



Advancing
Art&Design

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Prehistoric Cave Paintings by Max Raphael and Norbert Guterman

Review by: F.O. Waage

Source: *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Jun., 1947), pp. 133-134

Published by: CAA

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3047118>

Accessed: 20-07-2019 17:39 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

CAA is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Art Bulletin*

BOOK REVIEWS

MAX RAPHAEL, *Prehistoric Cave Paintings*, translated by Norbert Guterman, Washington, D.C., The Bollingen Series IV, Pantheon Books, Old Dominion Foundation, 1945. Pp. 51; 48 pls. \$7.50.

What a pity, in some respects, that accidents of geography set the location of Upper Paleolithic art in Gallic rather than Germanic territory! As a consequence the French, with their flair for the appreciation of "Art" and their sturdy individualism, have been forced to the grubby and impersonal observation and description, and the ethnographic explanation, of those monuments in the possession of which, for all their age, their national pride rejoices; even a Luquet is forced to qualify his theoretical interpretation by practical considerations to the point of almost fatal weakness. German scholarship, on the contrary, lacking the impetus furnished by possession, has seldom felt inclined to apply to this material the great resources of its literal and methodical painstakingness; instead that opposite propensity of the Teutonic mind, toward unrestrained theoretical speculation, has run riot over the field and in such dicta as that of the "purity" of Paleolithic art, to which "any secret mystical influence is entirely foreign" (Kühn), has given peremptory statement to what is without doubt the most egregious example in art-historical research of anachronistic interpretation, the "art for art's sake" explanation of Franco-Cantabrian art. And now does Max Raphael's book constitute an exception to this, with its advertised declaration that art "was based on hunting and on an elaborate ideology which tied together magic and totemism"?

At the beginning of Chapter 1, "The Elements of the Paleolithic World," we find these statements of point of view: a) Paleolithic (Franco-Cantabrian) art is not primitive art; b) it cannot therefore be interpreted through comparison with the art of modern primitive cultures; c) the present theoretical basis of art history prevents historians from interpreting art and translating "the language of artistic forms into universal philosophical concepts." These statements are presented as self-evident propositions, with no marshalling of meaningful evidence, but with the mere accompaniment of other bald assertions. On these unsupported assumptions, the author then proceeds to develop his own interpretation, one heavily interlarded with abstract philosophical considerations. The groups of animals as found in the cave art are not chance aggregations of individual representations, but purposeful group compositions whose significance lies in magic (hunting, propitiation, fertility) and totemism (events of clan history). The synthesis of the expression of magical and totemic meaning is what gives the art its formal character and this character permits various aesthetic, psychic and philosophical deductions to be made about Paleolithic man: ". . . this much is certain: the paleolithic artists . . . were quite familiar with all the innermost recesses of the human soul, with the comedy that is daily acted out between consciousness and being" (p. 11). Then follow interpretations of the non-zoomorphic signs and the anthropoid figures.

Chapter 2, "The Magic of the Hand," treats in similar vein the relations of curve and plane in the representation of the animals (p. 20): ". . . the curve is not a sequence of points that obey a rigid and always identical course, but a motion caused by an elemental force (*mana*) whose rhythm it follows," the representation of space, the arithmetical and geometrical proportions which were based on the hand as the device of mensuration, and the general character of Paleolithic art. In Chapter 3, "The Composition of the Magic Battle at Altamira," the author expounds upon the ceiling as revealing a

single conception represented by an equally unified composition which he interprets as illustrating the victorious conquest of the magically potent hind over the physically potent bison, in which representation actual contest, propitiation, and other qualities are discernible: "The materially and historically determined opposition between the two clans (or between a clan and an animal) has been transformed into a conflict between feminine tenderness and masculine bulk, between spirit and physical force; the hunting and fighting ideology of the early paleolithic period has become the conflict between spontaneous action and broken will; natural and historical facts have been transfigured to represent the power of Being, its constancy in change, the tragic break in human life" (p. 42).

Only quotations can possibly indicate the completely otherworldly quality of the author's treatment. Here are a few more, shorter but otherwise characteristic: ". . . the scenes . . . impress one as state occasions . . . some . . . have the grandeur of Aeschylean tragedies" (p. 9); "The bison at Altamira are obviously in contradiction with themselves and can only represent human beings who have become conscious of their internal antagonisms" (p. 10); "Only the degree of [art's] approximation to perfection can be studied from a historical point of view" (p. 17); "The physical distance between the two animals expresses the distance between what they want to do and what they are compelled to do, between their wishes and their fates" (p. 26); ". . . the horizontal line that runs from left to right expresses a passively accepted compulsion which became conscious, and the vertical line conquers and spiritualizes the earthbound heaviness of the animal's belly" (p. 35); ". . . [the Paleolithic artist] completely mastered the blending of emanation-like self-motion with causal and teleological determination" (p. 37).

What can one say in answer to a book on Old Stone Age art which indulges in such intellectualistic double-talk or, supreme example, finds necessity for mentioning in one paragraph (p. 11) Aeschylus, Ibsen, hypostatized Being, Hagia Sophia, Baudelaire and tragic dualism? Nothing can be said; the author's position, like a man's religion, is a matter of faith, outside the realm of meaningful historical discussion, and his point of view, like the peace of God, passeth all understanding. For the prime assumption that Paleolithic man was not primitive, no argument is advanced; we are not expected to ask one, nor even to point out, I suppose, that this assumption may find itself in opposition to the logical and anthropological consequences of remarks on page 38, to the effect that Paleolithic man was not fundamentally different from man today. Similarly, without justification or defense, totemic significance is gratuitously assumed in these brief lines (p. 7): "We know nothing about this organization [of society] except what a correct understanding of the works of art can reveal to us. And these tell us first of all that man represented his social unity as a group by animals." Needless to say, this is not in any sense a *study* of Paleolithic art and it is useless to subject it to the critical inquiry appropriate to historical research. Apart from its acceptance of a general social origin for Paleolithic art it is as unrealistic as the asseverations of the "art for art's sake" school, and in the fantasy of its interpretations it almost vies with the pathetic ingenuity of those who read world prophecy in the dimensions of the pyramid of Khufu.

Such excursions into the imagination need not, of course, be wholly useless; positively they may suggest a new way of looking at old material and negatively they have the shock effect of encouraging further study in opposition. Here, however, the

treatment is so extreme and goes so far beyond any interpretations which are at all reasonable in the light of present information that it seems ineffectual in any sense. Is it not about time that, in the presence of such stratospheric intellectual acrobatics as are displayed in this juggling with metaphysical verbalisms, someone should remark, like the child in Andersen's story, "But the emperor hasn't got anything on"? Certainly the use of such abstract terms and concepts in writings and criticisms about art objects has done more to confuse and antagonize the population at large than the best efforts of some artists themselves. There is an occasion for these speculations, perhaps after the third or fourth cocktail when helium-light minds can rocket far above the phenomenal world, and a place for them as essays in publications devoted to the more extreme elements of the *Zeitgeist* and *Gefühl* school of thought. But they should not be dressed up as, or otherwise confused with, art history in even the broadest sense, for its boundary is set at but one remove from the phenomenal world. To make an attribution from an attribution leaves little of validity; to make a speculation from a groundless assumption, or from another speculation, leaves none.

F. O. WAAGE
Cornell University

RODOLFO PALLUCCHINI, *Guardi's Zeichnungen im Museum Correr zu Venedig*, Florence, Sansoni [1943]. Pp. 251. \$18.00.

This is the translation by Eckart Peterich of the Italian edition published at Venice in 1942 by Daria Guarnati. Sra. Guarnati's prefatory note gives to her father, the distinguished art-historian Henry Lapauze, credit for the impulse obeyed in this publication (she herself having begun with an inventory of the Correr's Guardi's in 1911).

The volume is described as having been published in an edition of five thousand (the size of the Italian edition is not mentioned). One's first thought is not to believe it; one's second is to wonder whether the comparatively low price (it works out at about twelve and a half cents a plate) is the result of the size of the edition or rather of the current Italian exchange; one's third thought is to be grateful, regardless of Axis complacency in 1942-1943, for the production of a good art reference book in that quantity. Your reviewer has squawked often before about artificial rarity and limited editions in a field in which almost everything has to be subsidized anyway if it is to see the light of day. Why, for instance, should so fine a book as Fiske Kimball's *The Creation of the Rococo* be so very expensively produced and then in an edition of only one thousand? The result is to make it inaccessible, which is a shame. It is said that Italian activity in publishing has almost caught up with Swiss; one looks forward to the arrival here, for instance, of Benno Geiger's new book on Magnasco drawings, published at Pavia in 1945. At any rate, let us search no further for the ulterior motive than to remind ourselves that Guardi's mother was an Austrian, and get on to the book.

No doubt the Museo Correr has the largest assembly of Guardi drawings anywhere, though not perhaps the majority of his existing drawings, as Pallucchini suggests. The publication of this marvelous group is, however, a vast pleasure in itself for the consumer, and may encourage a monograph. As a picture-book, this is high grade B, and I doubt that anything but a complete set of four-color facsimiles on much finer paper could be better. The plates for such drawings as are in red chalk are printed in red, and the three sheets adorned with watercolor are reproduced in full color. The paper is of extremely matte surface and has a slightly deadening quality. There are special difficulties in the way of reproducing anything drawn on the very absorbent papers Guardi enjoyed, to say nothing of his anti-graphic handwriting. Even if he had more often used the

harder-surfaced white papers chosen by Tiepolo for pen and ink, he would have been hard to reproduce.

Pallucchini presents all the drawings of Francesco at full dimensions, reducing some of his selections from the work of Gianantonio, Niccoló, and Giacomo, of which he makes a useful appendix. His point that reductions, even to understanding persons, are deceptive, is well taken but rather typical of his anxiety to say absolutely everything he can think of. In general his critical apparatus seems fancier than is justified by the number of new or startling judgments in its content. Thoroughness is admirable but pretentiousness is not, and there is surely no longer any reason for going over the familiar prefatory jumps about the previous neglect of Such-and-such. The earlier literature is well used and justly appraised (e.g., a few disquieting attributions of drawings shown at Springfield, Massachusetts, in the important Guardi show of 1937, are revised). All the necessary technical points are gone over. In other words, the author has done everything that he should have done as a scholar with a catalogue to produce; he has also written a handsome appreciation under the headings of *Analyse* and *Formensprache der Zeichnungen*, which (though Italian may suffer in German translation) is devoted, understanding, and enthusiastic. Yet one does not find any conspicuous contribution to artistic judgment to be grateful for. The critical section and catalogue are in a way a statistical *travail de vulgarisation*; so that with the picture-book the whole is not so much a new tool for the profession as a portmanteau.

We already know that Guardi had a transforming and improving skill which, in its magical self, is more important to know and care about than all the detail of his vagaries in treating known localities and monuments. We know that some of his drawings are functionally related to his paintings in a closer sense than were Watteau's; that he was a figure-painter of distinction who made drawings in that field; but that much of his drawing was as independent of his painting as Rembrandt's. Pallucchini has put together the supporting information for these and other known aspects of the master, but I think he might have gone farther with his conclusions. Though the question of dating is perhaps the least important of the problems relating to Guardi, the author spends a long time on it and then produces not much more than the modest assurance that anyone who tried to lay out a dating criterion would be sure to err. It is also possible that some other arrangement of the drawings than in semi-iconological categories would have been more meaningful; half the "Entwürfe zu Booten" are not designs for boats but studies after them, and it would be impossible to say just where Guardi's drawings from nature merge into fantasies. One might just as well have isolated the chalk drawings from those in pure pen and those in pen and wash, and I am not sure that doing so would not contribute somewhat to a divination of the artist's intents and methods.

The pedigree of much of the Correr material is impeccable but at the same time suggestive, especially in connection with Lasareff's comments on the way in which Francesco Guardi moved gradually from figure-painting in association with his older brother Gianantonio toward the half-fantastic views of his later years. Niccoló Guardi said in the 1850's that his father Giacomo had all his father Francesco's "sketches," and it is presumed that a known sale of some of these to Theodor Correr was followed by more. The drawings in the Correr Museum that could be called *disegni* rather than sketches are almost all of unknown pedigree; there is no question of their authenticity, but it is possible that they are an assembly of material much of which came from the brothers' shop and was originally joint shop property in the Venetian tradition, rather than individual notes of Francesco's. This is not to say that the figure studies, portraits, compositions for paintings, and decorative essays necessarily date before Gianantonio's death (1760); indeed, one of the figure studies dates 1779 or later.