

ZITIERTE LITERATUR

Blisniewski 2004: Thomas Blisniewski, „Mit glühenden Augen lockt das nackte Weib“. ‚DIE SVENDE‘ Franz von Stucks im Wallraf-Richartz-Museum – Fondation Corboud, in: *Kölner Museums-Bulletin* 1 (2004), 22–33

Kunstchronik 1892: Kunstchronik (Franz Stuck im Kunstverein), in: *Münchner Neueste Nachrichten*, Jg. 45, Nr. 132 (Vorabend-Blatt), 22. März 1892

Malevič 1920: Kazimir Malevič, *Suprematism. 34 risunka*, Vitebsk 1920

Moeller 1994: Magdalena M. Moeller (Hg.), *Der frühe Kandinsky. 1900–1910*, Ausst.kat. Berlin, München 1994

Muter 1901: Richard Muter, *Istorija živopisi v XIX veke*, übers. v. Z. Vengerova, Bd. 3, St. Petersburg 1901

Muther 1894: Richard Muther, *Geschichte der Malerei im XIX. Jahrhundert*, Bd. 3, München 1894

Nietzsche 1972: Günther Nietzsche, *Die Terrarientiere*, Bd. 2, Stuttgart 1972

Raff 2003: Thomas Raff, *Franz von Stuck – der Maler und seine „Sünde(n)“*, Ausst.kat. Tetenweis, Passau 2003

Ritthaler 1998: Albert Ritthaler, Die Sünde – tema con variazioni, in: *Spiel und Sinnlichkeit. Franz von Stuck 1863–1928*, Ausst.kat. Koblenz 1998, 12–27

Rodčenko 1982: Aleksandr Rodčenko, *Stat'i, vospominaniya, avtobiografičeskie zapiski, pis'ma*, hg. v. Varvara Rodčenko u. Aleksandr Lavrent'ev, Moskau 1982

Rodčenko 1996: Aleksandr Rodčenko, *Opyty dlja buduščego. Dnevnik, stat'i, pis'ma, zapiski*, hg. v. V. Rodčenko und A. Lavrent'ev, Moskau 1996

Stepanova 1994: Varvara Stepanova, *Čelovek ne možet žit' bez čuda. Pis'ma, poëtičeskie opyty, zapiski chudožnicy*, hg. v. V. Rodčenko u. A. Lavrent'ev, Moskau 1994

Stuck 1996: Franz von Stuck und die Photographie. *Inszenierung und Dokumentation*, Ausst.kat. München 1996

Voragine 2014: Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda aurea*, 2 Bde., Freiburg/Basel/Wien 2014

Voss 1973: Heinrich Voss, *Franz von Stuck 1863–1928. Werkkatalog der Gemälde mit einer Einführung in seinen Symbolismus*, München 1973

DR. ANNE RENNERT

Anti-formalist responses

Caroline van Eck
**Art, Agency and Living Presence:
 From the Animated Image to the
 Excessive Object.** Boston/Berlin/
 München, de Gruyter 2015.
 274 S., zahlr. Ill.
 ISBN 978-3-11-034541-4. € 89,95

This is a very readable, engaging and witty book – yet it is not an easy one. It is actually more than one book, uniting a historiographical and a theoretical argument, both of high relevance to every student of visual culture. Its subject is a phenomenon that has been intensely debated over the last decades:

the perception of artworks as a living presence. As van Eck has stated repeatedly, it is her contention that this phenomenon “only make[s] sense if living presence response is understood as an experience, the experience of a work of art becoming alive” (Living Statues: Alfred Gell’s “Art and Agency”, living presence response and the sublime, in: *Art History* 32, 2010, 644).

The aim of her book, however, is not so much to map and analyse such historic cases of experiences of ‘living presence response’, but to discuss the *theoretical* explanations that were given over the course of early modern history for this phenomenon. In this respect, the book is more than just “a contribution towards a historically-informed ethnography of European responses to art” (25), but also an exercise in meta-theoretical reasoning. The scope of van Eck’s account is certainly not limited

by “grenzpolizeilicher Befangenheit”, as Aby Warburg would have called it. Her examples range from paintings by Giovanni Bellini in the mid-fifteenth century to Aby Warburg’s writings around 1900, and are further enriched by frequent excursions into other subjects, from prehistoric art and ancient rhetorical theory to Oceanic fetishes and contemporary art and iconoclasm.

CHANGING ATTITUDES

This expansive scope notwithstanding, the book pursues a coherent and chronologically cohesive core argument. On a historiographical level, van Eck argues that there were multiple decisive changes in art theoretical attitudes towards the ‘liveliness’ of art. The first moment of transition is located in the 18th century, although several precursors such as the Jesuit cardinal and philosopher Sforza Pallavicini (1607–1667) could be named (68). Van Eck identifies a shift from a rhetorical to a fetishist understanding of “living presence response” taking place during this timeframe. While “up to the 1750s, such attributions [of living presence to an artwork] were generally understood in the rhetorical terms of *energeia*”, this changed with the early Enlightenment; while in Early Modern times, lifelikeness was considered the highest praise for the mimetic qualities of an artwork, this perception was modified in the wake of emerging discourses on fetishism and idolatry. For 18th century thinkers, living presence was nothing more than a superstitious, primeval reaction untenable for an enlightened mind: “With the rise of Idealist aesthetics and the spread of ethnographic studies of fetishism, attributing life to a work of art was rejected from the range of acceptable reactions and relegated into the realm of the primitive, the uncivilized, the pathological or simply the tasteless” (141).

A second decisive shift in attitudes is located ‘around 1800’ (still an unfamiliar periodization for the English reader) with the arrival of historicism: Not a single artwork, but the foreign and distant realm of the past in general became the phenomenon that one wanted to animate. Practices like gallery-visits by torchlight (168–171) or

Piranesi’s eclecticism (147–157) are interpreted as the attempt to conjure up the past through the medium of artistic experience. Supposedly free from fetishist superstition, the modern aesthetes were now haunted by a different ghost: the past. These passages on Romantic Neoclassicism and its devices for creating a ‘presence’ of the past – purely by means of imagination of course – are among the strongest chapters of the book.

This history of changing attitudes towards the ‘living presence’ of artworks is told in rapid succession in a series of rather short chapters, each devoted to a single case study, be it of an author, a text, or an artwork. One truly has to admire the originality and breadth of the examples chosen. Many of the authors discussed, such as Guillaume-Alexandre de Méhégan or Ottaviano Guasco, to name just two eighteenth-century examples, are still not as well known as they probably deserve to be, although their works have attracted growing attention in recent years and are included in larger surveys (e. g. Ulrich Pfisterer/Cornelia Logemann/Maria Effinger [eds.], *Götterbilder und Götzen-diener in der Frühen Neuzeit. Europas Blick auf fremde Religionen*, Heidelberg 2012). But even in the case of more famous protagonists, van Eck chooses lesser-known examples such as Piranesi’s S. Maria del Priorato, or Sir John Soane’s description of Pitzhanger Manor in Reading.

The many illustrations of these and other objects – sculptures taken from unusual angles, surprising details of paintings, or mere curiosities like a wax statue of the former Dutch Queen Beatrix – make the book (which is very well designed and produced) a pleasure to read. In general, the text is clearly structured. Concluding paragraphs at the end of each chapter summarize and repeat the argument with a sometimes almost didactic (and slightly repetitive) insistence. However, the factual accuracy is not always up to scratch. Simple spelling errors, as in the case of the Vietnamese artist “Randy [sic – Rindy] Sam” (16) are among the less grave errors. More problematic is the fact that some of the quotes seem to be plainly wrong: Nowhere in

Warburg's manuscript *Grundlegende Bruchstücke*, for example, can be found the phrase "Wir schauen es an, aber das tut kein Leid" (176, 183 – no page numbers given in the quotation). Van Eck nevertheless makes a convincing case and selects her examples wisely. In general, one can observe a certain predilection for examples from Germany and France. It might, however, have been interesting to discuss a few more English examples (apart from John Soane); the art and literature of that country might have provided an interesting complement and presented cases where the fetishist animation of art, even during the heyday of the Enlightenment, might have been more acceptable than on the continent – Richard Cosway's *Lecture on Venus's Arse* (1775, Townley Hall Art Gallery, Burnley) or William Hazlitt's *Liber Amoris; or, The New Pygmalion* (1823) come to mind.

AN ESSAY ON THEORY

As mentioned in the beginning, this book is not only a historical account, but also a theoretical intervention that sets out to make a claim about the actual nature of "living presence response". Van Eck aims to "offer some building block towards a theoretical account of such responses" (25). The qualities of the book's historiographical argument notwithstanding, most art historians will be rather more interested in the polemic and controversial argument van Eck makes on this level. The theoretical framework the author builds on is Alfred Gell's posthumous book *Art and Agency* (1998). Gell's radically anti-semiotic approach understands art works "in performative terms as systems of actions", and more particularly, as "social agents" with which the beholder interacts. This results in the hypothesis that "living presence response can only be understood adequately when thought of primarily as the viewer's *experience* of an artwork coming alive" (53). The agency of an artwork thus only exists as a social occurrence, namely when an interaction of two social agents, object and beholder, takes place, during which the beholder *perceives* the unanimated artwork as being alive – a claim that only at first appears to be uncontroversial.

The consequences of this statement are fundamental and far-reaching. Its potential for controversy lies not so much in what it states, but in what it implicitly negates: Van Eck rejects the idea that the form, i. e., the inherent qualities of an artwork spark the viewer's reaction. By making this casual claim, she opposes – virtually *en passant* – some of the most influential art historical books of the last thirty years. Horst Bredekamp, WJT Mitchell, David Freedberg, and Hans Belting are just the best-known authors who wrote, according to van Eck, "books [that] share a tendency to give an account of viewers attributing life to art works that concentrates mainly on the work of art and its qualities that may elicit such responses" (25). Especially Bredekamp, whose *Bildakttheorie* is deemed to be not much more than "a synthesis of the work done in the past two decades inspired by Freedberg and Belting" is criticized severely. To assume that living presence responses are actually "triggered by inanimate objects" is regarded, at best, as a "reductive" perspective that does not do much for our understanding of the phenomenon (53). This is, by the way, a remarkable shift from van Eck's earlier convictions; in 2010, she still sought explanations of the phenomenon that offered "a way of thinking about them that keeps intact their almost supernatural and paradoxical character" (Van Eck 2010, 657).

Methodologically, this is not just a (debatable) "Entmythologisierung der Bildwissenschaft" (Martin Büchsel, in: *Kunstform* 15/9, 2015, <http://www.arthistoricum.net/kunstform/rezension/ausgabe/2015/9/27131/>; see also Büchsel, *Das Ende der Bildermythologien. Kritische Stimmen zur deutschen Bildwissenschaft*, in: *Kunstchronik* 67, 2014, 335–342) but more far-reaching: It is a critique of an object oriented, hermeneutic art history in general. Van Eck's argument is very much in line with anti-formalist philosophers like Arthur Danto who have argued that formal properties in themselves do not offer sufficient explanation for the visual efficacy of art objects (*The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, Cambridge/Mass. 1981).

The first example of van Eck's book is thus well chosen: It deals with the case of the above-

mentioned Rindy Sam, a Vietnamese artist who was (by her own account) so overcome by her love for a monochrome white painting by Cy Twombly that she felt the urge to kiss it and cover it with red lipstick. The agent of this emotional outburst is an almost aniconic image, a white surface that hardly shows any formal qualities that might explain a quasi-erotic appeal. The question of the nature and status of such “aniconic images” – not to be confused with “aniconism” (cf. David Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, 1989, chapter IV) – is a crucial one, especially since they were traditionally associated with fetishist beliefs. Milette Gaifman recently broke new ground for the study of this subject by offering a long overdue clarification of terminology (*Aniconism in Greek Antiquity*, Oxford 2012). Hence “aniconic images” might become an important test case for the discussions about the status of ‘pictoriality’ as opposed to ‘form’ in general (see Horst Bredekamp, *Der Bildakt*, Berlin 2015, and Whitney Davis, *Visuality and Virtuality*, forthcoming, for opposing opinions).

A VICTIM OF MAKE-BELIEVE?

By emphasising the necessity to focus on individual experience, the book thus becomes a powerful plea for a subjective and biographical approach that might also resonate well with the proponents of a neuroarthistory that focuses on neuroplasticity as the *explanans* for art experience (John Onians, *Neuroarthistory*, 2007). A lack of attention to the personal experiences and memories of the individual beholder is also named as one of the weaknesses of Gell’s anthropological theory (22). Van Eck’s working hypothesis is that the attributions of life to objects quoted over the course of the book are “genuine” and “not part of some social setting of make-believe, fiction or divided consciousness” (203). The (autobiographical) reports of her protagonists are thus often taken at face value, even if, as in the case of Herder, they are highly stylised literary texts – or even novels, as in the case of Goethe’s *Wahlverwandtschaften*. The authenticity and sincerity of many of the “living presence responses” are hard to believe. The episode of Rindy Sam covering a monochrome

painting by Twombly with lipstick kisses is such a case (16). Quoting a deliberate artistic performance, without apparent irony, as an example for the experience of a “living presence response” (and not as a performance which plays on just this topos) is quite irritating, especially as Sam herself claimed (in the BBC article quoted by van Eck) that she did it “just so the name Rindy gets in the newspaper for a week”. The author aims at “taking seriously viewers attributing life to art works” (203) – but some of these attributions might not have been intended as seriously as she takes them.

In general, one might also accuse van Eck of an inclination towards a somewhat apodictic way of arguing that does not always do justice to the texts discussed. In many cases, she shows a tendency to cherry-pick and quote convenient half-sentences that convey the impression of a “living presence response”-experience – but give little information about the context they stem from. In these cases, it would be advisable to stay closer to Gell than van Eck does; his extremely close-knit, micro-level analysis of social interactions would have certainly produced a more complex image of the said experiences than the discussion of sometimes rather detached quotes. In some cases, it might be even cast into doubt whether the artwork was actually perceived as a living presence. Especially in the nineteenth-century, the desired ‘animation of the past’ often failed. Van Eck quotes, for example, an essay by Carl August Böttiger on a night-time visit to the Dresden sculpture gallery, lit by torches – but she does not mention that this aim to animate the sculptures did not succeed, but rather revealed, to Böttiger’s dismay, the badly mutilated and heavily restored state of these statues – dumb material, not animated ideal presence (Hönes, Enlivening and – dividing. An Aporia of Illumination, in: *Contemporaneity* 4, 2015, 1–23). Often enough, the desired experience of a perfect illusion was to be maintained “only for the blink of an eye”, as Heinrich Wölfflin once wearily wrote. The lack of a living presence response was often perceived as equally disturbing as its occurrence.

To conclude, this is an important and timely book for many reasons. It reframes the debates on pictorial agency and insists on the part played by the beholder, encountering objects in a social setting. It deserves to be lauded for its attempt to discuss material from the margins of the discipline, and to tell a story beyond the well-trodden paths and theories. It is an ambitious book, presenting a succinct analysis of the changing attitudes of Western art theory towards the question of life-like images and a rich source for every art historian and

student of art historiography, especially for those with an interest in Neoclassical and Romantic art. Above all, it makes a bold claim for anti-formalist art history and thus is a most welcome challenge to current debates.

DR. HANS CHRISTIAN HÖNES

BEI DER REDAKTION EINGEGANGENE NEUERSCHEINUNGEN

Berit Wagner: **Bilder ohne Auftraggeber.** Der deutsche Kunsthandel im 15. und frühen 16. Jahrhundert. Mit Überlegungen zum Kunsttransfer. Petersberg, Michael Imhof Verlag 2014. 352 S., 155 s/w Abb. ISBN 978-3-86568-627-5.

Wie Texte und Bilder zusammenfinden. Vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart. Hg. Renate Kroll, Susanne Gramatzki, Sebastian Karnatz. Berlin, Dietrich Reimer Verlag 2015. 339 S., s/w Abb. ISBN 978-3-496-01495-9.

Die Wiener Hofburg 1521–1705. Baugeschichte, Funktion und Etablierung als Kaiserresidenz. Hg. Herbert Karner. Beitr. Sibylle Grün, Jaroslava Hausenblasová, Renate Holzschuh-Hofer, Markus Jeitler, Herbert Karner, Jochen Martz, Andrea Sommer-Mathis. (Österrei-

chische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Denkschriften der Philosophisch-Historischen Klasse 444). Wien, Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften 2014. 625 S., zahlr. Farbbabb. ISBN 978-3-7001-7657-2.

Wissenschaftlerleben mit Kunst. Druckgraphik der Slg. Heide und Wolfgang Voelter. Ausst.kat. des Kunsthistorischen Instituts im Museum der Universität Tübingen MUT 2014. Hg. Anette Michels. Tübingen, MUT 2014. 165 S., zahlr. Farbbabb. ISBN 978-3-9816616-2-0.

Altenbourg im Dialog III. Julius Bissier. Freiburg im Breisgau 1893 – 1965 Ascona. Ausst.kat. Lindenau-Museum Altenbourg 2015. Beitr. Julia M. Nauhaus, Matthias Bärmann, Christa Grimm, Isabel Herda, Frank Grimm. Altenbourg, Eigenverlag 2015. 135 S., 51 Abb. ISBN 978-3-86104-121-4.

À perte de vue. Les nouveaux paradigmes du visuel. Hg. Daniel Dubuisson, Sophie Raux. Dijon, Les presses du réel 2015. 448 S., 128 Farb-, 35 s/w Abb. ISBN 978-2-84066-505-2.

Daniel Arasse: **Anselm Kiefer.** München, Schirmer/Mosel Verlag

2015. 344 S., 355 Abb. ISBN 978-3-8296-0703-2.

Michael Baxandall, Vision and the Work of Words. Hg. Peter Mack, Robert Williams. Beitr. Alex Potts, Jules Lubbock, Alberto Frigo, Whitney Davis, Robert Williams, Paul Hills, Evelyn Lincoln, Peter Mack, Elizabeth Cook. Farnham, Ashgate 2015. 175 S., Farb- und s/w Abb. ISBN 978-1-4724-4278-9.

Barbara Beck: **Lucas Cranach der Jüngere.** Maler – Unternehmer – Politiker. Weimar, Weimarer Verlagsgesellschaft 2015. 136 S., zahlr. Farbbabb. ISBN 978-3-7374-0219-4.

Burgen und Schlösser in Sachsen-Anhalt. Heft 23, Mitteilungen der Landesgruppe Sachsen-Anhalt der Deutschen Burgenvereinigung e.V. 2014. 527 S., 30 Farb-, zahlr. s/w Abb. ISSN 0944-4157.

André Chastel. Méthodes et combats d'un historien de l'art. Hg. Sabine Frommel, Michel Hochmann, Philippe Sénéchal. Paris, Éditions Picard 2015. 280 S., s/w Abb. ISBN 978-2-7084-0992-7.

Teresa Ende: **Wilhelm Lehmbruck.** Geschlechterkonstruktionen in der Plastik. Berlin, Dietrich Rei-