

**CALL FOR PAPERS**  
– International Conference –  
Louvre Museum, Paris, Autumn 2020 and Louvre-Lens Museum, Spring 2021

***The Sensory Experience in 18th Century Art Exhibitions***

Throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the exhibitions of the Royal Academy of Painting in Paris – by setting the horizon of expectation – have created a *habitus* among European visitors and especially Parisians. Moreover, they have aroused the curiosity and the desire of the French public and of other nations who were inspired by the Salon. During this period, the Salon du Louvre became a highly popular event, where crowds gathered to see, be seen and to learn. Hence, the Salon embodied without any doubt the image of the Parisian social theatre and thus also indirectly that of the pleasure of the senses for educated European audiences. In other words, visiting the Salon or any other art exhibition in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, where the desire to be entertained and to learn was intertwined, presented itself as an experience in which the various senses were invoked and stimulated. The notion of “sensory body” becomes relevant: not only sight, but also the senses of hearing, taste, touch and smell were interpolated in a varied and complex manner at various moments during the visit.

The conference will focus on the sensations that visitors felt during their experience of art exhibitions. The latter are to be understood in their broadest sense during the long 18<sup>th</sup> century (1665-1815). The starting point is the moment when the Salon du Louvre became the role model for a growing number of temporary exhibitions, in Paris and in French provinces, at the Royal Academy in London, and, more broadly in Europe. All other spaces of sociability where works of art were subjected to the critical gaze of the public must be taken into account: galleries and private art collections, royal collections, temporary exhibitions, auction rooms, museums... In the context of research about the history of sensibilities and senses, this conference thus aims at defining the new perceptions that flourish in the Age of Enlightenment by questioning the sensory experience and the constitution of the sensory body in the specific context of exhibition spaces.

The understanding of this sensory body in its entirety implicates numerous elements that play an essential role in its constitution. Given the richness of the topic related to the sensory experience in 18<sup>th</sup> century art exhibitions, the conference will be divided into two sessions that will take place a few months apart, and in two different locations.

**Session 1**

***The experience of the visit: from spectator to critic***

This first session focuses on the sensory experience of the public when visiting an exhibition - whether it is a collection, a museum, or a temporary presentation of works of art. While 18<sup>th</sup> century art exhibitions in Europe contributed to urban identity, they also helped to define the identity of the larger public, as well as the single spectator, and the critic. It will be a question of capturing these actors, their visits to exhibitions, their sensory impressions, and the emergence of feelings as they developed along an exhibition tour, likewise further encounters with other visitors, with the spatial context and display of art. In order to encourage comparative research, we call for proposals on various exhibition spaces in various European cities, relating to the following two axes:

- **The public**, an individual or a group of individuals visiting the exhibition, engaged in the activity and experiences emotional, sensory and physical effects during the whole visit of the exhibition. The presence of other visitors, this more or less colourful crowd that implied a perpetual body interaction, as well as the view of the exhibition played a central role on the senses, the sensitivity and the body of each visitor. Within this audience, the writers that appear at the time of the exhibitions related these experiences to their readers, qualifying and theorizing them. Art criticism is thus no longer simply a primary source for art history, the history of the senses, and questions of reception, but becomes also a research subject by itself. How, in other words, did the sensations, emotions and feelings experienced by critics stimulate and transform art criticism itself? The reality and the sensory experience of the visitor are not necessarily the same in Paris as elsewhere in Europe: Hence, we would like to discover and understand these differences and similarities.

- **The space and the exhibition**, meaning the immediate environment, the exhibition design, but also the geographical territory with which the individual and its senses are engaged, play a central role in the experience of the spectator's sensory body. By providing stimuli, they cause sensations and an intense and specific cognitive activity. What kind of effects did the dimensions of the room(s), the movements of the body in the space, the encounter with the art and the exhibition design, the lighting as well as the symbolic aspects of the space have on visitors' sensory experiences, both in their expectation and during the visit of the exhibition? We will therefore focus on the different affects and effects that this experience catalyzed for each of the senses, sensations, and emotions that inhabited the spectator during and beyond the visit. An experience that is constituting an important part of the horizon of expectation for exhibitions. We can ask ourselves about the different approaches to installation and hanging, but also about the extent to which these approaches had an impact on visitors' sensations, their perceptions, and their feelings, whatever nature they are, and on the evolution and constitution of their sensibility, of their sensitive body. What role do the symbolic and physical aspects of space play in this experience? How are these effects translated through the written word?

## **Session 2**

### **The experience of the work of art: from emotion to sensation**

The second session is intended to invite reflection on the representation of emotions and human sensorium as well as on the reception of these elements when works of art were exhibited publicly in 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe.

The objective is to study how artists express their perception of the sensitive and the sensory, and how the spectator's senses react while looking at the works. We will take into account all aspects of the Fine Arts (painting, sculpture, drawing, engraving) and consider also different genres (history, portrait, genre scene, landscape, still life). For this session, we call for proposals around two axes:

- **The works**, these modes of representation of feelings and the sensory, evoke the sensitivity of the artist as well as that of the human being in general. According to what theoretical and practical criteria did artists translate the spectrum of emotions, but also that of sensory perceptions through the represented body, its gestures, its personality traits or its staging? We are obviously thinking of the rules governing the representation of passions such as those of the "ut pictura poesis", but especially of the attempts to renew them during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is not only a question of revisiting the interactions between theatrical staging and pictorial composition, but also of exploring all the components of mimesis, that is common to the Fine Arts and the performing arts, in order to reinforce the sensory and sensitive delight of art: expression, gestures, costume, decor, colour.

- **The senses**, (inter)linked with the organs of perception (sight, taste, hearing, smell and touch), are defined by and react to the contact with context, the exhibition as a whole, other individuals, and specific works of art. We would like to understand how the spectator's senses apprehend, perceive – or even feel – the encounter with a particular work or with the ensemble of works. According to which criteria does sensory perception stop at the level of analysis and reasoning? When and how does this experience lead to a true reaction, whether it is sensitive, sensory or physical? We know that in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the research on perception and cognition led to numerous publications on sensualist philosophy, physiology and physiognomy. How did artists consider these new contributions to the history of medicine, science and technology, and how did they translate them within their works?

This axis will explore the boundaries between the experience of each of the senses and the relationships that emerge between them in order to get an overall picture of all the sensations and feelings provoked by specific works, particularly by those representing feelings, emotions and allusions to the senses. In this axis, priority will be given to proposals based on sources from various fields (history, literature, philosophy, but also science and medicine) in order to renew the reflection on the phenomenon of exhibitions.

### **Schedule**

Proposals for original contributions in English or French (title and abstract of up to 300 words and short CV of up to 250 words) should be sent by 15 December 2019 to the following address: [corps.sensoriel@gmail.com](mailto:corps.sensoriel@gmail.com)

Response from the Scientific Committee: January 2020

Conference dates: Autumn 2020 and Spring 2021

Selected papers will be published after the conference.

### **Scientific Committee:**

Markus A. Castor (German Center for Art History, Paris)

Guillaume Faroult (Louvre Museum, Painting Department)

Dorit Kluge (hwtk, Berlin)

Gaëtane Maës (Université de Lille, IRHiS)

Françoise Mardrus (Louvre Museum, Dominique-Vivant Denon Center, Research and Collection Director)

Isabelle Pichet (UQTR, Québec)

Luc Piralla (Louvre-Lens Museum)

### **Partners :**

