

# *Perspective*

## *actualité en histoire de l'art*

### Autonomy, no. 2024 – 1

Issue coordinated with Maxime Boidy (université Gustave-Eiffel)



View of the exhibition “Préhistoire, une énigme moderne”, showing two works of Joachim Lutz copying cave paintings from Zimbabwe (1929), Paris, Centre Georges-Pompidou, 2019. © Pascal Rodriguez

The notion of autonomy has been key to understanding the work of art, at least since the development of aesthetic philosophy in the eighteenth century. It has been a central constituent of art history over the last century, to the point that critic Clement Greenberg positioned it as the touchstone of his formalist approach to modernist painting. On the other hand, certain theorists, such as Peter Bürger (*Theorie der Avantgarde*, 1974), consider the offensive that artists have waged against art’s autonomy as the common denominator of avant-gardism.

These debates, though apparently confined to the aesthetic sphere, invite the formulation of a more general observation: if the notion of autonomy is disputed, it is because of the different meanings it evokes in the various branches of the human and social sciences. It can relate to art or aesthetics (with respect to the political, social, moral, or even religious fields), the artworks themselves (their referentiality and, more broadly, their own life—in this sense, it also concerns their reception), the artist (whose history should be considered within the context of the advent of the individual or, for example, from its later Romantic definition), and finally, art history (as an *autonomous* discipline) all periods and geographical areas combined. In addition to contributions focusing on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which seem to be the periods most concerned, the journal would like specialists in the history of modern art, the Renaissance, Middle Ages, and Antiquity, to explore the prehistory of this notion, anywhere the political order, religious structures, and cultural and social dynamics have shaped or anticipated its contemporary definitions.

The editors invite contributors to rethink autonomy within the context of the shifts in the academic landscape that have happened in recent decades, focusing on non-Western as well as European contexts, following five main lines of thought from which contribution proposals can be formulated:

1. First, there is the question of considering the current conditions of autonomy as applied in art history, beginning from questions that initially appeared in the field of institutional theory. In producing a criticism of this notion, Andrea Fraser, for example, has underlined the centrality that autonomy maintains in contemporary art, as independence of the visual works “from rationalization with respect to specific use or function, whether moral, economic, political, social, material or emotional” (in Alberro 2005, p. 56). To what extent has this need to conceptualize become generalized or not? What new disciplinary definitions, what situated notions of autonomy have emerged, and via what channels?
2. This issue also seeks to interrogate the aesthetic dimension of this concept and to work on establishing an inventory of formalist art criticism’s legacy. How have artistic forms supported or reshaped the idea of autonomy, from the modernist painting defended by Greenberg to minimalist sculpture, and extending to contemporary photography? And what remains of the utopia of the modernist autonomous aesthetic, understood as a driver of the spectator’s emancipation?
3. From the perspective of the history of the discipline, it is a question of thinking about art history’s autonomy, but also of archeology, photographic and film studies, and so on, as independent, specialized disciplinary spheres, especially in light of recent transformations in their areas of research (recurrent calls for interdisciplinarity, the importation of Anglo-American studies, new methods and approaches, etc.).
4. In parallel, an axis will be dedicated to the political dimension of autonomy as applied to art. At several moments in history, artistic movements, artists, architects, even art historians, have appropriated the forms and/or discourses of certain ideological or political currents, weaving links with them: consider the example of the theorists bound to Italian Marxist workerism, beginning in the 1960s (Galimberti 2022). However, is the history of political autonomy in art limited to these defined and already claimed uses? Can we consider the landmarks of its history in a more comprehensive perspective?
5. Finally, we would like to reflect, from the perspective of the new forms of imagery autonomy induced by current technologies, on the technical dimension of this question (artistic expertise, status of the artwork, auctorality, etc.). Quite early, filmmaker Harun Farocki underlined this with his concept of “operational image”: the visible has become a terrain which machines organize for themselves. This “invisible visual culture” can be a starting point to investigate, in retrospect, a longer history of the autonomy of artwork and images (Paglen 2016).

Authors should take into account the reciprocity between objects and ideas: what does an image, a work, a form, teach us about the definitions of autonomy that they invoke? What does autonomy teach us about other elements of the artistic vocabulary (interactivity, immersion, and so on), the political (emancipation, self-determination, etc.), or the academic (including heteronomy and criticism)? No matter the proposed subject, contributions must be in line with the editorial guidelines of *Perspective*, which publishes overviews and historiographic essays on substantive issues underpinning and/or relevant to the discipline’s latest developments within the proposed theme. Case studies are only acceptable in so far as they provide the opportunity to address critical questions of a more general nature concerning the approaches, orientations, and stakes of the discipline of art history.

### ***Perspective : actualité en histoire de l’art***

Published by the Institut national d’histoire de l’art (INHA) since 2006, *Perspective* is a biannual journal which aims to bring out the diversity of current research in art history through a constantly evolving approach that is explicitly aware of itself and its own historicity and articulations. It bears witness to the historiographical debates within the field, while remaining in continuous relation with the images and works of art themselves, updating their interpretations, and thus fostering global, intra- and interdisciplinary reflection. The journal publishes scholarly texts which offer innovative perspectives on a given theme. These may be situated within a wide range, yet without ever losing sight of their larger objective: going beyond any given case study in order to interrogate the discipline,

its methods, history and limitations, while relating these questions to topical issues from art history and neighboring disciplines that speak to each of us as citizens.

*Perspective* invites contributors to update their historiographical material and the theoretical questionings from which they draw their work, to think from and around the starting point of a precise question, an assessment that will be considered an epistemological tool rather than a goal in itself. Each article thus calls for a new approach creating links with the great societal and intellectual debates of our time. *Perspective* is conceived as a disciplinary crossroads aiming to encourage dialogue between art history and other fields of research, the humanities in particular, and put into action the “law of the good neighbor” developed by Aby Warburg.

All geographical areas, periods, and media are welcome.

## **AUTONOMY, no. 2024 – 1**

Editors in chief: Marine Kisiel (INHA) and Matthieu L glise (INHA)

Issue coordinated with Maxime Boidy (Universit  Gustave-Eiffel)

See the **members of the editorial committee**.

Please send your proposals – **a summary of 2,000 to 3,000 characters / 350 to 500 words, a working title, a concise bibliography on the subject, and a short biography** – to the editorial contact ([revue-perspective@inha.fr](mailto:revue-perspective@inha.fr)) **before January 16, 2023**.

*Perspective* will provide translations for the editorial committee; all projects will be reviewed regardless of the language the proposal is submitted in. Authors of the successful proposals will be notified of the editorial committee’s decision in **February 2023**, and the completed articles will be due by **May 1, 2023**. Submitted papers, with a final length of 25,000 or 45,000 characters / 4,500 or 7,500 words depending on the project, will be accepted after an anonymous peer-review process.

[English translation: Bronwyn Mahoney]

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