Art History Before English: Negotiating a European Lingua Franca from Vasari to the Present

International Conference organized by Alessandro Nova in collaboration with Robert Bransan, Marco Mascolo, and Oliver O’Donnell within the framework of the research project “Languages of Art History”

The expansion of art historical scholarship across cultural and linguistic boundaries reveals problems with the inherited vocabularies of the discipline. Today, for better or worse, English has become an ever more prominent common language of academic discourse, art history being no exception, and yet the problems this development poses are not without historical precedent within the European tradition of art writing. Alongside the task of adapting classical concepts to modern usage, scholars have long had to contend with what was arguably the Lingua Franca of art historical discourse in their own time: Italian in the 16th and 17th centuries, French in the 17th and 18th, and German in the 19th and 20th. This conference seeks to leverage this succession of dominant languages in order to shed light on the present assumption of English as a Lingua Franca of art history. In so doing, the conference seeks to evaluate how Italian, French, and German have decisively shaped the discipline, assembling a cache of certain terms, concepts, and modes of thought – often to the exclusion of others – that remain central across a wide variety of languages in the field today.
FRIDAY MARCH 9

PANEL 2 ASSIMILATION AND TRANSFORMATION OF ACADEMIC MODELS
Chair: C. Oliver O’Donnell
09:30 Antiquiguida and Pintura. Concepts Redefined by a Novel Artistic University
Alessandra Russo | Columbia University, New York
10:10 In the Manner of Vasari: Italian Loanwords and Calques in Karel van Mander’s Schilder-Boeck (1604)
Francesca Terranova | Università degli Studi di Roma La Sapienza
10:50 Coffee Break

PANEL 3 IN THE SHADOW OF THE ACADEMY
Chair: Alexander Nagel
11:20 Reading Diderot in America
Michael Fried | Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore
12:00 Historical Genre: Negotiating a Hybrid Concept in and outside of 19th-century France
Stephen Barr | University of Bristol
12:40 Lunch Break

PANEL 4 TRANSLATING AND UNTRANSLATING ART WRITING
Chair: Brigitte Sölch
14:00 Winckelmanns Sprachen. Kunsttheorie als Übersetzung
Elisabeth Décultot | Universität Halle
14:40 Art Historical Untranslatables
Andreas Beyer | Universität Basel
15:20 Why did the ‘Renaissance’ Resist Translation?
Christopher S. Wood | New York University
16:00 Coffee Break
16:30 Site visit – Chapel of Saint Luke, Basilica della Santissima Annunziata led by Fabian Jonietz | Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz (for speakers only)

SATURDAY MARCH 10

PANEL 5 EKPHRASIS IN THE 20TH CENTURY
Chair: Andreas Beyer
09:30 Roberto Longhi e la sua ricezione, tra ekphrasis e connoisseurship
Marco Muscolo | Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz
10:10 Nello specchio della traduzione: l’ecfrasi longhiana alla prova della lingua francese
Emilia Passignat | Università Ca’ Foscari, Venezia
10:50 Coffee Break

PANEL 6 ART HISTORY AND SOCIAL SCIENCE
Chair: Hana Gründler
11:20 Schapiro and Lévi-Strauss: Structuralist Arguments among Color Field Paintings
C. Oliver O’Donnell | Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz
12:00 Reading-In: Franz Boas and the Languages of the Anthropology of Art
Whitney Davis | University of California, Berkeley
12:45 Concluding Discussion