

## Artium Quaestiones, issue: Work of Art as a Thing

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### Artium Quaestiones, issue 29: Work of Art as a Thing

After a long period of fascination with semiotics, textuality, visual culture and – generally – with images, since the late 20th century scholars of art have been more and more often focusing on the materiality of an artwork. They tend to think about it as a physical object or – the distinction is of importance here – a thing. This tendency – conspicuous in many academic disciplines – from archeology to philosophy, museum studies, sociology or anthropology – is variously described as a “material turn”, “return to things” or “thinking through things”. Its premises are related to a special kind of neo-positivist, empirical and science-based scholarly attitude and an attempt to overcome the humanist, anthropocentric orientation onto the world in favour of objects surrounding or rather coexisting with humans.

We would like to open the thematic section of the 29th issue of *Artium Quaestiones*, the peer reviewed yearly journal of the Department of Art History (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań), to a discussion of consequences such an interest in materiality has – or may have – for the discipline of art history and how ideas proposed by scholars such as Bjørnar Olsen, Graham Harman, Bill Brown, Lorraine Daston or Bruno Latour could be applied to reflection on a work of art. Years ago George Kubler in his book *The Shape of Time* noticed that the issues of things are those of art history, seeing them as a fusion of object and idea in a visible form. However, the contemporary thought on the question of materiality in our field seems relatively rare, albeit not completely absent due to publications by such scholars as Monika Wagner or Elizabeth Edwards. Indeed, problems of materiality should appear particularly important for art history, which, since its conception as an academic field, has been dealing with man-made material artifacts. Moreover, in the 20th century a variety of formally different objects entered the world of art (for instance surrealist objects, ready-mades, found objects) and their status often generated vivid discussions in our field. Thinking about art and its materiality also has its philosophical tradition. For instance, in his famous essay – often referenced by theorists of the “material turn” – “The Origin of Work of Art” Martin Heidegger pondered upon the “thingness” of a work of art. Moreover, in art historians and aestheticians on various occasions have revisited the idea of historical materialism.

We wish to open discussion on a work of art as things and on their materiality in theoretical and analytical articles that would respond to such questions as:

- if things have their own agency, relate to one another, and sometimes we speak of a “life” of things (possibly criticized for linguistic anthropocentrism) – then what – if anything – happens when the thing is a work of art?

- to what an extent the notion of “thingness” of an object as something which - according to one proposition – makes its objective character problematic, subjectifies it (Bill Brown) can be applied to a work of art?
- in what ways a history (its vicissitudes) of a given thing is able to make it a work of art or deprive it of such a status? In what way such a history of an object/work of art affects its status in collections?
- in what way commodity fetishism affects the status and a biography of an artwork?
- to what an extent a material-oriented analysis of a work of art (paint in painting, material of a sculpture, etc.) which takes into account the fact that forms are not imposed on an immobile sub-soil but emerge and function within the flow of materials which are active and undergo constant mutation (Tim Ingold) – can affect the interpretation not only of sculptures but also painting?
- does dematerialization of pictures, the loss of their material support in favour of their reproduction and diverse virtual interfaces, merely distances us from (thinking about) their materiality and the possibility of its experience or – to the contrary – facilitates bringing it out in a better or different way?
- what would happen if we revisited earlier notions concerning works of from the perspective of its materiality/being a thing?; for instance, to what an extent could we talk about “the power of images” (David Freedberg) or “the desires of images” (W.J.T. Mitchell)?; can we talk about the subjectivity of a work of art as a thing and if so, what are the material premises legitimizing such a claim?
- finally, a familiar issue which seems worth revisiting in the proposed framework concerns the relationship between a representation and the represented thing/object.

The above list of questions is exemplary and by no means exhaustive. We will be happy to receive proposals in that would broaden the above-mentioned spectrum of problems within the proposed theoretical perspective.

We accept submissions written in English, German and Polish.

Abstracts (1500-2000 characters) should be sent till November 5th 2017.

We would appreciate if they were accompanied by a short academic bio.

Authors of submitted proposals will be notified about the editors’ decision within a period of c. two weeks.

The deadline for the submission of full articles is February 11th 2018 (maximum length: 40.000 characters)

All submissions and materials (for details consult “Artium Quaestiones” website: <http://arthist.amu.edu.pl/publications-artium-quaestiones/>) should be sent to dr Filip Lipiński: [aq.redakcja@amu.edu.pl](mailto:aq.redakcja@amu.edu.pl).

Reference:

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