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Abstracts from the 5th Visual Science of Art Conference (VSAC) Berlin, Germany, August 25th–27th 2017

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Editorial: Bridging art and the visual sciences

The 117 short texts included in this special issue of *Art & Perception* comprise the abstracts of the keynotes, talks and posters that have been selected for presentation at the 2017 Visual Science of Art Conference (VSAC) in Berlin.[1] You will find the abstracts of the two keynotes, Jesse Prinz (CUNY) and Irving Biederman (USC), at the beginning of this issue followed by the peer reviewed contributions. Talks, as well as contributions to symposia, are printed in the order they were presented at the conference. By retaining this structure in the proceedings, we aimed to preserve the anticipated coherence that connected the presentations as we saw it while planning the conference. Some talks were part of symposia that especially aimed at combining artistic perspectives with those of researchers from the humanities and the psychological sciences (talks 1–3, 8–11). The peer reviewed talks were clustered around topics that have been of special interest to the community of researchers in the sciences of the arts. Such were, among others, aesthetic universal and cross-cultural differences (talks 4–7), the range of physiological measures in the aesthetic sciences (talks 12–15), or visual statistics of art images (talks 21–22). Poster abstracts are printed in a third section in alphabetical order. (For a full thematically ordered list of sessions – also including the posters – please consult https://www.vsac2017.org/).

For the first time of the VSAC the co-organizers belong to two adjacent disciplines, one being psychology (Claus-Christian Carbon, Bamberg) the other philosophy (Joerg Fingerhut, Berlin), and both are committed to research projects that span across disciplinary boundaries. We encouraged and actively selected submissions that promised a broadening of the topics to be addressed at the VSAC 2017. Many experiments in neuroaesthetics, to take one example, focus on immediate sensory responses to artworks and simple evaluative states. This focus is important when it comes to understanding our interaction with artworks, but it often omits questions regarding art that have concerned psychologists, philosophers, art historians, sociologists, and others

1 Established in 2012 by Baingio Pinna in Alghero/Italy, the Visual Science of Art Conference (VSAC) aims to better connect the communities of scientists and artists in order to deepen our understanding of art and aesthetic phenomena. The VSAC over the years has proven to be an ideal venue to engage, debate and collaborate on all topics associated with the perception of artworks. From its beginnings, the VSAC has been organized as a satellite conference of the ECVP (European Conference on Visual Perception), the leading European conference on visual science. This year the VSAC was held in Berlin/Germany from August 25th–27th at the Berlin School of Mind and Brain at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and the adjacent Campus of Charité Mitte. Around 250 participants joined the conference this year.

who recognize that art is an intellectually engaged, historically situated, and culturally varied phenomenon. In choosing the contributions among the positively reviewed submissions for this year's conference we therefore placed additional focus on approaches that deal with the appreciation of artworks that goes beyond simple preference and liking judgments. Several talks and posters therefore address the complex and layered aesthetic experience art enables. Others directly focus on the long underappreciated question of what underlies our evaluation and appreciation of art *as* art. These two emphases in new research in the visual sciences of the arts has made it necessary to include contributions from a wide range of topics and disciplinary perspectives spanning from image statistics, neuroscientific, behavioral, philosophical, phenomenological, and computational approaches, to those of the artists themselves.

The emerging interest in connecting art and vision science is well demonstrated by the wide variety of subjects and methods covered in the abstracts in this issue. The wide international appeal is evident in the diversity of countries represented in the conference (28 countries from six continents). In relation to previous years, a shift towards greater gender balance was also recognizable at the conference. While both keynotes were male, the contributors listed for talks presented at the conference were half female and male (27 female/27 male), with a slight prevalence for male first authors and presenters (12 female/15 male; not controlled for gender self-identification of the participants).

What unifies most of the contributions in this volume is the conviction that works of art and aesthetic engagement are observable entities, and that they therefore can in principle be studied using empirical methods. The two phenomena, artistic objects and aesthetic experiences, are two relata that cannot be studied in isolation without missing the relevant phenomenon. Yet one also should acknowledge that studying each relatum might require expertise in very different fields and that certain approaches swing either more to the object side or the experience side of the relation.

Art objects, on the one hand, can be interpreted as the level of main interest, independent of their context, the specific ways of inspecting them, or elaboration effects. Approaches that focus on the object side identify object-inherent qualities and analyze them, bringing a wealth of methodological accounts to the field. Recently, statistical regularities in artworks were revealed, for instance by analyzing the Fourier spatial frequency power or by calculating different measures of complexity, entropy or order. There are undeniable first impressions to artworks which guide beholders in their subsequent inspection behaviour, so such accounts might be very powerful in predicting such first moves towards to or away from specific works. Yet such analyses can also be brought to bear to identify properties in artworks that differ from one specific historical period to another, or between different cultures.

On the other hand, when it comes to the experience of art and its evaluation *as* art, psychology, neuroscience, and philosophy often provide competing descriptions of the relevant phenomena. This sometimes makes it challenging to identify whether the very phenomena under scrutiny actually overlap. Philosophers and artists alike often emphasize that subjective experience or artistic engagement resist generalization (leaning on the discussion whether subjective experience is assessable by a 3rd person perspective at all). This is a topic that is highlighted even more by the individualism prevalent to the art practice or the precariousness and variation in intense individual engagements with particular artworks. Empirically oriented philosophy, psychology and neuroscience commit to the very possibility that such phenomena are objectifiable to some extent, i.e. that there are structural component features of our engagement with the arts that can be identified, and that certain aesthetic responses systematically relate to specific properties of artworks (or to changes in the available semantic or contextual information regarding the artwork). Both perspectives on the experience-side of the field have been present at this year's conference.

Awareness of the need to conduct research that gives equal weight to both relata (visual artefacts and aesthetic experience) as well as to the specific pitfalls of a visual science of the arts has been a running topic throughout the conference and in the discussions after the talks, the sessions and the many productive breaks provided by the conference schedule.

In order to bring our actual engagement with works of art to the fore, VSAC has always aimed to incorporate artworks themselves into the conference. This has been realized this year by talks and posters that not only focused on general claims regarding our aesthetic responses but rather highlighted aesthetic engagements with the work of a specific artist (or a series of artworks of one artists) or a specific art period, thereby bringing psychological studies closer to the interest of art critics, art historians and artists. Yet this incorporation has especially been achieved by the exhibition of a series of artworks of local and international artists at the "VSAC Art Night" at "ACUD macht neu!" that has been curated by Gina Eickers, to whom we would like to express our deep gratitude. We unfortunately do not have space to include reproductions and descriptions of all the presented works in this volume. A list of the contributing artists has to serve as a stand-in: Charlotte Broecker, Persijn Broersen & Margit Lukács, Philip Crawford, Gina Eickers, Liat Grayver, Shelley James, Sebastian Loerscher, Morgan O'Hara, Robert Pepperell, Miao Xiaochun.

Additionally we had two visual artists directly "protocolling" the conference in very different ways. Both artists also exhibited their work at the art night. The LIVE DRAWINGS by Morgan O'Hara, who also contributed a poster to the conference, captured the movements of the speakers during their

talk performances. Below you can see her renderings of the presentation of the two organizers (Figs 1 and 2).

Graphic artist Sebastian Loerscher additionally graphically engaged with the contributions of this conference, while also focusing on the scientific insights and thematic unfolding of the talks. We chose to include his drawings of the two keynotes as well as of the poster sessions in this volume (see sections: KEYNOTES, Figs 3 and 4, and POSTERS, Figs 5 and 6).

We hope that the 5th VSAC in Berlin as well as this publication will further inspire the vivid and fruitful exchange between vision science and art. In publishing its proceedings for the very first time in a journal, we hope to enrich the field beyond those that attended the conference in Berlin. At the same time, we are very well aware that short abstracts in many cases will not capture the actual contributions, especially with respect to approaches in which disciplinary boundaries are crossed and more complex questions are raised. We want to end by encouraging researchers and practitioners in the field to submit their work to the next installment of VSAC in 2018 which will take place in Trieste/ Italy and to which we are very much looking forward.

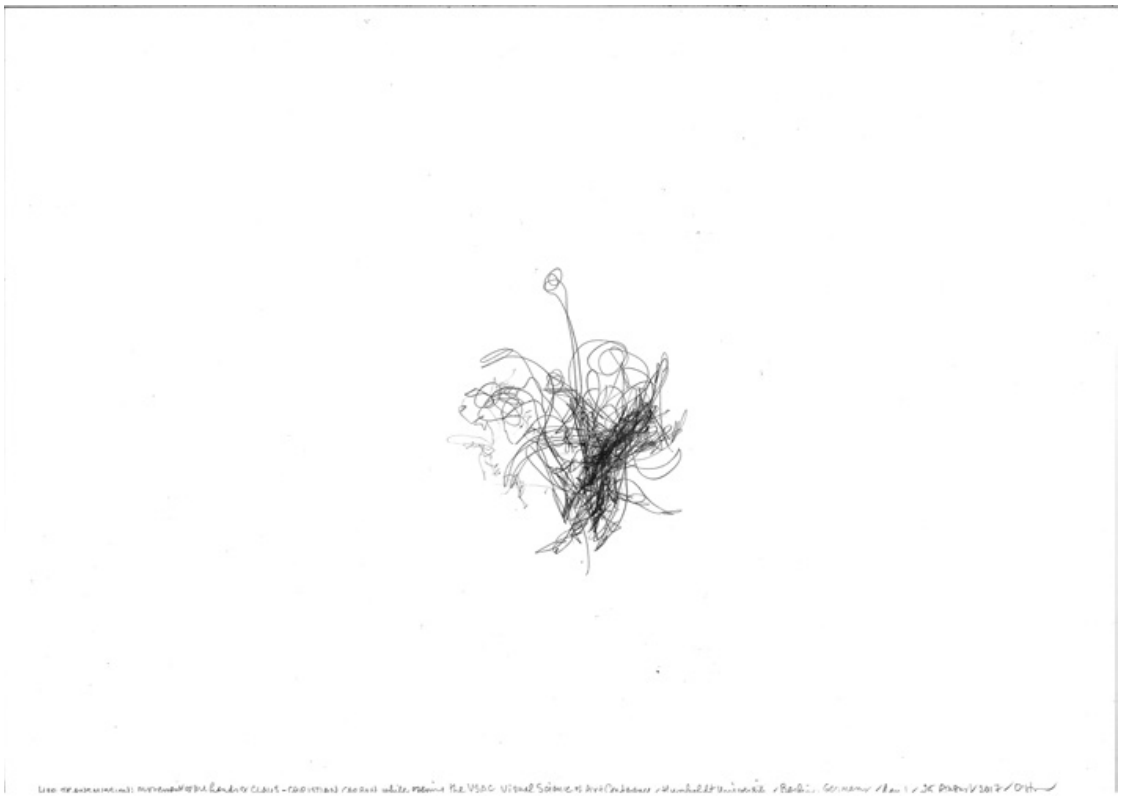

Figure 1. *Live Transmission*, movement of the hands of Claus-Christian Carbon during his opening remarks, 25.8.2017. By Morgan O'Hara, 2017.

Figure 2. *Live Transmission*, movement of the hands of Joerg Fingerhut during his talk, 25.8.2017. By Morgan O'Hara, 2017.

We would like to thank the members of the Conference Committee who contributed their time to help us review the talks and posters: Rossana Actis-Grosso, Marco Bertamini, Nicola Bruno, Andrea van Doorn, Uwe Fischer, Akiyoshi Kitaoka, Jan Koenderink, Ute Leonards, Rob van Lier, Manuela Marin, Slobodan Marković, George Mather, Claudia Muth, Marcos Nadal, Stefan Ortlieb, Galina Paramei, Alexander Pastukhov, Robert Pepperell, Sylvia Pont, Ana Radonjic, Bilge Sayim, Alessandro Soranzo, Branka Spehar, Christopher Tyler, Sandra Utz, Johan Wagemans, Maarten Wijntjes, and Daniele Zavagno.

We also would like to thank the *Research Group EPÆG* (Ergonomics, Psychological Æsthetics, Gestalt), Bamberg, as well as the *Einstein Foundation Berlin* for their generous support of the conference and the publication of the proceedings. Sandra Utz, Claudia Muth, Uwe C. Fischer (Department of General Psychology and Methodology, University of Bamberg) have helped tremendously in comprising the abstracts for this special issue, George Neish (Berlin School of Mind and Brain, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin) was a great help in the final editing and proofreading process of this volume. We are also very grateful for all the help we had in planning the conference (Felix

Binder, Gina Eickers, Coco Kühnapfel, Claudia Muth, Alexander Pastukhov, Marius Raab, and Sandra Utz), and would like to express our gratitude to the numerous helpers during the conference!

Finally, we would like to thank Brill Publishing for producing this volume, and for doing it on such a short timeline. It has been a pleasure working with their team.

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