THE REVIEW SECTION

From the Editors

We would like to introduce ourselves as the new editors of the book review section and take a moment to explain our editorial goals. While we do not anticipate making immediate major changes in the section we do have ideas about improvements, and in some cases changes will be quickly noticeable.

We are interested in providing reviews which are critical and analytical rather than primarily descriptive. Related to this goal we hope to publish some reviews which are longer than has been the common practice in Art Documentation, and to balance those reviews with a section of brief notices for titles we feel can be quickly assessed—something similar to the way The Burlington Magazine treats its section of “Publications Received.” By implementing this strategy we hope to improve on the timeliness of reviews. To that end, we are generally only interested in reviewing recently published titles to aid in acquisition decisions and to share promptly with our readers the reference potential of new titles.

We are interested in reviewing books covering a wider range of subject matter than perhaps has been done in the past. Our work in an architecture and “allied arts” library makes us particularly conscious of the need for reviews in this journal which address important publications in the areas of architectural design (rather than only history), landscape architecture, interior architecture, historic preservation, computer graphics, and performance and video art, as well as the traditional areas of art and art history. We intend to continue to review publications useful as reference tools and those of professional interest, but we are also interested in reviewing titles reviewed elsewhere which may be less well known and perhaps harder to find. For that reason we will look carefully at titles published by small presses and outside North America.

We hope that readers will feel free to contact us to suggest titles worthy of review. We look forward to working with the ARLIS/NA membership and seek the contributions of experienced reviewers and of those members who would like to begin reviewing books and serials for the journal.

The book review section in this issue is briefer than usual since we had barely gotten underway before our first deadline. We look forward to longer sections in the future, filled with insightful reviews that will be useful to all of our readers. We also welcome comments on reviews if you feel particularly provoked by ideas expressed herein.

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Sheila M. Klos
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BOOK REVIEWS


Those interested in the historiography of art will know Udo Kultermann’s Geschichte der Kunstgeschichte (1966; paperback 1981) as, until recently, the sole full-length “history of art history” at our disposal. Now Kultermann has produced a similarly conceived “brief history of art theory” and placed us still further in his debt. An English translation of the earlier survey was announced by Abaris Books some years ago; according to the publisher this projected translation has now been indefinitely postponed. Yet both volumes deserve to be translated. The current revival of interest in the historiographical and methodological foundations of art history leaves no doubt that a market exists for Kultermann’s handy, if inevitably superficial, handbook.

Like Kultermann’s earlier volume, this “brief history” is basically monographic in nature, offering, within a broad chronological framework, capsule summaries of the theories of the major figures. Just as the former book might be regarded as something of a who’s who of art historiography, the present one amounts to a who’s who of art theory. Thus, while readable enough even for those with little knowledge of German, Kultermann’s two volumes also make serviceable reference tools. However, the new volume lacks the portrait gallery of seminal figures that forms such a useful feature of his previous book.

Kultermann’s conception of art theory is broad: Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, for example, find a place along with scores of more predictable theorists. The author is unusually aware of the English-language literature on his subject, yet is not wholly free of a perceptibly nationalistic bias: Goethe, Hegel and Heidegger receive as much space as Plato, and more than Leonardo da Vinci. Few scholars in this country will endorse Kultermann’s statement that “all reflection upon art after Heidegger will remain conditioned by his new orientation” (p. 258); fewer still would applaud Heidegger’s admittedly considerable influence.

This is not the definitive history of art theory. It appears on the heels of Moshe Barasch’s Theories of Art from Plato to Winckelmann (1985), which also offers a popular yet scholarly survey. Barasch tells a more continuous story but is perhaps for that very reason less useful for ready-reference purposes. And unlike Barasch, who stops with the 18th century, Kultermann attempts to bring his story down to the present day; two-thirds of his book are devoted to the 19th and 20th centuries. In short, Kultermann has once again made a notable contribution to the literature on an important topic.

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