

Critical analysis of attribution reasoning in art history: the case of Raphael

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Additional information

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Research theme

[4. Actors, institutions, networks: socio-cultural conditions of artistic activity](#)

[5. Materials, techniques, crafts: theoretical and practical approaches to artistic making](#)

Thesis

Summary

Attribution in art history meets various criteria, which can be studied with regard to the history of the art market but also the history of taste. Raphael, whose art has been the subject of numerous attributions or disattributions, is in this respect a textbook case. The study of six drawings and paintings corresponding to the three periods of Raphael's career made it possible to identify characteristics relating to attribution reasoning not only for the painter studied but also for modern painting in general. These reasonings obey a well-established discourse which was put in place during the 19th century under the double influence of the natural sciences and the models of textual, philological and historical criticism. The latter is part of the tradition of the Maurists and within the framework of the institutionalization of knowledge which is taking place particularly in Germany for the new discipline that represents the history of art. Very quickly it is possible to observe a personalization of the attribution, a work by Raphael being able to be given to the master only by a "Raphaelist". The study of different attributionist texts spanning nearly two centuries has made it possible to understand the problem of taste and thus to explain the changes in attribution for the same work. The beginnings of the history of art in Germany are parallel to the emergence, under the influence of the first German romantics of a new taste for the Primitives which will lastingly influence the view of the "Raphaelists" who will seek to build a corpus of early works and will devalue those of the Roman period whose classicism is beginning to fall out of fashion. This change of view on Raphael first took place within the framework of a revival of Catholicism and would continue at the end of the 19th century with the rejection of academicism, for which Roman Raphael was judged responsible. However, over the past twenty years, the Roman period has been revalued, leading to the reattribution of Roman works to the master himself and allowing a new study of the notion of attribution.

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