WARBURG *REDIVIVUS* OR "VIVE L'ESPRIT"
THE IMAGE ATLAS OF ANDREAS M. KAUFMANN
by Thomas Hensel

> "Et la reproduction n'étant pas la cause de notre intellectualisation de l'art, mais son plus puissant moyen …."
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> [And the reproduction not being the cause of our intellectualisation of art, but its most powerful medium...]
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> André Malraux, *Le musée imaginaire*

Clicking through the CD-ROM of Andreas M. Kaufmann's archive of images, upon which this book is based, brings to mind the controversial relationship between the institution of the museum/art gallery and the so-called new media. In the meantime, their liaison has been accepted as an enduring love affair, yet many continue to regard it as not without its dangers. That suspicions exist, for example, with regard to the use of electronic media for registering and archiving, administering and passing on information about collections, which can be accessed via the Internet, visitors' terminals, or CD-ROM, has its roots in traditional reservations about reproductions per se. In the history of the critique of this institutional form, galleries and museums with their collections of originals were elevated to being *the* places for authentic experience of art. The reproduction of a work of art, on the other hand — in the past, using media such as copper plate engraving or photography — stood accused of decontextualisation and diminished quality of sensory appeal. Certain contemporary critics are of the opinion that, with the advent of the electronic media, the loss of the original's aura (already deplored by Walter Benjamin in the 1930s) and the declining facilitation of sensory experience is even more burdensome now that materiality has been withdrawn.

However, voices were raised in opposition to this cultural pessimism. In 1947, a key text of the twentieth century for the self-conception of museums in the age of their technical reproducibility appeared: *Le musée imaginaire* by André Malraux. Here the French art collector, statesman, and writer question the fundamental validity of the facile opposition between museums/galleries and media, between original and reproduction. Against the backdrop of experience with photography, Malraux demonstrates that the removal of an artwork from its historical context preceded the confrontation of museums and galleries with early mass media and that it was already initiated by these institutions through their new contextualisation of artworks in the exhibition space. Photography merely took this development further with all the rigour of a mass medium. For Malraux, photography, as a modern technique of reproduction, makes it possible for the first time to view an ensemble of artworks from different epochs and cultures. In the reproduction medium of photography, particularly because of black and white representation and standardised formats, artworks of different origins and in different media become like each other. It was precisely this aspect of neglecting all specific differences — the sum of all those qualities that made up the aura of an artwork for Benjamin — which allowed Malraux to discover common stylistic elements, new qualitative attributes, or unexpected functional contexts that previously had gone unnoticed. Thus, art history became, in Malraux's words, the "history of what is photographable".

Consequently, the original edition of *Le musée imaginaire* commences programmatically with the reproduction of a collection of reproductions. The first illustration shows a detail from David Teniers the Younger's painting *Art gallery of Archduke Leopold Wilhelm* (1651), which shows the Archduke's collection in Brussels during his time there as governor. The genre of paintings depicting gallery interiors, or *Kunstkammer*, first appeared at the beginning of the seventeenth century in Antwerp, a city whose wealth derived from foreign trade and the production of luxury goods, including paintings. Prosperity had brought forth a wealthy middle class; they had begun to collect artworks and considered themselves lovers and connoisseurs of art, which they purchased on a flourishing art market. In the tradition of Renaissance cabinets of art and wonders, treasure troves for contemplation and study of art and science that sought to present a universal overview of the state of knowledge of the time, the great number of new art collections were resplendent with objects and bronzes from classical antiquity, drawings, specimens from nature, and scientific instruments: *objets d'art* made by man and nature — artificialia and naturalia.

In the galleries of Antwerp, it was above all the paintings that caught the eye. All manner of different genres — landscapes, market and kitchen scenes, interiors, still lifes — were represented alongside historical paintings with religious or mythological motifs. Correspondingly, the gallery genre of paintings introduces a new way of presenting pictures hung on walls. For example, in Teniers' paintings, the pictures are hung so that the frames almost touch and include actual or supposed reproductions of originals. Essentially the gallery paintings show imaginary collections. Spiritually akin to Malraux's imaginary museum, these pictures do not depict actual historical collections; their documentary and descriptive qualities fade in importance compared to their function as a pictorial discourse on art. Whereas in Malraux it is common stylistic elements that produce the configuration of an imaginary museum (and vice versa), in the gallery paintings it is frequently an allegorical allusion or a political-dynastic message that determines the specific, composed, para- and hypotactic structure of their arrangement. By depicting paintings within a painting, this genre like no other makes painting itself the subject of painting. Both in a real and transferred sense, the gallery paintings were the image of images; on the one side, painted art theory and on the other, encyclopaedias of artworks and wonders. They are thus mirrors of the world of art as well as mirrors of the world itself. The paintings in the picture are not arranged according to national schools, genres, or epochs. To our contemporary perception, which has been conditioned by museums and galleries where paintings are often displayed on white walls in separate sections for different schools and historical epochs, the walls lined with paintings in the gallery pictures are an unaccustomed sight. Just like Malraux three hundred years later, the painter of an Antwerp gallery picture contextualises his subject in that he assigns an individual associative order to the pictures — or sculptures, drawings, artistic and natural objects, respectively — in his work.

It is not surprising that, in his image archive, Andreas M. Kaufmann makes a very prominent reference to these gallery paintings. In the very first file, alongside images of libraries and archives, there are several reproductions of gallery paintings, including works by David Teniers the Younger, Frans Francken the Younger, Peter Paul Rubens, and Jan Brueghel the Elder. Similar to Malraux, here paintings of this genre form the prelude to a "subjective archive of images," as Kaufmann expresses it, which is fed by collective memory thanks to individual recombination and subjective association. In earlier works, Kaufmann had combed the arsenals of collective memory and presented masterpieces of art history in the form of reproductions with multiple **breaks? refractions?,** for example, *Machina Encyclopaedia* (1995) and *Grosse Kunstgeschichtsmaschinerie* [Great Art History Machinery] (1992/1993). Moreover, the CD-ROM itself carries Kaufmann's motto for the entire project: it displays one of the most complex and rich examples of the gallery genre, an exceptional programmatic legacy for art's conception of itself. As a paratext, a detail from the painting *Gallery of Cornelis van der Geest* (1628) by Willem van Haecht is reproduced on the silver disk; in the first file, the entire painting can be viewed.

With this work of van Haecht's the genre of the gallery painting achieved its peak in terms of external form, size and representative design, the number of paintings depicted, abundance of figures of the staffage, and allegorical content and substantiation. In the form of an encyclopaedic art collection painting, it commemorates the visit of the Archduke and Archduchess in 1615 to the picture gallery of Cornelis van Geest, wealthy patron, merchant, and art collector. The high walls of his splendid residence are covered mainly with Dutch paintings of the sixteenth and particularly the seventeenth century, that is, the majority are "modern" works by contemporary artists. In the foreground of this temple and canon of modern art with its special accent on Antwerp, on the occasion of this historic visit the most important personages of Antwerp society past and present are gathered together in a fictitious-idealised constellation. This includes the commissioner of the painting van der Geest, Archduke Albrecht and Archduchess Isabella, leading public figures, and Antwerp's most prominent artist, Peter Paul Rubens. In van Haecht's gallery painting, recognition of the services of the ruler, accolade for the collector, and praise for the artist form a close liaison, which ennobles the collection of paintings in a complex way — which cannot be analysed in detail here — and elevates them to models of love of art and connoisseurship. The artist ennobles himself by including his painting of a "Danae" and, by way of a signature, situates it in the central foreground of the painting. This is reinforced further by the self-portrait of the artist at the right hand edge of the painting, placed in a triumphal arch-like opening that is crowned with van der Geest's coat of arms and the motto, alluding to how his name is pronounced, "*vive l'esprit*".

When, like André Malraux, Andreas M. Kaufmann integrates reflections and self-reflections of the operating system of art in the form of Dutch gallery paintings, they both have a common predecessor in the scholar of arts and culture Aby Warburg. Warburg's most important work, a collection of images entitled *Mnemosyne-Atlas*, included at least three reproductions of gallery paintings by none other than Willem van Haecht, from whom Kaufmann borrows the title for his own atlas of images. It was the mobility and mobilisation of pictures, the exchange of image products over time and distances that provided the motive force for Warburg's research. Time and again he would feel his way through what he called the "stages of the thoroughfares" of the "shifting classical superlatives of sign language", so-called pathos formulas. The transformations of the classical planet-gods in images he pursued through the Orient and into Padua and Ferrara and, finally, came upon them again on the facade of a house in Lüneburg. Warburg worked on his *Mnemosyne-Atlas*, the summation of his endeavours, from 1924 until his death in 1929. Originally the work was conceived as, in Warburg's words, "merely an inventory of classicising pre-determinations that had a contributory stylistic influence on the portrayal of colourful life in the Renaissance era". However, over the course of time it grew into a substantial treasure trove of images representing a collective memory, an experimental assemblage that demonstrated how the human urge for visualisation always finds forms that correspond with each other in order to depict an ordered world.

Andreas M. Kaufmann's statement regarding his motive for creating this atlas of images, could apply equally to Warburg: "At the end of the 1980s, I decided that I was not going to contribute anything more to the increasingly redundant production of images; what I really wanted to do was to use the images that already existed. My primary reference point here was the rich fund of art history. Not least because it contains the oldest images that portray adequately human life in all its complexity." Thus the interest of both the artist and the arts scholar lies in tracing the how the "oldest images" live on. For this purpose, they assemble groups of photographs or scanned images around certain themes — the older man mounted them on wooden panels covered with black cloth and the younger put them in digital files on a CD-ROM. Their modes of selection and association are similar. Frequently, it is the formal correspondences that are decisive; however, neither Kaufmann nor Warburg reduce the various units of images to a common

denominator by supplying a generic term — which would be a possibility — but merely use numbers: for example, 00001 to 000030 (Kaufmann), and 1 to 79 (Warburg). Both insist explicitly on the use of reproductions. Thus Warburg, as an image media scholar *avant la lettre*, regards photography as essential for his theoretical work: "If there were not a photographer in the house, the development of the "new method" would be impossible." This declaration of belief in the media dimension of art finds its modernised counterpart in Andreas M. Kaufmann's "Thumbnails".

The common features of the two arrangements, in fact, can be brought even closer together. Both Aby Warburg and Andreas M. Kaufmann ignore any kind of division between highbrow and mass culture. Indeed, Kaufmann models several of his files on some of Warburg's panels. For example, File 00009 presents conceptions of the cosmos from various epochs of cultural history, which are found in Warburg's Panels 1 and 2, as well as their B and C. File 000015 brings together various adlocutio scenes, like Panel 44; File 000012 contains hand gestures of blessing, oath-taking, or victory, classic pathos formulas, which Warburg illustrates in Panel 5 and, on an earlier panel for exhibition purposes, he assembles under the heading "Reaching for the Head". Further, the autoreferential structure of Andreas M. Kaufmann's image atlas is implicit in Warburg's *Mnemosyne-Atlas*: just as the artist devotes his first file to the meta-images of library, archive, and particularly gallery painting, the arts scholar focuses and takes this meta-iconic reference in Panels 1 and 5 virtually to endless lengths by integrating in each one a reproduction of one of his earlier panels, and in this way creates second-order panels.

Ultimately, the open structure of both works unites the concepts of Aby Warburg and Andreas M. Kaufmann. In both, collections of images meet in changing constellations temporarily and both process thinking in images that has no closure, which makes their atlases laboratories of the history of images. This open quality is closely connected to the idea of interactivity and creates an intriguing interplay between author and user. Both authors present works that are not delimited but instead, an environment they have structured where, in a processual exchange with their audience, a variety of work interpretations can be realised. The gallery paintings of Antwerp represented just such a fascinating interactive form of presentation. Like the art lovers in the painting conversing about art, the representation of which hung in a real gallery, it was intended that conversation should continue in reality in front of the painted one. The associative arrangement, in which the paintings were hung, where reception was not linear but inter-iconic, meant that the gallery paintings offered a wealth of associations that could be pursued in discussions among the invited art lovers and connoisseurs. It is in this spirit that the image atlases of Aby Warburg and Andreas M. Kaufmann represent a model of instructions for use, a communicative situation, wherein discourse about images can take place actively. Aby Warburg consulted friends and colleagues about his atlas; he incorporated their suggestions and objections for rearranging the images. Likewise, Andreas M. Kaufmann has enlisted other eyes and pens in his project, which makes him a congenial heir to Warburg's achievements. This book is ample testimony to this fact.

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