

*Colour and Culture* possesses no conclusion, but a final chapter, 'Colour without Theory: The Role of Abstraction', a focussed account of twentieth-century beliefs and practices about colour, which moves between movements and institutions (De Stijl and the Bauhaus), science (Ostwald), art practices (Sonia Delaunay-Terk's patchwork) and the New York art scene of the 1960s (Frank Stella). In this chapter one senses that Gage has his own aesthetic agenda, but that it is never fully articulated. The master themes of experiment and fragmentation are present, but to the last easy closure is resisted: 'The struggle to understand the nature of colour, whether physical or psychological, and to use that understanding in the shaping of our coloured environment has been the central subject of this book; it is a struggle that is still

going on' (p. 268). *Colour and Culture* is best understood then as a resource, as a celebratory exploration of a gigantic yet intimate subject. It is a book to be returned to, not once but repeatedly, and its very richness makes the absence of a single consolidated bibliography all the more frustrating. Despite the themes that are threaded through the volume, what holds it together is John Gage's lifelong engagement with colour. Increasingly, books are defined by archives, research selectivity exercises, and academic conventions about what constitutes a 'good' topic. It already seems to me to be difficult to imagine how, now, British academics can produce life's works. But here is one, and it should be cherished, but not uncritically. Above all it should be *used*.

## The Making of an Art-Historical Super-Power?

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Craig Hugh Smyth and Peter Lukehart (eds), *The Early Years of Art History in the United States: Notes and Essays on Departments, Teaching and Scholars*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1993. 122 b&w ill, 205 pp. (text), paperback ISBN 0-691-03645-4, £19.95

The essays which form this volume are taken from independently planned sessions at meetings of the College Art Association of America in 1987, 1988 and 1989, all of which focused on either the early history of some departments of the history of art or the achievements of a few art historian pioneers in the United States. The book is not an exhaustive study, but rather a varied, at times almost miscellaneous, series of accounts and reminiscences of early departments at Vassar, Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Smith, Columbia, New York, Wellesley, Bryn Mawr and Rockford Female Seminary; and of the luminaries Bernard Berenson, Arthur Kingsley Porter, Charles Morey, Fiske Kimball and Richard Offner. The papers are not arranged chronologically, but they cover the period c.1850–c.1955. The whole is richly varied and fascinating reading.

The papers tend to reflect something of their respective session chairs, Craig Smyth, Henry Millon and Donald Preziosi, and range from the highly personal and anecdotal in the first two sections, 'Glimpses of some Early Departments' and 'Three Decades of Art History in the United States (1910–1940): Five Figures', to the more critical and detached in the third session, 'Institutionalizing Art History'. To her own surprise, this reviewer found the more personal, less critically aware papers often more informative, vividly imparting as they do, even in their language and tone, a whiff of certain (usually conservative) values and the flavour of a way of life.

Rather than discussing each of the twenty-three contributions, this review will concentrate on some of the more important issues that the book raises for our understanding of American art history. In some senses, this can be seen as the American response to Erwin Panofsky's famous essay of 1955, 'Three Decades of Art History in the United States: Impressions of a Transplanted European',<sup>1</sup> which is an *eminence grise* behind many of the

essays here, although none of them has the depth and passion of that remarkable essay. For Panofsky:

after the First World War [art history in the United States] began to challenge the supremacy, not only of German-speaking countries, but of Europe as a whole. This was possible not in spite, but because of the fact that its founding fathers were not products of an established tradition but had come from classical philology, theology and philosophy, literature, architecture, or just collecting. . . .

Indeed, this book can also be read as a series of descriptions and analyses of the processes by which, in Panofsky's words, the United States had emerged by the mid-1920s as 'a major power in the history of art'.

One of the processes by which America put itself on the art historical map was the proliferation of Art History courses within the universities. In 1912, the editor of *L'Arte*, Adolfo Venturi, who was planning the Tenth International Congress of Art Historians in Rome later that year, asked Allan Marquand, Chair of the department of Princeton University, for information about the state of art history in America. This inquiry prompted a survey by E. Baldwin Smith, published in 1912, and reprinted here. It revealed that of one million students in the United States, 163,000 had the opportunity to study art. Of these, 145,000 studied in departments entirely dedicated to art history. 'There are approximately 400 institutions of learning in the United States where the Liberal Arts are taught for a period of four years. Of these, 95 Colleges and Universities give Art History courses, but only 68 adequately', declared Smith's report. 'Adequate' courses indicated a special chair in Art History or Archaeology. Of the 14,434 instructors in the country, only 117 (0.8%) taught art history exclusively. There were 420 art history courses given annually — an average of four and a half courses per institution. The indebtedness of American Art History to archaeology clearly emerges from this report. About half the courses at Harvard, for example, were in the ancient field (including Greek Archaeology). Princeton emerges in the lead with the most courses (34), which included a hefty dose of the Italian Renaissance (courses on Leonardo da Vinci, 'Masaccio and the Florentine Realists', 'Giotto and his Associates' and others), but stretched to include Classical Numismatics and the Theory of Art.

However, a large number of the courses in Baldwin Smith's survey were 'Art Appreciation'; and the extent to which Art History was not seen as a rigorous academic subject emerges sharply from the essays. Phyllis Lehmann's essay on Smith College includes the nugget that in the college prospectus of 1877, the president, L. Clark Seelye, justified the study of Art in terms of other disciplines:

Practical experience has demonstrated that those who have elected Art have frequently been among the best students in other departments, and have been able to do their work better from the strength and inspiration they have gained in this congenial study.

When the building of the Yale School of Fine Arts was dedicated in 1866, James Hoppin, a minister and professor of homiletics in Yale's department of theology gave the dedication address. He spoke of neglecting nothing essential, and cultivating nothing disproportionately', conjuring up an education which would provide security for the American middle class, where they would never be found wanting, in either sense of the phrase. For Hoppin, both religion and history were means to individual development, the ultimate goal of higher education. As such, he was part of the nineteenth-century privatization of values and the transformation of art from public monument to commodity. Art was commonly supposed to bring a practical element into higher education, in order to balance the classical and scientific curricula. Similarly, at Vassar in the late nineteenth century an art gallery was discussed in terms of its 'elegant culture', 'moral power', and public attraction. Pamela Askew observes, 'at Vassar, art was built into the collegiate structure so that it might play a moral role in the development of American civilization'. Art, nature and Christianity or morals were viewed as an 'educative trinity' whose power could shape the social good and forge a national identity. As late as 1917 (if not later) the College Art Association was still holding discussions to determine the appropriate instruction for future 'writers on art' and 'museum workers', giving the impression that the terms 'art historian' and 'curator' were unknown. And until 1940 Yale was little more than an academy where students learned with artists, from whom they picked up some art history, as George Kubler's essay shows.

Some of the essays indicate that if art history was not perceived as a rigorous subject, this was partly because it was not taught as such. The list of course titles in Baldwin Smith's 1912 Report has a decidedly dreary and monotonous quality (there seems little to distinguish between the many general courses, offered at most universities, on 'History of Painting', 'Masterpieces of Painting' and the like; and even the more specialised courses sound predictable: 'Medieval Art', 'Greek coins', 'Bellini and Correggio', etc.). This is where the personal reminiscences are so illuminating. Although Harvard offered a course in Japanese art as early as 1912, teaching there seems to have been particularly humdrum. Craig Hugh Smyth tells us that in the late 1930s John Coolidge, then a graduate student at New York University's Institute of Fine Arts but living at Princeton, characterised art history in general as having become 'a discipline concerned chiefly with facts and the evidence for facts', and as lacking a method to relate these facts to spiritual and cultural history except by intuition'. Edward Warburg

(one of Aby Warburg's nephews) writing of his undergraduate experience of Fine Arts at Harvard in the 1920s recalls: 'I never had any contact, other than sitting at a lecture, with the great professors who were the stars in the great lecture halls.' And although Chandler Post struggled to broaden the curriculum by including Spanish art, he required his students 'to memorize the points he made both in his lectures and in his books, which were required reading'. Warburg adds ironically, 'I often wondered whether he ever really particularly enjoyed the paintings, or the sculpture, or the architecture he was talking about. He certainly knew all the facts about them'. John Coolidge supplements this in his essay on the early days of the Harvard Fine Arts Department, with a story of how Chandler Post, in one Ph.D. examination, asked the candidate to name the popes between Martin V and Innocent X, and then to recite the names of their portraitists.

The exception seems to have been New York University, which Craig Smyth describes as offering 'a great *à la carte* bill of fare and poor *table d'hôte*'. There students were exposed to a remarkable range of lectures by Ernst Panofsky, Karl Lehmann, Alfred Salmony, Martin Weinberger, Walter Friedlander, Richard Krautheimer (commuting weekly for a course one semester each year from Vassar), and Julius Held (part-time for six years). New York University, above all, reaped the rich harvest in the mid-1930s when Nazism transformed highly qualified Jewish art historians into refugees. Smyth recalls Walter Cook's preferred metaphor for the situation: 'Hitler shook the tree, and I picked up the apples.' John Coolidge is more critical: 'In general . . . our leading American scholars and administrators of that era . . . admired the refugees as brilliant specialists, be it a Goldschmidt or a Panofsky. They had no concept that what the body of refugees brought to this country was in essence a new discipline'.

If the refugees were one major ingredient in the transformation of American art history in the 1930s, domestic economic and political forces also played a part. Art history assumed a growing importance in undergraduate teaching in the mid-1930s in response to increasing professional opportunities offered by museums, the art market, and new forms of publication. Although these aspects are touched on by some essays in the book, their implications for academic art history are neglected. Edward Warburg's essay is typical in this respect in praising uncritically 'the golden years when Harvard supplied both personnel and training for the art museums of America'.

A central and recurrent theme of the essays is the intellectual and institutional relationships between American art history and European art history. This is, of course, one of the great questions for American identity in general, stretching far beyond the realms of art history. But it is perhaps particularly true within the specialised walls of art history. As the course titles make abundantly clear, much of American art history has been European. Indeed, often culture itself was defined as non-American: George Comfort, founding dean of Syracuse's School of Fine Arts, described instruction in fine arts as necessary to the symmetrical development of the God-given faculties within each man, and explained that without the historical study of fine art in different ages, Americans would remain ignorant of culture. Very close personal and institutional links existed between Britain and most

American universities in the late nineteenth century. Berenson, for example, the subject of an essay by Michael Rinehart, undeniably an influential figure in American art history (though certainly not named by Panofsky as among the founding fathers of American art history and referred to by Warburg as an 'Attributzler'), was nothing if not Europhile and Eurocentric.

What becomes clearer from these essays, however, is that the Europe that was so often a model for American academics was both upper-class and also fantastical (viewed through an American novelist's eyes). Linda Seidel describes Arthur Kingsley Porter as a 'Jamesian hero abroad, affluent and innocent, enamored of an Edwardian Europe only privileged Americans could know'. Similarly, in her essay on Harvard and the 'Fogg Method', Sybil Kantor quotes Henry James, writing about Charles Eliot Norton and Shady Hill in 1908: 'His so pleasant old hereditary home . . . expressed that "Europe" which was always roundabout one'. Those ties extended, of course, to the intellectual sphere: Norton's approach to art history — using the imagination as the path to moral truth and beauty — was closely dependent on Ruskin (whom Norton visited regularly in Oxford).

What will perhaps be more surprising to British readers, bewitched by the myth of American egalitarianism, is the distinctly upper-class aspect of art history in America, epitomized by Bernard Berenson, and the Harvard Group, Charles Eliot Norton, Paul Sachs, and Shady Hill (their successive home, a huge mansion where they entertained 'thousands of students and scholars'). One suspects Otto Wittmann speaks for many when he refers approvingly to two of his distinguished classmates, Henry McIlhenny and John Newberry, as coming 'from families who collected old-master paintings'. There was, as in Britain, a significant contingent from the world of banking which included Sachs, Warburg, Porter, and Allan Marquand. However, the upper-class hallmark of American art history is best evinced by the fascinating portrait photographs of women reproduced here. Here amongst grim rows of genteel, sometimes rather arrogant looking men, are women, unmistakably upper-class in appearance, Agnes Mongan, Leila Cook Barber and others, prompting the observation that discrimination in relation to gender seems always to result in even more intense discrimination against women on grounds of class.

Although all the founding fathers, selected by Henry Millon as subjects for individual essays are male, the question of gender and art history recurs in manifold forms in various essays. Writing of Vassar between 1865 and 1931, Pamela Askew observes:

It was thought that through the influence of cultivated womanhood art would operate in the formation of American character, particularly since women at the close of the Civil War were called upon to play a more active part in the national destiny.

Mary Stankiewicz's essay on 'Virtue and Good Manners' sheds light on gender assumptions in the early days of art-historical instruction in the United States and charts some of the rhetoric of the early establishments. While the ministers at the inauguration of Syracuse's College of Fine Arts (1873) used phrases like 'The study of art . . . completes the development of the whole man', in 1889 at the opening of its women's college, the ministers spoke of the necessity of an art education for wives and mothers

who wanted to adorn their homes, 'give an upward turn to society' and teach their children 'aesthetic culture'. It is hard, however, to agree with Stankiewicz's conclusions that 'the phrases of civic humanism had indeed been appropriated by the unenfranchised'. Rather the enfranchised (men) were surely being encouraged to think of their own development; and the unenfranchised (women) to think of others. Furthermore, some explanation of why the private, female and domestic were seen as synonymous in opposition to the public, male domain (perhaps drawing on the work of Janet Wolff) would have enhanced this essay considerably. Claire Richter Sherman looks at two elite institutions for middle and upper-class American women: Wellesley and Bryn Mawr. Durant Freeman, second president of Wellesley (1881–87) saw the primary goal of a woman's liberal arts education as cultural enrichment of the domestic sphere. Thus, in the museum-training course Wellesley aimed at 'the training of museum assistants', while the Harvard programme envisaged the instruction of future museum directors and curators. By contrast to Freeman at Wellesley, Carey Thomas, President at Bryn Mawr from 1894 to 1922, aimed to educate independent competitive women to pursue professional careers. From the outset, Bryn Mawr ambitiously chose a curriculum and faculty that followed the model of a German research university and became the first women's institution to offer a doctorate. Just as its course had a male European model, so the architecture followed that of Oxford and Cambridge. In art history its emphasis was on Classical Art and Archaeology, which bore fruit in its highly professionalised women graduates.

Unfortunately, none of the essays directly addresses either the principal differences between current art history and the early courses, or the reasons why such changes occurred at particular times. Of course, the differences between the past and present are not as wide as some present-day art historians, desperate to be avant-garde and fashionable, would like to think. How much Berenson's approach had in common with some of the more confessional approaches to art history today, in his 'what effect does this object produce on me?' style questions is immediately clear from a reading of Michael Rinehart's essay on that 'founding father'. As Donald Preziosi points out in his stimulating introduction to Part III, 'Institutionalizing Art History':

critical rethinkings of art-historical practice have constituted the very foundation of the discipline since its academic formations a century and a half ago. Indeed there has rarely been a time when the discipline has been untroubled by conflicting and often strongly opposed visions of art, and of art's history . . . art history has always seemed to be "in crisis" . . . The diverse languages of early art history in America have produced a complex palimpsest of agendas, assumptions, and practices which our contemporary primers have more often than not reduced to progressive moments in a linear genealogy.

He offers, too, a timely reminder that so much that claims to be radical and 'critical' is inevitably entangled within the apparatus of late twentieth-century capitalist academia, of which it, too, is a product:

the very apparatus of academic art history has in itself been no neutral or innocent stage set for the articulation of art-historical knowledge, but rather has had a profoundly formative role to play in defining what art-historical knowledge might be.

If that should act as a cautionary tale to some arrogant claims currently being made within and on behalf of the discipline, so too it should remind more reactionary scholars that it is not possible to hark back to some 'real' or 'proper' art history:

We can no longer easily assume that there might (or should) exist somewhere some basic single core of art-historical theory or practice that has remained unchanged or unmoved (like the eye of a hurricane) amidst the marginal swirl of the latest fashions in theory and criticism. Such an orthodoxy has never existed within Art History.

Preziosi speaks of the emergence today of a more highly nuanced archaeology of the epistemologies that have worked to frame (and at the same time been the product of) particular modes of institutional practices. Such a history clearly must be 'more than simply a larger album of biographies of founding fathers and mothers':

Even in its most serene and seemingly autonomous moments, art history has been both product and producer of the epistemological enterprises we have inherited from the Enlightenment.

If the intellectual roots of American art history have clearly determined much of modern art-historical practice (even when this is denied by practitioners), it is perhaps in terms of resources and facilities where one sees the greatest shift. A surprising number of the early departments taught without slides or photographs; many — like Smith — relied on statues and autotype copies.

Edward Forbes, who became Director of the Fogg in 1909 described the original building as 'a building where there was a lecture hall in which you could not hear, a gallery in which you could not see, working rooms in which you could not work, and a roof that leaked like a sieve'. Today American universities are (whatever their occupants say) well-resourced to a level that most British universities can only dream about. However, none of these essays gets to grips with issues of the filthy lucre which has made possible the phenomenal expansion of academic art history.

What is missing from these essays is precisely what Panofsky's wonderful essay provided — namely the placing of American art history into a broader context. In order to assess the nature of American early art history, as this volume attempts one way or another to do, one needs to know how it differed and continues to differ from art history elsewhere — above all, in Europe (from where or in response or reaction to which so much American art history takes its peculiar stamp). This gap serves as a token of the remarkable unselfawareness of much American institutional life. However, it is in large part precisely because of what it does *not* do that this book is so fascinating and so informative about art history then and now in north America today

### Note

1. Reprinted in E. Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (New York, 1955), pp. 321–46.

## Western Orientalism and the Construction of Nationalist Art in India

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Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of a New 'Indian Art': Art, Aesthetics and Nationalism*, Cambridge University Press, 1992, xxiii + 352 pp. 96 b&w plates. ISBN 052 392470 £50

As the dust raised by the collapse of the vast edifice of colonialism begins to settle in our own *fin-de-siècle*, writers in East and West have commenced the dissection of the colonial legacy, namely, the implications of western technology, and ideas of progress and nationalism for the Third World. But above all, it is colonial representations, a product of the colonial knowledge system, that hold the attention of the scholarly world. Orientalism, coined by Edward Said, is the keyword that seeks to illuminate and encapsulate western representations of marginal groups. The works of a number of art historians who have taken up the art of marginal groups tend to fall within the orbit of western cultural history. It is only now the story from the side of the colonised is beginning to be heard. That story is about interactions between westernisation and nationalist responses to it, as colonial art inevitably sharpened the cultural identity of the colonised.<sup>1</sup> Nowhere perhaps is the problem of westernisation more acute and ambivalent than in the sphere of art, for it raises the question as to what was being transmitted and its value to the recipient. There is indeed an uneasy relation-

ship between the western universalist canon, taken for granted by the colonised, and pre-colonial taste that lost its grip with the spread of colonial rule.

Tapati Guha-Thakurta's book, based on her thesis submitted to Oxford, makes an important contribution to the emerging literature on the interface of colonialism and nationalism. Her own sympathies lie with post-modernist theories of culture best known from Said's work, which have had considerable influence on recent art-historical scholarship. Her objective is to question 'in-built notions of great art' and artistic excellence, as the 'sacrosanct standards of histories of art and culture' (p. 1). In the division of her work into several major themes, the sections on popular art, or 'subaltern' art if you like, are by far the most interesting and original parts of her book; these sections form an essential counterpoint to the history of élite art as it moves from early colonial art through academic art to what she terms new 'Indian' art. Included in the work is also a central chapter on the role of European Orientalist scholarship in the creation of new nationalist aesthetics in Bengal, though she questions its cultural authenticity.

In her introduction, Dr Guha-Thakurta provides a synoptic background to the acculturation of European naturalism in India with the foundation of British rule. The Calcutta 'bazaar' painters, for instance, fulfilled the demands created by colonial rulers, while they learned from European prints available from this time. Thus earlier 'crudely stylised figures acquired more refined