

The idea of art history as a collective endeavour is much in the air these days. Some scholars resist, not because they are anti-social, but because their every accomplishment, every recognition by their field, has seemed, at least on the surface, to be the result of individual effort – sifting the evidence and seeing things in a new, or singular, way. Still we are thinking about networks: how they have and continue to shape our work.

At a recent gathering of Canadian art historians, Kristina Huneault pointed out that research and writing, however solitary in aspect, have always been conducted in virtual networks, the voices of other researchers and theorists, alive or dead, intermingling conversationally in our thoughts.¹ But as I think Huneault would also admit, a single author's hearing can be quite selective. If this is productive in strengthening the walls of a room of one's own, it can be fatal to the harmony of team research or co-authorship. And the issue of who signs, or whose name appears first on a book or article, is only part of a sometimes thorny question.

Team research was the theme of a panel organized by Karla McManus for the Universities Art Association of Canada (UAAC) conference in 2012. Discussion was lively. Ruth Phillips made the point that however forcefully Canadian researchers are being encouraged to work as teams, a hierarchy persists in the way that funding applications are structured and evaluated. The lead author mind-set is in place before the team even leaves the gate. Phillips had just heard a paper by Carolyn Butler-Palmer on art history as "social knowledge," which chronicled Erwin Panofsky's vain attempts to situate his work within a net of contributions. As Butler-Palmer develops her argument in this issue, the model of 'big art history' can be applied to projects big and small, and it is not simply a matter of accommodating or acknowledging the input of others, but building a participatory apparatus from the ground up.

Museum curators have long known that there are other specialists in the house. The conservation unit or consultant brings performative interpretation of a work into play; it is remade before one's eyes, and dialogue ensues. Claude Payer and Gérard Lavallée's co-signed report on their rediscovery of a tabernacle should not be taken as unusual, and that's the point. Museums are sites of collective research, a structure that used to be honoured in exhibition catalogues – the museum signed – before the curator took on the role of author. Anne Whitelaw's fine-grained analysis of the new Canadian and Quebec pavilion of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts treats the hang as a process, the visitor following a path laid out, as we might imagine, in innumerable meetings between architects, designers, curators, and technicians.

This is not a thematic issue of *JCAH/AHAC*, but taking the network proposition seriously inflects my reading of every contribution. The

interdisciplinary approaches of cultural historians are necessarily networked, even when findings are repossessed by the discipline in charge. As Andrew Horrall shows us in his study of the Dorothy Cameron “obscenity” trial, an appreciable amount of Canadian art history can be found in judicial transcripts as positions are hardened and interpretations fixed like bayonets. Erin Morton’s investigation of J. Russell Harper’s correspondence brings out his consultative process as he imagines a pan-Canadian community of folk artists. There is much more to Morton’s article, of course, but even in her focus on this renowned art historian’s solo curatorial project, it is clear that institutional dynamics mattered. This message also bubbles up from Lorne Huston’s lively reconstruction of the critical reception of the 1913 Spring Exhibition of the Art Association of Montreal, a collective event *par excellence*, as a group exhibition assembled by a jury appointed by an association. A cacophony of voices, none of them disinterested, are brought into dialogue; they riff off each other, as an old hipster might say.

Polyphonic intellectual activity is not a new thing, but clearer, more reflexive statements of collective methodology might be required of us in future. This issue offers a few examples in text and by its very existence as a bound volume of essays heading out into the world. In his silent film *So Is This* (1982), Michael Snow projects a string of words that form the following question: When was the last time you and your neighbour read together?

So here we go, all together now ...

Martha Langford

NOTES

- 1 Mark CLINTBERG, Pablo RODRIGUEZ, and Sarah WATSON, “A Room of One’s Own and/or Global Networks?” *Knowledge & Networks: Canadian Art History*, circa 2013. Accessed 14 July 2013, <http://knowledgeandnetworks.concordia.ca/2012/en/a-room-of-ones-own-and-or-global-networks>.