

Visualising Learning in France, c.1500-1830

24 and 25 May 2017

New Seminar Room, School of History, South Street, St Andrews

A two-day symposium generously supported by the British Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, the Society for French Studies, The Centre for French History and Culture, School of Art History, and School of History, University of St Andrews

Abstracts

'Siegmond Jacob Apin on Visual Learning in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe'

Susanna Berger, University of Southern California / Villa I Tatti

At the cusp of the Enlightenment and toward the end of the early modern period, Siegmund Jacob Apin (1693–1732) wrote a treatise on pedagogy entitled *Dissertatio de variis discendi methodis memoriae causa inventis earumque usu et abusu* (*Dissertation on Various Methods of Learning, Invented for the Sake of Memory, and on their Use and Abuse*) that appeared in a revised and augmented edition in 1731. This work offers a helpful point of orientation for the study of visual modes of learning in early modern Europe, since it provides a sort of synoptic view over diverse species of didactic and mnemonic image-usage. Apin is also a particularly valuable tour guide, as he allows us to see the waning of a world of visual representation. He lived in a transitional era, in which one form of learning and organizing knowledge was dying out and a new one was coming into existence. The first part of his dissertation refers to key printed pedagogical visual representations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including the works of Jan Amos Comenius (1592–1670), Johannes Buno (1617–1697), Andreas Vesalius (1514–1564), and Leonard Fuchs (1501–1566). Among the philosophical prints discussed by Apin are the Parisian thesis prints of Martin Meurisse, Jean Chéron, and Léonard Gaultier. In the second part of the dissertation, Apin presents interesting criticisms of these mnemonic images. This dissertation allows us to appreciate both the early modern enthusiasm for epistemological visual representations and some of the reasons for their demise in the 1700s.

'Visualizing Drawing: Cochin, the Encyclopédie and the livres à dessiner Tradition'

David Pullins, Massachusetts Institute of Technology / The Frick Collection

Charles-Nicolas Cochin's vignette illustrating Charles-Henri Watelet's entry "Dessein" for the *Encyclopédie* (1763) remains the most comprehensive, regularly cited and surprisingly under-analyzed visual representation of art education in eighteenth-century France. Its importance derives not only from its immediate context in volumes that have come to define the early modern relationship between men and materials but also and perhaps more importantly from the period's nearly unanimous acceptance of a single method of drawing instruction as the foundation for the creation of objects in materials ranging in prestige from marble and oil on canvas to marquetry, porcelain, metalwork and textiles. This paper addresses this key image in the history of visualizing learning in France by contextualizing it within a tradition of depicting academic instruction balanced by the more mechanical tradition of *livres*

à dessiner in which Cochin's pivotal role during the 1740s and 1750s has been largely ignored. The latter is especially useful for better understanding the full spectrum of plates illustrating drawing in the *Encyclopédie* as they informed the remainder of the volumes documenting the *arts et métiers* of France and as they played the dual roles of illustrations and, themselves, tools for students to copy in the earliest stages of drawing instruction.

'Objects of Learning: Houdon's *Écorché* and Oppenord's Ripa'

Katie Scott, The Courtauld Institute of Art and Hannah Williams, Queen Mary University of London

This paper will examine two 'things' that once belonged to artists in eighteenth-century France – Jean-Antoine Houdon's *écorché*, an anatomical model of a skinless human body, and Gilles-Marie Oppenord's copy of Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* – each of which played an important role in artistic training. Exploring each of these 'objects of learning' in turn, one a practical model, the other a classic text, we will investigate the different spaces, processes, experiences, theoretical ideas, and practical engagements to which they lead in the broader context of artistic education in eighteenth-century France. Houdon's *écorché* takes us into the institutional spaces of the French Academy, in both its Paris and Rome branches, and into the methods and practicalities underlying academic education for artists at the beginning of their training. Oppenord's copy of Ripa belongs by contrast to the private world of the studio or *cabinet* and to 'life-long' learning, since Oppenord was very likely in his 40s at the time of his engagement with the text. Covered in marginal drawings that respond in a variety of ways to the verbal and visual definitions of abstract nouns proposed by Ripa, it allows us to examine how this early modern artist assimilated erudite literary culture, translating symbolic signs into his own visual terms. Things that spoke both of and to the mind and body, these examples encompass spheres of learning at the heart of art practice in the eighteenth century.

Drawn from a book that we are writing about *Artists' Things* in the eighteenth century, the objects in this paper allow us to investigate artistic education in the context of artists' personal possessions and the material culture of the art world more generally, extending this conference's concern with 'visualisations' to accommodate also 'materializations' of learning. What were the tools that artists used to learn their trade? What roles were played by objects, texts, and images in different pedagogic processes? How was scholarly or practical knowledge communicated materially? And how do Houdon's *écorché* and Oppenord's *Ripa* fit with other 'objects of learning' from this period?

'Histories of the Self in the Trioson Portrait Series'

Stephanie O'Rourke, University of St Andrews

Between 1797 and 1803, the French artist Anne-Louis Girodet-Trioson painted three portraits of a single child, the son of the artist's mentor Benoît-François Trioson. Unlike the large-scale history paintings for which Girodet is best known, the Trioson portrait series was a uniquely personal undertaking for the artist. The intimate portraits, which pay unusually close attention to the psychic particularities of their young sitter, were evidence of Girodet's significant emotional ties to the Trioson family. But the paintings were 'personal' in a slightly different sense too, in that they

documented the process by which the child was coming into being as a person. The serial manner in which the boy was painted placed particular emphasis on his identity as it developed over time, figuring selfhood as an ongoing process rather than a fixed and immutable fact. In doing so, they reflected contemporaneous philosophical ideas about cognition in which Girodet was well versed. But more than this, the Trioison portraits constellated multiple kinds of durational temporalities that were being articulated in related scientific discourses and pedagogical practices of the late eighteenth century. This paper considers how the Trioison portrait series might be seen to grapple with what it means to be, or rather, to become a person around the turn of that century, a messy and durational process in which various kinds of histories collect around the *moi* or the 'self.'

'Trees of Blood: Injection and Representation'
Charles Kang, Columbia University

While scholars have amply shown that scientific representation in early modern Europe was never devoid of aesthetic concerns, the visual culture of science in eighteenth-century France distinguished itself by making overt appeals to the aesthetic. My paper will explore the mechanism of these appeals by examining two period objects that visualize the human vascular system: a panel by Honoré Fragonard (cousin of the celebrated painter, Jean-Honoré) and a three-dimensional model by André Pierre Pinson. The former arranges a human heart and blood vessels injected with wax; the latter depicts the circulatory system of a child out of wax and brass wires. Created by two surgeon-anatomists active in and around Paris during the latter half of the eighteenth century, the objects occupied a pivotal moment when the primary purpose of injecting foreign materials into blood vessels began transitioning from demonstrating life to sustaining it. The use of wax in this context will help us understand how the two objects articulate problems of representing the human body—problems recognized not only by anatomists but also by painters and sculptors of the period.

'Cultivating Utility: Amateur Botany, Taste and Floriculture in Late-Eighteenth-Century France'
Sarah Easterby-Smith, University of St Andrews

This paper examines the connections between science education and art connoisseurship in late-eighteenth-century France. It investigates the discourses that circulated about amateur science during this period, focusing on how they were understood and interpreted by people interested in studying botany. As a number of contemporary botanical texts suggest, amateur science was underpinned by long-standing ideas about scholarly connoisseurship. Particular emphasis was placed on cultivating good taste and on training the vision; the refinement of both attributes was considered by many amateurs to be as significant as naming and classifying plants themselves. Good taste was considered necessary for the display and communication of botanical knowledge, but this paper will show that taste not only related to observation: it was also deemed to have a practical application, leading to the improved cultivation of specimens. In sum, the paper will examine how the formulation of tasteful amateur science influenced public participation in botany, and how it also encouraged an engagement with the practical art of floriculture.

'The Echo Chamber of the French Revolution'

Richard Taws, University College London

Becoming a revolutionary, as historian Timothy Tackett has noted, was a process rather than an overnight accomplishment. Revolutionary behaviour and the objects that accompanied it had to be learned over time. However, the means by which this knowledge was transmitted were far from stable during this period, and were subject to constant reevaluation. This paper focuses largely on models of education established at, and in conjunction with, the Conservatoire national des Arts et métiers, founded in 1794 at the instigation of the Abbé Grégoire, and considers transformations in the teaching and organisation of technical knowledge in post-revolutionary France. The demonstration practices of prominent artist-savants such as Nicolas-Jacques Conté or Joseph Montgolfier established the Conservatoire, and the museum of technological artifacts that opened alongside it in 1802, as a preeminent site for scientific and artisanal training. Meanwhile the associated practice of artists and administrators such as Léonor Mérimée at the Société d'encouragement pour l'industrie nationale, founded in 1801, helped protect and disseminate the products developed there. In particular, I will focus on mechanisms developed for communication across time and space, as they operated both inside such pedagogical and display environments and, more tellingly, outside—on the streets of Paris—and consider how such devices and protocols spoke to dynamics of mobility and stasis, transmission and reception, transparency and interference, grounded in the visual experience of French revolutionary politics.

'Colouring the Science of the Past: The Arts of Learning for the Present?'

Mary Orr, Buchanan Chair of French, University of St Andrews

The last 30 years have witnessed wide-ranging contributions to knowledge of nineteenth-century histories, literatures and cultures of the natural sciences, grounded in the importance in the period of advances in printing technologies and scientific instruments. This paper builds on this research, and the many important contributions made by feminist critics in these fields (Barbara Gates; Anne Shteir), by questioning how we might read potentially prejudiced – that is 'coloured' -- points of view. My interest in this paper is therefore how to close read colour illustrations in 'scientific'/ethnographical' texts published before 1830, particularly in the rare cases where these – text and image – were produced by women, and women actively engaged in scientific travel. My paper therefore focuses on one water colour illustration and its textual description in *Excursions in Madeira and Porto Santo* (1825) by the late T. Edward Bowdich (London: George Whittaker, 1825) that is by his widow, Sarah Bowdich. By examining Plate IX 'Costume of the Gambia' precisely for its colours, through both current interdisciplinary and inter-medial lenses, and the expert eyes of conference participants, my paper addresses whether the many educative purposes of the original might not have as much to teach us today about 'colour' prejudice – and blindness -- in disciplinary/interdisciplinary research working with text and image.