graphics. In addition, the shapes and subjects of American serigraphs offered an opportunity to break free from rigid conceptions of art and the greyness of the war years.

Surprisingly modern! *Polish Contemporary Painting* in 1967

A whole group of art exhibitions that have mainly gone unnoticed or partly been rejected, are the exhibitions from the former Central and Eastern European countries with 'a socialist shadow'. Art from the Eastern bloc faced prejudices – at least among those who did not take a positive stance towards the Soviet type of socialism and its reflections in art. Art from the Eastern bloc was thought to follow the method of socialist realism and was presumed to be propaganda. It was assumed to be disconnected from the Western discourse of art; therefore, it was seldom considered worthy in the West. This attitude was evident in the reception of the 1967 *Polish Contemporary Painting* exhibition organised in one of the main exhibition venues of the Finnish capital, the Kunsthalle Helsinki. It was the first extensive exhibition presenting contemporary Polish art in Finland. The exhibition, showcasing 95 artworks from the last few years by 28 artists, took Finns by surprise.[32] The exhibited artworks did not represent socialist realism as had been the norm during the Stalin era. As the commissar of the exhibition, art historian, art critic, and director of the Museum Sztuki in Łódź, Ryszard Stanisławski emphasized, contemporary Polish art had strong connections to modernism and the latest international art as well as to individualism and freedom, attributes essentially related to Western art. According to him, the two main trends in Polish painting were emotional and intellectual. He also underlined that Polish contemporary art had not lost touch with its roots in the Polish art tradition.[33]

The Polish exhibition gained exceptionally wide media coverage and it interested representatives

31 In detail about the reception of American visual art in Finland in the 1950s and 1960s, see Koskinen, "*Taiteellisesti elvyttävää ja poliittisesti ajankohtaista*," 293–315, 324–327.

32 The exhibition was a counter-visit to an official Finnish art exhibition that was recently shown in Poland. Its Finnish organizer was the Artists' Association of Finland. Polish film, music, theatre, and graphic art were known in Finland, while contemporary painting had remained unknown. Stimulerande polskt, *Hufvudstadsbladet* 15.4.1967.

33 Ryszard Stanisławski, "Puolan nykymaalaus," in *Puolan nykymaalausta* (Helsinki: Helsingin Taidehalli, 1967), 5–6. Among the 28 exhibition artists were: Władysław Hasior, Tadeusz Brzozowski, Zdzislaw Glowacki, Tadeusz Kantor, Aleksander Kobzdej, Zbigniew Makowski, and Teresa Rudowicz.

Image 4. Tadeusz Kantor, *Emballage humaine*, assemblage, canvas, oil paint, fabric, leather, 1965, 97 x 260 cm. Polish Contemporary Painting in Kunsthalle Helsinki 1967. Tadeusz Kantor © Dorota Krakowska & Lech Stangret / Tadeusz Kantor Foundation.

of the Finnish art scene especially.[34] The newspaper *Hufvudstadsbladet* stated that those waiting for stereotypic socialist realism because the exhibition came from a socialist country, "were most likely going to be 100 % disappointed". The reviewers found all the international trends in the Polish artworks: tachisme, informalism, surrealism, American and French neorealism, neo-materialism, abstractism, constructivism, dada, pop, op and kinetic art, but also something distinctively 'Polish'. Instead of an Eastern European tone, political subjects, or socialist realism, the reviewers were confronted with a romantic attitude and a wild desire for experimenting. Material painting and assemblages were considered especially intriguing. For instance, the assemblages of Władysław Hasior were compared to the works by Juhani Harri, a Finnish pioneer in the art of assemblage. Some critics thought that the number of exhibited styles was too much, or that Polish art was not very refined, and was still seeking its goals. A dissenting opinion about the exhibition was given by a leftist artist Kari Jylhä, whose overall impression of it was messy, oppressive and alien in spirit. He found, for instance, the colour palette in many of the collage works to be stale and described how they were made as "cobbled together". He considered the constructivist works to be the best part of the exhibition.[35]

While the *American Serigraphy* exhibition in Finland represented a new dimension in Western art, Polish art was perceived as astonishingly Western. Its reception appeared to be more influenced by ideological geopolitics than by the nature of the art exhibited. Since the *Polish Contemporary Painting* was an official exhibition within diplomacy, it presented the authorized Polish art canon of its time which – contrary to Finnish expectations – was not coloured by socialist realism. The Polish exhibition raises concerns about the impact of 'Westsplaining'

34 Number of visitors to the exhibition was 2 072 (16 days), slightly below the average rate. The Annual Report of Kunsthalle Helsinki 1967. The archive of Kunsthalle Helsinki. The archive collections of the Finnish National Gallery.

35 Eila Pajastie, "Utställningsrond: Förtvivlan, glädje, romantik," *Nya Pressen* 25.4.1967; "Stimulerande polskt," *Hufvudstadsbladet* 15.4.1967; "Nykytaidetta Puolasta," *Suomen Sosialidemokraatti* 15.4.1967; H. A–c, "Tunnelmoiva Puola," *Kansan Uutiset* 19.4.1967; Tuuli Reijonen, "Puolan nykytaiteen näyttely," *Helsingin Sanomat*, 23.4.1967; E. J. Vehmas, "Puolan ja Amerikan taidetta," *Uusi Suomi* 23.4.1967; Kari Jylhä, "Amerikan collageja ja Puolan nykytaidetta," *Keskisuomalainen* 29.4.1967; Soile Sinisalo, "Puolalaista ja amerikkalaista," *Aamulehti* 3.5.1967.

on art history writing in Finland and more broadly. The "Western gaze" has influenced the reception and valuation of European art as well as the formulation of European art history and its canon during the Cold War. Since the 1990s the situation has gradually changed when Central and Eastern European art histories after 1950 have been integrated into comparative regional narratives and have found their place as part of global art histories.[36] As an additional to this re-assessment, I propose a thorough re-evaluation of art and art exhibitions from the former Eastern bloc countries in Finland and their impact on Finnish art and the art scene as part of the transnational exchange of artistic ideas. Was it the case that Finnish art was only inspired by art that came from the West?

Is a flower still life socialist realism? *Soviet Art* in Helsinki in 1974

Since not all art from the Eastern Bloc turned out to be socialist realism, what kind of reception was given to an exhibition of Soviet art that specifically presented socialist realism? I address this question through my third case: an extensive exhibition of *Soviet Visual Art* in Kunsthalle Helsinki in 1974. Before it, only two comprehensive presentations of Soviet art had been seen in Finland (1950 and 1958).[37] Thus, the exhibition was of great interest to artists, art critics and the public alike – especially because at the same time the *ARS 74*, a large survey of international (Western, also Finnish) realistic contemporary art, was on display at the Ateneum Art Museum, only a few hundred meters from the Kunsthalle.[38] This provided an exceptional opportunity to compare the realism of the East and the West, provoking much debate about the mission of art and reflecting the tension between the different realisms and worldviews.

The exhibition *Soviet Visual Art* surprised the Finns. They were expecting the kind of hard-core socialist realism that was common during the Stalin era. Instead, the exhibition was found to be "delightfully people-oriented, gently narrative rather than aggressively declarative", as A. I. Routio wrote in *Uusi Suomi*, a right-wing newspaper.[39] With a power of 200 artworks from the 1920s to 1970s – depicting landscapes, still lifes, portraits and people at work and leisure – the exhibition updated Finns' perceptions of Soviet socialist realism. The artists from diverse ethnic backgrounds represented the various socialist republics of the Soviet Union along with their national characteristics.[40] Most of them were members of the Soviet Academy of Arts, had studied at its art school and had been awarded state prizes, i.e. the exhibition

36 See, for instance, Piotr Pietrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe 1945–1989*. (London: Reaktion Books, 2009); Christian Nae, "A Porous Iron Curtain: Artistic Contacts and Exchanges across the Eastern European Bloc during the Cold War (1960–1980)," in *Art History in a Global Context: Methods, Themes, and Approaches*, eds. Ann Albritton & Gwen Farrelly (Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2020), 13–26.

37 Unlike music, literature, films and theatre, visual art was not central to Soviet cultural diplomacy in Finland before the 1970s. Before that, mainly small-scale exhibitions of graphic art had been sent to Finland. This information is based on an extensive database that I have collected regarding exhibitions of Soviet art organised in Finland.

38 *ARS 74* was originally intended to be a meeting place for both Western and Eastern realistic expressions including works from the Soviet Union and the GDR. However, both countries withdrew from the exhibition: the GDR in the summer of 1973 and the Soviet Union as late as January 1974, one month before the opening. Kastemaa, *Nykyaikojen kampanjat, 2009*, 41–44. The Ateneum Art Museum is a state-owned art museum, now called the National Gallery.

39 A. I. Routio, "Ateneumin ja Taidehallin julistajat, Tarzan-huutoja, kylmää mieltä," *Uusi Suomi* 10.3.1974.

40 There were artists, for instance, from the Republics of Russia, Latvia, Georgia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Kyrgyzstan. From 1956 until its dissolution in 1991, the Soviet Union comprised 15 Socialist Republics.

represented the official Soviet canon of art.[41] It was curated by Tatjana Rottert, the head of the Department of Exhibitions at the Academy of Arts, and it largely followed the idea of socialist realism as defined by the art historian G. A. Nedoshivin.[42] The Finnish organiser of the exhibition, the Artists' Association of Finland, wished to develop cooperation in the exchange of exhibitions between the countries now that it had finally been launched.[43]

In the 1970s, the Finnish art scene, much like the entire cultural field, was heavily influenced by left-leaning ideologies (partly far left). This was reflected in the exhibition's reception and the positive attitude towards socialist realism. The more politically left-wing the reviewer, the more significant and exemplary he/she considered the exhibition to be, while the more 'neutral' reviewers sought to interpret the art on display from its Soviet origins, but from a Western perspective. The reviewers focused on the nature of socialist realism and its relevance to society and discussed what kind of art could be produced through its method. The discussion on the relationship between art and reality arose when comparing Eastern and Western realism. The general view seemed to be that Soviet art was more humane, warm and optimistic (forcibly maintained, according to some evaluators) but stylistically old-fashioned, for better or worse. In contrast, Western hyperrealism shown in the *ARS 74* was seen as cold, superficial, commercial, and pessimistic, but also experimental and technically superior.[44]

The two exhibitions presenting different interpretations of realism in art were the most important international exhibitions of the year attracting tens of thousands of visitors.[45] Both exhibitions were expected to influence Finnish art and artists, as had often happened following the major international art exhibitions in

41 Artists in the exhibition, for instance, P. P. Konsthalovski, A. Deineka, J. P. Kugatshin, J. I. Pimenov, R. I. Jaushev, I. M. Simonov, V. V. Tokarev, F. D. Konstantinov, D. H. Motchalski, O. G. Vereisky, P. D. Korin, L. J. Kerbel, L. F. Lankinen.

42 German Nedosivin, "Sisällön ja muodon etsintää Neuvostoliiton kuvataiteessa," in *Neuvostoliiton kuvataidetta*, (Helsinki: Artists' Association of Finland, 1974), 10–25. As a concept, multinational Soviet art is multifaceted and complex. The official canon of Soviet art varied over the years depending on societal changes and political currents. Outside this canon, there was also "unofficial" or "dissent" art (as was the case in many of the Eastern Bloc countries). Art that was once considered dissent later might have become accepted into the official canon. As David Crowly and Katalin Cseh-Varga have demonstrated, the synonymous concepts of unofficial/dissent/ alternative/ underground/ second public sphere/grey zone/counterculture/ non-conformist/ art are complicated and ambiguous and get different kinds of interpretations to varying times in different places, even inside one country. David Crowly, "*Art as Dissent*". *Official and Non-official in the Late Soviet Epoch*, Bibliotheca Hertziana – Max-Planck-Institut für Kunstgeschichte, Rom, Online, March 18, 2024, https://arthist.net/archive/41432; Katalin Cseh-Varga, "The Troubled Public Sphere: Understanding the Art Scene in Socialist Hungary," in *New Narratives of Russian and East European Art*, eds. Galina Mardilovich & Maria Taroutina, (London, New York: Routledge, 2016), 166–179.

43 The plan was to organise a similar exhibition of Finnish art in the Soviet Union and establish an exchange of artists between the two countries. Jussi Rusko, "Neuvostotaiteen monimuotoinen kuva," *Kansan Uutiset* 3.3.1974; I. L., "Neuvostoliiton kuvataidetta Helsingin Taidehallissa," Satakunnan Työ 2/1974.

44 Naturally, there were differences (sometimes very substantial) in the evaluations' interpretations based on the evaluator's political orientation. Dan Sundell, "Realismen som metod," *Hufvudstadsbladet* 10.3.1974; Liisa Tiirola, "Neuvostotaiteen katselmus," *Etelä-Saimaa* 13.3.1974; Ahti Susiluoto, "Neuvostotaiteen näyttely: Inhimillisen ilmaisun saavutuksia," *Kansan Uutiset* 10.3.1974; Ville Lindström, "Lännen ja idän kuvia," *Päivän Uutiset* 22.2.1974; "Taiteemme on humaanista – ihmisen kuvaamista ihmistä varten," *Tiedonantaja* 12.3.1974; Markku Valkonen, "Tärkeintä ei ole tyyli vaan periaate," *Helsingin Sanomat* 3.3.1974; "Työläiset ja taiteilijat keskustelevat Arsista ja neuvostotaiteen näyttelystä," *Tiedonantaja* 28.2.1974; "Toisenlaista realismia, Ihmisiä ja työn sankaruutta," *Demari* 2.3.1974; "Kahden realismin kohtaaminen," *Uusi Suomi* 3.3.1974.

45 The *Soviet Art Exhibition* had 40 102 (open for less than a month), and the *ARS 74* 120 000 visitors (longer opening time and shown also in Tampere which is included in the figure).

Image 5. Vyacheslav Tokarev, *Soldiers*, 1960s, oil, 160 x 183 cm. The Artists' Union of the USSR. Tokarev was a state-awarded Ukrainian-Russian Soviet artist and a member of the Republican Board of the Union of Artists of the Ukrainian SSR. Photo: Seppo Hilpo / The Artists' Association of Finland, all rights reserved.

Finland.[46] The impact of *ARS 74* on Finnish art has been studied in detail, and the *Soviet Visual Art* exhibition is often mentioned as *the* Soviet exhibition that influenced Finnish art in the 1970s. Could it be that its impact, though, has been overestimated? The influence of Soviet-led socialist realism on the realistic representation and socially conscious visual art of the 1970s is acknowledged in Finnish art history.[47] But what was it in the *Soviet Visual Art* exhibition that influenced Finnish artists in the mid-1970s when realistic imagery and the social role of art were already the focus of the Finnish art scene, considering that the exhibition was the first major Soviet art exhibition in Finland in sixteen years? The 1974 exhibition undoubtedly reinforced the trend of realistic imagery and strengthened artists working from social and political premises, especially among the younger generation. However, I consider the impact of the *Soviet Visual Art* exhibition to have been more ideological than 'stylistic'. Only a few works represented politically proclaiming socialist realism.[48] In Finland, the realistic tendencies of Western art – pop art, neorealism, and photorealism – have significantly influenced Finnish art, and there was no nostalgia for the kind of salon painting from the turn of the previous century, which was abundant in the Soviet exhibition.

46 Irma Puustinen, "Todellisuuden monet kasvot: Sosialistista realismia," *Savon Sanomat* 23.3.1974.

47 Leo Lindsten, *Realismin kasvot:, 18 taiteilijamuotokuvaa* (Helsinki: WSOY, 1976); Markku Valkonen, "Kuvataide vuoden 1970 jälkeen – kohti sitoutumista," in *Ars, Suomen taide 6*, eds. Salme Sarajas-Korte et al. (Helsinki: Otava, 1990), 220–233; Ulla-Maria Pallasmaa, "Poliittisuus maalaustaiteessa," in *Pinx 4: Maalaustaide Suomessa. Siveltimen vetoja*, eds. Helena Sederholm et al. (Espoo: Weilin + Göös, 2003), 148–155; Kimmo Sarje, *Realismi ja utopiat: Yhteiskunnallinen realismi Suomen 1970-luvun kuvataiteessa / Realism and utopias: Social realism in 1970s Finnish art,* [translation: Michael Garner], (Espoo: Harkonmäki Oy, 1991); Aimo Reitala, "Ystävyyttä politiikan varjossa: Johdatusta Venäjän/Neuvostoliiton ja Suomen kuvataidesuhteiden historiaan," paper presented at Suomen ja Neuvostoliiton historiantutkijoiden symposium, Helsinki, October 1979.

48 For example, paintings by V. V. Tokarev: *Soldiers*, I. M. Simonov, *Blast Furnace*, 1961 and Vera Muhina's smaller bronze sculpture of the iconic *The Worker and Kolkhoz Woman* from the 1930s.

Image 6. Yuri Pimenov, *Lyrical Housewarming*, 1960s, oil, 90 x 70 cm. The Artists' Union of the USSR. Russian-Soviet Pimenov was an Academician of the Academy of Arts of the USSR, a People's Artist of the USSR, and a winner of the Lenin Prize and two Stalin Prizes. Photo: Seppo Hilpo / The Artists' Association of Finland, all rights reserved.

In addition to the few major Soviet exhibitions, only a few others presenting art from the Soviet Union have been mentioned or considered influential in Finnish art history. What has been overlooked is the staggering number of Soviet exhibitions of different arts in Finland: in the 1970s alone, the amount was close to 80.[49] What kind of dialogue did the Finnish art scene have with the hundreds of other Soviet exhibitions during the Cold War years? The stylistic and substantive diversity of Soviet art exhibitions has also been overshadowed. Soviet art was multinational. Within the framework enabled by the method of socialist realism, it could vary significantly based on its place of creation in the vast country. Although socialist realism was the primary art export of the Soviet Union, other artistic influences were also conveyed. For example, art from the Baltic Soviet Republics, often seen in Finland, was created from specific national premises and traditions. Moreover, in these countries, the relationship between visual art and modernism had not been disrupted as in Soviet Russia, although it did not disappear there either but lived underground.[50]

To summarise, my study shows that a comprehensive study and reassessment of various Soviet exhibitions and their influence on Finnish art is necessary to understand the international dynamics of the Finnish art scene. A thorough and detailed analysis of the history of Soviet exhibitions in Finland provides new insights and perspectives on Finnish art history in the latter part of the 20th century. This involves incorporating the political aspect of exhibition activities and uncovering the state-run mechanism behind them.

49 The extensive database collected by the author regarding exhibitions of Soviet art organised in Finland.

50 Part of the modernistic art lived underground in the Soviet Baltic countries too. Christine Linday, *Art in the Cold War. From Vladivostok to Kalamazoo, 1945–1962* (London: The Herbert Press), 140–171.

History of exhibitions: A blind spot in Finnish art history?

Regarding exhibition histories, the most seminal question is not only what was shown, but also what was excluded, and why. As art historian Maria-Kristiina Soomre has pointed out, it is still not our habit as art historians to look at exhibitions to see what else becomes visible in these complex and comprehensive contact zones.[51] (Re)Writing the history of art exhibitions not only in Finland but also globally, is still in its early stages. As Julian Myers has pointed out, the history of art and exhibitions are inextricably linked because exhibitions are something historical. They appeared at a particular moment designed to answer a certain set of specific historical conditions.[52] In my exhibition cases, Cold War politics strongly dictated the conditions that shaped exhibiting international art in Finland, as elsewhere. The vibrant international art exchange kept the Finnish art scene busy. As stated at the beginning of the article, most of the international art exhibitions during the era were organised in the frame of state-run cultural diplomacy. This challenges the idea of international art and its origins in Finland. The internationalisation of the Finnish art scene was not just a 'neutral' development. The Cold War dynamics accelerated the cultural exchange and circulation of international art.[53] Art, power, and politics met in the Cold War art exhibitions. This kind of strong relationship between art, the art scene and political power has, not always, but too often, been avoided in Finnish art history writing.

51 Soomre, "Art, Politics and Exhibitions," 121.

52 Myers, "On the Value of History of Exhibitions," 24–25, 27.

53 This did not mean that art institutions would not have exhibited and curated international art out of their initiative. Towards the end of the Cold War era, increasingly often international exhibitions were organized outside the state-run diplomatic framework. This meant that curatorial power shifted more into the hands of art institutions, art field professionals, and artists.

Western and Finnish art history has traditionally been written through artists, artworks, and artistic trends. This focus is undeniably essential, but I argue, that Finnish art history would look different if more attention had been paid to exhibitions beyond the most obvious Western ones when considering the impact of international art on Finnish art. Western Europe, including Finland, has forcefully told its own story while too often Central and Eastern Europe have been undeservedly left out of the scope of larger narratives.[54]

Although only scratching the surface, the exhibition cases described here have shed light on interesting exhibitions providing new interpretations of their influence and revealing art historical blind spots in the Finnish narrative. I have also discovered that Finnish art institutions do not know their exhibition history. Only a few have listed the exhibitions they have organised, but barely analyzed them. The history of exhibitions is interrelated with the formation of the art canon, an evolving and selective social process. If we only know and refer to the few already known exhibitions that, no doubt, have a well-deserved place in the Finnish canon of significant exhibitions, and ignore the hundreds of others, the canon stays unchanged. I argue that conducting deeper and more detailed research on the history of art exhibitions would allow us to craft a more diverse and nuanced narrative of Finnish art history of the second half of the 20th century. It would change the perception of how we see exhibitions as art history and highlight their agency as an elemental factor in shaping art. It would also change the idea of transnational circulation of art and artistic influences as well as the impact of international art on Finnish art, artists, and the art scene. This applies equally to other periods and art history writing both locally and globally.

54 Maja Foweks & Reuben Foweks, *Central and Eastern European Art Since 1950* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2020).

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Canons and Counter Canons in the Battles about Global Art

Kaija Kaitavuori

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The Cubists' fascination with African and Oceanic art and its revolutionary influence on Western art in the early 1900s is an important stage in the development of modern art. Meanwhile in Africa, in what is now Nigeria, there was a reciprocal interest in Western figurative art, which eventually led to the establishment of academic art education in West Africa. This second story, however, is much less known and, when it is told, the adoption of Western influences has generally been seen as passive and even damaging.

Now that these 'othered' voices are claiming attention and bringing their views to the art historical debate, Western and non-Western art narratives need to be retold from new perspectives. This article examines two moments, one at the beginning and the other at the end of the 20th century, when the West has enhanced its artistic production by leaning on influences from elsewhere while maintaining the right to grant or deny the status of art for cultural objects to itself. The article calls into question Western practices in categorising products of visual expression and highlights the contractual nature of art historical classifications and canons.

Keywords: *canon, art history, Global South, Modernism, Picasso, Africa*

Regarding canons

Globalisation of art and the art field has been constitutive of contemporary art, to the point that contemporary art has been equated with global art.[1] The development has also deeply affected the discipline of History of Art and challenged many traditional art historical concepts and tools such as periodisation, influence, or canon.

The working definition of 'canon' for this study is the simplified idea of a canon as a body of knowledge that we are assumed to hold. Lists of must-know items are always specific to a context, with the content and the criteria for the canon varying accordingly. In discussions about national canons of literature, for example, the idea is to create a list of authors and works that all citizens should read or at least be aware of. For art historians, there are professional canons of artists and artworks that a scholar is expected to know in order to be taken seriously in the field. Claudia Mattos puts the matter succinctly: "What holds the field together is precisely the common canon, theories, and methods." [2] James Elkins, in his essay reflecting on whether art history can be global, considers a common canon as an argument in favour of a single unified discipline (as opposed to fragmentation of the discipline across the globe).[3]

But what is this shared knowledge in general, and in particular with regard to modern and contemporary art, and can it be defined globally? This article is structured around two moments, one at the beginning and the other at the end of the 20th century, both including a stock story and a counter story – an official narrative that we can call the canon, and its hidden counterpart. The stories sketch out the relationships between Europe and the African continent.

The article is not based on first-hand research and therefore does not seek to contribute to the debate on the development of modern or postmodern art, although it does use these debates as material. Nor does it discuss the content, meaning or significance of the works of the artists mentioned, or as such analyse the exhibitions discussed. Hence, the text does not contain new research on the artists or exhibitions in question but is based on second-hand material. The focus is on art history writing and how some things have filtered into the established body of knowledge while others have been left outside it, and how the professional field has been woken up to the situation and to the demands for change over the last couple of decades. An art historian trained in the 1980s, like the author of this text, has not only to supplement what she has been taught but also to restructure her perceptions. The article seeks to reassess the choices on which canonised art history is based and to question the foundations of these selections.

Picasso vs Onabolu

It is well-known that Picasso (1881–1973) and his colleagues – Derain, Brancusi, Modigliani, Matisse, Ernst… – were astonished and inspired by the objects from Africa and Oceania that they saw in Musée de l'homme at the Palais Trocadéro in Paris in 1907. The formal language and strong expressive power of the masks and other items spoke to the artists who, at the time, were struggling to break away from the conventions of academic fine arts and the centuries long tradition of mimesis and representation. It has been debated whether this encounter with a totally different form of expression was the main impetus for the artists to set off on new paths in

1 Hans Belting, "Contemporary Art as Global Art. A Critical Estimate," in *The Global Art World: Audiences, Markets, and Museums*, ed. Hans Belting & Andrea Buddensieg (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009).

2 Claudia Mattos, "Wither Art History? Geography, Art Theory and New Perspectives for an Inclusive Art History," *Art Bulletin* 96, no. 3 (2014): 259, http://www.jstor.org/stable/43188880.

3 James Elkins, "Introduction: Art History as a Global Discipline," in *Is Art History Global?* Ed. James Elkins (New York: Routledge, 2007), 16–18.

art, or whether it was just the final push on an already well laid-out course.[4]

Either way, without hesitation the artists adopted the visual features and integrated them into their own art. The breakthrough work was Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon*, the first painting showing the direct influence of African masks. Several matching exercises have been made to find and compare the original items with the creation of the artist.[5] *Demoiselles* and the subsequent works changed the development of western art. The painting and its maker have unquestionably become part of the canon of Modern Art.[6]

While Picasso and his friends were examining the tribal art in Paris, in one of the African lands colonized by the British, Aina Onabolu (1882–1963) was intrigued by the visual culture of the colonial masters. He saw reproductions of European art in magazines and books, and started exercising his own hand in the white man's style. He learned to master the technique to the point that he continued his studies in Europe to become an artist and a teacher. He studied anatomy, perspective, proportions, colour theory… that is, the whole repertoire of academic fine art.[7] Back in his home country in the 1920s, he introduced art education into schools (the colonial schooling system, geared to produce clerks for the colonial administration, did not include art in the curriculum). In addition, he convinced the education authorities to invite an artist-teacher from England to teach art students. Onabolu's initiatives were essential in establishing art teaching in Nigeria and the West of Africa. Today, Onabolu is celebrated as the founder of Nigerian modern art.

We know that Picasso felt strongly about the art he discovered and soon surrounded himself with African objects. For him, it was "a form of magic".[8] As to Onabolu, it is thrilling to imagine his wonderment and curiosity in front of Western representational image making as something comparable to the awe felt by the post-impressionists in reaction to the encountering of the strange, foreign images brought from Africa. In parallel, images that looked real were magic to Onabolu: he considered the ability to reproduce the visible world naturalistically as a proof of "wizardry of the white man".[9]

These two developments – both of them to do with the discovery of new pictorial form and expression – happened almost exactly at the same time; the artists were born one year apart. It is just that the second one is much less familiar to us westerners. Picasso is one of the must-to-know artists for art professionals and amateurs alike, while Onabolu is not.

The two cases have also been analysed and valued differently in art history writing. Recent

4 William Rubin ed., *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984); Thomas McEvilley, "Doctor Lawyer Indian Chief: '"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art' at the Museum of Modern Art in 1984," *Artforum* 23:3 November (1984): 54–60.

5 Rubin, *"Primitivism"*.

6 Picasso is number one in Elkins' list of canonical artists, based on an art history database counting the most studied artists. Elkins, "Introduction," 17.

7 For Aina Onabolu's life and work, see Ola Oloidi, "Growth and Development of Formal Art Education in Nigeria, 1900 – 1960," *Transafrican Journal of History* 15 (1986): 108–26, https://www.jstor.org/stable/24328610; Chika Okeke-Agulu, *Postcolonial Modernism: Art and Decolonization in Twentieth-Century Nigeria* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 39–70.

8 The famous and oft-quoted description of the effect of encountering tribal art reads: "And then I understood what painting really meant. It's not an aesthetic process; it's a form of magic that interposes itself between us and the hostile universe, a means of seizing power by imposing a form on our terrors as well as on our desires. The day I understood that I had found my path." The source of this quote, however, is almost never mentioned. It is quoted in André Malraux's *Picasso's Mask* from 1976, so dates 70 years after the event and hence cannot be understood as an immediate account of his impression.

9 Oloidi, "Growth and Development," 112, fn. 20.

scholarship on Picasso and modern art has pointed out how the influence of African art on Picasso has in fact been downplayed.[10] Art historians have tended to describe the relationships between African and modern art merely as a source of inspiration rather than direct influence. The leading contribution to this line of interpretation is William Rubin's definition of the similarities as "affinities", a concept that was nailed down in the title of his influential exhibition and its catalogue in 1984 at the Museum of Modern Art subtitled *Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*.[11] Affinity suggests empathy or benevolent liking (from the moderns towards the other) and avoids acknowledging any actual direct influence of African art or that the modern artists would use or adapt its visual features and forms. Rubin, indeed, spares no effort to prove that Picasso could not have seen some of the masks that are connected to *Demoiselles*, in this manner insisting that it was not a question of influence or a direct source. Instead, Picasso "metamorphosed", "extrapolated", "fused the points of departure".[12] Or else, it was a question of "morphological coincidence".[13] Simon Gikandi identifies other similar redefinitions such as "connotations" in Yves-Alain Bois' *Painting as Model* (1990) or "convergences" by art collector Daniel-Henry Kahnweiller (as early as in 1948).[14]

This view is of course in line with the emphasis of Western modernism on individualism and autonomous creation. The most serious insult against a modernist genius would be an accusation of copying or that their art is derivative in nature. Therefore, Picasso made clear on several occasions that for him it was never a question of borrowing or copying, and this attitude was reaffirmed by his chroniclers.[15] According to Gikandi, the aim was "to minimize [--] the constitutive role of Africa in the making of modernism".[16] The role of the 'Other' – the unknown that represents the primitive and magic – in the formation of modernism was identified in the spiritual and psychological power, which worked through the subconscious or unconscious, with no formal or aesthetic influence.[17]

For Onabolu, on the other hand, the project was a conscious emulation of Western easel painting. It was a radical departure from the tradition and, above all, against expectations of what a colonised person should do or would be able to achieve. He set out to prove wrong the assumption that a colonial subject could never learn to make art in the European sense.[18] Art was not included at all in the colonial curriculum, as, from the colonisers point of view, it was deemed not useful for the colonial project nor achievable to Africans.[19] As to its subject matter, Onabolu's paintings showed Africans as individuals, worthy of portrayal, contrary to the long history of the Western view of natives as devoid of human dignity or, at best, useful as work force. Onabolu quickly became popular among the educated local elite in Lagos. He also found a handful of European supporters but mainly the Western art professionals took a negative view of his approach. The European art teachers, including Kenneth Murray, the first one of them to

10 Simon Gikandi, "Picasso, Africa, and the Schemata of Difference," *Modernism/modernity* 10, no. 3(2003): 455–80, https://doi.org/10.1353/mod.2003.0062.

11 Rubin, *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art.*

12 Rubin, *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art,* 260–65, 278.

13 Hal Foster, *Recordings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1985), 184.

14 Gikandi, "Picasso, Africa, and the Schemata of Difference," 458.

15 Rubin, "*Primitivism" in 20th Century Art*, 240–343.

16 Gikandi, "Picasso, Africa, and the Schemata of Difference," 458.

17 Gikandi, "Picasso, Africa, and the Schemata of Difference," 466; 470–71.

18 Oloidi, "Growth and Development of Formal Art Education in Nigeria," 112; Olu Oguibe, "Appropriation as Nationalism in Modern African Art," *Third Text*. 16, no. 3 (2002), 243–59, https://doi.org/10.1080/09528820110120704.

19 Oguibe, "Appropriation as Nationalism", 247–48; Okeke-Agulu, *Postcolonial Modernism*.

be invited on Onabolu's recommendation, saw Western influences as degrading to African art and encouraged their students to turn to their own tradition instead.[20] This view persisted, as will be discussed in the next paragraph, and has lasted to the present day.[21] The two events testify to the asymmetry of the setting and to art historical double standards: whereas African influence on Western art is fruitful (notwithstanding attempts to deny it), Western influences on African art are to be deplored.

Magiciens vs Négritude

A second instance of non-Western art serving as a catalyst for change in Western art was – again in Paris – the *Magiciens de la Terre* exhibition in 1989. It is regularly described as a landmark exhibition, ground-breaking, paradigm-forming or, indeed, canonical.[22] The exhibition brought together, and showed side-by-side, art from the First and the Third World (as they were called at the time). It became hugely famous and discussed both in celebratory and in critical terms.[23]

The iconic image, almost always reproduced as an illustration of the exhibition, juxtaposes works by British artist Richard Long and Paddy Sims of Yuendumu community in Australia. The shot illustrates the ethos of showcasing creators from different parts of the world in the same space on equal terms. Similarly, the catalogue allocated equal space for each artist and had an inventive way of using the world map that showed the artist's place of origin as the centre point from which the rest of the map unfolded.[24]

In preparation for the show, the French curators travelled to other continents. What they brought back was not works by artists trained in the art academies, by that time well-established on the African continent, but items that were created for other purposes than the art context: objects made for use or items that belonged to belief systems and their rituals or to other cultural activities in various communities. For example, Ghanaian artist Kane Kwei made coffins shaped like objects connected to the deceased's occupation. Beninese Cyprien Tokoudagba's sculptures were in fact Voodoo shrine figures. Esther Mahlangu from South Africa created in the exhibition a house decorated in the style that she had learned from her maternal relatives as part of her Ndebele heritage.

The curators were fascinated by the creative power that was distinctly different from the modernist tradition. The works resonated with the sensibilities of contemporary artists and spoke to the postmodern quest for new forms and artistic approaches. They also responded to the growing interest in rituals, ceremonies and community-based or participatory processes in Western art, and in general to the turn towards the 'Other' in the 1980s and 90s. The title of the exhibition which designates both the non-Western as well as Western artists as 'magicians' acknowledges this sort of nostalgia for expanding the modernist notions of art and the artist.

20 According to Oguibe, this led to the development of two opposing strands of art education: Onabolu's model of learning technical skills, and the European-led instruction based on craft, folk stories and village life, which contributed to constructing the colonial view of the "authentic native". Oguibe, "Appropriation as Nationalism," 249, 254–56.

21 Chika Okeke-Agulu, "The Challenge of the Modern: An Introduction," *African Arts*, 39, no. 1 (2006), 15.

22 E.g. Cesare Poppi, "African Art and Globalisation: On whose Terms the Question?," *Engage review*, no. 13 (2003).

23 The literature on the exhibition is vast. For contemporary discussion, see e.g. *Third Text*, Special Issue on Magiciens de la Terre, no. 6 (1989); or Jean Fisher "Magiciens de la terre," *Artforum* 28, no. 1 (1989). For a retrospective reflection, see Lucy Steeds et al., *Making Art Global: Volume 2: Magiciens de la Terre 1989* (Köln: Walther König, 2013).

24 Jean Hubert Martin, *Magiciens de la Terre* (Paris: Editions du Centre Pompidou, 1989). Catalogue of the exhibition.

Again, the West recognized its own aspirations in art from elsewhere. New art was 'discovered' by the curators and artists and used as a source of artistic enrichment. As with the development of cubism and modernism, we may ask how essential the non-European impulse was for the new directions of western contemporary art, which was already in its process of breaking away from painting and sculpture as privileged media in the direction of installations, ritualistic performance, and participatory production. At least, it is safe to say, contemporary art would not look as it does today without non-Western influences. Since *Magiciens,* art from outside the Euro-American world became more explicitly a source of enrichment for Western art. According to anthropologist Cesare Poppi "*Magiciens de la Terre* [- -] gave public recognition to the set of aesthetic categories which have come to constitute 'the postmodern canon.'"[25]

As to the former colonies, they had their own ways of dealing with cultural influences and a different attitude to cultural categories. An occasion when various artforms were shown together, under the same umbrella, can be found in Havana biennial, founded in 1984. Its second and third editions particularly (in 1986 and -89) were full-scale global biennials showing contemporary art from all continents – prior to *Magiciens* which claimed to be "The first truly international exhibition of worldwide contemporary art". The biennial also had an inclusive approach to art forms showing art, craft, design, photography, and amateur art side-by-side as a conscious anti-colonial and anti-capitalist strategy.[26] The strict division between craft and (autonomous) art is a Western categorisation that the "Third world biennial" did not have to respect.

25 Poppi, "African Art and Globalisation".

26 Gerardo Mosquera, "The Third Bienal de La Habana in Its Global and Local Contexts," *OnCurating*, no. 46 (2020): 120–126, https://www.on-curating.org/issue-46-reader/the-third-bienal-de-la-habana-in-its-global-and-local-contexts.html.

An even earlier event was the first *Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres* (World Festival of Negro Arts) in Dakar in 1966. Its roots can be found in the Négritude movement, originating in Paris in 1930s and 40s among black students from French-speaking colonies in West Africa and the Caribbean that forged connections between the overseas cultures and the vibrant international arts community in Paris. The young African and Caribbean intellectuals frequented the same circles as the European artists, among them Picasso who became friends with the Senegalese poet Léopold Sédar Senghor. The movement reclaimed the value of black culture and history, opposing the European, particularly French, colonial culture, and emphasized Africanness and Blackness in their own right, not just in comparison with or as the 'other' in relation to whiteness.[27]

They did not, however, advocate for the rejection of the West and its modern culture, philosophy and technology but, on the contrary, for the adoption of the best and most useful parts of it, while holding on to their own African heritage. Loyal to this idea of combining tradition and openness, in 1966 Senghor, then the first president of the independent Senegal, organised the first *Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres*. The show included black artists, musicians, writers, poets and actors from both sides of the Atlantic and comprised a vast programme of events, including exhibitions, conferences and street performances.[28]

As part of the festival's visual arts programme, the exhibition *L'Art nègre: Sources, evolution,*

27 Reiland Rabaka, *The Negritude Movement: W. E. B. Du Bois, Leon Damas, Aimé Césaire, Leopold Senghor, Franz Fanon, and the Evolution of an Insurgent Idea* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014).

28 The Dakar festival was a start of a series of Pan-African events: *The First Pan-African Cultural Festival* in Algiers in 1969, *Zaire 74* in Kinshasa in 1974, and the second edition of *World Festival of Negro Arts* in 1977 in Lagos, Nigeria.

expansion was designed to juxtapose African art with modernist artworks and showed tribal and ritual objects for the first time as art. Held at the Musée dynamique, a museum built for the occasion, *L'Art nègre* gathered items from European museums and collections as well as royal treasuries in Africa. They were called 'masterpieces' and shown together with works of European modern artists such as Picasso, Modigliani, Braque and Derain.[29] The exhibition drew huge international attention and was later shown at Grand Palais in Paris. Under the umbrella of the festival was also an exhibition of contemporary African art titled *Tendances et confrontations* which included artists from several African countries and African-American artists from the US. Albeit in different locations, the exhibitions were conceived as complements to each other. According to Senghor, "*L'Art nègre* represents the past, *Tendances et confrontations* is conceived to represent art of a new vision of the world".[30] For more than 20 years before *Magiciens* the Festival showed traditional arts together with modern and contemporary art.

Once again, only one of these exhibitions, *Magiciens*, is recognised as ground-breaking and canonical in art history writing while the others, located outside the Western art world have remained in obscurity.

Categories and (in)validations

Art history has been written from the Western / Global North perspective. Its categorisations maintain a specific idea of what is modern and what comes thereafter whether it's called postmodern or contemporary. As narrated above, the swings from classical to modern and from modern to postmodern have drawn on contact with the outside: the Third World / Global South. The power to define what these moves entail and how the elements in the interaction are valued, nevertheless, has been withheld in the West. The categories that were born out of these encounters – Modern, Contemporary – have then been projected back onto the global landscape, and what has not seen as fitting into them has been deemed invalid.

Such a dismissal of non-Western modern art took place with *Magiciens*: Academically trained, fully fledged artists from outside Europe were seen as inauthentic and were not included in the exhibition; neither were artists in diasporas in Europe or the USA (exceptions were Brazilian Cildo Meireles and Pakistani-born UK-based Rashid Araeen). Instead, the curators chose to exhibit creative practice that had hitherto been categorised as primitive, folk art, or craft, as this type of creativity spoke to their sense of the new trends in contemporary art. Decisions regarding inclusion and trespassing on category borders were reserved for western curators. They shuffled the earlier classifications – separation of ethnographic objects and works of art as different categories – and elevated functional objects into art.[31] On the other hand, and as part of the same process, some of the newly discovered 'magiciens' were launched into the career of a contemporary artist and were happy to find success in that field. For example, Esther Mahlangu now exhibits in contemporary art galleries and is described as one of South Africa's best-known artists.

29 Cédric Vincent, "Tendencies and Confrontations: Dakar 1966," *Afterall* no. 43 (2017): 88–101, https://www.afterall.org/articles/tendencies-and-confrontations-dakar-1966/.

30 « L'Art nègre» représente l'art du passé, « Tendances et confrontations » est conçue représenter l'art d'une nouvelle vision du monde. Léopold Sédar Senghor, *L'art Nègre. Sources, évolution, expansion*, exhibition catalogue (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1966), 60–61.

31 The question of displaying functional and ritualistic objects in Western art institutions was addressed in the exhibition *ART/artifact: African Art in Anthropology Collections* at the Center for African Art, New York in 1988. See Susan Vogel, "Introduction" in the catalogue (New York: Prestel Verlag, 1988), 11–17; also Susan Vogel, *Africa explores: 20th century African art* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1991).

The categories of Western art history were created for describing the development of art in the occident and their explanatory power with regard to art from elsewhere is limited or outright distorted. There is a long history in Western art history scholarship of reading the art of other places and eras on the aesthetic level only, omitting the social and cultural context. Thomas McEvilley gives an account of this tradition in relation to *'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art* based on visual juxtapositions of anonymous tribal art and modern 'masters'.[32] He describes "(t)he need to coopt difference into one's own dream of order [--] a tribal superstition of Western civilization: the Hegel-based conviction that one's own culture is riding the crucial timeline of history's self-realization" and accuses the show of using the Third World to consolidate Western notions of quality and feelings of superiority.[33] In this way, *Primitivism* aimed at advancing the idea of modernist formal language as universal (and of MoMA as its stronghold).[34] Same dynamics can be seen at play in *Magiciens*: creativity from outside not only of Europe but also of modernism and fine arts in general carried the value of authenticity to guarantee the innovative potential and the global (instead of universal) scope of postmodernism.

A glaring asymmetry, on the other hand, prevails in how the West views non-Western modernism. Even if modernism was promoted as universal language, its use was reserved for Western artists. While Picasso's integrity was not seen to be compromised by the integration of tribal motives, the non-Western modern artists have constantly been criticised as derivative, inauthentic, and inferior. Partha Mitter has coined the expression "Picasso manqué syndrome" to describe how an outsider's attempt to use cubist language is always seen lacking in originality or quality: "while successful imitation was a form of aping, imperfect imitation represented a failure of learning."[35]

The visual appearance of Global South modern art is in general largely based on the formal language of cubism or expressionist abstraction but almost always maintains contact with a referent in the visible world; total abstraction or non-figurative art – the apogee of Western modernism – is rare.[36] Artists employed the formal language of cubism because "its revolutionary message furnished ammunition for cultural resistance to colonial empires, as each colonized nation deployed the language of modernism to fight its own particular cultural corner".[37]

The generation of artists which followed Onabolu was engaged in the processes of building the independence of new modern African states. "Young artists in a new nation, that is what we are! We must grow with the new Nigeria and work to satisfy her traditional love for art or perish with our colonial past", exclaimed Uche Okeke in 1960.[38] New era called for new art.

African modern art shared with European modernism the sentiment of modernity, that is, the sense of a change of era, of a struggle against

32 In their original context, the masks were never the immobile object of visual appreciation but part of communal spiritual ceremonies including music, dance, chanting and collective participation that gave them their meaning. See also Foster, *Recordings*, 183.

33 McEvilley, "Doctor Lawyer Indian Chief," 59–60.

34 Ibid.

35 Partha Mitter, "Decentering Modernism: Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the Periphery," *Art Bulletin* 90, no. 4 (2008), 537, https://www.jstor.org/stable/20619633. Mitter is writing about modern art in India. He also raises the parallel issue of the significance of Eastern though for the rise of abstract art.

36 Susan Vogel, "West African artists at the Venice Biennale," in *Fusion: West African artists at the Venice Biennale*, ed. Thomas McEvilley (New York: The Museum of African Art, 1993), 6.

37 Mitter,"Decentering Modernism," 531–48.

38 Uche Okeke, "Natural Synthesis Manifesto," in *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa*, eds. Clementine Deliss and Jane Havell (Paris: Flammarion; London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1995), 208–09.

destructive forces and a belief in a better future. While artists and intellectuals in inter-war Paris were mobilising against the rise of fascism, for their African and Caribbean contemporaries of the Négritude movement, and the Global South in general, the enemy was colonialism. Modernism and modern art were part of independence struggles leading to liberation from the colonial powers.

The tactic of mastering the oppressors' culture, such as Onabolu learning realist painting or the Négritude authors making use of surrealism and Parisian leftist philosophy, was hence a political act, a way of assuming agency as opposed to the position inscribed by the colonial masters.[39] In many places, the artists were also personally involved in politics and took part in the process of building the modern states. They were invited as experts or served as civil servants of the new states or even as the president as did Léopold Sédar Senghor. In India, art was engaged directly in visualising the newly independent state when artists from Santiniketan school led by Nandalal Bose, the pioneer of Indian modern art, were commissioned to illustrate the constitution in 1950.

Third World modernism was part of change, working against the old regimes, both politically and culturally. The way this translated into visual arts took the form of various syncretist approaches. The artists were drawing on their own traditions while coming to terms with the colonizers' culture. Instead of rejecting Western achievements in favour of their own, many artists chose to embrace the best of both. In Nigeria, the movement of Natural Synthesis founded by Uche Okeke advocated the fusion of indigenous visual arts with useful Western techniques and ideas. This was also clearly expressed in the Négritude movement that made use of features from the colonizers' culture. The epitome of this line of thinking was Cannibalismo, the Brazilian movement founded by Oswald de Andrade's Anthropophagist Manifesto (1928), which promotes the idea of 'digesting', that is interiorising the other by copying and adapting, and integrating any elements that can be used as materials for a new configuration of reality. Other syncretist philosophies include the Caribbean idea of creolization, used by Edouard Glissant, or hybridity, theorised by Homi Bhabha, among others. All these philosophies are grounded in specific histories and places, but they share the view of the productiveness that results from bringing alien elements together.

This kind of openness to external influences and mixing of elements was in direct opposition to modernist idea and more in line with postmodern ethos.[40] With regard to India, Geeta Kapur explains that the artists actually were simultaneously modern and postmodern, hence the mismatch of Western art historical categories. According to her, chronologically India came late to modernism ('late' in the Western calendar) around the mid-century, in tandem with the struggle for independence (similarly to the African nations). More importantly, a specific feature of modern art in India is the abundant narrative content stemming from the local art traditions – rejected by modernism but embraced again by postmodernism.[41]

Reading this art against Western modernism without considering the context (once more a decontextualised art historical reading) leads to misinterpretation or even to epistemic injustice. Modernism of the Global South has rarely been invited to Western shows.[42] It was shown

39 Oguibe, "Appropriation as Nationalism," 245–48.

40 Poppi, "African Art and Globalisation". With its thirst for the new and its fallacy of originality, the West has often been unable to see the inventiveness of adaptation.

41 Geeta Kapur, *When Was Modernism in India?* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2000 [1992]).

42 A notable exception is *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa* curated by Clémentine Deliss in Whitechapel Gallery in 1995. Deliss and Havell, *Seven Stories*. Also *Africa Explores* exhibition in 1991 included a section under the title "International Art", see Vogel, *Africa Explores*.

in Havana biennials, and African modern art was included in Dakar festival in 1966 as well as in Dak'Art biennials since the 1990s. Venice Biennale 2024 is now writing art history anew by including a large survey of 20th century art from outside Euro-America, curated by Brazilian Adriano Pedrosa. (At the time of writing this article it has only just opened, so cannot be considered here.) But can non-Western art ever be understood by Western art history and its categories (or canons)? And can the non-Western world trust Western art history when its art has been distorted by narrating it as a derivation of the West? Can art history be global? Should we have art history as a single discipline or multiple art histories?[43]

To the definition of canon in the beginning of this texts as a shared body of knowledge we could add a further dimension: As core elements of the discipline of art history canons are regimes of belief. They are sustained and renewed by a shared understanding and continuous collective investment in them. Pierre Bourdieu uses the Latin *illusio* to illustrate the shared belief that holds together a field.[44] In this way a discipline, such as history of art, functions as any 'magic' community gathered around a belief system. It is not without a reason that in the earlier quote McEvilley calls the belief in Hegelian view of history "a tribal superstition". The above cases show Europeans absorbing elements of foreign realms into their own belief system (art) but at the same time denying the same right of others.

Established canons enhance the power of the narrator, and the powerful narrator reproduces the established stories. What would an alternative story look like, narrated from the opposite viewpoint?

Epilogue: Picasso as African art history

A few years after the Dakar Festival in 1966, Senghor organised Picasso's exhibition in Dakar in 1972. It had more than 200 works by Picasso and attracted 13 000 visitors. The reception, according to the press, was mostly excited and interested, although some sceptical opinions were heard too. The exhibition left permanent marks on some artists. They were still fresh 50 years later in 2022, when another exhibition around Picasso opened in Dakar, in Musée des civilisations noires.

Organised by four museums – two in Paris, two in Dakar – the exhibition brought together artworks, objects from ethnographic collections, and documentary material. The historical documents showed Picasso's and his contemporaries' life surrounded by African objects on the mantlepiece and were combined with real items in the exhibition space. Artworks were shown together with objects that inspired them. The show also drew attention to Picasso's passion for human-animal combinations and the connection with sacred objects. The designer of the exhibition, artist Fodé Camara remembers visiting the 1972 exhibition as a teenager and the impression it made on him; today he is an artist himself. He even lent his catalogue from 50 ago to the exhibition.[45]

I want to interpret the exhibition as a cultural counterpoint in the usual story of Picasso and Modernism: Here Picasso serves, on the one hand, as a reference to collections of traditional African art and, on the other, as an inspiration for modern art in Senegal. In the exhibition, Picasso is a chapter in the story of West African culture, rather than the main protagonist. The poster

43 These questions are addressed by James Elkins, among others. Elkins ed,. I*s Art History Global?*

44 Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art. Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Stanford: Polity Press, 1996).

45 Valérie Marin La Meslée, "Picasso l'Africain, de retour à Dakar," *Le Point*, April 3, 2022, https://www.lepoint.fr/culture/picasso-l-africain-de-retour-a-dakar-03-04-2022-2470741_3.php.

of the exhibition speaks volumes: Once again there is a juxtaposition of a mask (by Gouro / Baoulé people of the Ivory Coast) and a work by Picasso, but this time the mask is placed slightly above Picasso's study for *Demoiselles* and seems to observe it calmly from its elevated position, benignly reconciling with history.

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Conservative Traditions in Polish Art History

The Challenges of Overcoming Entrenched Paradigms

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This article investigates the persistence of adherence to traditional approaches in Polish art history and the challenges faced in attempting to challenge it. The analysis reveals how art historians in Poland have adhered to notions of 'objective' and apolitical science, perpetuating earlier methodologies based on a factographic-object approach. This prevailing mindset inhibits the acceptance of newer, critical frameworks. The paper explores significant historical figures, institutional structures, and movements that have contributed to these conservative trends, while advocating for a more self-reflective approach in line with global methodological developments. By confronting resistance to change, the discipline can broaden its academic and cultural relevance.

Keywords: *Polish art history, conservatism, methodology, academic trends, critical frameworks*

This article seeks to dissect the historical, cultural, and political vectors shaping the narrative of Polish art history in recent decades. It queries the dominant hermeneutical approach and the marginalization of critical schools within this field. What socio-political dynamics have obstructed the evolution of critical methodologies in Polish art historiography? What historical conditions have impeded the development of critical methodologies in Polish art history? From what perspective has this narrative traditionally been – and continues to be – crafted?

The drive to explore the limited enthusiasm for critical methodologies in Polish art history sprang from my investigation into Marxist theories within our national art historiography, which currently resides at the margins of Polish art literature. This initiative was further shaped by my academic experiences during a period marked by significant politicization of the broader social, political, and artistic discourse in Poland, particularly following the last decade's shift in political power.

Additionally, the concept for this text was conceived during a period when the main political narrative, including historical and art historical discourse in Poland, was subjected to an extensive politicization of the broadly understood social, political, and artistic discourse in Poland over the last decade. These developments were, in part, the result of the populist Law and Justice Party assuming power, which led to the polarization of social and political discourse. The authoritarian inclinations of the populists have also affected crucial arts and culture sectors, where leadership positions were filled based on political allegiance rather than scholarly merit, transforming these entities into extensions of political propaganda.[1] This shift was mirrored in academia where the politicization has profoundly impacted art studies. Notably, the Ministry of Education and Science has favored Catholic universities, which often promote a narrowly defined worldview, thereby excluding academic pluralism. Furthermore, it directed research agendas by setting priorities within its scholarship and grant programs, actively discouraging critical methodologies, especially those concerning women's rights and minorities, gender identity, historical or cultural materialism. Additionally, topics perceived as potentially "offensive to religious sentiments" or accused of promoting "Marxism" – interpreted not as Marxist doctrine, but as a general disdain for communism – were also marginalized.

Certainly, innovative research projects and publications that pioneer new perspectives of inquiry are also emerging. These, however, are not part of the mainstream art history discourse and are developed outside the conventional

1 See, e.g. Vivienne Chow, "Self-Censorship Among Artists and Museum Workers Is on the Rise in Poland, a New Report Finds," *Artnet News*, October 11, 2022, read 09.03.2024, https://news.artnet.com/art-world-archives/poland-art-censorship-report-2189730; Anca Ulea, "Polish Artists Were Muzzled by the Populist Government: An NGO Wants Donald Tusk to Reverse It," Euronews, December 15, 2023, read 09.03.2024, https://www.euronews.com/culture/2023/12/15/polish-artists-were-muzzled-by-the-populist-government-an-ngo-wants-donald-tusk-to-reverse; "Poland's Right-Wing Party Censors Artists and Actively Suppresses Creative Expression, New Report Finds," *ArtDependence Magazine*, October 11, 2022, https://artdependence.com/articles/poland-s-right-wing-party-censors-artists-and-actively-suppresses-creative-expression-new-report-finds/; Alex Marshall, "Poland's Art World Awaits a Culture War Counteroffensive," *New York Times*, November 6, 2023, read 09.03.2024, https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/06/arts/design/poland-culture-election.html; Adam Mazur, "How Did Poland's Art World Swing Right?" *Frieze*, March 1, 2022, read 09.03.2024, https://www.frieze.com/article/how-did-poland-art-world-swing-right-wing; Kuba Szreder, "The Authoritarian Turn: On the Crisis of the Polish Institutions of Contemporary Art," *CIMAM*, March 6, 2023, read 09.03.2024, https://cimam.org/news-archive/the-authoritarian-turn-on-the-crisis-of-the-polish-institutions-of-contemporary-art/.

institutes of art history. During this period, numerous significant research projects emerged, particularly in the field of social art history. These were primarily focused around the Museum Center at the Museum of Art in Łódź until the museum's leadership was overtaken by a politically appointed director in 2022. One might expect the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw to engage in a more critical discourse; however, it neither conducts research activities nor publishes scholarly works. Furthermore, until 2023, it was administered by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, which undoubtedly contributed to funding constraints. Researchers such as Agnieszka Chmielewska and Tomasz Załuski led some of these noteworthy studies. Others, including myself and the community of researchers centered around the Institute of Literary Research at the Polish Academy of Sciences, the seminar at the Center for Cultural and Literary Studies, as well as many scholars from the Polish Academy of Sciences, have resisted the dominant narratives by choosing to publish their research abroad.

Looking forward, it is essential to explore the structural and institutional obstacles that have historically hindered the proliferation of critical discourse within Polish art history. Analyzing how political climates have shaped academic and cultural institutions offers a window into understanding the broader implications of these influences on art historiography. These insights not only enrich our understanding of the field's current state but also suggest how integrating these sidelined perspectives could rejuvenate the discourse in Polish art history.

Exploring Critical Challenges in Polish Art Historiography

Following the contextual groundwork laid in the introduction, it is crucial to explore four specific areas where the resistance to critical methodologies in Polish art history is most evident. These areas not only reflect the broader socio-political dynamics but also highlight the internal academic struggles and the external influences shaping the discourse:

1. Contrasting Schools of Thought in Art History: The tradition of Polish art history, rooted in the 1930s, has bifurcated into two main schools: one that views art history as an 'objective science' primarily concerned with cataloging monuments and compiling dictionaries using iconology and, more recently hermeneutics, and another that embraces critical studies and methodologies.

2. Historical and Intellectual Stances: Since the early 1960s, there has been a persistent belief within Polish political dialogue that intellectual circles should maintain an oppositional and anti-communist, or at times apolitical, stance. This belief system has led to the rejection of critical attitudes like socialist feminism,[2] criticism of apartheid, and anti-colonialism, which held an important place in socialist discourse during that era. Today, this translates into a reluctance to engage with these critical perspectives, often perceived as aligning too closely with past regime ideologies.

3. Anti-Communist Traditions and the Role of the Catholic Church: The anti-communist sentiments that have been strengthening since the 1960s view the church as a 'sphere' or 'oasis' of freedom, a perception that continues to influence Polish cultural and academic narratives profoundly.

4. Intensified Politicization of Social Conversations: In recent years, the rise of the radical right has notably intensified the politicization of social and academic discussions, influencing the thematic and methodologi-

2 Agata Jakubowska, "Feminist art and art history in state socialist Poland, as seen through all-women exhibitions," *MODOS: Revista De História Da Arte* 7, nro. 2 (2023): 94–119.

cal orientations of art historical studies. The history of Polish art largely still adheres to its belief in 'objective' and apolitical scholarship, which only reinforces the traditionalist tendencies developed earlier.

These points will be examined in detail to understand how they contribute to the current state of art historiography in Poland and what they imply for the future of critical methodologies within the field.

1. Contrasting Schools of Thought in Art History

From its inception, Polish art history functioned primarily as a chronicle of events rather than as an independent academic discipline. In 2000, Elżbieta Gieysztor-Miłobędzka published an insightful article entitled "Polish Art History: Its Conservatism and Attempts to Overcome It" in *Kultura Współczesna* [Contemporary Culture], one of the few scholarly periodicals comprehensively addressing cultural issues through theoretical, analytical-interpretive, diagnostic, and practical lenses. The researcher characterized the Polish discipline as "resistant to impulses brought by the current major cultural transformation," describing it as a discipline that "permanently merges the positivist fossil with deeply rooted ideas of romantic lineage."[3] She attributed this state of affairs to historical conditions that shaped the national and cultural heritage following the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth at the end of the eighteenth century.

As Poland vanished from the political maps for 150 years, the Polish field of art was shaped under the influence of political demands and national expectations associated with the struggle for the survival of the nation and its culture. This shaping continued and solidified with the restoration of statehood in 1918, establishing and safeguarding it as the moral and material basis for the existence of Polish identity. During this period, the primary task of artists was to support the Polish national movement, while art historians were tasked with securing the national symbolic capital. Art history and its components, such as museums, were utilized for nation-state building, and cultural heritage, including artifacts, was reduced to the status of national heritage that needed to be cataloged and, predominantly, described by highlighting its Polish national characteristics.[4]

In the nineteenth-century awakening of national consciousness and the continuous struggle for independence, Gieysztor-Miłobędzka sees the establishment of Polish art history as historiography. She argues that it was at this time that Polish art historians developed a sense of duty to work towards a political and social goal, intertwining romantic nationalism with the contemporary standards of knowledge, namely historicism and positivism. The researcher emphatically wrote, "national concern [then] displaced deeper philosophical culture, favored anti-reflectiveness – and today [also] it is painfully evident."[5] Under the banner of showcasing Polishness and securing national culture, inventory programs were initiated, factual knowledge was expanded, and monographs on objects and artists were developed. These efforts, admirable in their dedication, continued after the restoration of statehood in 1918 and again after 1945. Each time, alongside the rebuilding of the Polish nation, there was also a need to assess

3 Elżbieta Gieysztor-Miłobędzka, "Polska Historia Sztuki – jej konserwatyzm oraz próby jego przezwyciężenia [Polish Art History – Its Conservatism and Attempts to Overcome It]," *Kultura Współczesna* 4, no. 26 (2000): 58.

4 Agnieszka Chmielewska, *Wyobrażenia polskości: Sztuki plastyczne II Rzeczpospolitej w perspektywie społecznej historii sztuk*i [Polishness Imagined: Visual Arts of the Second Polish Republic from the Socio-Cultural History Perspective] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego 2019), 43–45.

5 Gieysztor-Miłobędzka, "Polska Historia Sztuki," 59.

war damages and to inventory objects within ever-changing geopolitical boundaries.

Secondly, the researcher identifies the factographic-object approach to art as rooted in nationalistic care, serving as the foundation for the establishment of the Art History Commission in Polish lands within the Austrian partition at the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow in 1873. This was the year when the First Congress in Vienna recognized art history as an independent academic discipline. The commission's statutory goal was to publish materials and archival sources, dictionaries, and catalogs of monuments—foundations that are still considered basic to the discipline today. In her text, Gieysztor-Miłobędzka provides a sharp diagnosis of Polish art history, which remains relevant today: the inventory and documentation practices showing a startling congruence with the nineteenth-century program and the ongoing factographic-object approach. Warsaw's art history continues this tradition to this day. It began in the capital by librarian and archivist Zygmunt Batowski, who was entrusted with the newly established chair of the Institute of Art History at the University of Warsaw in 1917. Batowski perceived the goal of Polish art history in its documentary activities. This positivist model of Warsaw's art history was continued by Batowski's students and remains the basis of teaching at the Institute to this day.[6]

However, in the 1930s, a new generation of art historians, such as Michał Walicki and Juliusz Starzyński, emerged, who laid the methodological foundations of the discipline and its developmental trajectories. They brought high intellectual standards and excellent contacts to Polish art history. Because neither of them worked at a university, they had no opportunity to introduce their thinking into the academic mainstream at the time. From the 1930s, Juliusz Starzyński was interested in social art history and theories inspired by Marxism. He emphasized that an art historian should see the contemporary art around them as an integral element of artistic life. From 1935, he managed the Institute of Art Propaganda, then the largest institution in the country dealing with contemporary art, which established contacts with modernist and avant-garde artists from all over Europe.[7] Together with Walicki, he was ambitious to introduce Polish art into the canon of Western art, introducing the first account of Polish art history as a chapter titled *History of Polish Art*, in the Polish translation of Hamann's *History of Art*.[8] Even then, he was interested in Marxist theories and the social conditioning of art. His approach was close to contemporary social art history.

It was not until 1949 that Juliusz Starzyński had the opportunity to establish his own scientific institution, the State Institute of Art, which in 1959 became part of the Polish Academy of Sciences as the Institute of Art. Until his death in 1974, Starzyński managed the Institute, gathering around him a community of outstanding researchers, theorists, and art critics, who were engaged in the research and development of theories and methodologies not only for studies on earlier art but also contemporary art. Starzyński promoted modern interdisciplinarity and cared about maintaining contacts with scientists,

6 Joanna Sosnowska, "Polska historia sztuki w latach 1945–1989: Zagadnienia metodologii" [Polish History of Art, 1945–1989: Methodological Questions], in *Humanistyka polska w latach 1945–1990* [Polish Humanities Research, 1945–1990], edited by Urszula Jakubowska & Jerzy Myśliński (Warszawa: Fundacja Akademia Humanistyczna, Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2006), 225–226.

7 Marta Leśniakowska, "Władza Spojrzenia – władza języka. Juliusza Starzyńskiego obraz sztuki i jej historii" [The Power of the Gaze – The Power of the Language: Juliusz Starzyński's Vision of Art and Its History], *Modus: Art History Journal* XII–XIII (2013): 31.

8 Michał Walicki & Juliusz Starzyński," Historja sztuki [History of Art]," in *Dzieje sztuki od epoki starochrześcijańskiej do czasów obecnych* [History of Art from the Early Christian Era to the Present], ed. Richard Hamann, Michał Walicki & Juliusz Starzyński, translated by Mieczysław Wallis (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo M. Arcta, 1934), vol. I, 9–619; vol. II, 627–905.

but also leading centers worldwide. He cared about scientific exchange with France, Italy, Switzerland, England, Germany, and the United States.[9]

The politicization of art history, particularly in the early 1950s in Poland, and the top-down imposition of socialist realism and Marxism-Leninism also facilitated the development of Polish thought about art based not on Marxism-Leninism, but on neo-Marxism, which was developed in Poland by the philosopher and writer Stanisław Brzozowski. Starzyński supported research into the social and economic conditions influencing artists' work, hence, for instance, the regular conducting of surveys and interviews with artists about living conditions, artistic education, and the need for studios, whose results were published in scholarly journals such as those issued by the Institute, *Przegląd Artystyczny* [Artistic Review], and *Materiały do Studiów i Dyskusji z Zakresu Teorii i Historii Sztuki, Krytyki Artystycznej oraz Metodologii Badań nad Sztuką* [Materials for Studies and Discussions in Art Theory and History, Art Criticism and Art Research Methodology]. Materials were collected by employees at the Studio of Documentation of Visual Arts of the 20th and 21st Century at the Art Institute, Aleksander Wallis, an art historian and sociologist. His work, *Visual Artists: Occupation and Environment*, published in 1964, was the first of its kind in Poland.[10] Wallis examined and analyzed social and institutional conditions, how the conditions for creation were organized, and why representatives of certain social groups could easily become artists in the professional sense of the word, while representatives of other groups never did.

Juliusz Starzyński was a visionary and a pioneer, but he also navigated the corridors of power with finesse. During the post-war years, Starzyński continued his vision of providing an organizational framework for research on visual and performing arts, a vision that, combined with Marxist dogma, lent itself well to being seamlessly inscribed into the political-propagandistic view of art history as a "master narrative" in a Socialist culture. Throughout the 1950s, Starzyński operated within a domain where he was the dominant authority, in which he controlled the Lyotardian knowledge/power nexus, giving him the ability to define the cultural canons of the time. He not only enjoyed the position of director of the State Institute of Art but also presided over the Committee on Art Studies at the Academy of Sciences. He was also commissioner of the Polish Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 1954, 1956, and 1958. In 1950, Starzyński founded the Department of Aesthetics at the Institute of Education of Scientific Staff under the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party. In 1956, he founded the Polish branch of AICA.[11]

It was precisely the strong association of Juliusz Starzyński with communist power, as well as his interest in theories rooted in Marxism, that led to his being erased from Polish art history in later years, with his achievements forgotten. As Gieysztor-Miłobędzka observed, all subsequent directors of the Institute did everything they could to transform Juliusz Starzyński's scientific institute into a documentation institute.[12] It is significant that the majority of texts on art treat art history as a subsidiary science to historical studies, focusing primarily on writing

9 Karolina Łabowicz-Dymanus, "Normative Practice and 'Tradition Management' in the Polish Art and History of Art of the 1950s," in *A Socialist Realist History? Writing Art History in the Post-War Decades*, ed. Krista Kodres, Kristina Jõekalda & Michaela Marek (Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2019), 81–99.

10 Aleksander Wallis, *Artyści-plastycy: zawód i środowisko* [Visual Artists: Occupation and Environment] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1964).

11 Juliusz Starzyński, Dokumentacja Osobowa Instytutu Sztuki Polskiej Akademii Nauk [Documentation of Employee Management of the Institute of Art], Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, file: A-112, 1949–1974.

12 Gieysztor-Miłobędzka, "Polska Historia Sztuki," 60.

monographs of artworks and artists, as well as on catalogs of monuments and dictionary compilations. Notably, an unusual multi-volume publication, *Polskie życie artystyczne w latach 1944–1960* [Polish Artistic Life in 1944–1960], appears as a monumental diary of artistic events that took place in Poland during those years.

Among Polish art research centers, the so-called Poznań school distinctly stands out, from which Piotr Piotrowski, the author of the book *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe* (2011) and probably the most renowned Polish researcher of Central and Eastern European art in the world today, emerged. The development of the Poznań school was significantly influenced by its contacts, due to geographical proximity, with the Munich and Berlin academic communities. Among these contacts was Richard Hamann, a student of Heinrich Wölfflin, who took up a professorship in what was then German Poznań in 1911. From the beginning, the Poznań school undertook research from a broad humanistic perspective, employing interdisciplinarity and methodological and theoretical awareness. Since the 1970s, it has been closely linked with the Institute of Cultural Studies at the Adam Mickiewicz University and the circle associated with the philosopher and theorist Jerzy Kmita. This period saw the emergence of the so-called "Poznań methodological school," which placed a strong emphasis on methodological issues, including primarily Marxist revisionism, albeit in a rather subtle version of superstructure. Among Kmita's followers was the aforementioned Piotrowski, who, along with his group of students and collaborators such as Agata Jakubowska, Izabela Kowalczyk, Mariusz Bryll, and Piotr Juszkiewicz, introduced Western methodologies and postmodernist reflection on art into Polish art history, including by publishing translations of key texts in the journal they edited, *Artium Quaestiones*.[13] After Piotrowski's departure in 2009, the emphasis on methodological development significantly weakened, and the community became dispersed. However, it is worth noting the research conducted by Agata Jakubowska, who is among the world-renowned specialists and theorists in feminist art and theories related to care and maintenance in women's artistic practice.[14]

2. Historical and Intellectual Stances

The above examples of the activities of individuals or even institutional entities, although spectacular, should be considered exceptional, not typical or characteristic of the majority of works in art history. Today, hermeneutics and biographics, along with the restoration of memory about forgotten women artists, dominate art research. Discussions among art historians regarding art literature are rare and conducted on a small scale. In recent years, perhaps the most interesting exchange occurred in the pages of the academic journal of art history, *Artium Quaestiones*, published by Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań.

In 2019, three recognized researchers in Polish art thought, Anna Markowska, Wojciech Włodarczyk, and Andrzej Turowski, contributed

13 Mariusz Bryll, Piotr Juszkiewicz, Piotr Piotrowski, & Wojciech Suchocki, eds., *Perspektywy współczesnej historii sztuki. Antologia przekładów* [Perspectives of Contemporary Art History: An Anthology of Translations] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. A. Mickiewicza, 2009).

14 See for example: Agata Jakubowska & Katy Deepwell, eds., *All-Women Art Spaces in Europe in the Long 1970s* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018).

their texts.[15] Their writings are maintained in a dialogue format, primarily concerning the changes that have occurred in the paradigm of Polish modern art and the understanding of "modernity" in the twentieth century. Włodarczyk analyzed the transformations in the meaning that the term "modernism" has undergone. The researcher noted that in Polish art history, "modernism" has become an established theory, where the researcher begins with an analysis of paintings and their "thick description," then finds confirmation in the analysis of the language of criticism and the conservative historical-artistic tradition of painting, with its categories of luminism or intensivism.[16]

Researchers agree that a paradigm of art was developed in Poland, which categorized art according to the degree of radicalism and political engagement in the following ranking: 1) critical art; 2) avant-garde; 3) modernism, where modernism is understood as autonomous art that sustains the political status quo.[17] This division was also associated with the valuation of art and positioned modernism and avant-garde as opposites. It maintained a vertical division in which the most highly valued paradigm was that of criticality, innovation (progress), and resistance.[18]

Markowska also highlights the binary construction of Polish history and art history after 1945, pointing out that it divides into anti-communist victims and communist persecutors. This division allowed for a cynical treatment of modernist art, particularly in its most popular form in Poland, known as "colorism," which was a local adaptation of the École de Paris art – seen as a victorious phase in Poland's path to artistic independence. In this process, Soviet influences on colorism, which Markowska identifies in the attitudes of the Peredvizhniki, were obscured and denied, whereas I would see them more in the concurrent development of Soviet modernism. The researcher pointedly states that the Polish art historian conceals an ideological backdrop behind nobly sounding slogans, believing in an enlightened, universalistic concept of their academic discipline. She rightly sees in this attitude the origins of an "obsession with formal analysis."[19]

It was precisely the social engagement, too strongly associated in Poland with socialist realism and the stigma of Marxism-Leninism, that discouraged the local academic community from engaging with critical methodologies. This was compounded by strong anti-communist sentiments, leading to a post-thaw period shift towards reflecting on aesthetic or stylistic categories. During the period when the doctrine of socialist realism prevailed, these categories were deemed antagonistic to realism, labeled as "formalism."[20] However, from the mid-1950s, art history turned back to its positivist tradition, considered to be an objective, anti-communist, anti-Soviet, anti-Russian, and pro-Polish stance. This period also addressed the mandate for a "Polish road to socialism" and "modernization"

15 Anna Markowska, "Around 1948: The 'Gentle Revolution' and Art History," *Artium Quaestiones* 30 (2019): 137–160, https://pressto.amu.edu.pl/index.php/aq/article/view/21878/20952; Wojciech Włodarczyk, "1989: On the Concept of Modernism," Artium Quaestiones 30 (2019): 257–270, https://pressto.amu.edu.pl/index.php/aq/article/view/21892/20968; Andrzej Turowski, "Remarks on the Marigin of Wojciech Włodarczyk's Article '1989: On the Concept of Modernism'," *Artium Quaestiones* 30 (2019): 271–273, https://pressto.amu.edu.pl/index.php/aq/article/view/21893/20969.

16 Włodarczyk, "1989," 258.

17 Piotr Piotrowski, *Znaczenia modernizmu: W stronę historii sztuki polskiej po 1945 roku* [Meanings of Modernism: Towards a History of Polish Art after 1945] (Poznań: Dom Wydawniczy Rebis, 1999), 119-121.

18 Włodarczyk, "1989," 261.

19 Markowska, "Around 1948," 140–142.

20 "Sprawozdanie Komitetu Centralnego na II Zjeździe PZPR. Referat wygłoszony przez Przewodniczącego KC PZPR Bolesława Bieruta [Report of the Central Committee at the 2nd Congress of the Polish United Workers' Party. Speech Delivered by the Chairman of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, Bolesław Bierut]," *Życie Warszawy* 1954, no. 60: 3–4.

under the first secretary Władysław Gomułka, who came to power in 1956. Socialist realist art was replaced, on the one hand, by so-called colorists from the circle of painter Jan Cybis, and on the other, by abstract art and later neo-avant-garde. In the latter two cases, these trends should be understood differently than their Western counterparts. They were meant primarily to express the modernity of Polish culture but were also perceived as apolitical, and autonomous from the regime.

Wojciech Włodarczyk has noted that the articulation of modernity following Clement Greenberg's concept of modernism and the foregrounding of the autonomy of art issue in Poland constituted a political qualification.[21] Hence, for example, the common political assessment in Poland of abstract art as autonomous, and thereby acceptable to the authorities of the People's Republic of Poland (PRL). Subsequently, in the 1990s, there was a negative judgment of artists involved in abstract art, branded as not anti-communist.

Meanwhile, Piotr Piotrowski's analysis in the exhibition catalog *A Decade* presents a critical perspective on the neo-avant-garde milieu of the 1970s. He critiques its professed apoliticism and artistic radicalism, highlighting how it seemingly satisfied the dual needs of the authorities and society during that era. The era's rhetoric of constructing a "second [parallel] Poland" – portrayed as prosperous, civilized, and tolerant – allowed for the de-ideologization of the state and tolerance for intellectual independence. However, this notion of modernization was largely illusory, as artistic freedom remained tightly circumscribed and curtailed by censorship. Piotrowski suggests that this period represents a form of historical mystification that reinforces prevalent stereotypes, stating, "We had avant-garde, but the values formulated by it were often superficial. [- -] What counted was activity, glossiness, noise."[22]

This marked the first such forceful attempt to confront the Polish art history of the 1970s and its seemingly conformist, pseudo-apolitical stance. Piotrowski's critique was directed less at the artists themselves and more at the critics and theorists supporting them. Despite the plethora of books on Polish neo-avant-garde, Piotrowski's work remains to this day one of the rare critical studies that debunk the myth of dissent, highlighting the symbiotic relationship between the neo-avant-garde community and the ruling authorities. Since the early 1960s, neo-avant-garde art enabled artists to conceal their intentions behind progressive forms while eschewing any "leftist/socialist" or political inclinations, even as they moved in the milieu of Parisian leftist artists and critics. Artists and critics associated with Galeria Foksal always crafted an apolitical image.[23] This did not prevent them from closely collaborating with artist Daniel Buren, as well as art critics Michel Claura and René Denizot, who regularly published in the journal *Les Lettres françaises* issued by the Communist Party of France. The environment, which effectively created its own myth of a politically non-committed stance, did not hesitate to represent Poland on the international stage during the martial law in 1982. The independence proclaimed by the avant-garde community bore little resemblance to the politics of dissent. Instead, it fulfilled the authorities' demand for promoted artistic

21 Włodarczyk, "1989," 260.

22 Piotr Piotrowski, *Dekada: O syndromie lat siedemdziesiątych, kulturze artystycznej, krytyce, sztuce—wybiórczo i subiektywnie* [A Decade: On the Syndrome of the Seventies, Artistic Culture, Criticism, and Art - Selectively and Subjectively] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Obserwator, 1991), 11.

23 Anka Ptaszkowska, "W cieniu dobroczyńcy, Analiza mecenatu socjalistycznego" [In the Shadow of the Benefactor, Analysis of Socialist Patronage], in *Wierzę w wolność, ale nie nazywam się Beethoven* [I Believe in Freedom, but I'm not Called Beethoven], (Gdańsk: Słowo/obraz terytoria, 2010), 96–100. Original title: "A l'ombre du bienfaiteur, l'analyse du mécénat socialiste," Art Press 1983, nr 71 (juin).

freedom and unrestricted cultural expression. The neo-avant-garde community willingly embraced this mystification.[24]

3. Anti-Communist Traditions and the Role of the Catholic Church

The environment of artists and art critics reflected broader social changes, particularly noticeable in circles such as art historians. The shift towards a more apolitical stance among the intelligentsia began as early as the mid-1950s. Since the early 1960s, there has been a persistent belief within Polish political dialogue that intellectual circles should maintain either an oppositional, anti-communist stance or adopt an apolitical position. Although there are no comprehensive sociological studies on this topic, examining the biographies of Polish art historians suggests that many came from landed, aristocratic, or intellectual backgrounds. Consequently, Polish art history was often written from the perspective of this social group, reflecting its cultural codes, interests, tastes, and political and social beliefs. This perspective aligns with Pierre Bourdieu's theory that cultural production often mirrors the habitus and cultural capital of dominant social groups.[25] As Markowska noted in the previously cited text, the Polish People's Republic (PRL) maintained class divisions, and the so-called high culture and humanities were dominated by this social group.[26] Interestingly, even Marxist theorists, who dealt with social practices in studies of culture and art, such as the previously mentioned Jerzy Kmita. In the introduction to the volume *Studies in the Theory of Culture and Methodology of Cultural Studies* the researcher wrote that the cultural capital and an enriched worldview system are necessary for the reception of symbolic culture, as are artistic practices.[27] Even Marxist theorists followed this belief system, which might also indicate that they were only interested in the superstructure, not the actual class divisions and social engagement. This has led to the rejection of critical attitudes like feminism, anti-colonialism, social engagement, class consciousness, social advancement, universal education, universal social insurance, and access to free higher education, which were pivotal in the era of socialist realism and undoubtedly a significant civilizational leap for many social groups during the first decades of the PRL. Interest in feminism did come at the beginning of the 1990s, along with the influx of Western methodologies. Interest in other social classes has intensified in Polish humanities in the last decade, thanks in part to publications such as *Sleepwalking the Revolution: An Exercise in Historical Logic* by the philosopher of culture, Andrzej Leder.[28] However, Polish art history remains uninterested in themes that fall outside the spectrum of intelligentsia symbolism and codes.

Additionally, there is the strong influence of ecclesiastical censorship. Since the 1960s, the Catholic Church has positioned itself as an anti-communist sphere, an "oasis" of freedom, depoliticization, and de-economization of discourse. It produced a strong language of values embraced by the Polish right, yet not recognized as a right-wing language, and accepted as the language of the intelligentsia because it was this group that shaped the field of art. This conventional environment of art historians allowed,

24 Karolina Labowicz-Dymanus, "Keeping up Appearances: The Neo-Avant-garde as a Smokescreen during Poland's Martial Law Era," in *The 1982: Cultural Exchange Between Łódź and Los Angeles*, ed. Agnieszka Pindera (Łódź: Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi 2024), 67–77.

25 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1984), 318–371.

26 Markowska, "Around 1948," 153–154.

27 Jerzy Kmita, *Studia z teorii kultury i mededologii badań nad kulturą* [Studies in the Theory of Culture and Methodology of Cultural Studies] (Warszawa-Poznań: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1982), 9–13.

28 Andrzej Leder, *Prześniona rewolucja: Ćwiczenia z logiki historycznej* [Sleepwalking the Revolution. An Exercise in Historical Logic] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2014).

and continues to allow, an escape from political engagement. As a language of science, it was meant to be a higher, better, safe, and politically neutral language. In reality, it turned out to be a detachment from leftist thinking and expression. A particular example of self-censorship, or so-called dispersed censorship, in Poland is the offense of religious feelings, which has been occurring regularly since the 1960s when the Catholic Church became the second most influential player after the Party.[29] The signing of the Concordat between Poland and the Holy See in 1993 made the offense of religious feelings a legal category.[30] There are countless examples of censorship of art or critical texts due to the offense of religious feelings. This phenomenon has undoubtedly also contributed to the strengthening of the factographic-object approach in Polish history.

The hesitation among scholars to tackle these and related issues is, without a doubt, a reflection of the deep politicization of historical discourse, leading to the perception of academic debate as inherently partisan. Precisely for this reason, since the 1970s, Polish art historians gravitated towards a study of formalism and iconology, thereby reinforcing the myth of the intelligentsia's apolitical posture and perpetuating the idea of art history as an objective, detached academic field.

However, an interesting and telling consequence of avoiding discussions on critical methodologies in art and engagement in debates related to historiosophy and art history's historiography includes: 1) a lack of discussion about the art canon, aside from the painstaking efforts to restore the memory of distinguished artists; 2) the absence of a permanent, museum presentation of Polish art post-1945 that would reevaluate the established canon; 3) the lack of textbook materials dedicated to Polish art comparable, for instance, to publications such as *History of Estonian Art*, which critically approach both the legacy of art created under state patronage during Soviet times and the so-called unofficial art; 4) a lack of interest in the heritage of Polish Marxist thought on art, which developed remarkably well thanks to figures such as Helena Blum, Elżbieta Grabska, Juliusz Starzyński, Mieczysław Wallis, and Aleksander Wallis.

The aforementioned paradigm of Polish art history also imposes a particular approach to research on art from the first half of the 1950s, when the centrally imposed doctrine of socialist realism dominated. Discussions on this topic are rather rare, and if they do occur, they often involve ridiculing realism as a style and the themes tackled by artists and critics. Placing art history within an anti-communist narrative forces a clear critique of the attitudes of artists, art historians, and critics engaged in socialist realism, or places them in the realm of dissent, potentially outside the historical and political context. This leads to a situation where dissenting themes or the escape towards Polish avant-garde are highlighted, while those that actually dominated the discourse of that period are excluded, such as improvements in the lives of workers, rural electrification, the dissemination of knowledge about hygiene, or the fight against illiteracy. Interestingly, despite the growing interest in postcolonial theories, there is no reflection on Poland's strong military involvement in the wars in Korea and Vietnam at that time. A notable example is the series of exhibitions and accompanying events that have taken place in recent years, such as *A New Beginning: Modernism in the Second Polish Republic* at the

29 Marcin Kościelniak, "Kościół-Partia-teatr: Cenzura rozproszona w PRL" [Church–Party–Theater: Diffuse Censorship in the Polish People's Republic], *Pamiętnik teatralny* 72, nr. 4 (2023): 139–163, https://ruj.uj.edu.pl/server/api/core/bitstreams/020be6cd-a795-40ad-9861-72315b4663e2/content.

30 Jakub Dąbrowski, "Art as a Feature of the Prohibited Act," in *Censorship in Polish Art After 1989: Art, Law, Politics*, ed. Jakub Dąbrowski & Anna Demenko, trans. Łukasz Mojsak & Aleksandra Sobczak (Oakville, ON: Mosaic Press, 2019), https://www.google.pl/books/edition/Censorship_in_Polish_Art_After_1989/GVQEEAAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&pg=PT10&printsec=frontcover.

National Museum in Krakow, *Henryk Streng/ Marek Włodarski and Jewish-Polish Modernism* at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, and *Cold Revolution: Central and Eastern European Societies in Times of Socialist Realism, 1948–1959* at the National Gallery of Art Zachęta. These exhibitions reinforce the concept of the clash between two universalist doctrines: socialist realism and abstract modernism. Today, this translates into a reluctance to engage with these critical perspectives, often perceived as aligning too closely with past regime ideologies.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the exploration of Polish art historiography reveals a deeply entrenched network of political, cultural, and academic influences that have molded the discipline's development and discourse over the years. This field has been shaped under the substantial weight of a conservative belief system, further compounded by ecclesiastical censorship and a politicized academic environment. Such influences have not only stifled the introduction and acceptance of critical methodologies but have also kept these important perspectives peripheral within the mainstream art historical discourse in Poland.

The reluctance to engage with and integrate critical perspectives – such as feminism, anti-colonialism, and class consciousness – highlights a broader hesitance within the field to challenge and redefine traditional narratives that have long been dominated by a relatively homogeneous intellectual elite. This elite has historically shaped the narrative to reflect its own cultural codes, political beliefs, and social standings, often overlooking or deliberately omitting the diverse and dynamic elements of Polish art history. Moreover, the perception of academic debate as inherently partisan due to the politicization of historical discourse has only served to reinforce these barriers, discouraging open intellectual exploration and the questioning of established orthodoxies.

As we move forward, it is imperative for the future of Polish art historiography to transcend its historical limitations by adopting a more inclusive and critically engaged approach. This shift would involve a significant reevaluation of the contributions of historically marginalized groups and perspectives, thereby enriching the discourse. It also calls for the cultivation of an academic environment that not only tolerates but encourages robust debate, the challenging of long-standing views, and the integration of previously sidelined methodologies.

Expanding the scope of interests and research in Polish art history, for example, provides the opportunity to examine art that has previously been overlooked and to analyze the mechanisms of exclusion and omission of certain themes or artists. This includes undertaking research into the legacy of Marxist thought on art and exploring the institutional, political, and social conditions of the discipline. Additionally, it would enable us to explore the role of institutions in shaping artistic discourse and art history, for example, by employing methods such as the biography of institutions. It is also important to examine and analyze the methodologies used in writing socialist art history, especially in the 1950s, and to investigate the patterns upon which it was based – patterns not necessarily derived from Moscow but often borrowed from Paris and, most importantly, rooted in the works of Polish Marxists and Marxist art historians from the 1930s. Such studies have yet to be undertaken.

Furthermore, this expansion would enable broader studies of art objects that did not fit into the previously described paradigm of modernity, progress, and avant-gardism. For instance, it would allow for new interpretations of exhibitions such as the so-called Art of the Youth from Socialist Countries, which took place in galleries and art museums. This approach also allows us to consider artists who did not align with the modernity paradigm and thus remained in the

margins of art historical interest. At the time, their works were catalogued as ethnographic objects even at exhibitions of contemporary art and were described as ethnographic, and to this day they remain largely unexamined. Incorporating these works would not only expand our understanding of 20th-century art but also include in the discourse the works of artists from Polish ethnic minorities such as the Roma, Armenians, Tatars, and others. Their art is still not recognized within the conventional category of art history and is usually exhibited in ethnographic museums rather than contemporary art venues, remaining outside the interest of the discipline.

By embracing these changes, Polish art history can better capture the rich tapestry of its national cultural heritage. It can transform into a discipline that not only acknowledges its past biases but actively works to rectify them, thus offering a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of both past and present artistic expressions. This evolution is crucial not only for the academic field but also for the broader cultural landscape of Poland, as it seeks to navigate its complex historical narratives and their implications for contemporary society.

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Overcoming Mutual Estrangement?

An Art-Historical and Media-Archeological Approach to Comics

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Despite their relevance in art history, comics have been largely overlooked in the research field. This article builds on recent scholarship that has addressed their historical marginalization in the field by focusing on Jean Dytar's graphic novel *#J'Accuse...!* (2021). The graphic novel revisits the Dreyfus Affair, a pivotal event in nineteenth-century France that marked the rise of mass media by generating an unprecedented media coverage. Drawing from art history and media archaeology, the article explores how Dytar's narrative intertwines past and present to propose a graphic theory of media and examine the notion of "historical event."

Keywords: *Comics, art history, historical event, mass media culture, print culture, the Dreyfus Affair*

Introduction

In 2008, art historian Katherine Roeder published an article titled "Looking High and Low at Comic Art," offering insights that remain relevant despite the ongoing dynamism of comic studies.[1] She recognized that comics have acquired legitimacy and represent a flourishing segment in the publishing markets of the United States, Europe, and Japan, and sought to understand art historians' lack of interest in the medium. Roeder noted some exceptions, highlighting figures like art historian David Kunzle, who worked with Ernst Gombrich at the Warburg Institute, and cartoonist and comics critic Robert C. Harvey, who both used from the 1960s onwards art historical approaches to analyze comics.[2] Dan Nadel[3] also contributed to this discourse, as did Scott Bukatman[4] and Bart Beaty, who in his book *Comics versus Art* questioned why comics were excluded from art history despite their increased presence in the institutions that shape contemporary art practice (galleries, museums, etc.).[5] Similarly, art historian Kim Munson recently analyzed the relationship between comics and museums.[6] Roeder also mentioned several important museum exhibitions that contributed to the recognition of comics within art history, such as *Comics and Abstraction*, held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2007. However, this exhibition did not focus on comics *per se* but rather on visual artists who used the language of comics for their paintings and installations. In France, starting from the 1960s and 1970s, Claude Moliterni, Gérard Blanchard, and Pierre Couperie mobilized art history to establish an artistic canon for comics, seeking to legitimize the medium by distinguishing them from childhood production and connecting them to "high art." Blanchard, in particular, aimed to provide comics with prestigious ancestors, tracing a genealogy anchored in Lascaux's parietal art, the Trajan column, and the Bayeux tapestry.[7] Couperie and Moliterni were the two specialists behind the pioneering *Bande dessinée et Figuration narrative* exhibition held at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris in 1967.[8]

Acknowledging these seminal yet infrequent efforts, English comics scholars Maggie Gray and Ian Horton, both trained as art historians, have recently published two volumes on comics and art history, filling a gap in current research and charting stimulating new directions. *Seeing Comics through Art History*[9] brings together contributions from authors who employ art historical methodologies to analyze comics,

1 Katherine Roeder, "Looking High and Low at Comic Art," *American Art* 22, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 2–9.

2 Robert C. Harvey, *The Art of Comic Book, An Aesthetic History* (Jackson: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 1994).

3 Dan Nadel, *Art Out of Time, Unknown Comics Visionaries, 1900–1969* (New York: Abrams, 2006).

4 Scott Bukatman, *The Poetics of Slumberland: Animated Spirits and the Animating Spirit* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2012); Scott Bukatman, *Hellboy's World: Comics and Monsters on the Margins*, 1st ed. (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1989394.

5 Bart Beaty, *Comics Versus Art* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 2012.

6 Kim A. Munson, ed., *Comic Art in Museums* (Jackson: online edn., Mississippi Scholarship Online, 2020), https://doi.org/10.14325/mississippi/9781496828118.001.0001

7 Gérard Blanchard, *La Bande dessinée: Histoire des histoires en images de la préhistoire à nos jours* (Paris: Marabout, 1969).

8 Pierre Couperie & Claude Moliterni, ed., *Bande dessinée et Figuration narrative*, ex. cat. (Paris: Musée des Arts décoratifs, 1967). Interestingly, some scholars keep trying to find ancestors to comics, like Bruce Mutard, who boldly argues in a drawn essay that Giotto is the father of Western comics, following in the footsteps of David Carrier, who posited in *The Aesthetics of Comics* "that at the time of Giotto, all of the visual technology required for making comics was present". Bruce Mutard, "From Giotto to Drnaso: The Common Well of Pictorial Schema in 'High' Art and 'Low' Comics," in *Seeing Comics Through Art History*, ed. Maggie Gray & Ian Horton (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), 269–288.

9 Maggie Gray & Ian Horton, ed., *Seeing Comics Through Art History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023).

while *Art History for Comics*[10] explores how art historians have approached printed visual culture and comics since the twentieth century, outlining new perspectives for the study of comics through various case studies. Part of my goal in this article is to build upon their conclusions.

This article focuses on the historical graphic novel *#J'Accuse…!* (2021) by French author Jean Dytar (b. 1984), whose narratives draw upon his extensive expertise in art history, visual culture, and comics graphic economy. My objective is to analyze how Jean Dytar, through his narration of the Dreyfus Affair – a significant historical episode – explores the relationship between media, the construction of events, and public opinion across the past and present. In so doing, he uses graphic techniques to theorize his own comic practice and the way images operate, which is a particularly interesting aspect of his work. To analyze it, I will use a methodology that combines iconology, visual studies, media archeology, and comics studies. This hybrid approach is necessary to study this rich and complex graphic novel, which is itself part of an equally hybrid comics production. Since both media archeology and art history consider artifacts in their physicality,[11] they will allow me to address the materiality of Dytar's book, from its external presentation that reveals part of the narrative to its overall design and layout.

I will first analyze how Dytar reinterprets the media coverage of the Dreyfus Affair using an approach informed by media archeology. In the second section, I will focus on Dytar's attempt to build a graphic theory on the notion of *historical event*. I will therefore address the role of media in shaping historical events, and more specifically the Dreyfus Affair, and its lasting impact over time. In the final section I will employ methodologies from art history and visual studies to examine how Dytar draws inspiration from existing visual sources related to the Dreyfus Affair, particularly nineteenth-century engravings and photographs, while elaborating on the functions and effects of these images.

Understanding the Media Coverage of the Dreyfus Affair Through Comics

The ambitious 312-page comic book *#J'Accuse…!* was released by the major comics publisher Delcourt in 2021. The story focuses on a well-known episode of French history, the Dreyfus Affair, which took place between 1894 and 1906. In 1894, Alfred Dreyfus, a brilliant Jewish captain, was accused of having sold French military intelligence to the Germans. This accusation arose in a climate of widespread suspicion and strong antisemitism following France's defeat against Germany in 1871. After many struggles, Dreyfus was eventually declared innocent and reinstated in the army, although not at his original rank. This event occurred during a paradigm shift in the press, whose economic and social influence grew to unprecedented levels at the end of the nineteenth century. Fueled by technological advancements, the press rapidly evolved from an artisanal model to mass media.[12] In January 1895, the anti-Dreyfus *Le Petit Journal* published

10 Maggie Gray & Ian Horton, eds., *Art History for Comics: Past, Present and Potential Futures* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023). The first part of the book traces the history of the relationships between art history and comics studies in a more extensive way than I can do here (11–53).

11 Arianna Esposito & Delphine Morana Burlot, eds., "Matières, matérialités, making," *Histoire de l'Art*, n. 93. Paris: Apahau, 2024.

12 Dean De La Motte & Jeannene Przyblyski, eds., *Making the News: Modernity & The Mass Press in Nineteenth-Century France* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999). On this subject, see also Dominique Kalifa, et al., eds., *La civilisation du journal. Histoire culturelle et littéraire de la presse française au XIXe* siècle (Paris: Nouveau Monde éditions, 2011). About the specific relationship between comics and the press, see Alexis Lévrier & Guillaume Pinson, *Presse et bande dessinée, une aventure sans fin* (Bruxelles: Les Impressions Nouvelles, 2021).

the emblematic image of Captain Dreyfus being expelled from the army, a reference point in Dytar's work.[13] At the time, the journal had a circulation of around 2 million copies a day.[14] The Dreyfus Affair was the first event to receive such extensive media coverage and to deeply divide society.[15] Dytar's *#J'Accuse…!* can be described as a historian's comic. It is based on a writer-reader contract that commits to historical accuracy, drawing on primary visual and textual sources, secondary bibliography, and employing specific comics techniques to present the event as authentically as possible.[16] Nevertheless, Dytar's *#J'Accuse…!* is not an academic historical study. Instead, he uses the creative tools of a comics author to narrate history, employing techniques such as anachronism or pastiche, for example, to establish correspondences draw parallels or highlight differences between past and present cultural practices.

The format of the book itself is unique: a black-and-white volume printed on thick recycled paper, packaged in a rigid cardboard box, which we will return to later. Rather than beginning *in medias res,* Dytar uses visual and literary threshold effects, echoing Gérard Genette's famous paratext theory.[17] Upon opening the book, the reader is greeted by a series of introductory pages that mimic a computer screen. First, a desktop appears with a folder labeled "Jean Dytar". A manicula – a hand-shaped typographical symbol already in use in medieval manuscripts to draw attention – points to it, like the cursor when hovering over a hypertext link on a computer. Inside the folder, the reader finds a sub-folder containing all of Dytar's books and opens the file *#J'Accuse... !*. At this point, the first page of the narrative appears: the front page of an online newspaper called "Hourra" (a reference to the search engine Yahoo). The reader is then prompted to "click" on an article, again guided by a manicula. This article introduces the beginnings of the Dreyfus affair, with Alfred Dreyfus's arrest recounted by his brother, Mathieu Dreyfus, in a pseudo-filmed interview. As the narrative progresses, the reader realizes the level of complexity of Dytar's approach, which requires a high level of attention and comics reading skills. To retrace the Dreyfus Affair, Dytar studied a substantial amount of written and visual materials of the time. He selected and incorporated newspaper articles, memoirs, trial reports, and correspondence without altering or adding a single word. Each page features an imitation of a URL bar at the top, indicating the source of the quoted text. Through this method, Dytar creates a polyphonic graphic narrative entirely composed of texts written by key actors of the Dreyfus Affair. The story is told through the perspective of first-hand witnesses, like Mathieu Dreyfus (who published his account in 1978), and through the media lens of the time.

Dytar further complicates his project by setting the nineteenth-century cultural and media production within the framework of twenty-first-century "new media," such as Internet and TV, using anachronisms. As a result, Émile Zola, author of the famous open letter *J'Accuse...!* (1989), which gave Dytar's book its title, is depicted strolling around Rome taking selfies and posting them on X/Twitter. Meanwhile, Mathieu Dreyfus sends text messages, experts discuss the Dreyfus Affair on talk-shows, and the politician Georges Clemenceau films himself for a YouTube video. These modern media elements are filtered through the visual culture and semiotic language of the end of the nineteenth century, drawing from press, phonograph, photography, print,

13 Jean Dytar, *#J'Accuse...!* (Paris: Delcourt, 2021), 31.

14 Christophe Charle, *Le siècle de la presse (1830–1939)* (Paris: Seuil, L'univers historique, 2004).

15 Philippe Oriol, *Histoire de l'affaire Dreyfus de 1894 à nos jours*, 2 vols (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2014).

16 Pascal Ory, "Historique ou historienne?" in *L'histoire... par la bande. Bande dessinée, Histoire et pédagogie,* Odette Mitterrand & Gilles Ciment, eds. (Paris: Syros, 1993), 93–96.

17 Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation,* trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

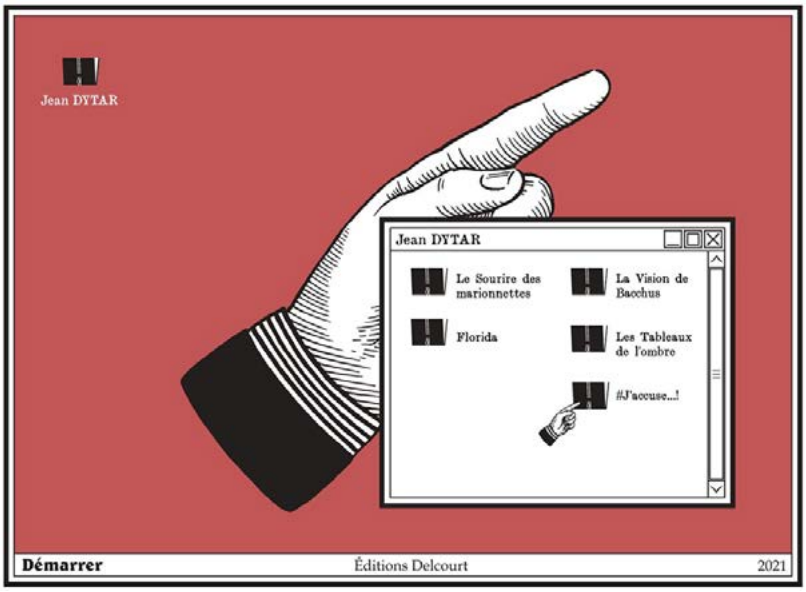

Image 1. Dytar, Jean. *#J'Accuse...!* Paris: Éditions Delcourt, coll. Mirages, 2021. Image source: Jean Dytar's personal website, all rights reserved. https://www.jeandytar.com/jaccuse/genese-du-projet/

Image 2. A page from Jean Dytar's book *#J'Accuse...!*. Paris: Éditions Delcourt, coll. Mirages, 2021, n. p. Image: Éditions Delcourt, 2021 – Dytar, all rights reserved.

and painting. Dytar adapts pictograms and standards of style used by the press of the time. For example, the YouTube sound icon is reimagined as a stylized phonograph, while Twitter/X's logo becomes an engraved nightingale singing on a branch. At the same time, all characters wear period-appropriate late nineteenth-century clothes and hairstyles, and the story unfolds in environments true to the era – train stations with locomotives, with typical bourgeois interiors, and streets filled with horse-drawn carriages. Even in the talk-show scenes, characters sit in Louis-Philippe style armchairs, a popular design of the time. From this point of view, Dytar's comic is a creative illustration of what media archeology is, an approach intrinsically connected to visual studies and art history. Media critic Geert Lovink describes media archeology as "a hermeneutic reading of the 'new' against the grain of the past, rather than telling of the histories of technologies from past to present." [18] As a result, Dytar navigates both past and present

18 Geert Lovink, *My First Recession: Critical Internet Cultures in Transition* (Rotterdam: Nai Publishers, 2004), 11.

Image 3. A page from Jean Dytar's book *#J'Accuse...!*. Paris: Éditions Delcourt, coll. Mirages, 2021, 1. Image: Éditions Delcourt, 2021 – Dytar, all rights reserved.

media landscapes, reflecting on their uses and evolutions. Through this lens, the "new" contemporary modes of communication are viewed "against the grain" of past forms, while the older modes appear in their contextual and historical specificity. This interplay highlights the friction between the two eras, using the past to better understand the present.

In so doing, Dytar artistically embodies the aim of media archeology as articulated by Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka:

> Identifying ways in which media culture relies on the already known is just as essential as determining how it embodies and promotes the never before seen. […] The new is "dressed up" in formulas that may be hundreds of years old, while the old provide "molds" for cultural innovations and reorientations.[19]

Dytar's work effectively identifies these dynamics through his exploration of effects and possibilities of intermediality,[20] which encompasses "all the phenomenon occurring between media, at their crossing." He specifically engages with one form of intermediality, the "media combination, which emphasizes the semiotic hybridization

19 Erkki Huhtamo & Jussi Parikka, *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 14.

20 Irina O. Rajewsky, "Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation: A Literary Perspective on Intermediality," *Intermédialités/Intermediality* no. 6 (2005): 43–64, https://doi.org/10.7202/1005505ar

Image 4. A page from Jean Dytar's book *#J'Accuse...!* Paris: Éditions Delcourt, coll. Mirages, 2021, 205. Image: Éditions Delcourt, 2021 – Dytar, all rights reserved.

of at least two medial forms."[21] Dytar uses the language of comics to blend various media, such as television, Internet video platforms, the press, and social networks – all of which are regarded as means of expressing both individual and public opinion. This process adds depth to his creative reflection on media, as he transposes printed signs of the past into the modern medium of comics. By doing so, he uses the full range of comic-book techniques to "reactivate" historical words and images, notably through visual elements such as speech bubbles that quote texts published in the nineteenth century. In this way, Dytar traces the shared dynamics between textual, visual, and oral practices in public discourse. His work goes beyond a mere playful exercise, offering a graphic demonstration of how some features of public expression – and even some discourses – persist across time.

Moreover, Dytar's reflection on media and history is evident in the materiality of his book. Like a media archeologist, he "rummages textual, visual, and auditory archives as collections of artifacts, emphasizing both the discursive and the material manifestations of culture."[22] This connection between discourse and materiality is another important characteristic of Dytar's graphic novels, and an often-neglected aspect

21 Elsa Caboche & Désirée Lorenz, ed., *La bande dessinée à la croisée des médias* (Tours, Rennes: Presses Universitaires François-Rabelais, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, Iconotextes, 2015), 9–10. Translated by the author.

22 Huhtamo & Parikka, *Media Archaeology*, 3.

in comics studies, as noted by comics scholar Ian Hague and historians Sylvain Lesage and Bounthavy Suvilay.[23] *#J'Accuse…!* is presented as a book enclosed in a cardboard box that blends the design of a typewriter keyboard with that of a computer pad. This tactile and visual experience has been carefully crafted by Dytar, in close collaboration with his publisher, Delcourt:

> I had a book-computer-journal object in my mind from the start. For the paper, I wanted something similar to a newspaper in color and texture – although newspapers have a finer, smoother paper than the one we finally chose. The paper had to be thick enough to withstand full patches of black without transparency. Once we had decided on the number of pages and paper, Delcourt's fabrication department produced two mock-ups of the box set, with variations, as well as a bound book in blank pages. This allowed us to validate our choices by handling the object. I wanted it to be warm in its material form and typography, in contrast to the hybrid dimension of a digital interface. [...] As much as possible, I like to go to the printer to validate the colorimetric settings. I am also involved in the graphic layout, in dialogue with the graphic designers at Trait pour trait, the structure working for Delcourt.[24]

This meticulous presentation shows Dytar's interest in both the materiality of printed paper and the virtuality of digital communication practices.[25] His narrative offers a compelling method of visualizing contemporary history, by intertwining the past with the present and vice versa. In so doing, Dytar engages with what historian François Hartog has called "regimes of historicity",[26] crafting a narrative where the past and present continuously inform each other. In his book, Dytar incorporates a wide range of subjective filters, merging multiple viewpoints to build his story – though notably excluding Alfred Dreyfus's own perspective, which is shaped through the opinions of others.[27] Through this approach, Dytar examines the relation between truth and narrative at the core of the Dreyfus Affair, where French justice and public opinion were deeply influenced by antisemitic prejudice, and allows for a reflection on how today's authors and historians can produce narratives as close as possible to historical "truth" or plausibility.

23 Ian Hague, *Comics and the Senses: A Multisensory Approach to Comics and Graphic Novels* (London: Routledge, 2014); Bounthavy Suvilay & Sylvain Lesage, "Introduction thématique: pour un tournant matériel des études sur la bande dessinée," Comicalités, online, 2019.http://journals.openedition.org/comicalites/3692

24 Emails exchanged in March 2024. Translated by the author.

25 Dytar and Delcourt also added a layer to this work on virtuality and materiality: Delcourt developed an augmented reality app that the reader could download and use on Dytar's book. Readers can therefore hover their phone over certain pages of the book (indicated by a typographical motif) and access the digitized version of the original article or book quoted by Dytar. For example, scanning the excerpt from Zola's article *J'accuse...!* in Dytar's story sends readers to the original article digitized by the Bibliothèque nationale de France on its Gallica website. Thus, this app makes the most of the extensive documentation work carried out by the author and extends the hybridization of this "book-computer-journal."

26 François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time*, trans. Saskia Brown (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

27 Alfred Dreyfus was a discreet man. Philippe Oriol, historian specialized in the Dreyfus Affair, has edited his personal writings: Dreyfus, Alfred, *Carnets, 1899–1907 (Après le procès de Rennes)*. Critical edition by Philippe Oriol. Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1998. Dreyfus also exchanged dozens of passionate letters with his wife, Lucie Dreyfus, published as well: Alfred and Lucie Dreyfus, 'Écris-moi *souvent, écris-moi longuement... ': correspondance de l'île du Diable*. Edition by Vincent Duclert, foreword by Michelle Perrot (Paris: Mille et une nuits, 2005).

Building a Graphic Theory of the Historical Event

All the subjectivities patchworked in Dytar's narrative weave together the "monster event" that was the Dreyfus Affair, a notion described by historian Pierre Nora in his seminal article *L'événement monstre*. Nora has shown that "the mass media now have a monopoly on history [...]. In our contemporary societies, it is through them and them alone that the event strikes us. [They are] the very condition of [history's] existence," because "for there to be an event, it must be known".[28] Even though this article was written in 1972 and was inspired by the May 1968 events in France, it is more relevant than ever: media shape our sense of history, both as a process that turns the present into a moment whose importance endures once passed, and as a narrative of the past whose surviving sources bear witness to. Nora had foreseen how social networks act as a sounding board, supposedly connecting people and facilitating communications, but also amplifying emotions and entrenching moral and political positions. Dytar demonstrates how this phenomenon was already present with the rise of the new mass media regime of the late nineteenth century, as well as the widespread antisemitic discourse that remains active today.

Through his depiction of the Affair, Dytar develops a diachronic graphic theory of media and the "event," seeing it as a mediatic lens that shapes our perception of reality and the contours of society. In so doing, he follows in the footsteps of media theorist Marshall McLuhan, who asserted that "the medium is the message": while a medium conveys a message, the frame of the medium itself also carries a discourse, with each medium having unique effects on its audience.[29] Information is not received in the same way across different media. Furthermore, McLuhan argues that the *content* of any medium is always another medium. As we have seen, Dytar combines (audio)visual media and discourses of the nineteenth and the twenty-first centuries, hybridizing them graphically through the comics form and its codes. Consequently, the author creates a new media ecosystem that is both content and message, using a visual language that also reflects on his own drawing practice and on the possibilities of comics as an ontologically polymorphic and intermedial language capable of expressing its own theory. Therefore, three levels of discourse operate in Dytar's narrative: one at the diegetic level (the story of Alfred Dreyfus), and two at the metadiegetic level, framing the diegesis (both the implicit discourses about media and public opinion, and about the language of comics itself). As a result, Dytar uses a specific popular medium to reflect on mass media in general. McLuhan, along with comics theorists like Thierry Groensteen and Thierry Smolderen[30] included comics in the modern media ecosystem that shapes our sense of reality and belonging. Dytar's book is an expression of this analysis: he participates in this ecosystem but simultaneously distances himself from it to better understand its characteristics, influence, and evolutions.

Building On the Past: Drawing from Visual Sources of a Historical Event

Dytar's approach to visual sources plays a significant role in his reflection on media, time, and intermediality. The sheer number of images he

28 Pierre Nora, "L'événement monstre," *Communications*, n. 18, 1972, 162–172, here 162. Translated by the author.

29 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 7.

30 Thierry Groensteen, *Système de la bande dessinée* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999); Thierry Groensteen, *La bande dessinée en France à la Belle Époque, 1880–1914* (Bruxelles: Les Impressions Nouvelles, 2022); Thierry Smolderen, *Origins of Comics: From William Hogarth to Winsor McCay.*, trans. Bart Beaty & Nick Nguyen (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014).

referenced made sourcing each one individually a difficult task, as he did with his written material. On his personal website, he explains that he employed various "modes of appropriation [of images], from copying to free inspiration, from transcribing photographic or video images into ink hatchings, sometimes with preparatory phases of photomontages mixing past and contemporary images, and finally interpreted with an ink drawing."[31] These modes of appropriation include: the *Oubapian* constraints of using only black and white, translating forms and shadows into hatchings, and dividing pages into four equal panels.[32] For example, the page depicting Dreyfus's trial in Rennes is a montage of four photographs taken before the trial,[33] which have been redrawn, reframed, and sometimes altered in perspective to enrich the narrative's spatial composition, harmonizing differences of colors, light, and grain through Dytar's drawing process.[34] This process reflects his view of visual sources as time machines, and as such as a framework for expressing and reflecting on time and history, transforming these images into "semiophores," as defined by Krzysztof Pomian[35] A philosopher and historian, and a specialist of museum history, Pomian developed the notion of semiophores to analyze the act of collecting artworks in the modern era. According to his conceptualization, the collector's activity is a semantic operation: by collecting an object, the collector imbues it with a new meaning, turning it into a signifier and a visual representative of the past, removed from its original context and functions. Furthermore, by adding the object to a collection, the collector also transforms the latter into a meaningful structure. In assembling images, Dytar similarly adds new meanings to images (and texts) by transforming them into semiophores – visual markers of history. The notion of semiophore can also be applied to less obvious features, such as the colors in the comic book's narrative: Dytar's choice of black and white – the (non-)colors of the printed press and many period photographs – also serves as a signal of the past. By structuring his narrative around this palette, he adds a historical depth and meaning that would not have been achieved without referencing original photographs. This process of color semantization can also be seen in other history comics with aims similar to Dytar's, such as *Révolution* by Florent Grouazel and Younn Locard (Actes Sud, 2019), which focuses on the French Revolution of 1789. The authors of *Révolution* deliberately avoided the "blue-white-red" color code associated with the French flag – a color palette consubstantial to the imaginary of the Revolution and potentially expected by the readers as a specific historical signal or filter — to create a fresh narrative of these events.[36]

31 https://www.jeandytar.com/jaccuse/sources-les-images/ Translated by the author. This website explains the creative process and comments on specific aspects of the books (sometimes in an approach akin to ekphrasis) and is thus conceived as an extension of the author's work.

32 The OuBaPo ("Ouvroir de bande dessinée potentielle") is the equivalent of the OuLiPo ("Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle"), a literary movement founded in 1960 by poet Raymond Queneau and chemist and mathematician François Le Lionnais. Queneau defined Oulipians as "rats who have to build the labyrinth from which they propose to escape," practicing writing under constraint with the aim of finding new forms of expression. Dytar does not belong to the OuBaPo nor to the OuLiPo but sometimes uses their modes of writing.

33 Most of them can be found on the website of the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire du Judaïsme in Paris, for example this photograph that Dytar used, representing militaries turning their back to Dreyfus on his way to his trial: https://www.mahj.org/fr/decouvrir-collections-betsalel/la-haie-du-deshonneur-alfred-dreyfus-sortant-du-tribunal-4639

34 In some ways, his graphic process is similar to David Vandermeulen's on the graphic novel Fritz Haber, studied by Adrien Genoudet, Dessiner l'histoire. Pour une histoire visuelle, foreword by Pascal Ory (Paris: Éditions Le Manuscrit, Graphein, 2015), 123–140.

35 Krzysztof Pomian, *Collectors and Curiosities: Paris and Venice, 1500–1800*, trans. Elizabeth Wiles-Portier (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990.) I thank Laurent Gerbier for bringing this concept to my attention.

36 Color-code, for instance, widely used during the celebrations of the Bicentenary of the Revolution in 1989.

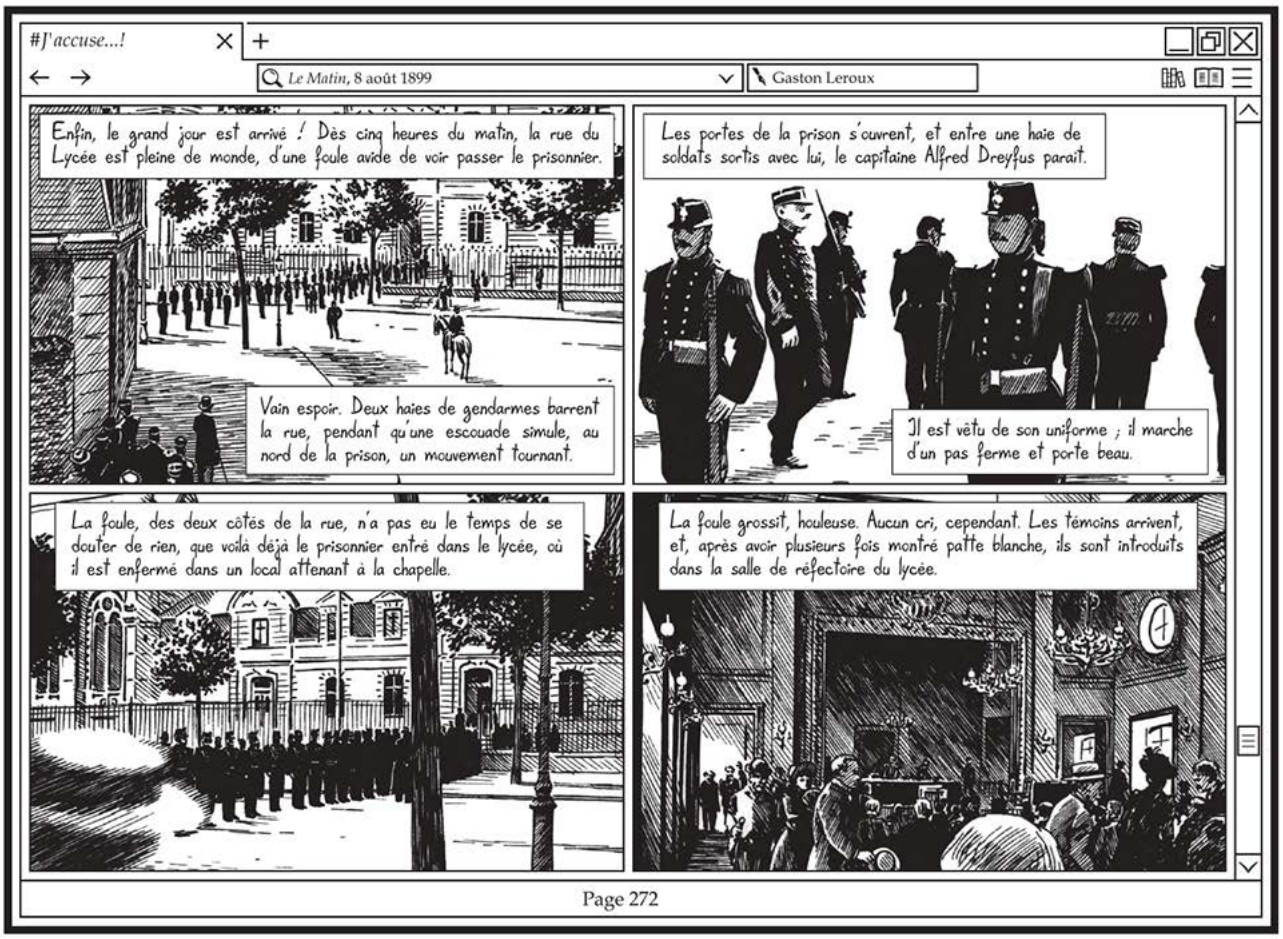

Image 5. A page from Jean Dytar's book *#J'Accuse...!*. Paris: Éditions Delcourt, coll. Mirages, 2021, 272. Image: Éditions Delcourt, 2021 – Dytar, all rights reserved.

Dytar also seeks to restore the original emotional intensity of the images produced during the Dreyfus Affair, an intensity diminished over time as the cultural context faded. Through the process of collecting and graphically reworking these images, he resemantizes them. For instance, he does so in the panels depicting Dreyfus's expulsion from the army – a deeply distressing ordeal for Dreyfus.[37] Throughout the story, Dytar consistently portrays Dreyfus with a fixed, almost anesthetized expression, conveying emotional restraint and the crushing weight of events. This approach recalls art historian Aby Warburg's concept of *pathosformel*, where medial transmission reactivates historical postures of the body, transforming affective energy – e.g., emotional restraint and fixity are transformed into expressions of horror. Warburg's theory is particularly apt here: as Giovanni Careri notes, for Warburg "Pathosformel is the shaping of an existential situation that measures up to the limits of the human condition as conceived in the West. It presents the artistic, textual, or performative figuration of an *ordeal*, and proposes a way of understanding 'destiny', which the Greeks called *pathei matos*: a kind of mourning process extended to the intelligibility of the world."[38] The reference to the pathosformel as presented by

37 Dytar, *#J'Accuse...!*, 28–29.

38 Giovanni Careri, "Aby Warburg: Rituel, *Pathosformel* et Forme Intermédiaire," *L'Homme*, no. 165 (2003): 41–76, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25157044

Image 6. Nineteenth-century photographs used by Jean Dytar. Image: Jean Dytar's personal website, all rights reserved. https://www.jeandytar.com/jaccuse/sources-les-images/

Warburg in his *Atlas Mnemosyne* resonates in Dytar's development of a detailed repertoire of gestures, not only as expressions of emotions but also of spoken discourses. Dytar's characters are constantly depicted in dialogue or engaging the reader-viewer, creating several key body patterns animated by micro-variations within the repetition.[39]

Analyzing Dytar's drawing process from sources, it is important to note that unlike most of his fellow authors, Dytar's overall ambition has not been to develop a distinctive style that readers or even collectors (as the comics art market continues to expand) could identify as easily as, say, Hergé or Enki Bilal.[40] It seems relevant to quote him extensively on this subject:

> I am often told of the "chameleon" aspect of my work, of the metamorphosis, the "reinvention" from one book to the next. Also, sometimes, I am called modest, because I put my own style second to the graphic styles I choose to interact with. As if style equals ego. On the contrary, I sometimes find myself presumptuous at the idea of daring to rub my comics language with graphic forms that I admire so much, such

39 For an exploration of how Warburg's approaches in *Atlas Mnemosyne* can be applied to understanding comics, see Ahmed 2023. Maaheen Ahmed is one of the few scholars to use methods and references of art history in her academic work; see *Monstruous Imaginaries: The Legacy of Romanticism in Comics* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi), 2020.

40 Jacques Dürrenmatt & Benoît Berthou, eds., *Style(s) de (la) bande dessinée* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, Perspectives Comparatistes, no. 84, 2019).

> as Persian miniatures or Italian Renaissance painting, or at the idea of venturing into certain major subjects... I think there is a kind of masks game at play, which would make an identifiable style elusive […]. And yet I have noticed that my books do have continuities which could constitute a style, and that readers seem to identify them. It must lie in the rhythm of my cutting, my narration, in the framing or gestures, but above all, I think, in a certain approach to creation, in the articulation between graphic and narrative choices, the choice of subject, the historical context I place my subjects in, the way I delve into and digest documentation. In short, for me, it would be the overall approach, its coherence perhaps, that would be like a signature. It is worth noting that the only graphic element common to all my books, apart from my signature, is my typography (a digitized handwriting). […] I sometimes feel like I am playing with the weapons of pastiche, but not so much to make people laugh as for the reflexive depth elicited by the game with reference.[41]

Another aspect completes Dytar's own description of his style (in choice and approach of subject, handling of historical documentation, and sequential rhythm): his deep ties with art history. This connection is evident in *Le sourire des marionnettes* (Delcourt, 2009), his first comic book, which draws from Persian medieval miniatures and addresses medieval Islam not as an exotic background but as a subject of its own right – a choice rare enough to merit attention.[42] It is also present in *La Vision de Bacchus* (Delcourt, 2014), centred on the life and oeuvre of Antonello da Messina in Renaissance Italy, and *Florida* (Delcourt, 2018), inspired by the drawings and maps made during the first French settlers' expedition to America's east coast in 1642.

Dytar's perspective on visual productions, from printed materials to paintings, stylistic trends, and cultural contexts, forms the foundation of his stories, both in terms of subjects and graphic approach. His books reflect on the status of images through his appropriation of visual resources, in a graphic process the comics scholar Thierry Smolderen calls polygraphy, which "compound[s] different systems of representation."[43] This concept is particularly appropriate for analyzing the case of *#J'Accuse…!* since polygraphy is a practice that "embrace[s] the whole spectrum of line-drawing illustrations; it drew on all graphic sources, old and new."[44] As Maaheen Ahmed and Benoît Crucifix observe, "Polygraphy is in many ways the life force of comics since it allows the medium to reinvigorate its visual vocabulary by reconfiguring other forms of representation in a playful manner that comics excel at".[45] Among many comics authors, Jean Dytar stands out as a dedicated practitioner of polygraphy, even making it the core of his work.

As a result, Dytar also builds a graphic theory on the functions and effects of the visual on our perceptual frameworks. Art and literature historian W. J. T. Mitchell, a founding figure of visual studies in the United States, has examined this process in his book *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*.[46] Mitchell's aim was to understand the ontology and effects of images (what they are and what they do), and to examine the relationship between the visual and the verbal in a society dominated by images, where the "visual turn" or "iconic turn"

41 Comments exchanged by email in March 2024. Translated by the author.

42 On the topic, see *Le sourire des marionnettes*; Mabboux, Carole, "Être *djinn* à la place du calife: l'Islam médiéval en bande dessinée. L'exemple du *Sourire des Marionnettes* de Jean Dytar" in *Le Moyen Âge en bande dessinée*, ed.Tristan Martin (Paris: Karthala, 2016), 275–299.

43 Smolderen, *Origins of Comics*, 67.

44 Ibid. 98.

45 Ahmed & Crucifix, *Comics Memory*, 6.

46 Mitchell, W. J. T., *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 35–82.

has prevailed.[47] He elaborated the concepts of *metapicture* and *hypericon* to describe self-referential images – pictures that refer to and contemplate their own condition of existence.[48] To illustrate his elaboration, Mitchell uses ambiguous or "bistable" images, like the famous duck-rabbit, an engraving published in the satirical journal *Fliegende Blätter* (1892),[49] and the illustration "My wife and my mother-in-law" by W. E. Hill (1915).[50] These are twofold images, both of which are difficult to interpret and resistant to single readings. For Mitchell, these images are continually questioning their own nature, action, and meanings. Originally conceived for amusement and entertainment, these images are also able to "move across the boundaries of popular and professional discourses […]. The metapicture is a piece of moveable cultural apparatus, one which may serve a marginal role as illustrative device or a central role as a kind of summary image, what I have called a 'hypericon', that encapsulates an entire episteme, a theory of knowledge."[51] In light of the previous analysis of Dytar's work on images and media, *#J'Accuse…!* qualifies both as metapicture and hypericon, and even extends these concepts by creating a "hypericonotext," a verbal and visual assemblage that simultaneously reflects on its own creation, conditions of existence, and on other images and iconotexts.[52]

47 Bernd Stiegler, "'Iconic Turn' et réflexion sociétale: Introduction." *Trivium*, No. 1 (2008): 5–11. http://journals.openedition.org/trivium/308

48 In doing so, Mitchell emancipates from traditional art history to posit the ability of images to theorize, therefore, to act as a political and potentially subversive force. Stiegler, "Iconic Turn," 6.

49 Anonymous, *Zeitschrift Fliegende Blätter*, n. 2465, 1892, p. 145. The journal has been digitized by the Universitätsbibliothek of Heidelberg: https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/fb97/0147/image,info

50 W. E. Hill, *My wife and my mother-in-law. They are both in this picture – find them / W.E.H. 15*, 6 Nov. 1915. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington.

51 Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, 49.

52 Alain Montandon, ed., *Iconotextes* (Paris: Ophrys, 1990).

Conclusion

Jean Dytar's comics narrative allows for telling, exposing, and discussing the Dreyfus Affair as a historical moment emblematic of the rise of mass media and political culture in France. Through a complex framework, it engages with the reader's own references, historical knowledge, and abilities to read comics – this "highly participatory form" that demands strong intellectual and emotional engagement from the reader.[53] Analyzing comics always calls for interdisciplinary approaches, even at the margins, as comic art is a particularly hybrid, complex and even "unruly" visual medium.[54] In this respect, *#J'Accuse… !* is especially demanding. Drawing from art history, visual, and media studies provides a better understanding of the visual economy of such an original comic narrative and the graphic theories it elaborates, especially as the book does not overtly present itself as such (unlike the almost singular example of a drawn theory of comics, *Understanding comics* by Scott McCloud).[55] Instead, it presents itself as a historical narrative that indirectly constitutes a theory of media, events, and images.

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53 McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 165.

54 Bukatman, *Poetics of Slumberland*, 4.

55 McCloud, Scott, *Understanding comics: The Invisible Art* (Northampton, MA: Tundra), 1993.

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Gákti as a Promise

The Multisensory Visuality and Aesthetics of *Duodji* in Ecclesiastical Spaces

Maarit Magga

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Lectio praecursoria: Maarit Magga's dissertation "*Gákti* lupauksena: *Duodjin* moniaistinen visuaalisuus ja estetiikka kirkollisissa tiloissa" was examined at the University of Lapland (Faculty of Art and Design) on the 16th February 2024. The opponent was Professor Maarit Mäkelä (Aalto University) and the custos was Professor Emerita Tuija Hautala-Hirvioja (University of Lapland).
See: **https://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-337-408-9**

Keywords: *duodji, artistic duodji research, christenings, confirmation, multisensory, duodji aesthetics, spirituality, ecclesiastical space, gákti structure, Sámi dressing tradition, duodji art textiles*

I have examined the essence and manifestation of Sámi *duodji* (Sámi crafts) in my research *Gákti lupauksena – Duodjin moniaistinen visuaalisuus ja estetiikka kirkollisissa tiloissa* ("*Gákti* as a Promise – The Multisensory Visuality and Aesthetics of *Duodji* in Ecclesiastical Spaces").

My research is artistic research on *duodji,* or Sámi crafts, comprised of a theoretical analysis and an artistic production. It contains influences from Indigenous research and emphasises the internal knowledge and competence of Sámi culture. My research contributes to the new kind of conceptualisation taking place in research on *duodji* now that this research is centering on Sámi knowledge[1]. Thus, I wanted the practical experiences of making Sámi crafts to be a central method of producing and understanding information. I have included myself as part of the research process. I have analysed ways of knowing and being through a theoretical model I have developed, as well as gathered material and analysed research results.

I have presented my production, i.e. the visual process of creating, in exhibitions and the printed version of my doctoral thesis. The first two exhibitions have been assessed as part of the thesis. The first exhibition consisted of preparing for Christian family festivities – confirmation and baptism – and the second one of crafting *duodji*-based art textiles for the Hetta Church in Enontekiö. The third collected exhibition was displayed at the Gallery Valo in the Arktikum Science Centre and Museum in Rovaniemi, Finland[2]. In this gallery, I presented experiments with materials, sketches, and the comprehensiveness of *duodji*, engaging, together with younger people, in experimental crafting in a traditional setting of a Sámi tent I called *LaavuStudio* ("Tent Studio").

During the past year, my research has aroused a great deal of interest in the crafting community of my home region, Enontekiö, and indeed, I am convinced that it is both meaningful and needed, especially from the point of view of the community. My interplay with the youngest members of our craft makers' community yields a picture of the meaning and understanding of *duodji* across generations: I hope that the skill of the older carriers of this heritage will be transferred to the younger ones through my research. The know-how of those who are experts in our crafting tradition has strengthened the knowledge basis and perspective of my research. One could say that I have studied my subject at the last moment since as many as half of my informants passed away during my research period.

Over the years, I have become positive that *duodji* carries an exceptional amount of tacit knowledge and that little of this internal knowledge of the community has been documented in written form. Therefore, I have considered it extremely important to examine the knowledge and worldview yielded by *duodji*, and even to apply this way of knowing to academic research. Usually, artistic research requires making art, and the know-how relied upon in this activity is manifested as a special mode of knowing.[3] My research shows the comprehensive nature of *duodji* and the multiple levels and unpredictability of creative activity.[4]

1 Sigga-Marja Magga, "Gákti on the Pulse of Time: The Double Perspective of the Traditional Sámi Dress," in *The Sámi World*, eds. Sanna Valkonen, Áile Aikio, Saara Alakorva & Sigga-Marja Magga (London and New York: Routledge, 2022), 91-92.

2 *Ráidalasas* – Duodjin moniaistinen visuaalisuus. Väitöstutkimuksen taiteellinen osio – Duoji máŋggaáiccat visuálavuohta. Nákkusdutkamuša dáiddalaš oassi. 17.2.–23.3.2024.

3 Anne Sunila, *Ulotteisuus – eletty tilallisuus: Ympäristösidonnainen maalaustaide* (Espoo: Parus Verus, 2019), 8.

4 Saara Jäntti, Riku Laakkonen & Marja-Liisa Honkasalo, "Yhteisö, taide ja tutkimus: keskustelu eettisistä mahdollisuuksista tietämättömyyden tilassa," in *Yhteisötaiteen etiikka: tilaa toiselle, arvoa arvaamattomalle*, eds. Lea Kantonen & Sari Karttunen (Helsinki: Taideyliopiston Teatterikorkeakoulu 2021), 311. http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-353-038-6

Sámi crafting is interwoven with the entire Sámi way of life, manifesting material culture in time, place, and experiences, as the following story highlights:

> As a young girl in Markkajoki, I spent a lot of time with adults. Our mother's uncle Aslak lived close by in his cabin. He was a bachelor who often accompanied me, for example, on skiing trips. I never got to know him as an adult, but there were lots of good stories about him. Maybe the best one was the story about his marriage plans. Great-uncle Aslak had been engaged at least four times, and then he and the fifth bride were about to get married. Uncle Aslak had asked his nieces to make him proper wedding attire, and they had done so. Once again, the wedding was called off. Our mother and her sisters wondered whether the plan to marry really was genuine or whether their uncle had just fooled them into making him new clothes.[5]

I grew up in a time when television was not as common as now, and our social life revolved around telling stories. At some point, I began to reflect on the content and the knowledge provided by our narratives and of course, the details of *duodji*.

In 2019, I studied Textile and Style of Expression to complement my doctoral studies on art at the University of Lapland. During my studies, I created an installation called *Lupaus* ("Promise"), which intertwines Uncle Aslak's story with Sámi man's clothing. To interpret *duodji,* one needs to craft it: one cannot understand it without making and seeing it, living with it and being able to perceive it in its context.

I reproduced Uncle Aslak's Sámi attire, or *gákti*, for my son by using the materials of the 2020s. In doing so, I also revived a decorative design that was on the brink of being lost in my community and family. Uncle Aslak's coat still exists, and my information on it is based on the information I received from my close relatives, especially my mother. I realised that I could get all the necessary information for my research on *duodji* by examining my community's notion of beauty and ways of making crafts. The ways of thinking, beliefs, customs, values, and ties to the land and area that are linked with *duodji* are manifested by my example piece of clothing, Uncle Aslak's *gákti*: it was the task of the women of the family to prepare for family festivities by making the clothes and designing them based on the collective knowledge so that the clothing embodied the family's design traditions and *duodji's* notions of beauty.

Image 1. A renewed *gákti* for my son. Image: Johanna Labba, all rights reserved.

"One must deliver what one promises", says an old Sámi saying. We will never know what

5 Maarit Magga, *Gákti lupauksena: Duodjin moniaistinen visuaalisuus ja estetiikka kirkollisissa tiloissa* (diss., University of Lapland, 2024), 13–14.

Uncle Aslak or his bride promised, but for me, his *gákti* was a promise that allowed me to study *duodji* in my own way. For a Sámi, the *gákti* is not merely a piece of clothing but something that carries special meanings. My "promised *gákti*" is manifested in two ways: as a traditional piece of clothing worn by Uncle Aslak, and, after renewal, as a more artistic reproduction for my son. Both processes of making the attire relate to a narrative that reflects the spiritual dimension of *duodji*. I do not refer to religion here, although my research is of a Christian nature. I use the word "spirituality" to describe the worldview and the philosophy of life *duodji* reflects. My understanding of the earlier generations' way of thinking became clearer when I went looking for moss for a baby's cradle with my aunt Elle:

> Finally, we found a good place and carefully started to pick tufts from a red, thick moss hummock. We didn't take more than we needed but kept all the time in mind that the plant should not be destroyed, and we should not leave any traces of picking moss in the area. Before we left, Aunt Elle advised me to bless the offerings we had taken from the land: "Jesus, bless us, do not infect us. If you are from the day, return to the day. If you are from the water, return to the water. If you are from the soil, return to the soil. If you are from the wind or the cold, go back." In closing, you had to say a blessing in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.[6]

This was a small, common undertaking as such, but it reveals something essential about the Sámi way of thinking, the relation between land and spirituality, and the coexistence of an ancient religion and Christianity.[7] We people should thank nature for its riches. Nature should be respected. We must not take more from nature than we need for ourselves, and we must not leave any traces behind. In everyday life, our views and understanding of life and appropriate behaviour become visible, contributing to the definition of beauty and the essence of *duodji*.[8]

Image 2. Image for the front cover of my dissertation made by Hannu Tikkanen. Image: Hannu Tikkanen, all rights reserved.

In the image used as the cover illustration for my dissertation, the focus is on a man's Sámi

6 Maarit Magga, "*Vásihit báikki – sággon govat muitalit*" (Masterdutkkus, Sámi allaskuvla, 2015), 57.

7 Sanna Valkonen, "Saamelaisen luonnonuskonnon ja lestadiolaisuuden suhteesta," AGON (2014): 16.

8 Päivi Magga, "Defining the Sámi Cultural Environment. New Perspectives for fieldwork," in *The Sámi World*, eds. Sanna Valkonen, Áile Aikio, Saara Alakorva & Sigga-Marja Magga (London and New York: Routledge, 2022), 134; Lovisa Mienna Sjöberg, *Att leva i ständig välsignelse. En studie av sivdnidit som religiös praxis* (Oslo: Universitetet i Oslo, 2018), 122; Mari Teigmo Eira, "Duodji historjjálaččat," in *Duodji Reader. Guoktenuppelot Sámi čállosa duoji birra. Twelve essays on Duodji by Sámi Writers*, doaimm. Harald Gaski & Gunvor Guttorm (Kárášjohka: Sámi allaskuvla & Norwegian Crafts, 2022), 36; Marit Mikkelsdatter Eira Murud, *Dollagáttis. Ved bålet* (Guovdageaidnu: Bárus, 2018), 12.

attire, *gákti*. When making Sámi crafts in practice I realised that it was possible to reflect the essence of *duodji* theoretically, the way I did when dealing with Uncle Aslak's clothing. Thus, I examine the essence of *duodji* through and with the help of *gákti*. *Gákti,* or traditional Sámi clothing, became a theoretical basis and the artistic inspiration for me. I began to see theory as an image that guided me in my research and formed the theoretical foundation I created and called "*Gákti* structure". Thus, the *gákti* structure is my tool for interpretation both theoretically and artistically, and it brings together two ways of knowing, diminishing the unnecessarily drastic differences between theory and practice and between disciplines[9].

The *gákti* structure is based on the design of a man's coat among the families of Jauristunturi Fell, and in terms of details, on the pattern of the 1940s, the period when Uncle Aslak wore the attire. I examine the back of a man's coat, as it tells about the cutting of the piece of clothing and the decorative design, as well as the community's conception of aesthetics. The land in the background affiliates the piece of clothing and the person wearing it to the area, showing that people belong to the land and a community.

The details of this piece of *duodji* represent the understanding of a certain area, community, and kin of what a beautiful and appropriate Sámi handicraft looks like. In my research, *duodji* was a tool for remembering as it is part of the unwritten history of a family and kin. The *gákti* design as a Sámi tradition did not represent just a relic of the past for me but connected me with my late relatives[10]. The design of the *duodji* (a Sámi craft) in the picture is hardly used anymore or has been changed, for time has an impact on the existence and development of a living piece of clothing. In fact, conscious renewal keeps the *duodji*-based culture alive. It is also possible that the younger generations of the craft makers of *duodji* no longer have the same kind of shared view of, for example, the composition and the use of colours as the older craft makers had.

The picture also shows a *ráidalas*, a ladder, that was earlier used when erecting a Sámi tent and covering the tent frame with a tent cloth. Through it, I describe my background, cultural competence, and ability to understand *duodji's* world of ideas. The ladder represents my climb: the way I have experienced and internalised *duodji* when crafting and doing research on it. The ladder was made from a birch with two stems. Thus, it symbolises the fact that my research became divided into two branches: the traditional collective "clothing *duodji*" and the more individual "*duodji* art". The carrying out of both activities lies in Sámi crafts, though their perspectives are different. The ladder lacks the uppermost step because we people are never complete and none of us can ever control everything.

The list of contents and the names of the chapters in my thesis are based on vocabulary dealing with traditional clothing (*gákti*) and concepts referring to Sámi handicraft or crafts (*duodji*). *Gákti* is comprised of various parts, based on which I have shaped and visualised the theoretical part of my research. *Vadjanmálle,* or the cut pattern, reflects the occurrence and making of regional *duodji* on the level of communities. *Hervenmáhttu,* or composition skill, refers to the shared skill and knowledge of the community which is put into practice by individuals. Through this term, I conceptualise my position

9 Harald Gaski & Gunvor Guttorm, "Duodječállosiid mearkkašupmi sámi áddejupmái duojis ja eallimis," in *Duodji Reader. Guoktenuppelot Sámi čállosa duoji birra. Twelve essays on Duodji by Sámi Writers*, doaimm. Harald Gaski & Gunvor Guttorm. (Kárášjohka: Sámi allaskuvla & Norwegian Crafts, 2022), 12; Harald Gaski, "Indigenous Elders' Perspective and Position," *Scandinavian Studies*, Volume 91, Number 1-2, Spring/Summer (2019): 260.

10 Veli-Pekka Lehtola, *Entiset elävät meissä. Saamelaisten omat historiat ja Suomi* (Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2022), 43.

Image 3–5. The decorations on the back in man's gákti (top left) and off-centre decorations in the same attire (right and down). Image: Maarit Magga, all rights reserved.

Image 6. I created *duodji*-based art textiles on the basis of sketches. Image: Nilla-Máhtte Magga, all rights reserved.

in the research. *Hervenmáhttu* connects me with my region, kin and family, revealing to other people where I belong. The shared knowledge contains, for example, information on how many decorative broadcloth strips are used and how they are positioned in a man's coat.

Sealgehearvvat, or the decorations on the back, symbolise the Sámi multisensory visuality and the *duodji*-based aesthetics, which is the basis of my thesis and the starting point of its artistic part. After all, artistic activity – a production – formed the primary research material of my study.

Doareshearvvat, or the off-centre decorations, reflect the starting points of dressing up for family festivities and *duodji*-based textile art, as well as the harnessing of the know-how and skill provided by *duodji*, and their use in different operations. *Guovttebealdilli* (the side decorations of the back part) in a man's clothing reflect two kinds of approaches: the preparing of clothing for family festivities and the making of artistic *duodji*.

Crafting traditional Sámi clothing is a straightforward activity. The body knows what it does, and the hands are used to certain habits of working and crafting.

Although my knowledge of Sámi handicraft was profound, the skill did not want to be expressed verbally. Therefore, I aimed to verbalise and piece together how a garment of Sámi handicraft is created. Hands and eyes are the tools that help visualise the finished piece of *duodji*. Often, Sámi crafts are designed and made among a network of relatives so that children get the opportunity to experience and see pieces of *duodji* at an early

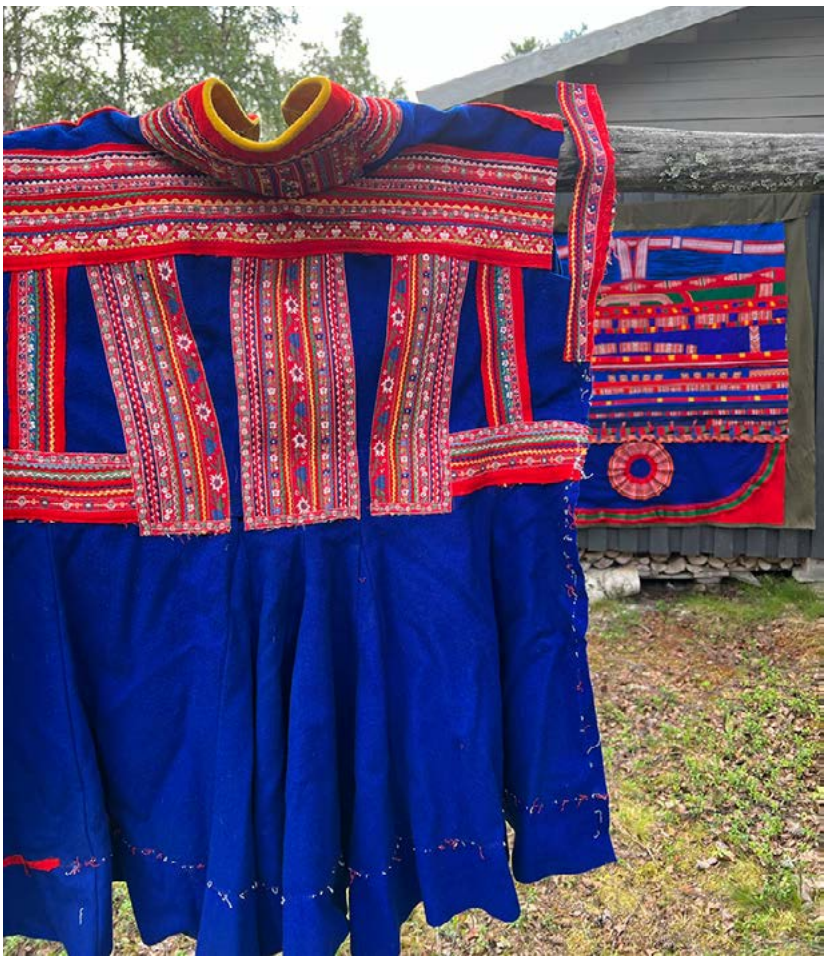

Image 7. Discarded clothes got a new life as a *duodji*-based art textile. Image: Maarit Magga. All rights reserved.

age: their way of thinking about and their eye for *duodji* develop naturally.

The starting point for creating *duodji*-based art lies in collective know-how and its interpretation, just as with the *duodji* that focuses on dressing practices. However, the visual creative process differs from communal *duodji* in terms of planning and experiments with materials and techniques[11]. *Duodji*-based art focuses on individual crafting and interpretation, and the search for a motif and an idea requires intentional experiments, producing solutions that differ from traditional Sámi crafting and can lead to innovative results. For me, the experience and perception of a public space and the realisation of how to use it brought about a multisensory visual interpretation of the work under process. The physical making of the materials for *duodji*-based art textiles turned into a hatchery of thoughts and mental pictures. "It was exciting to see traditional materials in a new way. I had never tried using strips of reindeer leather in the frame for woven items so that the result would be a rug,"[12] nor dyed tendon threads for embroidery. I designed *duodji*-based textile art on paper, and these sketches opened the way to a primary idea, as it was easy to change them and see how the artwork was proceeding and what its needs and requirements would be.

There has been no textile art as such in the Sámi cultural heritage. As I wanted to respect the principles of *duodji* by focusing on material

11 Maarit Mäkelä, *Saveen piirtyviä muistoja. Subjektiivisen luomisprosessin ja sukupuolen representaatioita* (Helsinki: Taideteollinen korkeakoulu, 2003), 20.

12 Maarit Magga, *Gákti lupauksena*, 164.

Image 8. The hemspiral, *holbespirála*, symbolises the phases of the research. Image: Nilla-Máhtte Magga, all rights reserved.

aspects, textile art was the answer to this multisensory nature of *duodji*. I developed the term "*duodji*-based textile art" to describe individual artworks and to participate through this naming in the field of textile art, among the makers of art textiles, as one who shapes, designs and makes *duodji*.

Holbi, or the hem, is the last piece that is attached to a Sámi dress or coat. It offers a concept for the last phase of my research: the artistic summary and the results. The hem is comprised of strips of broadcloth and decorative ribbons. The hem spiral symbolises my artistic research on *duodji* and the phases of the research process: *duodji* moves and occurs in varied environments, spaces, and times. The people of each era have their distinct notions of what kind of Sámi handicraft is beautiful. I have needed all the phases of the hem spiral. The hem may sometimes turn around, and the same also happened to my research: there were times when the overlap of work on the theoretical and the artistic part seemed purposeless, but such moments of despair also proved to be useful.

During the final phase of my research, I worked simultaneously on the theoretical questions and the *duodji*-based art textile *Maasta olen minä tullut* ("From the Earth Have I Come") that was to be situated in a public space. For me, creating with my hands at the same time helped me focus on the core issues of my research, as well as complete it. I realised that I was doing concrete work on the *duodji*-based aesthetics of the Sámi from the Jauristunturi Fell region and living in the heart of multisensory visuality. During my years of research, I reflected on what could be done with clothing that no longer served its intended purpose. Before cutting the garments, I documented them in my archive map in the form of writing and drawings. Altogether, I cut twenty-three dresses or coats into pieces. Mentally, it was not easy to cut the clothes, as I felt I was destroying part of our history. On the other hand, I was aware that I gave new life and new meaning to our heritage, showing respect for those who had passed away. The artwork of my research was displayed publicly for the first time in the exhibition that constitutes the artistic part of my dissertation.

My doctoral thesis begins with a poem in which I describe moments that I have lived when working on a *duodji* – even desperate attempts to give a handicraft a form that would satisfy my eye and enable me to achieve my goals. Sometimes this would take time: I had to wait until my idea was clear and I could embrace it. The words of a poem also reflect how I began to view my research as an image, and how I tried to verbalise my visual idea in the language and dialect of *duodji.*

I leave room for thoughts.

I allow the design to live,

to mature,

until I see it in my soul.

I understand

and make my vision come true.

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