

Vandredi

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Art Documentation , a problem.

It is true, we travel nowadays in automobiles and planes, we travel fast, but it does not seem that our fast communications have been of much help for the exchange of artistic information and documentation. I am going to make a few remarks about actual difficulties in getting such information hoping that this congress can do something about it.

If you have to select the plates for a book on, let us say, paintings or drawings from works that are in private collections of 3 or 4 different countries, as it happened to me last winter, you have to face a situation like this: First you have to study the legal aspect for each country. In the United States you have to get the permission of the owner of the art work. He might refuse to have you reproduce the work in question (although that happened to me only once) or he might give his permission stipulating conditions such as to ~~XXXXXXXX~~ let him have one or several copies of your book after publication. If your edition is small, includes a lot of plates, and you run into many such demanding owners, you have not much to worry where your books go. Another condition might force you to run one, two or even 3 credit lines along with the reproduction, that is on the very same page. If the lay-out of the publication does not allow for extended texts in connection with the plates, one faces real difficulties if one wants to stay on the strictly correct side.

Very different is the situation, when the art work is preserved in a European country. Whereas the American owner usually can provide you with a photo of the painting or drawing in his possession, in France for instance you buy, in many cases, the reproductions from a commercial photo firm and ~~there~~ may also buy, for a certain fee, the right of reproducing them. The photogr-

apher might also be able to tell you the exact measurements of the original and its present owner, so that you can see and study the original. But it might as well happen that the photographer is not able to give you any information or documentation about the work the photo of which he is ~~xxxxxx~~ willing and eager to sell you. Then the real trouble begins. You might have studied certain artistic aspects for many years and, step by step, brought together a great number of pertaining photos building up your own archive. Then you make your final choice for the works to be included in your reproductions to discover that a great deal of them cannot be used because on the back of them there is a small note saying: Reproduction interdite, or unknown private collection or nothing at all, and nobody can tell you anything about that matter. I agree however that these are the extreme cases. Often you might be able to trace the present ownership of the work through the help of some friend and colleague who has more secret information about it than yourself, or who is willing to make some inquiries for you in a remote place where even writing would not get you anywhere. One might, of course, find some help from bibliographical references or from one of the famous photo files and archives that have been set up in the Frick Library in New York, by Sir Robert de Witt in London, the Biblioteca Hertziana in Rome, das Kunsthistorische Seminar der Universität Marburg, and at various places here in Paris; If you are able to travel from one of these cities to the next and to get your information "sur place" then, I am sure, there is hardly a single work in the art world that you would not be able to find out about. But most people cannot do that, and these institutions are not equipped to give you any detailed information or photo documentation service by correspondence. But it is my belief that this kind of information about available photos and references as for present owner, pedigree, measurements, technique, etc. would be most important to provide in an international scale. Maybe UNESCO

could do it, maybe a permanent office of our new World Art Critics Association. It is not necessary to build up a new photo and documentation archive, but only to make communications between the existing ones by way of what might be called a Union catalogue or better a Union Photo Archive; This place should be equipped to give information on art documentation by correspondence to ~~artists~~ critics, writers, scholars, but not to tax collectors, for the very human fear of excessive taxes drives many art collectors, as you know, into hiding.

It is for others to decide whether and how such a project could be put into practice. But there cannot be the slightest doubt that if we can do it, we will have given the most tremendous help to all those who work in the service of art and, as far as art documentation is concerned, we would have no more to be ashamed to live in the time of automobiles and planes.

Thank you.

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