

Materials, materialities, making

The Athenians long preserved the ship that delivered Theseus to safety. They replaced, when necessary, the old planks with stronger ones. For philosophers, the legend of the ship of Theseus is a controversial example of the notion of identity.¹ It also illustrates the complex relationship that we have with materiality and its permanence.

Indispensable for its being constitutive of the work or artifact, materiality appears to be a marker of authenticity. Materials can nevertheless be repaired, replaced, and create illusion without upsetting our perception of the work. Underlying the artifact, it gives structure and confers its qualities. Despite this, its study has long remained on the margin of art history, pertaining to the restoration or authentication of a work. Now, the past two decades have seen the appearance of a *material turn* in art history, resulting from collaboration with other disciplines, particularly anthropology, and the interest in the biography of objects² and archaeology, bound ontologically to the materiality of artifacts. This important methodological contribution is also due to the influence of specializations like medieval or non-western art history. The preeminence of material studies in these areas is explained by the paucity (or absence) of written documents contextualizing works: materiality hence becomes an element through which information about an object can be retrieved.³ Today, the study of materiality is recognized throughout art history, whatever periods or geographies are concerned: it establishes a way to bypass the binary opposition between an art history of “content” and another of “form.”

The Congress of the Comité International d'Histoire de l'Art (CIHA), which will take place in Lyon in 2024, is proof of this. We wish to place ourselves in this trajectory, taking into account the interdisciplinary dialogue between art history and archaeology. To follow this event, it seemed necessary to devote an issue of the journal *Histoire de l'art* to the theme of materiality.

For this volume, we aim to develop an interdisciplinary approach, extending the reflection initiated by *Art in Archaeological Time (L'art à l'heure archéologique, no. 90)* on the relations and interconnections between art, science, art history, and archaeology. It will require reflection to do so, exploring know-how and modes of production; to consider the nature and origin of materials employed in the fabrication of artifacts and their perishability. The question of a work's authenticity will also be raised. These problems will be treated with anchors in multiple disciplines and without geographic or chronological restrictions. They will be applied to art history and archaeology in the hopes of finding possible convergences between the practices of archaeologists and art historians. Contributions from other disciplines, like the history of technology, anthropology, or different arts disciplines, will be welcome.

¹ Daniel Fabre, “La pérennité,” in Nathalie Heinich, Jean-Marie Schaeffer, and Carole Talon-Hugon (ed.), *Par-delà le beau et le laid. Enquêtes sur les valeurs de l'art* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2014): 83–103.

² Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge / New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

³ Michael Yonan, “Toward a Fusion of Art History and Material Culture Studies,” *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture* 18, no. 2 (2011): 232–48.

1. Raw Material: Matters and Materials

In a classic approach to materiality, articles in this rubric will concern production, commerce, supply, circulation, and the consumption of materials. This rubric also concerns the commercial value bestowed on raw materials, as well as their symbolic value.

- a. Matters and materials: fabrication, commerce, supply, consumption
- b. Aesthetic qualities of raw materials (stones, metals, plants...); price; the meaning attributed to the materials of certain artifacts; symbolism (the use of certain materials in a work of art or artifact is not innocuous—e.g. lapis lazuli or gold)
- c. Relationship between image and material; images produced materially; *techné* as a way of creating meaning or value

2. Making: Artisanal and artistic techniques, processes, gestures

This rubric is concerned both with operational sequences (*chaînes opératoires*) and systems of artistic techniques (tools, gestures, apprenticeship, workshop practices) with a particular attention on notions of transmission: if the entirety of these actions constitutes common knowledge, workshop secrets correspond to individual particularities, responding to commercial or authorial needs, and their transmission is controlled. In this frame, what is the place of freedom of invention and innovation on the part of the artist or artisan? Moreover, the desire for technical recognition on the part of artists and artisans manifests itself in the composition of recipes or the demand for exclusive patents, submitted to institutions. What links are established between art, science, and technique? Questions touching on practice allow us to revisit the definition of the artisan and artist and to show the porous boundary between the two. The question of talent and technical prowess is crucial here. Finally, the choice of tool used for creation, often put aside in studies on the making of art or artifacts, is an important element.

- a. Artists' secrets, artisanal savoir-faire: inventions, innovations, transmissions
- b. Mastery and talent (opposition between art and the artisanal; but talent or ability cannot be free from a certain mastery of materials; re-interrogated the relationships of artists / artisans)
- c. Materiality and tools: techniques as a form of knowledge (the different ways of working a material)

3. Ephemerality

The question of the durability of materials and artifacts is constantly negotiated from the moment of creation. Conscious of the perishable nature of works, artists try to modify this parameter, for example by using more durable materials. On the other hand, one seeks to prolong the life of artifacts in conserving and restoring them. Finally, certain artists, by contrast, play with perishability by consciously using materials that are unstable, in order to produce an ephemeral effect. The fugitive character of the work is found in certain contemporary styles, like Trash Art, but the creation of tapestry-paintings or ephemeral decorations, in the modern period, can be approached from the knowledge of its imminent disappearance.

- a. Consciousness of the evolution of materials constitutive of works, both in their structure and their aspect (disappearance)
- b. Making last: research on unalterable materials, processes of restoration
- c. Trash Art and recovered materials

4. Trace, imitation, and authenticity

This rubric is interested in the material study of the work and in the information that it bears not only on its technique and history but also its authenticity. While archaeometry has for some time allowed for archaeology to study the nature of materials constitutive of objects and to tease out information on the context of their production and use, the results of scientific examination are being used more and more in art historical studies to confirm hypotheses raised through documentation. Moreover, studies in archaeometry have for some time allowed certain fakes to be unmasked or to confirm the authenticity of a work. Finally, the study of materiality also involves experiment, whether in archaeology or art history, notably in studies related to conservation-restoration, or the artistic practices and ancient recipes put into practice in order to draw out new information on works. In a certain way, forgers also experiment with material and antique artistic and artisanal practices, with the goal of imitating antique artifacts and to hide the real origin of fake works.

- a. Material study of works and interdisciplinarity
- b. Imitations / counterfeits: archaeological “fakes,” a way of achieving material and technical “truth” for antique artifacts (challenge: the art and antiquities market)
- c. Archaeological materials: experimental archaeology (understanding materials and final products in past societies)

5. Materiality and immateriality (new technologies, creation, mediation, museography)

This rubric explores the *mise-en-scène* of new technologies to make the immaterial tangible, involving particularly museographic practices or immersive didactics, aiming, for example, to question the evocative sense of a material (on the level of sensation, the sensitive, perception, light, cognitive science, etc.); imagery and 3D reconstruction (for the material and textural aspect of monuments, in particular; ambience; the environment); photographs of artworks which make tangible the technical choices of an artist; scientific imagery or, finally, digital art, which can contribute to reinventing another relationship to materiality. Software and digital models intervene as tools for the creative imagination in architectural conceptualization, for example in video games or archaeological reconstruction. The goal is to mobilize a contemporary approach to materiality: can one really appropriate the material with the digital?

- a. Exploration, surprise, perception: from installation to the immersive experience; exhibitions and digital reconstructions which pertain to the material (*Van Gogh à l'œuvre*)
- b. Beyond the material: digital art (videos, video games, NFTs) and the dialectic between materiality and immateriality
- c. Digital experience in the service of the material: imagery and 3D renderings in archaeology

The “**Materials, materialities, making**” issue will be coordinated by Arianna Esposito, lecturer at the Université de Bourgogne, and Delphine Morana Burlot, lecturer at the Université Paris 1 – Panthéon-Sorbonne.

One-page abstracts in PDF format, including a presentation of the topic of investigation as well as a short biography of the author, should be sent to revuedachistoiredelart@gmail.com no later than **15 June 2023**. The editorial committee will review the submissions. The selected projects will be the subject of articles with a deadline of **15 October 2023**.