

SUPPLEMENTI

Le donne storiche dell'arte
tra tutela, ricerca
e valorizzazione

Vol. 2

20

IL CAPITALE CULTURALE
Studies on the Value of Cultural Heritage

eum

Rivista fondata da Massimo Montella

Il capitale culturale

Studies on the Value of Cultural Heritage

Supplementi n. 20, 2026

ISSN 2039-2362 (online)

ISBN 979-12-5704-146-5 (PDF)

© 2010 eum edizioni università di macerata

Registrazione al Roc n. 735551 del 14/12/2010

Direttori / Editors in chief Patrizia Dragoni, Pietro Petrarola

Co-direttori / Co-editors Nadia Barrella, Fulvio Cervini, Alexander Debono, Stefano Della Torre, Giovan Battista Fidanza, Pierpaolo Forte, Borja Franco Llopis, Angelo Miglietta, Christian Ost, Tonino Pencarelli, Giuliano Volpe

Coordinatore editoriale / Editorial coordinator Maria Teresa Gigliozi

Coordinatore tecnico / Managing coordinator Pierluigi Feliciati

Comitato editoriale / Editorial board Giuseppe Capriotti, Mara Cerquetti, Francesca Coltrinari, Pierluigi Feliciati, Maria Teresa Gigliozi, Emanuela Stortoni

Comitato scientifico / Scientific Committee Sergio Barile, Simone Betti, Ivana Bruno, Riccardo Lattuada, Anne Lepoittevin, Federico Marazzi, Iaria Miarelli Mariani, Raffaella Morselli, Haude Morvan, Federica Muzzarelli, Paola Paniccia, Giuseppe Piperata, Pio Francesco Pistilli, Massimiliano Rossi, Marialuisa Saviano, Valentina Sessa, Andrea Torre, Ludovico Solima

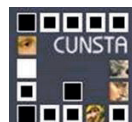
Editors Alice Devecchi, Concetta Ferrara, Costanza Geddes da Filicaia, Alessio Ionna, Chiara Mariotti, Enrico Nicosia, Alessandro Serrani, Carmen Vitale, Marta Vitullo

Web <http://riviste.unimc.it/index.php/cap-cult>, email: icc@unimc.it

Editore / Publisher eum edizioni università di macerata, Corso della Repubblica 51 – 62100 Macerata, tel. (39) 733 258 6081, fax (39) 733 258 6086, <http://eum.unimc.it>, info.ceum@unimc.it

Layout editor studio editoriale Oltrepagina

Progetto grafico / Graphics +crocevia / studio grafico



Rivista accreditata AIDEA
Rivista riconosciuta CUNSTA
Rivista riconosciuta SISMED
Rivista indicizzata WOS
Rivista indicizzata SCOPUS
Rivista indicizzata DOAJ
Inclusa in ERIH-PLUS

Respect to the remains: Lady Callcott and art criticism in the 19th century

Maria de Fátima Medeiros de Souza*

Abstract

Lady Callcott was a British traveler who was active in criticism and art collecting. From her book *Essays towards the history of painting*, we can discuss the establishment of a scientific methodology for the history of art and understand the participation of women in art criticism. We argue that direct observation and description of collections, aspects observed in Callcott's book, were resources used to attest to the authenticity of works acquired by Museums and private collectors.

Lady Callcott è stata una viaggiatrice britannica attiva nella critica e nel collezionismo d'arte. Dal suo libro *Essays towards the history of painting* possiamo ricostruire l'istituzione di una metodologia scientifica per la storia dell'arte e comprendere la partecipazione

* Postdoctoral researcher at the Institute of Brazilian Studies at the University of São Paulo, R. da Praça do Relógio, 109 - Conj. Res. Butanta, São Paulo - SP, 05508-050, Brasile, Link: <https://lattes.cnpq.br/4971554987953486>, e-mail: medeiros_fatima@hotmail.com.

This article is a résumé of a research published in another academic journal: Souza, M. de F. M. de (2024), *Respect to the remains: Lady Callcott e a crítica de arte no Oitocentos*, «Revista Do Instituto De Estudos Brasileiros», 1, 87, pp. 1-26, <<https://na01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?>>.

delle donne alla critica d'arte. Il saggio intende sostenere che l'osservazione diretta e la descrizione delle collezioni, aspetti osservati nel libro di Callcott, fossero risorse utilizzate per attestare l'autenticità delle opere acquisite da musei e collezionisti privati.

During the nineteenth century, the spread of print culture and travel contributed to including British women in art criticism and art collecting. They took advantage of their experiences abroad and their social networks to access the theoretical circuit of art. The participation of women such as Lady Maria Callcott (1785-1842) is a result of the change in critical production of the period. Whereas previously it was assumed that men had an inherently refined and "rational" taste, with the possibility of traveling, women demonstrated their knowledge through descriptions and analyses of European collections.

When we study women's intellectual production, it is necessary to consider the role of scholarly circles involved in the production of knowledge. These groups were organized on the edges of universities and scientific institutions, and there are places where women with social prestige could move more easily beyond the institutions that denied them formal access.

Francis Haskell¹ discussed the spread of the taste for the old masters of the Renaissance and Callcott's articulation as a scholarly correspondent of prominent figures in art collecting. Recently, Caroline Palmer² addressed the professionalization of women in art criticism and the contribution of female authors to the establishment of "art history as a discipline," emphasizing the role of travel and the strategies women use to establish their careers.

This research considers the assumptions presented by these two authors and proposes some questions for the analysis of Callcott's production based on the following hypotheses:

1. Lady Callcott's connection with erudite networks contributed to the establishment of her career in art criticism;
2. Scientific training influenced Callcott's art criticism. In other words, the systematic methodology and the observation of collections *in situ* are related to the scientism widespread at the time and are relevant to analyzing her works.
3. The descriptive method and the prominence of material aspects in "Essays towards the history of painting" are resources used to attest to the authenticity of the old masters works and were used to support the construction of trajectories of painters little known at that time.

To prove these points, it was selected some of Lady Callcott's correspondence and texts related to art criticism were selected, especially her books

¹ Haskell 1976.

² Palmer 2009.

dealing with the careers of Cimabue, Giotto, and Poussin, for instance, letters in which Callcott corresponded directly with Sir Thomas Lawrence, discussing the art collections of Germany, Austria, and Italy. They also talk about recent acquisitions and the movement of works in public and private collections are topics frequently mentioned by the author.

Based on the notions of direct observation of phenomena, art criticism became more viable for women. Furthermore, after the end of the Napoleonic Wars, a large contingent of British people were able to travel more freely throughout the European continent³.

Lady Callcott traveled through Austria, Germany, and Italy as a correspondent for Sir Thomas Lawrence and other art collectors. She also advised Queen Victoria on the selection of paintings and wrote books on the history of art and biographies of painters. Her literary output includes a travel journal in Brazil, Chile, and India during the first quarter of the 19th century. In addition to writing, Callcott produced drawings, watercolors, and paintings. Some of these images form the travel notebooks that are now in the collections of the British Museum and the Victoria & Albert Museum.

Callcott's travel notebooks circulated in various social networks formed around important figures of scientific, artistic, and social distinction. Associated with natural collections and works of art, these field notes constituted private archives in the homes of figures of outstanding intellectual prestige. The specialized literature indicates that these spaces contributed particularly to women's erudition. Representations of the Joseph Banks house, with natural collections and a reference library, or even Callcott's house with works of art and natural collections, are some examples of these spaces of sociability⁴.

1. *Notes on Essays towards the history of painting*

The 1830s were relevant for Maria Callcott in the field of art criticism and art collecting. In 1835, she promoted a limited edition of the book "Description of the Chapel of the Annunziata dell'Arena". The following year, she published "Essays towards the history of painting" and wrote the manuscript about Cimabue. However, her relationship with the collections of Renaissance masters acquisition was before that, identified in letters from the 1820s, in which she organizes trips, art catalogues, and works as a specialized correspondent⁵.

³ Haskel 1976.

⁴ Souza 2020, Patterson, 1974.

⁵ Callcott, 1835, Letters from Maria Graham to Thomas Lawrence 1820-40.

When reading the book “Essays towards the history of painting,” it is important to pay attention to the numerous footnotes, which show some of the objectives in her collection of essays. Initially, we find an articulate and eclectic text, with varied subjects and temporalities. The theme of studying painting in its most diverse configurations guides through reflections that encompass the oldest manifestations of the genre, with special emphasis on cultures before Greece and Rome. Her spatial and temporal scope also considers non-Western cultures, such as Chinese, Japanese, and Egyptian art, and even comments on monuments in Mexico and places still little known to Europeans⁶.

The writing of the British traveler follows a growing Orientalism wave in which the intersection of information collected during her travels considers remnants other than those of ancient Western art⁷.

In the Callcott’s words, the purpose of the book writings was to “report what I could gather of the materials used by painters; the substances on which they painted, the pigments with which they colored, the vehicles through which the colors were applied, and the tools employed in painting”⁸.

The scientific notion of knowledge about the materiality of artworks developed in the last chapter can be found throughout the volume. In Essay V, for example, called “On the materials used by painters”, the author deals with the pigments and supports used throughout the history of painting. This is what we will call an archaeological notion of art history, which considers it relevant to study materials and techniques used by artists.

This archaeological notion, extended to works of art, is linked to the scientism of the first half of the nineteenth century. The popularization of knowledge, the dissemination of scientific publications, and natural collections, all of this are based on the observation of phenomena.

For the author, providing detailed information about the paintings is a form of reverence for the culture of her ancestors. The study of materiality and the preservation of these reminiscences were ways of honoring the past: “the desire to show respect for the remains of those we once loved is a blessed principle of our nature”⁹.

Extending this concept to the study of materiality, it is possible to consider the methodology of studying painting from an archaeological perspective. In the polychromy reminiscent of bas-reliefs, sculptures, and ancient monuments, Callcott develops a historical perspective of colours. She discusses aspects of the customs involving the use of pigments. Recurrences and meanings of the constituent elements of the works acquire a scientific dimension in her writing on the history of art. The author warns, in her letters and essays, that Floren-

⁶ Callcott 1836.

⁷ Recht 2007, Avolese 2018.

⁸ Callcott 1836, p. 229.

⁹ Callcott 1836, p. 253.

tine and Venetian frescoes are in danger of disappearing. Thus, getting closer and scrutinising their layers becomes vital. In this way, the act of observation acquires a dimension of preservation.

The *Essays on the History of Painting* are travelogues, with vivid descriptions of the works and collections of palaces, churches, convents, and museums visited. This notion of displacement, as we argue, is crucial to understanding the articulation of Callcott's career in the context of art writing. An example of this is numerous footnotes with the location of the works to attest to her observations. From the Gallery of Florence, through the collections of the King of Bavaria to the Belvedere Museum in Vienna, most of the paintings cited were seen by the author: "of those I have named, except the ancient works, there are not even six of which I have not seen the originals"¹⁰.

The way she commented on her route and direct observation of collections were ways of promoting herself as an author. Many female writers consolidated their careers based on these textual typologies and, later, managed to publish significant artworks. Madame Johanna Schopenhauer (1766-1838), cited by Maria Callcott, established her research on the Flemish school of painting based on articles for specialized periodicals. A polyglot and self-taught, she became a reference for the study of the work of Jan van Eyck. About a painting by Van Eyck, Callcott highlights the "excellent description in Madame Schopenhauer's pleasant volumes of the old Flemish schools of art"¹¹. Johanna's fame was on the rise in the 1830s. She brought together figures such as the philosopher Johann von Goethe, as well as the art critic brothers August and Karl Schlegel, at her soirees¹².

Maria Callcott and Johanna Schopenhauer used the descriptive method for some purposes, including disseminating knowledge about paintings and supporting the construction of the artists' trajectories. Furthermore, given the scarcity of images and the technical limitations of engraving in the reproduction of paintings, the descriptive method was an essential contribution, as it led to a presentation of the works through the characterization of tonal constructions, sensations regarding their dimensions, their styles, and technical particularities¹³.

The exchange of information between scholars who articulated their writings through observation and description made it possible to construct repertoires and narratives about the artists. In this sense, claims such as "Madame Schopenhauer describes four of Schoreel's works in the Munich Pinacothek as worthy of the highest admiration"¹⁴ or "Madame Schopenhauer did not hes-

¹⁰ Callcott 1836, p. 216.

¹¹ Callcott 1836, p. 182.

¹² Sorensen 2023.

¹³ Schopenhauer 1822.

¹⁴ The Art-Union 1848, p. 298.

itate to classify the painting among Van Eyck's best, basing her judgment on the work's similarity to Saint Luke in the Munich Gallery"¹⁵, indicate mechanisms for mapping works to justify attributions. Again, rescuing one of the ideas we defend in this research, the possibility of seeing the collections was essential for women to build their careers and validate their analyses.

Correspondents, such as Callcott and Schopenhauer, provided data on material aspects to attest and confer authenticity, proposing ways to identify the works of the old masters and their apprentices. Especially with the diffusion of the old masters of the Renaissance, these descriptive mappings disseminated this taste and encouraged collecting.

With this method is possible to investigate the circulation of works through collections and the trajectory of artists through data provided by these intellectuals. These texts subsidized the construction of a "history of tastes", as proposed by Haskell¹⁶. Through these works, we can observe the changes that took place in art collecting during the nineteenth century, when many artists and schools were reevaluated by critics. In this context, some little-known painters of the Italian and Nordic Renaissance were rehabilitated into a special category within the art market. These new trends impacted on collection formations and even our current conceptions about the history of Art.

Numerous publications disseminated these new trends in the market and art criticism. Periodicals and publications such as *The Art Journal* were means of disseminating this information collected by intellectuals such as Lady Callcott. Frequently citing recent acquisitions, contesting attributions, and disseminating images and data on public and private collections, *The Art Journal's* editorial line was contradictory. It prioritized contemporary production but understood the relevance of acquisitions of old masters. The ambivalence of these positions indicates a complex relationship between the public and these new tastes for old masters propagated by critics.

The description of materiality supported attributions in a period of dispersion of large royal collections and the constitution of collections of national institutions. Inventorying pigments, supports, and techniques not only constituted a way of thinking about painting from a scientific perspective but also followed a market perspective. Articles in the *Art Journal* questioned acquisitions of old masters by the aristocracy and raised the possibility of forgeries. It was crucial to construct narratives in a period of intense movement of objects. That is why the circulation of these correspondents who observed and scrutinized these ancient masters was so important.

¹⁵ Crowe, Cavalcasselle 1857, p. 99.

¹⁶ Haskell 1976.

2. Some considerations

Lady Callcott influenced later generations. Her name was a reference to Anna Jameson, Lady Eastlake, and Mary Philadelphia Merrifield, as well as many others who formed the editorial board of the *Art Journal* and *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*.

Her written production is relevant to understanding how women built their careers in art criticism based on the spread of travel. Studying the British context is pertinent, since travel writing was particularly widespread. Travelers used the possibility of moving more freely around Europe and the continents in the early nineteenth century to add to their writings the notion of direct observation of collections, when occurred the spread of the taste for primitive masters. These movements in the market and art criticism were strongly associated with the construction of public and private collections.

References

- Avolesse C. V. de M. (2018), *Winckelmann e sua inserção no ambiente das artes em Roma*. «Figura: Studies on the Classical Tradition», v. 6, n. 2, 2018, pp. 107-127. <<https://econtents.bc.unicamp.br/inpec/index.php/figura/article/view/9953>>.
- Callcott L. M. (1835), *Description of the Chapel of the Annunziata dell'Arena, or Giotto's Chapel, in Padua*. London: Printed for The Author, by Thomas Brettell, Rupert Street, Haymarket.
- Callcott L. M. (1836), *Essays towards the history of painting*. London: Edward Moxon.
- Crowe J. A.; Cavalcaselle, G. B. (1857), *The early Flemish painters: notices of their lives and works*. London: John Murray.
- Haskel F. (1976), *Rediscoveries in art: some aspects of taste, fashion and collecting in England and France*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Letter from Maria Graham to Thomas Lawrence (1820-40), Scotland: National Library of Scotland.
- Palmer C. (2009), *Women writers on art and perceptions of the female connoisseur, 1780-1860*. PhD, Oxford Brookes University.
- Patterson E. C. (1974), *The case of Mary Somerville: an aspect of nineteenth-century science*. «Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society», v. 118, n. 3, pp. 269-275.
- Recht R. (2007) *Buren sobre Ryman, Moritz sobre Winckelmann: a crítica constitutiva da história da arte*. «Arte & Ensaios: Revista do PPGAV/EBA/UFRJ», n. 15.
- Schopenhauer J. (1822), *Johann van Eyck und seine Nachfolger*. Frankfurt Am Maim: Druck und Verlag Von Heinrich Wilmans.

- Sorensen L. (2023), *Schopenhauer, Johanna Henrietta*. Dictionary of Art Historians. <<https://arthistorians.info/schopenhauerj>>
- Souza M. F. M. (2020), *Viajar, observar e registrar: coleção e circulação da produção visual de Maria Graham*. Ph.D Thesis. Brasília: University of Brasília.
- The Art-Union (1848), *Monthly Journal of the Arts*. V. 10. London: Bradbury and Evans, Printers, Whitefriars.

JOURNAL OF THE DIVISION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE
Department of Education, Cultural Heritage and Tourism
University of Macerata

Direttori / Editors in chief

Patrizia Dragoni, Pietro Petrarola

Co-direttori / Co-editors

Nadia Barrella, Fulvio Cervini, Alexander Debono, Stefano Della Torre,
Giovann Battista Fidanza, Pierpaolo Forte, Borja Franco Llopi, Angelo
Miglietta, Christian Ost, Tonino Pencarelli, Giuliano Volpe

A cura di / Edited by

Elia Carrara, Patrizia Dragoni, Consuelo Lollobrigida, Ilaria Miarelli Mariani

Testi di / Texts by

Michele Amedei, Susanna Arangio, Erica Bernardi, Elia Billi, Irene Boyer,
Eleonora Caggiati, Laura Calvi, Elia Carrara, Rosanna Carrieri, Matilde
Cartolari, Elena Catra, Alessia Cecconi, Lucia Colombari, Laura Conconi,
Elena Corradini, Alice Cutullè, Anna Maria D'Achille, Laura D'Angelo, Andrea
Daffra, Margherita De Gennaro, Patrizia Dragoni, Alessandro Ferraro,
Alžběta Filipová, Maria Clelia Galassi, Irene Gerogianni, Ludovica Girau,
Laura Iamurri, Charis Kanellopoulou, Anna Kopócsy, Andrea Leonardi,
Danilo Lupi, Angela Maderna, Maria Giovanna Mancini, Marta Mascardi,
Fátima Medeiros, Margherita Melani, Martina Miorelli, Federica Muzzarelli,
Martina Nastasi, Francesca Nucera, Maria Letizia Paiato, Vittorio Pajusco,
Caterina Paparello, Valeria Raho, Rita Randolfi, Marina Righetti, Bernardina
Sani, Marta Vitullo

<http://riviste.unimc.it/index.php/cap-cult/index>

eum edizioni università di macerata



ISSN 2039-2362