

## Chapter 17

# Art History

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True beauty does not know boundaries.<sup>1</sup> And the same applies to art. Painters, sculptors, and architects often work on commission in a variety of places, and small-scale art works travel frequently either because they change hands or are (temporarily) exhibited elsewhere. Like music, the advantage art has over literature is that it does not need words to express itself and therefore is not bound to a specific country or linguistic zone. Although part of the artistic infrastructure—such as art schools, museums, and art academies—is organized on a national level, in general the art world has been international. Connections between artists from various places, countries, and continents have been frequent and productive, while even without direct contact artists can take inspiration from art works, or their reproductions, from elsewhere. Nonetheless, art has largely been categorized according to clearly drawn geographical boundaries, which for the modern period have mostly coincided with national borders.

In regard to the role of regions in art history, four different tendencies or narratives can be distinguished, which will be analyzed in loose chronological order. However, it should first be made clear that the study of art history has its own particular geography as well. Art critics, museum experts, cultural historians, and amateurs have written widely on art historical topics, but the academic discipline of art history is relatively new. In 1844, the University of Berlin created the first chair of art history. Other German universities soon followed, and the same happened in the Austrian Empire (including the non-German speaking parts) and Scandinavia. The rest of Europe only followed suit substantially later: Italy in 1896, France in 1899, and in England art history only became an academic subject with the creation of the Courtauld Institute of Art in 1933. As a consequence, the focus will be on

the German-speaking areas and France, which until 1914—and maybe even until 1940—formed the indisputable cultural, scientific, and artistic center of Europe.

## Defining National Schools

The rise of national art schools was intimately connected to changing views on art, history, and geography. Perhaps more telling in this respect than the writings on art was the placement of artworks within collections. During the early modern period, art collections often were just one aspect of cabinets of curiosities which aimed to give an inventory of God's creation by showing both *naturalia* (products of natural history) and artefacts (human creations) of all kinds. During the sixteenth and seventeenth century, in many princely collections artefacts were increasingly separated from the rest, although sculptures and paintings were generally shown together with scientific instruments, maps, furniture, decorative objects, weaponry, and gems (Olmí 1993, 110–11).

This situation did not fundamentally change in the eighteenth century, although now the emphasis was increasingly on systematically classifying all objects in a kind of encyclopedic, all-encompassing taxonomy. Under the impact of new enlightened ideals, these collections were to be made public. This was first done with the foundation of the British Museum in 1753, which contained a general repository of natural and artificial productions. However, during the eighteenth century there was a clear trend to separate the various branches of human activity, and thus give the arts, still in a very broad sense, their proper place. Geography and history, at least in our sense of the word, were not relevant in these universal taxonomies. In general, objects were classified by discipline and species, in which the direction was from the general to the specific and from the lowest to the highest degree of complexity (Meijers 1993a, 205–24).

Implicitly, however, history and geography mattered in regard to art. The highest standards of beauty in sculpture and architecture were supposedly reached in classical (thus, Greek and Roman) antiquity, and during the Renaissance (i.e., Italy) for painting. This was made explicit by Johann Joachim Winckelmann, who, in his *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums*, published in 1764, tried to understand the rise, flowering, and decline of ancient art by studying it in strict chronological order and by linking its development to its specific historical, and thus indirectly also geographical, context. Greek art could only be understood in the geographically defined framework of Greek history. Nonetheless, Winckelmann still considered beauty a timeless, eternal

category. His views were powerfully influential and would have consequences for the way art was exhibited.

Winckelmann's ideas were first applied in Florence and Vienna, where Grand Duke Leopold and his Habsburg brother and future emperor Joseph decided to change the arrangement of the art works in their collections. Although the new ideas were not adopted throughout the entire collection, substantial sections of it were now displayed as part of national schools. This had the objective of showing their growth, maturity, and decline to a wider public. This way it would be possible to understand the factors and conditions that fostered the flowering of the arts in the past, which in turn could help to improve the artistic situation in the present. This focus on national developments also had clear mercantilist motives. By improving the artistic taste of the nation, the arts (among which artisanal products were still included) would prosper, which in turn would increase the country's exports (Meijers 1993b, 225–44). In both cases, the emphasis was primarily on the domestic national school, which in Florence meant the art of the Tuscan nation and in Vienna of the German nation. In the eighteenth century, the term "nation" was still used ambiguously and could indicate both very small territories and even large stretches of the entire continent. After the French Revolution, this formula would also be applied at the Musée des Monuments Français and the newly created Louvre Museum (Kultermann 1997, vol. 2, 227; McClellan 1994).

Since the sixteenth century, however, geography and art had already been loosely connected in writings on art, primarily to distinguish between the various artistic centers within the Italian Peninsula. In the eighteenth century, authors also began to distinguish French, German, Flemish, Dutch, and, slightly later, Spanish schools (DaCosta Kaufmann 2004a, 26–35; Géal 1999). Both scholarly publications and exhibition practices thus slowly began to explore historical and geographical circumstances in order to understand the artistic developments of the past, although clearly embedded within an absolute standard of beauty and a universal taxonomy.

During the early nineteenth century a new, more radical historicist view, in which each period was judged on its own merits and thus not compared to the standard of classical antiquity, began to affect the way art was categorized. Art history was increasingly presented with a combination of chronology and geographically defined areas or cultures. In the age of nationalism, this meant particularly "national" cultures and art schools. Nations were thus projected back into the past and national schools were more closely defined. Progress was possible, but had to be embedded within the particular evolutionary path of each nation. Originality now became an absolute requirement for artists, while imitators were downgraded. These ideas had been anticipated by Jo-

hann Gottfried Herder, who already in *Von deutscher Art und Kunst* (1773) opposed the dominance of French artistic taste while exposing his new theories on the spirit of nations (*Volksgeist*). The new view also largely determined the layout of the first art museum that was explicitly designed as such, Karl Friedrich Schinkel's Altes Museum in Berlin, which opened its doors in 1830. The basement showed minor objects from classical antiquity, the first floor sculptures from ancient Greece and Rome, while the paintings on the second floor were divided between an Italian and a Dutch-German school. Significantly, the Italian section ended in the then-less-valued academic art of the seventeenth century, while the Dutch-German school culminated in the highly original works of Rubens and Rembrandt, which implicitly were seen as part of the Germanic heritage and thus were intended to inspire artists from Prussia and other German states (Wezel 1993, 321–31; DaCosta Kaufmann 2004a, 43–51).

The new combination of historicism and nationalism also had a profound impact on art historical studies. If we take the case of the Spanish school, it becomes clear that initially these “national schools” were used vaguely and mainly applied to the art of the past. During the eighteenth century, authors produced a kind of inventory of all the artistic objects present in a specific country. This began to change drastically during the nineteenth century. First, the encyclopedic approach was replaced by a chronological approach; thus the story of an artistic evolution, increasingly defined in national terms, was constructed. Thus, in 1848 the British scholar William Stirling-Maxwell published his *Annals of the Artists of Spain*, which still contained the most important foreign artists that had worked in Spain, such as Titian and Rubens, although he tried to define the more general trends in the country's artistic development. However, the volume for Spain that was published in the French series *Histoire des peintres de toutes les écoles*, edited by Charles Blanc in 1869, only contained “Spanish” painters. Thus, the place of birth increasingly determined the attribution of an artist to a certain national school (Storm 2016, 8–38).

During the romantic era, this national reinterpretation of the artistic past was accompanied by a new appreciation for art that did not conform to the dominant canon of the early modern period. Artists who showed a peculiar style were now seen as authentic and original, and had a better chance of becoming part of the national heritage than those artists who imitated Italian art or participated in general European classicist tendencies. As a result, national schools were defined ever more strictly, in turn establishing a new national artistic canon, a national golden age, and a specific national style (Storm 2016). This new nationalist view was particularly explicit in the debates over Gothic art. Since Gothic art did not conform to the classicist canon and had its origins in the Middle Ages, it was appropriated by various nationalist authors. In fact,

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, in one of his first publications, which dealt with the Cathedral of Strasbourg (1772) and was republished in Herder's *Von deutscher Art und Kunst*, already defined Gothic as "German architecture." However, it was also vindicated as the national style in France and Great Britain. Ironically, it was a German art historian who in 1850 discovered that Gothic architecture originated in Abbé Suger's church of Saint Denis in France (Kultermann 1997, vol. 2, 230–40; Bergdoll 2000, 139–70).

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, historical overviews generally dealt with art in a chronological way, in which for each period the developments of the major European nations were described. One of the first examples is provided by Carl Schnaase's *Geschichte der bildenden Kunst* (1843–68). Influenced by Herder and Hegel, he presented art as an expression of the *Volksgeist*, the history of which had an internal logic while evolving in a progressive way (DaCosta Kaufmann 2004a: 50). This in fact meant that nations were projected back into the past and functioned as the main geographical division from at least the late medieval period onwards. In some cases, Romanesque and Gothic art were discussed not by nationality but by principality or dynasty, such as Carolingian or Ottonian (e.g., Frantz 1900). Some artistic periods were entirely identified with one country; especially the Renaissance and sometimes also the Baroque period were defined as being Italian (Schmarsow 1897). In some overviews, the Italian Renaissance was dealt with in one chapter, while the following chapter discussed the "Renaissance in the North," meaning the Low Countries, France, and Germany (e.g., Springer 1921). From the Renaissance onwards, however, art was primarily discussed by nation. Mostly, the author gave precedence to the contributions of his own country, and often the tone was openly nationalistic.

Occasionally the art of other parts of the world was also included; however, this was generally done as a kind of prelude to classical antiquity. Thus Franz Kugler (1856) included both European prehistory and the art of the Incas, the Hindus, the Muslims, and the Sassanids in a chapter that also dealt with classical antiquity. Here, history seemed to begin, and the entire second volume discussed European developments since the Middle Ages. The focus in Kugler's *Handbuch der Kunstgeschichte* and almost all similar books was clearly on Italy and Western Europe. Chapters dealt with France, Germany, the Low Countries, and sometimes also Spain and England. Only in exceptional cases, and mostly for the nineteenth century, were other European countries, such as Sweden, Hungary, Poland, or Russia, mentioned. These paragraphs were generally very brief and only mentioned a few well-known artists or architects (e.g., Muther 1912; Springer 1921). Although this historicist and nationalist interpretation has remained dominant ever since, especially as the primary ordering principle for the hanging of paintings in museums, other trends have

had a considerable impact as well, while in some cases leaving more room for a classification system that used other geographical units.

### Search for Origins

The intellectual crisis of the *fin de siècle*, occasioned by a loss of faith in reason, progress, and international free trade, resulted in a new interest in intuition, spirituality, tradition, and national origins. The nation was no longer based on a shared interest of the citizens in the political and economic progress of the country; it was now increasingly seen as an organic community with common traditions and a shared past. In order to understand this national community, one had to study its “soul” and origins. Art had to be rooted in the nation and this could be done either by going to the ordinary people of the countryside, where the national spirit was assumed to be alive, or by studying the first expressions of the nation. In fact, this meant that the *Volksgeist* was not only a mysterious collective influence upon artists in the past, but was to be actively studied and incorporated into the work of living artists. Interestingly, this search for origins also led to a kind of dissolution of the existing national boundaries. Authors recognized both that there was a wide cultural diversity within existing nation-states—arguing for example that coastal regions had a different regional *Volksgeist* than mountainous areas—and that cultural spheres did not stop at national boundaries. Here the impact of Darwin and Nietzsche, various racial theories, new developments in the field of linguistics, ethnology, and archaeology, and above all new geographical ideas from Friedrich Ratzel and Paul Vidal de la Blache, can be detected (Arrechea Miguel 1993; DaCosta Kaufmann 2004a, 58–63).

A good example of this type of reasoning can be found in the German best-seller *Rembrandt als Erzieher* (Rembrandt as educator), which was published by the cultural critic Julius Langbehn (1890). According to him, Germany belonged to the same cultural sphere as Great Britain, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia. The great heroes of this wider Germanic culture were, according to him, Shakespeare and Rembrandt. At the same time, he distinguished various Germanic tribes, each with its own particularities, thus making room for significant regional differences, even within the German Empire. Artists had to look for inspiration to the great Germanic geniuses from the past, such as Rembrandt, and to the remnants of the original folk-culture of the countryside. It was clear that his book was also a reaction to the artistic and cultural dominance of the Latin peoples and, regarding artistic matters, to Germany’s archenemy France.

The distinction between a primitive but authentic art of a Germanic Northern Europe and a more civilized and superficial art of the Latin South was

also adopted by many of the German expressionists. The theoretical foundation was provided by the influential art historian Wilhelm Worringer, who in his *Formprobleme der Gotik* (1911) compared the transcendental, Gothic inclinations of the Nordic countries with a more realist and “emphatic” art of the Mediterranean peoples (Bushart 1990). At the same time, in Italy, Spain, and France a Latin or Mediterranean heritage was defined and defended by prominent intellectuals, such as Charles Maurras, José Ortega y Gasset, and Eugenio d’Ors, while artists such as Aristide Maillol and Giorgio de Chirico, as well as Catalan *noucentisme* architects and artists, tried to express a new Mediterranean classicism (Gowling and Mundy 1990; Jirat-Wasiutyński 2007). And in the East, artists as diverse as Alphonse Mucha, Nikolai Roerich, and Wassily Kandinsky showed their fascination for primitive Slav, Scythian, or Eurasian artistic traditions (Figs 2002, 355–431).

This search for origins also affected the rapidly growing community of professional art historians, although the majority continued their empirical studies of classical antiquity, the Italian Renaissance or the various national schools. Some scholars began a nationalist-inspired response against the dominance of the classical heritage. An early example of this reaction can be found in the work of Louis Courajod, who in 1887 became a professor in the newly founded *École du Louvre*. In his lectures on art history, he argued that Romanesque art was not a mere offspring of Roman and Greek art, but had clear Celtic, Byzantine, “barbaric,” and Arab roots as well (Courajod 1899–1903). More importantly, the Renaissance was not the result of a renewed interest in classical humanism that first came into existence in Italy and then spread to other European countries, but was born in France. According to Courajod, the origins of the Renaissance could be found in the “Nordic” realism and expressiveness of fourteenth-century French-Flemish sculpture. This naturalist and individualist art, inspired by the early Flemish school, was born at the Valois court in Paris. Unfortunately, this tradition was interrupted by the Hundred Years War, but it continued to thrive in Burgundy. Only during a third phase did it reach Italy, where this Nordic realism was mixed with themes from antiquity, after which it was exported again to the rest of Europe. According to Courajod, both classical and Italian Renaissance art were contrary to French cultural “instincts”; nonetheless, Italian artistic preferences had been imposed from the sixteenth century onwards. Partly inspired by Courajod’s lectures, interest in the French, Flemish, and also German primitives rapidly grew and resulted in ambitious exhibitions in Bruges (1902), Paris (1904) and Düsseldorf (1902 and 1904) (Ridderbos and Van Veen 1995; Passini 2012, 9–26 and 79–112).

German authors also began to attack the accepted views. In a voluminous study that was published in 1885, Henry Thode located the origins of the

Renaissance in the teachings of Francis of Assisi, and not in the rediscovery of classical antiquity. Moreover, in later works he presented Luther's Reformation as a direct continuation of the Renaissance (Passini 2012, 62–68). In his studies on Gothic architecture published around the turn of the century, Georg Dehio (1914) went even further and, while not trying to redefine the Renaissance, presented the evolution of German art as a parallel but independent development. He declared that the classical influences from Italy and the Mediterranean region did not conform to the German artistic predispositions. As a consequence, he defined Nordic late-Gothic architecture as an autochthonous tradition, which later evolved into an equally idiosyncratic Baroque style and was the product of "the same Nordic peoples that in the Middle Ages had created the Romanesque and Gothic styles" (Passini 2012, 168–80, quote in note 35).

The most ambitious attempt to rewrite art history along different geographical lines, while casting aside existing nation-states as the main frame of reference, was made by Josef Strzygowski, an Austrian scholar who centered his attention on those areas that had been peripheral to the discipline of art history until then. In 1901, he launched a frontal attack on the classicist legacy by publishing *Orient oder Rom*. In this book he argued that early Christian art did not have its main roots in Greece and Rome, but in Syria, Egypt, and Anatolia. Oriental influences, especially from a Hellenic, Coptic, and early Byzantine origin, were much more important for the development of medieval art in Europe (Strzygowski 1901). In subsequent years, he moved his attention further eastwards by publishing a large number of books and scholarly articles on the early artistic developments in Anatolia, Iran, Armenia, and Central Asia.

His strong anticlassicist preferences, his petulant personality, and his forceful rejection of the positivist philological tradition followed by most of his colleagues in favor of stylistic analysis based on close observation of artefacts made him a highly controversial figure. Nevertheless, in 1909 he was nominated to the prestigious chair of art history at the University of Vienna, although after much debate two chairs were created to pacify the intense feelings aroused by the nomination. In later years he also turned to Germanic, Nordic, and Slavic art, while connecting their decorative forms and construction techniques with the Near East and Central Asia. As a result, he changed the traditional South–North orientation, with Italy and Greece being the cradle of European civilization, into a new East–West axis, in which Germanic or Northern Europe became connected with the Middle East and Central Asia. Strzygowski's attack on classical humanism was strongly inspired by the increasingly popular ideas on the linguistic ties between the Indo-Germanic languages and by the more recent views on their origin in a mythic Aryan race.



However, this would only come to the surface more explicitly in the heated nationalist climate of World War I (Arrechea Miguel 1993; Marchand 1994; see also Marchand 2009 and Rampley 2013).

During the war, the bombarding of the Gothic cathedral of Reims in September 1914 by German troops was widely condemned as an act of vandalism but also ignited an international art historical debate that would polarize opinions. The French art historian Émile Mâle was among those who criticized this act as proof of German barbarism. In earlier publications, he appeared to share the anticlassicist ideas of Courajod, although he primarily saw late medieval art as a French invention and not as a generic Nordic one. In 1916, he began a series of studies on German art, which opened with this provocative conclusion: “In the sphere of arts, Germany has invented nothing” (Mâle 1917). He now clearly rejected any German role in the rise of Christian art and argued that early medieval Germanic decorations were of oriental origin, while the Romanesque and Gothic buildings were imitations of earlier French originals. In 1917 his articles were translated into German by the *Monatshefte für Kunstwissenschaft*, who also published the response of ten prominent specialists from the Central Powers. They obviously all defended German creativity and aesthetic originality (Passini 2012, 147–57; Lambourne 1999).

One could argue that these intellectual skirmishes were determined by the context of the war. However, Mâle did not change his views after 1918, and the Great War also seemed to have a radicalizing influence on other art historians. While before the war, French and German scholars could both defend a Nordic or Germanic heritage in order to subvert the artistic domination of the South, this was no longer an attractive option for French authors. At the same time, various German and Austrian art historians began to place more emphasis on the incompatibility of the Germanic and Latin heritage.

This was also the case with Strzygowski. Even more strongly than before, he rejected the traditional focus on the humanistic legacy of classical antiquity and the tendency to connect German or Germanic culture with Southern and Western Europe. Germans, according to him, were a Nordic people and, as Aryans, had more in common with their “tribal brothers” in Iran and India. However, the connection between the various Aryan peoples had been lost because of the intrusion of nomadic peoples, such as the Turks and the Slavs. As a result, the Germans had lost contact with their native roots and were increasingly distracted from the right path by the detrimental cultural influence of the Latin peoples (Strzygowski 1916, 1–2). He also rejected the almost exclusive focus of mainstream art historians on figurative art and monumental stone architecture by arguing that this definition of high art excluded the constructions and decorations of the Nordic countries, which were mostly constructed from brick, wood, and other perishable materials, and of the no-

madic peoples, which primarily consisted of tapestries and other decorative objects (Strzygowski 1917, 145–49; 1928, 1–5). Their art was seen as artisanal work; this view thus excluded vast segments of humanity from the history of art. Although his outlook was cosmopolitan and his interest in noncanonical art was unique, from early on he was a fierce nationalist; he expressed himself in anti-Semitic terms and toward the end of his life would openly support the Nazi regime (DaCosta Kaufmann 2004a, 70–73).

The main opponent of Strzygowski in France was Henri Focillon, who in 1924 succeeded Mâle as professor of medieval art at the Sorbonne. In the context of the war, Focillon had already written a book in which he dismissed German art since 1870 as bloated and vulgar. Shortly after the fighting ended, he also published his views on the origins of French medieval art. In a way similar to Courajod, he presented it as a mixture of Celtic, Roman, and Germanic influences, although now the contribution of the Germanic Franks was minimized. In the following years, he further developed his views on the origins of medieval art. Already in the introduction of his book on Romanesque sculpture, published in 1930, he implicitly rejected Strzygowski's interpretation of the presumably oriental and Germanic origins of medieval art. According to him, this was an autonomous art form that did not have its origin in Rome or the Orient, but was a creation of the West. In 1934, in the context of the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation of the League of Nations, he even engaged in a public exchange of letters with Strzygowski (Focillon et al. 1935) in which he defended his interpretation of Western Europe as the cradle of medieval art, while four years later this crystallized in the publication of his *Art d'Occident. Le Moyen Âge roman et gothique*. In this book, he presented medieval art as the original creation of an essentially secular, rational, and urban middle-class culture of Western Europe, in which France played a pivotal role. He thus located the origin of medieval art firmly in the West, while presenting France as the source and guide of an essentially modern Western civilization (Arrechea Miguel 1993; Passini 2012, 204 and 228–50).

As we have seen, in these debates various art regions were defined, the main division being the opposition between a Latin, classical, or Mediterranean South, a Germanic North, and a Slavonic or Byzantine East. In general, art historians defended the importance of their own part of Europe, emphasizing especially the pivotal role of their own country. This internal regionalization largely followed the linguistic borders between a Germanic, a Romance and, to a lesser extent, a Slavic Europe. Nevertheless, after World War I, in which the confrontation between the Central and the Allied Powers—at least from the French perspective—was largely framed as one between barbarity and civilization, it was difficult for French authors to continue in this vein. While

Strzygowski radicalized his views by seeing Nordic, Germanic Europe as part of a wider Eurasian “Aryan” cultural sphere, Focillon now explicitly defended the West as the cradle of European civilization.

Courajod, Strzygowski, and Focillon were not the only art historians who tried to develop an alternative geography of art. Others, such as Kurt Gerstenberg, Johnny Roosval, Hermann Aubin, and André Grabar, did the same. The broader cultural spheres identified by these authors during the interwar period were either based on primitive tribes, racial ideas, the affinity between different peoples and their respective popular spirits, or geographical influences. These underlying causes were presumed to have determined the artistic creations of the people living in these areas, and, as a consequence, in the view of these writers living artists should try to embody them in their creations. Thus, in publications such as *Den Baltiska Nordens Kyrkor* (The churches of the Baltic North; 1924) Roosval developed the notion of a Baltic artistic sphere. Authors such as Jean-Auguste Bratais, Arthur Kingsley Porter, Josep Puig i Cadafalch, and Focillon studied the diffusion of Romanesque and Gothic forms in Southwestern Europe in which they underlined the role of pilgrimage routes, while the Russian émigré Grabar focused on Byzantine and Balkan art. However, most of the writings on artistic geography dealt with substate regions, such as the Rhineland, Bohemia, or Roussillon, rather than large continental regions. That this interest in artistic geography was a truly European phenomenon became clear during the Thirteenth International Congress of Art Historians, which was held in Stockholm in 1933. The theme was the origin of national styles in art, and racialist and nationalist ideas were voiced by a large number of representatives from across the continent (Roosval 1933; DaCosta Kaufmann 2004a, 62–67).<sup>2</sup>

That this was not always a harmless undertaking becomes manifest in the case of the *Ostforschung*, which was used by the Nazi regime to underpin its claims to *Lebensraum* (living space) in Eastern Europe. Until the 1930s, art historians in East Central Europe had either studied traditional subjects, such as the Italian Renaissance or classical art, or local topics. In the latter case, one of the main questions had been the national attribution of specific artists or art works. German and Austrian scholars generally claimed that most artistic highlights had been created by German artists, for German patrons, or were imitations of German examples. Germans had brought civilization to these barbaric areas and, as a consequence, Eastern Europe clearly belonged to their cultural sphere. Obviously, these ideas were contradicted by art historians from the new Eastern European countries. However, these debates would have concrete consequences during World War II. Thus, prominent art historians, such as Dagobert Frey, justified German expansion to the east, while collaborating with the Nazi regime to secure and protect supposedly

German patrimony in the wake of the Wehrmacht's advance (Labuda 1993, 1–17; Born, Janatková and Labuda 2004).

## Modernist Dominance

Although a reference to the artist's nationality had become ubiquitous during the nineteenth century, there was also a more formal tendency within art history that did not primarily understand art as an organic expression of the nation's collective spirit, but preferred to study it as the product of an individual artist, while almost entirely ignoring geographical aspects. Giovanni Morelli, for example, embodied nineteenth-century connoisseurship by focusing on the hands and ears of the depicted persons to identify individual authorship. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, his formal approach was systematized and articulated in a more scientific idiom by prominent art historians, such as Berenson, Wölfflin, Wickhoff, and Riegl. This formal analysis of art became particularly associated with the influential Vienna School of Art History, in which Strzygowski remained something of an outsider. At about the same time, Aby Warburg introduced the method of iconology, which strictly focused on the interpretation of the content of images (Kultermann 1990).

The formal approach was very much connected to the new emphasis on the autonomy of art by the new avant-garde movements and by those art critics that favored them. This, for instance, was the case with Roger Fry and Clive Bell, both part of the Bloomsbury group. In his book *Art* published in 1914, Bell argued that good art did not depend on time and place (Gamboni 2005, 173–203). In Germany, there also was a strong cosmopolitan reaction against the nationalistic and deterministic influences on contemporary art. This was best exemplified by the famous critic Julius Meier-Graefe, according to whom art should be totally independent from politics and nationality. As early as 1904 he published his *Entwicklungsgeschichte der moderne Kunst* (The developmental history of modern art), in which he based his judgments primarily on formal criteria. In this seminal book, he sketched the rise of modern art, focusing especially on those artistic geniuses he considered most influential: Manet, Renoir, Degas, and Cézanne. Only painterly qualities mattered to him, not nationality. In this way, he defined a new canon of modern art in which French impressionism had a pivotal role (Storm 2008; Schäfer 2012).

Nonetheless, most of the pioneers of a formal approach to art history still firmly believed in the existence and impact of national differences. Heinrich Wölfflin's major art historical treatise, *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe* (1915), ended with a section on "national characters," in which he argued that within the unity of Western art different "national types" existed, and that these national sensibilities remained remarkably constant over time. Moreover, he also

concluded that the center of gravity of European art has shifted from Italy to the “Germanic North” (see also Passini 2012, 113–41). Even Meier-Graefe routinely framed artists according to nationality, and the second edition of the *Entwicklungsgeschichte* (1914–15) ended with a short, geographically ordered overview of recent tendencies. In it he defined Southern Europe as drowsy, while the North had only produced Edvard Munch, and the West had become artificial; the East, for its part, would not produce a Russian Rembrandt or Cézanne. Thus, salvation could only come from German art, which had remained true to itself, while Berlin had become the “kitchen of new formulas” (Meier-Graefe 1987, 680–93).

After World War I, the new formal approach to art became more widely accepted. This was directly related to the growing impact of the various new avant-garde movements, such as cubism, expressionism, futurism, dada, constructivism, surrealism, and abstract art. Although in general they focused on formal renewal, sometimes they also expressed a clear longing for national rebirth. This was especially evident in the case of German expressionism, Italian futurism, and the lesser known South-Slavic zenitism. In architecture, a similar movement was visible thanks to the rise of the International Style, with Le Corbusier as its boisterous propagandist. At the same time, it became increasingly common to show art on white, neutral walls, creating a kind of decontextualized “white cube” (Gamboni 2005, 178–81). After 1945, this view became hegemonic, mainly because the rival nationalist interpretation of authors such as Langbehn, Maurras, and Strzygowski had become tainted because of its association with fascism and Nazism.

The result was that, between about 1945 and 1980, geography was deemed irrelevant in most overviews of nineteenth- and twentieth-century art, which was now generally presented as the triumphal march of avant-garde modernism. This, in fact, also meant that peripheral artists who did not have a crucial role in this story of artistic progress were largely ignored. The history of art, thus, became the story of the successive avant-garde movements in the heart of Western Europe (France, Germany, and a few important innovative artists from neighboring countries), and, after 1945, also the United States. For earlier periods, the traditional focus on classical art and the high art of the West was restored and this would only change toward the end of the twentieth century.

The new modernist interpretation was best exemplified by Ernst Gombrich, who after his arrival in London in 1936 obtained a position at the Warburg Institute. In 1950, he presented his overview of artistic developments, starting with the famous statement “There really is no such thing as Art. There are only artists.” Like Meier-Graefe, Fry, and others, he presented the history of art as a succession of individual geniuses or masterpieces, which he

even dared call *The Story of Art*. Although he rejected a simplistic interpretation of the artistic past in terms of progress, he clearly valued originality and artistic innovation, and he structured his story as a succession of generations with different artistic ideals (Gombrich 1978, 1–4). Although Islamic and Chinese art were dealt with between classical antiquity and the European Middle Ages, the rest of the world only appeared in the first two chapters before the “great awakening” of Greek art, where history really seemed to begin.

Whereas historians of an earlier generation had been preoccupied with the (national) origins of art, especially in medieval times, Gombrich dealt with these issues in a factual way, indicating, for example, that while Romanesque churches adopted certain aspects of Roman constructions, such as the ground plan, the end result differed greatly from their classical predecessors. The Crusades fostered contacts with the Orient, and the sacred art of Byzantium was imitated in the West. But, and here the author clearly showed his Eurocentrism, “there is one respect in which Western Europe always differed profoundly from the East. In the East these styles lasted for thousands of years, and there seemed no reason why they should change. The West never knew this immobility. It was always restless, groping for new solutions and new ideas” (Gombrich 1978, 126, 133, and quote on 137).

Thus, although Gombrich was opposed to nationalism, he clearly advocated a Eurocentric interpretation of the history of art and uncritically accepted existing national boundaries as the main geographical framework to classify the past. As a result, almost 90 percent of the book dealt with the art of Southern and Western Europe, which from the later Middle Ages onwards was largely discussed by country. Only when dealing with the Renaissance outside of Italy did he cluster artists from various countries together by speaking of “northern artists.” Eastern Europe only entered the picture twice. First, when writing about the late medieval period, Gombrich (1978, 162–211) briefly mentioned the flowering of the arts in Prague at the court of Charles IV of Bohemia; second, he discussed the famous Veit Stoss altar in Cracow, although he maintained that its maker “lived for the greater part of his life in Nuremberg in Germany.” His discussion of the rise of modern art in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is entirely focused on Western Europe and the United States. From the periphery, only Munch, Chagall, and Kandinsky are mentioned, thus implicitly suggesting that Scandinavia and Eastern Europe did not partake in the progressive march of Western civilization. Other textbooks took a similar approach; not only those in the English language, but also those published in German, French, Italian, Spanish, and other West-European languages. Even books purporting to provide a global history were only slightly less biased. Obviously *A World History of Art*, by Hugh Honour and John Fleming (1982), paid considerably more attention

to non-Western art, but the Eurocentric approach was still visible in chapter titles such as “Wider Horizons,” “Eastern Traditions” and “Primitive Alternatives,” while the main body of the book still dealt with the rise and heydays of classical art in Southern Europe, and the rise of modernity in the West (see also Nelson 1997).

## **Postmodern Diversity**

From about the 1970s onwards, the existing interpretation of art history began to be criticized as being predominantly male, white, heterosexual, and elitist. Shortly afterwards, postmodern authors also began to criticize the excessive focus on Western Europe, high art, and modernism. By fundamentally questioning the entire concept of “progress,” they undermined the canonical story of the rise of modern art. Artists that did not adhere to the latest avant-garde trends, worked in more neglected fields such as the decorative arts, design, or photography, or those that lived in peripheral parts of the world now began to attract attention (Belting, Buddensieg, and Weibel 2013; Rampley et al. 2012). This is clear in the new interest in art from the more peripheral parts of Europe, a tendency reinforced by the end of the Cold War. On the one hand this resulted in a new orientation to the national past, especially in the new countries that came into existence after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. On the other hand, it led to the rethinking of established categories and divisions.

Recently, scholars also began to question the national framing of the artistic past. Thus, Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann (2004a, 107–54; 2004b, 51–67) has shown how the dominant national frame has profoundly affected the art historian’s view of the past. By focusing, for example, on seventeenth-century Dutch painters and sculptors in Central Europe, he shows how these artists, who generally followed the Baroque taste of their patrons, did not fit into the canon of Dutch art, and thus were not included in any overview of artistic developments in the Netherlands. Because they were foreigners, they generally are also ignored by Austrian, Czechoslovak, Polish, and Hungarian art histories. Moreover, since art historians generally concentrated on painting to the detriment of the prestigious and costlier fields of architecture and sculpture—which were also produced by Dutch artists, especially those who worked abroad—we have in general a very biased view of Dutch art (see also Storm 2015).

Both the postmodern undermining of the canon of modern art and the recent questioning of established national frontiers have increased interest in larger regions. This becomes clear by looking at art from the Nordic countries (although sometimes the adjective Scandinavian is preferred), which together

with East Central Europe is probably the area one might say has profited most from the new developments. Thus, in 1982 a first exposition of Nordic art, titled *Northern Light: Realism and Symbolism in Scandinavian Painting, 1880–1910*, was organized in New York by the American art historian Kirk Varnedoe. This has been followed by a large number of exhibitions and books on Nordic art and design, mainly outside the Nordic countries (Burch 2010). The more commercially oriented shows, in particular, gave a kind of touristic image of the region, selecting those artistic expressions that were deemed characteristic, such as paintings that depicted the forests and lakes bathed in a northern light, or simple, bright, and functionalist design.

Interestingly, while during the early twentieth century regionalization was mainly an internal affair, this time it is primarily externally driven. Museums and art historians outside of these regions want to give an overview of the art of various European countries, and they do this by applying regional labels, such as Nordic, Baltic, or Eastern European. Nevertheless, in the case of Nordic art, there was also a lingering local interest that even found an institutionalized expression in the Nordic Council, which was founded in 1952 by Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Iceland, and Finland. It created prizes for literature (1962), music (1968) and film (1995). The Carnegie Foundation also instituted an award “to promote Nordic contemporary painting” in 1998. Moreover, in 1984 a Nordic Committee for Art History was founded. Since 2005 there has been a joint Nordic research organization, which also funds a Nordic Network on Visual Studies (Burch 2010; Karlholm, Christensen, and Rampley 2012, 421–39). This international scientific infrastructure will probably produce more sustained interest in Nordic topics.

A similar story can be told about East Central Europe and the Balkans. As in other regions, most art historical studies took the (new) nation-state as their main geographical frame of reference, and many scholars are currently engaged in constructing a suitable national artistic past (Born, Janatková, and Labuda 2004; Rampley et al. 2012). Eastern European art had not received much attention elsewhere. Before 1945, the region was either studied as part of a broad German cultural sphere or seen as a provincial area, which was only of interest for a few exceptional artists. Only in the late 1960s and 1970s did international art historical conferences in Poland, Hungary, and Austria begin to pay more systematic attention to the artistic developments in the region. This resulted in the publication of major studies, such as Jan Białostocki's (1975) *The Art of the Renaissance in Eastern Europe: Hungary, Bohemia, Poland*.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, this small stream grew into a great river. Nevertheless, the borders of the region are not very clearly defined and switch, according to time period and theme, from a strict focus on the Austrian Em-



pire to a much broader conception including parts of Germany, Russia, and the Balkans. Moreover, there was much debate over the right label: should East Central Europe or “the New Europe” not be preferred over the Cold War designation Eastern Europe? Several institutes, such as the International Cultural Center in Cracow and the Center for the History and Culture of East Central Europe in Leipzig, actively organize meetings and research projects on East Central European art, such as *Central Europe: Art Centers and Provinces* (1994), *Vernacular Art in Central Europe* (1997), and *The Jagiello Dynasty in the Art and Culture of Central Europe* (2000–04). Although some ambitious studies are published inside the region, such as Piotr Piotrowski’s (2009) *In the Shadow of Yalta*, most overviews are produced elsewhere (DaCosta Kaufmann 1995; Mansbach 1998; Clegg 2006). The same applies to art exhibitions: as early as 1994, the Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle in Bonn organized *Europa, Europa: The Century of Avant-Garde in Central and Eastern Europe*; in 2000, the Parisian Jeu de Paume mounted an exhibition on *L’Autre moitié de l’Europe*; while in 2002, the Los Angeles County Museum showed *Central European Avant-Gardes: Exchange and Transformation, 1910–1930* (Labuda 2010; Piotrowski 2005, 153–73). As a consequence, external regionalization, wavering between a very eclectic postmodern diversity and more homogeneous cliché images, seems at least as important as internal initiatives.

Partly as a consequence of the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia, it became more in vogue as well to use the Balkans in order to categorize the artistic products from the region. Thus, in 2003 Harald Szeemann organized an exhibition titled *Blood and Honey: The Future is in the Balkans* at the Essl Museum in Klosterneuburg, Austria, in which he implicitly presented the Balkans as a region of profound contradictions. At the same time, René Block showed *In the Gorges of the Balkans* in Kassel to deconstruct existing prejudices about the region (Voinea 2007). Meanwhile, intellectuals discussed the Othering of the region, whether the Balkans should be seen as an in-between space that connected the West with the East, or if it should be treated just as any other region with talented artists that produce works of art in an increasingly globalized world (Avgita and Steyn 2007).

Thus, while “Nordic” seems to be a widely accepted label used for branding and regional cooperation, the use of “Eastern Europe” or “the Balkans” seems to be more contested and sometimes caused heated debates. Thus, one of the most ambitious attempts to map East Central European modernism, Steven Mansbach’s (1998) *Modern Art in Eastern Europe: From the Baltic to the Balkans, ca. 1890–1939*, received both praise and criticism. His broad survey of avant-garde artists, ordered by post-1918 or even post-1995 nation-states, has been interpreted as a justified eastward extension of the modernist canon. Some critics, however, accused him of “projecting the Iron

Curtain boundaries” onto the past by assembling the diverse modernist artists from these countries into a separate Eastern European category. James Elkin even argued that by constantly comparing artists from the East with their established modernist sources of inspiration from the West, Mansbach implicitly Orientalized them as parochial, repetitive, and inferior (Elkins 2000; Murawska-Muthesius 2004: 39–40). Since these regional categorizations are nowadays seen as constructions, they can easily be deconstructed as well.

The same process of rather pragmatic external regionalization, combined with an internal susceptibility for exoticizing stereotypes, also seems at work in other regions, such as the Baltic and the Mediterranean. However, Iberia, Southern Europe, and particularly Western Europe do not seem to attract any particular attention. Thanks to postmodern critiques, Western Europe is no longer identified with civilization (or art) *per se*. However, it still is generally referred to as “the West” or as part of a still largely hegemonic “Western World.” Another consequence of the new critical attitude is that attempts to essentialize regional categories are now increasingly frowned upon, at least within academic milieus. At the same time, region branding—for instance, to sell entrance tickets for an exposition—clearly favors the use of cliché images; but often these are used with a postmodern ironic twist.

## Conclusion

From the beginning of the nineteenth century, a historicist approach, combined with a subdivision into national schools, became dominant in art history and still largely determines how art works are arranged in museums and at art exhibitions. But although the nation-state was and remains the main geographical boundary in art history, other geographical subdivisions have been made as well. Starting around the 1890s, mesoregions and substate regions were also used to classify art. In a search for origins, broader European regions, racial categories and civilizations were utilized, especially for pleas to provide contemporary art with new authentic roots in a wider collective identity. In reaction to these often deterministic views, a new cosmopolitan modernist interpretation came to the fore, which clearly focused on the high art of Southern and Western Europe from antiquity until the eighteenth century, while narrowing the history of modern art down to the rise of the avant-garde in Western Europe. Since the 1980s, thanks to postmodernism and the end of the political division of Europe into East and West, there seems to be more attention given to regional diversity, and regions are again used to classify art, although now without the determinist and organic views that accompanied them in the past.

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## Notes

1. This chapter has profited from valuable suggestions by Wessel Krul, Kitty Zijlmans and William McNeil.
2. For substate regions see also Storm 2010.

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