After Burckhardt and Wölfflin; was there a Basel School of Art History?

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Figure 1 Basel from the Rhine (author)

For Linda Seidel in admiration and friendship

When I first came to Boston University in 1966, at 26 years of age, fresh from Basel University with a Dr. phil. in Medieval Art History, Classical Archaeology, and Church History, and a dissertation on Italian Romanesque sculpture,¹ one of the first

An earlier shorter version of this topic was presented as a paper at the symposium in honor of Linda Seidel, Challenging the Myths of Art History, New York on February 13th, 2011.

¹ I am especially indebted to the Director Emeritus of the Bibliothek des Kunstmuseums Basel, Nikolaus Meier for his generosity in providing insights and long discussions regarding this topic, and the staff of the Rare Book Collection at the Universitätsbibliothek Basel, as well as Dr. Ulrich Barth, Director Emeritus of the Basler Staatsarchiv for their help with primary and secondary sources. This article could not have been written without much advice in discussions with many colleagues and friends. I’d like to acknowledge especially my former contemporaries, the alumni students of the Kunsthistorisches Seminar der Universität,
co-medianevalists I met was Linda Seidel, then a young faculty member at Harvard. As luck would have it we saw each other each week when during my first year that coincided with Meyer Schapiro’s Norton Lectures on Romanesque Sculpture. I was struck by his brilliant lectures and insights and surprised that I had hardly heard of him. But not so strange, if you came as I did from Basel (Fig. 1). This and many other experiences in my first years in Boston, like encountering Hanns Swarzenski and Ernst Kitzinger, made me realize then as now, that as a young post World War Two- European art historian, I came from a very different art historical background to that of my new American colleagues. While I had been trained in a very old distinguished tradition, deeply rooted in a European historical and cultural ambiance according to the legacy of Jacob Burckhardt and Heinrich Wölfflin, my American colleagues had been mostly trained by Americans and the German Jewish émigré generation who settled in the USA in the Thirties. Cultural geography and political history of the Twentieth Century made for distinct differences and deep ruptures in the relationships between humanistic centres in Europe and the English - speaking world of the United Kingdom and the United States, which lasted until the late 1960s. The lack of easy travel or the availability of publications in translation made for strong divisions in art historical research after the First World War. Certain German-speaking regions and their universities seemed to have been cut off from the mainstream and became provincialized and somewhat ingrown. By contrast, others developed anew through the forced emigration of scholars that occurred especially in the Nazi period from Germany to the United States and the

Nurith Kenaan-Kedar, Jürg Ganz, Georg German, Dieter Koepplin, Ulrich Barth, Peter Kurmann, Elisabeth Krimmel-Decker, Max Seidel, Yvonne Boerlin, Katja Dreyfus-Guth, among others. Thanks also go to Günter Kopcke, Georgine and Ulff von den Steinen, Elizabeth Sears, Katja Brandt, Susan Fillin-Yeh, Arline Meyer and Andreas Verzar for valuable advice and insights. For some photographs thanks go to Jürg Ganz, John Siegel and Pamela Ross.

1 Christine Verzar, Die Romanischen Skulpturen der Abtei Sagra di San Michele; Studien zu Meister Nicolaus und zur “Scuola di Piacenza” (Basler Studien zur Kunstgeschichte NF 10), Bern: Francke Verlag, 1968.


3 Hanns Swarzenski was curator of Medieval Art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

United Kingdom. These German scholars began to write in the language of their new home, English. A more fertile broadening of approaches and expansion of fields of inquiry occurred really only from the 1960s onward. Finally, the old German institutes of art history and archaeology in Italy and Greece re-flourished in a new international climate with European scholars now internationalized receiving grants from such research centres as the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, the Center for the Visual Arts at the National Gallery in Washington DC (CASVA), and the Getty Foundation in the United States.

This paper explores how and in which form and direction art history at the University of Basel developed after Burckhardt and Wölfflin. It discusses in which manner this once great centre of art history from the mid nineteenth century to the First World War left its mark on art historical research, archaeology, and art criticism in the later Twentieth century. What was its legacy and how did their successors deviate and expand their method and approaches in the later Twentieth century?

Basel University, the oldest and most distinguished in Switzerland, founded by Pope Pius II Piccolomini in 1460, was known as one of the first four great centres of art history since the late nineteenth century through its own son, Jacob, (known locally as “Koebi”) Burckhardt (Fig. 2), who, as a cultural historian, offered lectures
in both history and art history from 1844 to 1886. Two other great centers in the German- speaking world were Berlin and Munich at which Jacob Burckhardt (1818-1897) and Heinrich Wölfflin (1864-1945) also taught. In 1893, Burckhardt was succeeded in Basel by his pupil, Heinrich Wölfflin (Fig. 3). Wölfflin had also begun

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6 For Heinrich Wölfflin as a lecturer and teacher, see Alfred Neumeyer, ‘Four Art Historians Remembered: Wolfflin, Goldschmidt, Warburg, Berenson,’ *Art Journal* 31 (1971) 33-36. Born in Winterthur in 1864 and died in Zurich in 1945, he studied with Burckhardt for two
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his studies with Burckhardt there. After a few years at Basel University, Wölfflin taught for a much longer period in Berlin and Munich where most of his pupils were trained and where he developed his intellectual and methodological theories and legacy. Then in 1924, increasingly opposed to and disturbed by the political developments in Germany, Wölfflin returned to Switzerland, now to Zürich, not to Basel, as an early emeritus and devoted himself to his writing. From there, he controlled all new appointments of art history professorships at Swiss universities until his death in 1945.

At Basel University these two giants of art history had already become known internationally during their lifetime; their work on the art of the Italian Renaissance and Baroque was translated early on into English and widely disseminated. Especially when Wölfflin’s Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Das Problem der Stilentwicklung in der Neueren Kunst (1915) was published in English in 1935 as Principles of Art History, it became the enormously influential handbook for formal analysis in art historical inquiry and teaching. He established the


comparative method of formal and stylistic analysis especially in comparing Renaissance and Baroque art and was accused by some of ‘art history without names’, when he articulated period styles with brilliant precision, but without mentioning individual artists. His expository methods fuelled the field of pedagogy in newer fields of inquiry and have remained solid and useful tools for his successors at Basel and elsewhere.

By contrast, from 1900 to the 1960s, the publications of Burckhardt’s and Wölfflin’s successors at Basel university and its important art museum (Kunstmuseum, Öffentliche Kunstsammlung) remained little known in the English speaking world, because their work had been largely left out of the international art historical canon. None of the scholarly work of my former teachers had been translated into English and, therefore, the Department of Art History at Basel was no longer known as a centre of art history as it had been in the period with Jacob Burckhardt and Heinrich Wölfflin. What were the reasons for this move to the sidelines of academic recognition? Was this due to a lack of quality or the provinciality of their research, or merely an accident of history due to the social, political and cultural circumstances for the period between 1900 and the 1950s?

Whereas geographically, linguistically, and culturally, Basel lies at the north-western corner of Switzerland between France and Germany, its university faculty has always been mainly German speaking, either Swiss or German by nationality. Its scholars were deeply rooted in the humanistic traditions of German Kunstwissenschaft. The city of Basel was not only an important ancient bishopric and economic centre on the crossroads of the Rhine, but recognized as a great cultural, humanistic, and artistic centre, in particular as the city of the painter family Holbein and the humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam. It prided itself as the site of the first public civic museum that had grown out of the sixteenth-century Bonifacius Amerbach Kabinett. Before the 1930s, its faculty and students moved freely and frequently back and forth between German and other Swiss universities for as long as this was possible until the beginning of the Nazi period in the 1930s. However, connections with Germany only resumed after the war and more intensely after the 1960s.

After Heinrich Wölfflin left Basel for Munich in 1900, his influence and following went

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9 Joseph Gantner, ‘Der Unterricht in Kunstgeschichte an der Universität Basel 1844-1938’ (Kunstwissenschaft an Schweizer Hochschulen 1) in Jahrbuch des Schweizerischen Instituts für Kunstwissenschaft, Zürich; Beiträge zur Geschichte der Kunstwissenschaft in der Schweiz, Zürich 1975, 9-32. Kunstwissenschaft an Schweizer Hochschulen, die Lehrstühle der Universitäten in Basel,
with him. In Basel, he positioned his pupil, Heinrich Alfred Schmid (1863-1951) (Fig. 4) as his successor. Schmid can be credited for discovering Matthias Grünewald and publishing the first monograph on the painter.\(^7\) He also published books on the Basel painters, Arnold Böcklin\(^11\) and Hans Holbein the Younger\(^12\) because so much of their artistic oeuvre was in the Basel Kunstmuseum. When

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Schmid took a position in Prague in 1904, another Wölfflin pupil, the Berliner, Ernst Heidrich became professor in Basel, but he died prematurely on the war front in 1914 and thus hardly left a legacy. He was succeeded by yet another Wölfflin pupil, the brilliant German Friedrich Rintelen (1881-1926), whose career was also cut short due to illness in 1926. However, his groundbreaking book on Giotto remains a classic and left an important pedagogical mark on his many pupils.\textsuperscript{13}

Figure 5 Paul Ganz at Seventy, 1942 (photo Basler Zeitung)

In 1908, the Swiss Paul Ganz (1872-1954)\textsuperscript{14} (Fig. 5) had already become the curator of the Basel Kunstmuseum, and subsequently was appointed to the faculty, first as associate, then as professor from 1928-38. Not a Wölfflin pupil, but trained by Johann Rudolf Rahn (1841-1912)\textsuperscript{15} at the university of Zürich, he also focused his


\textsuperscript{15} Johann Rudolf Rahn’s main great work was his \textit{Geschichte der bildenden Künste in der Schweiz von den ältesten Zeiten bis zum Schluss des Mittelalters}, Zürich, 1876 was influential as one of the founders of the Swiss Landesmuseum in Zürich, the Swiss Denkmalpflege and the \textit{Gesellschaft für schweizerische Kunstgeschichte. Die Künstlernächter der Schweiz}, ed. Gesellschaft für schweizerische Kunstgeschichte mit eidgenössischen, kantonalen, kommunalen und privaten Subventionen, Basel:
research on the Basel painter, Hans Holbein the Younger, as well as on the art of Switzerland and heraldry following the nationalistic trend of Rahn. Ganz was important for the institutionalization of Swiss art history. He is credited with having organized the first art historical congress to be held in Basel, and was a great promoter and organizer for the museum and its *Kupferstichkabinett* (Department of Prints and Drawings). He established committees to oversee the collections, the *Kommission des Kunstmuseums und des Kupferstichkabinett*. In addition, he was influential as the founder of the series *Kunstdenkmäler der Schweiz*. This important series inventoried works of Swiss art and architecture by canton, and was researched and written by a long list of different Swiss art historians. It remains a fundamental resource for historic, archeological and visual documentation of the works of art and architecture in Switzerland through the ages. He also helped to found the Swiss office of Historical Preservation (*Denkmalpflege*) and promoted the development of the *Landesmuseum* in Zürich, the national museum of Swiss art.

Having taken a position in Prague in 1904, Heinrich Alfred Schmid returned to Basel in 1926 and held the chair of the art history department until 1938. He and Paul Ganz shared the professorship and directorship of the art museum, a situation that lead to much personal rivalry and competition between them. Methodologically these art historians taught and published in a positivistic style combining historical/archeological/archival and documentary research, as applied mainly to the art of the Northern Renaissance and Swiss heraldry. They were formidable curators of the primarily North European collections of paintings, drawings and prints in their important city museums. Ganz was tireless in pushing for a better new *Kunstmuseum*, an art library, and the *Kupferstichkabinett*. There they had been housed in a nineteenth-century building, now the *Naturhistorisches Museum* on the Augustinergasse and small old townhouses near the medieval cathedral. Finally, between the years 1932 and 1936, the new *Kunstmuseum* (Fig. 6) was built on its present site that included the important *Kupferstichkabinett*, the art history library, and the *Kunsthistorisches Seminar der Universität* (the Department of Art History) and the offices for the art history faculty. Burckhardt and Wölfflin’s primary focus on the art and culture of the Italian Renaissance and Baroque was now abandoned in
favour of the art of Switzerland and Northern Europe taking advantage of the collections in local museums. For Ganz this focus on Swiss art also showed a truly nationalistic effort to promote the art of his country.

In 1933, an opportunity for the enhancement of the Basel art history program was missed. It would have introduced another art historical methodology, a more iconographic-iconological direction, to this positivistic school that focused on stylistic analysis. When, due to Nazi persecution, the Warburg Library in Hamburg was forced to seek a new home, the Basel professor of history, Werner Kaegi (1901-1979) (Fig. 7) fought for Basel’s acquisition of the Warburg Library. Funding to establish the institute and library in Basel would have been provided by generous donors primarily from its affluent Jewish community. As a cultural historian, Kaegi is best known as the main biographer of Jacob Burckhardt. His other contributions were the translations into German of the works by his Dutch friend, Johan Huizinga (1872-1945) and his research on Erasmus of Rotterdam. Friendly with Aby Warburg from the time of their early art history studies in Florence, Kaegi saw the acquisition of this library as an opportunity for interdisciplinary and cultural historical research. In active correspondence with Gertrud Bing and Fritz Saxl, he suggested Basel (or Zürich) among other options for the new home of the

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20 Dr. Katja Guth-Dreyfus, the daughter of the banker Dreyfus and director emerita of the Swiss Jewish Museum in Basel confirmed this to me.

Warburg Library. But he seems to have gotten little support from the Basel art history faculty and the Basel government denied the request as being too risky. Kaegi bitterly lamented this outcome. Could it have been an intellectual decision for reasons of incompatibility with the art historical direction of Basel’s Wölfflin School? Or was it fear and self-interest, a kind of protectionism against harbouring a Jewish institution in Switzerland, at a time of increasing anti-Semitism also in Switzerland and the fear of repercussions from Nazi Germany? This loss for Basel soon became a gain for Anglo-American art history, when the Warburg Library was put on a barge and sailed to London. And many of the brilliant Jewish intellectuals, among them Panofsky, emigrated to London or to America.

This partly explains the ideological break in art historical scholarship between the Swiss art historians and the Warburg School. It remained largely the case until the 1960s while the English and American universities and scholarship

had benefited greatly from this brain drain of *Kunstwissenschaft* from Nazi Germany. As is well known, an ugly period of National Socialism ensued for universities in Germany. 24 Switzerland, although officially neutral, also suffered greatly by being cut off intellectually from the newest developments in art historical research in the New World. Swiss intellectuals became marginalized and provincialized, a situation that continued into the post 1939-45 war era.25 In a letter


sent to Adolf Goldschmidt, who had escaped to Basel in 1939, Trude Krautheimer-Hess bitterly commiserates with him about his having to live among those ‘provincial’ Swiss. In fact, other older prominent German Jewish émigré art historians had sought refuge in Basel and at other Swiss universities: Otto Homburger (1885-1641)\textsuperscript{26} in Bern, and the medievalists Werner Weisbach (1873-1953),\textsuperscript{27} Edgar Breitenbach,\textsuperscript{28} and Adolf Goldschmidt (1863-1944)\textsuperscript{29} (Fig. 8) in Basel. Goldschmidt’s last minute escape from Berlin to Basel had been facilitated by Baron Robert von Hirsch,\textsuperscript{30} who himself was an earlier Jewish émigré from Frankfurt to Basel. He was a prominent businessman and a great collector of Medieval and


\textsuperscript{26} Otto Homburger organized the first exhibition on medieval art in Bern, \textit{Kunst des frühen Mittelalters}, Bern: Berner Kunstmuseum, 1949. He was primarily a manuscript scholar who fled from Germany to Bern in 1935.


\textsuperscript{28} Edgar Breitenbach fled to Basel from 1933-1937, after which he left for the USA and taught at Berkeley. See Ulrike Wendland, \textit{Biographisches Handbuch der deutschsprachigen Kunsthistoriker im Exil: Leben und Werk der unter dem Nationalsozialismus verfolgten und vertriebenen Wissenschaftler}, München: Saur, 1999, vol.1, 68-70. Interview Edgar Breitenbach, 18 February 1975, in \textit{Archives of American Art}, in which he speaks of his relation to Paul Ganz for whom he worked unhappily as an assistant in Basel at the Kupferstichkabinett. I am grateful to Elizabeth Sears for bringing this publication to my attention.


Impressionist art. It is sad to read in Goldschmidt and Weisbach’s personal papers, how isolated and unwelcome they felt and the extent to which they were never socially welcomed by the local Basel faculty and intelligenza, nor by Wölfflin himself. There, Goldschmidt, an internationally recognized scholar of medieval art, died of suicide, in 1944. While the collector Baron Robert von Hirsch remained loyal to Basel’s art museum, in 1941 he presented it with his famous painting by Paul Gauguin, Ta Matate (At the Market). Eventually he disapproved of its increasing orientation toward contemporary art (especially that of Joseph Beuys whose work he did not like) and decided to sell his important medieval collection at auction through Sotheby’s, rather than give it to the Basel Kunstmuseum.

Figure 9 Joseph Gantner at Ninety, 1986 (photo Basler Zeitung)

Upon H.A. Schmid’s retirement in 1938, the Swiss scholar, Joseph Gantner (1896-1988) (Fig. 9), who had been Wölfflin’s pupil at Munich since 1915, was chosen for the chair of art history at Basel University, recommended by Wölfflin over more prominent German candidates such as Ludwig Heydenreich.31 In spite of criticism voiced by some Swiss colleagues, Gantner held the chair of art history in Basel until his retirement in 1967.32 During this time, he produced the largest

31 Ludwig Heydenreich (1903-1978), had been professor of art history at Hamburg University from 1934-1937, then became director at the Deutsches Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence from 1941-1944, and finally director of the Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte in Munich from 1947-1970.
number of PhDs, seventy-four, among them myself. Internationally, he was known, not so much for his own many scholarly publications which ranged from Romanesque to modern art -- only one of which has been translated into English -- but rather as the editor of Wölfflin’s biography and collected works. While he received great recognition as the promoter of his great teacher, in his own research, he partially continued the Wölfflinian formalist approach, and took it a step further into the psychology of art, and he dealt with the aesthetics and art criticism of the medieval and modern periods. Here he transferred the comparative Wölfflinian method from Renaissance and Baroque to Modern and Romanesque art. In an early work, Revision der Kunstgeschichte (1932) he actually took issue with Wölfflin and coined instead the term Praefiguration, a concept similar to Riegl’s term Kunstwollen. The book was reviewed unfavourably by Herbert von Einem, but its premise remained a permanent preoccupation and direction in Gantner’s aesthetics and art theory in his later work and for aestheticians worldwide.

Due to a lack of Swiss jobs in the 1920s, Gantner had started his career as the editor of a journal on modern architecture, Das Werk, from 1922-1923 and in 1927. He also wrote a book on urbanism, Die Schweizer Stadt (1925), and in 1928, published a useful history of European urbanism, Grundformen der europäischen Stadt. Versuch eines historischen Aufbaues in Genealogien. In 1929, he was offered a teaching job at the new art academy in Frankfurt am Main, where he taught modern art from 1929 to 1933. He was also made editor of the short-lived but important avant-garde journal on contemporary art, Das Neue Frankfurt (Fig. 10), which published articles


33 See f.n. 7 also, Joseph Gantner, Schönheit und Grenzen der klassischen Form: Jacob, Burckhardt, Benedetto Croce, Heinrich Wölfflin, Wien: Schroll, 1949.
34 See footnote 7.
37 Das Werk was an influential journal that dealt mainly with essays on modern architecture, introducing, among others the Goetheanum in Dornach, Rudolf Steiner’s Anthroposophical Headquarters as an important German Expressionist concrete piece of architecture and the early work of Le Corbusier.
38 Joseph Gantner, Die Schweizer Stadt, München: Piper, 1925; Grundformen der europäischen Stadt. Versuch eines historischen Aufbaues in Genealogien, Wien: Schroll, 1928 with some of the earliest aerial photographs of cities and towns.
39 Das Neue Frankfurt; Internazionale Monatsschrift für die Frage der Großstadtgestaltung, Frankfurt a, Main: Verlag Englert und Schlosser, vols. 1-5, (1927-1931): then renamed Die Neue
about modern art and architecture. But in 1933, the Nazis banned the journal. Under Gantner’s leadership, it had become one of the most modern and radical journals on visual culture and had close connections to the Bauhaus in Dessau and Weimar. But the journal was also accused of being Marxist in its leanings. When the journal was abolished, Gantner, although not a Jew, had just married the Jewish photographer Maria Dreyfuss, and was forced to leave Germany for Switzerland. There, as a mere lecturer without a permanent job, he waited in Zürich for a professorship in Switzerland during which time he developed a close and lasting friendship with his teacher Wölfflin.

In 1938, filling the chair of art history in Basel at Alfred Schmid’s retirement was a controversial process and lead to some broad public debate. Prior to this period there had been a comfortable back and forth and exchange of German and German Swiss scholars moving between German and Swiss university positions, as in the time of Burckhardt and Wölfflin. However, with the increasing influence at German universities of National Socialist sentiment, Basel University after looking for the best candidate and considering several German art historians, did not want

*Stadt*: Quarterly, (1932-33). The journal folded upon Gantner’s forced departure for Switzerland in 1933.
to risk appointing a German and instead chose the Swiss scholar, Joseph Gantner, at the suggestion of his teacher Wölfflin.\textsuperscript{40} At that time Gantner was less well known and his appointment was challenged and criticized by some Swiss and German colleagues.

After 1938, Basel’s art history students were offered a broader choice of approaches. Another Basler, Hans Reinhardt (1902-1984),\textsuperscript{41} director of the Basel Historical Museum,\textsuperscript{42} also a pupil of H.A. Schmid and Rintelen, became associate professor in 1942 until his retirement in 1967. After publishing a monograph on Hans Holbein (1938), several articles on works in the Historical Museum, and a book on the Romanesque-Gothic cathedral of Basel (1939), he then directed his interests in an important shift toward France. He produced three important

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\caption{Hans Reinhardt, 1972 (Basler Zeitung)}
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\textsuperscript{40} ‘Joseph Gantner zum Ordinarius für Kunstgeschichte an der Basler Universität gewählt’, \textit{Basel National Zeitung}, no. 145, 28th March 1938 discusses the appointment and the controversy surrounding it in relation to two better qualified German finalists.


\textsuperscript{42} The Historisches Museum is especially important as the depository of the famous treasury of Basel Cathedral, of which some of the most important pieces were sold and dispersed after the Reformation. See among others, Hans Reinhardt, ‘Das Heinrichskreuz aus dem Münsterschatz’, \textit{Historisches Museum Basel, Jahresberichte und Rechnungen 1972} (1976) 33-46; see also the important exhibition: Timothy Husband and Julien Chapuis, \textit{The Treasury of Basel Cathedral}, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York/New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001. For Basel goldsmiths work, see Ulrich Barth, ‘Zur Geschichte des Basler Goldschmiedehandwerks (1261-1820)’, PhD.dissertation, Basel University, 1978. Barth became the archivist of the important \textit{Staatsarchiv}. 
architectural monographs, on the cathedrals of Reims (1963), Strasburg (1972), and finally on Basel (1961). These fundamental monographs earned him the Chevalier des Arts et Lettres in 1963, and the Chevalier de la Légion d’Honneur in 1968. He prided himself on his friendship with Louis Grodecki and many other French scholars, especially Alsatians, rather than with German colleagues. Together with Gantner he supervised several dissertations on the art and architecture of Medieval Alsace and France. As a teacher in seminars he was known for requiring close descriptions and readings of architectural and sculptural monuments that served his pupils well.46

Karl Schefold (1905-1999), a formalist of ancient art and archaeology arrived in Basel in 1935 having escaped from Nazi Germany because of his Jewish wife and his cultural and philosophical affinity with the German poet, Stefan George.48 Before his move to Basel Schefold had held appointments at the
German Archeological Institutes of Rome and Athens. He was a specialist of Greek art, mainly vase painting, mythology in ancient art, and Pompeian wall painting. In Basel, he joined a circle of Georgiani, and also found some avid collectors of ancient art. However, it took the Basel government until 1953, to make him a full professor of ancient art and archaeology, when he became director of its archaeological institute. His lectures and seminars on Greek and Roman art were required for nearly all art history students. All were also invited to candlelight evenings at his house where poetry by Stefan George and other German poets was read. Because much of his work was translated into English, Schefold’s enormous scholarly oeuvre is better known internationally than either Gantner’s or Reinhardt’s. Indeed, he had kept up his international connections all through the 1939-45 war. He also reached international recognition through his journal Antike Kunst, founded in 1956.


49 Antike Kunst, vol. 1, 1956-
ancient art and a dealer who was also a German Jewish émigré. After an extremely successful exhibition of Greek art from private collections, *Meisterwerke griechischer Kunst* at its Kunsthalle in 1960, their joint effort led to the creation of the Basel Antiken Museum in 1966.

This international profile and recognition for both Reinhardt and Schefold was not so for Joseph Gantner who after his return to Switzerland from Germany must have suffered from a lack of material for his research before and during the 1939-45 war. Therefore, upon his return from Frankfurt in 1933, Gantner was advised by Wölfflin to redirect his scholarly attention to the art of Switzerland. This change in direction for Gantner resulted in a four-volume history of the art and architecture in Switzerland, *Kunstgeschichte der Schweiz*. Its first two volumes on medieval art appeared in 1936 and 1947, and his pupil and then assistant, Adolf Reinle, completed volumes 3 and 4 in 1962. This survey has remained an important resource. It also influenced Gantner’s redirection from Italian Renaissance and modern art toward medieval art, due to the many fine and well-preserved medieval monuments in Switzerland. This new engagement with medieval art and his focus especially on the Romanesque period resulted in Gantner’s book, *Romanische Plastik, Inhalt und Form in der Kunst des 11. und 12. Jahrhunderts* (1942). He subsequently directed many dissertations on medieval art, mainly on Swiss, French, and Italian monuments. Nevertheless, it is lamentable that none of the very well preserved and important medieval monuments in Switzerland

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have been incorporated into international textbooks when several dissertations by students dealt with Romanesque art and architecture in Switzerland.55

Gantner’s approach was formalist; he dealt with style and the psychological aspects of the creative process. Dependent first on Wölfflin, he was also informed strongly by Henri Focillon’s structural principles expressed in his Vie des formes (1934) and L’art des sculpteurs romans (1931).56 At times remarkably close to Meyer Schapiro, Gantner recognized commonalities between the stylistic and aesthetic aspects of Romanesque art and modern art. He explored their common tendencies toward abstraction and similarities in their expressive content. He had deviated from the pure Wölfflinian formalist approach toward a more psychological and critically aesthetic one, but he still used the comparative method to suggest similarities between the medieval and modern aesthetic. He sent a copy of a collection of essays comparing Romanesque and Modern aesthetics, Schicksale des Menschenbildes, von der Romanischen Stilisierung zur Modernen Abstraktion (1959) to

Figure 13 Galluspforte, Basel Cathedral, 12th century (photo author)


Erwin Panofsky in Princeton.\textsuperscript{57} However, it is apparent from their correspondence that Panofsky firmly rejected Gantner’s method, in particular in dealing about modern art and they remained distant from each other.\textsuperscript{58}

Figure 14 Paul Klee, Head and 12th century wall painting Areines (photo after Gantner, \textit{Schicksale des Menschenbildes})

After the war Gantner’s research went back to issues raised in Wölfflin’s work on classical art, with monographic studies on some of the greatest artists of the Northern and Southern Renaissance and Baroque -- the Basler Konrad Witz, Rodin


\textsuperscript{58} For Panofsky and Gantner see the personal correspondence between Panofsky and Gantner, 1947, 1964, 1967, in Gantner’s Nachlass, Basel University Library, Rare Book Coll. Here Panofsky criticizes Gantner’s comparisons of Romanesque art and modern art. In a letter on the 2\textsuperscript{nd} of August 1947, Panofsky had asked Gantner to send some food rations to Wilhelm Voege, who was languishing after the war in isolation in Eastern Germany and to this Gantner complied. After 1967, Gantner refused to travel from Basel to Freiburg im Breisgau to attend a lecture by Panofsky. See \textit{Erwin Panofsky Korrespondenz von 1910-1968}, ed. Dieter Wuttke, 5 vols, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003, II # 1170, 860-861 and IV, 395-96, 303 # 22 30 2306.
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and Michelangelo, Leonardo, Rembrandt, and Goya. Here, Gantner also explored his ideas and theories about *Spätstil* or *Altersstil* (late style) and the *non-finito* (unfinished). These monographs developed out of his very popular and charismatic lectures at the university that attracted not only students but also the ladies of Basel society, thus nicknamed the *Pelzmantel Vorlesungen* (fur coat lectures). It is curious, that none of these lectures seem to have enticed any of his students to choose dissertations on these subjects of the great masters of Renaissance and modern art. One reason may well have been the lack of great collections of Renaissance and Baroque paintings in Switzerland. Furthermore, the absence of a Swiss art historical research institute in Italy comparable to the German institutes in Florence and Rome did little to encourage students to pursue their research there.

Gantner’s collected essays on *Spätstil* (late style) and the *non-finito* are published in *Das Bild des Herzens, Ueber Vollendung und Unvollendung in der Kunst*. Increasingly he developed a keen interest in aesthetics and art criticism and was strongly influenced by the Italian philosopher, Benedetto Croce, whom he visited in Naples on several occasions. After the war he collaborated with some German and Swedish colleagues, especially with Heinrich Lützeler, and he began to publish nearly exclusively in their journals of aesthetics. He participated in symposia on aesthetic theory and lectured widely in Uppsala, Athens and Tokyo. Again, few of his students followed in this direction of research. Connections with some post-war German colleagues began again after 1955, and in 1960 Gantner arranged for the

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64 Zeitschrift für Aesthetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft, editor Joseph Gantner with Heinrich Lützeler since 1951.
Deutscher Kunsthistoriker Tag, its annual conference, to be held in conjunction with Basel’s large Holbein exhibition.

Although Gantner had the greatest number of disciples of any other Swiss art historian, can one really speak of a ‘Gantner school’ of art history? Perhaps in sheer numbers that is the case. Because he was extremely open minded and directed his teachings toward a broad range of artistic periods and approaches, he remains one of the last great generalists in the area of Kunstwissenschaft dealing with a kind of Universalkunstgeschichte. His students were encouraged to take up research topics of their own choice with subjects ranging from the Middle Ages to the modern periods. However, it seems significant to me that in the series of twenty-two published dissertations in the Basler Studien zur Kunstgeschichte from 1943 to 1970, Gantner selected primarily those on medieval subjects for the series and several other medieval dissertations resulted in important separate books.

At Gantner’s retirement in 1968, he was succeeded by his former pupil for the post Renaissance period, Hanspeter Landolt (1920-2001) who had been the director of the Kupferstichkabinett and taught at the university since 1962. For a second professorship the Austrian medievalist, Hermann Fillitz, was appointed but stayed only for a brief period, before returning to Vienna. He was followed by Gantner’s former disciple and assistant, Beat Brenk (1936 -), a medievalist who had


It is interesting that Gantner was not interested in the medieval minor arts or manuscript illumination. By contrast Hermann Fillitz promoted an interest in medieval minor arts.
spent time as a professor in Germany. Brenk branched out beyond his earlier research in Western Medieval art to important in-depth studies on Early Christian and Byzantine art.69

Today, the art history department is comprised of three professorships held by German scholars ranging from medieval art through contemporary theory and the archaeological institute has also been expanded its faculty.

But the most important development since the late 1930s was the transformation of Basel into a city of contemporary art and art history. Two personalities were decisive in forming the cultural and artistic climate of postwar Basel: the museum director and critic of modern art, Georg Schmidt (1896-1965) (Fig. 15) a Basler and Marxist; and the art book publisher, Herman Loeb (1897-1963), a German Jewish émigré.

The appointment of Georg Schmidt as director of the Kunstmuseum in 1939 completely changed the reputation of Basel as the city of Holbein and Erasmus by shifting the focus in the museum to a great collection of Modern and contemporary art. Georg Schmidt was a pupil of Friedrich Rintelen, and after a short stint at German museums, he became the extremely popular director of the Kunstmuseum.

Beat Brenk developed a strong international reputation through several visiting professorships at Stanford and Rome, as well as research fellowships at Dumbarton Oaks and elsewhere. See a selection of his most important publications: Spätantike und Frühes Christentum, Berlin/Vienna: Propylaen Verlag, 1977; Die frühchristlichen Mosaiken in S. Maria Maggiore zu Rom, Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1975; La Cappella Palatina a Palermo, with Salvatore Settis, Modena: F.C. Panini, 2010.
from 1939 until his retirement in 1961. Even though never appointed to the university due to his Marxist leanings\textsuperscript{71}, he was extremely influential in the Basel art scene, and was both a mentor and teacher of modern art at its applied art school, the Kunstgewerbeschule, from 1929 until his death in 1965. He gave countless public lectures and guided tours at exhibitions at the Kunstmuseum and the Kunsthalle. However, Gantner’s students had to discretely sneak into Schmidt’s public lectures and courses so as not to offend Gantner. Unfortunately, his many brilliant articles, although collected as Umgang mit Kunst (1966), had a limited distribution internationally and lack acknowledgement outside Basel, as they too were never translated into English.\textsuperscript{72}

Another important figure, Herman Loeb,\textsuperscript{73} the Jewish publisher and founder of the Prestel Verlag in 1924, and his art historian wife Anna Maria Cetto, lost their jobs in Germany and fled to Basel in 1933. There, they founded the Holbein/Phoebus Verlag\textsuperscript{74} that quickly gained a reputation for its high quality art publications. Loeb soon published H.A. Schmid’s book on Hans Holbein the Younger, a two-volume work on Leonardo by Ludwig Heydenreich, and monographs on a series of Swiss painters from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century. His beautiful editions of Modern art books produced by Office du Livre and Albert Skira are still precious and highly prized works. In 1946, Loeb also started an ambitious international art


\textsuperscript{71} The conservative city government that controlled appointments at the university also denied and blocked other appointments, see Thomas K. Kuhn,” ‘McCarthy-Schwierigkeiten’- Der Streit um Helmuth Gollwitzer als Nachfolger Karl Barths 1961/62: Aus der Geschichte der Universität Basel”, Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Altertumskunde (109), 2009, 53-102.

\textsuperscript{72} See the dissertations under Gantner but strongly influenced by Georg Schmidt’s teachings on modern art: Carlo Huber, Otto-Meyer Amden, (PhD. diss.) Wabern: Büchler-Verlag, 1968; Alberto Giacometti, Genève: Editions Rencontre, 1970. Carlo Huber (1932 - 1976) later became the director of the Bern and Basel Kunsthalle and in his short career before his untimely death, he contributed immensely to the great interest and blossoming of exhibitions on contemporary art in Switzerland.

\textsuperscript{73} Hermann Loeb, and art historian and publisher, although the founder in 1924 of the Prestel Verlag in Frankfurt, however after being fired from his post by the Nazis, he is not acknowledged later in the postwar revived and still flourishing Prestel Verlag.

\textsuperscript{74} In 1935, the new Holbein Verlag replaced Loeb’s Prestel Verlag with over 100 titles, and was renamed Phoebus Verlag in 1955.
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history journal, *Phoebus* (1) with articles by Berenson, Heydenreich and Gantner, among others, and with an international editorial board that included Sir Kenneth Clark, René Jullian, Ludwig Heydenreich, Roberto Longhi and Georg Schmidt. Unfortunately, due to lack of funds, the journal did not last beyond 1951. Many art history students like myself had internships with this publishing house and benefitted from Loeb’s erudition, his experience in the art-publishing world, and his compelling acerbic humour.

In his first great project as director of the *Kunstmuseum*, Georg Schmidt had the foresight to grasp the opportunity to acquire many works of German Expressionist art that the Nazis now considered *Entartete Kunst* (degenerate art) and when they were being sold off at auction from German museums. Works by Franz Marc, Oskar Kokoschka, Max Beckmann, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, and Marc Chagall and others were acquired through the persuasive efforts of Georg Schmidt who convinced the Basel City Government to make a special one-time allocation of SFR 50,000 for these acquisitions. Through his friendship with Ernst Ludwig Kirchner who had settled in Davos, Georg Schmidt also arranged for the first major exhibition in Switzerland of Kirchner’s work at the *Kunsthalle* in Basel. At the *Kunstmuseum*, these important works by German Expressionist artists were saved from destruction and also enhanced its already rich collection of the Paris school. Thus, the Basel *Öffentliche Kunstsammlung*, the oldest public museum in the world, could now boast having, not only a fine Holbein, Böcklin and Konrad Witz collection, but also one of the most comprehensive modern and contemporary art

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collections. The museum had already simultaneously been augmented by loans or donations of modern masters of French art from several active Basel collectors of modern art who mostly drew their wealth from directorships in its pharmaceutical industries (CIBA-Geigy and Sandoz that then merged to become the present Novartis, and Hoffmann La Roche). Furthermore it led to the Emmanuel Hoffman Stiftung which is specifically devoted to the furthering of contemporary art. Schmidt’s extremely popular lectures at the Kunstmuseum and Kunsthalle nurtured a great interest in contemporary art for a number of art history students culminating in several dissertations and subsequent museum appointments. In addition, by the early 1960s, the Basel Kunstmuseum and Kunsthalle were some of the earliest European institutions to show and collect American abstract expressionist art. Equally influential in Basel was the famous collector and dealer, Ernst Beyeler who became internationally active after the war. Today, the passion for modern and contemporary art has enriched Basel with two new public art foundations, the

77 The Emanuel Hoffmann Foundation was founded in 1933 by Maja Hoffmann-Stehlin, the later Maja Sacher Oeri (1896-1989) to continue a commitment to contemporary art. In 1980 it lead to the construction of the world’s first museum of contemporary art in Basel, the Museum für Gegenwartskunst. From 1988/899-2003 it has been expanded to the Schaulager, a building by the Basel architects, Herzog and De Meuron and the Laurenz Stiftung that lead to the funding of an assistant professorship for contemporary art at the university.


Fondation Beyeler<sup>80</sup> built by Renzo Piano, and the Hoffman Fondation-Schaulager by the Basel architects, Herzog-de Meuron.<sup>81</sup>

These, together with the 1996 gift of a Jean Tinguely/Nikki de Saint Phalle Museum by the Swiss architect Mario Botta, and the commission of Tinguely’s large kinetic fountain (Fig. 17) paved the way for the big annual art fair, Art Basel that has transformed Basel into an international center known for the latest developments in contemporary art and architecture. Following also on Gantner’s early strong interest in modern art, the university eventually responded with the appointment of the modernist/theorist Gottfried Böhm,<sup>82</sup> who is an exponent of Bild-Wissenschaft

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<sup>80</sup> Fondation Beyeler, with contributions by Gottfried Boehm, Reinhold Hohl and Markus Brüderlin, München/London: Prestel Verlag, 1997.

<sup>81</sup> Hoffman-Schaulager by architects Herzog-de Meuron and the campus of Vitra with architecture of Frank Gehry, Zaha Hadid and others as well as the new Novartis Campus with architecture of Herzog-de Meuron, Gehry, and several other prominent contemporary architects.

<sup>82</sup> Gotttfried Böhm, an admirer of Gantner’s aesthetic and psychological approaches to art
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(visual culture). In Boehm’s *eicones* research and conference projects, he has collaborated with these newer institutions. His art theory and criticism shares some of Gantner’s values and Georg Schmidt’s focus on modern art -- a far cry from Jacob Burckhardt and Heinrich Wölfflin’s *Kunstgeschichte*, of more than one hundred years earlier.

![Figure 17 Jean Tinguely, Fasnachts Brunnen (1975-77) Basel (photo author)](image)

What was the legacy of this art history department at Basel University? Can one speak of a persistent cohesive ‘school’, a shared methodology or a specific trend developing from Burckhardt, via Wölfflin to the present day? Through Gantner’s broad lens, the many art historians who were trained in Basel have left their mark especially on the field of medieval art. After the sixties, those Gantner pupils who entered the Denkmalpflege or positions as museum curators, showed a variety of positivistic approaches used for the remaining volumes of the *Kunstdenkmäler der Schweiz*, and museum and exhibition catalogues respectively. Exposure to international travel, short-term study at foreign universities in France, Italy, and the UK as well as in post war Germany and Austria, and finally the United States, has considerably broadened the scholarly methodologies applied by this younger post


83 See Benjamin Z. Kedar, ‘Nurith Kennan Kedar as Joseph Gantner’s Disciple’, in *Pictorial Languages and their Meanings*, ed. Christine Verzar and Gil Fishhof, Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2006, xix-xxvi. See bibliography of her extensive scholarly contributions on western medieval, crusader art and on other media and periods.
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war generation of Gantner disciples. This approach, while still rooted in the Wölflinian descriptive method of formal analysis, is now combined with the hermeneutic, iconological methods of the Warburg school developed into current interdisciplinary contextual considerations. One has again to acknowledge that Gantner showed an open mind for ideas within art history and thus allowed his pupils a free hand in their choices of research topics and encouraged them to reach out in a broad manner. His insistence on close description of the artwork made him a forerunner for those scholars promoting agency in art and reception theory. Thus, his international pupils have contributed scholarly work ranging from early medieval to modern and contemporary topics.

Today, however, the city of Basel has lost its focus on its earlier historical tradition, although not its reputation as the oldest university city of Switzerland; but now it is best known for the central position and active role it plays each year within the world’s most contemporary art movements during Art Basel.

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I mention here a few of the international Gantner pupils, such as Nurith Kenaan-Kedar (Tel Aviv University), Christine Verzar (The Ohio State University), Max Seidel (Göttingen and Heidelberg Universities and directorship of Kunsthistorisches Institut Florenz), Beat Brenk (Basel and La Sapienza Rome). Professorships at Swiss universities by Gantner pupils were held by Emil Maurer (Zürich), Peter Kurmann (Fribourg), Georg Germann (Bern), Hans Rudolf Sennhauser (Zürich and ETH) and Dieter Koepplin at Freiburg i.Br., Germany.