

THE FRICK COLLECTION

EMERGING SCHOLARS SYMPOSIUM

ABOVE AND BEYOND:

CEILING PAINTING IN THE HISTORY OF ART

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THURSDAY, JUNE 27, 2019

2:00 to 6:00 p.m.

Attendance is free with [online registration](#).

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*Abstracts*

**The Metamorphosis of Mythology: Parmigianino's Ceiling Fresco for Rocca Sanvitale**

*Elizabeth Eisenberg, PhD Candidate, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University*

In the intimate *camerino* of Rocca Sanvitale in Fontanellato, Parmigianino created an airy garden room, its painted pergola open to the frescoed sky. The lunettes frame glimpses of the mythological story of Diana and Actaeon from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Scholars have long debated the purpose of this jewel-box of a room, at one point casting this sun-drenched cycle as the setting for a private mourning chamber in which to contemplate death. That misinterpretation has since been abandoned, but the cycle's seeming eccentricities—including irregular inscriptions, an apparently female Actaeon, and extraneous scenes—have not been satisfactorily resolved. Scholars have come to celebrate the cycle's multiple interpretations. However, Erwin Panofsky's warning that, within erudite northern Italian circles, it would be "an impossible contradiction" to acknowledge meaning in one part of a cycle but not the whole leads me to propose a new reading, one not with multiple interpretations but with multiple layers, all rooted in a coherent program.

By working with the enigmatic irregularities of the Ovidian narrative rather than against them, I suggest that Parmigianino incorporated not one but a number of metamorphoses into the cycle, weaving the stories of Callisto and Iphigenia into that of Diana and Actaeon. Parmigianino thereby created for his patron a contemplation on the inevitability of Fate, its hapless victims each punished by Diana for circumstances beyond their control. The multiple narratives are bound together by the golden sun in the center of the ceiling. Its mirrored surface encircled with the command *RESPICE FINEM* (Consider the End) would have both reflected and contained the illustrative scenes.

### **Ceiling Paintings in the Amsterdam Trippenhuis: Iconography, Design, and Production**

*Tatjana van Run, PhD Candidate, Delft University of Technology*

The Trippenhuis, a double dwelling built in Amsterdam for the arms dealers Louys (1605–1684) and Hendrick Trip (1607–1666), was completed in 1662 and financed by profits derived from the family's iron foundry in Sweden. The brothers each lived with their families in one side of the house. The quarters still feature many of the original painted and sculpted decorations, including ceilings with mythological representations, birds, hunters, and decorative floral wreaths. No archival documents regarding the commission and execution of the ceiling paintings are known today. Yet in 1662, the poet and glazier Jan Vos paid homage to the coffered ceilings with allegorical figures painted by Nicolaes van Helt Stockade (1614–1669) in the main reception rooms of both parts of the house. Only Hendrick Trip's ceiling, with coffers depicting allegories of war and peace, has been preserved.

A rediscovered poem by the unknown poet Salomon Oudart, celebrating the inauguration of the Trippenhuis, now confirms that all the ceiling paintings in the house were created as an ensemble directly after the building's completion. The poem shows that Hendrick Trip's coffered ceiling commemorates the peace settlement after the Second Northern War (1655–1660) between Sweden and Denmark. Moreover, the house and its decorations express a direct competition with the recently built town hall at Dam Square and demonstrate the political ambitions of the Trip family in Amsterdam.

## **A Princely Commission Dispersed: The Fate of Schloss Bensberg's Pictorial Program**

*Daniel M. Fulco, Agnita M. Stine Schreiber Curator, Washington County Museum of Fine Arts*

Commissioned by Elector Palatine Johann Wilhelm von Pfalz-Neuburg and his wife, Electress Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici, the pictorial program (1708–15) of Schloss Bensberg, near Cologne, Germany, invites close study of its fascinating imagery and provides an opportunity to investigate the critical fortune of early eighteenth-century ceiling paintings in the German states of the Holy Roman Empire. Much of the palace's original visual program survives, either *in situ* or in museum collections, permitting us to envision and reconstruct its former state.

Enlisting the talents of Giovanni Antonio Pellegrini, Antonio Bellucci, Domenico Zanetti, and Jan Weenix the Younger, the Electoral couple collaborated in embellishing the interiors of their country palace with a range of allegorical, mythological, and historical frescoes, oil paintings, and stucco sculptures that spoke to their ambitions as sovereigns and art patrons. This paper will contextualize this cycle in relation to comparable projects of the period and explore how key historical and cultural circumstances dictated its subsequent dispersal, disappearance, or destruction over time. Issues related to the alteration, documentation, conservation, and preservation of the paintings and their original architectural context will also be addressed. It will be argued that this project's fate and reception still bear relevance to European cultural heritage and the tradition of ceiling painting north of the Alps.

## **Gilded Allegories: Murals by Edwin Howland Blashfield from the Huntington Mansion**

*Josephine Rodgers, Marcia Brady Tucker Fellow, Yale University Art Gallery*

*Triumph of the Dance* by Edwin Howland Blashfield was designed for the first floor drawing room of Collis and Arabella Huntington's Fifth Avenue mansion. Partially draped dancers appear on the ceiling as if suspended in an ethereal space, surrounded by clouds. The softly illuminated sky animates the allegorical bodies. The provocative subject matter invites viewers to imagine that they are occupying the same expanse as the figures, revealing how the artist adapted his academic training to create a new mural practice while embracing traditional techniques.

In 1889, Arabella Huntington found inspiration for her Fifth Avenue mansion in eighteenth-century Italian palaces and the connoisseurship of the British aristocracy. By 1893, George B. Post had constructed the residence and commissioned a group of American mural painters to finish the

interiors. The final structure monumentalized the virtues of commerce and wealth, however, the opulence of the residence did not guarantee the Huntington family a position in the upper class, or permanence, in New York City. In 1926, the mansion was demolished to make way for commercial retail spaces. Today a majority of the murals are preserved within the Yale University Art Gallery. This paper will address *Triumph of the Dance* in the context of Gilded-Age architectural history, embodied by the Huntington mansion, as well as in relation to the artist's travels to Venice in 1893 and his personal collection of eighteenth-century Italian drawings.

### **“33 meters of immortality”: Cy Twombly’s Ceiling for the Louvre**

*Anthi-Danaé Spathoni, Researcher, University of Rennes 2*

In 2006, Cy Twombly was chosen to decorate the ceiling of the Louvre’s Salle des Bronzes, becoming the first contemporary artist to receive a ceiling commission at the museum since 1953, when Georges Braque executed *Oiseaux* for Salle Henri II. Completed in 2010, *Ceiling (Le plafond)* departs from the artist’s signature trembling line while retaining other characteristics of his pictorial language. Twombly treated the ceiling as an easel painting of monumental dimensions (4,300 square feet), a surface he filled with an almost monochromatic blue field, evoking the sky and recalling Giotto’s Arena Chapel. Simple, geometric motifs trace the ceiling’s contours, while inscriptions naming seven sculptors from ancient Greece invite the visitor to walk around the gallery.

This paper will show how Twombly participated in the long tradition of ceiling painting by building a strong connection between the space, content, and context of the room—a site where the viewer plays a decisive role. With a rare example of monumental twenty-first-century, painting, sited where one might not expect to encounter abstraction, Twombly made his entrance into the Louvre’s pantheon of great artists, gaining, as one critic put it, “33 meters of immortality.”