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ALFRED WOLTMANN AND THE HISTORY OF CONTEMPORARY ART

The protagonist of the present paper makes his appearance in Czech art historiography primarily in connection with the public scandal he provoked in the autumn of 1876. In his lecture on the subject of *German Art in Prague*, Woltmann proclaimed that the aesthetic character of the Bohemian capital was almost exclusively the work of German artists and the result of German cultural influences. His statements sparked brawls between Czech and German university students and even street riots that had to be quelled by the police. No less serious were the effects that the lecture had on art-historical discourse. By describing Czech artistic culture as derivative and provincial, Woltmann placed it in a problematic situation, the resolution of which became one of the central topics of Czech art history. In opposition to his conclusions, which purported to demonstrate the inferiority of the Slavic tribe, Czech art scholarship worked to assemble an image of spiritual and material culture that could successfully challenge its German, or even Italian or French, counterparts. Such a model of historical narrative was, understandably, difficult to defend. Hence it comes as no surprise that until very recently, Woltmann was, in Czech historiography, portrayed negatively or completely ignored.¹

A PIONEER OF THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD IN ART HISTORY – 150 YEARS AGO

It was in 1873 that Alfred Woltmann (1841–1880) received the position of a full professorship of art history at the

university of Prague.² Prior to this appointment, he had achieved a reputation as one of the most capable and active representatives of this discipline from the younger generation. He had studied art history at the universities of Berlin, Munich, and Breslau, while deepening his erudition through study trips to London, Paris, the Netherlands, and Italy. From 1868 he had a position at the Polytechnic in Karlsruhe. He entered the awareness of the scholarly community quite early thanks to his two-volume monograph on Hans Holbein the Younger, a development of the topic of his dissertation from 1863.³ Dedicated to an artist whose popularity in Germany at the time matched that of Albrecht Dürer, this publication formed a significant contribution toward the shaping of a new, positivistic history of art. Though Woltmann did commit several errors in it, which he had to correct in the second edition, his work remains today one of the foundations for research concerning Holbein. Anton Springer described it as ‘the best biography hitherto written about a German artist’.⁴ Woltmann also participated in the well-known congress that discussed the question of the authenticity of the two versions of Holbein’s *Madonna of the Burgermeister Meyer*. The full significance that this discussion had for formulating art history as an autonomous discipline, with its

¹ A. WOLTMANN, *Deutsche Kunst in Prag*, Leipzig 1877. See J. VYBÍRAL, ‘What Is “Czech” in Art in Bohemia? Alfred Woltmann and defensive mechanisms of Czech artistic historiography’, *Kunstchronik*, 59, 2006, pp. 1–7.

² ‘Amtlicher Theil’, *Wiener Zeitung*, 1, 1873, p. 1; ‘Professoren und Lehrer-Ernennungen’, *Die Presse*, 1, 1873, Abendblatt, p. 2. See J. HORÁČEK, ‘Alfred Woltmann’, in *Století ústavu pro dějiny umění na Filozofické fakultě Univerzity Karlovy*, eds R. BIEGEL, R. PRAHL, J. BACHTÍK, Praha 2020, pp. 68–70.

³ A. WOLTMANN, *Holbein und seine Zeit*, Leipzig 1866 and 1868; second edition 1874 and 1876; published in English as *Holbein and His Time*, transl. F. E. Burnet, London 1872.

⁴ A. SPRINGER, ‘Hans Holbein und sein neuester Biograph’, *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst*, 2, 1867, pp. 63–69, here pp. 63–64 (die beste Biographie, die bisher über einen deutschen Künstler geschrieben wurde).

own methodology and objective findings, was already established in 1966 by Udo Kultermann.⁵ Yet we should also recall Woltmann's contribution to the first international congress of art historians, held in Vienna in September 1873, which should be regarded as another major step in this process. It was there that Woltmann delivered one of the main addresses, on the topic of administering museum collections and conserving art objects.⁶

From the German standpoint, Woltmann's pedagogic activity in Prague was exceptionally successful: 'He could stimulate interest in art and artistic research more powerfully than anyone before him in Prague; during his Collegium Publicum, the hall could scarcely hold the crowd of listeners who breathlessly followed the words of the respected master.'⁷ In his four years in the capital of Bohemia, Woltmann managed to publish four highly regarded books and, along with his lecturing at the university, he also investigated the artworks in Prague's collections and more generally medieval Bohemian art. He performed a thorough examination of the picture gallery of Prague Castle, where despite many years of pillaging and removal of artworks to the imperial capital Vienna, he found many works of 'major artistic value'.⁸ In turn, he published an analysis of 150 pictures classified into 'national' schools in the journal of the Viennese monuments commission. This admirable research activity, to be sure, had certain unfortunate consequences, since twenty-one of the most valuable works were shipped to the Vienna Belvedere, sparking vociferous disagreement from Czech patriots.⁹ Woltmann devoted particular attention to the *Madonna of the Rosary* by Albrecht Dürer, the altar painting from St. Vitus's Cathe-

dral *St. Luke Painting the Virgin* by Jan Gossaert called Mabuse, and the paintings by Peter Paul Rubens from the Augustinian church of St. Thomas.¹⁰ Yet, as a pupil and follower of Gustav Friedrich Waagen, he took the greatest interest in the medieval book illumination in Bohemian collections. In his study from the end of 1876, he presented the results of his examination of six codices, among them the greatest treasures from the library of the National Museum: *Mariale Arnesti* from the first Prague archbishop, *Liber viaticus* of Johannes Noviforensis (Jan ze Středy), and the renowned 13th-c. Latin glossary *Mater Verborum*. These manuscripts contained marginalia with certain Slavic names, alleged to offer confirmation of their Czech provenience. Woltmann, from his thoroughgoing research, nonetheless established that these inscriptions were forgeries, thus removing from the history of Bohemian art several mythical illuminators: specifically, *Bohuss Lutomericensis* (Bohuš z Litoměřic), *Sbisco de Trotina* (Zbyšek z Trotiny), *Petrus Brzuchaty* and the painter *Miroslav* (Miroslav). In parallel, he used comparative stylistic analysis of lettering and pictorial depictions, concentrating on physiognomic details, bodily posture, folds of drapery, painterly technique and colouring, to perform a partial re-dating of these manuscripts and eliminating the possibility of their Bohemian origin.¹¹ This study clearly indicates how Woltmann imagined the methodological status of his discipline as a 'science': striving toward an empirical history of art grounded in the thorough study of written sources and detailed examination of actual artworks, where the connoisseurship relied on comparative stylistic analysis.

This scholarly activity, which also included the questioning of the authenticity of the Králův Dvůr and Zelená Hora manuscripts – themselves later confirmed to be forgeries of the early 19th c. – was perceived as another manifestation of hostility toward the Czech nation, and Woltmann became *persona non grata* among the Czechs. His departure from a Prague he had increasingly come to dislike, however, only became possible with his appointment to the university in Strasburg in the summer of 1878. His most significant work, published after he left Prague, consisted of the chapters on medieval painting in the first

⁵ U. KULTERMANN, *Geschichte der Kunstgeschichte. Der Weg einer Wissenschaft*, Wien–Düsseldorf 1966, pp. 251–262. O. BÄTSCHMANN, 'Der Holbein-Streit: Eine Krise der Kunstgeschichte', *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen*, 38, 1996, pp. 87–100; P. GRIENER, 'Alfred Woltmann and the Holbein dispute, 1863–1871', *Studies in the history of art*, 60, 2001, pp. 211–225; see H. LOCHER, *Kunstgeschichte als historische Theorie der Kunst 1750–1950*, München 2010, p. 48.

⁶ R. EITELBERGER, 'Die Resultate des ersten internationalen kunstwissenschaftlichen Congresses in Wien', *Mittheilungen der kaiserl. königl. Central-Commission zur Erforschung und Erhaltung der Baudenkmale*, 19, 1874, pp. 40–45. See H. DILLY, *Kunstgeschichte als Institution*, Frankfurt am Main 1979, pp. 161–172.

⁷ 'Prof. Dr. Alfred Woltmann', *Montags-Revue aus Böhmen*, 16. 2. 1880, p. 12 (Er wußte das Interesse für Kunst und Kunstforschung so mächtig zu beleben, wie Niemand vor ihm in Prag; in seinem Collegium publicum konnte der Saal kaum die Menge der Zuhörer fassen, die athemlos den Worten des verehrten Meisters lauschten).

⁸ A. WOLTMANN, 'Die Gemäldesammlung in der Kaiserlichen Burg zu Prag', *Mittheilungen der kaiserl. königl. Central-Commission zur Erforschung und Erhaltung der Baudenkmale*, Neue Folge, 3, 1877, pp. 25–50 (von erheblichem Kunstwerth).

⁹ 'Nový kus kulturní činnosti prof. Woltmanna', *Národní listy*, 3. 5. 1877, p. 3.

¹⁰ A. WOLTMANN, 'Ein Gemälde von P. P. Rubens in Prag', *Mittheilungen der kaiserl. königl. Central-Commission zur Erforschung und Erhaltung der Baudenkmale*, Neue Folge, 2, 1876, pp. 77–80; idem, 'Dürer und Mabuse in Prag', in idem, *Aus vier Jahrhunderten niederländisch-deutscher Kunstgeschichte*, Berlin 1878, pp. 28–48. See: 'Concordia. Die öffentlichen Vorträge', *Prager Abendblatt*, 28. 10. 1875, p. 3; 'Rubens der Prager Thomas-Kirche', *Politik*, 19. 10. 1876, p. 4.

¹¹ A. WOLTMANN, 'Zur Geschichte der böhmischen Miniaturmalerei', *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft*, 2, 1879, pp. 1–24; idem, 'Die tschechischen Fälschungen', *ibidem*, pp. 138–140. See J. KVĚT, 'Falsa v iluminovaných rukopisech knihovny Národního musea v Praze', *Národní listy*, 12. 6. 1927, p. 1.

volume of *Geschichte der Malerei*, the series that he edited in collaboration with Karl Woermann.¹² Yet the eight hundred pages of Woltmann's text, unfortunately, remained only a fragment, since the author, suffering from severe respiratory illness, died in February 1880.¹³

'PAINTING AND SCULPTURE IN THE HIGH STYLE'

Woltmann was not one of those art historians 'who fall short of breath in the sharp air of the present and, as a result, prefer to retreat to the past as to a peaceful island, there to devote themselves to the undisturbed exaltation of the beauty gained in the past,' as this category of academic historians was described by Wilhelm Lübke.¹⁴ Even during his early years as a *Privatdozent* at the university in Berlin, he organised two cycles of popular lectures on the art of the immediate present. In February and March 1864, the topic was the architecture of Berlin, and two years later he prepared six talks on contemporary art. Subsequently, in Strasburg he made German and French art of the 19th c. the topic of one of his university courses.¹⁵ At the same time, he published in German newspapers and magazines, essentially on an ongoing basis, reviews and notifications from exhibitions and commentaries on current events in the artistic scene.

His preferred artists were the Nazarene painters and their predecessors, primarily Asmus Jacob Carstens, Friedrich Overbeck, Peter Cornelius, and Carl Rahl. For discussing their work, Woltmann deployed a Winckelmann-influenced terminology, such as art of a 'high' or 'strict' style. The excellent formal qualities of the Nazarenes embodied for him not the 'old Germanic' style admired by the Romantics, but instead a respect for the normative ideal of beauty in the spirit of the classical



1. Peter Cornelius School (Jakob Götzenberger), *Madonna and Child with Parrot*, 1823 (engraving by Th. Langer). Phot. after: *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst* 3, 1868

tradition. It was classicism that, in his conviction, aided first German literature and then German art in extricating itself from the crisis of the latter part of the 18th c. Woltmann did not call for a literal imitation of antiquity, but instead for the creative apprehension of its spirit, which would allow artists to reach 'toward a new, autonomous grasp of nature'.¹⁶ The classical canon, in his view, implied a sense for calm, harmony, and above all the balanced relation between the semantic and formal aspects. Antiquity, in short, 'as its founding principle announced the congruence of content and form'.¹⁷ From this position, Woltmann disapproved, for instance, of the mixing of symbolic or allegorical motifs with real ones, yet refused even more forcefully, in the spirit of Lessing's aesthetics, literalness in pictorial compositions. Though the classical erudition of this era relied primarily on texts, he held that the fine arts should speak in their own, non-derivative language. 'Not communication, but depiction is the essence of the picture', he declared, stressing the visual character of the

¹² *Geschichte der Malerei*, vol. 1: *Die Malerei des Alterthums. Die Malerei des Mittelalters*, ed. A. WOLTMANN, Leipzig 1879; *Geschichte der Malerei*, vol. 2: *Die Malerei der Renaissance*, eds A. WOLTMANN, K. WOERMANN, Leipzig 1882.

¹³ B. MEYER, 'Alfred Woltmann', *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst*, 15, 1880, pp. 193-200, 242-250 and 301-315; M. THAUSING, 'Alfred Woltmann', *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft*, 3, 1880, pp. 357-360; A. STERN, 'Woltmann, Alfred', in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 44, Leipzig 1898, pp. 185-188.

¹⁴ W. LÜBKE, 'Die heutige Kunst und die Kunstwissenschaft', *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst*, 1, 1866, pp. 3-13, here p. 3 (denen in der scharfen Luft der Gegenwart der Athem ausgeht, und die sich deshalb lieber in die Vergangenheit wie auf ein friedliches Eiland zurückziehen, um dort in müheloser Anschauung des einmal gesicherten Besitzes von Schönheit zu schwelgen).

¹⁵ 'Vermischte Kunstdachrichten', *Kunstchronik. Wochenschrift für Kunst und Kunstgewerbe*, 1, 1866, p. 16; 'Vorlesungen aus der Kunstgeschichte der Gegenwart', *National-Zeitung*, 31. 3. 1866, Beiblatt, p. 3; *Verzeichnis der Vorlesungen an der Kaiser-Wilhelms-Universität*, Straßburg 1879, p. 20.

¹⁶ A. WOLTMANN, 'Carstens', in idem, *Aus vier Jahrhunderten*, pp. 169-190, here p. 182 (as in note 10) (zu einer neuen, selbständigen Auffassung der Natur gelangte).

¹⁷ Idem, 'Das Rauch-Museum', *National-Zeitung*, 29. 3. 1866, pp. 1-3, here p. 2 (verkündet als Grundprincip Übereinstimmung von Inhalt und Form).



2. Friedrich Overbeck, *Christ Blessing the Children*, 1826 (engraving by Th. Langer). Phot. after: *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst* 6, 1871

language of painting, since ‘all that is depicted is a purely pictorial phenomenon.’¹⁸

In his favoured artists, which included alongside the previously mentioned names other Nazarenes such as Josef Führich, Bonaventura Genelli, Alfred Rethel and Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld, and the American sculptor Erastus Dow Palmer, Woltmann prized their mastery of composition and virtuosity of line, while tolerating the underestimation of the expressive potential of colour by these ‘German Romans’. The ‘high style’, which for him ‘strove to grasp the highest ideas with the most essential forms’,¹⁹ should nonetheless do more than awaken the aesthetic experience of ‘the beautiful’. For his admired Cornelius, the same principle held true as for Michelangelo: ‘The style of both is turned more toward the powerful and the sublime than toward the purely beautiful.’²⁰ Likewise,

¹⁸ Idem, ‘Die Einkehr in das Volksthum’, in idem, *Aus vier Jahrhunderten*, pp. 317–344, here p. 321 (as in note 10) (Nicht Mittheilung ist Sache des Bildes, sondern Darstellung); idem, ‘Carstens’, p. 185 (as in note 16) (alles Dargestellte ist zu reiner bildlicher Erscheinung).

¹⁹ Idem, ‘Peter von Cornelius’, *Unsere Zeit*, 1867, pp. 801–822, here p. 821 (Malerei großen Stils, welche die höchsten Ideen in bedeutenden Formen zu fassen strebt).

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 802 (der Stil beider mehr dem Gewaltigen und Erhabenen als dem rein Schönen zustrebt).

in the work of sculptor Christian Daniel Rauch he admired, much like Friedrich Schlegel among Rauch’s contemporaries, its ‘force and solemnity.’²¹ From these statements, we can infer that the beauty of classicist forms was for Woltmann hardly the sole criterion of his evaluating judgments; that an added condition for his positive reception of artworks was their intellectual depth and inclination towards higher, impersonal values. The sensual experience of art should, in the Enlightenment sense, form the means toward the refinement of morals.

‘He bore in himself that aesthetic ideality that Schiller, in the same era, strove to express in his philosophical poems, that same ideality that elevates the human above time and the bounds of earth towards the pure Olympian calm wherein all the contradictions of life find resolution,’ is how Woltmann expressed this quality in his lecture on Carstens.²²

²¹ Idem, ‘Das Rauch-Museum’, p. 3 (as in note 17) (Kraft und Ernst). See H. LOCHER, *Kunstgeschichte als historische*, p. 160 (as in note 5).

²² Idem, ‘Carstens’, p. 190 (as in note 16) (Er trug in sich jene ästhetische Idealität, welche Schiller gleichzeitig in seinen philosophischen Gedichten auszudrücken rang, jene Idealität, die den Menschen über die Zeit und die Schranken des Irdischen hinaushebt zur heiteren olympischen Ruhe, in der alle Widersprüche des Lebens versöhnt sind).

The aesthetics of Romanticism led Woltmann toward the praise of individuals of genius who succeeded in freeing themselves from tradition and in 'starting entirely from the beginning'.²³ Their approach to the world was elemental and intuitive, rooted in a collective cultural identity. Ensuing from this postulate was Woltmann's enthusiasm for the genre painting of Franz Defregger, as much as for the Classicist sculpted oeuvre of the autodidact Palmer, who was able to express 'the characteristic American life in its most original forms'.²⁴ By contrast, Woltmann condemned superficial effects and manners in art that merely served aesthetic whims and ever-changing fashion. The bearers of this unfortunate current were mostly those artists who allowed themselves to be carried away by the unhealthy spirit of the academic painting of the French Second Empire. In Germany, he held, the embodiment of these negative tendencies was the successful painter and director of the Munich Academy, Wilhelm von Kaulbach. He did not hesitate to subject Kaulbach's work in lectures or articles to severe critique, despite earning angered reactions from the artist's admirers.²⁵ For Woltmann, Kaulbach lacked 'that great, powerfully emotive soul, that untrammelled creative force which can express the most sublime thoughts in visible forms'.²⁶ The painters of this decadent tendency, for him, produce only 'hollow theatrical pathos, internally empty characters without spiritual life, all together nothing more than a garish operatic performance'.²⁷ As with Kaulbach, Woltmann equally rejected the colouristic bravura of Hans Makart, the dream-visions of Anselm Feuerbach, the exaggerated subjectivism of Gabriel Max, and the conventional literalness of the Düsseldorf School.

Woltmann's heroes were the non-academic 'great idealists', taking a stand against the materialism of the modern age.²⁸ The idealism of German artists, though, was to be understood – in contrast to Schlegel and the Romantic followers of Winckelmann – not as the accentuation of a mystical-religious content but in connection with the

awakening of a patriotic enthusiasm. As shown through the example of Cornelius, classical form should be 'suffused and led by a pure national spirit'.²⁹ The nation provided the basis for a healthy link between the individual and society, through which art could bring to reality its 'higher ideal efforts'.³⁰ As in the conception of another representative of German Idealism, Friedrich Schelling, the national idea for Woltmann formed the complementary project that would bring to a culmination the role of the classical ideal.³¹

National identity should be articulated through the aesthetic means of art; hence for the visualisation of German national qualities Woltmann compiled an entire catalogue of specific signs: 'True-heartedness, forthrightness, strength of will and feeling are equally as appropriate as harsh angularity, unwavering defiance, coarse crudity', all traits that for him were made visible in German genre painting.³² Presented as such, this national character could not be idealised according to classicist norms; honesty and morality were best captured by the methods of realistic painting. 'The realism that dominates here is not content with dazzling effects, the perfect appearance of physical existence, or the virtuosic painting of materials', so Woltmann announced his aesthetic ideal prefigured in the painting of the German Renaissance.³³ His preferred stylistic modality, not surprisingly, 'expresses its feelings realistically in the sense of Dürer and Holbein'.³⁴ And these impressive figures were the points of comparison for his own hero Cornelius: 'For us, though, the name Cornelius matches the idea of a national art in the present. Since the age of Dürer and Holbein, the German nation has possessed no painter who could, as Cornelius does, speak to it through art in its native tongue'.³⁵

²³ Idem, 'Peter von Cornelius', p. 802 (as in note 19) (ganz vom Anfang zu beginnen).

²⁴ Idem, 'Der Morgenstern Relief von Erastus Dow Palmer', *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst*, 2, 1867, pp. 261–265, here p. 264 (das charakteristisch-amerikanische Leben in seinen ursprünglichsten Formen). See: idem, 'Ein Bildhauer Nordamerik's', *National-Zeitung*, 24. 11. 1865, pp. 1–2.

²⁵ B. MEYER, 'Alfred Woltmann', p. 303 (as in note 13).

²⁶ A. WOLTMANN, 'Kaulbach', in idem, *Aus vier Jahrhunderten*, pp. 288–316 (as in note 10), here p. 301 (ihm fehlte jene große, mächtig empfindende Seele, jene unmittelbare Gestaltungskraft, welche die erhabendsten Gedanken in sichtbaren Formen ausprägen vermag).

²⁷ Idem, 'Einkehr in das Volksthum', p. 325 (as in note 18) (hohles Theaterpathos, innerlich leere Charaktere, die kein geistiges Leben durchdringt, das Ganze nur ein prunkvoller Opernaufzug).

²⁸ Idem, 'Peter von Cornelius', p. 801 (as in note 19) (die großen Idealisten).

²⁹ Ibidem, p. 803 (von echt nationalem Geist durchdrungen und geleitet).

³⁰ Idem, 'Die Anfänge der deutschen Renaissance', in *Aus vier Jahrhunderten*, pp. 1–27 (as in note 10), here p. 8 (das höhere ideale Streben).

³¹ R. PRANGE, *Die Geburt der Kunstgeschichte. Philosophische Ästhetik und empirische Wissenschaft*, Köln 2004, p. 71.

³² A. WOLTMANN, 'Die Einkehr in das Volksthum', p. 331 (as in note 18) (Treuherzigkeit, Redlichkeit, Kraft des Wollens und Empfindens sind ebenso wie rauhe Eckigkeit, zäher Trotz, derbe Tölpelhaftigkeit am Platze).

³³ Ibidem, p. 330 (Der Realismus, der hier waltet, begnügt sich nicht mit glänzenden Effecten, vollendetem Schein körperhafter Existenz und virtuoser Stoffmalerei).

³⁴ Ibidem.

³⁵ Idem, 'Peter von Cornelius', p. 801 (as in note 19) (Bei uns aber fällt der Name Cornelius zusammen mit dem Begriff einer nationalen Kunst in der Gegenwart. Seit Dürer und Holbein hatte das deutsche Volk keinen Maler besessen, der wie Cornelius seine Muttersprache in der Kunst mit ihm zu reden verstand).

'A BRIGHT, NOBLE, AND FESTIVE ARCHITECTURE'

As previously noted, in parallel with his lectures and articles on painting and sculpture, Woltmann also produced writings on the contemporary architecture of three German metropolises, which were completed during the 1860s, i.e., before his arrival in Prague. In 1863, he published a study on the architecture of Munich; in the following year produced a series of articles that he later collected into a book on Berlin's architecture, and in 1866 he addressed the current architecture of Vienna. Revealing his art-historical competence, these texts display the use of highly precise descriptive tools in the characterisation and features of individual buildings, no less than the ability to construct a strong developmental line out of such heterogeneous material. Nonetheless, Bruno Meyer in his obituary for Woltmann termed the book on Berlin 'undemanding' and stressed its not entirely scholarly character.³⁶ At first glance, it may well appear that the only commonality between these texts and the same author's historical studies is their polemical impetus. If in the articles on early artworks Woltmann's 'argumentative and combative nature' was revealed in his disputes with scholarly opponents, in these discussions the target of his attacks was the artist who failed to match the standards of his evaluative criteria.³⁷ Unlike his reflections on the fine arts, which with only a few exceptions addressed exemplary and admired creators, the texts on architecture stood far closer to the genre of criticism. Woltmann did not view contemporary architecture through the dispassionate gaze of an academic expert interpreting the intentions of the architects and their clients, but more as an implacable judge operating with normative postulates. He articulated an operative discourse that has many points in common with the approach of the later canonical architectural historians of the 20th c. Just as in his writings on painting and sculpture, his aesthetic sensitivity prized the classically balanced arrangement of different sections, the use of proportion, rhythm, or scale in buildings with respect to their surroundings and their material execution. The 'beauty of form' as he saw it emerged, once more, from the ideal of Winckelmann – he admired buildings that were 'bright, noble, and festive'.³⁸ Their ideal order would be far from all extremes: not austere, bare, or monotonous, yet equally refraining from any exaggeration or decorative excess. Woltmann also demanded a balance between aesthetic factors and the rational questions of function and construction. The salient symptom of the ailments

³⁶ B. MEYER, 'Alfred Woltmann', p. 304 (as in note 13).

³⁷ R. v. E[ITELBERGER], 'Alfred Woltmann', *Wiener Zeitung*, Beilage zur *Wiener Abendpost*, 19. 2. 1880, p. 1 (eine streitbare und kampfbereite Natur).

³⁸ A. WOLTMANN, 'Die Münchner Architektur dieses Jahrhunderts', *Deutsche Jahrbücher für Politik und Literatur*, 8, 1863, pp. 38–74 and 279–300, here p. 59 (licht, edel und festlich).

of modern architecture was usually described in his texts as 'excessive ostentation matched with a complete indifference towards the actual purpose'.³⁹ The classical unity of structure, function, and art for him lay close to Schlegel's model of organic form, developing from within and, through the significance of the exterior, providing a truthful testament to its hidden essence; as Woltmann noted, the 'capability for truly organic form-creation'.⁴⁰

Woltmann's aesthetic ideal was met in contemporary architecture by the work of Karl Friedrich Schinkel, which conjoined the classical canon of Grecian antiquity with specifically modern construction impulses. 'Without being an imitator of antiquity, he recognised in its forms the eternally beautiful and the eternally valid, which have their grounding above all in a simple, strict regularity' – such were Woltmann's reasons for his aesthetic appreciation.⁴¹ No less vital for him were Schinkel's ambitions to adapt antiquity to modern ends: 'He felt no doubt that every era needs to create its ideal in architecture from its own demands and goals'.⁴² The direct opposite to Schinkel was, for Woltmann, Leo von Klenze, who in his view imitated ancient architecture without any ability to penetrate into the essence of stylistic laws or create a fully functional modern organism. 'Klenze's buildings, for all their richness, are bleak and empty', he announced, terming for instance the New Hermitage in St. Petersburg a 'true built monstrosity at the greatest of expenditures'.⁴³

The fulfilment of Schinkel's legacy, for Woltmann, was not to be found in modern Berlin but in Vienna, where the standard of building in his view surpassed that of other German cities. He greatly admired, above all, Heinrich Ferstel and Theophil Hansen for their fully comprehending Schinkel's idea of modernising antiquity. The Heinrichshof by Hansen was called the most beautiful apartment block in the world, while his design for the Austrian Parliament, with its imposing force, organic expression, and even sensibility for colour, even outstripped any of Schinkel's own works. Hansen, in Woltmann's view, 'clearly discerned what the present can learn and take from the Renaissance, and this not in its derivative forms relying on Roman architecture, but instead in the way that it uses

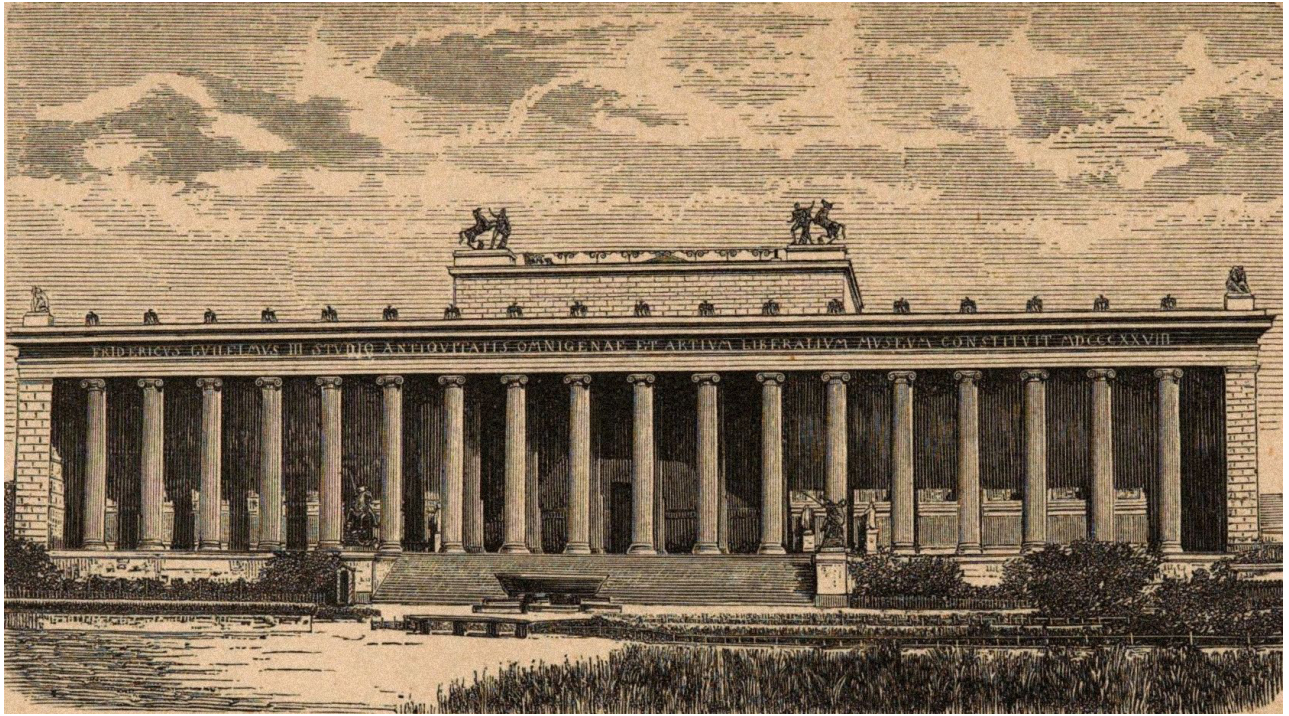
³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 53 (übermäßige Prunksucht ist mit völliger Rücksichtslosigkeit gegen den eigentlichen Zweck gepaart).

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 74 (einer wahrhaft organischen Gestaltungsfähigkeit).

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 297 (Ohne ein Nachahmer der Antike zu sein, erkannte er in ihren Formen das ewig Schöne und ewig Gültige, das vor Allem in der einfachen, strengen Gesetzmäßigkeit seinen Grund hat).

⁴² A. WOLTMANN, *Die Baugeschichte Berlins bis auf die Gegenwart*, Berlin 1872, p. 170 (Ihm war es zweifellos, daß jede Zeit ihren eigenen bestimmten Anforderungen und Zwecken ihr Ideal in der Baukunst gestalten muss).

⁴³ *Idem*, 'Die Münchner Architektur', p. 56 (as in note 38) (Klenze's Bauwerke sind öde und arm trotz allen Reichthums) and p. 53 (mit maßlosestem Aufwand ein wahres Bauungeheuer). See *idem*, 'Leo von Klenze', *National-Zeitung*, 17. 3. 1864, pp. 1 and 3.



3. Karl Friedrich Schinkel, *Altes Museum in Berlin*, 1823–1830. Phot. after: Alfred Woltmann, *Die Baugeschichte Berlins bis auf die Gegenwart*, Berlin 1872

and transforms old models and principles for new tasks.⁴⁴ Like Gottfried Semper, Woltmann viewed the present as the inheritor of all past architectural achievements, and hence never worried over his age's lack of its own architectural style. Similarly, like Semper he could not admit that new materials such as iron and glass could satisfy the aesthetic need for beauty. The attempts to create a modern style initiated by the Bavarian king Maximilian II were, for him, pure insanity. At the same time, he rejected the effort to take up the tradition of Gothic architecture, seeing its intellectual background as incompatible with the unavoidable trajectory of universal progress. In addition, for him the Gothic style was far too conditioned by the technical givens of construction, allowing artistic inventiveness only limited chances for application. 'There rules in it a mathematical law that makes the same forms repeat in an endless return, requiring for the achievement of a richer effect more an ingenious combination than an independent discovery' is how he summarised his aesthetic reservations in an article on London's contemporary architecture from 1866.⁴⁵ The Neo-Renaissance was

preferable because its aesthetic qualities best embodied the practical, economic spirit of the 19th c. 'To build in true Grecian style is in our age not possible' was his firm conviction.⁴⁶ The stylistic mode of the Renaissance should be supported by 'all those who stand on the side of progress in life and art, who expect from the artistic actions of our age something new and original'.⁴⁷ Indeed, this opinion is quite similar to the claims that he voiced in his texts on Holbein: the specific German Renaissance appeared as the expression of Germanic creativity and force, with a modern content indicating to German society the path toward the future.

CONCLUSION

Woltmann's activity in the field of art-critical discourse played out, for the greatest part, in the period 1863–1868, in other words before the start of his academic career in Karlsruhe. This finding corresponds to the observation of Hubert Locher that the year 1870 forms a turning point

⁴⁴ Idem, 'Wiens Architektur in der Gegenwart', *Neue Zeit. Deutsche Revue der Gegenwart*, 2, 1866, pp. 401–424, here p. 424 (klar erkennt, was die Gegenwart von der Renaissance lernen und brauchen kann, nicht in ihrer abgeleiteten, an das Römische sich lehrenden Formen, sondern in der Art, wie sie überhaupt die alten Formen und Principien für neue Zwecke verwerthet und umprägt).

⁴⁵ Idem, 'Friedliche Briefe', vol. III, *National-Zeitung* 4. 10. 1866, pp. 1–3, here p. 1 (Es herrscht in ihm das mathematische Gesetz,

das die nämlichen Formen in ewiger Wiederholung wiederkehren läßt, und um eine reiche Wirkung hervorzubringen, weniger des selbständigen Erfindens bei geschickten Kombinieren bedarf).

⁴⁶ Idem, *Die Baugeschichte Berlins*, p. 295 (as in note 42) (Wahrhaft griechisch zu bauen ist in unsrer Zeit nicht möglich).

⁴⁷ Idem, 'Wiens Architektur in der Gegenwart', p. 412 (as in note 44) (alle diejenigen, welche in Leben und Kunst auf der Seite des Fortschritts stehen, welche von den künstlerischen Leistungen unserer Zeit etwas Neues und Eigenes erwarten).

in the establishment of art history as an academic discipline set at a remove from contemporary artistic activities.⁴⁸ In Woltmann's case, though, the time limits on his interest in current artwork had entirely personal reasons. His articles on contemporary architecture, and possibly even on contemporary art, were most likely penned in the framework of his tactical preparations for winning a professorship at the polytechnic institute.⁴⁹ Once this goal was attained, his journalistic writing fell aside, almost certainly as result of the burden of university courses and the associated historical research. As a member of the academic establishment, he expressed his views on current events only in the most exceptional situations, such as the discussion on the future Reichstag building. In this question, Woltmann objected to the proposal of August Reichensperger, calling for the new building to use the Gothic style as an expression of the Germanic spirit.⁵⁰

In his critical activity, Woltmann understandably did not strive for objective value-based judgments, instead evaluating recent art with partiality, using a normative aesthetic ideal. Yet in no case did he reject the approach of the historian. Like Moritz Thausing and many other colleagues of his, he was convinced that this competence and his professional background could make him useful for current artistic work. Wilhelm Lübke expressed this view in his previously cited study on the methodological problems of writing on contemporary art, where he supported the 'universalist standpoint' of the art-scholar.⁵¹ As for his critical methods, Woltmann was hardly of particular originality, and his argumentation had no deeper anchoring in current philosophical theories. His writings make reference more frequently to earlier authors, most regularly to Johann Wolfgang Goethe and Johann Joachim Winckelmann, or among the Romantics to Friedrich Schlegel and Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder. That he was no deep speculative thinker is confirmed by his friend Bruno Meyer: 'In his intellectual constructions, abstract concepts played no great role'.⁵²

Woltmann was a Hegelian only to the extent that he believed in an all-powerful *Zeitgeist* and was convinced of the meaningful continuity of history, as well as of the task of art to represent its culture and society. This underlying

standpoint forms a crucial link between his texts on ancient art and his contemporary criticism. Another common denominator was the belief that art is a national matter and the 'nation' is the collective subject of its history. 'We know that style is not the creation of the individual, but the overall spirit of an age and nation', he remarked on the attempts to create a new style in the 19th c.⁵³ For the development of art and architecture, he added, this occurred 'when they are borne by the general education and free development of the nation'.⁵⁴ He did not question the postulate that artistic and architectural works should embody a national identity and serve the political needs of a nation-state. His patriotism, though, should not be confused with aggressive chauvinism, proclaiming the superiority of one nation or another. A convincing proof of this is his praise for French art and taste in his review of the Paris World Exposition in 1867.⁵⁵ Other texts of his seem to indicate that as a democrat, he saw the national community as a positive counterbalance to the privileged classes.

In the previously cited polemic with Reichensperger, Woltmann even delivered a provocative rejection of any need for a 'national' or 'patriotic' style: 'Even in the ancient years of classicism, the time passed in which building styles were national. Since the Roman world, they have had a universal meaning in the sphere of European culture'.⁵⁶ Even though this clash of opinions took place in the emotionally tense atmosphere following the formation of the German Reich, Woltmann made his plea for the values of reason and universality: 'The element of antique-classical erudition is present not only in our art, but also in our life, in our general spiritual development: effective, fertile, irreplaceable'.⁵⁷ In this light, it would seem that the label of hostile German nationalist that Woltmann acquired in Prague may well be considered an injustice.

⁴⁸ H. LOCHER, *Kunstgeschichte als historische*, p. 29 (as in note 5).

⁴⁹ A. AXTMANN, 'Die Etablierung der Kunstgeschichte am Karlsruher Polytechnikum', in *Kunstgeschichte an Polytechnischen Instituten, Technischen Hochschulen, Technischen Universitäten. Geschichte – Positionen – Perspektiven*, ed. R. STALLA, Wien-Köln-Weimar 2021, pp. 115–135.

⁵⁰ A. WOLTMANN, 'Parlamentshaus, Postamt und "vaterländischer" Stil', *National-Zeitung*, 14. 4. 1871, pp. 1–3.

⁵¹ W. LÜBKE, 'Die heutige Kunst und die Kunstwissenschaft', p. 13 (as in note 14) (Universalität des Standpunktes). See H. LOCHER, *Kunstgeschichte als historische*, p. 50 (as in note 5).

⁵² B. MEYER, 'Alfred Woltmann', p. 198 (as in note 13) (in seiner Gedankenkonstruktion spielten die abstrakten Begriffe keine große Rolle).

⁵³ A. WOLTMANN, 'Die Münchner Architektur', p. 283 (as in note 38) (Wir wissen, dass nicht die Berechnung eines Einzelnen, sondern der gesammte Zeit- und Volksgeist Schöpfer eines Styles ist).

⁵⁴ Ibidem, p. 300 (wo sie von der allgemeinen Bildung und freien Entwicklung der Nation getragen wird).

⁵⁵ Idem, 'Die bildende Kunst in Paris', in J. RODENBERG, *Paris bei Sonnenschein und Lampenlicht. Ein Skizzenbuch zur Weltausstellung*, Leipzig 1867, pp. 55–75.

⁵⁶ A. WOLTMANN, 'Parlamentshaus', p. 2 (as in note 50) (Schon während des klassischen Alterthums geht die Zeit vorüber, in welcher die Baustile national waren. Seit der römischen Welt haben sie auf dem Gebiet der europäischen Kultur eine universelle Bedeutung).

⁵⁷ Ibidem (Wohl aber ist das Element der antiken klassischen Bildung nicht bloß in unserer Kunst, sondern in unserm Leben, in unserer ganzen geistigen Entwicklung wirksam, fruchtbar, unentbehrlich).

SUMMARY

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ALFRED WOLTMANN AND HISTORY OF CONTEMPORARY ART

Alfred Woltmann (1841–1880) was the second full professor of art history at Charles-Ferdinand University in Prague, where he was active from 1873 to 1878. Unlike his predecessor Jan E. Vögel, who never studied art history and profiled himself more as a patriotic explorer of domestic monuments, Woltmann was a true, critically thinking art historian. To cultivate a scholarly art history, he was equipped with university studies at the University of Berlin (G. F. Waagen), numerous study trips abroad, and intensive contacts with the international professional community. The test of his scientific method was, above all, his involvement in the famous dispute over the authenticity of the Dresden Madonna attributed to Hans Holbein the Younger. Woltmann's Prague tenure, however, ended with his scandal forced departure, when in a lecture in 1876 he claimed that the artistic character of Prague was almost exclusively the work of German artists and the result of German influences, which were the source and support of the local Slavic culture. Nevertheless, Woltmann was not only an outstanding expert on medieval and Renaissance art. His extensive activity in contemporary fine art, architecture and decorative arts remains an afterthought. This neglected topic is the subject of the present paper, which seeks to relate Woltmann's interpretations of contemporary art to his historical studies. The focus is primarily on his conceptual grasp of current artistic events, but also on the special knowledge and skills that the author applied in relevant texts and lectures.