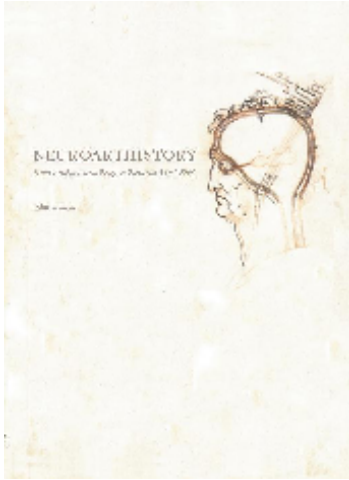


Neuroarthistory: From Aristotle and Pliny to Baxandall and Zeki / John Onians.--New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, March 2008.-- 225 p.: ill.--ISBN: 978-0-300-12677-8 (cl., alk. paper): \$40.00.



Art history has never had a methodology it could call its own. A blend of nineteenth-century academic disciplines bankrolled by wealthy collectors and their offspring, the public art museum, art history is perennially in an identity crisis. The positive of this is our discipline's ability to absorb other criteria to write and rewrite art history. The emergence of every new approach is typically termed a "fad" by those who disapprove of it, and a new "plurality to consider" by those who do. In 1999, Semir Zeki followed up an earlier article in the *Journal of Consciousness Studies* on the topic of "Art and the Brain." This became a core article for art historians and theorists to posit a new approach to *Kunstgeschichte*, Neuro Art History. An *Art Documentation* book review is not the place to examine the merits of this particular new approach. Our jobs as art librarians are to know the names of authors and latest trends in scholarship. John Onians' *Neuroarthistory* does that nicely for the field of neuro-aesthetics. In a single book, he connects the concepts, names, and events of the emerging field of neuro-art into a single book. It is a "must

read" for the art librarian.

Neuro-art history (spelled as a single word in Onians' book) is not a uniform concept. It is a theoretical approach including A) psychological reactions to art, B) neuron response, C) sociological interpretations and D) what might be broadly called the hard-science approach to reception theory. It is not new. Onians attempts to take us through the history of art history (and esthetics) to demonstrate neurological explanations to art have been with the discipline from the beginning. *Neuroarthistory* is, ironically, a rather old-fashioned book: a linear history of the "great men" who have led neuro-humanism to where it is today. I found Onians' argument that Pliny the Elder, Wincklemann, Kant, Ruskin (!) and Riegl to be the fathers of Neuro-art history too strained an argument to be convincing. Leonardo probably and Gombrich certainly. The book's strength is in its extended Introduction, where Onians outlines the movers and shakers of the new discipline, and in its final chapters where Herskovits and Zeki—not household names in the art world—are profiled. His reviving the work and memory of the architectural historian Adolf Göller (1846-1902) is commendable, separate from the use of him made in Onians' book. The fact that a book of this genre of book was published without a bibliography should be the eternal shame of Yale University Press.

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