# Art history, art historians, and the search for legitimacy: the shaping of a fledgling discipline in flux in the German-speaking countries, 1870-1900

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# Summary in English

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This study explores the formative period of academic art history in the German-speaking areas between 1870 and 1900. It considers and emphasises the inherent multivalence of the discipline: the simultaneous existence of different – sometimes conflicting – forms, practices and ideals of art history. The period between 1870 and 1900 was an important time for the development of the academic discipline. In these decades, art history underwent significant changes: from an initially limited field of interest to a widely supported academic discipline. For example, large numbers of chairs were established at various universities, important conferences took place, and it reached both a broad academic and a popular audience. Despite these achievements, however, academic art historians found it difficult to convince their colleagues of the importance of their subject in the long term. Moreover, art historians found it difficult position themselves in relation to the multivalence of the discipline. On the one hand, it was seen as a positive quality: it meant art history was widely supported and therefore socially and academically relevant. On the other hand, some art historians found it difficult to reconcile the resulting broad art history with their goal achieving recognition as a 'serious' science within the university. This complexity intrigued me and led to this research, in which I focused on several related questions about this formative period of the discipline: Why did art history develop in the (multivalent) way that it did between 1870 and 1900? Why did it narrow so emphatically in terms of subjects and methods, even though it had originally held a broad view on the world? And how does this path of development relate to the challenges facing the discipline in terms of recognition and legitimacy?

In recent decades, the history of German art history has been studied from various angles. The emphasis has often been on either a methodological or an art-theoretical perspective. In this study, I have used an alternative, three-part approach. Based on Max Weber's theory of the ideal type, I first distinguished between the different 'types' of art history in this period. In doing so, I aimed to demonstrate that what appears to be a single discipline, was in fact composed of different types of art history: each characterised by its own practical orientations, views on the nature of art and art history, and ideas about the purpose of the discipline. Secondly, by applying Thomas Gieryn's theory of boundary work, I examined how art historians perceived and used the boundaries of their field to shape the discipline. These boundaries, for example between art history and other academic disciplines, or between academic and non-academic art history, were an

important tool for art historians to perpetuate the legitimacy of their practice. Finally, I have chosen the theory of the scholarly persona, which has been used by Herman Paul, Mineke Bosch, and Lorraine Daston, among others, to analyse disciplinary development at a level between the individual, the collective, and the institution.

The first chapter, "Art history as a multivalent being", focuses on the development of art history: from a marginal, secondary field around 1860, to a firmly established academic discipline at the end of the nineteenth century. Here, the application of Max Weber's ideal type shows that art history consisted of a constellation of different art-historical types: art history as so-called *Bildung*, art history for the layman, art history as an auxiliary discipline, art history as preparatory education, art history as an academic specialisation, and art history as museum practice. A limited case study of mistakes in art historical publications clearly shows that these types are not only a theoretical tool but had demonstrable and practical implications. An analysis of reviews of art-historical works shows that the weight of an error and the assessment (or condemnation) of the author were related to the type of art history that was central to the publication. For example, factual mistakes in academic publications were judged more harshly, while a mistake in a well-written, popular book was overlooked. The multitude of types of art history therefore also affected how art historians interacted with each other. But the different types were not necessarily all compatible. Although some forms were compatible and could reinforce each other's positions, other types were at odds. This was caused, among other things, by the fact that different types were legitimised in different ways. For art history, this legitimisation – particularly in the academic environment – was a sensitive issue. From the very inception of the discipline in the early Humboldtian university, the discipline was questioned and criticised. This created a precarious situation, because to obtain chairs and facilities, the discipline had to be taken seriously and recognised as a legitimate, independent field of study.

The second chapter, "*Lehren und Forschen*: Art history in practice", focuses on how art history was put into practice within the Humboldtian dyad of education and research. Between 1870 and 1900, art history grew considerably in terms of chairs and courses. In addition, the taught art history gained an increasingly differentiated profile between 1870 and 1900. An analysis of lecture catalogues from the universities of Berlin, Bonn, and Leipzig shows that the number of lectures expanded significantly during this period. The analysis of catalogues moreover shows that art history rapidly developed beyond its status as a supporting discipline that served other subjects such as archaeology and history. Rather, it became a discipline in its own right, with coherent lectures at various levels. Additionally, the Berlin catalogues in particular show that the museum

was often used as a valuable source for lectures and that lectures were regularly given in the museums themselves. In addition to this practical analysis, this chapter emphasises the creation of internal boundaries within the discipline. At the interfaces with and in relation to other academic disciplines, art historians were critical, but also opportunistic. This is evident, for example, in the close relationship they emphasised with respected academic disciplines such as archaeology and history, while drawing a clear line in their relationship to aesthetics in order to protect their field. Drawing boundaries around the discipline thus also led to exclusionary practices, with major consequences for the form of art history. It was also during this period that the field began to severely limit what was considered 'art' (or rather, considered *relevant* art). Art that conformed to a Greco-Roman mimetic ideal, created by a genius male artist, increasingly became the leading standard. Art from areas outside Europe and art created by women was thus banished from the view of art history in one swift movement. And not only artists were at risk from this censure: female art historians faced a similar fate. This can be seen in the example of head teacher Johanna Kuss (dates of birth and death unknown), who was removed as author from her own popular art history textbook by male colleagues. This chapter thus shows how the discipline's perspective was influenced by ideas about legitimacy. Art history education remained relatively broad and accessible, while research narrowed – both with the explicit aim of being considered relevant and legitimate. It also demonstrates how specialisation was an important route to legitimacy, thereby highlighting the ongoing tension within the discipline between accessibility and exclusivity.

The third chapter, "'The' art-historical persona", focuses on art-historical reviews and the construction of the scholarly persona of the art historian. Reviews provide a compelling lens through which to view the development of disciplines, as they reveal different academic expectations and ideals in the assessment of colleagues' work. However, they have rarely been studied in the context of art history. Reviews of art-historical publications address characteristics and virtues such as accessibility, academic accuracy, and cultural authority in various ways. They therefore feature in the creation of art-historical personas, although their application often depended on the context and the art historian in question. And although many of the virtues pursued by art historians also applied to other disciplines such as history, it shows that in art history, they often had their own specific application. Furthermore, it appears that the type of art history that was central to a publication also played a role. For example, many art historians considered it important that their work contributed to a 'greater good', but this higher purpose could be conceived in different ways and was generally related to the type of art history. This sometimes led to conflicting ideals. In this chapter, I therefore identify various areas of tension

and constellations of epistemic qualities and virtues, which were reflected in the various – sometimes conflicting – concrete art-historical personae. These different personae also illustrate how the multivalence of art history was reflected in different standards of legitimacy and recognition. Based on an analysis of the personas of the art historians Carl Schnaase (1798-1875), Anton Springer (1825-1891), Wilhelm Lübke (1826-1893), and Alfred Woltman (1841-1880) , I show that each of them presented a persona that was well suited to the type of art history they advocated: Carl Schnaase as the dignified master, Anton Springer as the defender and bannerman of rigorous art history, and Wilhelm Lübke and the younger Alfred Woltmann as public art historians, who contributed greatly to the popularisation of the subject among a wide audience.

Chapter four, "Spaces of knowledge: the university and the museum as sites of art history", explores the changing relationship between art historians in the university and the museum. I focus on the debate known as the *Berliner Streit*, an important polemic that took place in 1890–1891 about the utility and goal of academic art history. It demonstrates how various developments in within the discipline itself and the world around it came into increasing conflict. Ideals that had previously largely dictated many developments in academia – such as the concept of *Bildung* and the scientific ideal of the Humboldtian university – became less dominant at the end of the nineteenth century. New developments, such as vocationally oriented education, the prominence of the natural scientific paradigm, and changing student populations demanded a new position and self-identification of the art historical discipline. Whereas it had previously relied heavily on legitimisation based on a social ideal of *Bildung*, this became more difficult in a society that progressively demanded practical applications from higher education. In addition, art historians noticed the consequences of the professionalisation of the academic profession and the professionalisation of museum staff. The growing specialisation of the field and changing institutional boundaries caused a significant shift in academic power relations and authority over knowledge development, the purpose of the art history discipline, and the authority of art historians. This led to a changing relationship between art historians in universities and their counterparts in museums. It was in this context that the polemic known as the *Berliner Streit* arose. The discussion was conducted by the art historians Wilhelm Bode (1845-1929), Herman Grimm (1828-1901), August Schmarsow (1853-1936), and Konrad Lange (1855-1921). It began as a discussion about the usefulness of art history, and particularly the goal of educating of art historians. As the debate unfolded, it broadened to include other topics. No longer was the focus solely on the purpose and utility of the discipline; increasingly, those involved also discussed authority over art history, the physical location of art-historical knowledge, and recognition of the

discipline. The debate shows that around 1890 there was no clear consensus on what exactly an art historian should know, be able to do, and do. The role of personae and identifications in the debate is moreover striking. Whereas Bode's ideal was strongly situated in the museum, Herman Grimm – and with him August Schmarsow – continued to profile themselves as more classical, university art historians. The discussion between Wilhelm Bode and Herman Grimm in particular makes it clear that they envisioned two different ideal personas for the art historian, and that they strongly criticised each other for advocating a different view.

The conclusion shows how far art history had developed in the 30 years this study covers. Around 1870, students were hard pressed to exclusively study art history as a subject, but by 1900 it was being offered throughout the German-speaking world. The number of chairs, lectures and art historians had grown exponentially, and a solid art-historical community had developed. Nevertheless, it was not yet self-evident for art historians to call art history a legitimate field of study. It remained characterised by different types of art history – although there had been a shift in the relationships between the types. This multivalence continued to have both positive and negative consequences for the image of the subject. Art historians still sought a balance between their field as a specialism characterised by 'pure' or academic knowledge on the one hand, and art history as an applied discipline that served an explicitly utilitarian purpose in museums or wider society on the other. It shows how the search for legitimacy was therefore a constant presence in art history, (partly) driven by factors such as shifting social, political, and academic values; a short history as a recognised independent discipline, which had been hard-won and was still often criticised; the fact that people (whether academics or laymen) did not always have a clear idea of what art history was; associations with dilettantism, connoisseurship, and subjectivity; and thus the enduring multivalence of the discipline. The way in which art history developed as a discipline – simultaneously unfolding and defining itself – was therefore strongly linked to this constant struggle for recognition, legitimacy, and acceptance, interacting with the various types of art history that had been present since the discipline's inception. This also significantly impacted the content and orientation of the discipline. During this period, the discipline took on a Western-oriented, canonical form that would endure for almost 100 years. It was the result of a complex balancing act in which art historians sought conceptual congruence between the discipline and the subject of "art"; academic relevance versus the subject matter; originality and innovation; social relevance; potential for recognition and authority; the relationship with other academic disciplines; and the potential in relation to *Bildung*. The latter also shows that art history and art historians within the discipline certainly did not isolate themselves or claim to be a "purely" academic field. On the

contrary, it was a highly socially engaged form of *Wissenschaft*, in which the greater good was almost always central. For a field that is still often dismissed as elitist and even useless today, art history turns out to have a committed history, although unfortunately a significant aspect was lost in the narrowing choices that art historians made in their search for legitimacy. At the same time, it is precisely this history of the subject's potential that shows that art history is a discipline that was and remains at the heart of society. The hope is that studies such as this one will enable current art historians to tell the whole story of the discipline and, at a time when the humanities are under pressure, to show why this field deserves a place in the university of the twenty-first century.