

Spunti e Ricerche

Vol. 38

Edited by Catherine Dewhirst
and Crystal Victoria Olin



Duggan's Artistic Legacy

Jo-Anne Duggan
(1962–2011)

JO-ANNE DUGGAN
Photomedia artist and
scholar at work, La Sala di
Mantua, Palazzo Ducale,
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ABSTRACTS

“My Post-Colonial Gaze”: Photomedia Artist Jo-Anne Duggan’s Theorisation of Viewing Art

Scholars have long engaged with interdisciplinarity within the Humanities, which is traced historiographically through developments in the traditional disciplines of Anthropology, Art History, History, Musicology, Linguistics, Literature and Sociology. A shift came over the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries from documenting political histories to rewriting the histories of everyday life through a socio-political lens. New social histories gained increasing momentum after World War II, but photographers had also been contributing to such critique after Joseph Nicéphore Niépce (1765–1833) paved the way for the invention of the camera through heliography in 1816, producing images from everyday life. The new discipline of Photography with a specialisation in photomedia entered universities and other higher-education institutions from the 1990s. This article introduces readers to Jo-Anne Duggan’s theorisation of the “viewing experience” as well as four academic contributions inspired by Duggan’s art practice and scholarship in this special edited collection.

Porta Pia, Gatedness and Artistic Reinterpretation: Engaging with an Urban Threshold across Time and Place

This article explores the layered meanings associated with Porta Pia—one of Michelangelo’s last works—as both a material and symbolic urban threshold. Designed in the sixteenth century as part of Pope Pius IV’s vision for an ideal humanist city, this gateway in Rome’s Aurelian walls transcends simple categorisation as an historic artifact or city gate. It also provides a site for exploring a powerful dynamic where past and present converge through an experiential interplay of spatial containment and release. Through a first-person account, the author recalls her encounter with Porta Pia during her architectural studies in Rome, where she used watercolour to reinterpret the structure within its broader spatial and temporal contexts. Upon encountering the work of Australian artist and scholar Jo-Anne Duggan years later, the author found synergy with Duggan’s method of interrogating layers of history, memory, and cultural representation through visual reinterpretation. Like Duggan, who used photomedia to question traditional narratives within museum contexts and explore the unseen spaces between artifacts, the author uses watercolour to explore transcendent ideas and challenge normative conventions. In doing so, she invites readers to engage critically with the notion of gatedness, with what it means to encounter the unknown, and with the forces that shape urbanity.

Reconceptualising the *Sala dei Cavalli*: Extending Historic Interpretations through the Viewer’s Experience

In Italy, there remain centuries-old *palazzi* and villas with intact interiors. The *Sala dei Cavalli* in Mantua, now a public museum, is one such room. Yet there is little scholarship in English on its history as being fully-furnished when it was newly completed in 1530, or Italian Renaissance domestic interiors in general. While it is impossible to re-create this room as accurately as it was conceived, this article proposes a re-conceptualisation of the early

sixteenth-century Renaissance Italian *Sala dei Cavalli*, through a combination of the viewer's experience, as mediated through conventional art history and the contemporary conceptual photography of photomedia artist Jo-Anne Duggan. Conventional art historical methods explore: the cultural and social conditions that shaped the room; the architectural theories that reflect the concepts behind its design; the patron and architect; notions behind a room's formal style; and historical material culture relevant to the room. Duggan's photographic images go further by providing a fresh perception of the room's history that challenges scholarly approaches through insights on subjective, sensory, imaginative and time-collapsing concepts. The result for the viewer is a more complex, nuanced knowledge of the *Sala dei Cavalli* than has been interpreted by previous scholars in the English language, reflecting ways that viewers today engage with the world of historical museums and art.

"A Peculiar Act of Doubling": Experiencing Andrea Urbani's Eighteenth-Century Room of the Gardens

In the 1760s, the renowned Venetian painter and theatre scenographer Andrea Urbani (1711–1798) was commissioned to decorate the villa Vendramin Calergi in the Veneto township of Noventa Padovana. For the *Room of the Gardens*, Urbani illusionistically transformed a modest chamber into an elegant Rococo pavilion. This fictive structure purports to offer views out to a surrounding formal landscape, while the room's two windows allow real vistas of the villa's rear garden. Between the windows is the painted depiction of a mirror frame without its accompanying glass. To explore how the eighteenth-century visitor may have experienced such an intriguing space, this article takes an integrative, contextual approach. In so doing, it parallels Jo-Anne Duggan's engagement with decorated Italian sites of historical significance. It is a method that has largely been overlooked in the study of the early-modern Venetian villa, and here it highlights the significance of a painter who has also been neglected in art history. Through this analysis, the *Room of the Gardens'* resonance for the present-day viewer is likewise considered. This article suggests that, akin to Duggan's photographs and their "peculiar act of doubling", the decorated space—which itself foregrounds the notion of replication—is continually reanimated by those who engage with its playful puzzle.

"Mi raccomando tesoro, cerca di fare bella figura": Exploring "making a good impression" Evoked through a Photograph and Story

They say "a picture paints a thousand words", which is what artist and scholar Jo-Anne Duggan's photographs do. One of her collections, *Reverence #1*, not only inspired the author's short story, but became its setting. The photograph of Prato's Monastery of St. Niccolò whispered "voglio fare bella figura" (I want to make a good impression), a concept that simmers under the surface of every aspect of Italian life. This article encapsulates the concept via a story that breathes care and love, and a desire to make just the "right" impression. Both story and the analysis thereafter, highlight the importance of "bella figura" in Italian culture. While second nature to Italians, it explores the historic medium through the creative media of photography and storytelling.