



## Frank Fehrenbach, Dr. phil.

Professor of Art History

Harvard University

Born in 1963 in Oberndorf a. N., Baden Württemberg  
Studied Art History, Medieval and Modern History, and Philosophy at the  
Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen and at the Universität Basel

### PROJECT

## "Enlivenment" in Art and Art Theory of the Italian Renaissance

As a topos of ekphrasis, the esthetic power of artists to animate their products leads back to antiquity. In the Italian Renaissance, *vivacità* (and its semantic variations) becomes the most widespread category of esthetic praise. This is embedded in a mythology of life that interprets cultural history in analogy to the living organism, to aging and renewal (or reproduction), and it is paralleled by a natural philosophy that works as pan-psychism or "spiritual naturalism" against dualistic paradigms. Giorgio Vasari uses the topos of enlivenment in his *Lives* in an almost inflationary way, as one of the most important esthetic characteristics of the "third manner", the perfection of art after ca. 1500. However, *vivacità* is an achievement that goes well beyond mere lifelikeness. The category of vividness requires explorations along the borderline of the visible and the invisible, an oscillation - and this is Vasari's point - that characterizes the living organism itself: "this gracious and sweet facility that appears between the seeing and non-seeing, as can be seen in flesh and living things."

It will be crucial to keep the proper "life" of this vast topic and its tendency to transgress any thematic border mildly under control. My project at the Wissenschaftskolleg starts with early modern conceptualizations of "life" (in natural philosophy and medicine), and confronts them with strategies of representation and response. Paradigms for my flexible approach to "enlivenment" will include: the esthetics of force (Giotto's legacy); *compositio*; monochrome sculpture and the emergence of life in 15th-century Italian art; analogies between money and art (Titian); portraiture and petrification (Moroni, Bronzino); gazes and glances; the ruler as statue (triumphal entries); tombs; enlivenment as transgression (Vasari); and the metonymy of materials (Marino).

### Recommended Reading

- Fehrenbach, Frank. *Compendia mundi*. Gianlorenzo Berninis 'Fontana dei Quattro Fiumi' (1648-51) und Nicola Salvisi 'Fontana di Trevi' (1732-62). Berlin and München: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2008. (I Mandorli, 7.)
- "Calor natus - Color vitale. Prolegomena zu einer Ästhetik des 'Lebendigen Bildes' in der frühen Neuzeit." In *Visuelle Topoi: Erfindung und tradiertes Wissen in den Künsten der italienischen Renaissance*, edited by Ulrich Pfisterer and Max Seidel, 151-170. Berlin and München: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2003.
- *Licht und Wasser: Zur Dynamik naturphilosophischer Leitbilder im Werk Leonardo da Vincis*. Tübingen: Wasmuth, 1997. (Tübinger Studien zur Archäologie und Kunstgeschichte, 16.)

## "Vivacity" in the Art Discourse of the Italian Renaissance

My project at the Wissenschaftskolleg is an analysis of one of the predominant topoi of the Italian Renaissance - vivacity. For Giorgio Vasari, the most influential art critic of all time, the term - with its semantic derivatives (*vivacità, vivezza, più vivo della vita*, etc.) - marks the central criterium of a model that began in Florence in 1260 and culminated in Michelangelo. It is first in the *terza maniera* of art after 1500 (beginning with Leonardo da Vinci) that painting and sculpture seem to come to life. Many authors agreed with Aristotle that vivacity was primarily self-movement, reproduction (respiration) and perception, those classic hallmarks of the enlivened animal organism. Even the use of the biological category in the art discourse has a pre-history that reaches back to the ancient Greeks. Shortly after 1300, Dante ascribed to God, that greatest of artists, the ability to animate his narrative marble reliefs in purgatory in such a way as to make the dead appear truly dead.

But the authors of the Renaissance went beyond the striking vividness of works of art. It is mostly the case that the topos of praise was part of a dialectical constellation in which the actual inanimateness of the artifact is constantly changing into the emergence or (as Niklaus Largier would perhaps put it:) possibility of life - and vice versa. It is precisely this oscillation that is of much greater interest to artists and their audience than perfect illusions (automatons, *Doppelgänger*, horror, pornography). Paradigmatic for this dialectic is the poetic diptych composed by Petrarch in his *canzoniere* in sonnets 77 and 78 - the breathing and seeing body and soul of the beloved would seem to be alive in her portrait (77); but it remains mute and gives no answer to the questions posed by her love. The dialectic of presence and withdrawal remains irresolvable; it rests on the active sensual-imaginative sympathy of the observer. My project is also concerned with showing this oscillation in the early modern discourse in natural philosophy and medicine on the living body (as an inclusion of the dead in the organism).

For my depiction I will be concentrating on two examples from the sixteenth century - Michelangelo's *Non-finito* and a portrait by Tizian, framed by certain general considerations regarding the project and a provisional outline of my planned book's chapters.

Fehrenbach, Frank (2013)

"Tra vivo e spento" : Marinos lebendige Bilder

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=74389345X>

Fehrenbach, Frank (2011)

Leonardo da Vinci : Proportionsstudie nach Vitruv

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=678796149>

Fehrenbach, Frank (München,2008)

Compendia mundi : Gianlorenzo Berninis Fontana dei Quattro Fiumi (1648 - 51) und Nicola Salvis Fontana di Trevi (1732 - 62)

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=540333131>

I Mandorli ; 7

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=540333131>

Fehrenbach, Frank (Berlin,2005)

Kohäsion und Transgression : zur Dialektik lebendiger Bilder

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=833353918>

Fehrenbach, Frank (2002)

Blick der Engel und Lebendige Kraft: Bildzeit, Sprachzeit und Naturzeit bei Leonardo

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=670718580>

Fehrenbach, Frank (München,2002)

Leonardo da Vinci : Natur im Übergang ; Beiträge zu Wissenschaft, Kunst und Technik

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=340970030>

Bild und Text

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=340970030>

Fehrenbach, Frank (Tübingen,1997)

Licht und Wasser : zur Dynamik naturphilosophischer Leitbilder im Werk Leonardo da Vincis

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=235778583>

Tübinger Studien zur Archäologie und Kunstgeschichte ; 16

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=235778583>

Fehrenbach, Frank (Ostfildern,1996)

Die goldene Madonna im Essener Münster : der Körper der Königin

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=532117271>

KunstOrt Ruhrgebiet ; 4

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=532117271>