

Nach der Lektüre des Buches von Eva Bouillo hält man einen Haufen Blätter in der Hand, da seine Klebebindung bereits dem einmaligen Lesen nicht standhält. Die Mehrzahl der Farbabbildungen sind koloristische Entgleisungen, die s/w-Abbildungen flau. Dem Buch liegt eine Doktorarbeit zugrunde, die einem jener Universitätsverlage anvertraut wurde, denen das Drucken von Büchern eine widrige Obliegenheit ist, in der mangelhaftes Know-How und unzureichende Mittel sich ergänzen. Gerade im Hinblick auf die Abbildungen ist das bedauerlich, denn während sich die Bilder von Delacroix, Ingres oder Delaroche in Form guter Reproduktionen anderweitig finden lassen, gilt dies für viele der weniger bekannten Teilnehmer am Salon von 1827 nicht. Und angesichts von Bouillos primär institutionshi-

storischem Ansatz bleibt auch inhaltlich die Frage, was das für unseren kunsthistorischen Umgang mit den Gemälden von Horace Vernet oder Eugène Devéria und all der anderen Vertreter des romantischen Mittelwegs bedeutet, die so zahlreich in den Depots und Provinzmuseen vor sich hindämmern. In der öffentlichen Wahrnehmung sind eben nach wie vor nicht sie prägend für das Bild vom Salon von 1827, sondern die wenigen unmoderaten, ästhetisch kompromisslosen.

PROF. DR. GREGOR WEDEKIND
 Institut für Kunstgeschichte,
 Johannes Gutenberg Universität,
 Binger Str. 26, 55122 Mainz,
 gregor.wedekind@uni-mainz.de

Waking the Dead. Sublime Poetics and Popular Culture in the Aftermath of the French Revolution

Académie de France à Rome/Royal
 Dutch Institute in Rome,
 28-29 January 2011

Last Winter has given a new impulse to the study of the arts in the period of the French Revolution. Exhibitions focusing on this turbulent era have been organized by museums throughout Europe. The Fondazione Roma had *Roma e l'antico*, on the eighteenth-century reception of classical antiquity *in urbe*; the Louvre, under the heading of *Saison XVIII^e*, organized a series of exhibitions revolving around

the arts in this period (for the Paris show see the review by Philippe Bordes in this same issue, pp. 360–366). The Teylers Museum in Haarlem opened *Egypte & Napoleon*, focusing on the new knowledge of the East brought about by Napoleon's Egyptian campaign, and Napoleon was also the subject of the exhibition *Napoleon und Europa. Traum und Trauma* in the Bundeskunsthalle in Bonn (see the review by Klaus Heinrich Kohrs in this same issue, pp. 378–383).

What unites this remarkable accumulation of exhibitions, apart from the period they cover, is first of all their interdisciplinary approach: they combine disciplines such as art history, archeology,

the study of books, museography, and history of science. Secondly, they share a wide array of themes, ranging from the sublime, popular culture, life and death, and historical thinking, to the early development of museums and academic art history and related fields.

The period around the French Revolution has long received a good deal of attention from art historians. But the issues that are currently being addressed are new. The Revolution created an irreparable gap between past and present, and made people aware of the importance of preserving national cultural heritage. How did the arts represent the sense of loss caused by the Revolution? What was the role of new multi-medial techniques and popular culture in reviving the past? What was the role of new aesthetic categories such as the sublime?

WHAT IS PRESENCE IN ART?

These issues and more were addressed during an exciting two-day conference held in Rome as a joint project of the Académie de France and the Royal Dutch Institute. As Caroline van Eck (Universiteit Leiden), the main organizer, explained in her introductory remarks, the conference programme was based on two ideas: firstly, the notion of historical experience or the sudden eruption of the past into the present (described by Johan Huizinga, and more recently also by the Dutch philosopher of history Frank Ankersmit, one of the conference's keynote speakers); and secondly, the experience that works of art are somehow alive and/or act upon their viewers, or, in other words, the experience of paintings, sculptures, and buildings having „presence“. Thus, the main question underlying *Waking the Dead* may be formulated as follows: what did the presence of art and the presence of the past produce together in the period of the French Revolution? To discuss this problem, scholars with a variety of backgrounds were invited: besides art historians this included historians, theatre history scholars, and philosophers.

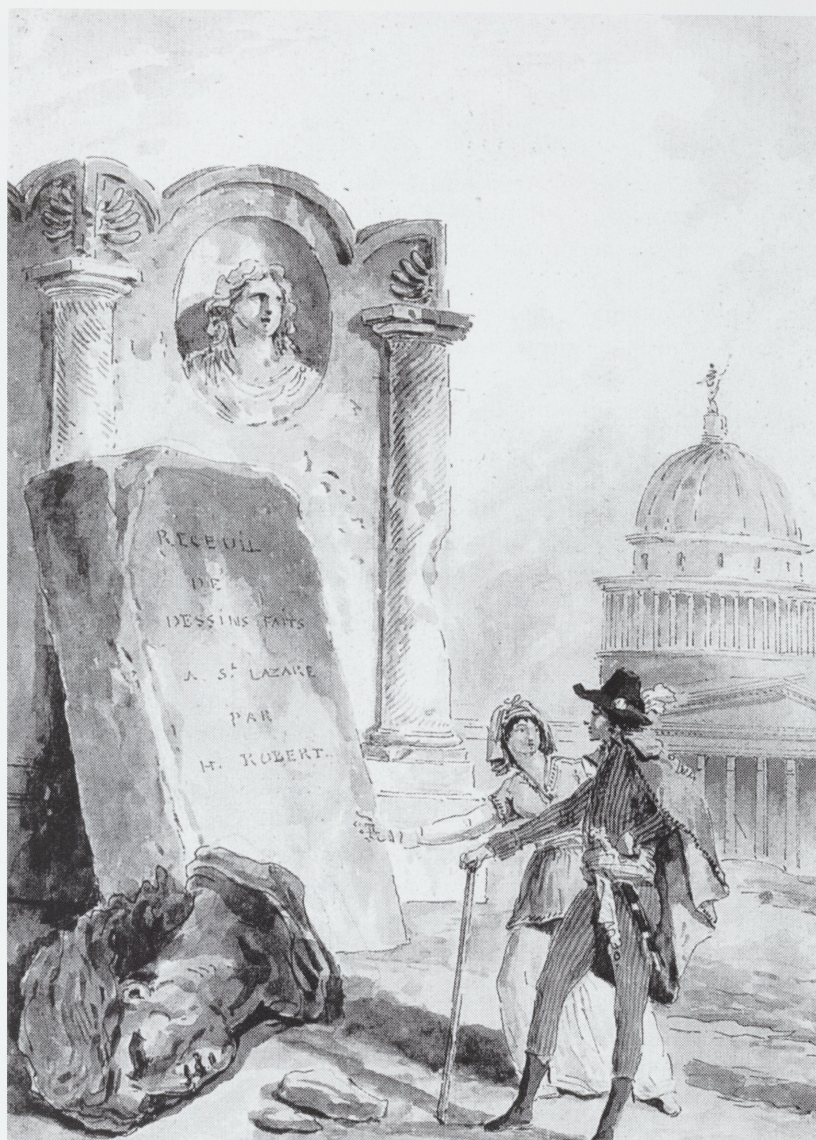
The conference programme started with a keynote lecture by Frank Ankersmit (Rijksuniversiteit Groningen). Exploring the relation

between past and present in a theoretical and philosophical way, his lecture provided a touchstone for all succeeding discussions: How was people's relationship to the past defined in the aftermath of the Revolution? Key concept in Ankersmit's talk on what he concisely summarized as historical representation was „presence“ – a quality, he argued, of re-presentation rather than the thing or person represented. With Nietzsche's *Die Geburt der Tragödie* in mind, he proposed that art and music have „presence“ because they participate in the Schopenhauerian Will. They are, in a sense, more real than reality itself. Now, when an individual is confronted with a very „present“ piece of music or work of art, he or she temporarily loses him- or herself in what may be called a sublime experience. And, as Ankersmit argued, it was this same kind of sublimity that, since the French Revolution, also characterized the experience of the past: the split between present and past only came into being in the experience of the traumatic loss of a former collective identity, namely that of the *Ancien Régime*.

Likewise, Pamela Warner (University of Rhode Island), herself present *in absentia*, compared the experience of art and that of history in a paper on the historical studies of the naturalist writers Edmond and Jules de Goncourt (1822-96 and 1830-70). As Warner argued, the Goncourts aimed for a fragmentary way of writing history, increasingly inspired by works of art; in doing so they tried to undo the barriers between present and past, and to bring their historical object, the eighteenth-century aristocracy, back to life. Warner's subsequent proposal to connect the Goncourts' historical approach to Walter Benjamin's notion of *Jetztzeit* was not fully accepted in the discussion following her contribution.

Visuality and fragmentation were equally important notions in the paper of Caroline van Eck. The idea that visual fragments such as ruins have the power to make the past present in an unmediated way can be traced in the work of many artists and historians of the period, such as the architects Giovanni Battista Piranesi and Sir John Soane and the historians Edward Gibbon and Jules

Abb. 1 Hubert Robert, Couple lisant une inscription. Entwurf für ein Titelblatt, um 1795. Privatbesitz (Hubert Robert et la Révolution, Ausst.kat. Valence 1989, Kat.nr. 31)



Michelet. Van Eck's paper offered a history of thinking about the liveliness of art from the later half of the eighteenth to the first half of the nineteenth century. Towards the end of that period, she argued, a paradoxical situation arose: as is particularly evident in the case of the *Musée des monuments français*, the first of the new museums opened by the French nation, the pre-revolutionary past could be resurrected with so much success that the old fear of idolatry was revived as well.

THE BIRTH OF ART HISTORY

The upcoming art-historical discipline on the other hand aimed for a historicization and conservation of works of art and monuments from the past, so that life was ultimately taken from them. The first public museums took centre stage in the contribution of Pascal Griener (Université de

Neuchâtel). Griener compared the newly founded Musée du Louvre with the afore-mentioned *Musée des monuments français* – a much discussed topic during these two days – from the perspective of a 'histoire du regard' (see the review of his recent book *La République de l'œil* in: *Kunstchronik*, march 2011, 148-152) and showed how these museums offered the spectator a sublime experience in which reality and fiction, museum room and *phantasme* became completely intertwined.

Like Van Eck, Maarten Delbeke (Universiteit Gent/Universiteit Leiden) addressed the historicization of art as a means to overcome idolatry. He focused on the Revolution's search for new images and showed that primitive architecture was very

attractive in this sense. Alexandre Lenoir and others saw architecture as the origin of all arts, and thought of it as the product of a community expressing its deepest beliefs in seemingly artless, spontaneously assembled constructions. A return to origins became a means to start history from scratch. Stephen Bann (University of Bristol) also spoke about a (post-)revolutionary interest in the architecture of the past. His topic was the representation of historical church interiors in paintings, but also in new media like lithography and the diorama in the period of the Bourbon Restoration. As Griener and Van Eck had done in relation to the museum interior, Bann pointed to the theatrical effects of light and shadow, in this case meant to enhance the illusion of a church interior's presence.

The return of the Bourbon kings was discussed in another paper, that of Emmanuel Fureix (Université de Paris-III), who connected the mourning for the royal victims of the Revolution, widely expressed during this period, with the category of the sublime. The Restoration resulted in the rise of a cult around the bodily remains of the royal family, most notably those of Louis XVI, and an attempt to sanctify these victims, for example in the famous *Chapelle expiatoire*. In this context, according to Fureix, the sublime was an often recurring notion with great plasticity; sacralised in relation to the exhumation of the royal bodies, highly ambiguous in relation to later representations of the dynasty in burial rituals. The sublime returned in the contribution of Sigrid de Jong, who discussed the late eighteenth-century quasi-obsession with the Vesuvius and its frequent eruptions during that time. The main question here was in what ways the vulcano – an unstoppable natural force, destroying everything in its way – figured in representations of the Revolution.

THE ANIMATED THING

A particularly lively and rich contribution was given by Marina Warner (University of Essex), second keynote speaker of the conference, who sketched a

cultural history of the nineteenth-century animated „thing“. Focusing on the French fascination with the Orient, she went from objects possessed by jinns in *Les Mille et une Nuits* – lamps, severed heads, talismans – to paper money, finally to modern Egyptian machines as illustrated in the *Description d’Egypte*. Warner related this omnipresence of animated things to the advent of global consumerism already in the eighteenth century, and to a longing for a secularized spirituality which was at the basis of orientalism. A central point of her paper, moreover, and which resurfaced in many of the other contributions and discussions, was the animating force of representation in itself.

Whereas Warner addressed the topic of living things, Frédérique Baumgartner (Harvard University) spoke about Hubert Robert's attitude towards his dead fellow human beings. In a sharp analysis of a single drawing, *Couple reading an Inscription* (c. 1795; fig. 1), Baumgartner argued that Robert criticized the recently established French Panthéon. Or, more precisely, that he questioned the notion of immortality that was propagated by the Panthéon but had lost its relevance during the Terror, when reputations were made and broken on a daily basis.

Immortality was also an important theme for the Belgian artist Antoine Wiertz, discussed by Bram van Oostveldt (Universiteit van Amsterdam) and Stijn Bussels (Rijksuniversiteit Groningen). Wiertz was among the first artists to have his own personal museum, in which he staged his work in a heretofore unseen spectacular way, in an attempt, according to Van Oostveldt and Bussels, to overcome the deaths caused by the Revolution.

The dead returned once more in the contribution of Philippe Bordes (Université de Lyon-II), only this time as nightmares continuously haunting the living. Bordes compared a selection of artworks from the period following the Terror and particularly asked attention for the social aspects of art production in those few years: during the Directory and the Consulate, artists, argued Bordes, were at liberty to experiment, made images with a huge popular appeal, and developed a new relation to their work and their audiences.

NEW TECHNIQUES AND THEIR POWER

An important and often recurring theme during these two productive days was representation as a means to achieve animation. New reproductive techniques such as lithography became a tool for the academic study of historical art; but they were also feared as a kind of uncontrollable magic. As Stephen Bann remarked, Napoleon impeded lithography being afraid of its possibilities, also on the political level. Another returning question concerned the impact of the political events of the Revolution on the development of the arts and their function. Did the Revolution cause artistic change? Or were the developments demonstrated in this conference the outcome of much older processes? Was the French Revolution a time of „moderation“, as Philippe Bordes wondered? Such a problem can only be solved taking into account the *longue durée*.

If the aim of the conference was, and I here quote the organizers, „to show that the birth of modern multi-media mass culture can be traced back to the desperate attempts to bring back the dead of those who were stranded in the present after the Revolution“, these two days in Rome have also made clear that the process of exchange between high and low culture was granted only a short life; the visual arts were soon about to go their own, academic way. The far-reaching historicization of the arts, according to a consensus of opinions, did no longer lead to further enlivenment but, quite the opposite, to silence. Or, as Quatremère de Quincy wrote so eloquently: „Déplacer tous les monuments, en recueillir ainsi

les fragments décomposés, en classer méthodiquement les débris, [...] c'est tuer l'art pour en faire l'histoire“. In this sense, the conference in itself may be viewed as an attempt to bring back the dead; by which I mean the victim of a much more silent revolution taking place in the course of the nineteenth century: the historicized and musealized work of art.

Conference Program:

<http://arthist.net/archive/611>. Scientific Committee: Marc Bayard (Académie de France), Stijn Bussels (Rijksuniversiteit Groningen), Caroline van Eck, Sigrid de Jong (both Universiteit Leiden), Annick Lemoine (Académie de France), and Bram Van Oostveldt (Universiteit van Amsterdam).

ELSJE VAN KESSEL, M.A.
Universiteit Leiden, Faculty of Humanities,
Institute for Cultural Disciplines,
School of Art History, P.O. Box 9515,
NL-2300 RA Leiden,
E.Van.Kessel@hum.leidenuniv.nl