

Perspective

actualité en histoire de l'art

Narrative(s), no. 2022 – 2



Rock art of Cerro Azul (detail), c. 12 600-11 800 BC, Colombia, in the Serranía La Lindosa (Guaviare). © photo Julian Ruiz P. (CC BY-SA 4.0)

The journal *Perspective's* thematic issue 2022-2 will explore the relationships between narration, art and art history. From the stories that inspire images and art objects, to those (re)constituted by its viewers, to the “story-telling” of art historians, this issue is intended to make use of the act of narrating as a productively destabilizing heuristic tool. Even in the absence of figured diegetic content, the image and the art object narrate, if only as witnesses of an era or practices, as *vehicles* of narrativity. The resulting visual narratives in turn generate other narratives: fictions or legends, scholarly articles or fanciful ramblings, dialogues between artworks or viewers' monologues. And art historical narratives as well, given that art historians continuously recount the process performatively, with its multiple *mises en abyme* and comings and goings in the grey areas between fact and fiction, expression and narration, description, analysis, and projection.

The historical place of the terminology of narrative within the field of literary studies also calls for examining the relationship between a narrative in images and its possible written sources. Does representing a story in images amount to imitating the textual narrative or faithfully reproducing its dramaturgy for the eye? What are the possibilities of visual narrativity relative to those of verbal language? The debt of figurative representation to its source has prompted a variety of responses from researchers in art history, some of whom posit the primacy of the written over the visual. Here, the concept of figurative thought (Pierre Francastel, *La figure et le lieu : l'ordre visuel du Quattrocento*, Paris, Gallimard, 1967) permits a distinction between two equally valid conceptual domains, where each narrative medium has its own logic. This dialectical approach, which connects the narrative image to its cultural environment, then opens the way to multiple interactions and reformulations, in particular through orality and a dialogue between the collective imaginary, individual imaginaries, and visual culture (Hans Belting, *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body* [2001], Princeton / Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2011). In methodological terms, the emergence of narratology within French literary theory in the 1970s (Gérard Genette, *Figures III* [1972], selections translated as *Narrative Discourse, An Essay in Method*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1980) provided a body of conceptual tools for renewing the study of the internal mechanisms of the literary narrative, in particular through the distinction between *histoire* (story), *récit* (narrative text) and *narration* (narrating act). The possible influence, or not, of this approach on the theoretical frameworks used in art history to analyze the narrative elements of the artwork or the image merits further consideration. And the same is true for the connections between visual, linguistic, and semiotic studies.

The figured narrative calls on a wide variety of visual means for shaping and spatializing narrative content through still and moving images (analog or digital), architecture, fashion, or art objects. Each work produced – monument, dress, painting, sculpture, film, book, digital interface, art object – requires a match between the narrative in images and its medium, dimensions and volume so as to fashion its visual effectiveness and reception by judiciously condensing or expanding it. Giving visual form to the narrative is also a means of fashioning or recounting its time. In sum, this issue of *Perspective* seeks to take into account all the narrative dimensions, specificities, and potentialities of art objects and works and explore the way(s) the narrativity of the visual is rooted in a lengthy process of legitimization and empowerment.

If the image and the art object narrate, art historians in turn continuously provide a dialogical account of this multifaceted relationship as a kind of story within the story. The history of art, rooted in the works of Giorgio Vasari and Karel van Mander (considered as its modern founders), is based on a narrative exercise, from the *ekphrasis* of Antiquity to the epic narratives of modernist autonomy, but also anecdotes and biographical legends. The way art historians have forged their discipline by freeing themselves from a willfully mythical literary practice and gradually adopting, fashioning, and discussing “scientific” methods bears witness to a complex relationship with the narrative and narration – otherwise stated, a kind of fiction. Some recent historiographical studies have focused on the question of these close ties between the writing of history and that of fiction. Mark Ledbury, in the collective work *Fictions of Art History* (Williamstown, Mass., Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute / Yale University Press, 2013), Ivan Jablonka with *History Is a Contemporary Literature: Manifesto for the Social Sciences* [2014] (Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 2018), and more recently, Myriam Métayer and Adriana Sotropa, the editors of *Le récit de l'histoire de l'art. Mots et rhétoriques d'une discipline* (Le Kremlin-Bicêtre, Éditions Esthétique du divers, 2017), for example, have offered fruitful insights. Is it possible to write history without telling stories? From the point of view of the images and art objects or that of the viewers, can – or should – we forego any narrative process? Can we communicate without narrating (or narrating ourselves)? If this is not the case, what epistemological conclusions can be drawn about the way we consider our practice – our writing – of art history? In the era of “alternative facts” and storytelling, when the question of the relative nature of narratives is both a considerable risk and an opportunity, raising question about the making of narrative, the way that art and art history narrate (and narrate themselves), ultimately implies a return to teleological issues: what has meaning, what gives meaning, what creates meaning?

The appearance of an image, be it figurative, aniconic, material, or mental, gives rise to a story and a way of arranging it into a narrative. But does the absence of figuration signify the absence of narrative? For in the same way, the appearance of the *image*, be it material or mental, figurative or aniconic, gives rise to a desire to narrate. While no one will deny that the image and the narrative act go hand in hand, the precedence of one over the other remains an eternal subject of debate, as are the relaying and embedding processes that engender them, from the time of the *paragone* to modernist discourse predicting the end of narrative artworks. For the upcoming thematic issue, these different oppositions and complex transmission phenomena can be approached from a variety of vantage points, provided that the analysis is situated within a historiographical perspective addressing the narrative processes at work in the creation and reception of art from the origins to the present day, from symbolic Paleolithic expressions to contemporary cinema. For this reason, specific case studies bearing on iconographic analyses will not be accepted unless they raise broader critical questions.

Proposals involving one or several of the following approaches will be particularly welcome:

- Artists telling stories;
- Artists telling their own stories (authorized accounts, etc.);
- Historians recounting the life of the artist (from Vasari to Ernst Kriz and Otto Kurz);
- Historians telling the story of visual narratives (iconography, iconology, interpretation, etc.);
- Synchronic narratives of art history (the “great” movements, the “master” narratives);
- Counter-narratives and re-narrated art historical narratives (historiography, fictionalization);
- The place and possibility of a collective and/or participatory narrative within the discipline;
- The socio-political consequences and echos of art-historical narratives and counter-narratives (activism, societal debates).

Perspective: actualité en histoire de l’art

Published by the Institut national d’histoire de l’art (INHA) since 2006, *Perspective* is a biannual journal which aims to bring out the diversity of current research in art history through a constantly evolving approach that is explicitly aware of itself and its own historicity and articulations. It bears witness to the historiographical debates within the field, while remaining in continuous relation with the images and works of art themselves, updating their interpretations, and thus fostering global, intra- and interdisciplinary reflection. The journal publishes scholarly texts which offer innovative perspectives on a given theme. These may be situated within a wide range, yet without ever losing sight of their larger objective: going beyond any given case study in order to interrogate the discipline, its methods, history and limitations, while relating these questions to topical issues from art history and neighboring disciplines that speak to each of us as citizens.

Perspective invites contributors to update their historiographical material and the theoretical questionings from which they draw their work, to think from and around the starting point of a precise question, an assessment that will be considered an epistemological tool rather than a goal in itself. Each article thus calls for a new approach creating links with the great societal and intellectual debates of our time.

Perspective is conceived as a disciplinary crossroads aiming to encourage dialogue between art history and other fields of research, the humanities in particular, and put into action the “law of the good neighbor” developed by Aby Warburg.

All geographical areas, periods, and media are welcome.

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To the [board composition](#).

Please send your submissions (an abstract of 2,000 to 3,000 characters / 350 to 500 words, a provisional title, a short bibliography on the subject, and a biography of a few lines) to the editorial office (revue-perspective@inha.fr) **before July 1st, 2021**.

Proposals will be examined by the issue’s editorial committee regardless of language (articles accepted for publication will be translated by *Perspective*). The authors of the pre-selected proposals will be informed of the committee’s decision by the end of **July 2021**. The complete articles (25,000 or 45,000 characters/ 4,500 or 7,500 words depending on the project) must be submitted by **December 15th, 2021**. These will be definitively accepted after the journal’s anonymous peer-review process.

[translated from French by Miriam Rosen]

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