

Presenting Finnish Art History in an international context: The case of J. J. Tikkanen

Review of:

Towards a Science of Art History: J. J. Tikkanen and Art Historical Scholarship in Europe, The Acts of an International Conference, Helsinki, December 7-8 2007, edited by Johanna Vakkari, *Taidehistoriallisia Tutkimuksia / Konsthistoriska Studier / Studies in Art History* 38, Helsinki: Society of Art History, 2009, 163 pp., 20 color plates, 61 b. & w. illus., £00.00 hdbk, £00.00 pbk ISBN 978-952-5533-10-1.

How to present the history of art history? This collection of papers takes a largely celebratory approach, as is fitting given the event that occasioned it: the 150th anniversary of the birth of Johan Jakob Tikkanen, first professor of art history in Finland. Better integrating Tikkanen's contributions and context into the discipline's history are promising goals. The proceedings of this conference address a range of topics which, in aggregate, underline the particular value of reexamining not only Tikkanen's scholarship but also art and its historiography in Nordic lands and their relationships to broader European artistic and academic discourses. While it is left largely to the reader to draw out common themes and overriding questions raised by individual papers, such themes and questions are plentiful, and demonstrate the strengths of highlighting positive contributions made by turn-of-the-last-century art historians to the future of the discipline. At times, however, the papers suggest the corresponding weaknesses inherent in sidelining these same scholars' engagement with the more disturbing cultural dialogues of their own day or, in the most egregious instance, in sidelining the scholar altogether.

Johanna Vakkari's brief preface outlines the organization of the conference proceedings into three sections: "The Role of the Arts in Finland in J. J. Tikkanen's Time," "National and International Art History," and "Viewing, Experiencing and Interpreting Art." Her introduction provides an intellectual biography of Tikkanen. She notes that his early and extensive training in painting, which concluded at the Munich Academy of Art, appears to have informed his considerable skills in formal analysis as well as his interest in the creative process. Both are integral to his doctoral work on Giotto, completed in 1884 in German. Here he began investigations of the roles of color and gesture in art that he would pursue throughout his career. He shared this interest in gesture with Julius Lange (subject of another essay in this collection), whose work Tikkanen studied closely (15). Tikkanen's lifelong work on color, with its forward-thinking technical and scientific considerations, would only be published posthumously (1933). In her notes as well as in her text, Vakkari is concerned to emphasize Tikkanen's work on color and gesture as both undervalued and particularly relevant to twenty-first-century scholarly concerns.

Another forward-thinking aspect of Tikkanen's scholarship addressed in Tikkanen's dissertation was the relationship of Giotto's work to earlier, Byzantine-

influenced painting (10). Vakkari notes that, during studies abroad following Tikkanen's doctoral work (from 1885 to 1888), it was the "Byzantine problem" that came to preoccupy him (16). Having acquainted himself with Anton Springer and his students, Tikkanen published studies on subjects that Springer had only recently addressed, such as the Genesis mosaics in San Marco, Venice. Tikkanen wished to underline the Byzantine contribution to Western art, which Springer had not considered particularly important (10-11). It appears that Tikkanen had been encouraged in this bold direction by both Eduard Dobbert in Berlin and Eugène Müntz in Paris, who led him to the work of leading Byzantinist Nikodim Kondakov. By the 1890s Tikkanen was corresponding with both Kondakov and his student Dmitrii Ainalov, and studying Russian for the purpose of accessing Byzantine manuscripts in Russian collections (16). This reader wished that Vakkari had not broken up her discussion of this aspect of Tikkanen's scholarship into separate sections of her paper. It would be interesting to know more about Tikkanen's embrace of the Byzantine material both because it suggests Tikkanen had taken a position relative to geopolitical concerns embedded in the international dialogue concerning medieval art, and because it is a thread that has relevance to other papers presented in the conference.

The three essays in the section on the role of the arts in Tikkanen's time highlight common themes. The governing board of the Finnish Art Society during the last decades of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries included J. J. Tikkanen and the scholar who had guided his dissertation, Carl Gustaf Estlander (1834-1910). Susanna Pettersson, in considering Tikkanen's contributions to the Society, demonstrates his lifelong efforts to promote contemporary Finnish art and artists. At the same time, she addresses tensions between the academic community and the artistic community that even Tikkanen, though he had trained as a painter, did not fully manage to bridge. Riitta Konttinen presents another angle on these tensions in her essay on the Finnish art world at the end of the nineteenth century. Both Estlander and, to a lesser extent, Tikkanen, retained artistic orientations rooted in German Idealism. These were strongly challenged by the Realist, Impressionist and Symbolist approaches to painting in France that increasingly fascinated the leading Finnish artists (25, 27, 37, 41). In 1880 Estlander made his preference for German Idealism explicit to his student, the painter Helena Westermark; her subsequent embrace of French art and ideas, evident in her work by 1883, was subjected to his opprobrium as well as that of Tikkanen and the Finnish press (40-42).

By 1888 the tables had turned. The inaugural exhibition of the Finnish Art Society's collections in a purpose-built space, which Estlander in particular had worked hard to achieve, met with such disapproval for its rejection of French ideas from the now numerous Finnish artists who had trained in France, that to appease the artists the next exhibition, held in 1891, was jointly organized with the Artist's Association of Finland. Estlander only grudgingly accepted the presence of Impressionist works, openly wondering whether the Finnish Art Society should give up holding exhibitions altogether (23). An intriguing light is shed on this split between artistic and academic orientations in Finland by Konttinen's comment that, even during a period of growing

political tensions between the Grand Duchy of Finland and the Russian Empire, when looking beyond France, Finnish painters looked towards Russian Realism more than towards German developments (41). The Finnish academic community, by contrast, turned increasingly towards German scholarship, as is evident by the languages in which dissertations were being written at the University of Helsinki. While dissertations in German were the exception when Tikkanen completed his, by 1914 more were written in German than in any other language.¹

The triumph of the French-oriented artists' community is evident in the following essay, in which Anna-Maria von Bonsdorff investigates Finnish art at the turn of the twentieth century. The goal towards which Axel Gallén, Pekka Halonen and Väinö Blomstedt, in particular, aspired, was a "Nordic Renaissance" (49). To achieve this they studied Assyrian and Egyptian art and the Italian Primitives at the Louvre, while absorbing the techniques and ideas of Puvis de Chavannes and Gauguin (46-47, 49-50). Through combining historic models and contemporary ideas, these Finns sought to produce "a mirror of simultaneity, linking time and reflecting the past in the future and the future in the past" that would, through their intervention, be specifically Finnish (54).

Five essays comprise the second section, "National and International Art History." The first two of these provide a Scandinavian context for Tikkanen's work. Mai Britt Guleng's essay on Lorentz Dietrichson (1834-1917) looks at the development of a specifically Norwegian art historical narrative. This narrative, she demonstrates, "pointed forward to an, as yet, unrealized end: a future Golden Age for Norwegian art" (65). Another interesting aspect of Dietrichson's work indirectly suggested by her paper concerns his transition from literary historian to art historian. Art history was a subspecialty commonly tied to literature and aesthetics. Estlander in Helsinki, for example, served as Professor of Aesthetics and Modern Literature from 1868 to 1910, while Carl Rupert Nyblom in Uppsala served as Professor of Aesthetics, Literature and Art History from 1867 to 1897. Dietrichson, who was of the same generation as Estlander, began his career as a literary historian in Sweden (67 n.12). He wrote histories of both Danish (1860) and Swedish (1862) nineteenth-century literature before turning to the poetry of Norway, his birthplace. When, in 1866-69, Dietrichson turned his efforts towards a history of Norwegian poetry, he emphasized that during the period of Danish rule Norway had not stagnated but rather had experienced inner growth (61-62). Dietrichson's positive assessment of the impact of Danish rule was spurred by his political advocacy of a reunited Scandinavian monarchy (65; 69 n.12). The gap in Norway's literary output evidently still troubled him, however. Inspired by the cultural approach to literary history taken by Hippolyte Taine, Dietrichson sought other forms of art to fill this gap and so turned to the subject of Norwegian woodworking (62). By 1875 this new direction had earned him an Extraordinary Professorship in Art History at the University of Christiania (Oslo) – the first professorship in art history in Norway. One can't help but wonder whether, if Norway's literary history had been continuous,

¹ Matti Klinge, "The Germanophil University", in *Finland: People, Nation, State*, London: Hurst, 1989, 171.

Dietrichson would have turned to art at all.

Marianne Marcussen's essay on Danish art historian Julius Lange emphasizes his European context. Lange, after petitioning the university to let him graduate in art history was, in 1866, the first to receive a degree in the discipline as such (74). Marcussen points out Lange's indebtedness to Carl Friedrich von Rumohr who, in the 1830s, had introduced the catalogue raisonnée and *Quellenkritik* to Denmark, and to Niels Lauritz Høyen, director of the Danish Royal Art Collection, who was engaged in inventorying Denmark's medieval architecture at the time he oversaw Lange's examinations (72; 75). For Lange, the art of Classical Greece towered over that of all other times and places (75). The sculpted nude fascinated him most of all. His unfinished *magnum opus* on this subject was published, in full, shortly after his death (1898-99). Within Nordic art it is not surprising, therefore, that Lange held classicizing sculpture by the internationally-trained Scandinavians Johan Tobias Sergel and Bertel Thorvaldsen in his highest esteem (76), rather than work in any native specialty (such as Dietrichson's Norwegian woodcarving).

Asked to write a Nordic supplement for two Danish editions (1872 and 1881) of Wilhelm Lübke's popular survey of art history, Lange obliged (73). Having fought in the Second Schleswig War against Prussia and Austria, however, Lange bore a grudge against Germans that he did not conceal in his explanations to the reader. This reader found amusing some of his changes to the 1881 edition – for instance, placing the section on the Italian Renaissance before, rather than after, the section on the German Renaissance (74). It was Lübke who had essentially created the concept of a German Renaissance with his monumental study of 1872.² That it existed, Lange was apparently willing to accept, but that it had superceded the Italian Renaissance, apparently not. Lange's ambivalence towards Lübke's German-centric narrative highlights his desire and that of other scholars beyond the new German Empire, of feeling compelled both to engage with German scholarship and to maintain critical distance. Marcussen notes Lange's, Estlander's and Nyblom's participation in a specifically Scandinavian forum for art history, *Tidskrift för bildande konst och konstindustri*, founded by Dietrichson in 1875, which helped to address this concern (80).

The significance not only of German contributions to art history but also of German art collections only continued to grow. By 1904, within the German Empire, increasing interest in the art of non-Western peoples had led to the founding of the Islamic Museum in Berlin and the re-establishment of the Indian Department of the Museum of Ethnology as an independent entity; by 1906 a collection of East Asian art was also in the works (89). That such resources sparked great interest among Scandinavians is indicated by Minna Törmä's contribution. She documents an excursion to Berlin organized by Osvald Sirén for his students in 1919. This reader would have appreciated a little more background on his studies under Tikkanen and his position, as of 1908, as professor of art history at the University of Stockholm (apparently the first permanent chair in art history as an independent discipline in the Nordic lands). The

² Wilhelm Lübke, *Geschichte der deutschen Renaissance*, Stuttgart: Ebner & Seubert, 1872.

extensive non-Western portions of their visit were presumably informed by Sirén's developing expertise in non-Western – and especially Chinese art. Törmä notes that Sirén had taken his first trip to Japan the preceding year and, like Otto Kummel, the curator in Berlin, drew much of his knowledge of Chinese art from Japanese scholarship, as well as from Ernest Fenollosa at the Museum in Fine Arts in Boston (89).

It is with Gianni Carlo Sciolla's essay on the origins of 'Kunstwissenschaft' in Italy that we return to consideration of Tikkanen's personal contributions. In 1888 Tikkanen, towards the end of his post-graduate study tour, arrived in Rome. Here he met Adolfo Venturi, a scholar from Modena. At that time, as Sciolla explains, Venturi was engaged in launching a new journal, *L'Archivio Storico dell'Arte*, with Domenico Gnoli (95). Venturi encouraged Tikkanen to contribute to the journal. Tikkanen obliged and for the first volume, published in 1888, submitted an article-length analysis of the mosaics of San Marco, which he would expand and publish as a monograph in the following year. A connection could be drawn here to Vakkari's discussion of Tikkanen's analysis of the mosaics, which contradicted Springer's (95). Tikkanen made a second contribution to the journal in 1891 – this time a book review. Sciolla tells us that Tikkanen's review of Josef Strzygowski's *Das Etschmiadzin Evangeliar* "shows extensive learning and knowledge of Early Christian and Byzantine art and iconography, along with the principal related literature (Springer, Kondakoff, Müntz)" (96). What is more, according to Sciolla, Tikkanen's articles demonstrated the use of formal and iconographical analysis in a manner that was new within Italy.

Sciolla devotes much of his discussion to the early Italian art historians, and in particular to those who founded art-historical journals. He closes by describing a journal launched in 1907 that employed "a mould clearly deriving from the Viennese School of Art History, whose methodological approach was, by this time, also spreading in Italy, and it will become more noticeable in the years to come" (100). Given the significance of the Vienna school and Strzygowski's famously difficult relationship with it, it would be satisfying to know more about Tikkanen's reception of Strzygowski's work in the *L'Archivio* review. Had Venturi or Tikkanen already made Strzygowski's acquaintance in Rome, as seems likely? Reasons why one might be tempted to disregard such questions come to the fore in the next essay.

Georg Vasold considers both the historical and the contemporary reception of Josef Strzygowski in "Riegl, Strzygowski and the Development of Art." (A German version of this article may be found in *ARS, Journal of the Institute of Art History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences*, 2008, no. 1, according to a note at the end of the article.) Vasold notes "a strikingly intensive involvement with the founding fathers of art historiography has lately given rise to conferences and publications, all of which seek to remind us of the early masters of our discipline and their often forgotten achievements" (103). The present volume celebrating Tikkanen might be considered as confirmation of this observation. Rather than "respect for one's elders," however, Vasold asserts that studying the history of art history "is primarily a question of analyzing writings, studying the origin and their impact in context, and keeping that impact in mind." Vasold finds Alois Riegl, for instance, "championing the cause of intellectual freedom

and deploring its subordination to political ends" (104). Vasold notes that Josef Strzygowski, Riegl's nemesis, did not follow suit; much of Strzygowski's work reflected an obsession for undermining Riegl, or an obsessive anti-Semitism, or both.

Vasold mentions that Danish art historian Julius Lange's work also contains irrational, even rabidly anti-Semitic remarks, and that these have not gained Lange equivalent opprobrium (107). Julius Schlosser, a leading member of the Vienna School, was a great admirer of Lange who overlooked the issue (107); Marianne Marcussen, in her paper in the present volume, does the same. The reader is left to wonder to what extent anti-Semitism played a structural role in Lange's or Schlosser's work akin to that which Strzygowski's played in his.³ For his part, Vasold notes the context of widespread anti-Semitism, but finds Strzygowski's work to be uniquely irredeemable. Vasold concludes by asking whether "there is any real justification to view Strzygowski in a positive light, to describe him as pioneer of global art history, and to make a distinction between the 'early,' supposedly interesting Strzygowski, and the 'later,' openly racist scholar? In every respect the answer is emphatically 'no!'" (112).

Overt racism dramatically distorted much of Strzygowski's work. Vasold's answer remains, nevertheless confusing. It should be possible to find some aspects of a scholar's work to be useful, some less so or even problematic, and others reprehensible. Strzygowski could well have been both innovative in his global focus, and a virulent racist. What is more, the virulent anti-Semitism for which Strzygowski is infamous does not come to the fore in his work until 1902, well into his career and over a decade after Tikkanen's review.⁴ Given his major role in the art-historical dialogue of his day, can we afford to ignore whether anything aside from anti-Semitism propelled his thinking? He was an integral part of the larger dialogue; we can't understand it without him. By the same token, we might ask whether Lange's anti-Semitism and Schlosser's indifference have been sufficiently investigated in relation to their broader agendas. Racism of one sort or another has informed much of the history of art history. Even Riegl resorted to racism when it suited his political agenda; his was anti-Slavic.⁵ Vasold's unmitigated rejection of Strzygowski appears in the end to be a foil for his unquestioning praise for Riegl, which in turn is rooted in the same search for attractive founding fathers that he rejected at the outset. This search promises misunderstandings. Scholarship in art history has been at least as rife with racism and politicization as scholarship in any other discipline. A sanitized historiography can only obscure the scope of the issue.

The four papers in the third and final section of the conference proceedings, "Viewing, Experiencing and Interpreting Art", take an eclectic range of approaches to turn-of-the-century art history. Altti Kuusamo evaluates formalism as an approach to art in "The Idea of Art as a Form behind Tactile Values: The Recuperation of Art in Art

³ Schlosser's ambivalent comments concerning Jewish artistic abilities are addressed in Matthew Rampley, "Art History and the Politics of Empire: Rethinking the Vienna School", *The Art Bulletin* 91 (Dec. 2009), 459.

⁴ "Strzygowski's first extended anti-Semitic tirade was his article 'Hellas in des Orients Umarmung,' *Beilage zur Münchener Allgemeinen Zeitung*, 40-41 (1902)." See Rampley, "Art History and the Politics of Empire", n. 84. This tirade is the focus of Vasold's analysis; he cites no earlier anti-Semitic remark on Strzygowski's part.

⁵ Rampley, "Art History and the Politics of Empire", 454-59.

History c. 100 Years Ago.” Kuusamo focuses on the overriding interest in formal qualities in art expressed by Bernard Berenson, Clive Bell and Roger Fry. Berenson, Kuusamo notes, referred often to the “tactile values” of artworks, but without concrete explanation of these values (119-20). Paradoxically, Kuusamo writes, Berenson, like other formalists, uses this concept to denote a pure or universal significance that elevates artworks beyond the sensual immediacy that the term “tactile values” implies (125). Kuusamo cites a variety of authorities to underline the limitations of “the culture of form” promoted by the “atmosphere around Berenson” (125).

Kuusamo underlines at the outset that Berenson, Bell and Fry belonged to “different camps” of art historical analysis than did J. J. Tikkanen and his student Osvald Sirén (119). Tikkanen, Kuusamo notes, took a strong interest in narrative, while Sirén wrote that form is merely a vehicle for “some indwelling purpose or principle” (123). This reader wished that Kuusamo had had an opportunity to delve deeper into the interrelationships between these camps. Sirén, for instance, while he sparred with Berenson concerning attributions of Italian artworks, chose English rather than German as the primary language for his publications at a time when the formalist mode dominated Anglophone scholarship, and contributed, along with Roger Fry, to a pioneering introduction to Chinese Art (*Chinese Art: an Introductory Handbook to Painting, Sculpture, Ceramics, Textiles, Bronzes and Minor Arts*, London, 1935). A look at just how differently Sirén approached artworks from Berenson, or just how strongly the methodology of his introduction to Chinese materials diverged from Fry’s, might yield a more complex discussion of these camps – one that could perhaps shed some light on Tikkanen as well.

In “Learning by Looking (with Words): Wölfflin’s Legacy,” Dan Karlholm analyzes “Wölfflin’s scholarly working procedure with respect to the basic human activities of looking and speaking” (129). This approach reveals the significance of lecturing as an analytical framework for Wölfflin’s writing, and how his ample use of speech metaphors maintains the primacy of oral presentation in his publications. Karlholm explores, furthermore, how Wölfflin’s pioneering use of photographic images did not so much demonstrate points concerning the artworks represented by the images, as reify the ability of these images to “speak” to him while he transmitted to the audience what the images had to say. That these images distorted the size of the originals and omitted their colors and textures further served Wölfflin’s purposes, as Karlholm elucidates. For Wölfflin, the artwork demonstrated less the specific goals or circumstances of any given artist, viewer, time or place, than an abstract concept of “classic” or “baroque.”

Wölfflin, in Karlholm’s analysis, thus specifically embraced the disembodied image. Wölfflin explained, for instance, of how to establish ideal viewpoints for 3D works - viewpoints that would allow these works to be analyzed as static, 2D images. His aesthetic system did not incorporate movement through time or space, and thus it was the 2D version of a sculpture or work of architecture that captured, for Wölfflin, its true, universal image – that is, one that could be projected on a wall adjacent to a similarly abstracted image and so help to establish the dialectic that was Wölfflin’s larger

goal. At the end of his discussion Karlholm notes Wölfflin's interpretation of Impressionism not in terms of texture or color, but rather as the physical world transformed into "a view of things as they appear to the eye," that is, the transformation of the tactile into the visual (133). It is in this sense that Wölfflin did not merely champion Impressionist painting, but found in the term "impressionism" a means of defining and, thereby, revalorizing the virtues that he found in the Baroque.

An odd stage for Alessandro Scafi's article, "Warburg and Böcklin: Myths in Word and Image," is set by the quotations in Vasold's article that demonstrate Strzygowski's similarly tremendous admiration for Böcklin. For Strzygowski, Böcklin was the modern flower of "Slavo-Celto-German" art (106, 108). For Warburg, Böcklin was "the champion of a new Renaissance... free from the restraints of Judeo-Christian ethics" (137), that offered "a corrective to the bourgeois materialism of modern society" (138). Seemingly with the text of the Christian sermon preached at Böcklin's funeral still ringing in his ears, Warburg struggled through ten drafts of a poem in remembrance of the occasion. Scafi focuses on the final draft, noting that earlier drafts of this poem have been quoted in discussions of Warburg without attending to their provisional nature (140). Warburg sought to create an alternate, pagan text – one that honored Böcklin's paganism and his specifically pagan funereal imagery (142). Scafi highlights Warburg's literary ambitions and his strong identification with Böcklin as a fellow seeker of a better world who had likewise left the Germanic North for self-imposed exile in Florence (143-44).

An investigation of "Stendhal's Syndrome" by Anna Kortelainen draws the volume to a close. This syndrome, as Kortelainen describes it, "may occur when a sensitive foreigner is exposed to art, especially Renaissance art in Florence...dizziness, disorientation, euphoria, rapid heartbeat, confusion, emotional collapse, and even psychosis" may result (149). The diagnosis, as it turns out, is fairly new. It was first made and named by the psychiatrist Graziella Magherini in 1979 (156). Jerusalem and Paris lend their names to related syndromes, in which visitors to those cities are overcome by, respectively, religious or cultural euphoria. Kortelainen describes Stendhal's experience in Florence in 1811, for which the syndrome was named (152), and Anna Dostoevskaya's descriptions of her husband Fyodor's and others' similar experiences in front of Florentine paintings which, at least in Fyodor's case, have traditionally been attributed to epilepsy (153-55). Kortelainen's book on this subject, in Finnish, has just been released.

The Grand Duchy of Finland in Tikkanen's day occupied a rapidly evolving geopolitical position within the Russian Empire, near the German Empire, and adjacent to Sweden, a nation that had once controlled it. This volume provides a useful introduction to issues concerning European art and art history from the perspective of a people striving towards independence while experiencing the pull of Russian, German and Scandinavian academic and cultural orientations. The issues these papers raise deserve further investigation in the interest of broadening and reframing the historiography of art, which has generally been written from a more narrowly Central and Western European perspective. That said, a few production issues are worth noting.

Translating the essays into English has produced typos and grammatical errors which are occasionally confusing, e.g., “we can thus not image that a wide brow denotes intelligence” (15), where “image” apparently means “assume,” or “the German Atropos Geographers” (98) meaning, it would seem, Germans who investigated Human Geography, or “the mystery of tactile badly values needed a theory” (122), where “badly” may belong on the other side of “values.” Perhaps owing to their origin as talks, an essay occasionally has not been provided with endnotes sufficient for the reader to trace just what has been pulled from where (e.g., Guleng nn. 12-17). An annotated bibliography of Tikkanen’s writings (or a note stating where one might find one) and a brief vita would have been useful supplements to this volume.

Jeanne-Marie Musto
Department of Art and Art History
Sewanee: The University of the South
735 University Ave.
Sewanee, TN 37383-1000
U.S.A.

jmmusto@sewanee.edu