
Editorial Introduction

In *The Absolute Artist: The Historiography of a Concept* (1997), Catherine M. Soussloff demonstrated how art history as a discipline has privileged the study of the art object over that of its creator. This preoccupation is probably registered in the influence of a hermeneutic directed more and more towards a scientific, positivist approach, in the spirit of Winkelman, attenuating by its very existence that older history which was constructed under the aegis of the exemplary biography on the Vasarian model.

Among the few historical studies that have been undertaken on the subject of artists' lives, two works cannot be avoided: *Born Under Saturn. The Character and Conduct of Artists: A Documented History from Antiquity to the French Revolution* (1963) by Rudolf and Margot Wittkower, and the analysis carried out by Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist: A Historical Experiment* (1979). It appears from these findings that literary representations of the artist have continued to be enunciated around the same ancient narratives, even if they vary considerably from one period to another. This construction of the representation of the artist through time in effect crystallizes around certain dominant figures, whose exemplarity does not exclude consideration of marginal status. So many Raphaels, Caravaggios, Poussins, Rubens's and Van Goghs have been recounted. These representations, however, virtually monolithic and emblematic of various periods, give place to cases of fragmented artistic characters in the twentieth century: prophet, Christ, clown, martyr, businessman, proletarian – the image of the producer of modern art, whether literary or visual, is at the very least pluralistic. Indeed, it can be said that it is imposed "differentially," like every representation that has now broken with the univocity of its relation to itself.

The modernist "deconstruction" of this consensus on the representation of the creator results, among other things, in a multiple enunciatory capacity. From this mode of study of the

artistic personality, perceptions arise that "those who speak" propose as the "postures" of the artist, elaborations which are, in fact, revealed to be "impostures," that is, identificatory constructions erected around certain elements that escape critical vigilance.

From the perspective of this identificatory manipulation of the artist's personality, the importance of the contributions in this special issue of *RACAR* is clear. Various specialists have turned their attention to the analysis of several figures of artistic modernity. Thus, Véronique Rodriguez disengages, from a study of nineteenth-century French literature, a detailed rendering of artists' workshops that mirror portraits of their occupants. Victor Stoichita focuses on the self-portraits of Manet and Degas as the site for a paradoxical investigation of the modern self. Heather Dawkins, for her part, puts the representation of the artist Degas in the hands of a model in order to demystify the persona constructed through a masculine-formulated interpretative tradition. Nicole Dubreuil proposes a link between aesthetics and sociology in situating Renoir's technical and thematic idiosyncrasies within the framework of his conflicts of personal identity. Françoise Lucbert, prompted by a study of nineteenth-century art criticism, considers the collusion between critics and artists that led the former, within the framework of French Symbolism, to present the latter as isolated. Nathalie Heinich, elaborating on her work *La gloire de Van Gogh. Essai d'anthropologie de l'admiration* (1991), specifies how this artist was paradoxically established as a paradigmatic but not exemplary figure of the modern artist. Finally, Gerda Moray derives from an analysis of Emily Carr's journals a self-construction of the figure of a modern woman-artist.

Nicole Dubreuil and
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