

Listening to images (Rome, 21-22 Nov 19)

Académie de France à Roma – Villa Médicis, Nov 21–22, 2019

Deadline: Jul 19, 2019

Marta Battisti

Call for Papers

International research workshop in art history

Listening to images

Sounds, noises and whispers in Early Modern Art

Presentation

To think about representation in terms of sound seems to be a paradox, as, historically and theoretically, it is considered to be mainly linked to what is visible. Leon Battista Alberti, in his seminal book on the theory of representation, states that “the painter has nothing to do with things that are not visible. The painter is concerned solely with representing what can be seen”. The sense of sight allows the artist to imitate nature and the viewer to appreciate his work.

Despite this importance of vision, theory and practice of visual arts have often resorted to sound. Since Antiquity, within the comparison of arts – the paragone –, figurative arts, and especially painting, are defined as “mute”, unlike language and poetry. In his work, Alberti expresses the fear of visual disorder and confusion in painting composition in auditory terms, through the idea of “turmoil”: according to the theorist, the inarticulate sound of the world must remain outside the pictorial practice, which is theorized following the model of rhetoric and of musical harmony.

If noise is a repellent, the accomplishment of mimesis is also achieved with the inclusion of an impossible sound. Thus Donatello, according to Vasari’s famous anecdote, was enraged by his sculpture of the prophet Habakkuk, which only lacked voice. Likewise, Leonardo regrets that a representation of a battle cannot allow to hear “the noise of the machines, the fearsome roars of the victors, the cries and tears of the frightened men”. The use of ekphrasis, which reveals hidden sound through detailed descriptions, will be the answer brought by the humanists to this “silence” inherent to artworks.

The question of sonority, considered in the broad sense of vocalicity, musicality or noise, has found a new relevance in recent years in the field of history and social sciences, and has given rise to stimulating reflections in the field of art history and musicology. While the study of past sensory cultures (François Quiviger, *The Sensory World of Italian Renaissance Art*, 2010) and “soundscapes”, notably urban (Niall Atkinson, *The Noisy Renaissance*, 2016), have allowed to approach the auditory environment and sensitivity of the modern era, art historians have analysed the multi-sensoriality which is present in artworks (Victor Stoichita, “How to taste a painting”, 2010; Susan Boynton

and Diane Reilly, *Resounding images. Medieval Intersections of Art, Sound and Music*, 2015; Elisabeth Oy-Marra, *Intermedialität von Bild und Musik*, 2018), engaging a new critical reflection on the notions of silence, expression and language (Klaus Krüger, “Musica depicta’. The Silent Sound of Painting”, 2015; Bernard Vouilloux, “La peinture dans la rumeur du langage”).

This research workshop would like to bring together international scholars for a discussion on the relationship between sound and visual arts in European art from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century. While the workshop intends to focus on this period, concepts or studies that consider these topics in previous or later periods, will be welcome, in order to deepen and nourish an analysis of the modern times. Participants will be able to adopt iconographic and interpretative approaches as well as theoretical and epistemological ones.

These two days will be an opportunity to rethink the different iconographic motives that make it possible to represent sound visually, to evaluate their political, religious or artistic issues, as well as to highlight various devices able to suggest multi-sensoriality to the viewer. Theoretical, aesthetic or philosophical proposals, dealing in particular with terminological issues, may also be useful to reconsider the specific articulation between visual medium, sound and critical language. Just as Derrida spoke of a “tympanising” philosophy, the workshop aims to contribute to the development of an “acoustic criticism” in art history, where the viewer becomes “a listening eye”.

Proposals for papers (title and abstract of 700 words) and a 150 words CV, in English, Italian or French, should be sent before 19 July 2019 to Patrizia Celli (patrizia.celli@villamedici.it) with the subject “Listening to images”.

Organizers: Francesca Alberti Académie de France à Rome – Villa Médicis; Marta Battisti Université de Grenoble Alpes – LAHRHA; Guillaume Cassegrain Université de Grenoble Alpes – LAHRHA; Pauline Lafille Académie de France à Rome – Villa Médicis.

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