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## The museum as a work of art

Site specificity and extended agency

If we shift attention from the art object to the context of its presentation and consider that this context plays an active part in the process of signification, then the possibility arises that the aesthetic unit be augmented to include the context, and that those responsible for this context be integrated into an enlarged notion of authorship or agency. For instance, it becomes possible to regard the museum as a work of art, a move that can do justice both to the search for aesthetic unity and completeness present in the establishment and evolution of certain museums and to the visitors' tendency to contemplate, experience and remember their visit as one aesthetic event rather than as a series of discrete encounters with individual works of art. Such a move agrees with developments in the (relative) *longue durée*. A post-modernist ›return to the context‹ is thus visible in the art of site-specific or *in situ* works and installations, in the conservation of historical monuments within the ›urban fabric‹ or the natural environment, in the exploration of the history of display, and in the preservation or recreation of past presentations.<sup>1</sup> Somewhat less obviously, an understanding of the authorship of cultural artefacts as a collective and continuing process is gaining ground, by which works of art (and not only of architecture) tend to be seen as the continuously evolving results of interventions of many different actors.

One readily considers that artists acting as curators do not thereby relinquish their artistic status. And we have grown accustomed to seeing curators claiming something close to artistic authorship for their (mostly temporary) exhibitions. But time seems ripe even for collectors – traditionally less exalted and more ambivalent figures – to be regarded as creators. The latest institution devoted to contemporary art in Paris, the Fondation Antoine de Galbert, recently inaugurated its exhibition premises, *La maison rouge* on the boulevard de la Bastille, by showing fifteen ›boxes‹ recreating rooms from the homes of as many private collectors, from the entry hall in the founder's own house to a bathroom in which Bernd and Hilla Becher's photographs of water-towers receive an unexpected connotation.<sup>2</sup> An artist like Louise Lawler, who started her career in 1982 by exhibiting at Metro Pictures in New York *An arrangement of pictures* from the inventory of the gallery, came to take photographs of works in the homes of their owners and exhibit them with titles such as *Bedroom with fireplace, arranged by Mr. and Mrs. Burton Tremaine Sr., New York City* (1984/1989).<sup>3</sup> Such an image is of course ambiguous and can be interpreted as denouncing a reduction of Mondrian's abstraction to the level of fireplace ornament, or as documenting the impact upon the picture of the ecosystem invented for it by the Tremaines. But coming from someone who had defined the ›arrangement‹ of other people's works as her artistic contribution, it implied acknowledging the aesthetic and semantic agency of the arrangers, in this case the collectors.

Another evidence of the changing understanding of authorship, which offers tools both to apply and to analyse it, is Alfred Gell's posthumous book *Art and agency*.<sup>4</sup> For Gell, the notion of ›agent‹ is relative and linked dialectically to that of ›patient‹. He proposes to extend ›agency‹ (in relation to art) beyond the artist to the ›index‹ (the work itself), the prototype (what the work represents), and the recipient.

The recipient's agency is most obvious when he or she is »cause of the artist's action (as patron)«, but we can also consider the contextual impact made upon a work by its owner or a curator as one instance in which the recipient is »the cause of the [...] form taken by the index«. <sup>5</sup> The depth and reach of this impact depend to some extent on its duration, and a qualitative jump takes place when the ›arrangement‹ becomes permanent and the private collection turns museum. Artists' and collectors' museums lend themselves particularly well to be regarded as works of art because their authorship, albeit in the second degree, often bear the strong mark of an individuality and fulfil in this way a major criterion of the traditional notion of authorship. I shall therefore examine two cases of such museums founded in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when the cult of the author was particularly strong. I will do so not only to show that considering them as works of art makes sense and helps understand them better, but also to see what difficulties and problems – ethical as well as aesthetic – such an approach entails. This brief examination is thus meant as a case study in the virtues and vices of ›extended agency‹.

My two examples are the Museo Vela in Ligornetto (Switzerland) and the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston (USA). The first one derives from the intentions of the Swiss sculptor Vincenzo Vela (1820–1891). <sup>6</sup> Born in a peasant family and a political radical, Vela became one of the foremost artists of the Italian Risorgimento in Milan and Turin. At the height of his career, he hired the court architect Cipriano Aimetti to build a house with studio and gallery in his native village of Ligornetto in southern Ticino. He moved there permanently in 1867, gathering his plaster models and a collection of North Italian paintings that he opened to the general public. After his death, his son Spartaco bequeathed the building and the collections to the Swiss state under the condition that it would use them ›either as a museum or as a school for the public good‹; the Museo Vela was inaugurated in 1898.

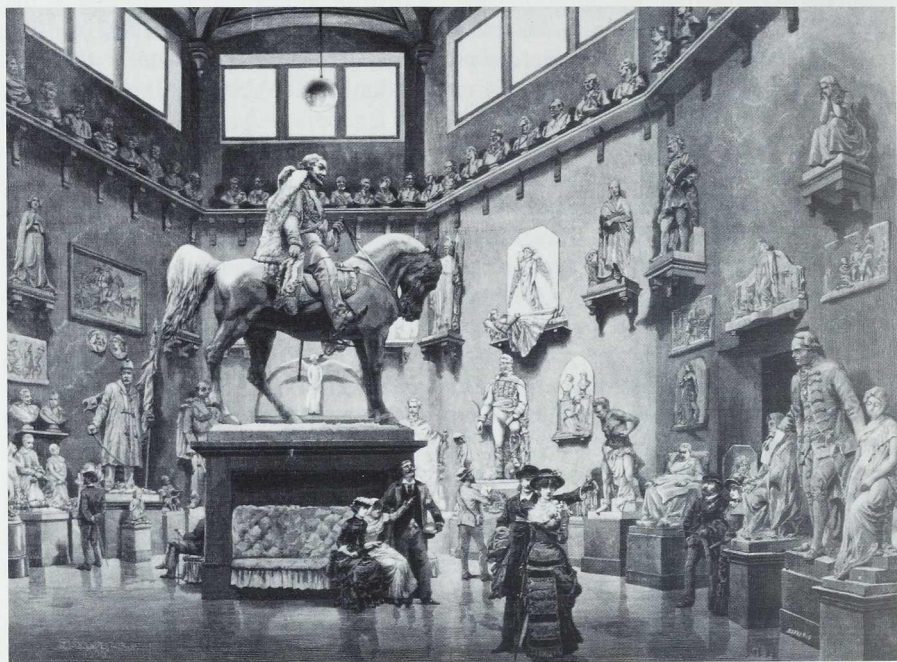
Isabella Stewart Gardner (1840–1924) was born and married in wealth, respectively in New York City and in Boston. <sup>7</sup> An independent personality early described as ›a millionaire Bohemian‹, she travelled widely with her husband and befriended Henry James, Whistler, John Singer Sargent and the young Bernard Berenson, who became her *protégé* and art agent. She amassed a broad ranging collection that eventually counted more than 2500 objects, and after spending a few summers in Palazzo Barbaro in Venice, she decided to build her own palace in a new area of Boston created by the landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted. Gardner designed Fenway Court herself with the help of the architect Willard Thomas Sears. It was conceived as a Venetian *palazzo* inside out, with a spectacular courtyard incorporating many architectural elements from Venetian buildings as its centre, and it was opened to the public in 1903. At Gardner's death in 1924, her will stipulated that the building and the collection become a museum ›for the education and enjoyment of the public forever«. <sup>8</sup>

Let us first look at the context of the context, the sites and situations of these two museums. Both were established in meaningful places for their founders, Vela's place of birth and Gardner's home by marriage. In both cases, the building and its content were meant to motivate the contingency of the place, contribute to its *genius loci* and upgrade its cultural status. By virtue of this intention and to the extent of their success, they would therefore become – to use intentionally an anachronistic



term – ›site-specific installations‹. Vela's patrician villa, established on top of a hill with a view reaching neighbouring Lombardy, proclaimed the artistic and social achievements of the ›Phidias of Ligornetto‹ and claimed for the small village a regional, national and even international importance – as a member of the Ticino parliament, Vela tried to have it connected to the Gottardo train line.<sup>9</sup> Gardner's massive transfer of Old World (and Far Eastern) artefacts, although individually decided and funded, was part of the broader movement by which the still young North American nation endeavoured to acquire and display its roots and its reach – a *translatio imperii* best visualized by the later construction of The Cloisters in Gardner's native city to house the medieval department of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.<sup>10</sup>

I suggested at the beginning that considering such museums as works of art could do justice to their search for aesthetic unity and completeness. This applies better to the Gardner than to the Vela Museum, since we know little about the display organized by the sculptor himself. The best visual document is an engraving published in 1883 on the occasion of Vela's participation in the Swiss national exhibition in Zurich (fig. 1): it shows the artist's plaster models in the central hall or ›Pantheon‹, presented against or along the walls, with a series of busts on top, around the equestrian statue of the Duke of Brunswick on a high pedestal. The central position, justified in part only by the size of this statue, is revealing because the commission for the large, complex and costly monument that it was to crown had ended up in a bitter litigation for Vela, and it eventually escaped him.<sup>11</sup> By gathering



1 A. Bonamore: Vincenzo Vela's museum in Ligornetto. 1883. Engraving by Barberis. Published in *Öffentliche Zeitung der Schweizer Landesausstellung, Zurich 1883*



2 Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, Long Gallery with Botticelli's *Madonna of the Eucharist* above a fragment of a mid-fourteenth-century glass mosque lamp

his plaster models and organizing them according to his own criteria, the artist could thus free his works from the vagaries of commissions and the limitations of (the original) site specificity, recuperating a greater part of agency from the patron and using it to shape the recipients' reactions.

Isabella Gardner had the means necessary to keep the museum operating after her death, and she was cautious to require that nothing in the galleries ever be changed from their original installation. This puts us in a better position to observe and appreciate the care with which she organized, placed and combined her objects, creating echoes, rhymes and dialogues between them that can be learned, didactic, witty or idiosyncratic. The traditional designations of the rooms suggest a distribution according to great artists, periods, ›schools‹ and cultural areas.<sup>12</sup> In detail, however, things are more complex and less predictable. The aesthetics of display involve accumulation and even layering, for instance in the Blue Room where paintings grouped around Antonio Mancini's *Standard bearer of the harvest festival*, purchased from the artist in 1895, are hung on top of a French or Italian cope of circa 1700–1725.<sup>13</sup> In the Tapestry Room, three fifteenth- and sixteenth-century objects presented contiguously on a table refer respectively to the Fall of man (a Nuremberg plate depicting *The Temptation of Adam and Eve*), Redemption (a German or Franco-Flemish *Head of Christ*), and Salvation (a Mass book opened to the offering of the sacrament).<sup>14</sup> But the objects only suggest this interpretation of the sequence, spelled out in Hilliard Goldfarb's guide to the museum.

A more ambiguous link was created in the Long Gallery by placing Botticelli's *Madonna of the Eucharist* above a fragment of a mid-fourteenth-century glass



mosque lamp (fig. 2). Goldfarb concludes that Gardner »appreciated the painting's luminous colorism«, since the enamelled colours and gilt of the mosque lamp correspond to those in the Botticelli, but one could equally read the combination as an expression of ecumenism.<sup>15</sup> One may compare this juxtaposition with a 1984 photograph by Louise Lawler entitled *Pollock and tureen, arranged by Mr. and Mrs. Burton Tremaine, Connecticut*.<sup>16</sup> The chromatic harmony of the Tremaines' arrangement is obvious too, and the tureen does point out baroque qualities in the painting, but Lawler's parallel use of the words »Pollock and tureen«, by reducing the artist's name to a thing, seems to imply an element of irony – at the Tremaines' expense? at Pollock's? – or at least of provocation. In other words, Lawler seems to play with the assumption that extending artistic agency in a way that encompasses both a high modernist masterpiece and a decorative (and useful) object is a taboo.

I see no reason to do so with Gardner's *Mosque lamp and Botticelli*, while acknowledging that the social gap between an Old Master and a religious utensil is easier to bridge than the one between a consecrated Rebel and a piece of bourgeois table-ware. Another example of Gardner's art of assemblage leads us from sacred to profane love. The Titian Room (fig. 3) is named after one of the greatest works in the collection, the *Rape of Europa* painted by Titian in 1561–1562 for Philip II of Spain. The painting, purchased in 1896 from the Earl of Darnley through Berenson, takes pride of place on the east wall. On one of two eighteenth-century Venetian end tables beneath is placed a *putto* attributed to François Duquesnoy, which »is set on its side to mime the poses of Europa and the painted *putti*, its feet in front of an enamel platter, the design of which suggests the splash of water.«<sup>17</sup> Behind the *putto* and covering the lower part of the wall beneath the Titian is a silk garment fabric from Lyon, which was cut from a gown designed by Frederick Worth for Gardner. Here again, Goldfarb notes that »its colour and tassel pattern [are] complementing the tables«, but it seems reasonable to perceive an erotic dimension in the placing of a gown that Gardner had worn under the depiction of an abducted and little clad beauty, a painting about which she wrote to Berenson after receiving it: »I have no words! I feel ›all over in one spot‹, as we say. I am too excited to talk«, and spoke weeks later of a »two days' orgy«: »The orgy was drinking myself drunk with *Europa* and then sitting for hours in my Italian Garden at Brookline, thinking and dreaming about her.«<sup>18</sup> The effectiveness of Gardner's installation art can be measured in a case where she created a context to serve as a trap to catch an object that she desired and did not yet possess. It was John Singer Sargent's painting *El jaleo (The ruckus)* of 1882, which belonged to her cousin by marriage Thomas Jefferson Coolidge.<sup>19</sup> She organized for it a Spanish Cloister leading to a Hispano-Moresque window meant as a stage for the performance depicted in the painting, with a lighting from below. Coolidge acknowledged the appropriateness and gave her the painting in 1914.

Like many bigger and less individualistic museums, the Museo Vela and the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum include references to religion and signs of sanctity. Vela was anti-clerical, and in his case it is essentially the octagon lantern flooding the central hall with light that can evoke temple architecture and antecedents such as John Soane's Dulwich Gallery (1811–1817) and his own museum in London (1808–1824).<sup>20</sup> At the Dulwich Gallery, a lantern signals the mausoleum of the founders Bourgeois and Desenfans. In Ticino, it was not allowed to be buried out-



3 Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, Titian Room

side cemeteries and Vela could not follow the example of Bertel Thorvaldsen, who had been buried in 1844 in the central courtyard of his museum in Copenhagen.<sup>21</sup> But it would probably have been his wish, since he had his lying in state staged in the middle of his private ›Pantheon‹. Photographs by Grato Brunel show that little had changed since 1883 in the display of the plaster models.<sup>22</sup> For the occasion, the plaster of an *Ecce homo* realized by Vela in 1866–1867 for a funerary chapel has been placed behind and above the artist's head and may seem to put him under the protection of the divinity. However, this suffering and plebeian Christ, with whom Vela identified himself, is also one of his works, and the halo-like focus of the photograph rather suggests an apotheosis of the artist surrounded by his own creations, like Raphael lying in state under his *Transfiguration* or, later, Malevich under a version of his *Black square*.<sup>23</sup>

Isabella Gardner was an Episcopalian attracted to Catholicism, probably not least for aesthetic reasons. We have already observed direct references to religion in her choice and installation of objects. In the Early Italian Room, she seems to be representing the original liturgical use of some of the works by placing a fourteenth-century altar painting of *Saint Anthony Abbot with four angels* (by Niccolò di Pietro Gerini) high on the wall above a (French) chasuble and two monumental candlesticks.<sup>24</sup> But this arrangement also has a funerary and memorial dimension: the chasuble placed on an easel serves as background to a small triangular *tempera* panel of



*Saint Elizabeth of Hungary* by Ambrogio Lorenzetti that the American writer John Chapman and his wife had given to the museum in 1917 in memory of their son who had died in combat in France. Gardner also included in her museum a Chapel, where she stipulated that a requiem Episcopal Mass be held each year on her birthday. She was buried in the Gardner tomb in Mount Auburn Cemetery, Cambridge, but as the author of an anonymous *Guide to the collection* wrote, »her true memorial is this museum.«<sup>25</sup> In her case, the religious cult is thus integrated into – rather than simply replaced by – the cult of art, which the museum clearly serves. For Vela, the cult of art involved a cult of the artist, as became even more explicit when the lying in state arrangement was made permanent two years later in a marble version with a Greek temple frame in the cemetery of Ligornetto.<sup>26</sup> An equivalent can be found in Fenway Court with the Gothic Room and the portrait of Isabella Gardner by John Singer Sargent. Painted in 1887–1888 and exhibited at the Saint Botolph Club in Boston under the title *Woman – an enigma*, this iconic effigy, both hieratic and sensual, attracted negative comments that prompted Jack Gardner to ask Isabella not to exhibit the portrait publicly during his lifetime. When Fenway Court was built, she placed it in the Gothic Room and kept it off-limits to the visiting public until her own death.<sup>27</sup>

The issues of propriety that led to the concealment of Gardner's portrait obviously had to do with her gender and social class and it would be exaggerated to read them as an expression of uneasiness about a cult of the collector (as artist). But there is no doubt that Gardner had creative ambitions and was conscious of her achievement as collector, museum founder and curator. She proudly expressed her dedication to the primacy of taste and her claim to authorship by inscribing over the central portal the motto »C'est mon plaisir.«<sup>28</sup> She also obtained recognition for her work.<sup>29</sup> When Fenway Court was opened to the public in 1903, Henry Adams wrote to her that he did not »think any one else could have done it. [...] You are a creator and stand alone.«<sup>30</sup> On her birthday in 1911, the painter and Harvard art lecturer Denman Ross wrote her on behalf of the assembled company: »You have built this beautiful house, yourself the Architect, and have filled it full of Treasures. You are, not only the lover of Art, and the Collector, but the Artist, having built the house and having arranged all the objects which it contains in the order and unity of a single idea – an idea in which you have expressed your whole life with all its many and varied interests.«<sup>31</sup> Finally, and most importantly, her sense of the value of this »order and unity« was expressed and made binding in her requirement that the installation be preserved and that no items in the collection ever be added or sold. As Hilliard Goldfarb commented: »Fenway Court was to remain her creation.«<sup>32</sup> Vela did not have the financial means to make such a requirement and may not have found it desirable – it was not necessary for his primary contribution as an artist to be recognized. Considered in the light of Gell's collective and continuous notion of artistic agency, Gardner's posthumous hold on her museum represents an attempt to retain agency and to put an end to the physical process of re-interpretation by re-installation.

This is of course a severe limitation for the later curators of a collection, and one may agree with Ivan Gaskell's comment on what he called a »regressive attitude to collections«, sanctioned by »the growth of the history of taste«, in recent attempts to »return collections open to the public in their original settings to their original arrangements. [...] The subordination of the individual work of art to an overall scheme is of course inherent in any gallery arrangement, but when that arrangement

is chosen because of its illumination of an individual's taste in an uncritical manner and is instituted as a permanent, not a temporary, arrangement, a petrifying authoritarianism seems inherent in the project.<sup>33</sup> In the case of the Gardner Museum, however, the arrangement has been preserved, not returned, and the authority of its author may be found legitimate. Its ›petrifying‹ effect also corresponds to another function of the foundation, that traditionally attached to the notion of (intentional) monument, and the connection with mausoleums that we have observed in comparable cases is significant. It can be argued that the meaning and the appeal of museums like the Museo Vela and the Gardner Museum depend on an indexical relation to the past, especially to the person, life and ›taste‹ of their founders. This has important consequences for their maintenance and conservation, which should be effected with the greatest respect for the original installations when they have been preserved. The careful restoration of the Gardner Museum that took place in the 1990s did not challenge the founder's agency but helped to make it the object of historical inquiry and analytical interpretation. The Museo Vela, unfortunately, has been subjected to many undistinguished interventions, the latest of which (1997–2001), justified as a mere technical renovation of the building, was entrusted to Mario Botta. The high-profile architect could not resist imprinting his mark upon the villa, at the expense of much original substance. A mezzanine was created (fig. 4) as well as pedestals made of industrial metal beams; on the ground floor, a wooden parquet has replaced the stone traditional to the region and to sculpture galleries. Even the octagonal lantern has been replaced. The only room that has retained its former appearance and substance is the modest library.

We encounter here the vices of extended agency by way of the disruption of an artist-collector's arrangements, when an insufficiently valued installation is unduly modified. However, these arrangements themselves depend on transfers that have been more or less disruptive, and as such they can be defined as creative destructions. This is rarely the case when the arranger is also the author of the works arranged, so that we leave Vela for Isabella Gardner. She was herself in contact with many artists and bought or even commissioned works directly from them; this is again a practice that raises no issue, as is generally the case with art made for the market. Problems arise with art from outside the museum era (chronologically) and area (culturally), in Gardner's case mostly with works by the Italian ›Primitives‹. The issues of provenance, illegal or unethical transfer, and repatriation, which have become ever more topical in the second half of the twentieth century, were already debated in her time. The Raphael Room includes for instance a panel whose creator, now supposed to be the Umbrian painter Piermatteo d'Amelia, has long been dubbed the ›Master of the Gardner Annunciation‹ – a fitting expression of the owner's appropriation of agency. This painting had disappeared from a chapel of Saint Francis below Assisi, and the monastery was reclaiming it when it was tracked down in the ›workshop‹ of a dubious dealer by Bernard Berenson's wife Mary, who had a special trunk prepared for it with a separate compartment covered with dolls so as to avoid any ›complications‹ with customs.<sup>34</sup>

An even more paradigmatic example is the *Hercules* fresco in the Early Italian Room. It was painted about 1467 by Piero della Francesca for the public room of the grand residence he had built for himself in his native Borgo Sansepolcro.<sup>35</sup> Cut off below the knees to make space for a doorway, it was the only remaining part of the





4 Museo Vela, Ligornetto, view from the central octagon toward the newly created mezzanine (architecture by Mario Botta, 1997–2001)

decoration when discovered and detached from the wall in the 1860s. In 1903, a descendant of Piero sold it to a Florentine dealer who had worked for Gardner. She purchased it the same year, but appeals to prevent its export from Italy delayed its removal for three years. It sat another three years in London and Gardner eventually had to pay a very high US luxury tax on the importation of art works. In this case, the monument erected by Gardner to herself and her collection was enriched by key element of site-specificity from an early example of an artist's house. It is true that the fresco had already been physically separated from its context, which was in a very fragmentary state, but it might theoretically have found place in an attempted reconstruction *in situ*.

Gell's notion of extended agency is intentionally amoral and does not consider distinguishing between more or less successful, appropriate, relevant, or legitimate interventions in the continuous process of art. But we have seen that the making of a site-specific arrangement of works tends to be predicated upon the destruction of previous arrangements, so that conflicting claims to authorship, ownership and the determination of a ›just display‹ are bound to arise. If such conflicts must be resolved, the products of extended agency need to be evaluated, and the criteria employed cannot be only aesthetic but must include or confront ethical and political arguments. This is also the case with an institution like the Gardner Museum that is historically tied to the rise of formalism, for which ›if the forms of a work are significant its provenance is irrelevant‹.<sup>36</sup> Assuming the existence and the unlimited relevance of an ›original‹ context has always been a weakness of the theories of site-specificity, from Quatremère de Quincy to Richard Serra. If one is content neither with ›freezing‹ and reducing the artistic-historical process in this way nor with accepting the *status quo* or any intervention whatsoever, then instruments are needed to deal with the extended notion of agency in a coherent and responsible manner. I believe that a model could be found in a book published in the same year that Isabella Gardner opened her museum, Alois Riegl's *The modern cult of monuments*.<sup>37</sup> In proposing guidelines for the preservation of historical and artistic monuments, Riegl famously stated that they are not monuments because they were meant to be so, but because we, ›modern subjects‹, see them as such. He further proceeded to distinguish between the different values that turn buildings into monuments, observed that these values can be mutually exclusive, and concluded that any decision about what should be done with a monument amounts to an arbitration between these values and the corresponding requirements. Following his example – a step that has to remain only a hint at this stage –, we may also find ways to understand why not all museums can be regarded as works of art, or not to the same extent and with the same consequences.

### Zusammenfassung

Der Blickwechsel vom Kunstgegenstand auf den Kontext seiner Präsentation ermöglicht es, Sammlungen und Museen selbst als Kunstwerke zu betrachten. Dies kommt dem Streben nach ästhetischer Ganzheitlichkeit entgegen, das sich aus der Institutionalisierung des Museums und aus der Neigung des Publikums ergibt, den Museumsbesuch als ein umfassendes ästhetisches Ereignis zu erfahren.



Diesem Schritt entspricht jener Vorschlag des britischen Anthropologen Alfred Gell, den Begriff künstlerischen Handelns (*agency*) auf die Kunstrezipienten zu erweitern. Damit entsteht ein vertieftes Verständnis dafür, dass die Autorschaft kultureller Erzeugnisse ein kollektiver und andauernder Vorgang ist. In diesem Licht betrachtet erscheinen die Daseinsgründe und Wirkungsmöglichkeiten von Sammlungen deutlicher, insbesondere von kleineren Institutionen wie Künstler- und Sammlermuseen, denen eine besondere Individualität zukommt. Zwei Beispiele werden im vorliegenden Beitrag besprochen: das Museo Vela im schweizerischen Ligornetto sowie das Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston.

Die Schaffung dieser zwei Institutionen im späten 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert zeugt vom Willen, die Zufälligkeit eines Geburts- oder Wohnortes umzudeuten und gesellschaftlich aufzuwerten. Andeutungen auf religiöse Einstellungen sind in den Bauten erkennbar, und sowohl die Bestände als auch ihre Ausstellung verweisen auf einen Kult der Kunst und auf eine Verehrung des Künstlers oder der Sammlerin. Die Bedeutung und Anziehungskraft solcher Museen hängt von einem indexikalischen Verhältnis zur Vergangenheit ab, insbesondere zu den Begründern und Stifterinnen solcher Institutionen, was wichtige Folgen für ihre Unterhaltung und Konservierung hat.

Allerdings beruht der ästhetische Beitrag der Sammlermuseen auf den Abbau originaler Kontexte und ortspezifischer »Installationen«, der als eine kreative Zerstörung angesehen werden könnte. Gells wertfreier und erweiterter Ansatz künstlerischen Handelns ist daher für die Vermittlung zwischen konkurrierenden Ansprüchen unzureichend. Riegls Analyse des »modernen Denkmals«, das konträre und einen Schiedsspruch erfordern Werte impliziert, könnte hingegen ein Modell für die Schaffung neuer Urteilskategorien bieten.

## Notes

- 1 I allow myself to refer to three earlier essays: Dario Gamboni: *Arts visuels, espace et territoire*. In: *Le grand atlas Universalis de l'art*, vol. 1. Paris 1993, p. 10–17; Id.: *Déplacer égale détruire? Notes historiques sur un argument théorique*. In: *Annales d'histoire de l'art et d'archéologie de l'Université de Bruxelles* 17 (1997), p. 33–46; Id.: »Independent of time and place«: on the rise and decline of a modernist ideal. In: Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann (ed.): *Time and space. The geohistory of art*. Burlington, VT, forthcoming. I thank Valentine Talland and the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston for the invitation to give the fifteenth annual George L. Stout memorial conservation lecture in 2003 and the opportunity to study the Museum in situ, as well as Gianna Mina Zeni, curator of the Museo Vela, for the generous hospitality and sharing of information over the years.
- 2 *L'intime. Le collectionneur derrière la porte*. Exhib. cat., *La maison rouge – Fondation Antoine de Galbert*. Paris 2004, especially cover, p. 11.
- 3 Louise Lawler and others. Exhib. cat., *Kunstmuseum Basel, Museum für Gegenwartskunst. Ostfildern-Ruit 2004*, p. 25, 31.
- 4 Alfred Gell: *Art and agency. An anthropological theory*. Oxford 1998, here: p. 28–36.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 29.
- 6 See Marc-Joachim Wasmer: *Museo Vela in Ligornetto. Das ehemalige Wohnatelier des Tessiner Bildhauers Vincenzo Vela*. Bern 1986 (*Schweizerische Kunstführer* 74/1/

- 742); Gianna A. Mina Zeni (ed.): Museo Vela, Le collezioni. Lugano 2002, especially p. 11–35.
- 7 See Hilliard T. Goldfarb: The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. A companion guide and history. Boston, New Haven and London 1995; Alan Chong, Richard Ligner and Carl Zahn: Eye of the beholder. Masterpieces of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. Boston 2003.
  - 8 Goldfarb (as note 7), p. VII, 8.
  - 9 See D. Gamboni: Phidias in Ligornetto. Das letzte Jahrhundert von Vincenzo Vela. In: Beat Schläpfer: Swiss made. Die Schweiz im Austausch mit der Welt. Zurich 1998, p. 67–78.
  - 10 See James J. Rorimer: The Cloisters. The building and the collection of mediaeval art in Fort Tryon Park. New York 1941.
  - 11 See Nancy Scott: Vincenzo Vela (1820–1891). New York and London 1979, p. 401–426; Giovanni Piffaretti: Il grande rifiuto ovvero La storia del monumento Brunswick a Ginevra che Vincenzo Vela non poté realizzare. Ligornetto 1990.
  - 12 Goldfarb (as note 7), p. 22.
  - 13 Ibid., p. 34.
  - 14 Ibid., p. 91.
  - 15 Ibid., p. 129.
  - 16 Louise Lawler and others (as note 3), p. 8.
  - 17 Goldfarb (as note 7), p. 119.
  - 18 Ibid., p. 118–119.
  - 19 Goldfarb (as note 7), p. 36–38.
  - 20 See Gillian Darley: John Soane. An accidental Romantic. New Haven and London 1999, p. 207, 222, 268–277.
  - 21 See Bente Lange: Thorvaldsen's museum: architecture – colours – light. Copenhagen 2002, p. 71–78.
  - 22 See Dario Gamboni: La dernière demeure de Vincenzo Vela. In: Unsere Kunstdenkmäler 43 (1992), p. 523–538.
  - 23 Giorgio Vasari: Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori ed architettori scritte da Giorgio Vasari pittore aretino. In: Gaetano Milanese (ed.): Le opere di Giorgio Vasari con nuove annotazioni e commenti. Florence 1906, here: vol. 4, p. 383: »Gli misero alla morte al capo, nella sala ove lavorava, la tavola della Trasfigurazione che aveva finita per il cardinale de' Medici, la quale opera, nel vedere il corpo morto e quella viva, faceva scoppiare l'anima di dolore a ognuno che quivi guardava«. My thanks to Tristan Weddigen for these comparisons.
  - 24 Goldfarb (as note 7), p. 59.
  - 25 Ibid., p. 133. Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. Guide to the collection. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Boston 1997, p. 15.
  - 26 Gamboni 1992 (as note 22).
  - 27 Goldfarb (as note 7), p. 144–147.
  - 28 Ibid., p. 3.
  - 29 For some elements of context, see Michael Conforti: Decorators and the antique room: collecting European decorative arts in the United States from the 1890s to the 1990s. In: The Grosvenor House antiques fair 1992 handbook. London 1992, p. 20–25.
  - 30 Goldfarb (as note 7), p. 18.
  - 31 Ibid., p. 20.
  - 32 Ibid., p. VII.
  - 33 Ivan Gaskell: History of images. In: Peter Burke (ed.): New perspectives on historical writing. London 1991, p. 168–192, here: p. 181.
  - 34 Goldfarb (as note 7), p. 65, 71–72.
  - 35 Ibid., p. 51–55; 51–5; Marie Kraitová: Das Haus von Andrea Mantegna in Mantua und von Piero della Francesca in Sansepolcro. In: Eduard Hüttinger (ed.): Künstlerhäuser von der Renaissance bis zur Gegenwart. Zurich and Munich 1985, p. 54–56.
  - 36 Clive Bell: Art. New York 1914, p. 37.
  - 37 Alois Riegl: Der moderne Denkmalkultus. Sein Wesen und seine Entstehung. Vienna 1903, reprinted in: Georg Dehio, A. Riegl: Konservieren, nicht restaurieren. Streitschriften zur Denkmalpflege um 1900. Braunschweig and Wiesbaden 1988. English transl.: The modern cult of monuments: its character and its origin. In: Oppositions 25 (1982), p. 21–51.

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Fig. 1: *Öffentliche Zeitung der Schweizer Landesausstellung*, Zurich 1883. Fig. 2: ISGM Boston. Fig. 3: David Bohl, ISGM Boston. Fig. 4: Dario Gamboni, Geneva.