

The International Consortium on Art History

8th International Springtime Academy

Florence, May 31 – June 5, 2010

The Portrait

Call for Papers

It is to this subject that the International Consortium on Art History will dedicate its 8th Springtime Academy, which will be held in Florence from May 31 to June 5, 2010. It will once again permit post-graduate students of diverse specialties and approaches to compare their research, approaches and experiences with each other and with those of more advanced researchers. Past programs are available at <http://www.proartibus.net>. Participation in a Springtime Academy constitutes an essential element in obtaining a certificate recognizing international experience in art historical studies.

Presentation of the Theme

The origins of painting seem to lie in a primal scene, that of a man who recognises his own image as a shadow or reflection on a mirroring surface. The shadow is at the heart of the legendary tale recounted in Pliny's *Historia Naturalis* (XXXV, 151) of the daughter of a Corinthian potter, Butade Sicionio, who, at the moment of parting from her lover, "traced the outline of the shadow of his face cast on the wall by the light of a lantern; her father moulded clay on to this silhouette, thus reproducing the face". While Alberti, in *Della Pittura* (1435-36), has recourse to the mythical figure of Narcissus gazing at his reflection in the fountain "in the same way painting is nothing else but embracing and seizing with art the surface (speculum) of the fountain". In a more empirical fashion, Leonardo reminds us that "The first painting consisted simply of a line which bordered the shadow of a man cast by the sun on a wall" (*Trattato della pittura*, 126).

An ontological statute of the portrait, as the quintessence of painting rather than its primary *genre*, may be substantiated by the Italian etymology of the term (v. *Ritratto* in the volume *Enciclopedia Universale dell'Arte*), from *traho* (draw lines) with its two derivations, *retraho* (*ritratto*, *retrato*) or *protraho* (*portrait*, *Porträt*), both with the underlying meaning of duplicate or copy. Central to the history of painting as mimesis, the portrait is of course recognized as such in Hegel's *Aesthetik* ("All painting tends towards portraiture"), but even nowadays it is correlated to painting by philosophers like Jacques Derrida (*Mémoires d'aveugle, L'autoportrait et autres ruines*, Paris, 2000) or Jean-Luc Nancy (*Le regard du portrait*, Paris, 2000).

In another direction, the interdisciplinary cast of recent art history has privileged the study of the portrait for the almost infinite taxonomic potential that is available and for the complex phenomenology that seems to offer unlimited areas of research. Far from being a simple matter of (even psychological) verisimilitude (G. Simmel, *Die aesthetische Bedeutung des Gesichts*, 1901; B. Croce, *Ritratto e somiglianza*, 1907, in *Problemi di estetica*, Bari, 1923), the practices, the connotations, the displacements of the portrait seem to be retraceable only within the specifically historic contingencies of the appearance of the genre itself, in a context which brings into play the different tensions of its normative canons, of its visual rules and of the social expectations which motivate it and by which it is engendered.

From time immemorial, and until the twentieth century avant-garde, the portrait arbitrates the very definition of painting. This is the main premise of this International Springtime Academy and which will be tackled in the ensuing thematic sections, which, however, are not necessarily restrictive but merely indicative as are the following examples:

1. *The portrait and anthropology*

How can the practice of portraiture contribute to a more general consideration on the anthropological status of the image, or, more specifically, of the work of art? It is possible here, for example, to suggest a series of elements which are equally effective/dynamic in portraiture and which could be the object of interdisciplinary research: the archetypes of the double and of the mask; the exorcism of death and the simulation/simulacrum of presence; the function of memory, or, on the contrary, the incorporation in the image of material pertaining to the referent; and, finally, the dimension of the sacred and of magic.

2. *Genre and the portrait; canons and codes*

Renaissance treatises founded the legitimation of the portrait upon the principle of resemblance, and consequently asserted the implicit inferiority of this genre with respect to the painting of ideas. How and how far has this canon become the object of critical research and revision both from the point of view of theory and from that of practice? What are the roles played by such different factors as the ambiguous function of the mirror, the implications of *decorum*, the difference between physical similarity and moral truth, or, again, the importance of memory techniques, which permit the realization that resemblance is simply artifice complying with a specific semiotic code?

3. *The theories of physiognomy and pathognomy*

What was the impact of the theories of physiognomy on the practice and reception of the portrait? To what extent was the creation of a table of character types able to influence the search for veracity? Nowadays, especially since the adoption of photography, how has the definition of an anonymous type such as the superposed portraits by Francis Galton or the photos by August Sander, been able to negate the concept of individual identity? And again, how far, today, does the portrait come to realize the impossibility of recognizing any identity at all, witness the examples of Francis Bacon, Arnulf Rainer and others? And to what extent can the actual being represented in a portrait determine recognition, if this is not the very existence of a social group?

4. *The portrait and society*

Customers are without any doubt at the basis of the origin of the portrait. In what way did the expectations of the different social classes, in different historical periods, and from different social backgrounds and of different mental development, contribute to the definition of the codes of portraiture? And, again, what were the basic requirements for the practice of portrait painting (the organization of the studio, the interaction between painter and model, the social role of the painter, the significance of the costume, etc.)?

In the contemporary context, what was, or is still the role played by problems of gender and ethnicity in relation to the portrait, and what practices have they instigated (disguise/cross-dressing is one example)?

5. *Typologies*

Following which process has it been possible to establish well-defined typologies of the portrait (and there is a considerable number of these) such as that of the man of power, or of the artist, of the heroic portrait or that of the lover, going on to that of the codified portrait, in which the subject corresponds to the codes of myth or history? For all these types of portrait, currently defined as “role” portraits, what is the difference between identity and identification, between the display of external appearance and the insinuation of details appertaining to a more existential sphere? How, for example, is it possible to interpret the denotative meaning of a set of elements, imparted both by pose and by codified features, directed and recognised by the society to which they belong? What was the reception of these images and the meaning they acquired during their diffusion? And, finally, to what extent may all these elements contribute towards conditioning them?

6. *The Portrait and the “Paragone”*

Is it possible to argue an antagonism between painting and sculpture in the practice of portraiture? And again, what is the relationship between the literary portrait, codified from the Renaissance onwards in the *genre* of *Lives* or of *Viri Illustres*? What is the relationship between biography and portrait? To what extent can the presence of details or allegorical attributes, which are communicated in the portrait, suggest the biography of the character represented?

7. *The Portrait today. The new media*

How has the *genre* of portraiture been discussed from Symbolism to the contemporary world, through the use of the different tools offered by the psychology of perception and psychoanalysis? What are the identification procedures, which have been evinced thanks to these new perspectives, between painter and model? In what way has the *genre* of portraiture been changed, whether by the consciousness of fragmented and impermanent identity, or by the continual interest of avant-garde art for the metalinguistic aspect of painting, which has compromised the importance of the subject?

What is the importance of photography for the portrait, especially when considering certain tendencies of contemporary art, such as performance, *arte povera*, or conceptual art? How much, above all, has the semiotic reading of portraiture been influenced by photography, with the antagonism between its meaning as an icon and its meaning as an index, considering not only the resemblance to but the impression of the referent? Finally, what is the role played by video and recent digital technology, with their deconstruction and manipulation of the gaze?

8. *The self-portrait*

Since the origins of self-portraiture, what are the practices of alienation and the objectifying of the self, in answer to a series of socially codified expectations? What are the variations, or articulations of the self-portrait as *genre* of the portrait of the artist? How much does the self-portrait contribute to the search for identity? And especially, what questions are raised by the case of the feminine self-portrait?

From another linguistic perspective, what is the role of the mirror or the gaze in the construction of a picture?

It could also be possible to ask to what extent the criss-crossing of disciplinary interference has conditioned the practice of contemporary self-portraiture.

The Procedure and the Proposals

Students –doctoral and postdocs- who wish to participate in this Academy are requested to send a single proposal describing their 20-minute talk, as well as a brief c.v. to their national correspondent (see list below) before 20 January 2010. Proposals should not exceed 1800 characters or 300 words and must be written in English, French, German or Italian. They should be submitted as Word Documents and must include the e-mail address of the candidate and the name of the Institution of appartenance. They must also name the specific session or sessions, above outlined, that correspond (s) to their proposal. Candidates will be ranked and participants will be notified of their acceptance. The list of the participants will be forwarded by each national correspondent, in no case later than 10 February 2010, to the Organizing Committee (EDP2010@unifi.it). The final program will be established by the Organizing Committee together with the international panel of Consortium representatives. (Please note that following the acceptance of proposals, participants will be required to send, within two weeks, a *correct* translation of their proposals in a second language of the Consortium to the organizing Committee)

Proposals (Student Respondents)

Students who have already presented two papers at previous Consortium Academies are requested to apply as respondents. This function is also open to other advanced graduate students and junior scholars. Respondents will be responsible for the material covered in each session. Respondents are expected to act as mediators during the discussion period by framing a given session's key issues, posing new questions, or drawing on their own research. Those who wish to take part in this Springtime Academy as respondents should submit a short C.V. inclusive of their experiences and research interests. In their proposals, candidates should name the particular session or sessions in the program in which they would like to take part, making clear how their research interests intersect with the chosen session(s). Proposals should not exceed 1800 characters or 300 words, should be submitted as Word documents and be sent to the national correspondent before 10 January 2010.

Proposals (Consortium Professors)

As in previous years, members of the Consortium who wish to give a paper or chair a session, should make their intentions known to the Florence organisers, by sending a brief proposal to the following address: EDP2010@unifi.it

The Organizing Committee

Maria Grazia Messina (Università di Firenze)

Marco Collareta (Università di Pisa)

The National Correspondents

Canada :

Todd Porterfield (Université de Montreal)

todd.porterfield@umontreal.ca

France :

Anne Lafont (INHA)

anne.lafont@inha.fr

Germany:

Thomas Kirchner (Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main)

kirchner@kunst.uni-frankfurt.de

Michael Zimmermann (Katholische Universität Eichstaett-Ingolstadt)

michael.zimmermann@ku-eichstaett.de

Italy :

Marco Collareta (Università di Pisa)

m.collareta@arte.unipi.it

Maria Grazia Messina (Università di Firenze)

mariagrazia.messina@unifi.it

Switzerland :

Christian Michel (Université de Lausanne)

christian.michel@unil.ch

United Kingdom:

Richard Thomson (Edinburgh University)

r.thomson@ed.ac.uk

United States :

Henri Zerner (Harvard University)

hzerner@fas.harvard.edu

