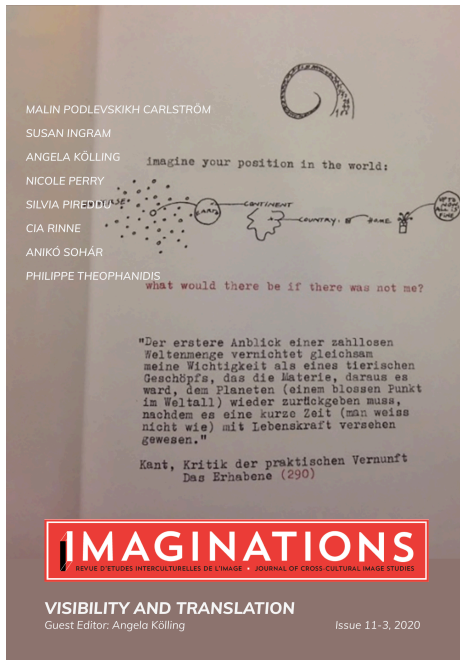


# IMAGINATIONS

REVUE D'ÉTUDES INTERCULTURELLES DE L'IMAGE • JOURNAL OF CROSS-CULTURAL IMAGE STUDIES



IMAGINATIONS:

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## TRANSLATING ART CATALOGUES: THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ISSUES

SILVIA PIREDDU

*This article addresses the translation of exhibition catalogues in the context of cross-medial communication by discussing a small corpus of multilingual texts. Multilingual art catalogues are a standardized genre, which collect academic, explanatory, and descriptive writings. These hybrid volumes pose problems related to semantic and communicative translation, terminology, specialized language, and emotive discourse by involving the visual. In a world where art is communicated with diverse media, publishers should reconsider the format of exhibition catalogues, as translation across media and languages can play a crucial role in marketing art and culture.*

*Cet article traite de la traduction des catalogues d'exposition dans le contexte de la communication cross-médiatique en abordant un petit corpus de textes multilingues. Les catalogues d'art multilingues sont un genre standardisé, généralement imprimé, qui rassemble des écrits académiques, des textes explicatifs et descriptifs également. Ces volumes hybrides posent des problèmes liés à la traduction sémantique et communicative, à la terminologie, au langage spécialisé et à la fonction du discours émotionnel en impliquant le visuel. Dans un monde où l'art est communiqué par les médias les plus divers, les éditeurs devraient reconsidérer le format des catalogues d'exposition afin d'impliquer le public, car la traduction entre les médias et les langues joue un rôle clé dans le marketing de l'art et de la culture.*

## ART CATALOGUES: POSITIONING IMAGES AS A FORM OF CREATIVENESS

This article aims at discussing the editing and translation of exhibition catalogues in the context of cross-medial communication. The analysis of a corpus of multilingual art catalogues shows that this text type is a standardized genre, typically printed, that collects academic writing along with more popularized texts that explain the organization of an exhibition. These volumes combine essays on theoretical and critical approaches to art, along with more traditional historical descriptions of artworks and informative contributions aimed at guiding reader/audience response. The composite, hybrid structure of these printed texts poses problems related to semantic and communicative translation; in particular, they involve the translation of terminology and specialized language along with the rendering of the emotive discourse function, which will be discussed in the next section. The corpus shows that the visual element is especially challenging in multilingual catalogues that have to frame images and texts on the same page. Far from being a problem of layout management, the positioning of visual imagery in art catalogues is an integral part of the creative process and motivates the public to buy them. Images are discursive artefacts that can be used to investigate the rhetorical processes involved in art criticism and the marketing of an exhibition. Translation in exhibition catalogues is the interface where many areas of human creativity meet and contribute to an intercultural conception of aesthetics. In the first two sections, my article defines the genre of the exhibition catalogue and then examines examples from the corpus. I then discuss aspects of translation in linguistic terms to point out that in a world where art is communicated with diverse media, publishers should reconsider the format of exhibition catalogues to engage audiences better. Finally, the article suggests that translation across media and languages can play a key role in marketing art and culture.

## CROSS MEDIAL COMMUNICATION, CATALOGUES, AND THEIR

## CONTEXT

**A**rt catalogues are composite books collecting images, essays, and short personal texts written by artists and curators. Short interviews with people involved in an art event may also be added. Catalogues can be monolingual or contain both the original text and its translation in one or more languages. The structure of these publications is an interesting case study to discuss translation in relation to the persistence of traditional forms of communication despite the dominance of web-mediated practices—catalogues are a tradition that dates back to late-16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>-century sales lists (see “Sale Catalogues”).

The context in which these volumes are realized is shaped by the complex interaction between the artists and a range of actors, such as patrons, dealers, critics, gallery managers, and collectors. A catalogue is always a collective enterprise. In fact, in the context of contemporary web-mediated social relations, art is construed by cross-medial communication strategies which reuse traditional text formats such as catalogues and reviews with different levels of mediation. In practice, museums and institutions stimulate audience narratives and support the mixing of official and informal contents (especially images) on social-network pages. At the same time, critical writings, academic reviews, and catalogues are traditional genres that continue to be printed and published in digital format to testify to the value of art.

As Arthur C. Danto points out, context “creates the creators” and defines what position the creator will occupy whatever the medium, as the circulation of the artwork is part of the creative process itself (Danto 216). Art is authenticated and recognized as such by a network of experts that mediate meaning to the public: catalogues preserve the purpose, message, and intention of art beyond *individual taste* (Arnold 211-30).

However, in our globalized culture, the function of specific instances of communication makes little sense if these are not seen in concert with other media usage. Books, videos, installations, exhibition pro-

grams, technologies, and events support the public by helping them to shape their personal experience of art and make their own meanings and narratives around which they can build a *memorable understanding* of the shared art object. The creative aspect of art communication is enhanced by the collective construction and interpretation of *any* message about art and its aesthetic meaning. In this perspective, cross-medial communication has stimulated research about convergence culture (Jenkins 1-24), transmedia storytelling (Scolari), interactive marketing, the impact of localization, and the co-creation experience and emotive engagement of the public in museum and art event organizations (Cho et al.). Whatever the approach, all the specificities of the various research methodologies boil down to some key aspects: the crucial role played by the public in augmenting aesthetic meaning, the need for flexibility in devising exhibition content, and the *mobility* of textuality enhanced by images in the art product and its communication (Chaim; Hughes and Moscardo; Runnel et al.).

Moreover, cross-media forms of expression also highlight the importance of the relationship between words and images as a form of performance (Auslander 107-09). As Richard Schechner points out, “Performativity is everywhere—in daily behaviour, in the professions, on the internet and media, in the arts, and language. It and its sister term, ‘performative,’ are very hard to pin down. These words have acquired a wide range of meanings” (Schechner 123). The concept of performativity relates to the fact that the Arts and, in particular, contemporary art, is dynamic, collaborative, and mainly an urban phenomenon. Art is performed to be experienced: artists expose themselves and their works in real or virtual spaces, while the public is engaged and stimulated to react to, participate in, and reformulate the work of art (Bay-Cheng et al.). Art does things with images and exists along with words: variously mediated, art is moved to a web-based reality that is subsequently augmented by social sharing in a third dimension. This mediation process may be planned, spontaneous, or arranged to look unstructured. The communicative act constructs the art object within the frame of collective modalities of

observation, choice, and foregrounding, which can be seen as an act of translation.

The translation is indeed a form of mediation that struggles to carry a specimen of culture and its language into another one (Ulrych, ch. 1). In the case of art texts and especially catalogues, the translator has to mediate something that is construed both as culturally specific (a text in a particular language) and universal (art encapsulated into a picture). Moreover, one of the specific functions of art is to stir emotions, but translating emotions is very complex: for this reason, the integration of the visual element in the translation process is mandatory (Dewaele).

In general, emotions that are generated by art objects are subjective, but communication makes them collective: the visual element on a web page or the printed page is what *surrogates* the art object or the event to stir emotions as a form of displacement. In the case of exhibitions, one can experience *emotional contagion* as a form, immediate and automatic, of emotive involvement to be partaken with or without any cognitive mediation: pure sensation and immediate sharing with other people. The art event produces virtual places to accommodate the urgency of getting together in a great emotional outlet, which is usually short-lasting. Nevertheless, once the experience is over, we need something to recollect the event (Turnaturi 15; Cerulo 94).

If art needs to be described and published, the public needs to know and understand about art beyond the exhibition: books, reproductions of artworks, and merchandising bring art and design into homes. The catalogue, in particular, allows the public to prolong the exhibition, as a *re-collection* of the exhibition itself. Museums and similar institutions work to *democratize* art by fostering accessibility: the catalogue objectifies this mission too.<sup>1</sup>

In general, art books and catalogues are sold along with stationery, prints, and apparel. Catalogues address those who look for more in-depth commitment to what institutions do for the arts. Most of all, they are published to reach potential buyers and donors. Artbooks are now available both in electronic and print formats and there ex-

ists a flourishing second-hand market that aims at collectors all over the world.<sup>2</sup> Catalogues are marketed by a combination of traditional publishing tactics (ads in *specialized publications*, mailings to reviewers and bloggers) and extensive social media campaigns. In sum, catalogues function as part of the elaborate ritual that connects the public, the artists and their work, and the institutions that support and validate the arts. Publications serve as a metric for demonstrating the degree of gallery/institutional support for an exhibition. They aim at stirring the emotional effect of art and stimulate affection. They work as an extension of the exhibition and a proof of the existence of the art object itself, especially mediating and translating the essential ineffable and performative quality of contemporary art.<sup>3</sup>

### MULTILINGUAL ART CATALOGUES: STANDARDIZED GENRE, GIFT, AND A CELEBRATION OF EVENT

**M**useums publish catalogues, but specialized publishers have their share. Phaidon, Skira, Somogyi, and Taschen are among the most famous publishers in Europe. In recent years, more independent publishers have engaged in experimental book project design, focusing especially on artist books that widen the scope of the catalogue.<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, art catalogues should not be confused with coffee table books, which are expensive large-format collections of pictures with concise descriptions. Designed to start a conversation or be skimmed and admired by guests, these publications became an essential feature in any 20<sup>th</sup>-century bourgeois household, conveying the impression middle-class people wanted to give the world about their tastes, education, and aspirations. Art catalogues, instead, are academic works that *balance* the visual with the textual element as they aim at discussing, informing about, and acknowledging the relevance of an exhibition or artist work.

Whatever the language, the content, or the publisher, the core structure of the volume is the same and testifies to the formulaic nature of this genre and its long-lasting tradition.



Most exhibition catalogues share several components which include:

- a list of the exhibition schedule (if relevant)
- the exhibition's funders and sponsors with their logo and copyright claims
- a table of contents for featured authors and authorities
- the sponsor's statement and the list of lenders to the exhibition
- a list of trustees and funders that represent the marketing/business environment in which the exhibition takes place

Short chapters or writings may follow, in which the curator(s) describe(s) the aims of the exhibition. The director's foreword acknowledges all the people who contributed, while the essays are positioned with the catalogue entries, acting as a guide to the exhibition. Finally, there is a chronology and a bibliography with an index.

Ideally, the text is organized as a "Chinese box" with the external box containing the context and reference to the communicative situation in which the exhibition takes place, which, in turn, contains the "academic box" with the essays and the bibliography, this "box" contains also the core item, which is the images of the works of art. There are cases in which the essays (textual) are separated from the images (visual), but usually, the visual element is inserted within the essays and becomes part of the narrative. In this way, the textual element serves to explain, or gloss, the content, and emphasize and prove a point. Just like in academic writing, where tables, figures and graphs enhance the readability of an essay, pictures provide readers with a more stimulating experience of the critique itself. If the catalogue functions as a guide to an exhibition, there must be a core section with pictures that are accompanied with a proper catalogue number, the indication of the artist, his/her nationality, dates, title of the work, where and when it was created, indication of the material/medium, the dimensions, the provenance, and signature/inscription information, if relevant. In other words, there is a well-defined order in the description of the artworks that relates to established cataloguing methodologies, which makes art catalogues a highly codified

genre (see “Categories for the Description of Works of Art”). In order to clarify these points, I will consider three examples.

The catalogue *Omaggio a Lucio Fontana/Homage to Lucio Fontana* was published in 1988 by the Italian publisher Marsilio as a complement to an exhibition dedicated to Lucio Fontana (1899-1968) held at the Collezione Peggy Guggenheim, Venice, and the Murray and Isabella Rayburn Foundation, New York. The catalogue consists of a preface and biographical information followed by a commentary and description of the works exhibited. Finally, the credits and the names of the two translators are given.<sup>5</sup> The text is printed on double columns, i.e. the Italian texts are paired with English ones (front texts). Blank pages separate the various segments which have no titles or indications of the chapters or subsections. The images are, for the most part, collected on the right pages while the text is usually placed on the verso or left page. The catalogue is prototypical in the sense that, as most catalogues do, it contextualizes Fontana’s work and outlines the development of his career.

An essay by Fred Licht describes the rationale of his art by visualizing his lines (fragmenting the material toward an abstract understanding of its form) against works of other artists, sharing a classical understanding of sculpture, and a deep understanding of the material essence of the creative gesture and its inherent manipulating force.

[IMAGE 1]

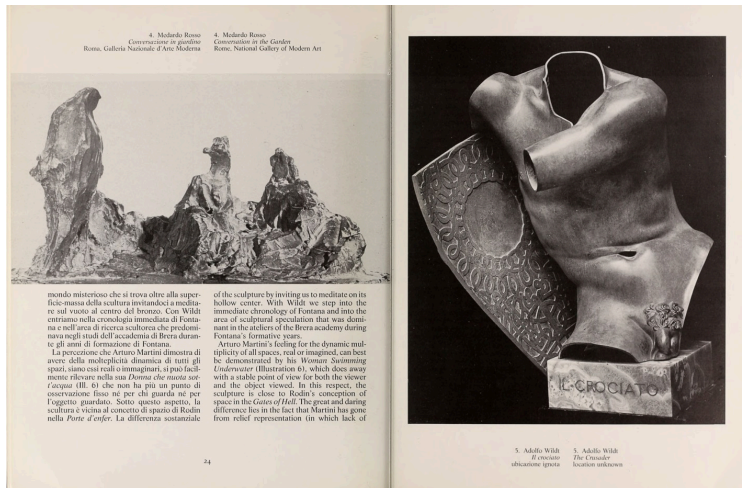


Image 1: Omaggio a Lucio Fontana, 1988, 24-25, <https://archive.org/stream/omaggio00font#page/24/mode/2up>

Given the size of the images, the reader will focus first on the image and then follow a reverse path towards the column corresponding to his/ her own preferred language. This move indicates that there exists a linear hierarchy that runs from the image (which is bigger in size and therefore more eye-catching) and goes to one of the columns (which is visually dense with its complex textual content). Facing translation will end up marginalizing one text column for most readers without proficiency in both languages. However, the alignment of the two texts is often not equal even if the English translation is accurate and follows the original very closely in both the rendering of specialized vocabulary and syntax. The phrase structure of the two languages is different and therefore produces misalignment. [IMAGE 2]



Image 2: Omaggio a Lucio Fontana, 1988, 60-61, <https://archive.org/stream/omaggio00font#page/60/mode/2up>

Moreover, there are important stylistic differences. Italian art writing is typically rich in terminology, drawing on a vocabulary with unusual connotations and preferring long sentences to short ones. The preference for long sentences is rather unusual in standard English but acceptable in the context of art writing, where the reader is likely to defer to the authority of the art critic.

The following examples, however, show the overall adherence of the English translator to the structure and organization of the Italian syntax and in particular the use of premodified noun phrases and chains of relative and *that*-clauses:

I quadri ad olio a lavorazione più spessa integrati da frammenti colorati di pietre e vetri sono a metà strada tra lo stile austero e intellettualmente maturo di Fontana e la natura più gioiosa e sensuale delle sue prime ceramiche.

Thickly worked oil paintings supplemented with colored fragments of stones and glass stand midway between Fontana's

austere intellectual mature style and the more playful, sensuous nature of his earlier ceramics.

Proprio come c'è una coordinazione tra alto e basso, destra e sinistra, così c'è una varietà di coordinate che va dal punto più alto di ogni pietra che penetra lo spazio di fronte la tela e lo spazio dietro la tela reso visibile dai fori.

Just as there is a coordinate of up and down, right and left, so is there a set of coordinates which goes from the highest point of each stone that penetrates the space in front of the canvas to the space made visible behind the canvas by the holes.

A Fontana è spesso piaciuto fare ritorno alle esperienze iniziali e certamente la forte lucentezza della superficie, i colori intensi e l'impasto con la sua calligrafia espressiva contribuiscono a presentarci un'opera enormemente attraente che combina il tono ottimistico dei lavori iniziali in ceramica con le complesse meditazioni della sua maturità.

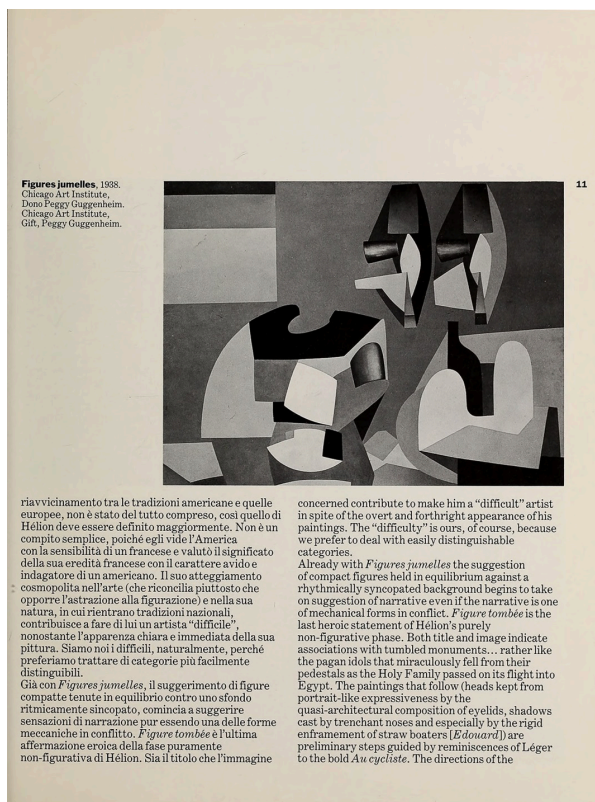
Fontana often liked to return to earlier experiences, and certainly the high gloss of surface, the intense colors and the carefully worked impasto with its expressive calligraphy conspire to present us with an enormously appealing work in ceramics that combines the optimistic tone of his earlier work with the complex meditations of his maturity. (*Ommagio a Lucio Fontana* 60)

The translation is extremely accurate as if the evaluative and descriptive stance of the critic overlapped in both languages.

The same approach can be observed in *Ommagio a Jean Hélion: Opere recenti/Homage to Jean Hélion: Recent Works*. This catalogue was published for an exhibition of Jean Hélion (1904-1987) held at the same Peggy Guggenheim Collection in 1986. In this text, a bio-sketch, written authoritatively by the director of Guggenheim Foundation, is followed by a letter written by the artist which, in turn, is followed by an academic essay by the same curator and critic Fred Licht. The

texts are set in columns: Italian on the left, English on the right. The letter is in French to testify for the authenticity of the artist's word/work.

Licht introduces Hélión's work of the as a separate block: ten pages of writing around a core of four black-and-white images that describe the rhythm of his nonfigurative compositions and his architectural vision of life. [IMAGE 3]



**Figures jumelles**, 1938.  
Chicago Art Institute,  
Dono Peggy Guggenheim.  
Chicago Art Institute,  
Gift, Peggy Guggenheim.

riavvicinamento tra le tradizioni americane e quelle europee, non è stato del tutto compreso, così quello di Hélión deve essere definito maggiormente. Non è un compito semplice, poiché egli vide l'America con la sensibilità di un francese e valutò il significato della sua eredità francese con il carattere avido e indagatore di un americano. Il suo atteggiamento cosmopolita nell'arte (che riconcilia piuttosto che opporre l'astrazione alla figurazione) e nella sua natura, in cui rientrano tradizioni nazionali, contribuisce a fare di lui un artista "difficile", nonostante l'apparenza chiara e immediata della sua pittura. Siamo noi i difficili, naturalmente, perché preferiamo trattare di categorie più facilmente distinguibili. Già con *Figures jumelles*, il suggerimento di figure compatte tenute in equilibrio contro uno sfondo ritmicamente sincopato, comincia a suggerire sensazioni di narrazione pur essendo una delle forme meccaniche in conflitto. *Figure tombée* è l'ultima affermazione eroica della fase puramente non-figurativa di Hélión. Sia il titolo che l'immagine

concerned contribute to make him a "difficult" artist in spite of the overt and forthright appearance of his paintings. The "difficulty" is ours, of course, because we prefer to deal with easily distinguishable categories. Already with *Figures jumelles* the suggestion of compact figures held in equilibrium against a rhythmically syncopated background begins to take on suggestion of narrative even if the narrative is one of mechanical forms in conflict. *Figure tombée* is the last heroic statement of Hélión's purely non-figurative phase. Both title and image indicate associations with tumbled monuments... rather like the pagan idols that miraculously fell from their pedestals as the Holy Family passed on its flight into Egypt. The paintings that follow (heads kept from portrait-like expressiveness by the quasi-architectural composition of eyelids, shadows cast by trenchant noses and especially by the rigid enframement of straw boaters [*Edouard*]) are preliminary steps guided by reminiscences of Léger to the bold *Au cycliste*. The directions of the

Image 3: Omaggio a Jean Hélión: opere recenti, 11, <https://archive.org/stream/jeanhli00hlio#page/10/mode/2up>

The rest of the catalogue consists of images and technical description with corresponding numbers. The catalogue is a set sequence of pictures that follow the path of the exhibition. The visuals reproduce the tempo of the exhibition while the introductory essay is a full discussion of the author's work that prepares the visit. The volume is completed with credits and a note about the relevance of Hélon's painting and its non-objective view of reality. [IMAGE 4]

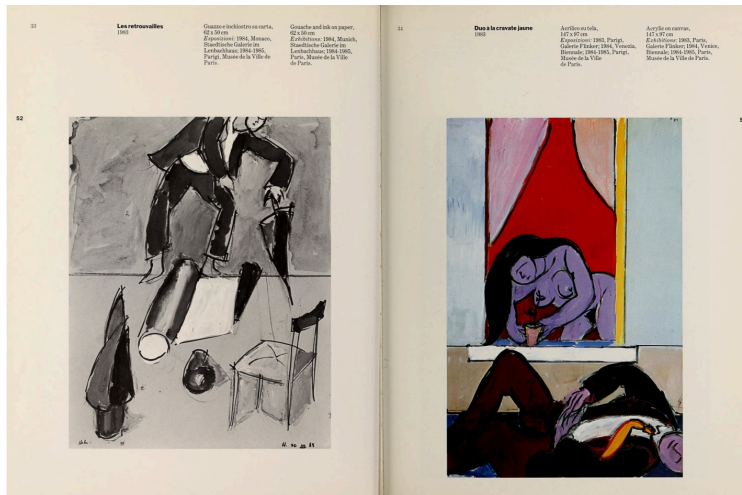


Image 4: Omaggio a Jean Hélon: opere recenti, 33-34, <https://archive.org/stream/jeanhlon00hlio#page/52/mode/2up>

In both texts, the alternate use of black-and-white images and colour ones, although motivated by the need to limit the cost of publication, allows the reader to focus on the drawings; albeit this feature is rather disappointing for more contemporary readers used to the vividness of digital printing.

In the examples above, the art catalogues celebrate the life and career of an artist: the role played by the images is especially relevant as they testify for his creative force. Nevertheless, contemporary art uses mixed techniques, diverse media, and often prefers installation and performances to traditional formats, which can hardly be real-

ized in the images used in a traditional catalogue. Images are a bidimensional device displacing meaning beyond the physical or cultural conditions in which it was meant to be experienced, yet, they are valuable. The pictures and the book distance both the object and the message. At the same time, the images recollect the *tempo* of the artwork time and time again. A case in point is a recent publication by the Italian publisher Skira with the collaboration of Castello di Rivoli – Museo di Arte Contemporanea (Turin, Italy) and Sharjah Art Foundation (Sharjah, United Arab Emirates): *Anna Boghiguian*.

The volume opens with a sequence of full-page pictures of a recent work, *An incident in the Life of a Philosopher* (2017) dedicated to Nietzsche, followed by four essays (two-column text in English and Italian, with small size pictures), a 98-page section reproducing the artist works, book projects and writings, describing the most significant achievements of Boghiguian, and a rich biography made of short writings, interviews, descriptions of works, images of exhibitions and works, as well as covers of catalogues. Finally, there is a list of the works exhibited at Rivoli (August 2016–January 2017) and a bibliography.

The catalogue itself is the result of the artist's intense expressive force and engagement with communication. Boghiguian's work is related to the very concept of the book as a canvas of relations—a *topos* of her activity since the 80s. Notebooks have become part of her installations, including architectural structures and scenarios as if they were gigantic pop-up books, where space is experienced as a constant form of displacement. The large installations reproduced in the volume are expanded books (i.e., spaces of intellectual resistance that even in print engage viewers in a direct and bodily sensitive experience). The reader is motivated to buy the catalogue to understand the work and career of the artist. The catalogue is a beautiful object itself, where the graphic design is dynamic: pages may be filled with full-size pictures or small ones, long-text columns and short notes, while different fonts (alternating grey and black characters) are used to enhance readability. Pages are “cut” to transport the reader immediately into the world of Boghiguian. English, Italian, and French simply mix and co-exist with the images that are the main player on



the page. It is the artist and her work ultimately that is foregrounded. Recalling Venuti, we could conclude that the critic is as invisible as the translator, and takes a step back, leaving the images and the texture of the book to speak for itself.<sup>6</sup> [IMAGES 5, 6, 7]

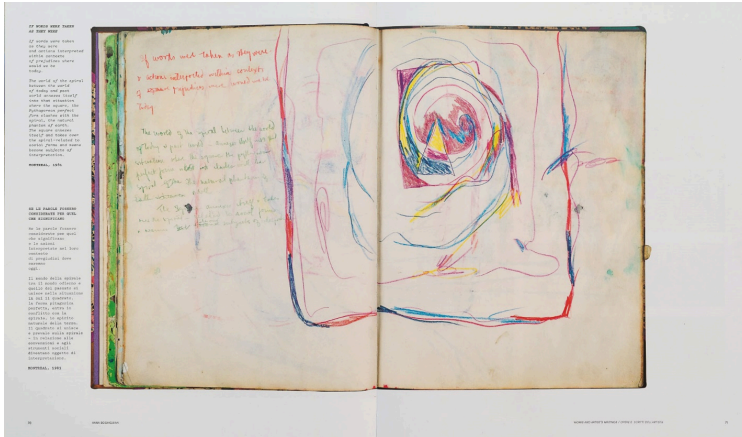


Image 5: Anna Boghiguan, Milano, Skira, 2017, 70-71

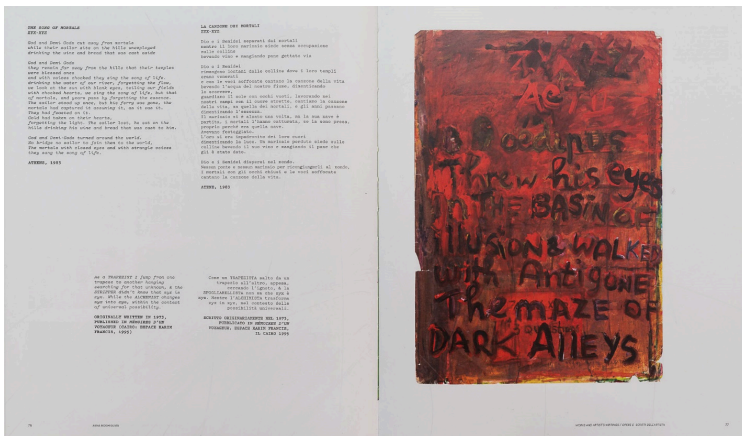


Image 6: Anna Boghiguan, Milano, Skira, 2017, 76-77



Image 7: The Modern Series at the Art Institute of Chicago, Installation Photographs, [https://publications.artic.edu/modernseries/reader/shatterrupturebreak/section/434/434\\_anchor](https://publications.artic.edu/modernseries/reader/shatterrupturebreak/section/434/434_anchor)

TRANSLATING ART CATALOGUES: SOME TECHNICAL REMARKS

**A**rt catalogues combine theoretical and critical writings, along with descriptions and informative contributions aimed at guiding reader/audience response. The composite, hybrid structure of these printed texts poses problems related to the semantic and communicative aspect of translation, in particular, the managing of terminology and specialized language and the rendering of the emotive discourse function (e.g., use of standardized language vs. a metaphorical, poetic one). In general, translators have to mediate specialized language by working on the network of meanings that these texts develop, consisting of verbal and visual information. Moreover, working with art texts, translators need to consider the potential performative value of both the source and the target text (i.e., the aesthetic gesture that it realizes in relation to the expectations of the audience).

The most challenging aspects of translating art catalogues and more generally art texts are related to coherence and the complex syntax

that art writing uses. Texts in art books are descriptive and evaluative, and their complexity can be related to the academic frame of the text (i.e., the art critic writing an essay) or to the *poetic* frame in which an artist may describe, explain his/her work. Moreover, the text may fulfil an emotive function (surprise, provoke, disgust, amuse). In the first case, the visual completes the information and supports the point of view of the critic; in the second case, the artist's prose may be rich in metaphors, use non-standard word meaning, and play with sound symbolism. In both cases, the meaning is *dislocated*, a word or phrase is used with a different function (verb phrase as noun phrase; adjective phrase as verb phrase and vice versa), or it is used because of phonosymbolic reasons. Synonyms are also meaningful, words being selected to reinforce meaning. The same is true with repetitions that do not gloss or explain meaning but *narrate* a concept from a different point of view. This *poetic vagueness* can be challenging for the translator, whose cultural background is continuously tested.

The visual may be an aid to the interpretation of the text, and, for this reason, it is considered a discursive element. In other words, images are an integral part of textual cohesion. Cohesion is the property that distinguishes a sequence of sentences that forms discourse from a random sequence of sentences, and it concerns how the components of the surface text (the actual words we hear or see) are mutually connected within a sequence. If cohesive, lexical, grammatical and other relations provide links between the various parts of a text that realize the meaning and display it at the level of lexis (word choice) and grammar (analytical organization) and hence define the style and genre of a text. Coherence, on the other hand, concerns how the components of the textual world (i.e., the concepts and relations which underlie the surface text) are relevant to communication. In both cases, visualizing concepts is a means to bring together levels of meaning, prompt terminology for concepts, and complement both textual and contextual information. More specifically, it helps the translator to make lexical and collocational choices and to develop description strategies for any creative/cognitive processes. When translating art texts, image-based documentation leads to a better

understanding of concepts and a better rendering of pertinent terminology (Baker, ch. 6-7). Art texts address a diverse public, realizing what has been defined as the *principle of vertical variation*, that is, the existence of different degrees of specialization in texts. Translators must be aware that images are visual resources for the representation of specialized concepts conditioned, to a great extent, by the level of expertise of readers and the level of density of texts (Cabr  73).

As a whole, the visual information always complements and amplifies verbal narration. An image is immediate and refers to space. A word refers to time; it depicts and creates entities. In the case of art, both aspects are combined in the representation that is realized by the image. The difference lies in the time frame, as the picture in the catalogue reports about the artistic event, and *differs* it (Derrida 3-27). For this reason, art is placed within a system, a cross-medial one where meaning is always combinatorial and relational such that no one element within the system can be considered in isolation: the catalogue is a whole (Hooper-Greenhill 3).

The implications for interlingual and intersemiotic translation are complex: the target text must be considered with its source text and in its relation to other target texts as well as to visual elements. In other words, the translated text is part of a network of visual, textual, and cultural elements. A failure to *negotiate* and adapt the translation to such multiple polarities may lead to varying degrees of interpretive breakdown on the part of the end-user. In a multilingual environment, both target and source texts must operate side by side within the book space and in relation to the same set of visual items.

In general, translators are required to render a text with no deletions or additions that might alter the lexicogrammatical structure of the text. With creative texts and, more generally, with texts that work out the meaning by pushing lexical choice to the limits such as literary criticism, philosophy, and art criticism, a translation might need to depart widely from the original, submitting the target text to various degrees of revision and editing to clarify meaning. In other words, the translator has to reposition style along with the content

in a different cultural context. Moreover, style and content have to be adapted to the needs of the public.

It is acknowledged that the interpretive force of translation issues from the fact that the source text is not only decontextualized but recontextualized (Sakellariou). The recontextualizing process entails the creation of another network of intertextual relations established by and within the translation (i.e., a receiving intertext). The process results in the emergence of another context of reception, whereby the translation is mediated by editing and printing, promotion and marketing strategies, various kinds of commentaries, and the uses to which diverse readers put it.

When translated, then, the source text undergoes not only various degrees of formal and semantic loss, but also, in attempting to fix the form and meaning of that text, the translator develops an interpretation in the translating language that ultimately proliferates cultural differences and further meaning so that the translation can signify in the receiving situation. Quite interestingly, art catalogues are conservative. Word for word translation or the invisibility of the act itself of translating is valued as prototypical of the *good translation*, despite all the possible connections to traditions, movements, and institutions, the hierarchy of values, beliefs, and representations that are activated in the cultural situation surrounding the target text. As for images, they work for both the target and the source texts with the same intertextual and intersemiotic relations. In general, the texts and paratext (paper, typography, page, and web design) assume a similar cultural and social readerships, as if both the target and the source text were on the same level of signification and shared a common language. This aspect seems to be a constant feature even when the text is moved onto the web.

In recent years, some publishers have begun to exploit the potentials of more interactive types of format. This is the case with the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. which publishes the *NGA Online Editions* providing information on the Gallery's collections in a customized reading environment that allows exploring the images in detail ("User's Guide"). In particular, the toolkit that frames the image

enables the reader to adjust the reading environment with more information (e.g., comparative images, technical images, notes, overlay and cross-fading techniques) and to learn about terms and concepts drawn from encyclopedic entries or biographies.

Similarly, the Art Institute of Chicago publishes a series of online scholarly catalogues that aim at a specialized public and allow access to curatorial and conservation research with a focus on techniques (“Digital Publications”). Moreover, high-resolution, zoomable images allow the reader to investigate and inspect the collection: the time of the learning experience is a crucial aspect, in the sense that the reader/viewer takes his/her own time to experience every single detail of the work of art beyond the customary timing of a museum visit. [IMAGE 8, 9]

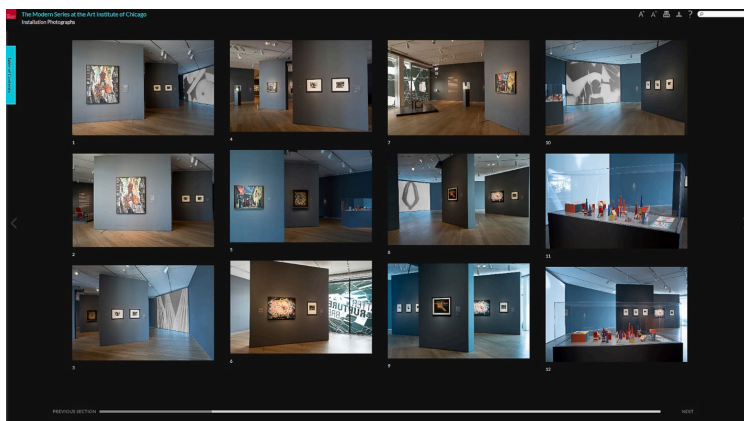



Image 8: Anna Boghiguian, Milano, Skira, 2017, 176-177

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NGA ONLINE EDITIONS :: AMERICAN PAINTINGS, 1900-1945



Hartley, Marsden  
American, 1877 - 1943

*Maine Woods*  
1908

oil on canvas  
overall: 74.9 x 74.9 cm (29 1/2 x 29 1/2 in.)  
framed: 82.5 x 82.5 x 5.3 cm (32 1/2 x 32 1/2 x 2 1/16 in.)  
Gift of Bernard Brodman  
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**OVERVIEW**

*Maine Woods* represents a dense forest interior that emphasizes the verticality of the white birch trees pressed up against the picture plane. A snow-covered mountain is barely distinguishable at the upper right. Marsden Hartley adopted the Italian divisionist artist Giovanni Segantini's "stitch" brushstroke, which he used to build up an image out of short, interlocking lines of pure color. He applied the pigment thickly and spontaneously, giving the painting a highly expressive character.

In the fall of 1908, Hartley moved to Maine and settled on a farm in Stoneham Valley near North Lovell, where he remained until March 1909. Working in isolation and enduring the severe winter conditions, he produced a large number of paintings, including *Maine Woods*, in his fully developed neo-impressionist style. The innovative, expressive, and spiritual quality of such works impressed Alfred Stieglitz—photographer and avant-garde art impresario—who arranged a solo exhibition for Hartley at his 291 gallery in New York in 1909. Although the show received mixed reviews and was a financial failure, it helped establish Hartley as a leading member of the American avant-garde.

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Image 9: Hartley, Marsden, *Maine Woods*, 1908, <https://www.nga.gov/Collection/art-object-page.72332.html>

Observation of the images, comparison with other works, and the reading of a scholarly comment is a form of *slow access* to a collection, addressing the specialist or student. However, the availability of the catalogue as an open-access work stimulates a wider audience.

The reader may browse the images and decide to read more, moving to and fro into the text according to individual choice and interest, acting as a self-curator (Borowiecki et al.).

Unfortunately, both projects are not multilingual, but the format and the general display of the content is a valuable model that could be used by publishers in multilingual contexts to improve the accessibility of art to diverse publics.<sup>7</sup> Rather than columns with parallel texts, the translation might appear “on demand” supported by dynamic effects. Given the hypertextuality of the online medium, an adaptive translation could endorse, engage or muddle the reader’s visual understanding *along with* or *instead of* the original, making the reading of the catalogue a real interactive experience.

### SURVIVING THE DIGITAL: THE FUTURE OF ART CATALOGUES

The production, distribution, and consumption of editorial content are changing. Production and consumption, in particular, define new forms of self-publishing, with individuals selling directly to their readers/fans according to different business mechanisms that may involve, for example, crowdfunding (Rectanus).<sup>8</sup> At the same time, distribution is influenced by online collaborative mechanisms that filter projects and recommend them through online networks of relationships that orient reading and build the reputation and cultural capital of the publisher. The same mechanism may stimulate collaborative translations to be integrated and supervised by the authors of the texts. Nevertheless, art is seen as a universal language that does not need translations.

Art catalogues have survived the digital age. The examples illustrated above highlight the strengths and weaknesses of a genre that should be reconsidered to better involve the public with a mix of tradition and new trends while keeping in mind the complexity of the media involved in the communicative process (Hughes, ch. 4-6). Translation has to mediate the academic content, letting the visual play the semiotic role of completing the aesthetic meaning of both art and its evaluation, communication, and transmission. In a world



where art is conveyed with the most diverse media, publishers should reconsider the format of exhibition catalogues to engage new audiences by using more interactive devices and dynamic design while favouring the digitization of paper catalogues.

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## IMAGE NOTES

Image 1: Omaggio a Lucio Fontana, 1988, 24-25, <https://archive.org/stream/omaggioofont#page/24/mode/2up>

Image 2: Omaggio a Lucio Fontana, 1988, 60-61, <https://archive.org/stream/omaggioofont#page/60/mode/2up>

Image 3: Omaggio a Jean Hélion: opere recenti, 11, <https://archive.org/stream/jeanhlionoohlio#page/10/mode/2up>

Image 4: Omaggio a Jean Hélion: opere recenti, 33-34, <https://archive.org/stream/jeanhlionnoohlio#page/52/mode/2up>

Image 5: Anna Boghiguian, Milano, Skira, 2017, 70-71

Image 6: Anna Boghiguian, Milano, Skira, 2017, 76-77

Image 7: Anna Boghiguian, Milano, Skira, 2017, 176-177

Image 8: The Modern Series at the Art Institute of Chicago, Installation Photographs, [https://publications.artic.edu/modernseries/reader/shatterrupture-break/section/434/434\\_anchor](https://publications.artic.edu/modernseries/reader/shatterrupture-break/section/434/434_anchor)

Image 9: Hartley, Marsden, Maine Woods, 1908, <https://www.nga.gov/Collection/art-object-page.72332.html>

## NOTES

1. Contemporary museum experience is evolving. Institutions embrace technology to address new publics and implement inclusiveness. Both blockbuster exhibitions and smaller exhibits do their best to be, or at least look, interactive and immersive, as they aim to attract the public. The issue is controversial and can be examined from different perspectives (see, for example, Giaccardi; Drotner and Schrøder; Wellington and Oliver; Rectanus; “What Makes Us Different”; *The Met Store*).↵
2. The Museum Bookstore is an interesting example of a specialized web bookstore: “exhibition catalogues are a great way to open up the many hundreds of wonderful museum shows taking place around the globe to new audiences. While these books are some of the most thought-provoking, informative and beautiful around, they can be heavy to carry and difficult to track down, particularly for past exhibitions. We set up Museum Bookstore for art, fashion and design lovers whether they want to read up on an exhibition they are about to visit; read more about an exhibition being held far afield, revisit an old favorite show or just add another beautiful coffee table book to their collection” (“About Us”).↵
3. Catalogues are written and published with the contribution of scholars and may contain academic essays but their function is not confined to the academic context. As a genre, they fulfil a different communicative functions depending of various factors such as the kind of public they address, the format, the positioning of the artist within the catalogue

- (i.e., if she or he contributes directly to the text or not). They also testify to the exhibition itself (see Sant; Dekker; Houlihan).<sup>4</sup>
4. Examples are D.A.P, Distributed Art Publishers, Badlands, Damiani, David Zwirner, Deste Foundation for Contemporary Art, Editorial RM, Editions Xavier Barral, Exact Change, FUEL, Gregory R. Miller & Co., Hatje Cantz, Hauser & Wirth, Heni, The Ice Plant, JRP|Ringier, Karma, Lars Müller, Metropolis Books, naio10, National Portrait Gallery, Poligrafa, Radius, Reel Art Press, Siglio, Spector, Steidl, Turner, Valiz, Visionaire, Wakefield Press, and Walther König.<sup>5</sup>
  5. The catalogue mentions Annarita Fuso and Renata Rossani as translators; Mennini and Gregolin, Ugo Mulas, and Fondazione Lucio Fontana for the photographs along with Teresita Fontana, Carla Panicali, Fondazione Lucio Fontana, and a private collection as lenders of the works exhibited.<sup>6</sup>
  6. The notion of invisibility was introduced into the field of Translation Studies by Lawrence Venuti's polemical monograph *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (1995). Invisibility refers to the fact that the translator does not normally appear as a co-producer of a text and to the fact that the translated text tends to be written in line with prevailing notions of plainness. In other words, the translator effaces him/herself, disappearing from the text and leaving no stylistic mark. In this context, the critic serves as the translator.<sup>7</sup>
  7. The examples use only English and no translation is provided in Spanish, Chinese, French, or other languages. In recent years though, some US institutions have engaged with local communities by addressing the issue of multilingualism. For example, in California, the *The Main Museum of Los Angeles Art* has developed its media in Spanish ("En Español") and the Natural History Museum in Los Angeles also provides materials for visitors in Spanish (*Natural History Museum*). Bilingualism in museums exhibitions is now being investigated and treated as a resource to attract audiences (see, for example, Yalowitz et al.). Institutions such as MOMA allow visitors to translate the key information on the webpage in many languages (machine translation). As for Europe, the British Museum and Musei Capitolini in Rome provide audioguides in many languages ("Audio Guide"; "The MiC APPs"), while the Louvre in Paris and the Prado in Madrid provide the translation of their website in English and other languages (*Louvre; Museo del Pra-*

- do*). Translation is increasingly becoming a research topic in Museum Studies (see, for example, Kwon; Patterson).↵
8. A good example of collaborative approach to publishing by involving the public is represented by Unbound, a team of writers, designers, publishers, and producers working together in central London that support the publication of independent book projects (“Coffee Table and Art”).↵