MANUEL ANTONIO CASTIŃEIRAS GONZÁLEZ

1. *In the last thirty years, images have been a focus of scholarship from many different viewpoints, and they have been pivotal in the many scholarly movements, or "turns", attempting to methodologically reframe the study of art history in general. Can you briefly explain which was your original focus of interest and in which directions your scholarly approach developed over the course of time?*

A small group of scholars was trained at the University of Santiago de Compostela (Spain) by professor Serafín Moralejo (1946-2011). He pioneered in our country the introduction of the Panofskyan iconographic and iconological method in the study of medieval images, and he took up Gombrich's criticism of that method in claiming the primacy of genres, the theory of decorum and the terminological fallacy. It was a formative experience. My first approach to medieval art occurred within that context and, more generally, within the study of the Western tradition. I was interested in the connection between art and pilgrimage, the migration of images, and the survival of Antiquity in the Middle Ages. My PhD on Spanish medieval calendars (1993, edited as a book in 1996: *El calendario medieval hispano: textos e imágenes*), as well as the handbook *Introducción al método iconográfico* (Barcelona 1998), that developed from the classes I was holding at the time, were both indebted to that approach. Before long, my further steps as a young scholar were affected by several stays in Italy. In Pisa, Salvatore Settis enlarged my vision on the survival and reception of Antiquity and on Aby Warburg's legacy. The reading of his three volumes on *Memoria dell'antico nell'arte italiana* (Torino 1984-1986) was an epiphanic experience which has long conditioned my approach to this fascinating topic as my recent publications on the image of Hercules (2017) or the reliquary-altar of St Saturninus at the abbey of St-Hilaire d'Aude (2020) show.[1] In Rome, I worked with Chiara Frugoni (1940-2022), who pushed me to become a medievalist concerned with the relationship between text and image and the role of patronage in the "production" of iconographic programmes.

At that time, I also began to explore other fields. Semiotics, literary theory, and reception aesthetics expanded the toolkit at my disposal in the study of the meaning and function of images. Umberto Eco's semiotics, Julia Kristeva's intertextuality, Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the dialogic capacity of a text and its re-accentuation over time, Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics and fusion of horizons, were all instrumental in my inquiry into the complexity of the iconic language in medieval art. As a result, I am

fascinated by issues concerning medieval images that go beyond the limited approach of iconography/iconology and focus on the role of the beholder. For instance, in my view, the paving mosaic of Otranto is a monumental equivalent of the literary exercise of ekphrasis.[2] Romanesque portals, to use another example, do not exactly correspond to texts, but are more akin to a performative text, in the sense of Marco De Marinis' *Semiotics of Performance* (Bloomington 1993).[3] The issue of authorship, anonymity, and "portrait" in relation to medieval artists is another case in point, as I try to show in my work on Romanesque panel painting and illumination.[4] Finally, the intercultural and transcultural aspects of the image of Saint George between the Eastern and Western Mediterranean allowed me to explore the shifting meaning of this representation and its varied reception by different audiences.[5] The open-minded spirit of the journal *Iconographica* has been a point of reference for all of those concerned with seeing images from multiple, transdisciplinary, and transcultural perspectives – and I am no exception.

2. *Please name up to three books that you consider to have played an important role in orienting your research.*

Books are not the only publications to convey ideas in our field. In my experience, essays and articles play as crucial a role as books in increasing knowledge and widen our epistemic horizons. For instance, Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl's seminal *Classical Mythology in Medieval Art* ("Metropolitan Museum Studies", 4, 2 (1933), pp. 228-280), Otto Karl Werckmeister's *Pain and Death in the Beatus of Saint-Sever* ("Studi medievali", 3rd series, XIV, 2 (1973), pp. 565-626) and Michael Camille's *Seeing and Reading: Some Visual Implications for Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy* ("Art History", 8, 1 (1985), pp. 29-49) spurred my interest in understanding the mechanisms of transmission, creativity, and perception of medieval images in ways that art-history books have yet to do.

The most influential books in challenging my research on medieval images do not belong to art history, but to other fields, such as semiotics, anthropology, and literary theory. Umberto Eco's *I limiti dell'interpretazione* (Milano 1990) gave me the opportunity to reflect on the continuous process of resignification and polysemy of images and texts by distinguishing among the *intentio auctoris*, *intentio operis*, and *intentio lectoris*. Alfred Gell's *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford 2010) prompted me to use the term "agency" instead of "patronage" and to apply the formula Recipient as Agent/Index (material entities) and as Patient, whenever patrons regard themselves as authors of a work of art. Finally, Stephen Jaeger's *The Envy of Angels: Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe, 950-1200* (Philadelphia 1994) and *Enchantment: On Charisma and the Sublime in the Arts of the West* (Philadelphia 2012) offered a better understanding of some peculiar processes in the ontology of art and the production of images during the Middle Ages. Jaeger's publications, for example, can be used to explain on which grounds abbots and bishops were presented as agents of the divine driving-force in texts and works of art, and how the concepts of charisma and aura replaced the role of the artist in the creation of medieval images, in both icons and reliquaries.

3. *What is your assessment of traditional art history, with its emphasis on controversial notions and often rigid distinctions between "style" and "iconography"? What do you see as its hermeneutic limits and advantages? Do you think it should be thoroughly replaced with new approaches, or simply revised and integrated into the present-day art-historical discourse?*

We are anxious about the future of our discipline and the renewal of medieval studies. First, we feel the need to test the boundaries of the established narratives of art history in the modern-nation states. Second, most scholars are keen to participate in the emerging field of the Global Middle Ages. Third, I am convinced that works of art should be studied as examples of specific cultural and artistic encounters. The distinction between "style" and "iconography" is an old-fashioned one – the signifier is always a bearer of meaning, no matter what. Thus, in my course on Romanesque Art, I focus an entire class on looking at the celebrated portal of Saint-Foy at Conques from a semiotic point of view, along the lines of the seminal contributions by Meyer Schapiro (*Words, Script, and Pictures: Semiotics of Visual Language,* New York 1996) and Jean-Claude Bonne (*L'art roman de face et de profile. Le tympan de Conques*, Paris 1985). Frontal, profile, symmetry, asymmetry, beauty and ugliness, scale, order, and chaos are intrinsic to the meaning of an image. Conques offers a beautiful example to explore those semantic possibilities. Furthermore, the tendency of iconography/iconology to look at medieval images as a reflection of a written text, or of a collection of written texts, should be replaced by an understanding of works of art as performative texts in themselves, in which the onlooker is included in it.

Post-structuralism has highlighted how figurative and non-figurative elements (*ornatus*) are equally seminal in the hermeneutics of art. They cannot be separated from other aspects such as relative position, distribution, and relation to space. This is what Jérôme Baschet, Jean-Claude Bonne and Pierre-Olivier Dittmar call "iconographie totale." The visual arts are seen as part of a complex set of relations between ritual and hierarchy. Sometimes this kind of approach forces art into a structure or logic system that is alien to any specific cultural and historical context and ignores the limitations of the makers' skills and the will of patrons. I am convinced that works of art are evidence (or indices) of a specific culture. In order to place them into their context and reconstruct contemporary perceptions and audiences, we need to consider several issues including some theoretical ones. Hence, the importance of exploring coeval written sources in any attempt to develop a discourse on medieval art and of considering the different agents involved in the making of a work of art.

4. *Since the 1990s, our field has experienced many different "turns", each laying emphasis on one of the multiple dynamics in which images are involved. To what extent did your research benefit from such scholarly debates?*

Many things have changed in our field in the last decades. The blurring of frontiers in Europe and the growing interest in cross-cultural issues pushed the study of images in different directions. Compelling studies have explored artistic interactions in the Mediterranean and the various processes of hybridization, appropriation, and cultural exchange that characterized them. Scholars are testing the boundaries of established art-historical

narratives. We are indebted to Hans Belting's *Bild und Kult: eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst* (München 1990) and his approach to the cult and reception of Byzantine images in Western Europe. As a topic, it dominated our understanding of the status of medieval images in the last decades and it opened new ways of thinking about the scholarly debate. The collection of essays edited by Herbert Kessler and Gerhard Wolf on *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation* (Bologna 1998), Michele Bacci's *The Many Faces of Christ* (2014), Beate Fricke's *Fallen Idols, Risen Saints: Sainte Foy of Conques and the Revival of Monumental Sculpture in Medieval Art* (2015), the rich scholarship on Crusader art, are all examples of this renewed interest in the status of representation, the cultic value of images and the complex reasons for the circulation of icons and of repertoires of images between the Eastern and the Western Mediterranean.

In this regard, I have focused my attention on the reception of Byzantine and Crusader images in the art of the Iberian Peninsula, especially in Catalonia, and the expansion of the Crown of Aragon into the Mediterranean. This pushed me to shift the core of my research from Romanesque art to Crusader, Byzantine, and Gothic art with a focus on artistic exchange, cross-cultural studies and the making of new identities. My views on Magister Alexander and Cypriot art,[6] the Sigena chapterhouse and the legacy of the Psalter of Melisende,[7] Catalan rule in Greece and its echo in the metropole or homeland (the main territories of the Crown of Aragon),[8] the controversial question of the artistic milieu of the creation of the Kahn Madonna and its possible arrival in Calahorra (Spain) as a religious/diplomatic gift,[9] the fighting over the image of saint George from East to West and into the Atlantic kingdoms are all topics that I believe can contribute to this new trend that looks at Mediterranean studies as a global phenomenon. Along these lines, I edited together with my colleagues of the Sapienza University of Rome a special issue of *Arte Medievale* (2020), on *Incontri mediterranei. Arte e artisti tra Bisanzio e l'Occidente dopo la Quarta Crociata (1204-1430*), and, with the Portuguese scholar, Carla Varela Ferndandes, the collective book *Images and Liturgy in the Middle Ages. Creation, Circulation and Function of Images between West and East in the Middle Ages (5th-15th centuries)* (2021). My forthcoming book, *Latin Perceptions of the Byzantine East: Art and Identities in Flux during the Catalan Expansion across the Late Medieval Mediterranean* is focused on similar themes.

5. *In your opinion, which specific notions have become particularly relevant to our present-day understanding of images, and how have they affected your own approach?*

Rethinking the issue of representation in art has benefited the three main fields of my research. For some time now, I have looked at the meaning and perception of images in the context of pilgrimage and Romanesque art in terms of textuality, intertextuality, and patronage. Little by little, I have realized the importance of including the beholder as well as his experience of the surrounding space. An understanding of the phenomenology of embodiment and Edmund Husserl's kinaesthetic consciousness in the experience of art changed my insight on the function of images in the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. The setting of a cultic statue of Saint James on the main altar in 1211, as a dou-

ble of the central high relief of the apostle-patron on the Western portal (1168-1188), transformed the direction of the pilgrim's itinerary into the building and his perception of narrative and iconic images.[10] Similar cases have been explored by Giovanni Freni (2011) for the Duomo of Fidenza and by Christopher Lakey (New Haven 2018) in his book on the Romanesque portals in Modena and Ferrara.[11] A growing interest in liturgical performances, the performative aspect of medieval images, and the five-senses approach pushed me to go beyond the restricted limits of iconography. My studies on the representation of the Sibyl since the 11th century are a pertinent case.[12] Finally, the emerging field of Mediterranean studies as a privileged space to look at images from a cross-cultural perspective gave me the opportunity to shift my research to new problems and geographies. Thus, as I mentioned before, I have been working in the last decade on travelling objects and shifting identities in the context of the expansion of the Crown of Aragon to the East.

6. *What is your specific understanding of "meaning" in visual objects? How do images manage to convey messages, and what are the implications?*

I consider the visual object as a performative text, not only because of its capacity to evoke other texts and images but also because of what it means by itself. It is true that a visual object is a sign, whose signifier – shape, form, dimension, colour – can stress and adjust the signified. As a result, the "meaning" is based on the peculiar relationship between signifier and signified and it can change over time and in different contexts. A visual object can also be categorized as an iconic, indexical, and symbolic sign – these categories are not mutually exclusive, so that any depiction may combine any of them. Thus, the complex iconographic programmes of the portal of Santa Maria de Ripoll and the Creation Tapestry in the Cathedral of Girona can be seen as text by themselves, with an incredible capacity for quoting other texts and images, such as the Ripoll Bible or an astronomical treatise.[13] At the same time, however, the iconic value of most of the narratives of those artworks become both index and symbol.

I consider myself an art historian and the aim of my research is to understand how works of art matter in the expression and transmission of ideas, beliefs, devotions, and conflicts in the Middle Ages. Hence, my emphasis on highlighting that in every process of production of a work of art there are three main agents involved: the artist (or maker), the recipient (or patron), and the audience. The relationship among them and their role can be interchangeable, as Alfred Gell pointed out, and they all condition the meaning of the work of art. This leads us to question the idea of authorship, which in the Middle Ages is often related to the recipient, who can be God or the commissioner. Then, as far as the role played by the artist in the process of meaning is concerned, we must distinguish between *auctor materialis* and *auctor intellectualis* as Lucia Battagia Ricci has done in her study on the Buffalmacco's paintings in the Camposanto at Pisa.[14] Ultimately, the meaning of a work of art is the result of a long process in which material and intellectual aspects are thoroughly mixed. However, the result is not univocal an in every case we must address *intentio auctoris*, *intentio operis* and *intentio lectoris*.

7. *To what extent is "meaning" determined by factors not immediately associated with the specific visual appearance of images, such as* mise-en-scène *strategies, conditions of visibility, and more generally the experiential dimension of viewers?*

The shaping of "meaning" is the result of many factors and, in some cases, makers and commissioners are not in full control of the process. We have overcome the belief that the significance of an image is based on visual appearance, iconographical identification, or a patron's requests only. The significance of a topic, image, or work of art can change depending on their location and media. For instance, it is not the same to be within a religious or a secular building, at the main altar or on a portal. Likewise, images change audience and significance from being on an illuminated page, on a painted panel or on a fresco. The growing interest in issues related to lighting, visibility and *mise-en-scène* has fostered studies on materiality, 3-D virtual reconstruction and aesthetic perception. They are all helpful tools in re-enacting the onlooker experience and in offering a better understanding of the original setting and intention. My own participation in the 3-D virtual reconstruction of the main altar of the Cathedral of Santiago during the period of Diego Gelmírez (1100-1140) made me realize that the shrine was literally enclosed by a railing which emphasized the perception of this place as a *sancta sanctorum*.[15] Likewise, during my study of the mural paintings in the chapterhouse at Sigena (1197-1208), the original distribution of the benches for the nuns and the lighting through the windows on the west wall helped me understand the direction of the narrative into the room and the effects of light on its content and meaning. Finally, thanks to reconstruction drawings of the original hanging system of the Kahn Madonna, I could distinguish between the original Byzantine layout of the piece and the later addition of two wings for display in a Latin context.

8. *In your view, are we now better equipped to reconstruct and more deeply understand the complex relationship between the visual appearance of an image and the expectations of its viewers?*

A medievalist should be trained in the study of the coeval texts concerning the theological, aesthetic, devotional, and sociological value of images. Ekphrases, travel accounts, chronicles, visions, exegetical debates, collection of miracles, homilies, customaries, rituals and even wills are usually good tools to reconstruct the horizon of expectations of the potential viewer of a work of art. Sometimes scholars forget the need to plunge into written sources and explore the coeval vocabulary for the visual arts in order to assess the appropriateness of their interpretation and test their own limits. The reconstruction of the horizon of expectations of the original audience is a difficult but necessary task. No less complicated is to build a hermeneutical bridge between present and past. We should be aware that in the process we are projecting our own concerns. In this regard, Alexander Nagel's *Medieval Modern: Art Out of Time* (London 2012) is a provocative effort at finding analogies between our contemporary aesthetic experience and medieval modes of perception.

9. *To what extent can images contribute to informing their viewers' understandings of other images and other aspects of reality and experience?*

This is the core of our mission as art historians who study images. In the past, this was the aim of Panofsky's iconology, but this logocentric approach has been contested and, in many respects, overcome by semiotics and post-structuralism. Recent studies on the perception and fruition of images try to avoid old-fashioned intellectual history by focusing on gender, multiculturalism, body awareness and the five-sense theory. I am convinced that images have the capacity to express fears, emotions, ideas and to take us back into the past. Each category of image – narrative, iconic, devotional, portrait, marginal, etc. – belongs to a system of communication with a horizon of expectations. Fruition, therefore, is not only aesthetical and can be translated in terms of religious debates, social concerns, strategies of promotion, etc.

10. *What is your assessment of the materiality of images?*

I worked in a museum – the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya – as curator for five years (2005-2010). There, I developed a special sensibility for the materiality of images. It is a complex field, which requires the combination of traditional art-historical approaches with lab-analyses and knowledge of technical literature. Research on pigments, pictorial techniques and artistic materials can bring new insights into the meaning of an image. The precious character of some pigments, such as lapis lazuli or orpiment, the search for glittering effects and the use of some specific colours such as blue or red convey meaning, as I show in the case of Catalan panel painting.[16] Often materiality is connected to exegetical debates or aesthetical questions. It might even entail a reflexion on the ontology of a work of art, as Beate Fricke showed in the case of the reliquary statue of Saint Foy at Conques.[17]

11. *In your view, how can we approach the "social life" of images? In what sense can we assume that images interrelate with their viewers and users?*

The social life of images in medieval culture is apparent. As Meyer Schapiro pointed out, the emergence of extensive iconographic programmes on Romanesque portals constitutes the "speaking face" of the Church and its will to communicate with an audience. The aim of this medium – the Romanesque portal – is to provoke the curiosity of the viewer, and often addresses its audience by way of inscriptions. These image-laden portals acted as stage or backdrop to both liturgical and daily life. Likewise, devotional statues and most illuminated books can be seen as part of a ritual performance. We can obviously add other examples of the social life of images in the Middle Ages both in private and public domain.

12. *Does the experience of images exclusively imply the exercise of sight, or do other senses also play a role? If possible, please cite a relevant case from your research field.*

In the last decades, several scholars contributed to enlarge our perception of the experience of medieval images. Alexei Lidov's hierotopy highlights how the creation of sacred

spaces involves not only images but also lighting, music and smell. The five-sense theory provided us a helpful tool to include other senses in the perception of images, in which touching and tasting were usually part of the religious experience of the sacred. Most of these approaches are in debt to the principles of Edmund Husserl's *Phenomenology of Embodiment* and the concept of synaesthetic consciousness. In it, movement and contrast with others are at the core of the individual's search and perception of space. I found these ideas helpful to understand the ways in which pilgrimage centers were transformed during the 12th and 13th centuries. In the case of the Cathedral of Santiago, at the turn of the 13th century, Maestro Mateo set a new longitudinal axis (W-E) in the sacred topography of the basilica thanks to the building of an impressive western porch – the Pórtico de la Gloria – the setting of a monumental choir in the central aisle and the placing of a statue of Saint James on the main altar. It dramatically altered the previous transversal axis (N-S) as well as the itinerary created by Diego Gelmírez around 1100. It also engaged pilgrims in new kinetic devotional practices in front of the statue of the Apostle.

13. *Recent studies have emphasized that "iconicity" (or "visual efficacy") is not an exclusive property of artistic images but can also be regarded as an attribute of non-figurative objects, such as elements of landscape, natural materials, and living beings. To what extent can such objects be included in an art-historical narrative?*

Iconicity is a phenomenon that involves many signifiers and artistic images are not unique in their access to it. In his study on the "copies" of the Holy Sepuchre in western Europe (1942), Richard Krautheimer made clear that there is an iconography of architecture. A stone, a mountain, a cave, a road, a rock or a river can also become an icon within a specific culture or belief. These natural elements are relevant in any pilgrimage culture, in which the sacredness of space is often based on some relevant elements of the landscape. In the Byzantine and post-Byzantine world, the impressive landscape of Mount Sinai became iconic. Its features appear not only in icons related to Mount Sinai but also as a mirror image of Mount Tabor in the depiction of the Transfiguration. Something similar happens with the reception of the Holy Land in the West – the sacred topography of the biblical stories is evoked through images, places, and natural landscapes.

14. *Many studies have focused on the dynamics by which images originally meant for a specific viewing context come to be transferred to, appropriated by, and transformed and reshaped in another. Which hermeneutic tools can be useful in our analysis of such phenomena?*

The study of images should always entail the phenomenology of reception. I find especially suggestive Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the dialogic capacity of a text/image and its continuous re-accentuation over time.[18] I am also devoted to Umberto Eco's distinction between *intentio auctoris*, *intentio operis* and *intentio lectoris,* and the unquestionable character of the work of art as "opera aperta". In the last few years, we are witnessing a renewed interest in this topic from the perspective of cross-cultural studies. Terms alien to the traditional vocabulary of art history – such as appropriation, framing, intercultural, transcultural, hybridization and introjection – have been progressively incorporated into

our field. Most of these terms stem from anthropology and psychoanalysis. They can help in the study of the use of images in cross-cultural contexts. Currently, I am using these concepts in my research on the image of Saint George in the Mediterranean and in some case studies of the Catalan presence in late medieval Greece and Sinai, and its consequences for the art of the metropole.

15. *English is more and more the* lingua franca *of global art-historical scholarship. To what extent may we avoid applying to non-European contexts notions drawn from an essentially Western European understanding of images and their materiality and meaning?*

Art history has been transformed by a global perspective in the last few decades. The terminology used in our field often shows its limitations in the understanding of images from milieus that are multicultural or unrelated to the Western tradition. The application of western European concepts to the study of other geographies and beliefs is unwarranted and research on the ontology of artistic creation in these cultures is needed. I believe that anthropological studies and comparative art history can be helpful in this endeavour.

16. *Finally, what are we still lacking? In which direction should we pursue our studies in the following decades?*

Global art history seems here to stay and to develop in the future. Our understanding of artistic areas such as the medieval Mediterranean is transformed by this new perspective. The era of established narratives in art history, based on the geography of modern-nation states, is obviously over. Comparative art history offers a new field of research and new methodological tools for its development are in order. Help may come from other fields – semiotics, anthropology, literary theory – as the study of images cannot be restricted to art history. The training of future art historians will have to be open to input from outside.

Manuel Antonio Castiñeiras González
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona
manuel.castineiras@uab.cat

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