

ATHANOR AND THE ARTIFACT

Works of art and architecture, just as novels or symphonies are artifacts. They must be superbly crafted, technically sound, and contain a clearly articulated message which in turn *must* be *useful* on a multitude of emotional levels. In contrast to the penetrating presence of an artifact, the personally interpretative essays of art criticism have—more often than not—been arty facts in which “critics” mirrored the outdated and clanish predilections of a basically conservative elite. Collections of 19th century criticism, for instance, deal with fashionable artists whose names and works are forgotten, just as some of the recent, elegantly biased art historical writing contains statements which already seem ludicrous. We all have had to pay for our errors in taste and judgement from J. Burckhardt’s abhorrent view of late Roman sculpture to H. Sedlmayr’s post-Nazi denunciation of abstract art in his *Verlust der Mitte*.

In contrast to time bound effusions, well crafted art history has remained relevant. This fifth issue of ATHANOR establishes it as a periodical which has found its profile and a level of professionalism worthy of its readers. The rich variety of essays centers around the works of art and their creators in a “nuts and bolts” approach which brings them closer to readers who will be free to form their own biases. Above all they contain accurate and fresh information ranging from a study of the provincialism of Spanish Cistercian architecture; the efficiency of Dutch 15th century *scriptoria*; the perception of van Gogh as an originally literary creation; Dow’s fundamental influence on American painting theory; to the precise chronicling of the bureaucratic process which makes Christo’s work possible. It is only in the two essays on the women artists Hannah Höch and Miriam Schapiro whose problems are analyzed almost painfully, that a contemporary bias appears. The creators of art have always been competitive, be they male or female. The ruthlessly professional women artists such as Medieval and Renaissance painters, or figures such as Angelica Kauffmann, Elizabeth Vigée-Lebrun, Mary Cassat (who received the Légion d’Honneur), Kaethe Kollwitz, the recently deceased Meret Oppenheim and Louise Nevelson were as hesitantly accepted and as enthusiastically praised as their male counterparts. Artists as well as historians have always treated exceptional excellence with grudging admiration.

Lastly, and above all, this issue shows the scholars’ respectful pleasure in creation, which is the well spring of our extraordinary discipline. It demonstrates that the rigorous methods of our young colleagues succeed in capturing the very essence of art. In a verbal transmission they illuminate the difficulties of the creative process which in the end produces monuments and documents which tell us who and where we are.

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Manuscript submission: readers are invited to submit manuscripts for consideration. Authors should consult the *Modern Language Association Handbook* for matters of form; manuscripts should be original typescripts with photographs and cannot be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. The University assumes no responsibility for loss or damage of materials. Correspondence and mss. may be addressed to the Editor, ATHANOR, Department of Art History, FAB, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL 32306.

To obtain copies: ATHANOR is published annually by the Department of Art History under the sponsorship of the Institute for Contemporary Art. The issues are available for a suggested minimum donation of \$4.50 to cover handling and contribute to subsequent issues; please request volumes through the Department of Art History, Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida 32306.

Annual Art History Graduate Symposium: Held at week’s end on one Friday and Saturday in March each Spring, Symposium paper sessions cover a wide variety of topics. Students from the Southeast deliver presentations which frequently become papers published in ATHANOR. The format of the Symposium includes a featured speaker of national reputation in addition to the student paper sessions. For details of date in March, 1987, and for precis submission, please contact Professor Patricia Rose, Chair, Department of Art History, Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida 32306-2037.