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Born in 1949 in Bucharest, Romania

Studied History of Art, Philosophy and Comparative Literature at the University of Bucharest, the University of Rome and the Université Paris 1, Panthéon Sorbonne

PROJECT

The Pygmalion-Effect

Ausgangspunkt ist der Pygmalionmythos, so wie ihn Ovid in den Metamorphosen geschildert hat. Ich beabsichtige das Überleben dieses Mythos in der mittelalterlichen und neuzeitlichen Literatur und insbesondere in der Ikonographie der bildenden Künste zu analysieren. Im Zentrum meiner Abhandlung steht das Motiv der lebendigen Statue. Von der Kunsttheorie (Gauricus, Vasari, usw.) und der Naturphilosophie (Agrippa von Nettesheim, Paracelsus, usw.) der Renaissance, über Descartes und die Philosophie des 18. Jahrhunderts (Condillac, La Mettrie, usw.) bis zum kinematographischen Bild der Gegenwart wird das Verhältnis zwischen Kunstwerk, Körper und Leben unter die Lupe genommen.

Lektüreempfehlung

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COLLOQUIUM, 07.07.2003

Some Difficulties in Being an Artist's Model

The digitalized edition of Giorgio Vasari's Lives of the Artists (Florence, 1550 and 1568) contains several revealing indications of how a work of art was judged in the Renaissance and of what precisely was understood by the term "work of art". For example, we see that the word "beauty" (bellezza) is used 491 times, the word "flesh" (carne) 91 times, the word "breath" (fiato) 28 times, and the word "pulse" (polsi) only 3 times - the latter reserved for the greatest masters, Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, and Michelangelo.

Apart from having to be beautiful: following the canon provided by the ancient world's myth of mimesis, a work of art in the Renaissance is characterized primarily by its celebration of the liveliness of the body's external appearance: trembling flesh, breathing body, and - in exceptional cases - a beating pulse. These seem to be the primary metaphors of giving life.

It appears as if the first history of art in the modern era was based on a kind of "Pygmalion mania"; but this suspicion is immediately controverted by two crucial facts. First, the myth of Pygmalion is extremely rare in the iconography of the 16th and 17th centuries, and beyond that, explicit allusions to this myth are

equally rare in the period's textual commentaries on art.

But Vasari and other Renaissance authors provide numerous examples of a "Pygmalion effect"; here, the "exchange of life for the work of art" is thematized.

My lecture takes a closer look at one of these examples. I think it is one of the most beautiful stories about a model and his artist that the old art-historical literature has left us. In the first part, I comment upon a passage of the "Vita" of Jacopo Sansovino that recounts the creation of a masterpiece and the sad fate of the model. The second part is an attempt to reconstruct the origin and effect of this story Vasari narrates.

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