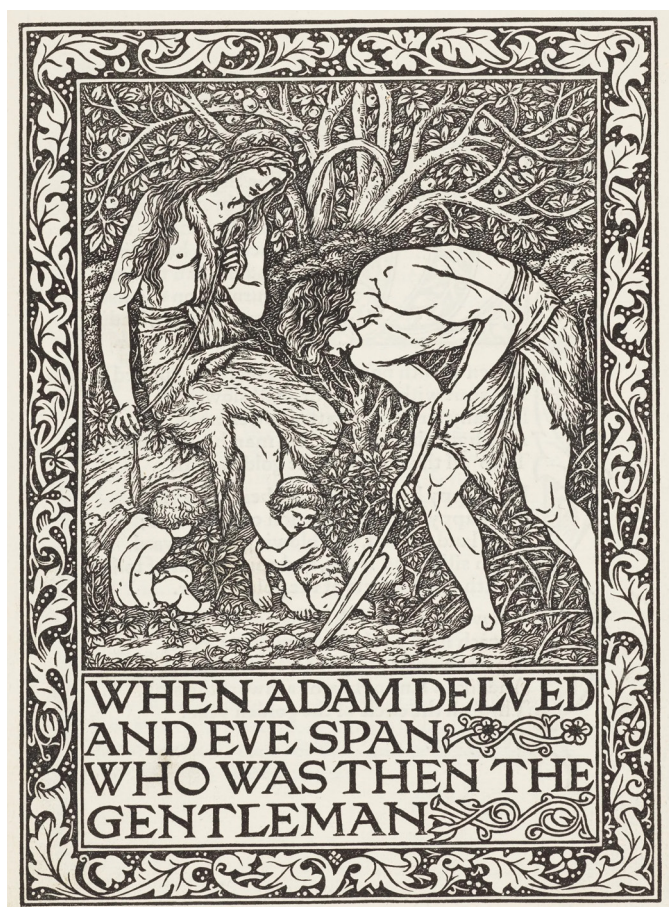


Perspective

actualité en histoire de l'art

Labor, no. 2025 – 1

Editor-in-Chief: Thomas Golsenne (INHA)



Edward Burne-Jones (illustration), William Morris (border design), William H. Hooper (engraving), *When Adam Delved and Eve Span*, 1892, front cover of a brochure for Ancoats Brotherhood, 1894.

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, highly situated and explicitly aware of its own historicity. It bears witness to the historiographic debates within the field without forgetting to engage with images and works of art themselves, updating their interpretations as well as fostering intra- and inter-disciplinary reflection between art history and other fields of research, the humanities in particular. In so doing, it also puts into action the “law of the good neighbor” as conceived by Aby Warburg. All geographical areas, periods, and media are welcome.

The journal publishes scholarly texts which offer innovative perspectives on a given theme. Its authors contextualize their arguments using case studies allows them to interrogate the discipline, its methods, its history, and its limits. Moreover, articles that are proposed to the editorial committee should necessarily include a methodological dimension, provide an epistemological contribution, or offer a significant and original historiographic evaluation.

The journal publishes texts with an emphasis on current questions that drive research in art history and neighboring disciplines, particularly those that speak to all of us as citizens. Each article thus calls for creating links with the great societal and intellectual debates of our time.

For issue 2025 – 1, *Perspective* is digging into the question of labor in relation to art history, understood both as a scholarly discipline and the material under study. That which we collectively term “labor” is today the subject of rapid changes and fierce debates which, in an often caricatural way, pitches those for whom labor is a value in and of itself (work or else laze about) against those who question the value of labor: Which type of work is useful to society? Are the conditions acceptable where labor is active? Is labor a form of domination (COUTROT, PEREZ, 2022; CRAWFORD, 2009; GORZ, 1988; GRAEBER, 2018; MÉDA, VENDRAMIN, 2013; RIFKIN, 1995)? Posing these questions from an art-historical point of view allows us to start from scratch. This volume suggests that we study the relationships between labor and art history along four axes:

- 1. The debate over art as labor:** How has art history participated; effected changes in its vocabulary; and interacted with those artists, art critics, or philosophers who played a role in this debate?
- 2. Art as a process of production:** Which strands of art history have turned their attention more to the production of art than to its reception and through what type of theoretical, methodological, and ideological apparatus?
- 3. The iconography of labor:** What contributions does art history furnish, through the analysis of images, to our knowledge of the realities or representations of labor? What does it borrow from or contribute to other humanistic disciplines that study labor?
- 4. Art history as labor:** What are the material conditions in which art history is produced? How do these conditions vary in relation to individual, local, and/or historical situations?

1. The debate over art as labor

The question of whether making art is a type of labor is an old debate, largely overlapping with the reflection upon “art” in the modern and European sense of the term, which is to say something distinct from craft, as a “liberal” activity (ANHEIM, 2014; DUBOURG GLATIGNY, VÉRIN, 2008; GAVOILLE, 2003; GUICHARD, 2015; KLEIN, 2017). Beyond the accepted idea that this distinction—acquired by art and artists since the Renaissance and the Enlightenment—offers an autonomy, even a superiority vis-à-vis working members of society, more materialist and sociological approaches since the late 19th century have questioned this a priori opposition between art and labor. Even the way of labelling the results of artistic labor—as an *œuvre d’art* or *objet d’art*, artistic production or piece; work or image—changes over time, according to the professional context or the country in question, and in turn conveys discernable ideas or even ideologies, sometimes unconsciously. Artists themselves have, occasionally, asserted their status as artistic labor, as did William Morris in the 1880s in England (MORRIS, [1889] 1901), the Mexican muralists (OLES, 2022), artist coalitions formed within the General Confederation of Labor in Argentina after 1968 (LONGONI, MESTMAN, 2008), the near-contemporary Art Workers Coalition in the United States (BRYAN-WILSON, 2009), or artist collectives that can be found almost anywhere today (CATIN, 2020; GORI, LUBAT, SILVESTRE, 2017). On the flip side, yet other artists reject the very notion of labor in respect to their own work, if not generally, positing that it is necessarily alienating: art appears here as a form of resistance to labor. Hence, to imagine art from the perspective of labor is, from the start, a matter of writing the history of this debate, understanding its theoretical, sociological, and political challenges.

2. Art as a process of production

Broaching art as labor likewise invites one to turn toward studying the processes of artistic production in general (STRASSER, 2006), including in contexts or periods where the question of the artist as laborer is not even a question, insofar as the status of artist did not exist (BARRAL I ALTET, 1986; HAMBURGER, 2012). This applies to the European Middle Ages as much as to the Dahomey Kingdom of the 17th century or Edo-period Japan—in other words everywhere and anywhere that the modern distinction between art and craft does not hold or when there is no known artist. How does one thus approach the question of the processes for making so-called artistic objects? What are the methods and theoretical tools developed in art history and archaeology to analyze, from prehistory to the present, the forms of production of art and images? What is the state of research on guilds (GUILLOIS, 2018), the organization of studios (*L’Atelier*, 2014), the place of technique and technologies (BUMFORD,

NÈGRE, HERMENS, 2015), “post-studio” practices (ADAMSON, BRYAN-WILSON, 2016)? How have understandings of authorship changed, a notion which is not necessarily reserved for the artist but can also be extended to those who contribute, in one way or another, to the existence of images and works of art (be they assistants, technicians, preparators, curators, conservators, institutions themselves...)? In what way is art history informed by research in other disciplines that study the material conditions behind the production of artifacts: the history of architecture (GUILLOUËT, 2019; NÈGRE, 2016), design (PETIOT, BRAUNSTEIN-KRIEGL, 2019), photography, archaeology, history, and the anthropology of technology (HOUDART, MINATO, 2009; INGOLD, 2013; NAJI, 2007; STOICHITA, GRIMAUD, JONES, 2011; YANEVA, 2009; YONAN, 2011), sociology (BETTE, 2021; LATOUR, 2010; MENDER, 2009; SENNETT, 2008; VANDENBUNDER, 2014), gender studies (CASSAGNES-BROUQUET, 2008), etc.?

3. The iconography of labor

Examining the relations between art and labor requires asking oneself how art history interrogates the artistic representations of labor (TEXIER, VOISIN, 2014). It is of less concern to tackle such representations as a subject in themselves but rather to study the discourses that comment upon them—in other words, the representations that art historians perceive as constituting an iconographic unit or ensemble. What depicted activities qualify as “labor” in art history? What knowledge from other humanistic disciplines are used in art history to inform research on this iconography? Which currents have been particularly attentive to it? If one immediately thinks of various developments in social art history (ALPERS, 1988) or Marxist art history and theory (ARVATOV, [1926] 2017; BENJAMIN, [1934] 2005), we can also interest ourselves in feminist reflections on the range of domestic activities excluded from the conventional (or Marxist) definitions of labor, and to the way in which art historians and critics have requalified or even rediscovered an ensemble of artists and works that represent this reproductive labor—like the Cooperativa Beato Angelico in Italy in the 1970s (BREMER, 2019-2020), or the forms of art long misjudged as “women’s work” (PARKER, 1984). By the same token, it would be interesting to study—in relation to ideological commitments, methodological approaches, or areas expertise—the varied ways in which art historians have considered the images of the artist at work: Is this reflexive iconography interpreted as a manifestation of lone genius; the struggle of the artist against the material; their representation of a real or idealized social status, pride or modesty, difference or conformity (BONNET, 2002)?

4. Art history as labor

Finally, what type of labor is art history itself? What are the work processes of art historians and archaeologists, and how do they create research in these scholarly domains? How have the digital humanities impacted these, between the accessibility of resources, innovative technological possibilities, and newly induced restrictions? Beyond the obvious, one must more specifically question the material conditions of production in this scholarly discipline and its research activities. Not only are the social and professional positions of people who do art history quite varied, but individual situations also vary according to educational qualifications, the level of recognition or precarity, and the time apportioned to research versus that taken up by other activities. At a time of a growing research precariat, the fall in public funding, the multiplication of temporary projects, quantitative or qualitative assessments, and the competition between universities, museums, or art schools with intellectual capitalism, what effects do these socio-economic conditions have on art history research? What can we say about the effects of discrimination on the basis of gender, cultural background, or sexuality on the practice of art history? If sociological studies have been conducted on other professions in the art world (BECKER, 1982; POULARD, DEPUISSET, 2022), it remains urgent to make clear the transformations and difficulties of art historical professions.

[English translation: Matthew Gillman]

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See [the members of the editorial board](#).

Taking care to **ground reflections in a historiographic, methodological, or epistemological perspective**, please send your proposals (an abstract of 2,000 to 3,000 characters/350 to 500 words, a working title, a short bibliography on the subject, and a biography limited to a few lines) to the editorial email address (revue-perspective@inha.fr) no later than **December 11, 2023**.

Perspective handles translations; projects will be considered by the committee regardless of language.

Authors whose proposals are accepted will be informed of the decision by the editorial committee in **January 2024**, while articles will be due on **May 15, 2024**. Submitted texts (between 25,000 and 45,000 characters/4,500 or 7,500 words, depending on the intended project) will be formally accepted following an anonymous peer review process.

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