

The Fascist Art Market before, during and after the Rome-Berlin Axis – 27-29 May 2019

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List of participants and topics

Prof. Dr. Kim Oosterlinck, Brussels: The Fascist art market – conceptual remarks
Elena Franchi, Lucca: Gifts, legal exportations and illegal exportations: the ministerial lists of artworks and art dealers
Dr. Meike Hopp, Munich: Julius Böhler – Buying from (and selling to) Italy
Edda Bruckner BA, Munich: Antiquarians' trade with Italy – the case of Karl & Faber
Dr. Daria Brasca, Udine: Italian exportation offices and the art dealers
Dr. Christian Huemer, Vienna: The Italian-Austrian Trade
Matilde Cartolari, Berlin/Udine: Argan, Fascism, and the market in Italy
Dr. Susanne Meyer-Abich, Berlin: The Fascist art market in comparative perspective
Katharina Hüls MA, Mainz/Venezia: The Italian art market during World War II
Prof. Dr. Emanuele Pellegrini, Lucca: Ragghianti, Briganti and the Art Market
Theresa Sepp MA, Munich: Ernst Buchner and Italy
Emanuele Sbardella MA, Berlin: The Numismatic Coin Market During the Ventennio Fascista: The Swiss Midpoint of the Axis
Patrizia Cappellini MA, Udine: Art market practices and personal relationships amongst dealers and museum curators in the 1920s

Dr. Giuliana Tomasella, Padova: Giuseppe Fiocco and the art market

Dr. Martina Visentin, Udine: The Pallucchini archive – an ongoing research project

Sophia Barth MA, Munich: Alois Miedl & Hermann Göring in Italy

Elisabeth Heider MA: Viktor Wallerstein and Michelangelo Masciotta in Firenze

Prof. Dr. Barbara Murovec, Maribor: “Via Trieste” – Trieste as intersection and cross point for the art trade between Italy and Southeastern Europe in the 1930s and 1940s

Dr. Ljerka Dulibic, Zagreb: Italian-Croatian art market relations

Dr. Federica Veratelli, Parma: The photo archive of Antonio Morassi

Aims

The aim of the workshop was to assemble both qualified researchers and doctoral students to jointly analyze a field that requires transnational (and transdisciplinary) approaches. The Italian art market in the 1930s and 1940s is a topic which has not been thoroughly researched so far, especially as far as regards the Italian side. Ideological interpretations have heavily influenced research on this topic, together with some reticence in reconsidering the activities of some important exponents of the Italian art historical discipline during this crucial period.

Although the field undoubtedly needs further and deeper enquiries, the goal of the workshop was not only to offer a map of the situation, of the people and of the institutions involved in the Italian art market during the 1930s and 1940s, but also to deal with more general topics which transcend the specific cases and involve an insight into the relationships between art and politics. Moreover, the workshop intended to explore both the internal dynamics of the art market (role of dealers, collectors, experts and art historians) and the relevance of political and economic instances.

All individual contributions had been limited to a maximum of 15 minutes each, in order to allow for extensive discussions among all participants.

Assessment in Overview

The standard of the papers that were given at the workshop has been very high; in fact, all participants have generally presented results of fresh and unpublished research, mainly based on (sometimes newly discovered or up to now unnoticed) archival findings, and have explored a variety of perspectives in analyzing the – verbal and/or visual – documents.

Some papers investigated individual trajectories (such as Ernst Buchner, Julius Böhler, Alois Miedl, Antonio Morassi, or Giuseppe Fiocco), depicting their activities and connections; others were more

focused on relationships among German and Italian figures (like Viktor Wallerstein and Michelangelo Masciotta, Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti and Giuliano Briganti) and their respective networks. Many papers, however, dealt with broader themes and overarching topics, such as the economic aspects of the European art market in the 1930s and 1940s, foreign museums' acquisition policies in Italy, the attitudes of the Italian Fine Arts staff towards acquisitions for museums, or legal and illegal exportation procedures, etc. However, all papers have aimed to answer the main issues of the workshop: how the art market mirrors power relationships which are foreign to it and how art history, as a discipline in the humanities, is complicit or, in any case, is positioned in this context. Also due to the specific competences of the scholars involved in the workshop, each paper has aroused a lively debate which, at its turn, has allowed to fruitfully compare not only data, but also different perspectives. We, as organizers, were not entirely surprised, but we did definitely not expect the phenomenon that quite frequently persons or constellations and networks that were mentioned in one paper (as active in one specific area or playing a role in a specific episode) resurfaced an hour or two later in another participants' research. This truly testifies to a fruitful exchange and a successful joint endeavor. At the same time, it has been possible to compare attitudes and behaviors, often finding similarities, much more than differences, in approaches, tools and procedures among dealers and experts involved.

Key areas

Regarding both dealers and art historians active in the art market, and regarding practices in art dealing within specific political contexts, four key areas of investigation within the "Fascist Art Market" emerged:

1. economic issues, related to the boom of prices in countries occupied by the Nazis and to the 'good opportunities' to buy, apart from moral issues

These issues have been discussed both in terms of long period processes and of micro-cases. The flourishing of sales in the UK and in Switzerland during the 1940s has been singled out, stressing in particular the increasing importance of the Swiss art market (also in specific fields, e.g. numismatic). The boom's multifarious consequences have been examined as regards the expansion of the black market and the considerable increase in the production of fakes and forgeries. Economic issues have been also largely debated in relation with the symbolic meaning of dispossessions or even attempts at dispossession (as in the case of Italian Savoia collection of coins), taking into account also

propaganda antisemitic elements in the art market. Some participants of the Villa Vigoni workshop voiced these and other views in an online publication that was launched in late September 2019 (<https://www.memofonte.it/studi-di-memofonte/numero-22-2019/>).

2. museum policies, as regards purchases by German and Austrian museum directors in Italy and the network of agents and experts involved

Their choices have been widely considered: these mainly aimed at filling the gaps left by already confiscated collections. New interesting data have emerged about the relationships, and the concrete nuts & bolts of institutional collecting e.g. for the planned “Führermuseum” in Linz.

3. art market practices, dealings and supply channels

The key question is: To what degree did the political culture of the Axis affect long established practices among dealers and professionals? In general, in spite of new opportunities raised by the dispersal and forced sales of Jewish-owned cultural objects, it emerged that art practices did not change formally, and not radically. During various discussions it also very became clear how multi-faceted and complex the world of art dealings was: different figures, professionals and non-professionals, occasional middlemen, negotiations in backrooms, with scarce written evidence, etc. Nonetheless, the impact of the political system cannot be underestimated, as it established the power relations that also governed the art market.

4. behavior of art historians within and on the art market

This topic was at the core of the workshop and the subject of several papers as well as of the debate. Which was the role of academic art historians and of curators in the art market? How did they react to the well-known provenance of the art objects? This implied not only a discourse on the morality of single individuals, but on the role itself of art history as a discipline. In particular participants have discussed the use of connoisseurship, that specific kind of art history which was (and always is) especially linked to the art market, in that it focuses on attributions and on assessments related to quality, both crucial in setting values and prices. Attitudes of several 20th century art historians towards expertises have been taken into consideration: mainly based on obvious economic motivations, they often show an easier and more enthusiastic approach towards artworks, which contrasts with more prudent concerns, as expressed in their publications.

Finally, a pervasive concern that ran across many studies was the key role of archival documents. In addition to ordinary written files, visual evidence, as preserved in photo archives, is indispensable also with regard to identifying transferred and dislocated objects and artefacts. In this regard, during the workshop, the importance of extant photo archives was frequently confirmed: Photographs not only afford useful hints for provenance research, but they shed light on the working methods of dealers, art historians and experts (Morassi, Masciotta), showing a continuity of processes and of methods.

Results

The primary result was a successful “awareness-raising” vis-à-vis the complexity of the issues at stake: To research the art market and its inner mechanisms always means to investigate in a grey zone, where first-hand documentation is often deficient and incomplete; the more so in such a troubled period as the one here scrutinized. In no other period than that under consideration, relationships between art and politics have been more vivid and essential. Facing art market issues in general, one could be more inclined to call on economics or on the history of taste, but as a matter of fact, art dealers and art experts were heavily involved in the Fascist and Nazi regimes, something that they were very anxious to accurately conceal after the war. Therefore, losses due to wartime as well as the willful destruction of damaging evidence have heavily affected both private and public archives. This circumstance makes all the more important the cross-checking of all available data. The need to pragmatically come to terms with present research infrastructures, as part of fundamental research, was successfully communicated – only information that is accessible can be studied, analyzed and scrutinized.

On the methodological level, the participants achieved a nuanced understanding, i.e. the need to resist the temptation of having simplistic instead of holistic and encompassing explanations. Essentially, the workshop underlined the dialectic nature of art market research, which is marked by the acknowledgment of a substantial continuity in processes and should be featured in the form of a constant interplay between broader perspectives and the zooming in specific cases. Rather pragmatically, the workshop again proved the relevance of face-to-face-communication, as precondition for transnational or at least bilateral networking. As a matter of fact, it is a truly

dialectic result that at the same time the understanding of the complexities of the topic evolved, and also what is to be gained by cooperation, sharing, and discussion.

network to face the raising complexity which emerged on the topic of the workshop, to be considered as an important step for further research. Finally, it can be considered a rather nice implication that, because of the entangled nature of the field of study, a young German doctoral student sighed at the end “Oh well, now I truly realize that I have to learn Italian”, while an Italian professor resumed that she had thought she could do without, but that her experiences during the workshop showed her that she needs to enhance her proficiency in the German language. Hence, the Villa Vigoni again proved her role as matchmaker.