

CRSA FORUM

The Newsletter of the Catalogue Raisonné Scholars Association

an Affiliated Society of the College Art Association

Winter 2003

No. 10

FROM THE PRESIDENT

by Nancy Mowll Mathews

How do you know when you are finished?

In the abstract for his upcoming CAA paper, "Counting the Rayographs of Man Ray", Steven Manford eloquently expresses the dilemma facing the catalogue raisonné scholar: "How do you know when you have all of them? How do you know when you are finished?" Answering this question is like looking into a crystal ball or prophesying the end of the world—it calls out the psychic in all of us. Of course, it is an educated prediction because we all learn the habits, foibles, and ticks of the artist we're working on and, like Steven looking for Man Ray's keys, we recognize the signs of a completed artistic cycle and begin to run out of places to look for new works. Completion begins to settle over the project like a mantle.

But once the catalogue raisonné is in print, as is ours on Maurice and Charles Prendergast (published 1990), that sense of completeness is suddenly withdrawn. Although the work is no longer all consuming, it stays with you in its naggingly unfinished state. Approximately fifty works are sent to the Prendergast Archive and Study Center here at the Williams College Museum of Art

each year in hopes of authentication. Of these, perhaps one will make its way into our records as an accepted work by one of the two brothers. Changes in ownership, and additions to bibliography and exhibition history and ongoing research challenge claims of an "up-to-date" database. Our responsibility to provide the art world with reliable information will continue until someone else rises up to take our place. How do you know when you are finished? For the catalogue raisonné scholar, it remains a question even after it has been answered.

PANEL DISCUSSION DURING CAA ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Organized by the CRSA. Chaired by Steven Manford, *Photo Historian*

To be held on February 20th, 2003, Thursday afternoon, 12:30 – 2:00 p.m., at the New York Hilton, New York, 1335 Avenue of the Americas

Why it is Important to Reinvent the Wheel: Photographic Historians Authoring Catalogues Raisonnés

A substantial amount of original research is being published by photo

historians, yet only now does such scholarship include the preparation of catalogues raisonnés. While there exist numerous catalogues of collections and discrete suites of photographs, only in the new millennium do we see historians completing catalogues on the life work of photographers. The year 2002-2003 sees the publication of three important catalogues: *Alfred Stieglitz: The Key Set* by Sarah Greenough (National Gallery of Art, June 2002), *The Photographs of Linnaeus Tripe: A Catalogue Raisonné* by Janet E. Dewan (Art Gallery of Ontario, December 2002), and *Julia Margaret Cameron: The Complete Photographs* by Julian Cox and Colin Ford (The J. Paul Getty Museum, January 2003). Several catalogues are in process by both senior scholars and young photo historians.

NOTE: James Trezza has graciously offered to host a reception for CRSA members attending the CAA conference on Thursday, Feb. 20, 5-7 pm, at his gallery: James Francis Trezza Fine Art, 39 East 78th Street, 6th floor, New York City—just off Madison Avenue.
Please RSVP: 212 327-2218

The panel's goal is to address the particular challenges and opportunities faced by the photo historian undertaking a catalogue raisonné. As a means of representing the current state of scholarship four photo

historians will introduce an aspect of their catalogue raisonné project. Speakers will discuss their research on the photography of William Henry Fox Talbot, Julia Margaret Cameron, Alfred Stieglitz, and Man Ray. What problems are specific to the preparation of a catalogue focused on photographs? What constitutes a finished work of a photographer? How does one deal with the enormous output of many photographers? What models can one employ given that the medium by nature produces multiples? How does the photo historian best use such materials as: the photographer's own negatives, contact sheets, work prints, and tear sheets? How can these resources be exploited to create a comprehensive catalogue? And lastly, once the work is done how might the research of the catalogue raisonné scholar be used by photo historians as a means of advancing studies in the history of photography?

Miscellanea Photogenica: Towards a catalogue raisonné of Talbot & his circle

Larry J. Schaaf, University of Glasgow

William Henry Fox Talbot (1800-1877), most widely known as the inventor of photography, was also the first artist to be trained by it. He conceived the idea in 1833, achieved his first successes by 1834, and introduced his art publicly in 1839. While both his technique and his artistic achievements grew rapidly after the public debut, by 1844 Talbot was actively trying to persuade others to take over the art. His last photographs were made little more than a decade after he first realized his dream.

Within this period, Talbot produced around 4000 distinct negative images and perhaps 15,000 hand-made prints. A catalogue raisonné of this

work is vital to understanding both the process of invention and the aesthetic progression of the first photographic artist. Several unique problems challenge this effort. Since there were no commercial products available, every single one of Talbot's negatives and prints was made on hand-sensitized paper. Frequently in his photograms and especially in his earlier period, he felt that the negative was fully sufficient as a final visual expression. His technical experiments are intertwined with his more conventional photographs and often have a beauty of their own. Some of his most critical work has faded beyond our ability to detect the image. Finally, Talbot worked closely with members of his household and with a few artist friends—it is often impossible to determine the exact authorship beyond being a product of this circle.

Dr. Schaaf has been compiling a catalogue raisonné of this circle for more than twenty years. Advances in computer technology have encouraged more advanced analysis of this body of material. For example, each of Talbot's negatives was made on paper cut to size by hand. In contrast to later factory-made standardized film, the unique shape of each of these negatives can be matched to the outline of them on the prints. Even when early negatives are totally faded, Talbot's inscriptions on them often include dating and subject identification. Since Talbot's photographs are scattered world-wide, computer databases greatly facilitate this effort. Much of the groundwork has been laid for this catalogue and it now requires an institutional home and regular funding to properly bring it to publication.

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CRSA Forum

The Newsletter of the Catalogue
Raisonne Scholars Association

Nancy Mowll Mathews, President
Scott R. Ferris, Editor, CRSA Forum.

Submit Manuscripts

Please send manuscripts and letters
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NY 13341 or kentiana@dreamscape.
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Membership

To become a member, and maintain
membership, please fill out the
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issue and return it to: Nancy Mowll
Mathews, Williams College Museum
of Art, 15 Lawrence Hall Drive,
Suite 2, Williamstown, MA 01267
Please submit this annually.

Peaks and Valleys: Assembling the Complete Photographs of Julia Margaret Cameron

Julian Cox, The J. Paul Getty Museum

In January 2003 the Getty Trust will publish *Julia Margaret Cameron: The Complete Photographs*, a single volume catalogue of the complete photographs of the pioneering nineteenth-century British photographer, Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-79). The principal authors are Julian Cox and Colin Ford (founding head of the National Museum of Photography, Film & Television, England), with contributions by Joanne Lukitsh (Associate Professor of Art History, Massachusetts College of Art) and Philippa Wright (Assistant Curator of Photographs, the National Museum of Photography, Film Television, England).

Julia Margaret Cameron's accomplishment has generated a body of literature and commentary awarded few other photographers of the nineteenth century and has inspired successive generations of writers and historians. As one of the most written-about artists in the history of photography, Cameron has also been assiduously collected, by individuals and public institutions as well as by foundations and corporations. Her photographs reside in collections all over the world. In a career that spanned fourteen years Cameron generated a corpus of more than 1200 photographs, a prodigious output for a photographer working in the age of wet-collodion. Prior to the publication of this catalogue raisonné less than forty percent of Cameron's oeuvre had been published or exhibited. With the complete photographs available in one place for the first time, this volume provides abundant opportunities for fresh understandings of the work.

The catalogue raisonné is, of course, one of the essential tools of art-

historical scholarship. But in the field of photographic history, what makes such a catalogue complete? This question and related issues will be the subject of this presentation. The talk will outline the research process required to realize the catalogue raisonné of a major body of photographs. While Cameron's own preferences for the classification of her work provided a useful point of departure for the taxonomy of the catalogue, it was also necessary to formulate methodologies uniquely suited to the requirements that her work presents. These methods will be described, as will the intellectual process that determined the sequencing and presentation of the photographs and their accompanying cataloguing information.

Alfred Stieglitz: The Key Set

Sarah Greenough, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

In June 2002 the National Gallery of Art and Abrams published *Alfred Stieglitz: The Key Set*, a two-volume scholarly study of the museum's collection of photographs by this seminal American artist. Using the 1,642 photographs in the Gallery's key set, the largest and most comprehensive collection of Stieglitz's work in existence, this publication establishes for the first time an accurate chronology of the development of his art. *Alfred Stieglitz: The Key Set* was the culmination of a multi-year project on Stieglitz, which began with the 1999 release of a new edition of the Gallery's 1983 book, *Alfred Stieglitz: Photographs and Writings*, and included a series of online tours of the Stieglitz collection and an exhibition of 102 photographs, *Alfred Stieglitz: Known and Unknown*. The exhibition was on view at the National Gallery from 2 June to 2 September 2002 and at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, from 6 October 2002 to 5 January 2003.

Alfred Stieglitz: The Key Set includes an introductory essay by Sarah Greenough, an examination of "Stieglitz's Portfolios and Other Published Photographs," by Julia Thompson, and an "Exhibition History," by Janet Blyberg. The entries on each of the photographs in the collection are arranged chronologically and include such information as title; negative date; print identification and date; inscriptions; exhibition and reproduction histories; location in other public and private collections; and contemporaneous accounts by Stieglitz. In addition, each work is reproduced to scale and every effort has been made to suggest the varying tonalities of the original photographs.

This talk will focus on scope, methodology, and cataloguing processes used in this publication. It will discuss the challenges encountered in compiling this information, as well as the kinds of insights that can be gleaned from the information presented in the entries.

Counting the Rayographs of Man Ray
Steven Manford, Independent Scholar, Toronto, Canada

During his career in New York, Paris, and Los Angeles, Man Ray (1890-1976) worked in a range of media, but he remains best known for his photographs. Although his portraits, fashion photographs, and nudes have been much copied, it is his Rayographs which have had the greatest impact on modern art and the history of photography. It was in the spring of 1922 that Man Ray began producing his cameraless photographs. In making a Rayograph no negative was produced. His photographic process employed neither lens nor camera. Instead he arranged objects on photographic paper and allowed light to trace the contours. The result was a unique work.

There can only be one of each Rayograph. This sets them apart from the bulk of photography. It also makes compiling a catalogue raisonné a particularly difficult challenge. The catalogue raisonné scholar collecting camera made images has the advantage. There are additional resources to draw upon, including a photographer's negatives, contact sheets, and work prints. Moreover, the finished photographs may exist in various quantities, qualities, and formats. There are fewer leads in locating Rayographs. To complicate research, Rayographs were easy to produce, were rarely documented, and were almost never titled. Given the obstacles, how does one estimate how many Rayographs exist? This is a basic challenge all catalogue raisonné scholars face: How do you know when you have all of them? How do you know when you are finished? It's the difference between a coffee table book and a catalogue raisonné.

This talk will explore one method for determining the number of unique Rayographs made by Man Ray. The process chiefly involves studying and cataloguing the objects used in creating each Rayograph. These objects often are reproduced as recognizable objects or shapes, such as a gyroscope, a key, or a pipe. In making comparisons among works we will bring together groups of Rayographs created on the same date. In the process one can begin to speculate on unaccounted for Rayographs.

Literature and the Photograph Conference

11 to 13 March 2004, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

Keynote speakers: Mieke Bal, Eduardo Cadava, David Farrell Krell, Fred Wah

Proposals in the form of a title and brief abstract (250 words) are invited for papers which address the photograph in literature, theory, or culture, in relation to: translation, poetics, place, space, gender, genre, fragment, memory, aurality, aesthetics, archive, colonial experience, race, body, document, portrait, narrative, modernity, architecture, genealogy.

Proposals should include a brief c.v. The deadline for abstracts/proposals is 7 March 2003.

Please direct inquiries and proposals to Lisa Muirhead at: mosaicjournal_conference@umanitoba.ca or send to: Mosaic, 208 Tier Bldg, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB, R3T 2N2

E-mail inquiries: mosaicjournal_conference@umanitoba.ca
Website: <http://www.umanitoba.ca/publications/mosaic/>

Submission deadline: 7 March 2003

Organized by: Mosaic, a journal for the interdisciplinary study of literature. This announcement was distributed via <http://www.ConferenceAlerts.com>.

FACTUALITIES AND FACTITIOUSNESS AT THE CAA

by Francis V. O'Connor

On February 24, 2000, the Catalogue Raisonné Scholars Association (CRSA) sponsored a session at the annual meeting of the College Art Association in New York City on the topic: Factuities: A Debate on the Value of Factual Research for the New Millennium. The participants were: Michael Ann Holly, Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Stephen Eisenman, Northwestern University,

Anne Adrien-Pannier, The Museum of Modern Art, Brussels, Gary Tinterow, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and myself. The session was co-chaired by Nancy Mowell Mathews, Williams College Museum of Art, and Melvin Lader, George Washington University.

This event raised a number of questions that prompted the following commentary, that shall mention and/or reply to some of the key ideas raised by the participants.

Metaphysics of the Catalogue Raisonné: Facts, Factids and Factoids

My first reaction to the topic was that for an organization such as CRSA, dedicated to the objective scholarship of the catalogue raisonné, to be debating the value of factual research seemed too great a concession to the current hegemony of subjective theoreticians. Without research into the factualities of an artist's oeuvre, there can be no objective scholarship—just factitious criticism and uninformed interpretation. This view, as will be seen, was not shared by all members of the panel.

The word "fact" comes from the Latin *facere*, "to make," and means something certain or existent, implying that metaphysical state commonly known as "being"—here understood as "truth." This is not, alas, readily achieved.

Let me start with the good news.

When we are discussing an object such as a work of art, we essentially know a priori, to borrow from Kant's useful notion, only three things about it that are absolutely true:

1. the fact that it exists as a thing in space,
2. the fact that it was made at some moment in past time, and
3. the fact that it was caused by

whoever made it—hopefully the artist we are cataloguing.

We are safe in presuming a priori the factual nature of space, time and cause in respect to an art object. Beyond that, the facts that constitute the truth about any object are almost always far from absolutely certain—which is the bad news. Consider these parallel ambiguities: Art objects can change their shape over time—be cut down, re-stretched or reduced in a casting process, or as a result of conservation. Their date is often ambiguous, even when clearly signed or dated, since backdating often occurs. Their authorship can also be open to question until proven with reason—a tricky business.

Further, the history of an object accumulates myths and interpretations that may have nothing to do with it—or else are distortions of what was once known, or what was imagined about them.

This suggests that when considering factualities, there are three to be dealt with:

1. facts that can reasonably be construed a priori,
2. factids, that form a constellation of information around any given object that may or may not be true,
3. factoids, that, of their nature, only resemble truth.

If this seems obscure, consider us humans, who truly exist a priori as indisputable biological facts. But there were hominids, who are the zoological ancestors of humans, that were not quite mentally or physically human, and humanoids, who resemble humans, but are really designed by myth (think of centaurs or angels)—or by Bosch or Walt Disney (think of Mickey Mouse).

For the author of a catalogue raison-

né, factids are the most numerous and troublesome, since when describing works of art—you know those nettlesome notions: artist, title, date, medium, dimensions, collection, provenance, exhibitions, and bibliographic references—each of these elements can raise almost insurmountable problems: Is the title the artist's, or merely descriptive or traditional? Is the inscribed date certain, artists being careless after the fact? Absent a date, is our connoisseurship conclusive? Do we always know exactly how the thing was manufactured? Whose eye is perfect to the sixteenth of an inch? Are owners or dealers owning up to their treasure's origin? Are the citations always relevant—or even necessary?

Was it really in the show—or shelved by curatorial whim or with good reason? And what do you do about works listed passim as “untitled”?

You get the idea. . . .

A catalogue raisonné is usually understood to be an objective compilation of facts about the oeuvre, along with reproductions of each object. This really means they are really more or less reliable compilations of verbal and visual factids (reproductions being what they always are) compiled with moral—if not metaphysical—certainty.

Recently there has been a tendency to write “critical” catalogues, with interpretive essays. I feel the only texts necessary ought to be devoted to contextualizing the creation of the oeuvre within the chronology of the artist's career—not to imposing a personal interpretation upon the artist. A catalogue raisonné is a reference book, not a monograph containing opinions and theories. The author of the reference book can write the monograph later. Putting the two

together serves no particular purpose, especially these days, except to compound factids with factoids. So here I must disagree with Professor Yves-Alain Bois when he reviewed oeuvre catalogues of Twombly, Klee, Rothko and Mondrian in the October 1999 *Artforum*, favoring those that had a monographic dimension.

Indeed, during the discussion at the CAA, several voices objected to my views on this. David Anfam hotly defended his sometimes proscriptive Rothko essay, that Bois had described admiringly as avoiding “most of the booby traps associated with the artist: transcendentalist “spiritual” mishmash (he explains its function in Rothko literature but keeps his distance), the “biographism” (no, the late “black paintings” are not about depression), the referential mania (no, there is no landscape there). . . .” Indeed, Anfam explicitly stated that it was no longer correct to see landscape references in Rothko's art. (See my review on O'Connor's Page—Review No. 8—of his otherwise excellent catalogue for just how landscape can be seen in Rothko). [Ed. Website address at end of this article.]

Gail Levin claimed that the Jackson Pollock catalogue raisonné had no interpretive essay because the artist's widow, Lee Krasner, had told her that she had forbidden one—something that is not true. Back in the 1970s, when Eugene Thaw and I were editing Pollock's work, there were few recent such catalogues as models, and those in existence, mostly about European masters, provided ample biographical and technical information, but hardly anything resembling a modern “critical” essay. We followed these precedents, and the issue of such an essay never came up, whatever Lee Krasner may have claimed after the fact.

Indeed, imposing proscriptive, interpretive or ideological interpretations on the inevitably ambiguous factids of an artist's oeuvre seems ill-advised. There is no better way to manufacture "factoids."

Factoids are pseudo-allegorical constructions imposed on ambiguities that are presented as new facts but which only resemble facts. Factoids can take on a seductive intellectual allure, are always dated, are vulnerable to becoming pretexts for somebody else's new text, and are motivated by matters seldom germane to either the art object or to objective scholarship.

Factoidinal glosses have nothing to do with the informational nature of the catalogue raisonné, distort its readers assessment of the oeuvre as a whole, and, in the spirit of Occam's razor, are unnecessary in such a context. [*Essentia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem!*—Literal translation: An argument's essentials are not to be multiplied unless of necessity. Vulgate version: Cut the bullshit unless you need it, and if so, explain why.]

Let me turn to the metaphysical import of facts, factids and factoids.

First, a recent study of the history of truth adduces four ways in which past thinkers have approached this intractable subject. [Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Truth: A History and a Guide for the Perplexed*, New York: Thomas Dunne Books / St. Martins Press, 2000.] The first way to truth is through feeling, the second through sense perception, the third through logical reasoning, and the fourth by accepting authority. If we ponder these methods, it is plain that all pertain to crafting a catalogue raisonné. We perceive our artist as a totality through intuitive feelings

and senses, make decisions concerning shaping that whole on logical deductions from the best visual and textual evidence, and then let the artist, the work, and the tradition within which he or she created, be the authority for what we conclude. We let the facts and the factids prevail as best they might, while rejecting the temptations of factitious factoids.

I ought to add a fifth factor concerning truth to the process: namely reaching some decisions through a

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FEEDBACK FORUM

In our Feedback Forum column, in the summer 2002 (No. 9) issue of CRSA Forum, I made a comment on the use of expert opinion by auction houses. I suggested that auction houses and commercial art venues in general, adhere to a modicum of professional courtesy: to acknowledge the source of the expert opinion and consider paying for this service. In response I received this letter from our fellow CRSA member and colleague, David P. Silcox, of Toronto.

Dear Scott,

Your comment in the last newsletter on the use of expert opinion by auction houses has prompted me to comment further.

Like many of our colleagues, I was regularly called upon by auction houses [David's cr is on David B. Milne] to provide expert opinion and research information (dating, letter references, etc.), all of which I was happy to do. As a courtesy I got free catalogues and advance notice on the movement of pictures. I also got ready information on owners, something that is a little more formally done

today.

Now I run Sotheby's for all of Canada. The issue of expert opinion, and my new relation to it, has taken on a fresh cast.

First, auction houses need expert advice. Although Sotheby's has some of the world's finest experts, they don't have them all. And the company doesn't want adverse gossip from curators, artists' estates, or knowledgeable collectors. Controversy kills pictures for the market. Consultations are often requested, therefore, to avoid surprises for everyone—owners, curators, buyers, critics. Sotheby's doesn't knowingly sell dubious or wrongly attributed pictures, and I have found them to be assiduous in this regard, despite occasional pressures by collectors, dealers and sometimes curators.

Second, auction houses should provide, I believe, some compensation for services rendered. This can take several forms, depending on what the task is. *Quid pro quo* is easiest—a catalogue subscription or a lunch or a modest fee, for a quick opinion. Curators know that we sometimes steer donations to their institutions in exchange for their knowledge. For scholars, information on collectors or collections (provided with permission, of course) is often our way of helping them when they help us.

In the case of artists' estates or catalogue raisonnés, I believe that auction houses can provide raw and useful information and that the exchange there is mutually advantageous. I located quite a number of paintings through Sotheby's and others. Sotheby's regularly submits works to artists' estates in order to get certificates of authentication; a charge is usually levied for this, along with the shipping bill if necessary, and put [placed on?] the account

of the vendor.

Independent scholars or experts, whose opinion is needed to establish authenticity, rather than confirm it, should be paid a fee, in my opinion. This is something the vendor should bear the cost of, if the opinion is needed to authenticate and to sell the work. Credit should be given in these instances, and of course support of the catalogue raisonné is in everyone's interest.

Maybe what we should do as an association, is try to establish a reasonable schedule of minimum fees, which could be charged for providing a) an opinion; b) a written assessment or opinion; and c) a formal letter of authentication. Whether mitigating circumstances could amend this schedule would be up to each individual. At least we would all have something to show to those who inquire. In the matter of providing appraisals, by the way, I have found that citing the costs and procedures right up front is usually the best way of making known what is expected on each side of an exchange.

David P. Silcox, 19 August 2002

Factualities and Factitiousness

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consensus of expertise, since relying on unilateral decisions is to be avoided, especially in the area of authenticity. (For more on this, see Commentary No. 3, "About Consensus Authentication.")

Given that these more or less intuitive, historical and practical approaches are part of our scholarly process, there are also two other matters to be considered.

The first is Richard Rorty's "anti-essentialist" notion that all quests for

the "truth" are pragmatic problem solving—and the seemingly pragmatic need for consensus scholarship when judging authenticity.

There are substantive differences here.

When dealing with the ambiguities of factoids indigenous to scholarly documentation, we resolve them whenever possible on the level of their overall plausibility, not their usefulness; if we did the latter, we would be violating the scholarly process. On the other hand, there is a distinction to be made between the documentation of an art object with morally plausible factoids, and the shaping of the many such objects in an artist's oeuvre into a coherent whole by means of decisions made by the connoisseur editing the compilation. Here, experience of the artist's overall oeuvre in respect to its iconic, stylistic and formal characteristics takes precedence over empiricism. When faced with undated works, putting them in some sort of sequence is an exercise in both subjective and pragmatic interpretation. It is always understood to be open to revision on the basis of new factualities.

As for making decisions by consensus, this is far more a matter of prudence than pragmatism; it protects the integrity of a process that is always open to the fallibility of unilateral decisions. It is pragmatic—that is overtly useful—only when the ultimate decision needs to be defended.

Second, I think one of the reasons art history as a humanistic discipline has been intellectually blindsided by current ideological interpretations, is that it is uniquely engaged with non-verbal objects—with things rather than words. This has forced art historians to doubt the objectivity of their craft despite the inherent am-

biguities of objects discerned immediately in space, rather than discursively as far more temporally perceived "texts," as they are in history, literature and philosophy.

Postmodernist discourse denies the validity of that connoisseurship central to our scholarly process. Ambivalence about the object itself has left many verbally-oriented art historians open to fashionable factoids that relieve the scholar of having to deal with the non-verbal object in itself. By turning art into texts to be "read," factualities, and the sensibility of the connoisseur, are relegated to the sidelines, and visual objects become pretexts for factoidinal literary interpretations.

Here the current fashion for concocting "narratives" that are essentially based on subject matter, and not on intrinsic artistic or aesthetic criteria, further relieves the postmodernist "reader" of art of engaging it per se, but only as a sort of documentation of an idea that may be utterly without pertinence to what happened in the past. One could, for instance, take a series of paintings depicting the washing of clothes from the last two centuries, and using this "narrative," expatiate on the sociological ramifications of household drudgery or the condition of the servant class. One could also use such a narrative to document the development of clothing, laundry techniques, and the history of soap and wash boards. Art can have many uses. But the narrative method can be oblivious to the subtleties of the past.

Let me digress a bit to consider the delightful clash of factoidinal discourses to be found in James F. Cooper's *Knights of the Brush: The Hudson River School and the Moral Landscape* [New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1999]. Mr. Cooper, who is the

director of the cultural studies program of the Newington-Cropsey Foundation, and editor of *American Arts Quarterly*, argues persuasively that the Hudson River painters, pious Christians all, saw themselves presenting through dramatic landscapes a morally suasive vision of God's grandeur. He also believes, far less persuasively, that their ostensible code of "truth, beauty, goodness and chivalry," if translated to our own times, would have a salutary impact on the horrors of modern art and postmodern theory. The latter he excoriates for seeing his favorite artists as being, in effect, agents of early 19th-century capitalism's lustful gaze out upon all that virgin real estate.

Here we have two utterly factoidinal interpretations: the first a nonsensical idealization of a seeming morality, and an equally nonsensical projection of politically correct paranoia upon the very same situation. The first would have us regress to a Golden Age of ideal Christian virtues; the second addresses ostensible greed for gold; neither can see the past as an evolution of prologues; both, however, in their own way see their myths of the past as somehow prophylactic for us.

Metaphysically, of course, neither can see nature itself as teleological in the sense of having a goal, and ourselves, as part of nature, sharing in its goal. Yet each of us who reconstructs the oeuvre of an artist, can come to see, in micro, that dialectical unity that is the great artist's achievement, that tactic of survival that is the creative process, and which parallels our cumulative biological destiny as human facts. This is at the heart of the spirituality artists often grope to express, and that we ought to take seriously for what it reveals of a

secular fate—and about art.

It was of interest that Gary Tinterow noted that he found interns at the Metropolitan—that his graduate students brought in on stipends to learn about museum work during the summer months—are increasingly ignorant of how to see a work of art, and how to deduce information from it—as from the labels on the back or the age or characteristics of its frame or stretcher. I noted that the postmodernist dispensation had wasted two generations of students, training them as theoreticians before they had the visual or factual knowledge with which to operate as connoisseurs and historians. Holly replied to the contrary, saying in effect that art history had never before been more "exciting." What kind of an educational criterion is that? Sure it's exciting to be exempted from the drudgery of scholarship for a career in factitious speculation unsupported by factualities. The more the pity!

...regress to a Golden Age of ideal Christian virtues

The same current attitudes that disdain the true qualities and quiddities the connoisseur and historian seeks, reduce art objects to grist for ideological milling. Such thinking has no use for objective truth, and the difficult methods of attaining it. Facts become myths, factids become irrelevancies; leaving factoids the only locus for an ever-shifting, temporary, and all too seductive intellectual inebriation—that erases any remembrance of a historical past or semblance of a meaningful future.

All this leads to yet another, perhaps more practical, metaphysical insight, with which I shall conclude.

Some years ago Robert Hughes pointed out that the art world, which we, more than most art historians, serve directly, was the last bastion of "laissez-faire capitalism." I think it is fair to say that the catalogue raisonné, however it may be used, is the last bastion of absolute truth. Despite the paucity of given facts, the contingencies of factids, and the intrusions and distractions of fatuous factoids, we still want to know the art object absolutely:

- what was it like when created?
- when was it made and where has it been? — and
- who made it?

Several members of the panel took issue with the idea of "absolute truth," noting the many failings, lacunae, and malfeasances to be found in some catalogues. Yet such works exist (unless conceived from the start to deceive) to establish the truth—and a bastion is not a temple, but a protection. As long as factids prevail, this will always be the case—yet the ideal of the idea of absolute truth is worth trusting as a goal—and defending.

Stephen Eisenman's Marxist argument against the catalogue raisonné saw it as tainted by money and power, often sponsored by dealers, auction houses, museums, collectors with an interest in the artist, or the artists themselves (he mentioned specifically the many print catalogues that are sometimes published even while an artist is alive). He also noted that the prestige of such a massive scholarly undertaking could be bestowed upon artists of minor achievement, and that such works promote the apparently invidious idea of human genius. All this expressed an ethical stance without logic or consequence, and is typical of this failed political philosophy however spun out upon practical

pursuits. Long ago in the last century, when Marxism was alive and well, Freud declared it "psychologically untenable" for the reason that it hoped to change human nature wholesale in the bosom of a future socialist utopia. As history has demonstrated, human nature can only be subdued by wholesale violence (as in "utopias" such as the old Soviet Union, China, Cambodia, etc.). The totalitarian state would seem to have failed in this respect, although it is my perception that it lives on in certain academic hothouses where we might hope, in time, that it will wither on its own rootless vine.

Indeed, at a April 1999 conference in Washington, D.C., of the American Society of Historians of Art of Eastern Europe and Russia, Dr. Alexandra Shatskikh, a Senior Fellow of the State Institute of Art Studies in Moscow—and an expert on Kazimir Malevitch—who is currently editing his papers and preparing a catalogue raisonné of his work (who belongs to CRSA and was present at the CAA meeting here discussed)—voiced a similar thought. She pointed out that under the old Soviet system, top Party officials determined the Marxist-Leninist "line" on art matters and forced scholars to follow their ideologically-tainted theories, or else. In such a system, a painting by Malevitch titled *Red Square* would be given the obvious ideological cast as referring to the famous rallying site in front of the Kremlin, even if the artist would have understood it in terms of his own mystical theories of art's purpose. Now that Russia is free of such Soviet agitprop, those same scholars now have good reason to look askance at western art historians who seem similarly to be enforcing a theory of art and to making scholars conform to its dictates or else. (That is, lose students, tenure, fellowships and book contracts.) As

she put it, "It would be only a slight exaggeration to say that most of Russian historians of art are allergic to theories and methodologies coming from outside, from other disciplines or spheres." [Her lecture has been published in Russian and English in *Pinocotheca*, No. 8-9. Fall 1999.] Serious American scholars in all fields ought to start vaccinating themselves against the virus of ideological factitiousness here prevailing.

It is certainly true that catalogues raisonné have an impact on the art market—I learned long ago that every time you opened your mouth about Jackson Pollock, there was the possibility of tweaking the international balance of payments—and that some sort of self-interest is behind many that are produced. Certainly estates profit from them, and sellers and buyers of art use them to certify authenticity, and many artists are concerned that the editions of their prints, that are produced of course in multiple copies, are catalogued as a defense against clever reproductions and outright forgeries. It is certainly true that certain skullduggeries can be perpetrated in the editing of a catalogue raisonné, and that greed and dishonesty are not unknown in the art world. What else is new? Human nature is what it is, and are we not to catalogue art to insure the integrity of an oeuvre just because a few individuals are out there ready to exploit what one does?

As for the idea that unworthy artists get catalogued, this raises two points. First, following the current *laissez faire* discourse concerning quality in art, what, in theory, does that matter? Second, in practice, the cataloguing of less-than-great artists can teach us much about the nature and permutations of the creative process. Seeing a complete oeuvre is to

see a symbolic autobiography. To understand the symbols by comparison with other oeuvres is to learn much about why art happens and how it serves individual survival. Of course, you need scholars who care about such matters, and who find fashionable theories of little use in understanding the etiology, psychology and symbology of image making.

If there is real concern about all these matters, and not just theoretical rhetoric being expended for "excitement's" sake, then the institutions of the art world must join together to protect the scholarly process by setting up an umbrella organization that will take in cataloguing projects, establish the highest standards for such work, indemnify the scholars involved, and guarantee to the extent possible the integrity of the results.

It therefore does not help for scholars to start questioning objective scholarship because of the ways it may be exploited. Rather scholars ought to be united in defense of whatever means are available for establishing and securing the truth about works of art. To abandon facts for factoids is irresponsible folly. Given that few facts are a priori, that factoids are usually deliquescent by nature, and factoids are notoriously delinquent by nurture, we must proceed cautiously—but with concerted resolve. But there can be no concession concerning the legitimacy of factuality, however difficult it is to attain, despite the rampant conceits of factoids, however factitiously alluring.

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This essay was first published as Commentary No. 8 (March 15, 2000) on O'Connor's Page: <http://members.aol.com/FVOC>.

Recent Publications

The AAM Guide to Provenance Research

by Nancy H. Yeide, Konstantin Akinsha, Amy L. Walsh
American Association of Museums.

According to the AAM Fall/Winter 2002 Bookstore Catalogue "this is a comprehensive and authoritative resource for tracing the ownership history of works of art. Focused on cultural property looted by the Nazis and others during WWII, it is divided into three parts: Basic Provenance Research and Principles, Holocaust-Era Provenance Research, and Appendices, which include bibliographies of collections, dealer archives, and 'red flag names' compiled by the Office of Strategic Services. Includes on index and reproductions of artworks and relevant documents."

Paper. 304pp. 2001. ISBN 0-931201-73-X. \$40 (AAM Member), \$50 (Non-member). Order no. 1201 from the AAM, by mail: AAM Department 4002, Washington, DC 20042-4002; Tel: 202 289-9127; Internet: <http://www.aam-us.org>.

[Ed. A review for the next issue would be welcomed.]

Pulled from the Shelf

There are a number of resources available for obtaining catalogue raisonnés, oeuvres, and monographs. One that recently came across my desk is the Winter, 2003 list/book order form from **Alan Wofsy Fine Arts - Wittenborn Art Books**. You can view the list online at www.art-books.com or write Alan Wofsy Fine Arts, P. O. Box 2210, San Francisco, CA 94126 or telephone 415 292-6594. Another source is **Edward R. Hamilton Bookseller**, Falls Village, CT 06031-5000. And, also offering a new list of

books is **The Scholar's Bookshelf**, 110 Melrich Road, Cranbury, NJ 08512; also reachable by telephone 609 395-6933 or online www.scholarsbookshelf.com/fine_arts/.

Of note, **Sarah Greenough's**/The National Gallery of Art's book, *Alfred Stieglitz: The Key Set*, received mention in the New York Times Book Review (Dec. 8, 2002) and the Wall Street Journal (Dec. 9, 2002). As mentioned above Sarah will be participating in the photographic catalogue raisonnés panel discussion at the upcoming CAA meeting in February.

Editor's Notes

by Scott R. Ferris

I knew I should have turned this issue of *CRSA Forum* over to the wardrobe manager when I sucked in that first paragraph: trimming here only to find out that I should have lengthened there (no need to search for the paragraph girdles, they bounce out at you). Ah, the problems associated with wishful thinking—if I wait another day will I get that extra bit of information for the newsletter? (last minute submissions create havoc).

The reason why I did not come out with another issue of the Forum between the Summer 2002 edition and now is that no material was submitted. Francis O'Connor came to the rescue—again—with an essay; my sincerest thanks to him. Steven Manford provided a lead-off for his upcoming CAA meeting panel discussion. And we have begun some dialogue on our relationship to the commercial market with a reply to our "Feedback Forum" from David Silcox.

Barbara Buhler Lynes provided me with material she found on artnet.com—"The Picabia Affair"—that will appear in our next *CRSA Forum*

(I've received more material from both parties in this exchange—now referred to as a public catalogue raisonné—than I will possibly be able to use). I will edit this extensive material as my base for the next issue. Again my intention is to break from our bi-annual publishing cycle; this time I hope to have something out during March or April.

Please send any bit of news—recent publications, a call for papers, events, legal news, an essay, etc.—to me by mid February, or bring your material to the annual meeting! I plan to attend the day of the panel discussion (20th).

Nancy Mathews wants me to remind you that you need to submit the membership form—found at the end of this newsletter—on an annual basis, whether or not your contact information has changed. Please mail it to her each January.

Thank you. Scott

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