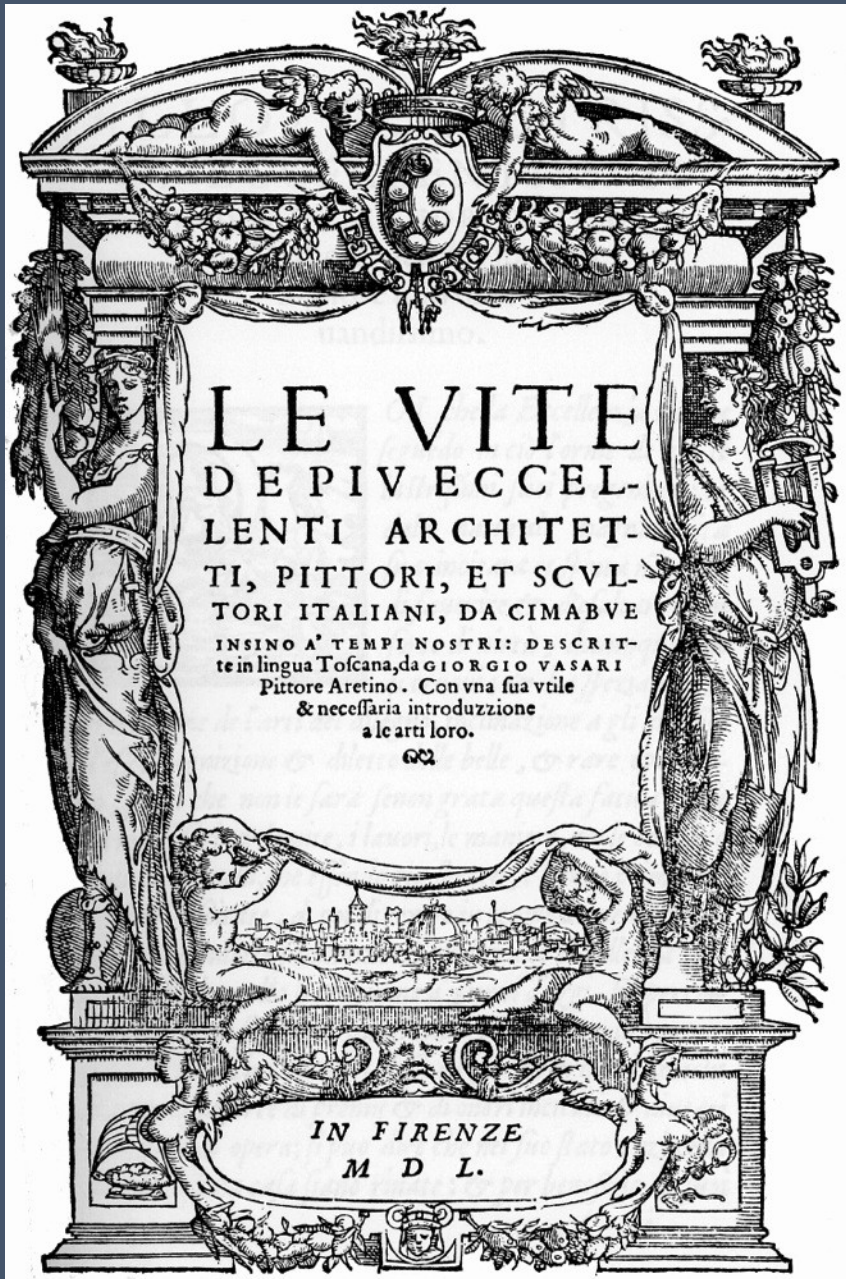


Art History as a 'Science'

Observation and the Role of 'Theory'



R: Giorgio Vasari – Self Portrait (1566-68)

L: Giorgio Vasari – Frontispiece of *The Lives of the Most Excellent Architects, Painters and Sculptors* (Florence, 1550)

Furthermore ...

‘I have endeavoured not only to record what the artists have done but also to distinguish between the good, the better and the best, and to note with some care the methods, manners, styles and behaviour and ideas of the painters and sculptors. I have tried as well as I know how to help people who cannot find out for themselves to understand the sources and origins of various styles, and the reasons for the improvement or decline of the arts at various times and among different people.’

Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, Preface to Part 2, p. 84.



Cimabue – Flagellation of Christ (1280s)
(Frick Collection, New York)



‘Although Giotto’s fame obscured his ... Cimabue was, as it were, the first cause of the renewal of the art of painting. Giotto, although he was his pupil ... aspired even higher. It was Giotto who opened the door of truth to those who have subsequently brought the art of painting to the greatness and perfection it can claim in our own century.’

Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*,
‘Cimabue,’ p. 55.

Giotto – Kiss of Judas (1305) Arena Chapel, Padua.



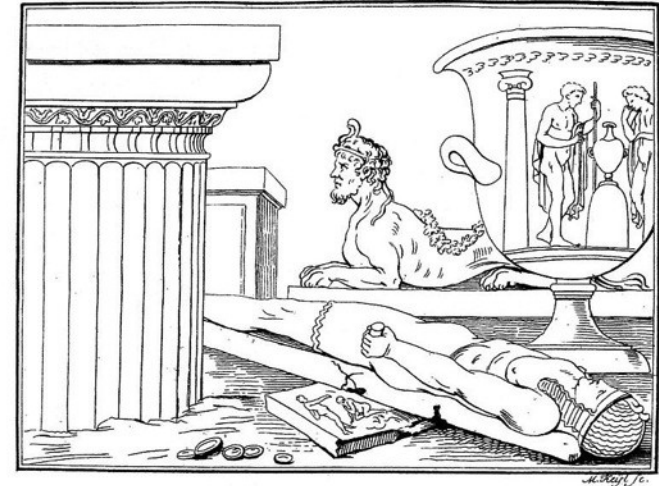
Winckelmann – *History of the Art of Antiquity* (Dresden, 1764)

Anton Raphael Mengs - Johann Winckelmann (after 1755)

‘Just as visible and understandable as the influence of climate on appearance is, secondly, its influence on ways of thinking, to which external circumstances also contribute ... The way of thinking of Eastern and southern peoples, as well as that of the Greeks, is evident in their works of art. Among the former peoples, figurative expressions are as warm and fiery as the climate in which they live, and the flight of their thoughts often takes them well beyond the bounds of possibility ...

By contrast, the Greeks, who lived in a moderate climate ... Their imagination was not exaggerated as with the Eastern and southern peoples ...’

Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity* (Los Angeles, 2006) p. 121.



Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums.

Erster Theil.

Untersuchung der Kunst nach dem Wesen derselben.

Erstes Capitel.

Von dem Ursprunge der Kunst, und den Ursachen ihrer
Verschiedenheit unter den Völkern.

Die Künste, welche von der Zeichnung abhängen, haben, wie alle Er-
findungen, mit dem Nothwendigen angefangen; nachdem suchte
man die Schönheit, und zuletzt folgte das Ueberflüssige: dieses sind die
drey vornehmsten Stufen der Kunst.

Erstes Schätz.
I.
Allgemeiner
Begriff dieser
Geschichte.
Die

‘The history of the art of antiquity that I have endeavoured to write is no mere narrative of the chronology and alterations of art The history of art should inform us about the origin, growth, change and fall of art, together with the various styles of peoples, periods and artists’



Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums. Zweyter Theil.

Nach den äußeren Umständen der Zeit unter
den Griechen betrachtet.

Der zweyte Theil dieser Geschichte ist, was wir im engeren Verstande ^{vorherige} de Geschichte nennen, und zwar der Schicksale der Kunst unter ^{des zweyten} den Griechen, in Absicht der äußeren Umstände von Griechenland betrachtet, welche den größten Einfluß in die Kunst haben. Denn die Wissenschaften, ja die Weisheit selbst, hängen von der Zeit und ihren Veränderungen ab, noch mehr aber die Kunst, welche durch den Ueberfluß, und vielmals durch die Eitelkeit, genähret und unterhalten wird. Es war
X r 2 also

Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity* (Los Angeles, 2006) p. 71



Archaic



Classical ... and Hellenistic



The turn to a 'positive science'



Moriz Thausing (1838-1884)

‘The aestheticizing approach has been a great disadvantage for the reputation of a discipline which has only recently been successfully inaugurated ... It created the impression that history of art represented a sort of intellectual sofa – a sort of snack which carries with it the threat of indigestion - and not a hearty intellectual fare, a field fraught with difficulties and satisfaction like any other scholarly endeavour. For these reasons, the history of art has been unnecessarily often associated with aesthetics, and we are here all the more admonished to clarify the distinguishing characteristics more strongly than the common elements.’

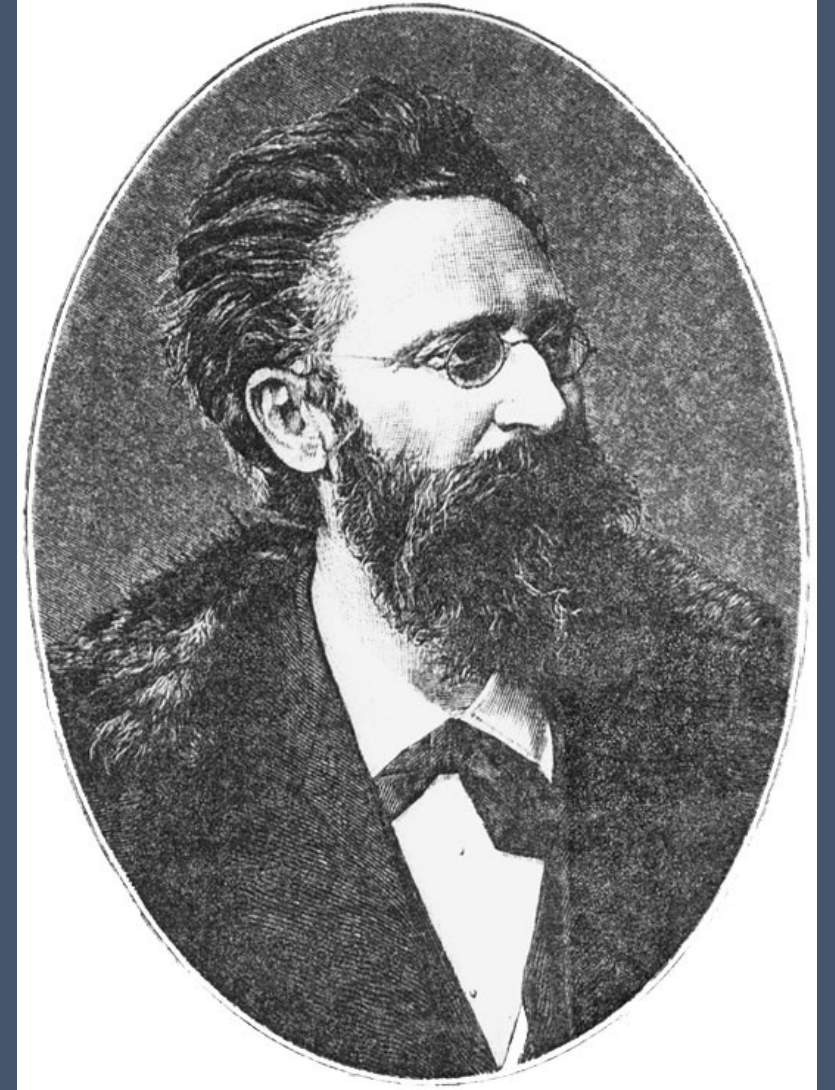
Moriz Thausing

‘The Place of Art History as an Academic Discipline [Wissenschaft]’
(1873)

‘[Art history] has nothing whatsoever to do with deduction or speculation: what it publishes are not aesthetic judgments, but historical facts which might then serve as a subject for inductive research. The benchmarks of the history of art are as little of an aesthetic nature as political history serves as the subject for moral judgments [...] the question whether a painting is beautiful or not is actually not in any way justifiable in the history of art, and the question for instance of whether Raphael or Michelangelo, Rembrandt or Rubens achieved greater perfection is an art historical absurdity.

Moriz Thausing

‘The Place of Art History as an Academic Discipline [Wissenschaft]’
(1873)

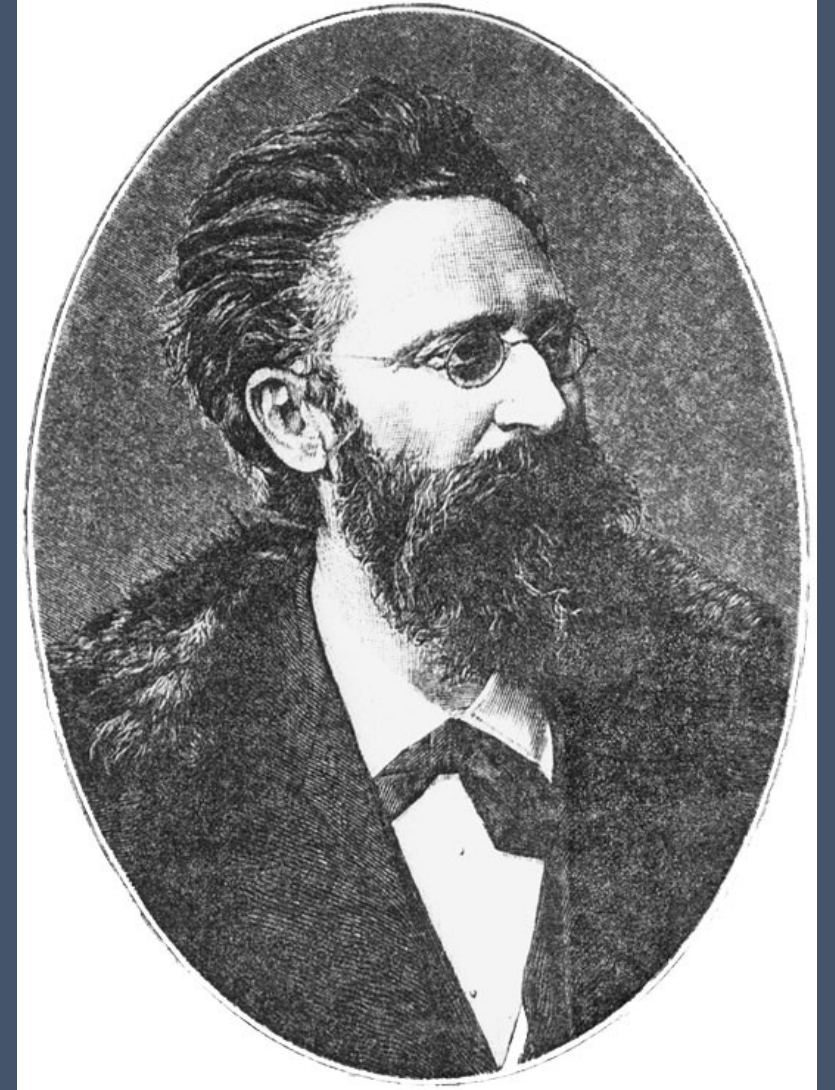


Moriz Thausing (1838-1884)

'I can imagine the best history of art in which the word 'beautiful' does not at all occur. Art historical judgments are limited to the conditions under which a work of art was created, as these are discovered through research and autopsy.'

Moriz Thausing

'The Place of Art History as an Academic Discipline [Wissenschaft]'
(1873)



Moriz Thausing (1838-1884)

The Historical Critical Method

Origins in the interpretation and criticism of biblical and classical texts:

Barthold Georg Niebuhr (1776-1821) - *Roman History* (Berlin, 1811-1832)

David Strauss (1806-75) – *The Life of Jesus, critically Analysed* (Tübingen, 1835-36)

Leopold Ranke (1795-1886) – *German History in the Age of the Reformation* (Berlin, 1839-47)

Based on systematic and critical reading of historical source texts

Guided by belief in objectivity and idea of presenting history ‘as it really was’ (Ranke)



Carl Friedrich von Rumohr (1785-1843)

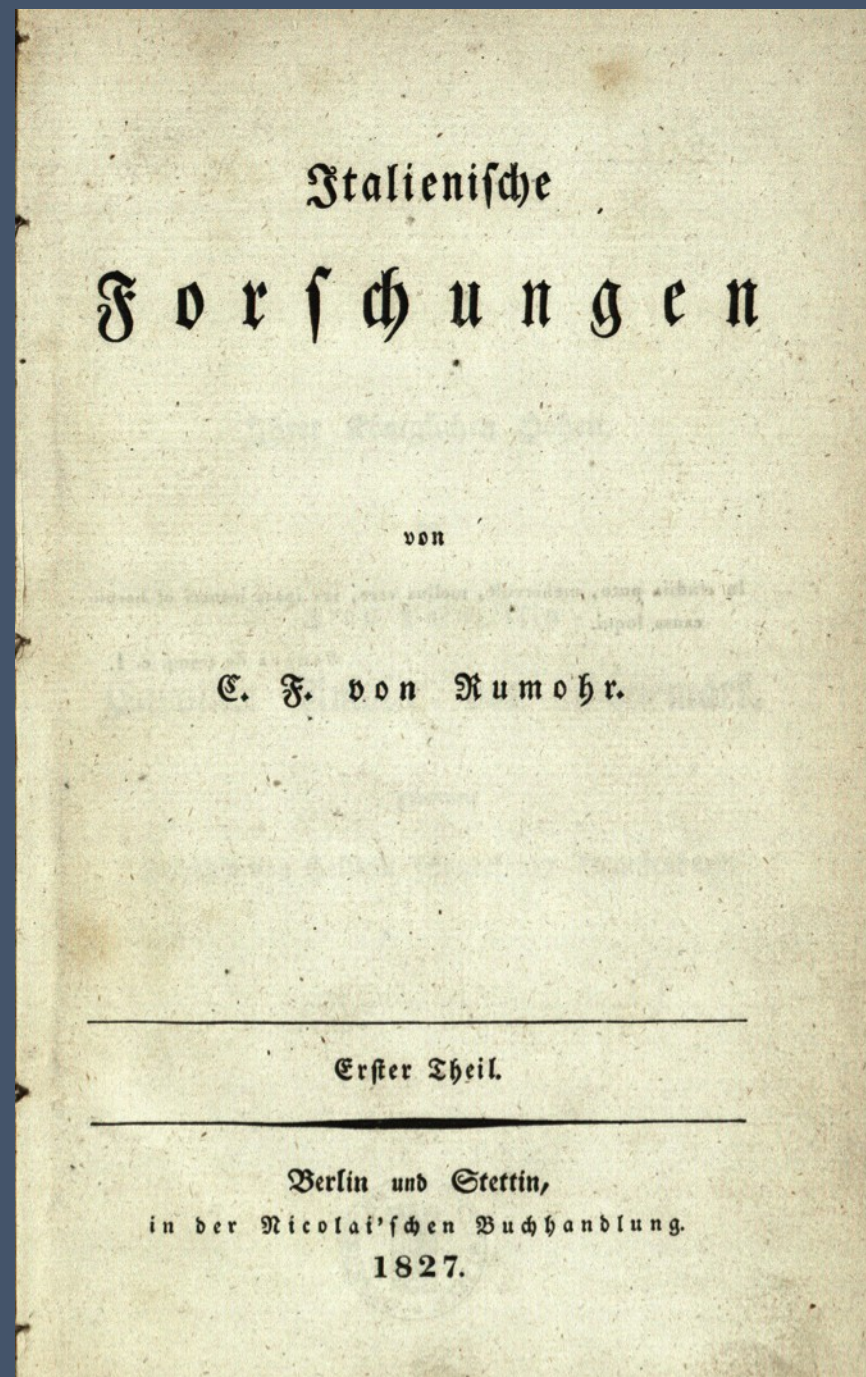
Author of *Italienische Forschungen* (Italian Enquiries) (Berlin, 1827)

Pioneer of the 'Philological Method'
borrowed from historians at the Humboldt
University, Berlin

Friedrich Gröger
Portrait of Carl Friedrich von Rumohr (1802)

‘The reader should not expect any literary accomplishment ... when establishing individual facts that provided a point of support in obscure periods, I found it necessary to present them in an intricate manner and their connections extensively, since any benefit that I can bring to others with my work rests on the reliability of the details, I can assure, have been fully weighed up, examined and inspected in every way.’

Rumohr, *Italienische Forschungen*, Vol. I, p. ix.



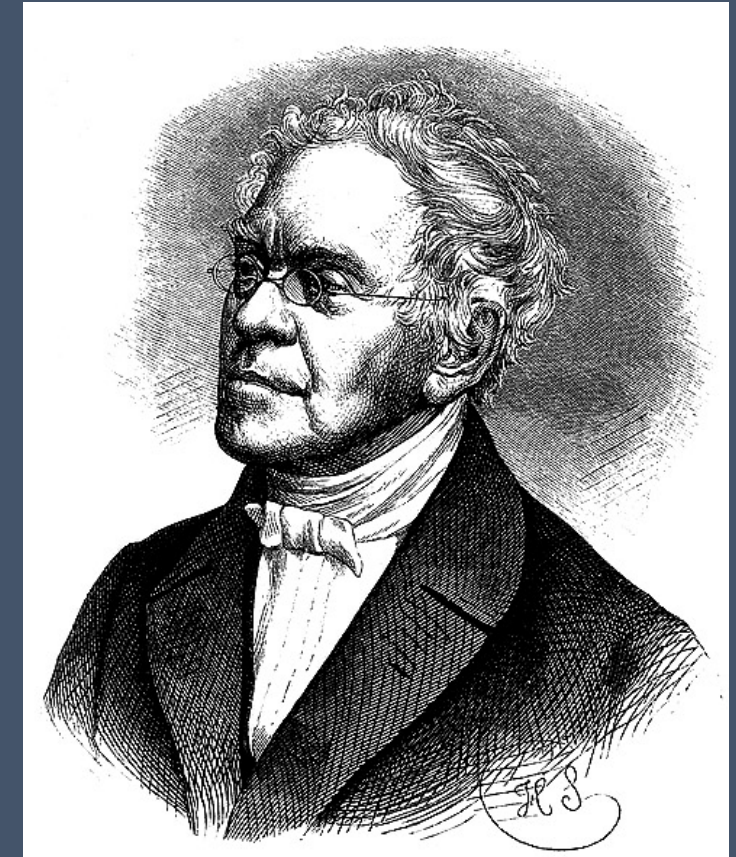
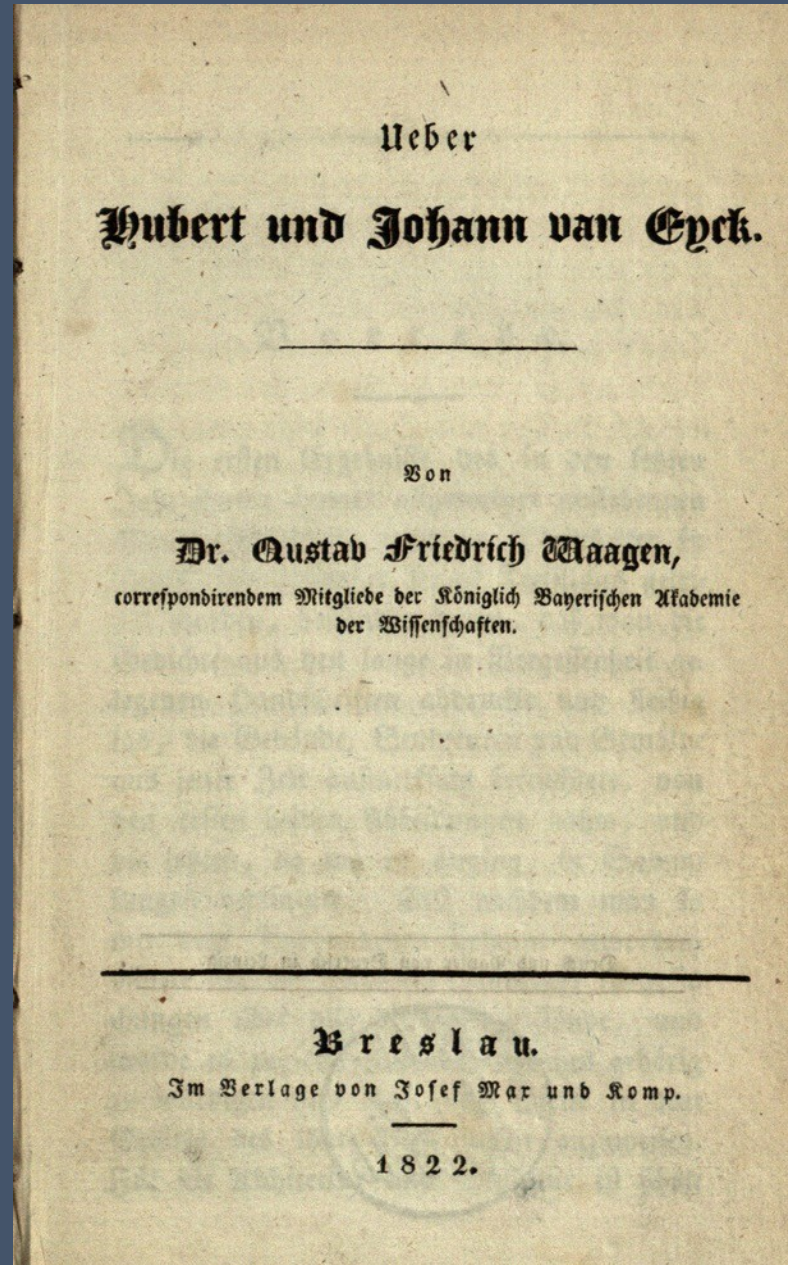
Gustav Friedrich Waagen
(1794-1868)

Director of the Art Gallery,
Berlin

Author of *Über Hubert und
Johann van Eyck* (Breslau,
1822)

First catalogue raisonnée

Like Rumohr – use of historical
sources and critical analysis of
their reliability



‘The information preserved for us by Vasari about Johann van Eyck, especially about his invention of oil painting and its dissemination across Italy, has been contradicted in many ways, and moreover its credibility has been challenged due to his claim that he has no source. It cannot be denied, he provides no guarantor for what he says about van Eyck. And yet he is not entirely silent about his sources. In the paragraph where he deals with van Eyck and many other Netherlandish painters, he says, when discussing the painter Lambert Lombard: “Domenico Lansonio of Liège, a highly learned man with fine judgement in all matters, told me many things about the excellent qualities of this Lambert in his letters”.’

Waagen, *Über Hubert und Johann van Eyck*, pp. 4-5

für angebe, angefochten worden *). Auch läßt sich nicht läugnen; daß er für das, was er über J. v. Eyck sagt, im Einzelnen keinen Gewährsmann anführt. Er hat jedoch über seine Quellen nicht gänzlich geschwiegen. In dem Abschnitte nämlich, worin er von dem J. v. Eyck und vielen andern niederländischen Künstlern handelt, sagt er, nach Erwähnung des Malers Lambert Lombard: „Von den trefflichen Eigenschaften dieses Lambert hat mir M. Domenico Lansonio von Lüttich, ein in den Wissenschaften viel erfahrner Mann, und in allen Dingen von großem Urtheile, durch seine Briefe viele Nachrichten mitgetheilt.“ **)

Er erwähnt darauf noch namentlich einer Biographie des Lombard in lateinischer Sprache, welche er von demselben erhalten habe, und gibt den Inhalt seines ersten Briefes vom Jahre 1564 an. Dieser Lampson, damals Secretair des Bischofs von

*) S. Lambroni in der Vorrede zu Cennino Cennini Trattato della pittura. Roma 1821. p. 57.

***) S. den 3ten Band. p. 271. der Ausgabe, welche von 1648 bis 1665 zu Bologna in 5 Bänden in Quart erschienen ist, von denen der erste die beiden ersten Theile, die andern beiden aber den dritten Theil des Werks enthalten. Unsere Citate beziehen sich immer auf diese Ausgabe, da wir nicht Gelegenheit hatten, eine andere, bessere benutzen zu können.

QUELLENSCHRIFTEN
FÜR
KUNSTGESCHICHTE
UND
KUNSTTECHNIK DES MITTELALTERS
UND DER
RENAISSANCE
HERAUSGEGEBEN VON
R. EITELBERGER v. EDELBERG.

X.
DES JOHANN NEUDÖRFER
SCHREIB- UND RECHENMEISTERS ZU NÜRNBERG
NACHRICHTEN
VON
KÜNSTLERN UND WERKLEUTEN DASELBST
AUS DEM JAHRE 1547
*nebst der Fortsetzung des ANDREAS GULDEN, nach den Handschriften und mit
Anmerkungen herausgegeben*
VON
DR. G. W. K. LOCHNER
STADTARCHIVAR ZU NÜRNBERG.

WIEN, 1875.
WILHELM BRAUMÜLLER
K. K. HOF- UND UNIVERSITÄTSBUCHHÄNDLER.

DÜRERS *binden
rot*
BRIEFE, TAGEBÜCHER
UND
REIME *+ C 7079 ^{0/5} =*

NEBST EINEM ANHANGE
VON
ZUSCHRIFTEN AN UND FÜR DÜRER

ÜBERSETZT UND MIT
EINLEITUNG, ANMERKUNGEN, PERSONENVERZEICHNISS UND EINER
REISEKARTE VERSEHEN
VON
MORIZ THAUSING.

WIEN, 1872.
WILHELM BRAUMÜLLER
K. K. HOF- UND UNIVERSITÄTSBUCHHÄNDLER.

QUELLENSCHRIFTEN
FÜR
KUNSTGESCHICHTE
UND
KUNSTTECHNIK DES MITTELALTERS
UND DER
RENAISSANCE
HERAUSGEGEBEN VON
R. EITELBERGER v. EDELBERG.

XIV.
ARNOLD HOUBRAKEN'S
GROSSE SCHOUBURGH
DER
NIEDERLÄNDISCHEN MALER UND MALERINNEN.
ÜBERSETZT
UND MIT EINLEITUNG, ANMERKUNGEN UND INHALTS-VERZEICHNISSEN VERSEHEN
VON
DR. ALFRED VON WURZBACH.
I. BAND.

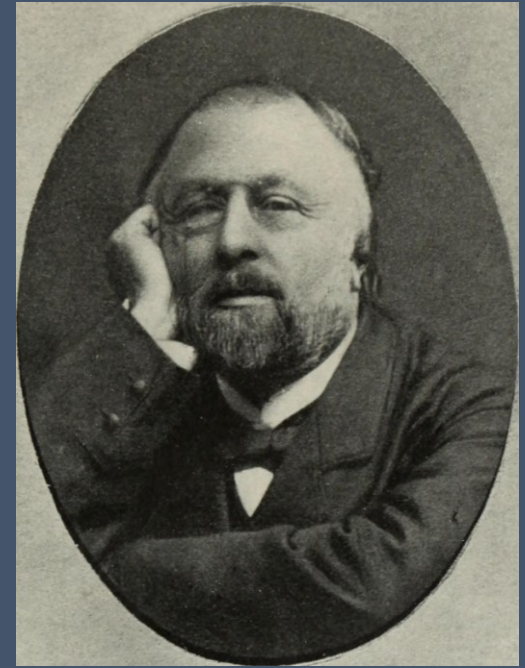
WIEN, 1880.
WILHELM BRAUMÜLLER
K. K. HOF- UND UNIVERSITÄTSBUCHHÄNDLER.

The Idea of Positive Science (1)

‘ ... just like the physical sciences, research [into culture] culminate in the establishment of constant relations between facts; the discovery of these dependencies in the physical sciences has given men the ability to anticipate and modify events in nature; an analogous discovery in the moral sciences must be able to provide men with the means to anticipate and modify to a certain degree historical facts.’

‘The entire secret of our practical progress, 300 years, is encapsulated here: we have separated out and defined pairs of facts, such that whenever the first appears, the second one never fails to follow ...’

Hippolyte Taine, *Essais de Critique et de l’Histoire* (Paris, 1858) p. xxiv and xxv



Hippolyte Taine
(1828-1893)

The Idea of Positive Science (2)

'The key ideas are as follows: (1) An emphasis upon verification (or some variant such as falsification): Significant propositions are those whose truth or falsehood can be settled in some way. (2) Pro-observation: What we can see, feel, touch, and the like, provides the best content or foundation for all the rest of our non-mathematical knowledge. '

Ian Hacking, 'Positivism' from Hacking, *Representing and Intervening* (Cambridge, 2012) p. 41

Positivism and its problems

Examples of Art Historical Positivism

- Research into who painted / sculpted / engraved / installed what, where and when (questions of provenance, attribution etc.)
- Research into the life history of artworks (who owned them, how much they were sold for etc.)
- Catalogues raisonnées
- Topographical Studies
- Iconological dictionaries

‘Research into sources leads, as every expert knows, to the singular item; hence the results of my research disintegrated into a series of ragged treatises, for which I could provide no external coherence. In order to avoid repetition of this, it therefore seemed all the more necessary to determine the point of view from which I was grasping the individual objects. I was thereby prompted, against my wishes and initial purpose, to reach into the domain of theory ...’

Rumohr – *Italienische Forschungen*, p. ix

lich erwogen und auf alle Weise geprüft und gesichtet worden.

So viel von dem Inhalte der zweyten Abtheilung dieser Schrift, welche der ersten unmittelbar nachfolgen soll. Doch auch von dieser werde ich erwähnen müssen, weshalb und wie sie entstanden.

Urkundliche Forschungen führen, wie es Sachkundigen bekannt ist, gar sehr ins Einzelne; und so zerfiel auch das Ergebniß der meinigen in eine Reihe abgerissener Abhandlungen, denen ich keine äußere Verbindung zu geben wußte. Desto mehr schien es mir nöthig, um Wiederholungen auszuweichen, von vorn herein den Standpunct zu bezeichnen, aus welchem ich das Einzelne aufgefaßt. Hiedurch ward ich über meinen Wunsch und ersten Zweck hinaus veranlaßt, in das Gebiet der Theorie hinüber zu greifen, was der reinsten Wille, das Gedeihen der Kunst und den ungetrübten Genuß ihrer Werke zu fördern, auch bey denen entschuldigen mag, welche auf die Sache minder, mehr auf die Form sehen.

Allein auch in historischer Beziehung bedurfte das Vereinzelte und Abgerissene eines gemeinschaftlichen



David Teniers the Younger
Archduke Leopold in his Art Gallery in Brussels (1647-51)

‘The hundreds of pictures in a gallery ... Art History places them in a context they do not possess in themselves, and for which they were not painted, and from which there arises a sequence, a continuity, under the influence of which the painters of these pictures stood without being aware of it.’

Gustav Droysen, *Historik. Enzyklopädie und Methodologie der Geschichte* (1858) (Munich, 1958) p. 35

‘ ... if historians are to contribute distinctive knowledge, annals of events have to be ordered according to some principle. The alternative ... amounts to nothing more than a “planless conglomeration of human actions.” But what might serve as an ordering principle? This question in turn raises other questions. Does history have meaning? Shape? Pattern? Direction? Stages?’

John Hall, *Cultures of Inquiry* (Cambridge, 1999) p. 35.

'The visitor must learn some physics before he can see what the physicist sees. Only then will the context throw into relief those features of the objects which the physicist sees.

[...]

This obtains in all seeing. Attention is rarely directed to the space between the leaves of a tree, save when a Keats [poem] brings it to our attention

[...]

There is a sense, then, in which observation is a theory-laden undertaking. Observation of x is shaped by prior knowledge of x .'

Norman Hanson, *Patterns of Discovery* (1958) in Stuart Brown, ed., *Conceptions of Inquiry* (London, 1981) pp. 267-9

The problem of 'objectivity'



Max Weber (1864-1920)

'Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy' (1904)

'The quality of an event as a "social-economic" event is not something which it possesses "objectively." It is rather conditioned by the orientation of our cognitive interest, as it arises from the specific cultural significance which we attribute to the particular event in a given case.'

On the Methodology of Social Sciences (Glencoe, 1949) p. 64 and 80.



Max Weber (1864-1920)

‘There is no absolutely "objective" scientific analysis of culture. ... All knowledge of cultural reality ... is always knowledge from particular points of view. ... An “objective” analysis of cultural events, which proceeds according to the thesis that the ideal of science is the reduction of empirical reality to “laws,” is meaningless [because] the knowledge of social laws is not knowledge of social reality but is rather one of the various aids used by our minds for attaining this end.’

On the Methodology of Social Sciences (Glencoe, 1949) p. 64 and 80.

‘The topics of socio-historical inquiry are not pre-formed things in the world itself. Instead, inquiry draws aspects of the world into focus through concepts like “industrialisation”, “social movement”, “coup d’état” and “citizenship” ... we are best served by assuming that these organizing rubrics are not only historically saturated but also mediated by a welter of meaningful interests that shape inquiry.’

John Hall, *Cultures of Inquiry* (Cambridge, 1999) p. 33

'Knowledge is not produced by passively perceiving individuals, but by interacting social groups engaged in particular activities. And it is evaluated communally and not by isolated individual judgement. Its generation ... must be accounted for by reference to the social and cultural context in which it arises. Its maintenance is not just a matter of how it relates to reality, but also of how it relates to the objectives and interests a society possess by virtue of its historical development.'

Barry Barnes, 'Conceptions of Knowledge' in C. Harrison, ed., *Modernism, Criticism, Realism* (London, 1984) p. 104

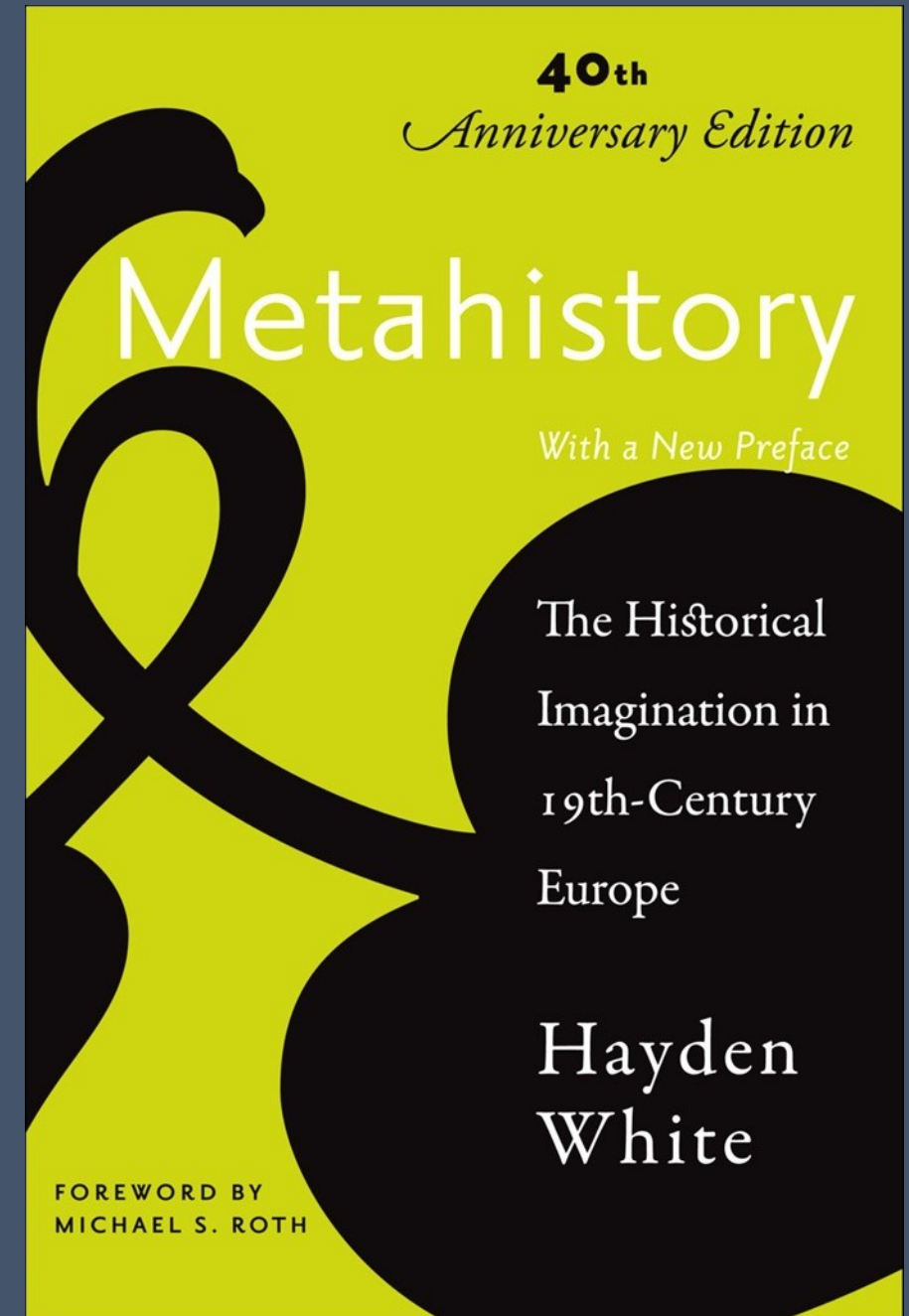
Some art historical examples:

- Renaissance
- Medieval
- Modern(ism) / modernity
- 'Early', 'late'
- Baroque, Classical / Neoclassical, Gothic
- Italianate
- Avant-garde
- Archaic

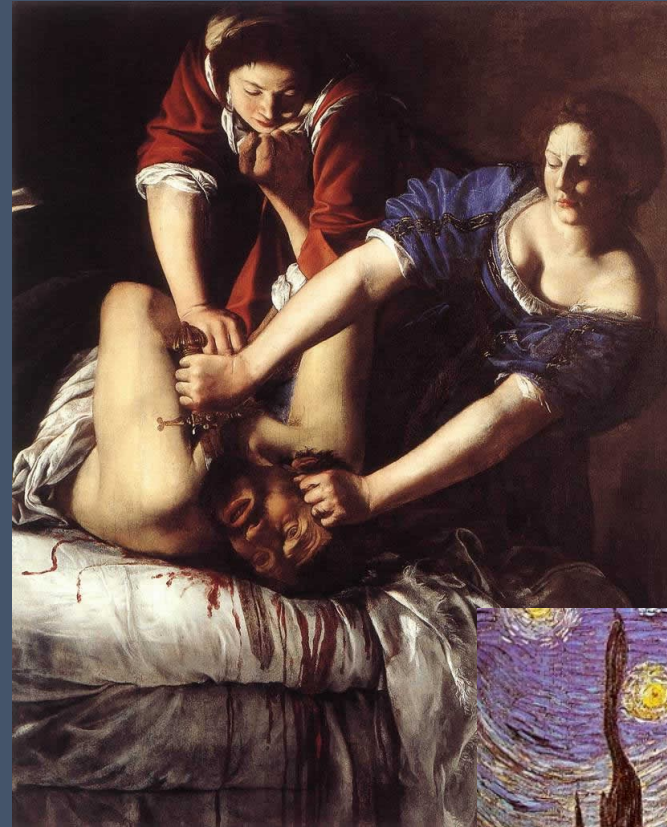
Hayden White (1928 - 2018) - history as a kind of writing that maps historical events onto narrative structures ('emplotment') according to literary genres such as:

- Tragedy
- Romance
- Comedy
- Satire

White, Hayden, *Metahistory. The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe* (Baltimore, 1973).



Consider the tradition of artists' biographies, which involves constructing a narrative about the artist's life, using emplotment according to a particular literary genre. Thus, Artemisia Gentileschi is heroic, Suzanne Valadon is romantic, van Gogh is tragic



.... Tracy Emin is satirical



Indecidability – the Case of Modernism

For Clement Greenberg the rise of modern painting was dominated by the quest for artistic autonomy in the face of popular culture ('kitsch').

The logic of modernism was driven by an emphasis on the physicality of painting, resulting in a flattening of the pictorial space and, eventually, abstraction.

Greenberg, Clement (1939). 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch,' in *Partisan Review* Vol. VI No. 5, pp. 34-39.



For Thomas Crow the flatness of modernist art was a positive engagement with popular culture, and in particular, with the flat surfaces of advertising posters.

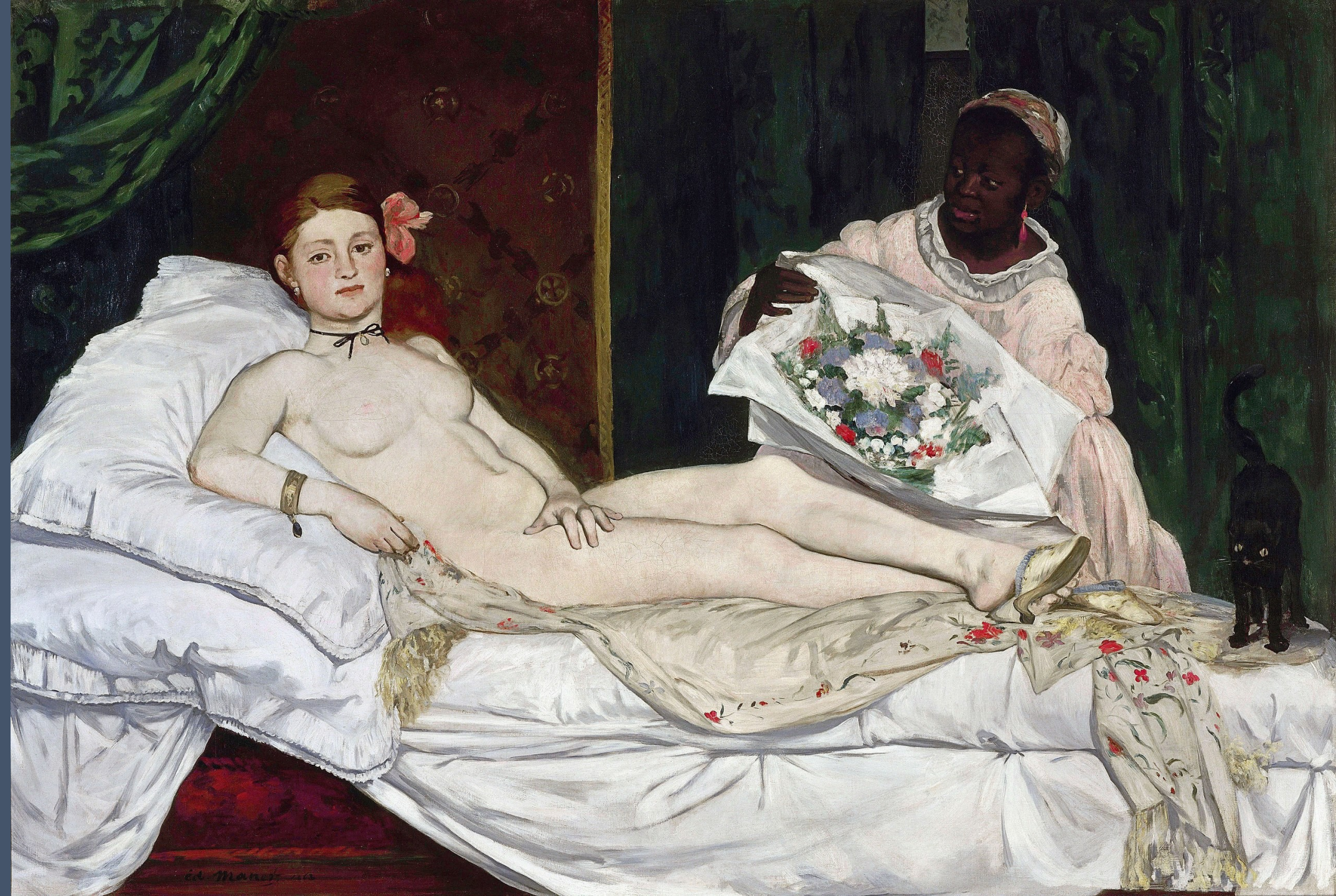
Thomas Crow, 'Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts' (1985)



For Rosalind Krauss modernity resulted in a crisis of subjective identity, as a result of which modernism was concerned with interrogation of identity. Consequently, for Krauss, it is *surrealism*, rather than abstraction, that is of key importance.

Krauss, Rosalind (1985). *Amour Fou. Photography and Surrealism*. Cambridge, MA, MIT Press.





Edouard Manet
Olympia (1863/65)



Left: Titian, Venus of Urbino (1534)

Right: Giorgione / Titian, Dresden Venus (1510-11)





T.1299

Goya, The Naked Maya (1797-1800)



MANETTE, ou LA FEMME DE L'ÉBÉNISTE, par MANET.

Que c'était comme un bouquet de fleurs.

Ce tableau de M. Manet est le bouquet de l'Exposition. — M. Courbet est distancé de toute la longueur du célèbre chat noir. — Le moment choisi par le grand coloriste est celui où cette dame va prendre un bain qui nous semble impérieusement réclamé.

BERTALL Caricature of Olympia, Le Journal Amusant, 2



MANET.

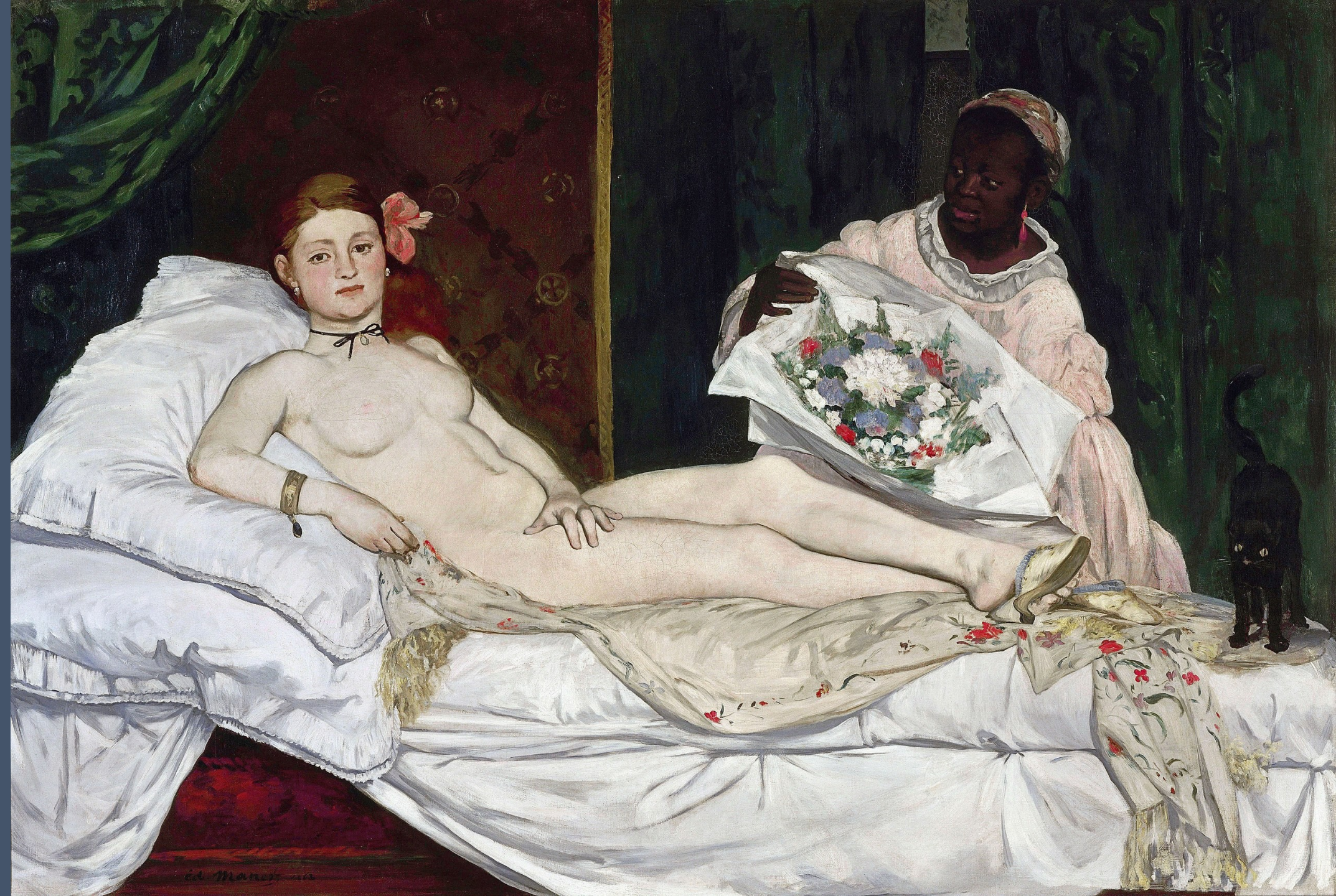
La Naissance du petit ébéniste.

M. Manet a pris la chose trop à la lettre :
Que c'était comme un bouquet de fleurs !
Les lettres de faire-part sont au nom de la mère Michel
et de son chat.



La queue du chat, ou la charbonnière des Batignolles.

Chacun admire cette belle charbonnière, dont l'eau, liquide banal, n'a jamais offensé les pudiques contours. Disons-le hardiment, le charbonnière, le bouquet dans du papier, M. Manet, et son chat, sont les lions de l'exposition de 1865. Un bravo senti pour M. Zacharie Astruc.



Edouard Manet
Olympia (1863/65)



Gustave Courbet
Bathers (1853)

'I want to argue that, for the critics of 1865, sexual identity was precisely what Olympia did not possess. She failed to occupy a place in the discourse on Woman, and specifically she was neither a nude, nor a prostitute: by that I mean she was not a modification of the nude in ways which made it clear that what was being shown was sexuality on the point of escaping from the constraints of decorum — sexuality proffered and scandalous.'

T J Clark, 'Preliminaries to a Possible Treatment of "Olympia" in 1865,' *Screen* 21.1 (1980) p. 32

'Let me make what I am saying perfectly clear. Olympia refuses to signify — to be read according to the established codings for the nude, and take her place in the Imaginary. But if the picture were to do anything more than that, it (she) would have to be given, much more clearly, a place in another classed code — a place in the code of classes.'

T J Clark, 'Preliminaries,' p. 39

For Clark, therefore, *Olympia* is a failure:

The meaning of Manet's *Olympia*, according to Clark, is (or was in 1865) open rather than closed, unfixed rather than established or tied down, shifting, runaway, endless, interminable, lacking a brake or an anchorage, destabilised, not maintained or kept in being, multiple rather than single or uniform, not adding up, not endowed with coherence, not articulated, inconsistent, insignificant, ineffective. In short, a failure. Manet's *Olympia* colludes in

Peter Wollen, 'Manet: Modernism and Avant-Garde,' *Screen* 21.2 (1980) p. 15

'This, it seems to me, is the point where Timothy Clark, in his exegesis of Olympia, is most confused. 'The signs of social identity are as unstable as all the rest'. Does he really think that class identity is something necessarily clearly and definitely fixed? That a successful prostitute might carry the signs of more than one class seems inadmissible to him. Yet a prostitute, particularly one who employs a servant, wears jewellery, refuses to be abject as she should and to abhor luxury, simply is not an unambiguous proletarian

Wollen, 'Manet,' p. 16.

'The problem lies in the very project of Realism, the idea that there is Reality and here am I (and Olympia, and Manet, and Courbet) and I can recognise my place in it — tied down, got right, given an identity ...'

Wollen, 'Manet,' p. 17.

Here, therefore, is the difference between these interpretations.

For Clark, *Olympia* has all sorts of ambiguities and lack of clarity because Manet *failed* to convey the class / sexual identity of the prostitute consistently,

For Wollen, *Olympia* has all sorts of ambiguities because it reflects the contradictory and ambiguous nature of reality

‘Fundamentally, the problem is whether to accept or reject contradiction in the real, whether to categorise all inconsistencies as signs of cognitive dissonance or failure to signify, or possibly as reflections in knowledge of a contradictory reality’

Wollen, p. 20

But the point is that *no appeal* to objective facts can settle this argument.