

Epistolary Discourse: Letters and Letter-Writing in Early Modern Art

Deadline: Jul 1, 2017

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Please consider submitting an abstract to Epistolary Discourse: Letters and Letter-Writing in Early Modern Art

While cultural historians have recently published a number of studies on letters and letter-writing in Early Modern Europe, the subject has not been sufficiently explored from an art historical perspective. Though some texts on Early Modern private life offer insight on the prominence of the theme in art, a more exhaustive analysis is in order, especially since letters and letter-writing are depicted in art in other contexts besides the domestic realm. Indeed Early Modern epistolary discourse falls into both private and public categories. In the private sector, the Early Modern period saw a significant increase in literacy, especially among women, mainly due to the development of the printing press and the subsequent proliferation of texts. Women no longer dictated their letters to others, but wrote them themselves. As letter-writers, they could now take on intimate roles, such as that of mothers, lovers, or travelers, without the intrusion of a writing assistant. In the public sector, members of the papal curia exchanged letters to publicize new statutes, while spiritual leaders in general often corresponded to offer religious instruction and guidance. Travelers wrote letters to inform of their experiences abroad, and merchants used the rhetorical form to exchange information on financial events or to issue letters of credit and other financial instruments. Further, the renewed interest in antiquity during the Renaissance revealed the epistolary discourse of Pliny, Cicero, Seneca, and others, resulting in the revival of humanistic epistles, such as those composed by Erasmus of Rotterdam. For the learned, letters could be a form of rhetorical self-fashioning, as often these were made public, revealing the friendships and patronage they enjoyed from powerful individuals. No less significant is the fact that a new literary genre emerged at this time: the novel written in epistolary form. Examples include Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *La nouvelle Héloïse* (1661) and Samuel Richardson's *Pamela or Virtue Rewarded* (1740).

Zephyrus Scholarly Publications LLC is seeking papers for an upcoming anthology on letters and letter-writing in Early Modern art. Papers dealing with any aspect of this theme will be considered. Please send a 300 word abstract by July 1, 2017 to Lilian H. Zirpolo at lzirpolo@zephyruspubl.com (deadline extended).

Reference:

CFP: Epistolary Discourse: Letters and Letter-Writing in Early Modern Art. In: ArtHist.net, Jun 21, 2017 (accessed Dec 16, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/15851>>.