

The Truth in Painting

Review of:

Lexicographie artistique: forme, usages et enjeux dans l'Europe moderne, edited by Michèle-Caroline Heck with Marianne Freyssinet and Stéphanie Trouvé (Montpellier: Presses Universitaires de la Méditerranée, 2018). 445 pages + b&w and colour illustrations. 24 euros ISBN 978-2-36781-256-4

LexArt Words for Painting (France, Germany, England, the Netherlands, 1600-1750), edited by Michèle-Caroline Heck (Montpellier: Presses Universitaires de la Méditerranée, 2018). 519 pages. 24 euros ISBN 978-2-36781-285-4

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Michèle-Caroline Heck is a leading scholar of northern European art theory, author of a penetrating analysis of Joachim von Sandrart's *Teutsche Academie* (German ed., 1675; Latin ed., 1683) (2006), and editor of two important new contributions devoted to the Early Modern European reception of Italian publications on art north of the Alps. Full disclosure: Heck contributed an excellent study comparing Sandrart's treatise to Karel van Mander's *Schilder-boek* (1604), to my edited volume, *Re-Reading Leonardo: The Treatise on Painting across Europe, 1550-1900* (2009). Her chapter on the transformation of Leonardo's ideas through a close textual analysis was the precursor to the two publications reviewed here, a dictionary of art terms and an edited volume of twenty-four case studies of writings on art published between 1600 and 1750 in German, French, English, and Dutch. They correspond to artistic practices in France, England, the Low Countries, and Germanic lands. Both volumes result from the collaborative research project that Professor Heck directed from 2013 – 2018, funded by a prestigious European Research Council grant that supported the work of post-doctoral fellows and doctoral students overseen by an international scientific committee of leading scholars specialized in the theoretical literature.

The tradition for studying this literature began in the second half of the nineteenth century with ambitious research initiatives associated with the Vienna School of Art History. One of the fundamental questions has always been whether and to what extent the language of art has a basis in practice. Or is it intended solely for theoreticians and connoisseurs? Rudolf von Eitelberger, appointed the first professor of art history at the University of Vienna in 1852, dealt with the analysis of texts, translations, and their sources apart from the formal analysis of actual works of art, as did his influential student, Moritz Thausing, and Thausing's students, Franz Wickhoff and Alois Riegl. Among the next generation of Viennese art historians who established comparative formalist practices modelled on a positivist understanding of science, Julius von Schlosser, author of a monumental study of Italian artistic literature originally published in German in 1924 that remains the

field's historical and conceptual foundation today (3rd ed., ed. Otto Kurz, translated into Italian by Filippo Rossi, 1964), insisted on keeping his investigations of theoretical writings separate from his studies of material culture for methodological reasons. The Vienna School, as studied recently by Matthew Rampley, Mitchell Frank, Dan Adler, and others whose work appears regularly in this journal, developed 'objective' analyses of formal elements in works of art to counter both traditionally subjective aesthetic preoccupations of connoisseurs and newer documentary approaches disengaged from any direct, affective response to works of art. Later generations of art historians with an interest in the literature of art run the gamut from Erwin Panofsky to Michael Baxandall but they all share in the project of closing the gap between art theory and artistic practice.

Most recently, study of the historical literature on art has swerved away from broad humanistic themes toward close textual analysis facilitated by the digitalization of rare texts, computer-assisted word searches, and other electronic instruments. The LexArt project, writes editor Heck in her introduction to the volume of essays that accompanies the dictionary of art terms, is 'situated in a European perspective of exploration across texts on the theory of art, on the circulation of concepts and practices, and the permeability of artistic frontiers' (p. 11). Both volumes remain committed to the Viennese School's belief in comparative analysis, which has been adapted to pursue different research questions. The publication is unprecedented in being a systematic comparison of artistic vocabulary in four languages as the terms appeared in a range of publications indebted to Italian sources. It charts the literature from c. 1604, when Van Mander's *Schilder-boek* was first published, until c. 1750, when Alexander Baumgarten introduced the term 'aesthetics.' Heck justifies the chronological and geographical limits of her study based on the growing importance of publications on art in northern Europe during this period. The appearance of philosophical aesthetics marks the upper chronological limit of her investigation.

After centuries of scholarly hedging, Heck speaks plainly about the relationship between practice and theory: seventeenth-century art theory was an explanation of practice. The actual challenge is to examine the various meanings of a word in the contexts in which they appeared. Broadening the study to several countries and languages shows both the fragmentation of a received discourse and the emergence of common elements in an evolving, dynamic conception of painting. This is how an intersectional history emerged without a fixed identity or allegiance to any particular ideas (p. 16).

Heck's polyglot approach to the historical study of art terminology is unprecedented conceptually. The purpose of the study is not to provide definitions or propose translations, but to 'highlight what was at stake in the usages, re-situated in different contexts of time and space, by confronting different manners of thinking, painting, and looking' (p 21). Heck defines the aim of the investigation as threefold: first, to explicate the terms starting from the sources that contributed to their elaboration; second, to understand how the language served both the

intellectual activity of theoreticians and artistic practice; and third, to study the dissemination of this vocabulary among amateurs and connoisseurs.

The study of art literature north of the Alps is relatively new, and a further justification for Heck's focus is that Amsterdam, Paris, and London all supplanted Venice as capitals of publishing in the seventeenth century. Concepts circulated in texts and translations that were often excerpts from and compilations of sixteenth-century Italian works including Vasari's *Vite* (1550 and 1568), Alberti's *Della pittura* (1435; first printed edition, 1540), and Lomazzo's *Trattato* (1584). Heck's contributors document the dynamic changes in vocabulary that became agents of these transfers. Among northern European theoreticians, many of whom were artists themselves, new terms were imported, others invented, and inherited terms were transformed.

Citing Marc Fumaroli, Antoine Arjakovsky, and others, Heck argues that a European 'conscience' began to develop in the emerging republic of the arts that was constructed in the image of the established republic of letters (p. 16). Perhaps 'conscience', with its implications of a unified identity and moral standards, is not the most appropriate word to flag the kind of collective identity that emerges from this study. Unity was created through the circulation of people, knowledge, and artistic practices. However, the same words could describe very different practices. Heck and her contributors find that period translations indicate the plasticity of art terms whose meanings were sometimes transformed in translation and at other times translated with different words. I note that ancient writers such as Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian whose writings on poetics and rhetoric formed the basis of Early Modern literary theory, had established a vocabulary rooted in artists' workshop practices to describe language, specifically to discuss the virtues and vices of style. The use of words such as 'perspicuous' and 'bright' or 'lucid' to describe literary images were never simple optical metaphors but signalled complex ideas about the value of certain literary structures. New painting terms were not as easily integrated as these longstanding inter-art analogies, as Heck notes.

Leon Battista Alberti and other modern writers who adapted rhetorical theory to discuss the visual and plastic arts returned ancient pictorial metaphors to the visual register. The plasticity of art terms is a central finding of the study, the purpose of which, Heck emphasizes, is not to provide definitions or propose translations, but to highlight what was at stake in different contexts of time and space, by comparing different ways of thinking, painting, and looking. Drawing upon Roland Barthes, Heck and her collaborators imagine a new linguistic science that studies not the origins of words or their diffusion, but their 'thickening' in the historical discourse. The LexArt dictionary includes 250 notions discussed in seventy-seven articles that emphasize the meanings and connections among terms (p. 22). To write these essays, citations were collected in a database, completed by period translations, associated terms, and a list of cited sources. The citations were chosen from a close reading of the sources with the aim of bringing together a wide variety of concepts initially studied as separate entities. Taken together, they form a clear vision of the conception of painting formulated by painters and theorists of the

seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (p. 21). The dictionary is organized as an alphabetical list of terms, mostly in English, including many familiar concepts such as agreeableness, art, artifice, caprice/bizarreness, chiaroscuro, colouring, countenance, genius, harmony, invention, imitation, judgement, style, and taste, and a few outliers such as *houding* and *reddering*, two key terms in the Dutch literature that derive from workshop practice. The essays are clear, reliable, and densely packed with information. Most of the bibliography references scholarship on seventeenth-century sources. To gain a broader historical view of complex terms such as 'genius', it pays to use this valuable dictionary in conjunction with other sources, such as the *Dictionary of the History of Ideas* edited by Philip P. Wiener (1973) or more recent focused studies, such as *Logodaedalus: Word Histories of Ingenuity in Early Modern Europe*, another collaborative effort, headed by Alexander Marr (2018). I was surprised to learn that *chiaroscuro* was a word mainly used for monochrome painting (p. 100), before Leonardo da Vinci defined it as the second principle of painting that deals with light and shadow. It is the singular accomplishment of the dictionary and its companion volume to analyze such widely used terms in the context of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century literature on art.

Artistic terminology is mobile, sometimes contradictory, and always adjusted to the environment in which it is used. This study is devoted to analyzing semantic slippages and modifications of technique in different settings. Since the terms are unstable, it is not a matter of calling out 'exceptions' but of recognizing the polysemy and diversity that constitutes the richness and variety of European modernity. The accompanying volume of essays addresses the question of artistic terminology across two axes, a diachronic vector that establishes the historical context of ideas, and a synchronic vector that establishes specific, local contexts of use. One recurring theme is the function of illustrations, especially in drawing manuals where images play a fundamental role for self-taught amateurs to appreciate art and connect to the artist. Heck and her contributors specify that three types of vocabulary are involved: literary, vernacular, and a jargon specific to the workshops.

The diachronic axis is concerned primarily with establishing the history of a term, topic, or issue, while the synchronic axis concerns their circulation, transformation, and dissemination by means of translations. This framework settles the first question of how to organize the evidence to ensure a pluralistic outcome, one that does not subsume difference under essentializing rubrics. The second question is how to understand the strategies of transfer in the translation of texts, given that the practice of translation is central to the transmission of ideas and knowledge.

The transnational, European framework of these twin volumes is effective in addressing fundamental questions to a discipline historically organized by modern nation-states, such as how different national and regional styles could arise on the basis of the same textual heritage. The short answer is local conditions of reception. One audience for this literature was the spectator who needed to know what was

important to see and how to see it (p. 24). On the crucial question of whether these texts had a real impact on artistic practice, and vice versa, did practice affect terminology, the answer is a resounding 'yes' but the mechanisms and outcomes were diverse. The volume of essays, which I will describe individually briefly below, opens with a prologue by the historian of the French art academy, Christian Michel, on light and colour in literature and in practice; the remaining twenty-three chapters are divided into three subsections: Book as Lexical Laboratory, Word and Concepts, and Circulation of Notions: Transfers, Translations.

By way of caveat, the publication does not fully take into account the Aristotelian tradition for quantifying colour, light, shadow, thickness of the air, and other phenomenological aspects of perception that are widespread in Leonardo da Vinci's writings on pictorial perspective incorporated in his *Trattato della Pittura* circulating in manuscript and first published in Paris in 1651 (in Italian and French). Leonardo's writings on painting were central to the authors who form the core of Heck's comparative study, Roger de Piles, André Félibien, Charles-Alphonse DuFresnoy, Filippo Baldinucci, J. P. Bellori, and Franciscus Junius. The wealth of publications celebrating Leonardo's 500th anniversary in 2019 means it will take scholars several years to catch up to the revised view of his importance in the history of Academic art. Furthermore, the divide between theory and practice extends to the modern scholarship: these two volumes demonstrate that art historians practicing connoisseurship and those studying the history of the theoretical literature have many reasons to read one another's work.

The volume of essays, *Lexicographie artistique*, including contributions in French and English, represents a wide range of research interests. In the first section, Cecilia Hurley studies book fairs to examine the history of book distribution and the accessibility of art literature in the seventeenth century. Claudine Moulin studies drawing manuals as part of a network of compilers that contribute to the transmission of knowledge, comparable to the genesis and distribution of vernacular grammars. In her chapter contribution, Michèle-Caroline Heck studies the relationship between Dufresnoy's considerations on the art of painting and Roger De Piles's 1668 translation of his Latin poem, *De Arte graphica*. Stéphanie Trouvé examines the career of painter/theorist Hilaire Pader, whose partial French translation of Lomazzo's 1584 *Trattato*, published in 1649, was the basis for his own later theoretical writings. Anaïs Carvalho studies the German translation of De Piles' work. De Piles' French translation of Dufresnoy's Latin poem was published in German in 1699, with the help of Samuel Theodor Gericke, a highly positioned painter at the Brandenburg Court who wanted to ally theory to the practice of painting. Gericke also translated Gerard de Lairesse's drawing manual, subject of the next chapter by Gaëtane Maës, who argues that drawing manuals are privileged sources of information for evaluating the situation of the arts in each country. Lairesse's manual corresponds to the two stages of apprenticeship, the elementary rules of drawing and information for those who have acquired the necessary principles to practice painting. Like Pader and many others, De Lairesse combined

several sources using, for example, Lomazzo, Jean Cousin, and Dürer to explain proportion theory. Saskia Cohen-Willner looks closely at Van Mander's vocabulary in a process she calls 'hypotextuality', where the preceding hypotext is transformed, modified, and extended to create a new text. Aude Prigot focuses on the career of Charles-Antoine Coypel, elected Director of the Royal Academy in 1747.

Opening the second section, Elisabeth Oy-Marra investigates how Bellori's concept of the 'idea' developed in response to Zuccaro's late Scholastic account. At stake was the central issue of whether to imitate nature directly or ideally. Eva Struhel documents the formation of Florentine historian Filippo Baldinucci's *Vocabulario Toscano* (1681), whose emphasis on practice was indebted to Félibien and different from Vasari's emphasis on universal judgment and theoretical speculation. In contrast to Bellori, Baldinucci's definition of *idea* associates it only with terms such as *capriccio*, *fantasia*, and *bellezza*, but not divine truth. Bellori, who cites Raffaello Borghini's definition of *disegno* in *Il Riposo* (1584), transforms *disegno* into a visible characteristic style. Struhel concludes that Baldinucci's efforts match other Early Modern attempts to systematize the knowledge of artisanal practices by emphasizing the role of artworks. Marije Osnabrugge focuses on art terms such as genius and *gave* (gift) used in the Dutch literature to describe the characteristics that allow an artist to become successful. Beginning with the Dutch translation of De Piles' *Abrege de la vie des peinture*, Osnabrugge shows that Dutch authors used a variety of terms to denote different components of genius. Emmanuelle Hénin takes up the complex term verisimilitude, literally truthlikeness, central to Aristotle's *Poetics* and clearly felt in Roland Fréart de Chambray's *L'Idee de la perfectione da la peinture* (1662), and the first Conférences at the French art academy. The discussion concerns how distinctions between truth and verisimilitude are treated in relationship to Horatian ideas of decorum found in artistic theory of the 1660s. Verisimilitude authorized modifying historical truth to fit the circumstances on the principle of the freedom granted to poets and painters alike. De Piles displaced the criteria of verisimilitude on to the spectator: the 'truth in painting' is a pure fiction.

Still in the second section, Hans Joachim Dethlefs studies J.G. Sulzer's two-volume dictionary of the fine arts (1771-74), the foremost work of eighteenth-century German-language lexicography. Discussion focuses on the semantics of *campo* (variously translated as field, ground, a relationship of contrasts) in the French translation of Leonardo's *Trattato della pittura* (1651), its sources in Leonardo's autograph manuscripts, and other texts that followed Sulzer's publication. This chapter includes charts of terminological equivalences with three other art dictionaries. Marlen Schneider studies academic notions of hybrid genres in light of recent theoretical discussions of this problematic term, using the case of historical portraiture to examine why these composite genres were met with widespread academic reticence at the end of the seventeenth century. Sébastien Bontemps contributes a study on the decorum of architectural ornament debated in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century theoretical literature associated with the *Académie royale d'architecture*.

Opening Part Three, Ralph Dekoninck studies the relationship between various terms associated with the Italian word *concetto* (*idea, conceptus, exemplar, idolum*, etc) and its Scholastic roots in the writings of Catholic Reformation art theorist Gabriele Paleotti and French academic Fréart de Chambray's *Idea de la perfection de la peinture*. Rosa De Marco and Carline Heering discuss the artistic lexicography of festivals to examine the constitution, use, and circulation of artistic vocabulary in seventeenth-century Europe associated with different kinds of ephemeral constructions such as luminous and pyrotechnical objects. Lizzie Boubli studies regional differences of terminology in Spain and Italy regarding two kinds of terms adopted in Spain: terms transferred from one language to another without significant change, and more profound modifications that transform the nature of the imported word, such as *diseño*, discussed as a foremost example of semantic ambiguity. Émilie Passignat revisits the vexed history of the term 'manière' and its cognates from Vasari to Luigi Lanzi (1804) who first used the term 'manierismo' in the sense of 'an alteration of the truth.' Paul Taylor takes up the Dutch term 'gladdicheyt' in Van Mander's *Schilder-boek*, as a word that had a broader semantic field than its English counterpart, 'smoothness.' Taylor perceptively notes that one of the greatest difficulties in reconstructing the meanings of art theoretical language is that it was largely oral – we have to try to reconstruct nuances of conversations that we are unable to share. Wieneke Jansen studies translations of Longinus's terminology of the sublime in a widely influential text discussed at several points in this volume, Junius's *De picture veterum* (Latin ed., 1637; English ed., 1638; Dutch ed., 1641). Junius uses the concept of the sublime to discuss the artist's genius and innate talent, rejecting the technical aspects of artistic creation while giving an important role to the quality of grace that makes an artwork successful and cannot be described by rules. Aude Prigot continues the discussion of how artistic vocabulary was subject to change, focusing on reception in the Netherlands where the new vocabulary was transferred without a corresponding network of lexical innovators: how was a theory of art rendered intelligible in such circumstances? Prigot focuses on the engraver Johannes Verboek's translation of De Piles' writings on colour, which include invented terms borrowed from Latin, German, and Italian. Verboek was forced to create neologisms in some cases and in other cases gave double translations. In the final chapter, Ulrike Kern takes up the general problem of translating terms in texts that were increasingly supplemented with glossaries for this reason. Kern focuses on various translations of the term 'attitudine' widely used in the mid-sixteenth century by Vasari, Cosimo Bartoli, and others before being adopted by Van Mander, Fréart de Chambray, John Evelyn, John Dryden, William Aglionby, and others.

I will be consulting this richly conceived reference work for many years to come. As these very brief references to the chapter essays suggest, Professor Heck and her team have made an important and timely contribution to our historical and theoretical understanding of the rise of western representation that will be useful in many different contexts of interpretation. A future project could look further into

historical and conceptual connections with the formal language developed by the Vienna School of art history for describing all works of art (regardless of cultural origins) as objects of perception.

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