

## Fear of knowledge? Artists' book collections (online, 24–28 Oct 22)

Online via zoom, Oct 24–28, 2022

Deadline: May 9, 2022

Lejla Mrgan

The fear of knowledge. Artists' book collections

Session at the 13th triennial NORDIK Conference of Art History in the Nordic Countries, with the topic "COLLECTIONS"

Session organizer: Lejla Mrgan, PhD student, University of Copenhagen and The Thorvaldsen Museum

In his 1960 contribution to the prestigious Reith Lectures at BBC Radio, art historian Edgar Wind points to a problematic notion central to art history: the idea that that knowledge impedes the imagination of the artist.<sup>[1]</sup> The transition period between the Enlightenment and Romanticism is fundamental to the ratification of this idea, as the notion of the ideal artist changed radically in this period. Moving away from the earlier conception of the artist as a *doctus artifex*, i.e. a learned artist rising above mere craft through erudition and intellect, Romanticism firmly established a new artistic ideal: the artist as an intuitive genius unmarked by the "touch of cold philosophy", as John Keats puts it in his *Lamia* (1820). The twentieth century, of course, challenged this notion through readymades and conceptual art, but the fear of knowledge lived on. It recently resurfaced in Denmark in connection to the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts when several prominent politicians juxtaposed the more academic, desk-based disciplines of research, theory, reading and writing against artistic practice.<sup>[2]</sup> What's essentially at stake here is the very understanding of the relationship between art and thinking.

This session invites papers that discuss this problematic juxtaposition by looking at the way artists have collected, used, and read books.<sup>[3]</sup> Which books did artists own? How did they collect them? How did books circulate amongst artists? And how were books involved in artistic practice? By examining these questions, the session hopes to widen our understanding of artistic practice and education, and to open inquiry into broader questions regarding the nature and history of knowledge and the artist as a figure – in the past as well as today.

<sup>[1]</sup> This lecture was published a few years later in the book *Art and Anarchy*, 1963.

<sup>[2]</sup> The debate started in early 2021, in the wake of a larger debate about the leadership and organization of the Academy. See for example the piece written by the then Minister for Culture in Denmark, Joy Mogensen, "Kunst bør ikke være en skrivebordsøvelse", *Jyllandsposten*, 20.02.21

<sup>[3]</sup> For one of the only investigations into this question to date, see Heiko Damm, Michael Thimann, and

Claus Zittel, eds., *The Artist as Reader: On Education and Non-Education of Early Modern Artists*, 2013.

How to apply?

Session format: 3 papers of 20 minutes each + 30 minutes collective discussion at the end. If the number of relevant abstracts should exceed this time frame, a double session of 6-7 papers is also an option.

Ample time for collective discussion at the end is prioritized.

We will accept paper proposals until May 9th 2022.

The proposals must be in English and include a title, short description of the theme/subject of the presentation (max. 250 words), contact information of the organizers and keywords (max 1 page).

Please submit your proposal (or any questions) via e-mail to: [lejla@hum.ku.dk](mailto:lejla@hum.ku.dk)

For general inquiries regarding NORDIK contact: [info@nordikarthistory.org](mailto:info@nordikarthistory.org)

Reference:

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