

The Catalogue Raisonné Scholars Association

an Affiliated Society of the College Art Association

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No. 7

A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT

by Nancy Mowll Mathews

I took over the presidency of the CRSA from Gail Levin at the last CAA meeting in Toronto. We all owe her a debt of gratitude--Gail is one of the founding members and has served as president since the organization's inception in 1993.

Let me say a word about the nuts and bolts of CRSA. Last year, in my role as treasurer, I began to formalize the membership records and collection of dues. As you know, we were forced to raise the dues to \$20.00 per year to pay off the deficit and to publish our semi-annual newsletters. Now that we have the beginnings of a membership database, we will be able to provide more help to scholars and others seeking information about current catalogue raisonné projects.

On a more far-reaching level, I hope to see CRSA grow as a forum for discussion of issues confronting those doing extreme and extraordinary research. Catalogue raisonné scholars face unusual legal and financial dilemmas as well as research and theoretical challenges. This organization will serve its members seeking both peer and expert advice through the newsletter, the annual meetings and sessions at the CAA, and now through the CRSA list serv. We would also like to organize public panels or debates to reach a wider audience. There is a great deal of misunderstanding about what we do that could be clarified through open discussion.

I salute all of you who have chosen this difficult path and look forward to a productive partnership through the CRSA for years to come.

If you have not paid for 1998, or know someone who has not, please send me a check payable to CRSA. Membership renewal for 1999 (\$20.00) will be due February 15, 1999.

1999 CRSA SESSION, COLLEGE ART ASSOCIATION LOS ANGELES

The CRSA is sponsoring a session at next year's College Art Association conference, to be held in Los Angeles, February 10-13, 1999. Chaired by Gail Levin and Nancy Mowll Mathews, the session's theme is "Fakes and Their Implications for Art History." The description of the session reads:

Since Roman times fake works of art have fooled collectors; later, dealers, museum directors, curators and art historians have fallen prey. This session is aimed at works of art manufactured with the intent of tricking the audience, rather than works innocently misattributed. However, works known to be by one artist yet intentionally passed off as being by another more famous artist with the intent to defraud, are to be considered in this discussion.

Before fakes and intentional misattributions receive serious critical reappraisal and are exposed, they sometimes entered into art historical literature. Any scholar compiling a catalogue raisonné must by definition weed out such fakes, but this may prove difficult as other scholars and institutions have invested intellectual or real capital in the authenticity and value of these objects.

The focus of this session will not be how authenticity is determined, but rather to examine what effect objects we now identify as fakes have had on art history and on art historical practice before and after they have been labeled as counterfeit.

The speakers selected to deliver papers at the session are:

Nina E. Serebrennikov
Davidson College

"When the Fake Looks Nothing Like the *Echt*." The Case of Pieter Bruegel the Elder"

Sandy Kita
University of Maryland
"Matabei and the Ko-jokuri Scrolls: How a
Controversial Attribution Turned a Court Artist into a
Commoner Painter"

Stephanie R. Miller
National Gallery of Art
"When a Copy Becomes a Fake: Franz von
Lenbach's Copies after Titian"

William I. Homer
University of Delaware
"Clouds over the Moon: Ryder's Fading
Reputation"

The session is scheduled for Friday evening,
February 12th, 5:30-8:00 p.m.

Report on 1998 CRSA Session Toronto, Canada

The annual CRSA meeting at CAA was held on Thursday, February 26, 1998 in Toronto. During the business meeting, new officers were elected for three year terms. Replacing Gail Levin as President is Nancy Mowll Mathews, who previously had served as Treasurer. Melvin P. Lader, a member of the steering committee, became Vice-President, replacing Barbara Lynes. Gerald Carr, also from the steering committee, was elected Treasurer, and David Silcox became the new Secretary.

It was reported that annual dues had to be raised to \$20.00 to cover operating expenses and publication of the CRSA newsletter.

Following the business meeting, there were short presentations by members of a panel and subsequent discussions on the theme, "The Catalogue Raisonné in Progress: Coping." The members of the panel and their subjects were: Barbara Wolanin (long-term coping); David Silcox (money and support); Melvin P. Lader (working with an artist's family); Joan Marter (working with a foundation); and Gail Levin (problems of authentication).

Barbara Wolanin stressed the fact that most CRs are indeed long-term projects that minimally require 5-7 years and could conceivably last more than a decade. Keeping up one's interest and working around job requirements is difficult, as is keeping track of works as they move from one location to another. Financial support, computer technology, and requests for information before the

catalogue is complete were other issues she addressed.

David Silcox focused on the need to raise large sums of money to cover the high cost of publishing a catalogue raisonné. Creating an aura of confidence and a sense of reality around the project is vital, and the endorsement of a few prominent people goes a long way. He recommended budgeting twice as much money as the initial estimate to allow for unforeseen costs, monetary fluctuation, and budgetary revisions. Seeking funds may take about 40% of the time committed to doing a catalogue.

Mel Lader spoke about establishing a good rapport with the artist's family and the need for mutual trust. The family and the scholar must also agree on who has access to the information prior to publication and what role the family will play in financing the project, including the possibility of setting up a non-profit foundation. Statements of indemnification that safeguard the scholar from legal action by the family itself is advisable.

Joan Marter spoke from the perspective of her role as director of the Dorothy Dehner Foundation for the Visual Arts. The Foundation, according to Dehner's will, was set up to support education in the visual arts and is financed by the sale of Dehner's works and funds from the residuary estate. A complete inventory of the works will become the basis for a catalogue raisonné. Joan emphasized the need for careful planning in a will to set up such a foundation and for artists to keep organized records to facilitate cataloguing their work.

Gail Levin talked on coping with problems of authentication. If a gallery is supporting the project, a contract should be drawn up that includes a statement that the gallery will take no issue with the scholar on authentication decisions. Scholars must be careful to protect themselves against any liability. If opinions are to be put in writing, phrases such as "for your eyes only," "at this time...," "based on...," should be used. It may also be wise to consult with other knowledgeable individuals in making judgments on authenticity. When, or even if one should write such opinions was discussed, along with the pros and cons of charging a fee for such statements.

CRSA List Serv

CRSA owes a debt of gratitude to Heidi Hornik, a member of our steering committee, for setting up the CRSA Listserv. It is now possible to exchange ideas via e-mail on topics of interest to

authors of catalogues raisonné. Initiated this past summer, there has already been some discussion on issues of authenticating works of art. To subscribe to the list, send a new e-mail message to this address: LISTPROC@BAYLOR.EDU and in the body of the text, type: Subscribe CRSA-L your name

Example: Subscribe CRSA-L Heidi Hornik

Once you are subscribed, you will receive a "welcome" message including instructions for unsubscribing. Please save this welcome message.

If you wish to send a message to everyone subscribed on the list, please be sure your message has a meaningful subject line, and the message should be addressed to: CRSA-L@Baylor.edu Your message will automatically be distributed to everyone subscribed to the list.

Members whose e-mail addresses were already on record have been contacted previously. If you have not been contacted, please follow the instructions above. It is a wonderful way to give and receive information of mutual interest.

The Challenges of the Catalogue Raisonné

Thoughts on a Recent Panel

by Francis V. O'Connor, Ph.D.
Independent Historian of American Art

On Wednesday evening, January 21, 1998 the International Foundation for Art Research (IFAR) sponsored a panel discussion at The National Academy Museum in New York City on "The Challenges of the Catalogue Raisonné." The panel was chaired by Constance Lowenthal, the former director of IFAR, and now director of the World Jewish Congress' Commission for Art Recovery.

Aimée Brown Price, who is completing a CR on Puvis de Chavannes, outlined the nature of such a work of objective scholarship, and the ethical obligations it imposes, with commendable specificity.

Frank Martucci, a businessman, discussed his sponsoring a CR on George Inness, that is being edited by Michael Quick, mentioning the various policy decisions concerning condition and insurance such an effort entails.

Michael Findlay, the International Director of Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Works of Art at

Christie's, emphasized the art market's need for the definitive documentation of works of art that CR's provide, and deplored the problems of competing CRs, committees of art experts who disagree, and the ethical anomalies in situations such as collectors buying color plates in CRs. His cogent and challenging remarks were the highlight of the evening.

Wolf Kahn, NA, a distinguished landscapist, expressed his approval of the charming idea that an art historian might come in to clean up the mess he has made of his life's work.

The discussion and questions developed some of these ideas, but the panel did not really respond to the challenges of its theme, and rather than bore the reader with a detailed commentary on what was, was almost, and was not, said, it might be useful here just to list this writer's understanding of what the challenges of a CR are in today's art world, bringing in the panel where relevant.

1. WHO GETS CATALOGUED?

While one might have gotten the impression listening to some of the panelists that CR's were done by simply renting an art historian for the purpose, everyone seemed to forget that one does not begin a task so technically and economically daunting without there already existing a) the consensus of art historians, dealers and collectors that the artist to be catalogued is worth the effort, and b) that the integrity of that artist's oeuvre is seriously threatened by misattributions and forgeries. While any sensible artist ought to keep a hand list of works, only fame worth faking makes a CR justifiable--and, of course, death.

2. AUTHENTICATION

The greatest challenge to the editor of a CR is the duty--and the current dangers--of declaring which works attributed to the artist are wrong and thus not to be included. (SEE "The need for Consensus Connoisseurship in the Authentication Process," the Catalogue Raisonné Scholars Association Newsletter, August 1997, p.1ff. for the writer's views on the matter, as delivered at CRSA's 1997 session at the CAA convention in New York.)

3. WHO VETS THE VETTERS?

This challenging question from the floor, concerning who judges the qualifications of those who authenticate works of art, was answered by a consensus of the panel that it was indeed a difficult problem, and that, in general, the editor of a CR is the expert de facto. To another question about the utility of committees of experts, there was no consensus. The real problem here is that the art world, especially its older denizens, is still fixated on the idea of a "Certificate" from an individual "expert" that certifies authenticity. Until there is an acknowledgment of the need for a committee system, and a means of establishing and protecting such committees, the vetters shall go unvetted.

4. ART WORLD SECRECY

The next greatest challenge to the editor of a CR about a recent artist is the endemic secrecy of the art world when it comes to establishing ownership and/or provenance. Collectors are afraid of being robbed, kidnapped or looted by the tax collectors--especially in Europe, where the latter operate with a creativity that makes our IRS seem almost neighborly. Dealers, of their professional nature, are more than reluctant to reveal their past or present customers, and can often be quite recalcitrant about such matters. The auction houses, which promise their clients anonymity, are almost always helpful in approaching those clients (that is the collectors and dealers) about cooperating, but not all do so for the above reasons. The artist's own records, if any, often reflect this problem in that they do not know the identity of the buyers of their works because their dealers and the auction houses will not tell them.

5. CONDITION REPORTS

This is usually a problem with old rather than recent masters, but nonetheless a very real and difficult one, since few art historians have the technical knowledge to make such judgments, and obtaining experts here adds another dimension of expense to the process. With old works, when does in-painting make a work unauthentic? With recent work, when does relining or fading make, say, a Rothko, unauthentic? And to what extent is actually seeing each work in a CR possible, and/or necessary when the documentation is impeccable?

6. INCLUDING INTERPRETATIVE ESSAYS IN A WORK OF OBJECTIVE SCHOLARSHIP

Ought the text in a CR be as objective in describing the artist's career and methods as the entries for the work, or should the editor supply an on-going interpretive commentary? Is there an essential difference between a CR and a monograph? Ought not art historians, if only for purposes of career advancement, answer yes to both questions, realize that their subjective musings are risking being seen (especially these days) as conspicuously dated by the next generation of scholars, and opt for two books rather than one?

Let me conclude with two very recent challenges to the CR.

7. THE CHALLENGE OF NEW METHODOLOGIES TO OBJECTIVE SCHOLARSHIP

Connie Lowenthal, who chaired the panel, made several efforts to prompt discussion about this matter, but elicited no real response from the audience. Scholars who think a painting is a "text" and thus a "pretext" for their definitively subjective, and thus tendentious, text about it, seldom have much respect for an objectivity that "privileges" the artist, "reifies" the art object, and begs questions of "historicity" and "truth"--while thwarting their megalomania to boot. For them, theory is all, and a fake is as interesting a text as an authentic work. Many such minds are presently initiating young art historians in these tendentiously subjective rites, and if successful, the methods of objective scholarship will meet the same fate as the print-on-paper book is going to meet over the next decade or so.

8. PUBLISHING A CR IN BOOK FORM, OR ELECTRONICALLY?

This is as crucial to objective scholarship as tendentious subjective scholarship is dangerous to it. The expenses involved in producing printed CRs, and the ease with which one can add a computerized data base, make using a CD-ROM format (or its successors) essential and inevitable. The development of high definition screens for TVs and PCs over the next decade will provide a technology for digitized continuous tone imaging that makes print-on-paper books seem as efficient as quill pens. The challenge here is more psychological and cultural than technical; scholars must simply get over the notion that it is their biological fate to conceive books, and then dandle the things in their arms like

babes. The future of objective scholarship is cyberspace, and scholars who fail to realize that now will wind up with the increasingly insolvent dinosaurs who run publishing houses that scorn the electronic media. Only novels, autobiography and poetry ought to be brought forth on paper--the latter two preferably in letterpress.

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Editor's Note by Melvin P. Lader

One of the tasks that falls to the vice-president of CRSA is editing the semi-annual newsletter for the organization. As a newly installed officer, I have opted to change slightly the dates

when the newsletter is published to October and April. My intention is to bracket chronologically the annual CAA meeting, with the fall edition announcing upcoming CRSA events at CAA and the spring edition presenting a summary of that meeting, and perhaps an announcement of future plans and activities. Moreover, although I realize that not all of our membership is in academia, a good many of us do work on an academic fall/spring schedule that mirrors the October/April publication dates.

As editor, I would like to invite suggestions as to what might be included in future newsletters. Of course, we will always need articles on issues that concern the authors of catalogues raisonné, and these are essential to keeping the newsletter of value to our members. But what other types of columns might prove interesting and helpful?

For example, I plan on introducing a column devoted to catalogue raisonné status reports, to which CR authors are invited to give us an update on their research currently. How long have you been at it? Is publication imminent? What unique problems have you faced and how have you resolved them? What are your experiences with publishers? Funders? Can you give advice to others who might encounter similar problems and experiences? If your catalogue has already seen the light of day, what kind of feedback have you had? Were there things you might have done differently? Has the c.r. raised unforeseen issues? How are they being addressed? How are you dealing with post-publication discoveries?

This is just one thought, and I would like to hear from you about others. The newsletter will only be as good as the level of participation of the general membership. And, of course, your participation in submitting articles is critical. Please contact me with your suggestions on this or about any proposed future articles: lader@gwu.edu

The next issue will also include a listing of recently published CRs, which has been very helpful in the past. I will be doing my best to keep abreast of these new volumes, but please notify me if you know of any as well.