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# Who was the “Father of Art History” ?

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Dong Rui

## Abstract

When Gombrich first proposed the concept of the “Father of Art History” in 1977, it was a time when Western historiography was trying to get rid of the influence of Ranke’s historiography, and completely abandoned the basic viewpoints of the Annales School and turned to the new historiography. The new historiography focused on the interpretation of historical events rather than on chronicles. Vasari’s *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* can be seen as the earliest history of art, while Winckelmann’s *The History of Ancient Art* should be seen as the birth of the discipline of art history, and Hegel as a sign of the full maturity of art history. Hegel’s *Lectures on Aesthetics* not only explore the concept, origin, scope, functions, types, and categories of art, as well as the methods of study of artists and art, but more importantly, the scope of art refers not only to painting, sculpture, and architecture but also to music, theater, and poetry, encompassing the various disciplines of art. All these aspects were not present in Vasari and Winckelmann. Therefore, not only Gombrich, but also Danto, Fischer, and Bertin after him considered that only Hegel was the real father of art history.

## Key Words

Hegel, Gombrich, father of art history

## Introduction

The title “Father of Art History” was first coined by E.H. Gombrich (1909-2001), a British historian of contemporary art, who gave the lecture “The Father of Art History: A Reading of Hegel’s *Lectures on Aesthetics*” on the occasion of receiving the Hegel Prize in February 1977 in Stuttgart, Germany, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s (1770-1831) hometown, and based his lecture on the paper “The Father of Art History”<sup>1</sup>. The Chinese text of Gombrich’s speech was translated and published in *New Art*, No. 3, 2002, by Professor Cao Yiqiang of the China Academy of Art. Gombrich said in his lecture: “I call Hegel the father of art history because I feel that it is his *Lectures on Aesthetics* (1820-1829), and not Winckelmann’s *The History of Ancient Art* of 1764, that constitutes the founding document of modern art. The lectures contain an unprecedented attempt to

examine comprehensively and systematically the history of the art of the whole world, or even the history of all art in all its aspects.”<sup>2</sup>

Before Gombrich, it is generally accepted that art history originated with the eighteenth-century German artist Johann Joachim Winckelmann’s (1717-1768) *The History of Ancient Art*. It was Gombrich who first coined the name “Father of Art History”, which in effect meant a reconceptualization of the origins of art history. However, after the translation of Gombrich’s article into Chinese, there was not much attention or discussion in Chinese academia. It was not until the publication of Li Jun’s book *Visual Art History: from Churches to Museums* in 2016 that the issue was revived for academic discussion. In the article “Who is the Real ‘Father of Art History’” in the book, Li Jun questioned Gombrich’s view that Hegel was the father of art history, and argued that Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574), who was more than two centuries older

than Winckelmann and Hegel, should be regarded as the father of art history. However, Li Jun did not explain the reasons for this, and at the end of his article, he put forward an open-ended conclusion: "The question of the 'Fathers of Art History' is not closed, and it can be further pursued and discussed."<sup>3</sup> Li Jun's article has aroused the author's keen interest, therefore, this article hopes to further pursue the question: what conditions must be met for someone to be called the father of art history? Who is more suitable to be the "Father of Art History", Vasari, Winckelmann, or Hegel? Why did Gombrich honor Hegel as the "Father of Art History"?

The above three questions have a progressive relationship, and this paper analyzes them along this line. First, in the context of Western historiography to analyze the development of historiography in Gombrich's era; second, to explore the problem of the writing of art history and to clarify the differences in the writing of *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, *The History of Ancient Art* and *Lectures on Aesthetics* and finally to analyze Gombrich's respect for Hegel and reasons for calling him the father of art history.

### 1. The Development of Historiography in Gombrich's Time

Since Hegel was called the "Father of Art History" by Gombrich, his works must be written according to the standards of art history. There is no clear discussion in foreign historiography about the discipline of writing art history. However, as a branch of history, art history must follow the standards of history. Moreover, the "Father of Art History" was proposed after history became an independent discipline. Gombrich, as a famous British art historian, no matter by what standard he measured, thought Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* must be in line with the standards of Western historiography.

There must be a standard recognized by most people for how we judge the correctness or incorrectness of Gombrich's views. That criterion is that the key question of the origins of art history is whether it is written in a way that conforms to the standards of art history. Since the title "Father of Art History" was first coined by Gombrich, we must first clarify the development of art history in Gombrich's time.

The origin of Western historiography is very early. In the 5<sup>th</sup> BCE the ancient Greek historian Herodotus' history of the Greco-Persian War, *The Histories*, is the earliest historical work in the West. However, it was not until the end of the nineteenth century that traditional Western historiography became an independent discipline

and gradually developed its system in terms of the content of writing, the method of writing, and the view of history.

The "truthfulness and straightforwardness" advocated by Rankean historiography is considered the starting point of the establishment of Western historiography. Before that, in terms of writing content, "the state and politics were the main subjects of historiography".<sup>4</sup> The method of writing about history used by the German historian Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886) was the common style followed by traditional Western historiography. Ranke is regarded as the founder of modern historiography, and the impact he caused can be called the Copernican Revolution in historiography. Ranke's historiography is the symbol of the establishment of Western historiography as an independent discipline. Not only foreign academics but also Chinese scholars have a high opinion of Ranke's historiography. "Rankean historiography is the symbol of 19<sup>th</sup> century historiography, representing the highest achievement of 19<sup>th</sup> century historiography."<sup>5</sup> At the same time, the research method of Rankean historiography was also taken as the standard method by Western historiography at that time. "The Rankean method was an important symbol of Western historiography as an independent discipline, and the resulting traditional historiography has been guided by Ranke's method."<sup>6</sup> According to Ranke, "playing with words and ink is not the task of historians. Presenting historical facts straightforwardly and chronologically, even if it may feel inhibiting and dull, remains the highest principle of historiography."<sup>7</sup> It is difficult to overstate the impact and influence of Ranke on history as a whole. From a historical point of view, in the nineteenth century traditional Western historians also developed their way of understanding the problem, i.e., "the traditional historians differed from their predecessors in that they consciously used their intuition and made a set of statements to that end".<sup>8</sup>

At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, the development of historiography entered a new stage. In 1911, American historian James Harvey Robinson (1863-1936) published his work *The New History*. He proposed to expand the scope of history to include all the past activities of mankind, to explain and analyze historical facts from a comprehensive point of view, to examine historical changes from the perspective of evolution, and to view human history as a "continuous" growth process.<sup>9</sup> The French Annales School was one of the most influential entities, and the *Annales de L'histoire Économique et Sociale*, founded in France in 1929, insisted on

broadening the field of historiography and expanding the horizons of historians. Marc Bloch (1886-1944) added the word social to the name of the Annales precisely because it encompassed the whole of history, “history is the history of society as a whole”. The influence of the Annales School spread throughout Europe and “soon became the main driving force guiding Western historians into unfamiliar channels and proposing new methods and directions of research”.<sup>10</sup>

The Annales School had a great impact on German and British historians, and the new historians continued to expand their historiography into social and cultural history. British social historians such as E.P. Thompson (1924-1993) and E. Hobsbawm (1917-2012) founded the New School of Social History, also known as the British Marxist School of History, and put forward the idea of general social history emphasizing the study of overall social history and the idea of “history from the bottom up”. They took the practice of historical research as their starting point, and their research on cultural history was their most distinctive feature. The new historiography gradually gained a dominant position and became mainstream in Western historiography, reaching its peak in the 1970s. The essential feature of the new historiography was the shift of research focus from the broader general concepts created by the social sciences to the methodological issues of the social sciences.

If we want to summarize the characteristics of the new historiography under the influence of the Annales School, in 1960 the American historian H. Stewart Hughes (1916-1999) argued that present-day historians are no longer satisfied with traditional historiography and its research methods as “traditional historiography and its methods have no clear concepts, no recognized norms of interpretation, and are always impotent from an intellectual point of view”.<sup>11</sup> In 1965, the French historian Jean Glénisson (1921-2010) argued that the new trend in historiography was a reaction to new research techniques and methods; only new research techniques and methods can lead to the development of historiography. Therefore “the central question of reflection should be centered on research methods”.<sup>12</sup> In 1976 the British historian Geoffrey Barraclough (1908-1984) made a more objective assessment of the trends in historiography at that time: “If we want to summarize the new trends in historical research since 1955, we can say that the most prominent trend is convergence, the main feature of which is the complete abandonment of the basic views of the previous generation of historians.”<sup>13</sup> The new historiography draws mainly on sociology, economics, and anthropology, and even on the means of science, to enable the historian to improve and further clarify the

whole of his interpretative process, and not to arrive at unsubstantiated assertions.

Gombrich’s lectures in 1977 came at a time when Western historiography was attempting to move away from the influence of Rankean historiography, abandon the basic ideas of the Annales School altogether, and turn to a new historiography, focusing on the interpretation of historical events; Gombrich could not have been unaffected by that current of historiographical research. To understand why Gombrich regarded Hegel as the “Father of Art History” and whether he was influenced by the methodological trend of historiography at that time, we need to analyze whether there is the same change in characteristics among the three in terms of writing style.

## 2. The Writing Style of *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, *The History of Ancient Art*, and *Lectures on Aesthetics*

The writing style of history includes three aspects: writing content, writing method, and historical outlook, and so should the writing of art history. We discuss the differences in the writing styles of *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, *The History of Ancient Art*, and *Lectures on Aesthetics* from these three aspects, to further analyze which one is more in line with the development of historiography in Gombrich’s time.

Vasari was a student of Michelangelo and an Italian art theorist of the Renaissance. In 1550 Vasari published his seven-year masterpiece *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, an epoch-making biography of sculptors, painters, and architects. The book chronicles the life stories, artistic practices, and major works of the Florentine painter Giovanni Cimabue (1240-1302), the first painter of the Renaissance, through Michelangelo in the sixteenth century. The body of the work is preceded by a general preface and a technical preface on architecture, sculpture, and painting. The text is divided into three volumes, each with a separate preface, and there are 28 biographies in the first volume, 54 in the second, and 53 in the third, for a total of 133 artist biographies.<sup>14</sup>

Vasari uses the term renaissance (Renacimiento) and the concept of regeneration of the arts (rinascita of arts) for the discussion of the staging of art history, and the characteristics of this work are reflected in the following aspects. Firstly, the book is organized according to artists’ genres. Secondly, the book divides the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries into different stages of art development according to the schools and styles of the artists rather than chronologically, laying the ground-

work for later generations to recognize the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries as the Renaissance period. Thirdly, the book discusses the relationship between painting, sculpture, and architecture, revealing that there is an equally important link between all three and design, and discusses the relationship between design and proportionality, which paved the way for the later study of art morphology and the discussion of aesthetics in terms of the relationship between human beings and nature. Fourthly, Vasari's exposition emphasized the importance of the ancient Greek and Roman art traditions and the classical status. Since then, the classical works of art as a guideline for European art historians have always been the style, so Vasari can be said to be the first of a generation in this trend.

In terms of content, traditional historiography requires the state and politics to be the main subject matter, and the biographies of all the artists recorded in *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* seem to be inconsistent with the requirements of traditional historiography in this regard. However, by the concept of total history advocated by the Annales School and the tendency of the new historiography towards new techniques and methods, Vasari's preface, in which he elaborates on the destruction of ancient statues and paintings as a result of the Christian campaign of iconoclasm, meets the requirements of historical work. From a methodological point of view, according to the Rankean school's view of truthfulness and straightforwardness, *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* is a true record of the painters, which is in line with Rankean historiography, and should be included in the Annales School and new historiography of the twentieth century. From a historical perspective, Vasari's adoption of Lorenzo Ghiberti's (1378-1455) view of the regeneration of art and the division of artists into phases according to genre and style reflect his view of history.

Winckelmann's *The History of Ancient Art* was also epoch-making in the discipline of art history. The contents of the book are divided into twelve volumes, with several chapters in each volume. The first volume discusses the origins of art, the second is the art of the Egyptians, Phoenicians, and Persians, the third is the art of the Etruscans and their neighbors, the fourth and fifth are the art of the Greeks, the sixth is clothing and ornaments, the seventh is the craftsmanship in Greek art, the eighth is the four periods and four styles of the rise and fall of Greek art, the ninth and tenth are the circumstances of the times external to the Greeks about the history of ancient art, and the eleventh and twelfth are Greek art under the Romans.<sup>15</sup>

Winckelmann contributed in several ways. Firstly, he was one of the first to make a serious study of the plastic arts of ancient Greece, and his treatise "Some Observations on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture", published in 1755, suggests that ancient Greek sculpture was characterized by "noble simplicity and quiet greatness". Secondly, he was the first scholar to write a history of art rather than a history of individual artists, as this work dealt with the origins of art, its nature, proportions, composition, etc., and endeavored to explore the evolution of the form and style of works of art, rather than merely a biographical description of the artist. Thirdly, his work redefined art history and redefined the discipline of art history. Prior to Winckelmann, the Frenchman Pierre Monier (1641-1703) published *Istoire des Arts Qui Ont Rapport Au Dessein* in 1698, and David Durand published *Histoire du Seizième Siècle* in 1734.<sup>16</sup> Winckelmann's history of art, however, "not only includes painting, sculpture, numismatics, and other categories of art, but also abstracts the artistic phenomena of different eras into four styles to be grasped."<sup>17</sup> In this way, Winckelmann accomplished the task of art history as a discipline.

We analyze this work according to the same three elements of traditional Western historiography. Firstly, *The History of Ancient Art* is richer in content than *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, and fully meets the requirements of historiography in terms of its content from the Rankean historiography to the new historiography. Secondly, the method of writing has gone beyond the standard of Rankean historiography; in the first volume on the origin of art, when discussing the reasons for the differentiation of the art of different peoples, it talks about the influence of climate on the form of art, which is characterized by the social history of the Annales School. Finally, Winckelmann put forward many important ideas, such as his view that the development of the artistic life of each nation goes through three stages, namely, the initial stage, the maturity stage, and the decline stage, and he summarized ancient Greek art as "noble simplicity and admirable greatness", which can be regarded as the most classic manifestation of his view of history.

Hegel's three-volume *Lectures on Aesthetics* was first published in 1835. The first volume of the book addresses such issues as the concept of beauty, standards, individuality, and the fine artist. The second volume discusses how the beauty of art developed into various special types of artistic beauty, in the vein of symbolic, classical, and romantic art. The third volume analyzes the various arts, including the types, purposes, structures, and characteristics of architecture, the principles,

materials, and historical development of sculpture, the medium and characteristics of painting, and the characteristics of music and poetry.<sup>18</sup>

In a nutshell, Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* takes works of art as its object of study, looks at works of art in terms of the emotions that they should evoke such as pleasure, admiration, fear, and pity, and explores such issues as the standards, stages of development, and types of artistic beauty. In terms of content, *Lectures on Aesthetics* is neither national nor political, nor sociological, economic, or anthropological. Methodologically, it meets neither the standards of Rankean historiography nor the requirements of the Annales School, and even according to the vision of the new historiography, *Lectures on Aesthetics* was not written historically. From the viewpoint of history, *Lectures on Aesthetics* is a reflection of Hegel's view of history, in which he proposed that "beauty is the sensual manifestation of the ideas", and classified the beauty of art into three forms: symbolic art, classical art, and romantic art. It can be said that most of the content in *Lectures on Aesthetics* is Hegel's understanding of artistic beauty.

Combining the above three works, we can judge that Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* is the least deserving of being categorized as art history. Instead, *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* and *The History of Ancient Art* are both characterized as historiography. Who, then, deserves the title of "Father of Art History" more, Vasari or Winckelmann?

Comparing *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* and *The History of Ancient Art*, we find that the latter is more in line with the characteristics of historiography in every aspect, and it seems that Winckelmann is not the only one who should wear the hat of the father of art history. However, Vasari was more than two hundred years older than Winckelmann. Is it fair to compare Vasari with Winckelmann according to the standard of two hundred years after his death?

If it is not good to judge by the Western standard of historiography, let us evaluate this question by the standard of Chinese historiography. The *Shi Ji* (*Historical Records*) is China's first chronological general history; however, the *Spring and Autumn Annals* can also be called the ancient official history. In terms of content and style, the maturity of *The History of Ancient Art* can be compared with the *Shi Ji*, while *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* can be compared with the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. This is because the *Spring and Autumn Annals* is a record of the deeds of the twelve rulers of the state of Lu during

their reigns, and its content goes far beyond the scope of biography. If we compare it with the origin of Chinese art history, Zhang Yanyuan's *Record of Famous Paintings of All Ages* (《歷代名畫記》), written in the first year of Dazhong (847), is the first complete biographical history of paintings, which contains biographies of 372 painters from the ancient times up to the period when Yanyuan wrote his book, as well as a few commentaries. *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* can be regarded as the same kind of art history as the *Record of Famous Paintings of All Ages*. In this way, the title of "Father of Art History" would be more appropriately placed on Vasari's head. Gombrich would not have failed to see these problems, and as a world-renowned art historian and art theorist, he must have had his reasons for determining the "Father of Art History". We should still explore Gombrich's academic understanding.

### 3. Gombrich's Reasons for Honoring Hegel as the "Father of Art History"

To analyze why Gombrich honors Hegel as the "Father of Art History", we must first return to his speech. According to Gombrich, Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* "contains an unprecedented attempt to examine comprehensively and systematically the history of the arts of the whole world, or even the history of all the aspects of the arts."<sup>19</sup> What is the history of all aspects? Hegel begins his *Lectures on Aesthetics* by saying "These lectures are a discussion of aesthetics. Its object is the vast field of beauty, and, to be more precise, its scope is art, or rather, the art of beauty."<sup>20</sup> Hegel defines the concept of aesthetics in his preface. He makes it very clear that what he means by beauty is "asthetik", the word Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714-1762) discusses as "aesthetics". However, Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* do not include natural beauty, while Baumgarten's "aesthetics" includes natural beauty. Therefore, Hegel believed that the more precise meaning of "asthetik" was the science of sensation and emotion. The term "asthetik", then, is inappropriate for Hegel's work. Therefore, the proper title of Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* should be "Philosophy of Art". But since the term "aesthetics" was already in common use, Hegel still adopted it, but with a different connotation than Baumgarten's conception of "aesthetics".

Here Hegel clarifies the name of the *Lectures on Aesthetics*. Hegel's "asthetik" is distinct from Baumgarten's aesthetics in that the former is directed only to man-made artifacts, while the latter includes both natural objects and man-made artifacts. Let us look at the

contents of Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*: the first volume is on the idea or ideal of artistic beauty, the second volume is on the development of the ideal into various special types of artistic beauty, and the third volume is on the systems of the various arts. All of these elements discuss art on a theoretical level, focusing on rather than discussing the history of art. In this way, we find that Hegel is discussing types of art, the connections between the different disciplines of art, and how art should be viewed, rather than the traditional history of art.

Gombrich called Hegel the "Father of Art History", and this issue cannot be analyzed according to the standard of our understanding but should be sorted out in Gombrich's academic approach. Gombrich's thought of art history is mainly influenced by his close friend, the philosopher Karl Popper (1902-1994), whose contextual logic or contextual analysis is a more objective and scientific conception of history than Hegel's historical determinism, which is embodied in the conception of art history as a history of art problems, and the use of the trial-and-error and make-and-match methods. In the concept of art history, it is reflected in the reduction of art history to the history of art problems, and the use of trial and error and making and matching to explain the innovations and changes in art history, to complete the systematic logic of art history.<sup>21</sup> Gombrich's practice of applying situational logic to art history is to regard art history as the history of art problems. He pointed out: "Problems and artistic values in art—even those of Abstract Expressionism—emerge from the problems and values of the craftsman. It is a historical fact that most of the great artists of the Western tradition have felt themselves haunted by solving the problems of art rather than expressing their individuality."<sup>22</sup>

According to Gombrich's contextual logic, Hegel believed that "beauty is the sensuous manifestation of man's ideas," and in *The Aesthetics* classified art according to its stage of development into three forms: symbolic art, classical art, romantic art, and this distinction belongs to the idea of contextual logic. This classification is made according to the development process of how human thinking and artistic expression are dislocated and fit together.

When Gombrich put forward the concept of the father of art history, the development of Western historiography was in the stage of turning from traditional historiography to new historiography, which focuses on the central issue of historical research methods. Against the background of this shift, art history did not shift along with the new historiography. However, if we look back at the development of moder-

nist art in the twentieth century, we will find that the germ of modernism in Western art had already begun in the Romantic art of the first half of the nineteenth century.

When Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* was published in 1835, the development of Western art was in the period of the turn from Neoclassicism to Romanticism. Classical and Neoclassical art saw art as a facsimile or reproduction of reality, and Romantic art saw art as an expression of personality and emotion. However, whether Neoclassical or Romantic art, its creative techniques were realistic, only that the former favored the reproduction of reality and the latter favored fictional scenes. Only after the emergence of Impressionism did this situation change.

The first exhibition of Impressionist paintings took place in 1874, organized by a group of young painters in an apartment on the Boulevard de la Capicina in Paris, with painters including Monet, Renoir, Pissarro, Sisley, Degas, Cézanne, and Morisot. Impressionist painting no longer aimed at realism, but emphasized the expression of color, volume, shape, and spatiality and, in the language of Chinese painting, the technique was more pictorial. Cézanne (1839-1906), after participating in the first Impressionist exhibition, gradually distanced himself from the other Impressionists and went the furthest along the road of Impressionism and was called by modern Western painters as the father of modern art, while Duchamp's (1887-1968) 1917 work *Fountain* was even more forward-looking, though not recognized at the time. From the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, even though so many artists had distanced themselves from traditional art, theoretical reflection on what constitutes art had yet to take shape.

On the other hand, from the trajectory of art historiography, with the two world wars and the development of science and technology in the twentieth century, the upheaval of social institutions and trends also stimulated the conceptual renewal of the art world. Beginning in the 1960s, art continued along the path of Duchamp, and in 1964, contemporary American artist Andy Warhol (1928-1987) organized an exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts that used wooden boards as they were to replicate the paper soap boxes used in shopping malls—the *Brillo Boxes* exhibition, where the boxes were either placed individually or stacked in multiples, looking no different from a shopping mall. This exhibition caused American philosopher Arthur Danto (1924-2013) to think deeply. In 1964 Danto published the article "The World of Art" to explain why *Brillo Boxes* could be works of art. Danto argued that what makes a work a work of art "requires a certain

atmosphere of art theory, a certain knowledge of art history: that is, a certain art world.”<sup>23</sup> Danto later used this essay as the basis for his 1984 book, *The End of Art*. Danto argued that anyone before Hegel had defined art in a way that lacked universality. “If we think that art has an end, we need a linear view of the history of art, but the best example of a theory of reproduction art that is universal enough to embrace a different kind of illusionistic painting than that one is: the reproduction of literature and even the reproduction of music. Now, Hegel’s theory fulfills all these needs.”<sup>24</sup>

In the 1970s, there were many calls within the discipline of art history for the end of art or art history, and on February 15, 1979, at the Pompidou in Paris, the painter Hervé Fischer (1941-) declared in an exhibition of performance art, with the monotonous ticking of an alarm clock connected to a microphone, that “Art history is over.”<sup>25</sup> Fischer’s proposal for the end of art history was to put an end to the notion of art history embodied in Vasari’s *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*. He argues that the logic of a linear progression, a progression toward a static, non-literal, and non-authentic history of art, has come to an end. “If the activity of art must be kept alive, then the pursuit of impractical novelty must be abandoned. Art is not dead. What has ended is only its history as a progressive process of constant search for newness.”<sup>26</sup>

In 1984 Hans Belting (1935-2023), a professor of art history at the University of Munich in Germany, published his famous treatise *The End of the History of Art?* Belting argued that traditional art history was heading towards a dead end of reproduction, linearity, and grand narratives, but rather than dismissing the significance of the discipline of art history in this regard, he instead proposed that it should turn to new open spaces and “question the theoretical discourse of ‘grand’ narratives that have been established as truths, and that artworks should not be simply used to confirm the existence of a certain system of reproduction (the history of art). ...At the same time, art should also be scrutinized in the attitudinal context of public response and not simply based on traditionally given orthodox conclusions.”<sup>27</sup>

Belting points out that the meanings of the concepts of art and history only developed in the nineteenth century. Vasari’s and Winckelmann’s art historiography is a form and logic of historical account based on an aesthetic value system, and at the center of this logical shift is Hegel’s philosophy of art. Hegel’s *Lectures on Aesthetics* is what allows art to lead us to rational reflection, a reflection that aims not to recreate art, but to philosophically recognize what art is. The purpose of art

history is to define the role of art, a role that has evolved. In other words, the form and internal logic of Hegel’s account of art history is a whole new dimension of reflection on art.

If we look back at the history of this scholarship, we will find that Danto, Fischer, and Belting’s conclusions about art are all later than Gombrich’s formulation of the “Father of Art History”. Indeed, a reading of Gombrich’s writings reveals that he was already thinking more maturely in *The Story of Art*, published in 1950. The book’s narrative is different from that of *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* and *The History of Ancient Art*, and similar to Hegel’s *Lectures on Aesthetics*. That is, it is problem-oriented rather than time-or-character-driven.

Belting, an art theorist twenty-six years Gombrich’s junior, who only published *The End of the History of Art?* in 1987, continues along Gombrich’s lines. He argues that Renaissance historical codification established a norm of value, a standard of ideal or classical beauty. This standard had a profound effect on Vasari’s *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*. Therefore, Vasari believed that art evolved according to a cyclical pattern of growth, maturity, and decay, and that the future of art would evolve with such a pattern.<sup>28</sup> Vasari’s idea of art history was in turn inherited by his most important successor, Winckelmann, and the form and logic of the account in *The History of Ancient Art* remained determined by aesthetic criteria. *The History of Ancient Art*, like *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, remains a practical art criticism.<sup>29</sup> Art historiography has been trying to separate itself from the traditional historiographical model, and Hegel’s *Lectures on Aesthetics* made art history a meditation on past modes of human expression that no longer indicated a model of how art would develop in the future, as Winckelmann did.<sup>30</sup>

From Hegel onward, Western art history was no longer written in the style that Vasari and Winckelmann had written. Whether it was Heinrich Wölfflin’s (1864-1945) *Renaissance and Baroque*, Alois Riegl’s (1858-1905) *Problems of Style, Late Roman Art Industry*, and *The Group Portraiture of Holland*, it was all problem-oriented. When we look at these writings today, some of them can be categorized as art theory, but at that time, the concept of art theory had not yet emerged. All of these writings follow the path of aesthetics, and all of them can be taken as studies in problem-oriented art history. In this way, Gombrich was ahead of his time when he gave Hegel the title “Father of Art History”. Moreover, he was the first art historian to promote Hegel’s *Lectures on Aesthetics*, and Hegel’s influence on art was largely

influenced by Gombrich.

#### 4. Conclusion

The concepts of art, art history, art theory, and so on, which are common nowadays, all emerged gradually during the development of art, and the connotations and extension of these concepts are constantly developing and changing. There is no fixed pattern for the writing of art history, and how to write it is the author's own choice. There is no fixed standard for us to evaluate art history, and how we judge it depends on the perspective of the judge. Duchamp's *Fountain* was rejected as a work of art because it changed the way art exists, but later it became a major event that changed the history of art in the twentieth century. As art continues to evolve, so should theory. Does practice drive theory, or does theory drive a change in practice? This is a philosophical question, a question of art, and a question of art history. Before Gombrich, Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* had long been regarded as philosophy or aesthetics, but in fact, Hegel talked about art. As an art historian and art theorist, Gombrich thought deeply about the turn from traditional to modern art in the twentieth century and wrote *The Story of Art* in a way that was quite different from *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* and *The History of Ancient Art*, but rather more similar to *Lectures on Aesthetics* with a narrative that was oriented to issues rather than to time or characters. Philosophers such as Danto, Fischer, and Belting built on Gombrich's

work to further explore the question of writing about art history. In their eyes, writing about art history should be consistent with both the development of art and the trend of the historical discipline. The contribution made by Hegel was not only in thinking about the concept, origin, scope, function, type, and category of art, as well as the method of study of artists and art, but more importantly Hegel referred to art not only in terms of painting, sculpture, and architecture, but also in terms of music, theater, and poetry, encompassing the various disciplines of art. These are aspects that Vasari and Winckelmann do not possess. As Gombrich puts it, "Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* is the history of all art in all its aspects". In this way, Vasari's *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* can be seen as the earliest history of art, Winckelmann's *The History of Ancient Art* should be seen as the birth of the discipline of art history, and Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* as a sign of the full maturity of art history. Therefore, not only Gombrich, but also Danto, Fischer, and Belting later believed that only Hegel was the real "Father of Art History"

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## 誰是“藝術史之父”？

董睿

**摘要：**貢布裡希於 1977 年最早提出“藝術史之父”的概念時，正是西方歷史學界試圖擺脫蘭克史學的影響，全面拋棄年鉴學派的基本觀點，轉向新歷史學的時期。新歷史學注重對歷史事件的解釋，而不是以記事為重點。瓦薩里的《藝苑名人傳》可以看作最早的藝術史，溫克爾曼的《古代藝術史》則應該看作藝術史學科的誕生，而黑格爾則是藝術史完全成熟的標誌。因為，黑格爾的《美學》不僅探討了藝術的概念、起源、範圍、功能、類型、門類，以及藝術家和藝術的研究方法等問題，更重要的是，藝術的範疇不僅指繪畫、雕刻和建築，還包括音樂、戲劇和詩，涵蓋了藝術的各個門類。這些方面都是瓦薩里和溫克爾曼所不具備的。因此，不惟貢布里希，在其之後的丹托、菲舍爾、貝爾廷也認為只有黑格爾才是真正的“藝術史之父”。

**關鍵詞：**黑格爾；貢布里希；藝術史之父