

‘The simplicity of old times’ and a community of artists: the construction of history as an artistic objective in Johann David Passavant’s early texts

Robert Skwirbli

Passavant’s construction of art history to justify contemporary art

In 1820, a ‘German Artist in Rome’ had anonymously published his reflexions on art history and contemporary art – under a long, baroque, yet self-explanatory title: *Views on the Fine Arts and description of their course in Toscana, to set the perspective from which the new-German painting school has to be looked at.*¹ The book was the young man’s first ‘attempt at writing’ – as one reviewer, the art critic and scholar Karl Friedrich von Rumohr noted.² In fact, the author, Johann David Passavant, had just become an artist by second-chance education.³ Born to a merchant family, ‘neither instructed to be a scholar, nor an artist’, as Rumohr pointed out,⁴ Passavant was a tradesman himself until his late twenties. Never having been satisfied with that profession, he decided to become a professional painter in 1815 and trained in the atelier of Jacques-Louis David and Antoine-Jean Gros in Paris. As many artists before and after him,⁵ he afterwards travelled to Italy, in late 1817, where he settled in Rome among other young German artists and stayed until 1824. Passavant did not become famous for his work as an art historian until his monograph on Raphael

¹ [Johann David Passavant], ‘Ansichten über die bildenden Künste und Darstellung des Ganges derselben in Toskana; zur Bestimmung des Gesichtspunctes, aus welchem die neudeutsche Malerschule zu betrachten ist. Von einem deutschen Künstler in Rom’, Heidelberg and Speyer: Oswald, 1820.

² Karl Friedrich von Rumohr, [review] ‘Ansichten über die bildenden Künste und Darstellung derselben in Toscana [...]’, *Kunst-Blatt*, 2: 32, 19 April 1821, 125 (‘den schriftstellerischen Versuch’).

³ Peter Betthausen, s.v. ‘Passavant, Johann David’, id, Peter H. Feist, Christiane Fork, eds, *Metzler Kunsthistoriker-Lexikon*, 2nd ed, Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzler, 2007, 320-322; Jennifer Fischer-Falckenberg and Robert Skwirbli, s.v. ‘Passavant, Johann David’, *Allgemeines Künstler-Lexikon*, 94: 2017, 394–5 (with latest bibliography). The exchange of letters by Johann David Passavant from 1807 to 1824 is about to be published in a scholarly edition: Robert Skwirbli, ed, *Johann David Passavant. Briefwechsel 1807-1824*, 2 vols, forthcoming.

⁴ Rumohr, [review] ‘Ansichten’, 125 (‘weder zum Gelehrten noch zum Künstler angeleitet’).

⁵ Besides his friends from the David atelier, Wach and Rittig, e.g.: Begas, Catel, Eckersberg, Gareis, Klinkowström, Melzer, Schick: France Nerlich, Bénédicte Savoy, eds, *Pariser Lehrjahre. Ein Lexikon zur Ausbildung deutscher Maler in der französischen Hauptstadt*, vol. 1: 1793–1843, Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2013.

was published in 1839.⁶ However, what he gave to the readers in 1820 was a patchwork – a kind of manifesto, mixing elements from a handbook, a theoretical essay, a compilation and a petition.⁷

First and foremost, Passavant's goal was to defend the young German painters – in particular, their ideas of what to represent and how to do it technically – against the critiques which had been published shortly before. The most prominent critiques came from Johann Heinrich Meyer, the voice of the Goethe circle, in 1817 and from Jakob Salomon Bartholdy in 1819.⁸ Bartholdy was a Prussian diplomat and an active supporter of the German artists, having some of them, in 1817, paint a whole fresco cycle in his Roman house, 'The Story of Joseph and his Brothers', which gave highest visibility of their art to the public.⁹ However, Bartholdy anonymously gave a harsh review on their Roman exhibition in 1819 at the Palazzo Caffarelli, which contained about 175 works; on show were smaller paintings and drawings with scenes from the bible or Mary with the Child, some copies after Perugino, Raphael, and other early Renaissance masters, but also landscapes and portraits.¹⁰ Bartholdy claimed that most of the German artists in Rome were demanding, but mediocre in their works. Instead of feigning enthusiasm, he appealed to judge art 'in cold blood'.¹¹ Both Bartholdy and Meyer accused the *neudeutsche* painters of blindly imitating the old masters and irrationally

⁶ Johann David Passavant, 'Rafael von Urbino und sein Vater Giovanni Santi', 2 vols, Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1839.

⁷ See Michael Thimann, 'Eine anticlassizistische Programmschrift aus Rom: Johann David Passavants *Ansichten über die bildenden Künste und Darstellung des Ganges derselben in Toscana* (1820)', Alexander Rosenbaum, Johannes Rößler, and Harald Tausch, eds, *Johann Heinrich Meyer – Kunst und Wissen im klassischen Weimar*, Göttingen: Wallstein, 2013, 301–24.

⁸ W.K.F. ['Weimarer Kunst-Freunde' = Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Johann Heinrich Meyer], 'Neu-deutsche religio-patriotische Kunst', *Ueber Kunst und Alterthum in den Rhein- und Mayn-Gegenden*, 2: 1817, 7–62; [Jacob Salomon Bartholdy], 'Ueber die Kunstaussstellung im Palaste Caffarelli zu Rom im April 1819', Beilage zur *Allgemeinen Zeitung*, 124: 23 July 1819, 493–6.

⁹ Michael Thimann, *Friedrich Overbeck und die Bildkonzepte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2014, 271–89; Peter Vignau-Wilberg, *Die Lukasbrüder um Johann Friedrich Overbeck und die Erneuerung der Freskomalerei in Rom*, Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2011; Cordula Grewe, *Wilhelm Schadow. Werkverzeichnis der Gemälde mit einer Auswahl der dazugehörigen Zeichnungen und Druckgraphiken*, Petersberg: Imhof, 2017, 30–7.

¹⁰ [Bartholdy], 'Ueber die Kunstaussstellung', 493. Among the few works praised by Bartholdy was the self-portrait of Wilhelm Schadow, together with his brother Ridolfo and Bertel Thorvaldsen, today Berlin, Alte Nationalgalerie, Inv. A I 325: Grewe, *Wilhelm Schadow*, 170–3; on the Nazarenes in Rome see: Thimann, *Friedrich Overbeck*; Klaus Gallwitz, Ingrid Sattel, eds, *Die Nazarener in Rom. Ein deutscher Künstlerbund der Romantik*, exhibition catalogue, 22 January – 22 March 1981, Rome, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Munich: Prestel, 1981; Max Hollein, Christa Steinle, eds, *Religion, Macht, Kunst. Die Nazarener*, exhibition catalogue, 15 April–24 July 2005, Frankfurt am Main, Schirn Kunsthalle, Cologne: König, 2005.

¹¹ [Bartholdy], 'Ueber die Kunstaussstellung', 493: 'Mit Kaltblütigkeit über die Kunst zu reden, jetzt wo der Enthusiasmus an der Tagesordnung ist, möchte für viele Kezerei sein.'

neglecting timeless artistic principles. Two paintings presented in the exhibition by Friedrich Overbeck, 'perfected with extraordinary love and full of tender sentiment', as Passavant wrote to his mother,¹² Bartholdy dressed down as 'too insignificant to dwell on'.¹³

This debate is well known and has been addressed by many scholars, and Passavant was certainly not the first to give his opinion.¹⁴ His denying the accusations with counterclaims that the young German artists would, instead, aspire towards a 'vivid, characteristic form' and 'a severe style in drawing nudes and robes'¹⁵ were less striking than his argumentation with historiography. Michael Thimann has pointed out how Passavant took up Meyer's attempt to historicize the Nazarenes in order to disavow them, and turned it into an alternate construction: Passavant 'makes up a tradition that actually has not existed' in order to construct a positive historical analogy.¹⁶ His point was not – not even in the second place – to provide an art history of Italy in the late middle ages. In fact, this part was little more than a compilation from Giorgio Vasari's *Vite*, modified at most by the more structural overviews by Luigi Lanzi and Johann Dominik Fiorillo.¹⁷ Passavant says quite frankly that 'Vasari remains the best source for art in Italy, all his successors [...] make many words about what he tells in a most concise and precise way.'¹⁸

¹² Johann David Passavant to Catharina Elisabeth Passavant, 1 May 1819: Skwirblies, *Passavant. Briefwechsel*, n° 7.43 = Frankfurt am Main, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. Ffm. J. D. Passavant, A.I.a [Italy, I], 14, fol. 32 r ('mit außerordentlicher Liebe vollendet u voll des zartesten Gefühls').

¹³ [Bartholdy], 'Ueber die Kunstausstellung', 493 ('zu unbedeutend, um dabei zu verweilen'), a 'Madonna with Child', now in Copenhagen, Thorvaldsens Museum, Inv. B 136: Andreas Blühm, Gerhard Gerkens, eds, *Johann Friedrich Overbeck 1789-1869*, exhibition catalogue, 25 June–3 September 1989, Lübeck, Museum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, Lübeck, 1989, 128–9, and a 'Flight from Egypt': Thimann, *Friedrich Overbeck*, 258–60.

¹⁴ Thimann, 'Eine anticlassizistische Programmschrift', 308–11; Christian Scholl, *Revisionen der Romantik. Zur Rezeption der 'neudeutschen Malerei' 1817-1906*, Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2012, 19–93; Robert Skwirblies, 'Altitalienische Malerei als preußisches Kulturgut. Gemäldesammlungen, Kunsthandel und Museumspolitik 1797–1830', Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2017, 150–8; Frank Büttner, 'Der Streit um die 'neudeutsche religiös-patriotische Kunst'', *Aurora*, 43: 1983, 55–76; Christine Tauber, 'Über Kunst und Altertum', in Andreas Beyer and Ernst Osterkamp, eds, 'Goethe Handbuch', Supplemente, 3: Kunst, Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzler, 2011, 418–20; Susanne Netzer, 'Jacob Salomon Bartholdy – ein Diplomat Preußens in Rom (1815–1825) und ein Wegbereiter des Königlichen Museums in Berlin', *Jahrbuch Preußischer Kulturbesitz*, 41: 2004, 119–60.

¹⁵ [Passavant], 'Ansichten über die bildenden Künste', 88-9: '[...] vielmehr bestand dieses Streben in einer [...] lebendigen, charakteristischen Darstellung, [...] einem strengen Style in der Zeichnung des Nackten und der Gewänder'.

¹⁶ Thimann, 'Eine anticlassizistische Programmschrift', 309–11 (quote: 309).

¹⁷ Thimann, 'Eine anticlassizistische Programmschrift', 311–2; Rumohr, [review] 'Ansichten', 125.

¹⁸ Johann David Passavant to his mother, Catharina Elisabeth Passavant, 1 May 1819: Skwirblies, *Passavant. Briefwechsel*, n° 7.43 = Frankfurt am Main, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. Ffm. J. D. Passavant, A.I.a [Italy, I], 14, fol. 31 r ('Vasari bleibt immer die beste Quelle für die

Indeed, Passavant himself asked friends not to talk about his own book as a history of art,¹⁹ as it should originally be perceived as fictional 'letters of the painter J. D. Passavant in Rome to art lovers in Frankfurt, 1819'.²⁰ The purpose of insisting on the Vasarian progression of art in Tuscany was to draw parallels between the contemporary German artists, mostly painters, with Italian masters from Giotto to Masaccio, Angelico, and Raphael. This attempt was noticed – and criticised – by Karl Friedrich von Rumohr in his book review from 1821.²¹ Defending himself, Passavant openly declared, 'that you want us to look at the artistic development of that period too much like a contemporary of the time; whereas I am judging it more in relation to the present.'²²

The main point that Passavant saw throughout art history, or more precisely, what he envisioned based on Vasari's conception, was the idea that art has been divided by nation throughout history – with cycles of growth, bloom, and degradation. Stories and anecdotes about the single artists themselves were not much more than a quarry for his construction, as Passavant was not inclined to identify single works or masters. Instead, he was interested in the greater outlines. The second step in his construction shows how late medieval Italian painters – above all, Giotto – presumably drew inspiration from German sculptors and architects: this would make Italian Renaissance the fruit of the German artistic spirit.²³ Passavant's third step combines these two ideas: he claims that the Fine Arts had always developed in the sequence, architecture – sculpture – painting.²⁴ In Germany, only architecture would have reached its fruition, while, due to 'civil and revolutionary wars', sculpture and painting would never have had the chance to fully blossom – in spite of Dürer's genius – but instead plant seeds for the central

Kunst in Italien; alle seine Nachfolger schimpfen über ihn obgleich sie ihn nur benutzen und einen langweiligen Brey um das machen was er in Kürtze weit bestimmter sagt').

¹⁹ Johann David Passavant to Johann Friedrich Böhmer, 11 March 1820: Skwirbli, *Passavant. Briefwechsel*, n° 8.18 = Frankfurt am Main, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. Ffm. J. D. Passavant, A.I.d, 6, fol. 10 r ('[...] nur hoffe ich daß ihr meine Versuche vom Gang der Kunst in Toskana einen Begriff zu geben, nicht das Ansehen einer Kunstgeschichte geben wollt, obgleich die Grundzüge darin zu finden sind; zu einem solchen Unternehmen aber gehörte viel mehr u etwas viel ausführlicheres').

²⁰ Johann David Passavant to Johann Friedrich Böhmer, 9 January 1820: Skwirbli, *Passavant. Briefwechsel*, n° 8.2 = Frankfurt am Main, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. Ffm. J. D. Passavant, A.I.d, 3, fol. 5 r ('Briefe der [sic!] Malers J.D. Passavant in Rom an Kunstfreunde zu Frankfurt a/M 1819').

²¹ Rumohr, [review] 'Ansichten', 127.

²² Johann David Passavant to Karl Friedrich von Rumohr, 18 June 1821: Skwirbli, *Passavant. Briefwechsel*, n° 9.17 = Berlin, Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, VI. HA, NI Bunsen, K. J. v., B, II, 114, no pag.: '[...] daß Sie die Kunstrichtung jener Zeit zu sehr als einer jener Zeitgenossen betrachtet wissen wollen; während ich sie mehr zum Verhältniß der jetzigen Zeit beurtheilt habe.'

²³ [Passavant], 'Ansichten über die bildenden Künste', 37.

²⁴ [Passavant], 'Ansichten über die bildenden Künste', 7.

Italian artists who would then rise to the top.²⁵ This argumentation means that the Nazarenes and their circles could now gain leeway and catch up to the culmination that German art had missed.

Passavant's sources and references

It may help to have a closer look at the romantic roots and the impact that the post-Napoleonic political situation in Europe had on the artistic ideas revealed by this 'fictional space of history', which Passavant created in his early publication and reflected upon in his contemporary letters.²⁶ He read Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder's *Herzensergießungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders*, published in 1796, and Ludwig Tieck's *Sternbalds Wanderungen* (1798), only in late 1816, and with much disappointment. 'Although they contain something good and instructive, these works did not satisfy me, because they do not seem to me written with much profound knowledge or seriousness; everything seems to me quite trifling and sentimental instead.'²⁷ He does, however, say that he would have loved these works ten years prior. Passavant states that these texts, which had been at the forefront twenty years earlier, have lost their appeal and become worn out. In fact, he sees this deficit as an opportunity to renew, modify and professionalize the obsolescent romantic ideas that have once been the basic impulse for a great part of the young German arts community. Passavant uses art history and politics to widen his reader's point of view and deepen the discourse; and for this reason, he addresses both the public and artists themselves in his manifesto.

Passavant's argument is based on three sources: firstly, the topical critique of academic formation and education, represented most prominently by the *Lukasbrüder* and their insistence on autonomy from any institution. Secondly, Passavant takes up ideas and impressions obtained through his own artistic formation and practice in the master atelier of David, later Gros, in Paris. Finally, a great part of Passavant's construction derives from history books of the late enlightenment, connecting an idealized picture of history, one intended to criticise the *ancien régime*, with a patriotic vision of an essentially republican society.

²⁵ [Passavant], 'Ansichten über die bildenden Künste', 7: „Drei Perioden gibt es nothwendigerweise in der Kunstgeschichte eines jeden Volkes, wo die Kunst ihre völlige Ausbildung erhalten hat; nämlich, die des allmählichen Emporstrebens, die der höchsten Blüthe und die des Verfalls.'

²⁶ Thimann, 'Eine anticlassizistische Programmschrift', 313: 'fiktionalen Geschichtsraum'.

²⁷ Johann David Passavant to Catharina Elisabeth Passavant, 23 February 1816: Skwirblies, *Passavant. Briefwechsel*, n° 5.34 = Frankfurt am Main, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. Ffm. J. D. Passavant, A.I.a [Paris], 78, fol. 149 v ('so manches gute u unterrichtende sie indessen auch über Kunst u die Geschichte mancher Künstler enthalten, so leisteten mir diese Werke doch nicht Genüge, da sie mir nicht mit viel umfassender Kenntniß noch mit dem Ernste den ich jetzo verlange, geschrieben scheinen, sondern es kommt mir alles, etwas tändelnd und empfindsam vor').

In his youth, Passavant was close friends with Franz Pforr, who lived with Passavant's family until 1806.²⁸ Later, the two frequently exchanged letters when Pforr attended the art academy in Vienna and, together with Friedrich Overbeck, founded a self-organized, anti-academic group of young painters in 1809, known as the confraternity of Saint Luke.²⁹ Pforr's letters to Passavant report the hostile atmosphere at the academy, the lack of artistic and personal understanding and the courageous segregation of these young artists, followed by their move to Rome in 1810. It is of no doubt that Passavant internalized Pforr's complaints and his pride not to have 'come to the way thousands of artists are going, without relying on one's own forces' but instead having 'thrown down the yoke'.³⁰ Pforr wrote of self-organized tours, studies of nature, and living models, coupled with a particularly sensitive description of his feelings and imagination. Passavant confesses to the personal impact Pforr had upon his life – that is, until Pforr's premature death in 1812.³¹ Such was the model of a religious, but above all free and independent community of artists, which Pforr conveyed in his letters. This is recalled in Passavant's appraisal of the *Lukasbrüder* who wanted to 'teach and enlighten each other', re-entering a path that has been 'abandoned for a long time and almost forgotten'.³²

From Passavant's own foundation in drawing and painting we can derive a second aspect of his anti-academism. He was impressed by Napoleon's former court painter Jacques-Louis David's unconventional teaching in the few months before he had to leave Paris in early 1816. We do not know exactly what David told his

²⁸ Heinrich Thommen, *Im Schatten des Freundes. Arbeitsmaterialien von Franz Pforr im Nachlass Ludwig Vogels*, Basel: Schwabe, 2010, 92–4; Elisabeth Schröter, 'Raffael-Kult und Raffael-Forschung. Johann David Passavant und seine Raffael-Monographie im Kontext der Kunst und Kunstgeschichte seiner Zeit', *Römisches Jahrbuch der Bibliotheca Hertziana*, 26: 1990, 309–23.

²⁹ Michael Thimann, 'Friedrich Overbeck, Franz Pforr und die Anfänge des Lukasbundes, 1806 bis 1809', in *Friedrich Overbeck (1789–1869) in Wien. Unbekannte Zeichnungen aus dem Ostholstein-Museum Eutin*, Kiel: Ludwig, 2016, 11–54.

³⁰ Franz Pforr to Johann David Passavant, 25 August 1809: Skwirbli, *Passavant. Briefwechsel*, n° 2.27 = Frankfurt am Main, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. Ffm. F. Pforr, A.34, fol. 79 r ('[...] ich [...] wäre auf den Weg gekommen den taußende gehn grade nur seinen Vorgängern nachzugehen, ohne sich auf seine eigene Kräfte zu verlassen, alein hir war es zu arg das Joch drückte mich nur bald zu unleidlich ich warf es ab [...]').

³¹ Johann David Passavant to Catharina Elisabeth Passavant, 30 July 1813: Skwirbli, *Passavant. Briefwechsel*, n° 4.75 = Frankfurt am Main, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. Ffm. J. D. Passavant, A.I.a [Paris], 63, fol. 123 r ('[...] so lange Pforr gesund war hatte ich kaum den Gedanken Künstler werden zu wollen, [...] da er nun aber immer kränker wurde und an seinem Aufkommen nicht mehr zu hoffen war, schmerzte es mich sehr und ich fühlte in mir den Drang, als, sozusagen, sein zweites Selbst, das Amt zu übernehmen welches er hier auf dieser Erde verwaldet hatte').

³² [Passavant], 'Ansichten über die bildenden Künste', 73.

pupils,³³ but we know how Passavant perceived his words: a warning not to go the *École des Beaux-Arts* and a disparaging attitude towards the 'older French School' and the likes of (François) Boucher and (Carle) van Loo. David recommended instead – 'just like Winckelmann', as Passavant joyfully wrote to his mother³⁴ – the 'sublime silence and dignity of the antiques, the simplicity and great nature of Leonardo and Raphael'.³⁵ Passavant had studied Winckelmann's 'art history', or as Passavant calls it his 'History of Antique art',³⁶ in Paris already before his own artistic career, and moreover, together with a paternal friend he used to 'correct [Winckelmann's] observations by looking at the artworks here [in the Louvre] ourselves'.³⁷

One can tell from these very different sources, that it was neither Romanticism nor Neoclassicism that formed Passavant's view, but in fact a patchwork of these different ideas. Observing the reports from his time in the David atelier when it was in the hand of Antoine-Jean Gros,³⁸ one constant aspect becomes apparent: Passavant tends to take a nonconformist, anti-official point of view. This is revealed quite openly as he rejects Gros' general encouragement to proceed with a career in the academy – with prizes and recommendations – counting himself among the 'disobedients' of the atelier.³⁹ However, private master ateliers and the academy depended on each other, and the recurring motif of rebellious artists in these ateliers does not imply a segregation comparable to the *Lukasbrüder* in Vienna.⁴⁰ Passavant's later attempts to mediate between artists in Rome, the public

³³ Cfr. similar affirmations quoted as the master's words, e.g. his polemics against the 'virus academique', in: Etienne-Jean Delécluze, *Louis David. Son école et son temps*, Paris: Didier, 1855, here p. 57 (thanks to Gerrit Walczak for this indication).

³⁴ Johann David Passavant to Catharina Elisabeth Passavant, 18/22 December 1815: Skwirblies, *Passavant. Briefwechsel*, n° 5.24 = Frankfurt am Main, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. Ffm. J. D. Passavant, A.I.a [Paris], 75, fol. 144 r ('ganz wie Winckelmann').

³⁵ Johann David Passavant to Heinrich Anton Cornill, 24 December 1815: Skwirblies, *Passavant. Briefwechsel*, n° 5.25 = Frankfurt am Main, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. Ffm. J. D. Passavant, A.I.b [Paris], 19, fol. 41 r ('die hohe Ruhe u Würde der Antiken, die Einfalt u große Natur des Leonardo da Vinci u Raphaels').

³⁶ Johann David Passavant to Catharina Elisabeth Passavant, 16 February 1813: Skwirblies, *Passavant. Briefwechsel*, n° 4.52 = Frankfurt am Main, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. Ffm. J. D. Passavant, A.I.a [Paris], 60, fol. 116 v ('die Kunstgeschichte Winkelmans [sic]').

³⁷ Johann David Passavant to Catharina Elisabeth Passavant, 16 February 1813: Skwirblies, *Passavant. Briefwechsel*, n° 4.52 = Frankfurt am Main, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. Ffm. J. D. Passavant, A.I.a [Paris], 60, fol. 116 v ('[...] als wir seine Bemerkungen gleich durch eigenes Betrachten an den hier aufgestellten Kunstwerken berichtigen können').

³⁸ Nina Struckmeyer, 'Dans l'atelier des élèves de Jacques-Louis David', Alain Bonnet, France Nerlich, eds, *Apprendre à peindre. Les ateliers privés à Paris 1780-1863*, Tours: Presses universitaires, 2013, 123–39.

³⁹ Johann David Passavant to Catharina Elisabeth Passavant, 1 January 1817: Skwirblies, *Passavant. Briefwechsel*, n° 5.84 = Frankfurt am Main, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. Ffm. J. D. Passavant, A.I.a [Paris], 87, fol. 167 r ('Widerspenstige').

⁴⁰ Alain Bonnet, 'La formation pratique dans les ateliers d'artistes au XIX^e siècle', id, France Nerlich, *Apprendre à peindre*, 59–71; Nerlich, Savoy, *Pariser Lehrjahre*, XI; William Vaughan,

through his publications, and the *Städelsche Kunstinstitut* in his home city Frankfurt am Main echoed this Parisian experience.

(Art) history and (Art) politics

Since 1815, Frankfurt had been an independent, flowering merchant city.⁴¹ This explains Passavant's civic pride and republicanism,⁴² which is evident throughout his correspondence, and met his ambitions in art. In 1818, he made very detailed propositions to the administrators of the newly founded *Städelsches Kunstinstitut*.⁴³ Established by the bequest of a rich merchant, its aim was to promote the fine arts by founding a museum and possibly an art school.⁴⁴ This institution was perfectly fitted to Passavant's ambition. 'Not an academy!' Passavant exclaims in his letter,⁴⁵ underlining these words for emphasis. Instead, he suggests a new system of independent teachers who should not depend on restricted schedules or programmes, and independent scholars who should be free to choose any teacher they wanted. The formation itself, as Passavant outlines it, seems quite like the French master atelier system – in other words, not at all anti-academic.

In his proposition to the Städel, Passavant also stresses art history in the abstract way we have seen above: the hope is to see art flourish, more precisely, to see a national German school of painting and sculpture flourish. Passavant wanted the Städel to purchase monumental examples of the fine arts such as frescoes, statues, and whole buildings to provide models and inspirations for future generations of followers. Passavant claims that the present is 'an era of vigour and aspiration'.⁴⁶ These words make it perfectly clear that the artists he recommends,

'The first artistic brotherhood: *fraternité* in the Age of Revolution', id, Laura Morowitz, eds, *Artistic Brotherhoods in the Nineteenth Century*, New York: Ashgate, 2000, 32–47; Thomas E. Crow, *Emulation. Making Artists for Revolutionary France*, New Haven/London: Yale University Press 1995; Philippe Bordes, 'Jacques-Louis David et ses élèves. Les stratégies de l'atelier', *Perspective*, 1, 2014, 99–112; George Levitine, *The Dawn of Bohemianism. The 'Barbu' Rebellion and Primitivism in Neoclassical France*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978.

⁴¹ Wolfgang Klötzer, 'Die Freie Stadt Frankfurt (1789) 1815–1866', Walter Heinemeier, ed, *Handbuch der hessischen Geschichte*, vol. 4, Marburg: Elwert, 2003, 610–47.

⁴² Most explicitly in a letter written in Florence to his mother, 31 July 1819: Skwirbli, *Passavant. Briefwechsel*, n° 7.57 = Frankfurt am Main, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. Ffm. J. D. Passavant, A.I.a [Italy I], 15, fol. 34a r–34b r.

⁴³ Johann David Passavant to the Administrators of the *Städelsches Kunstinstitut*, 7 March 1818: Skwirbli, *Passavant. Briefwechsel*, n° 6.24 = Frankfurt am Main, Städel Museum, Graphische Sammlung, Archiv, Karton P, Faszikel 17a, no pag.

⁴⁴ Corina Meyer, 'Die Geburt des bürgerlichen Kunstmuseums – Johann Friedrich Städel und sein Kunstinstitut in Frankfurt am Main', Berlin: G+H, 2013.

⁴⁵ Johann David Passavant to the Administrators of the *Städelsches Kunstinstitut*, 7 March 1818: Skwirbli, *Passavant. Briefwechsel*, n° 6.24 = Frankfurt am Main, Städel Museum, Graphische Sammlung, Archiv, Karton P, Faszikel 17a, no pag.: 'Also keine Akademie!'

⁴⁶ Johann David Passavant to the Administrators of the *Städelsches Kunstinstitut*, 7 March 1818: Skwirbli, *Passavant. Briefwechsel*, n° 6.24 = Frankfurt am Main, Städel Museum,

Friedrich Overbeck and Peter Cornelius, are to play just as an important a role as Giotto, Pisano, and the many Italian artists he would write about shortly afterwards in his *Ansichten*; they were to provide the base for the 'flowering' of art. As Overbeck's and Cornelius' qualifying competences, Passavant cites their 'emotion, naivety and natural grace'.⁴⁷ He uses almost the same words later when writing about Giotto and his students, whom he sees as possessing 'spiritual profundity and higher truth'.⁴⁸

Michael Thimann has characterized Passavant's view of art history as highly political.⁴⁹ In 1816, he declares his wish to 'build up a school of art in Frankfurt one day, with the help of some other German artists, that shall provide the same glory as the city already has for its trade and patriotism'.⁵⁰ Passavant claims himself to be a 'republican'. In his opinion, only republican cities can provide the opportunity for fine arts to blossom, by giving orders for monumental buildings and such decoration that would express a self-confident community of citizens instead of selfish rulers – let them be profane princes or popes.⁵¹ Passavant misinterprets Vasari's *Vite* as nonpolitical information, written just with 'love, naivety and even impartiality'⁵² which Passavant, in fact, claims for his own work. For him, it is not peace or wealth, not baronial patronage or regimented academies that provide a 'Blüthe der Kunst', but the 'Größe der Gesinnungen': a high-minded community of the people, not of individuals.⁵³ There is a structure above the individual minds, as Passavant points out, when he says that 'in very different regions of Germany have risen the same ideas in the bright minds'.⁵⁴

At this point, Passavant refers to the patriotic movement around 1812 to 1815 and reveals an ambiguous attitude concerning war and violence. When he states that 'the battling life keeps the mind awake',⁵⁵ he means that war would be more

Graphische Sammlung, Archiv, Karton P, Faszikel 17a, no pag. ('der Kraft und des Emporstrebens').

⁴⁷ Johann David Passavant to the Administrators of the *Städelsches Kunstinstitut*, 7 March 1818: Skwirblies, *Passavant. Briefwechsel*, n° 6.24 = Frankfurt am Main, Städel Museum, Graphische Sammlung, Archiv, Karton P, Faszikel 17a, no pag. ('Gefühl, Naivität und natürliche Grazie').

⁴⁸ [Passavant], 'Ansichten über die bildenden Künste', 37–9, (quote: 39, 'geistige Tiefe und höhere Wahrheit [...]').

⁴⁹ Thimann, 'Eine anticlassizistische Programmschrift', 308.

⁵⁰ Johann David Passavant to Heinrich Anton Cornill, 27 October 1816: Skwirblies, *Passavant. Briefwechsel*, n° 5.63 = Frankfurt am Main, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. Ffm. J. D. Passavant, A.I.b [Paris], 23, fol. 48 v: '[...] ich bin auch noch der guten Hoffnung einstens mit Hülfe einiger anderer deutschen Künstler, in Frankfurt eine Schule der Kunst zu errichten, die sie zu eben solchem Ruhm bringen soll, als sie es jetzo durch ihren Handel u durch ihre patriotische Gesinnungen ist'.

⁵¹ [Passavant], 'Ansichten über die bildenden Künste', 55–6.

⁵² [Passavant], 'Ansichten über die bildenden Künste', 9: 'Liebe und Einfalt, und selbst Unpartheilichkeit'.

⁵³ [Passavant], 'Ansichten über die bildenden Künste', 5–6.

⁵⁴ [Passavant], 'Ansichten über die bildenden Künste', 72.

⁵⁵ [Passavant], 'Ansichten über die bildenden Künste', 4 ([das] 'streitende Leben').

fruitful than the allegoric cornucopia of peace and more helpful than noble 'protectors of art'. Having taken part in the last campaign against Napoleon, Passavant had witnessed and shared patriotic fever. After Napoleon's return from Elba in early 1815, Passavant joins the forces to 'campaign against the monster'.⁵⁶ However, the regiment he was part of marched off almost a month after the battle of Waterloo had ended, meaning that Passavant himself had never been confronted with battle, death, or hunger in the field – he lived a war simulation.⁵⁷ 'The most beautiful times of [ancient] Greece' as well as the age of the Italian *comuni* that he glorifies as golden eras of 'political and civil agility',⁵⁸ had in reality been tough and brutal times of war. Nonetheless, Passavant became part of the troops marching through southwest Germany and Alsace, experiencing a spirit of comradeship – a noticeable factor also within the *Lukasbrüder* circle⁵⁹ – that might have been decisive for him breaking up definitely with his family's business and joining the circles of artists.

In fact, he did not return to Paris as a soldier in 1815, but as a student a year later. Besides frequenting David's atelier to become a painter in 1816 Passavant reads and 'lives' – as he puts it – the Ancient Rome of the first century B.C., the Roman civil war: 'no law, no justice, only brute force; our times are golden in comparison with those'.⁶⁰ This is how Passavant writes to his mother referring to 'Pollio or Augustus and his age', an invented version of the lost *historiae* of the late Republican military statesman and writer Gaius Asinius Pollio, published by the almost forgotten L.P. (Louis-Philippe) de Bugny in 1808.⁶¹ This book consists of a constructed history that draws parallels with the present, assuming an imaginary point of view by an old Republican politician who saw the despotic Principate rising. The book reflects – perhaps using the disguise of history to avoid censorship – a critique of Napoleon and his empire. Passavant seems to have read ingeniously De Bugny's book as a well written history book. Methodically, its use of history as a kind of quarrel can be recognized in Passavant's *Ansichten*, which came a few years later. With regards to content, the basically anti-monarchist attitude is the same one

⁵⁶ Johann David Passavant to Johann Elias Mieg, 19 April 1815, draft: Skwirbliès, *Passavant. Briefwechsel*, n° 5.1 = Frankfurt am Main, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. Ffm. J. D. Passavant, A. I. b [Paris], 18, fol. 35r ('es ist nichts anders zu machen als ein jeder dessen Verhältnisse es erlauben gürtet sein Schwert um und zieht gegen das Ungeheuer zu Felde, daß es erliege mit seinen hundert Tausend Köpfen; so auch ich').

⁵⁷ Johann David Passavant to Catharina Elisabeth Passavant, 22 August 1815, and Johann David Passavant and Daniel de Bary to Heinrich Anton Cornill, 28 August 1815: Skwirbliès, *Passavant. Briefwechsel*, n° 5.8 and 5.11 = Frankfurt am Main, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. Ffm. J. D. Passavant, A.I.a [Paris], 69, and A.I.b [Paris], 17.

⁵⁸ [Passavant], 'Ansichten über die bildenden Künste', 4 ('die politische und bürgerliche Regsamkeit').

⁵⁹ Thimann, 'Zeichnen in Wien'; Thommen, *Im Schatten des Freundes*, 151–201.

⁶⁰ Johann David Passavant to Catharina Elisabeth Passavant, 19 June 1816: Skwirbliès, *Passavant. Briefwechsel*, n° 5.46 = Frankfurt am Main, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. Ffm. J. D. Passavant, A.I.a [Paris], 81, fol. 155 v ('jetzo lebe ich im alten Rom [...] kein Gesetz, kein Recht nur die Gewalt; unsere Zeiten sind noch golden gegen jene').

⁶¹ [Louis-]P[hilippe] de Bugny, 'Pollion ou Le Siècle d'Auguste', 4 vols, Paris: Garnery, 1808.

that Passavant shows in his statements. We can find a similar example in Johannes von Müller's books on history, which Passavant reads several times, expressing his admiration, and which he quotes in his *Ansichten*.⁶² His ideal is the reign of an élite, such as the romanticized republics of ancient Greece and Rome, Switzerland in modern times or the medieval *comuni* in Central Italy.

Politics, religion, and the autonomy of art

Art history becomes an issue because of the politically imagined history. Once more, artworks now function to illustrate Passavant's already developed ideas. Impressed by the frescoes at the Campo Santo in Pisa, in the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena, in the churches of Florence, and by the statues of Or San Michele in Florence, Passavant puts emphasis on the composite work as an ideal.⁶³ As the patrons should act as a community, so the artists should too. The Nazarenes' freshly finished frescoes in Bartholdy's house in Rome were both an echo and an archetype for a new Renaissance – their motive matched perfectly: showing the story of Joseph and his brothers, a tale of betrayal, piety and common destiny.⁶⁴

Within this context, it is not surprising how much less important the religious aspect turns out to be in Passavant's texts. He wants to avoid narrowing down basic questions about art to a confessional conflict. Friedrich Overbeck and Friedrich Schlegel had become Catholic, and the confessional break within the artists' community was a problem for Passavant.⁶⁵ He never became intimate with Overbeck's circle – one reason was that his friends and relatives emphasized that Passavant must remain a Protestant.⁶⁶ Although Passavant believed in religion as

⁶² Johannes von Müller, 'Vier und zwanzig Bücher Allgemeiner Geschichten, besonders der Europäischen Menschheit', Johann Georg Müller, ed., 3 vols, Tübingen: Cotta, 1810; [Passavant], 'Ansichten über die bildenden Künste', 36.

⁶³ Johann David Passavant to Heinrich Anton Cornill, 18 July 1818, and to Catharina Elisabeth Passavant, 22 October 1819: Skwirbli, *Passavant. Briefwechsel*, n° 6.56 and 7.69 = Frankfurt am Main, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. Ffm. J. D. Passavant, A.I.b [Italy], 4, fol. 10 r, and A.I.a [Italy, I], 16, fol. 35 v.; Johann David Passavant to the Administrators of the *Städelsches Kunstinstitut*, 5 May 1818: Skwirbli, *Passavant. Briefwechsel*, n° 6.38 = Frankfurt am Main, Städel Museum, Graphische Sammlung, Archiv, Karton P, Faszikel 17a, no pag.

⁶⁴ Thimann, 'Eine anticlassizistische Programmschrift', 315. These ideas were already expressed by Passavant's cousin, travelling to Rome in 1817 where he writes about the frescoes to Passavant in Paris and orders copies directly by the painters for himself: Philipp Jacob Passavant to Johann David Passavant, 20 March 1817: Skwirbli, *Passavant. Briefwechsel*, n° 5.104 = Frankfurt am Main, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. Ffm. J. D. Passavant, A.II.c, 7, fol. 15 r-v.

⁶⁵ Johann David Passavant to Catharina Elisabeth Passavant, 10 January 1818: Skwirbli, *Passavant. Briefwechsel*, n° 6.17 = Frankfurt am Main, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. Ffm. J. D. Passavant, A.I.a [Italy, I], 6, fol. 12 v.

⁶⁶ Johann David Passavant to Heinrich Anton Cornill, 16 January 1819, and Philipp Jacob Passavant to Johann David Passavant, 4 March 1819: Skwirbli, *Passavant. Briefwechsel*, n° 7.22 and 7.33 = Frankfurt am Main, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. Ffm. J. D. Passavant, A.I.b [Italy], 6, fol. 14 r, and A.II.c, 17, fol. 55 r.

the 'right, profound reason' for 'everything man knows and does', giving artworks their real meaning and purpose,⁶⁷ and although he prefers religious subjects in his own works, Passavant does not strictly utilize art for devoutness, which has been one of the strongest reproaches by Meyer and other critics.⁶⁸ In fact, his critique of the early acquisitions of the *Städel* do not point at (non-)religious content but technical quality: the essence should be 'only the best, classical' works.⁶⁹

This argument leads to the question of the autonomy of art from religion and from politics – and the autonomy of the single artist as an individual. Again, Passavant takes history as a testimony: Leonardo, Michelangelo, and Raphael would have studied Giotto, Gaddi, and Masaccio, 'enriching their minds, without damaging their particularity by strictly imitating and copying', they would have melted the 'collected impressions, notions and ideas in their soul and rendered them [...] as a new work with increased interest'.⁷⁰ Undeniable is the former clerk and merchant shining through this wording.

The acid-tongued Rumohr points out his non-artistic background when he accuses Passavant of mere dilettantism in his book review, a few months after the *Ansichten* had been released.⁷¹ In fact, Passavant's crucial problem is how to extract the concrete formula of good artistic practice, which in his eyes would have been perfectly realized in the early central Italian Renaissance. He refers to the depth of soul and emotion, to a congruence of artistic idea and work and to truth as a major ideal. However, all these claims remain imprecise. The painter should not fall into a 'manner', that is: he must not imitate the surface of model artworks⁷² but express the

⁶⁷ Johann David Passavant to Heinrich Anton Cornill, 28 December 1822: Skwirblies, *Passavant. Briefwechsel*, n° 10.17 = Frankfurt am Main, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. Ffm. J. D. Passavant, A.I.b [Italy], 15, fol. 32 r: 'so glaube ich doch daß alles Wissen und Wirken des Menschen nur in der Religion seinen rechten tiefen Grund hat'; and to the Administrators of the *Städelsches Kunstinstitut*, 5 May 1818: Skwirblies, *Passavant. Briefwechsel*, n° 6.38 = Frankfurt am Main, Städel Museum, Graphische Sammlung, Archiv, Karton P, Faszikel 17a, no pag.: '[...] durch die Beziehung die es [=a work of art] auf unsere Religion und Geschichte hat, wird es erst den Zweck erreichen, wozu die Kunst eigentlich soll angewand [sic] werden'.

⁶⁸ Thimann, 'Eine anticlassizistische Programmschrift', 307–8.

⁶⁹ Johann David Passavant to the Administrators of the *Städelsches Kunstinstitut*, 29 November 1817: Skwirblies, *Passavant. Briefwechsel*, n° 6.8 = Frankfurt am Main, Städel Museum, Graphische Sammlung, Archiv, Karton P, Faszikel 17b, 39, no pag. ('überhaupt ist zu bedenken daß wenn etwas öffentlich ist, man nur das Beste, das Classische wählen soll').

⁷⁰ [Passavant], 'Ansichten über die bildenden Künste', 47–8: 'So bereicherten sie ihren Geist, ohne ihrer Eigenthümlichkeit durch strenges Nachahmen und Copieren [...]; die eingesammelten Anschauungen, Begriffe und Ideen verschmolzen sie so zu sagen in ihrer Seele und gaben sie [...] als ein neues Erzeugnis mit reichen Zinsen wieder.'

⁷¹ Rumohr, [review] 'Ansichten', 125.

⁷² [Passavant], 'Ansichten über die bildenden Künste', 39, 51–5, 101–2; Johann David Passavant to Heinrich Anton Cornill, 27 October 1816: Frankfurt am Main, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. Ffm. J. D. Passavant, A.I.b [Paris], 23, fol. 48 r.

'warmth of the soul' in them.⁷³ This is how Passavant quotes David in his post-Napoleonic atelier – or he puts the words in his master's mouth. In the same way, Passavant blames the Carracci as eclectics.⁷⁴ But the consequence of his own philosophy is nothing more than a formal eclecticism, based on a presumed inner motivation of the artist. The conflict between following the inner voice and 'true' objections, avoiding any 'manner' or 'imitation' and creating exactly that reality through education and collaboration, remains an unsolved problem.

The point is not to decide how progressive or sensitive Passavant was with his thoughts. But his statements, expressed in private letters as well as in his first book, reflect a kind of moderate modernism. The artists are considered as individuals on one side, committed above all to their respective originalities or even peculiarities ('Eigenthümlichkeit'),⁷⁵ and embedded on the other side into a society that was asked to actively support them. Passavant realized that the artistic ideals from the beginning of the century had to be actualized to keep them alive so he adjusted them to the altered political situation after the Napoleonic wars, in a Europe that in 1819 still had the chance to head an era of liberal constitutional monarchism. Passavant's imagined self-organized community of artists, supported by civil patrons if not by the authorities, was more a loose group of collaborators than a closed sect. Passavant declares frankly that some exceptional artists would allow the minor ones to flourish – this is the crucial point in Passavant's idea of an artist group, and again, put in a historical analogy.⁷⁶ Neither religion, nor concrete subjects were considered, but rather the balance of personal freedom and common sense in the process of creation. In this frame, history, and art history took the role of a structural pattern – to emulate imagined predecessors. For Passavant as a young painter, art history was not a subject of its own merit – at least, not yet.

⁷³ Johann David Passavant to Catharina Elisabeth Passavant, 18/22 December 1815: Skwirblies, *Passavant. Briefwechsel*, n° 5.24 = Frankfurt am Main, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. Ffm. J. D. Passavant, A.I.a [Paris], 75, fol. 144 r: 'Wärme der Seele'.

⁷⁴ [Passavant], 'Ansichten über die bildenden Künste', 57–9; Johann David Passavant to Catharina Elisabeth Passavant, 16 November 1817: Skwirblies, *Passavant. Briefwechsel*, n° 6.5 = Frankfurt am Main, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. Ffm. J. D. Passavant, A.I.a [Italy, I], 3, fol. 5 v–6 r.

⁷⁵ Johann David Passavant to Catharina Elisabeth Passavant, 16 November 1817, and to Heinrich Anton Cornill, 20 January 1818: Skwirblies, *Passavant. Briefwechsel*, n° 6.5 and 6.19 = Frankfurt am Main, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. Ffm. J. D. Passavant, A.I.a [Italy, I], 3, fol. 5 r, and A.I.b [Italy], 2a, fol. 6 r.

⁷⁶ In a letter to his friend Cornill, 7 August 1821: Skwirblies, *Passavant. Briefwechsel*, n° 9.24 = Frankfurt am Main, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. Ffm. J. D. Passavant, A.I.b [Italy], 13, fol. 29 r ('du mußt aber wissen daß ohne diesen und wenn man allein als Künstler lebt, es nicht wohl möglich ist ein der Vollkommenheit nahendes Werk zu liefern, dieses haben selbst die größten Meister erfahren; geschweige minder begabt; diese sinken nothwendiger weise wo sie allein stehen, wie sie sich in der Gemeinschaft erheben. Daher kommt es auch daß öfters Künstler ganz verdienstliche Arbeiten in Rom liefern und zu hause in einer dem Kunstleben fremdartigen Umgebung nichts rechts mehr zu stande bringen können. daher denke ich darauf mich stets in einer großen Umgebung zu halten').

Robert Skwirbliès ‘The simplicity of old times’ and a community of artists

Robert Skwirbliès is a research assistant to the Chair for Modern Art History at the Technische Universität Berlin. He is currently collaborating with Bénédicte Savoy on a scholarly edition of the letters written by and addressed to the painter and art historian Johann David Passavant from 1807 to 1824. His PhD thesis, published in 2017, explored the reception of and the market for Italian Renaissance paintings in Germany, especially in Berlin, in the early 19th century, focusing on cultural policy, the art trade and personal networks in post-revolutionary Europe.

robert.skwirbliès@tu-berlin.de



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