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1. *In the last thirty years, images have been a focus of scholarship from many different viewpoints, and they have been pivotal in the many scholarly movements, or "turns", attempting to methodologically reframe the study of art history in general. Can you briefly explain which was your original focus of interest and in which directions your scholarly approach developed over the course of time?*

Over thirty years ago, starting when I was a child and continuing through my teenage years, I studied drawing and painting in the workshop of the artist Denis Godefroy in Rouen, Normandy. Teaching – both children and adults, including patients at the psychiatric hospital – was for him not only an artistic but also a social engagement. His understanding of images, as a drawer and painter, was physical and metaphysical. He had deconstructed images in the 1970s, in the sense of a *figuration analytique*, and he reinvested his art with material and gesture, technique, sensitivity, and emotion in the 1980s. He died in 1997. A few months later, I began studying art history.

In 2002, I completed my degree at the École du Louvre in Paris. My wish to study objects and images first-hand, in museums, had determined this course. However, I felt uncomfortable with the widely practiced sacralization of art. For this reason, another focus of my studies at the Louvre was the anthropology of European societies and cultures. This included some fieldwork: I followed bronze-casting techniques in contemporary handicraft and experimental archaeology. An additional interest of mine was museology, especially anthropological museums, which reflect social life. In order to shed light on the long European tradition of keeping and admiring sacralized objects for centuries in institutions, I turned to historical anthropology for my Ph.D. The result was my book translated as *Treasure, Memory, Nature. Church Objects in the Middle Ages* (London-Turnhout 2020).

2. *Please name up to three books that you consider to have played an important role in orienting your research.*

André Leroi-Gourhan, *Le Geste et la Parole*, 2 vols., Paris 1964-1965 (*Gesture and Speech*, Cambridge, Mass. - London 1993). Symbolic artefacts and images arise in tandem with hominization. In France, the study of art history is thus associated with that of archaeology. These two volumes, entitled *Technics and Language* and *Memory and Rhythms*, are rooted in physical anthropology, prehistoric archaeology, and contemporary ethnolo-

gy. Presenting a theory of human behaviour and cultural development, this study is also an ecological critique of modernism. I read the volumes in 2001. This sparked my interest in being a scholar. Leroi-Gourhan inspired much research in *technologie culturelle*, the anthropology of techniques. In 2012, I tried to build a bridge between this subdiscipline and art history with an essay and an edited volume on tools and instruments. That was important for my subsequent work.

André Desvallées, François Mairesse (ed.), *Dictionnaire encyclopédique de muséologie*, Paris 2011. This comprehensive reader, produced by the dedicated committee of the International Council of Museums, offers an introduction to museology. Ten years before its publication, in 2001/2002, I studied this field enthusiastically at the École du Louvre. At that time, anthropological and aesthetic approaches to extra-European indigenous art and culture were a subject of debates concerning the future Musée du Quai Branly in Paris (inaugurated 2006). In those years, Michel Colardelle was also reinventing the Musée national des Arts et Traditions populaires in Paris (closed 2005) as the Musée des civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée in Marseille (opened 2013). Colardelle, driven by ideas from "new" and "critical" museology, wanted to make central the visitor's sensory and cognitive experiences with objects, as well as to reflect on interculturalism. He was a figure of socialist museum politics, engaged and creative, and an inspiring teacher.

Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Le corps, les rites, les rêves, le temps. Essais d'anthropologie médiévale*, Paris 2001. When I was looking for a Ph.D. advisor, Michel Colardelle introduced me to Isac Chiva (1925-2012), a retired ethnologist of rural France and a close collaborator of the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. Chiva suggested Jean-Claude Schmitt, a historian of the Middle Ages whom he felt knew ethnography well. I told Chiva of my interest in the development of the European Union and especially in Germany. He referred me to a text in which he discusses the pogrom of Iași in Romania in 1941, which he survived, as well as his friendship with the poet Paul Celan in their Parisian exile and his collaboration with German ethnologists who confronted the National Socialist heritage of *Volkskunde*.[1] Chiva urged me to pursue what I felt committed to. Jean-Claude Schmitt agreed to help me study a church treasury in former East Germany. His recently published collection of essays was perfect for my transition from ethnologist to medievalist. I admired the depth of his methodological reflection and his ability to historicize all sorts of human experiences. This opened up possibilities for me at a key point, as I realized that contemporary museology came to bear upon many questions about church treasures.

3. *What is your assessment of traditional art history, with its emphasis on controversial notions and often rigid distinctions between "style" and "iconography"? What do you see as its hermeneutic limits and advantages? Do you think it should be thoroughly replaced with new approaches, or simply revised and integrated into the present-day art-historical discourse?*

What is traditional art history? We should distinguish the *traditio* of artefacts, their handing down from one generation to the next, from research about them, which is about

interpretation in the present and is thus never really traditional. With its objects and questions, art history is a heterogeneous field in which factual knowledge and logical interpretations are brought to bear on material and ideological issues. This is a strength of the discipline. Our teachers at the École du Louvre were museum professionals, most of them brilliant. We did not reflect much on methods, but we were introduced to art from all times and continents, in the Louvre galleries and other Parisian museums: the scope was universal. Such an approach, in this case bound to the patrimony of the French nation, raises questions. Leaving the Louvre, I felt the need to step back and study our "Western" fascination with museum objects as a cultural construction. History and anthropology were helpful. With later academic experiences in Germany and Italy, I came back to objects and art history. Traversing several scientific cultures, almost like an ethnologist, and holding organizational roles within international research communities (at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence, the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich, and the German Center for Art History in Paris) have taught me that rejecting methods often happens out of ignorance and fear, or out of an irrational commitment to the idea of progress. Integration is more productive. I admire strong argumentation, whether on style, iconography, or various other topics, and do my best to learn and collaborate and to enrich art history.

4. *Since the 1990s, our field has experienced many different "turns", each laying emphasis on one of the multiple dynamics in which images are involved. To what extent did your research benefit from such scholarly debates?*

I have been part of two groups of scholars committed to renewing the study of images. These experiences were formative. Among other cultural historians close to Jacques le Goff, Jean-Claude Schmitt understood that images document the *imaginaire* of past societies. He also situated the concept of *imago* within medieval anthropology. Michel Pastoureau, focusing on the history of the symbolism of colours and animals and extending this approach to objects, explained how the imaginary is part of reality (I realized later how this connects to surrealism, through his father's friendship with André Breton). My second encounter was with the *Bildwissenschaft*, or "image-science", of Horst Bredekamp, my other Ph.D. advisor, in Berlin. From there, I obtained a faculty position in Hamburg, where Bredekamp had contributed to actualizing the legacy of Aby Warburg (1866–1929) and his Warburg-Haus, and this deepened my understanding of this intellectual community. The first scholarly conference in which I presented, between Paris and Berlin, was organized by Hans Belting's group in Karlsruhe, and his rather physical anthropology of images was important for me too – as was, later, Herbert L. Kessler's broad knowledge and theoretical understanding of medieval Christian images. *Bildwissenschaft* analyses all sorts of images, beyond the sacralized notion of art. Progressively, this brought me back to art history. However, since this discipline has more to account for than images – their various relations with all kinds of three-dimensional material objects being one major question – I suggested *Objektwissenschaft* as a complement and expansion and launched a book series entitled *Object Studies in Art His-*

*tory*. My efforts concentrate on easily movable objects, at the intersection of art history and cultural and social history.

5. *In your opinion, which specific notions have become particularly relevant to our present-day understanding of images, and how have they affected your own approach?*

I understand images as objects. By definition – etymologically – an object is that which affects the senses of a subject and is processed through cognition. There is a useful difference between thing and object, though a given item can be both at once. Things are conceived abstractly as existing concretely. Objects, on the other hand, are perceived in life by the senses: they consist of sensory properties, coming together as we experience them in specific situations. Perception is culturally determined and continuously creative. It is an experience of presence, but also one of distance, or absence, when it comes to sensory deprivation. The latter occurs when access to objects is not immediate; and obviously, with images, what is depicted can be seen in most cases only from one side and cannot be touched, smelled, heard, etc., although our brain supplements this. Represented objects might even be unrealistic, able to exist only in images or texts or in our minds. Perceiving objects, interpreting them cognitively, allows for creative recombinations and actualizations. This is, for me, what art history seeks to study. Images, like other objects, are multisensorial and cognitive experiences.

6. *What is your specific understanding of "meaning" in visual objects? How do images manage to convey messages, and what are the implications*?

Only a tiny part of what humans perceive with their bodies is elaborated into ideas. Most perceptions remain unconscious, still contributing, however, to shaping future perceptions and reactions. We become accustomed to perceiving and acting in environments. This process of adaptation, constitutive of identities, gives rise to styles, which are best described as effects of repetition and familiarity – as in a volume on style in anthropology, techniques, and aesthetics edited by Bruno Martinelli in 2005. Beyond individuals, collective styles are created when human groups share practices, objects, and images. In such sensory communities, people agree on how specific perceptions are to be valuated and interpreted: when meaning is attributed to styles, they become symbols. How symbolism is conceived within groups varies, as Philippe Descola has shown for visible forms in his anthropology of figuration.

7. *To what extent is "meaning" determined by factors not immediately associated with the specific visual appearance of images, such as* mise-en-scène *strategies, conditions of visibility, and more generally the experiential dimension of viewers?*

The notion that humans have five senses, sight being particularly valued among them, was known in antiquity. It is a simplification, ignoring the dynamics and complexities of multi- and intersensoriality, as well as other senses, like proprioception, through which we know our movements and positions. When we see bodies in images – heroic, tortured, active, etc. – our brains relate them to our perceptions of our own body, both from the past

and in the immediate present. The same happens with other representations and perceptions. Experiencing images is never solely visual, such that the reverse question is worth asking: when is meaning created in a more specifically visual way in images? Perhaps when meaning becomes conventional, in what is commonly called "iconography". But visual codifications are only meaningful in certain situations. There are iconographic styles, as are there styles of thought. And likewise, the boundaries of iconic representation are not always clear. I co-edited a volume on fifty objects that, while all shaped like books, served a variety of functions, from reliquaries and mechanical clocks to camera obscurae and laptop bags, spanning the late Middle Ages until today. Are they feigned books, and thus images experienced in practice, through their use? They are rather combinations of actual elements of books – combinations held together materially and symbolically, invoking mental images to create meaning in given situations.

8. *In your view, are we now better equipped to reconstruct and more deeply understand the complex relationship between the visual appearance of an image and the expectations of its viewers?*

We are at an interesting moment. My impression is that considering images in isolation is a dead end. It certainly allows us to take them seriously and to develop adequate theories. But it also entails an essentialization of images, or even a generalization of "the image", which might interest aesthetes or philosophers and can be studied from these perspectives but cannot serve as a fundament for art history as a full human science. To cultivate more comprehensive approaches to images, we need to recognize that vision and imagination are experienced and memorized in connection with all sorts of sensory perceptions. Moreover, both as artefacts and in our brains, images are part of the reality they represent. In two essays, I have exposed how the theologian and natural philosopher Albertus Magnus explained the appearance of the head of a king in veined-marble panels, in Venice, as an astral influence ultimately directed by God; and how Giotto, hearing of this, painted in his famous chapel in nearby Padua vices and virtues as figures in stone in order to impress upon viewers that free will resists astral determinations. This assertion of the place of human art in the forces of nature was important well into the early modern period. Today, developments within sensory anthropology and the anthropology of techniques are opportunities for art history to participate in interdisciplinary debates and to expand its scope.

9. *To what extent can images contribute to informing their viewers' understandings of other images and other aspects of reality and experience?*

The notion of different modes of existence is helpful here. Bruno Latour describes the heterogeneity of human experience, between the realms of science, politics, and religion – establishing new connections as a way to address social and ecological challenges. Objects, images, and texts also exist as realities that are ontologically discrete from one another yet are related via sensory properties, whether experienced directly or in representations. These properties establish continuums across distinct realms, and

their recombinations inform future perceptions. As I recognized in a co-authored book, the crown of Hildegard of Bingen, which features images, existed in several different though related forms: as a vision experienced by the twelfth-century mystic; as a textual description of said vision; as a preciously embroidered personal insignia (extant to this day and newly identified); in the similar yet simpler crowns for Hildegard's singing nuns; and in what people outside their convent heard related to this. This diversity produced significance and legitimation for the objects and subjects involved. Art history can reconstruct such connections, in which images often have important functions, along with their implications.

10. *What is your assessment of the materiality of images?*

Materiality, as a term, is an abstractum. I think we need concrete and precise questions about the physical properties of specific materials (their colour, brilliance, sound, texture, etc.) and about the history of their interpretation and organization in cultural systems. Equally relevant are techniques dealing with the physical and symbolic properties of materials: natural and data sciences can reveal technical choices and patterns; an iconology of techniques can shed light on their socialization through representations. Forming materials into images establishes relations among the materials, the images, and the techniques entailed, with possibly far-reaching consequences. My analysis of figures of slaves sculpted in ebony – as parts of chairs and gueridons made in Venice around 1700 – led me to retrace the history of the association between the material ebony and the bodies of people identifying or identified as black. This relates to the transatlantic slave trade and its legacy in Europe and America. As this case underlines, we experience images materially with our bodies, and they shape how we inhabit our bodies, both individually and socially.

11. *In your view, how can we approach the "social life" of images? In what sense can we assume that images interrelate with their viewers and users?*

If we avoid metaphors in order to seek precision, as I think we should on this topic, then images do not have "social lives". They do not live, nor do they act, and therefore making them the subject of any active verb is, in a factual sense, wrong. Humans, rather, make images, involve them in their social lives, act with them. Images and objects have histories, not biographies. It is certainly common to attribute some life and subjectivity to inanimate objects. This is the case with toys at a normal phase of child development; it seems to be the primary purpose of certain images of divinities or individuals, and it is also frequent in advertising. Art historians as scientists, however, should not share such beliefs. Their role is rather to describe the origins, forms, and functions of these beliefs. Evident partners in this endeavour are psychologists, specialists of religion and politics, and sociologists (as all human societies involve objects). Most importantly, attributing subjectivity to images and other objects can mean delegating responsibility and thus distracting from the actual role of humans. This can have important consequences. Art history can contribute to explaining, in many cases, what is at stake.

12. *Does the experience of images exclusively imply the exercise of sight, or do other senses also play a role? If possible, please cite a relevant case from your research field.*

Objects that bear images – that is also: images as objects – involve multisensoriality in various ways, as do images that represent objects in relation to bodies. One task of art history is always to understand how this occurs. Not all objects and images are intended for an "objective" perception. Take for example a transparent glass beaker, enamelled around 1300 with colourful images of three camels – animals known to drink rarely, but a lot at a time – amid vivid vegetation. Made to be sold, probably in Venice, and later unearthed in the Rhineland, this small vessel invited the user to glimpse the refreshing wine through and between these images, before consuming it. It must have been appealing on the market, as well as entertaining for drunken people with altered sensory and cognitive faculties: hence the simple pattern and generic message. Another multisensorial object that I have studied, this one much more complex, is a hydraulic musical fountain, an exceptional piece of precious metalwork made in Paris in the fourteenth century and now in the Cleveland Museum of Art. It is rich in images: water-spitting men, dragons, and animal heads, enamelled figures of couples playing musical instruments, of winged hybrids, and more, all amid architectural forms whose details caught sparkling drops of water. Modest in size, this refined object would have offered an overwhelming sensory experience to a small, privileged, educated group. As a "fountain of youth" and a political allegory, it seems to have manifested eternal felicity in the kingdom of France. I think that such complex cases can teach us a lot about images, about the various ways in which they relate to objects, and about art history more generally.

13. *Recent studies have emphasized that "iconicity" (or "visual efficacy") is not an exclusive property of artistic images but can also be regarded as an attribute of non-figurative objects, such as elements of landscape, natural materials, and living beings. To what extent can such objects be included in an art-historical narrative?*

Seeing includes our experience of images, which contribute to shaping our perception. This is why we speak of a picturesque landscape or a photogenic person – and inversely, things like landscape design and facial cosmetics follow trends established in existing images. Moreover, we can use real objects iconically in life, just as figures use attributes in images. Such relations between presence and representation, between earlier experiences and sensory perception, are not limited to vision and images; they accompany other senses and objects, too. This poses a major question indeed. If perceiving an object is already creative and thus means creating an artefact, should art history expand its purview beyond objects made by humans? I think so, also because this has important implications. The interpretation of the long tooth of a narwhal as the horn of a unicorn, for example, was established in the twelfth or thirteenth century and still, in part, motivates the hunting of this small whale from the Arctic Ocean. Art history has the means to uncover the leitmotifs that shape how humans relate to "raw" materials and other resources. This is relevant also in terms of political ecology.

14. *Many studies have focused on the dynamics by which images originally meant for a specific viewing context come to be transferred to, appropriated by, and transformed and reshaped in another. Which hermeneutic tools can be useful in our analysis of such phenomena?*

Like other objects, images are made and then perceived, used, and transformed in specific historical situations. These situations are materially, socially, and symbolically determined, each one unique and continuously changing. Objects and situations are intricate, and these intricacies as they exist in time are, I think, the main problem of art history. How should we thus analyse objects, especially those not meant to exist in front of us? More than to situate them solely in known history or the present, we should seek to understand how situations are determined by objects, how they would not exist without them. Objects result from, deal with, and contribute to shaping situations, that is, contexts. They are not autonomous – and this includes modern works of art – but are created as solutions to material, social, and symbolic problems, sometimes with ingenuity or virtuosity. In addition, objects exist in dynamic situations and may be kept, given away, or destroyed in reaction to them. The better we describe the materials, techniques, and forms of objects and especially of images as specific combinations of sensory properties to be perceived and interpreted, the better we can grasp and explain their correlations to the specific situations in which that experience happened. This approach brings together object studies and cultural history.

15. *English is more and more the* lingua franca *of global art-historical scholarship. To what extent may we avoid applying to non-European contexts notions drawn from an essentially Western European understanding of images and their materiality and meaning?*

Artefacts, in their material logic, already relate to language. Considering pertinent languages is thus important for their study, always with the necessity of distinguishing between the language practiced by those being studied and the analytic language of the scientist (even if that is contemporary English in both cases). Cultural anthropologists refer to the emic and etic approaches, describing cultures complementarily from within and outside. "Art" in the common sense and thus "artist" and "art history" are local and recent inventions, originating in Europe just a few centuries ago. They are related to Christianity, its tradition of interpretation and representation and its transformations, and they involve European languages, past and present. European legacies are now more or less globalized, or are treated as such. But "global art history" should not be a history of only this process of globalization, whether in the form of Christian missions or the development of multiple modernities and contemporary art scenes. This scope is in itself a marker of progress, because it is more explicitly Eurocentric than the nineteenth- and twentieth-century practice of selecting, in the history of the world, what would fit best with current Western ideas of art or of world heritage. But it is not yet global. A universalist perspective in art history would be fruitful in its analyses and as a message, but to develop it the discipline needs more radical approaches, beyond the common notion of "art" or notions specific to any single community. It would have to encompass, non-hierarchically, productions from all times and places, including those of cultures with less material

equipment, even beyond Homo sapiens. A strategic field in which to begin exploring this is the European Middle Ages, as a profound alterity that generated Western modernity, key notions – *imago*, *obiectum*, *artifex* – having been elaborated there. But the discipline must also test its concepts with even more distant alterities, in dialogue with archaeology and anthropology.

16. *Finally, what are we still lacking? In which direction should we pursue our studies in the following decades?*

Art history's recent achievements concerning vision and images are impressive. But they come at a price: relegating the discipline to mere questions of observation and representation. There is an urgency now, in the face of the current ecological situation, to grasp more comprehensively how humans create artefacts and act with them in the world, and how they might do so in more sustainable ways. Such questions demand global approaches to the human experience and to human experiences in their past and present diversity. Our crisis is primarily a legacy of Europe. It has roots in the divisions among, and the evolutions of, craft, art, industry, and design. Art history has much to contribute by broadening its questions around and beyond images, with a sense of responsibility.[2]

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1. I. Chiva, *Des itinéraires décalés et croisés / Getrennte und gekreuzte Wege. En l'honneur de Utz Jeggle*, Tübingen 2001.

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