



April 29, 2014

Response of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem Department of Art History
to the CHE Evaluation Report

We would like to thank the Committee for its report.

The self-evaluation report submitted by the Department of Art History at the Hebrew University was compiled two years ago, during a "transitional period" at the Department. Since then, some substantial changes have taken place. Some have already been implemented in the academic year 2012-13, before the committee's visit (but were not included in the self-evaluation report written earlier). In our response, we will refer to the situation of the Department today. At the same time, we will also point at inaccuracies included in the evaluation report.

Reassessment of the Department's Mission

The mission of the Department is only partially presented in the evaluation report of the committee. The full mission (see e.g. p. 3 of the self-evaluation report) includes the following aspects: 1. To acquaint the student with the visual arts in complex historical and cultural contexts; 2. To show how images, monuments, and objects alike function as invaluable documents, reflecting religious and cultural dialogues and conflicts as well as aesthetic aspirations of the societies that produced them; 3. To consider the interpretation of the language of art as crucial to the learning process; 4. To train professional art historians to conduct independent research based on the study of primary sources and on the critical evaluation of secondary sources and the methods that they describe; 5. To encourage critical thinking, creativity, and originality.



During the last two years the missions and goals of the Department have expanded and the global dimension of the discipline has been stressed. In keeping with this new direction, we aim to endow the visual language with universal qualities and to develop models for the analysis of works of art and visual culture that can be adopted across geo-cultural areas. We aim to expose our students not only to the variety of existing research methods, but, by studying the different universal features of the visual language, to provide them with tools for the development of innovative new methods.

In recent years, and contrary to an inference at the Committee's report, theoretical aspects have been present in each and every course of our program, in accordance with the international trends. At the same time, we believe that it is impossible to bestow the discipline of Art History without a solid basis rooted in the context in which the works of art were produced. Theories are crucial for paving new paths for analysis, for exposing new aspects of visual culture, and for raising new issues for discussion. In our view, the teaching program should combine the theoretical approaches with contextual ones; one should not negate the other.

Art of the land of Israel, Jewish art, and Muslim art are subjects of special attention because of their unique local significance for our University as an Israeli institution. We thus disagree with the Committee's suggestion that these areas are developed only as a means to induce a more general interest in the field. Students are obligated to study at least one course in one of these areas or replace them by other courses in non-European art, which are given in other departments, such as Chinese, Japanese, and other options, depending on the faculty program for each year. The Department encourages those who choose to specialize in non-European art to study relevant courses for understanding its cultural contexts.



Reforming the introductory curriculum

The Introductory Courses are analytical, complex courses, supplying tools for academic research, using diverse methods and at the same time suggesting a close affinity to the contextual frame. They offer systematic bodies of knowledge that form the basis for advanced courses. They combine historical and theoretical approaches, supply tools for the development of the students' visual perception and cannot be pursued independently. Although the courses focus on Western art, they suggest various models for analysis that can be used for the study of visual culture in every geo-cultural area. In recent years, the theoretical dimension of the introductory courses has received significant emphasis. One of the four is a new course (2012-13); another is an updated version (2013-14). The two other courses are in the progress of change.

The Committee noted in its report that it is against evaluating the students' performance at the introductory course level on the basis of multiple-choice exams. While we strongly agree with the normative aspect of this comment, it is important to note that the information that the evaluation is or was based on such exams is wrong. Two-thirds of each introductory course is taught frontally, while one-third is a tutorial. The exam, which is only one part of the requirements, includes a visual part and a verbal one, whose main focus is one (or two) analytical question/s. In addition, in each introductory course, the students are required to submit two analytical assignments during the year. Contrary to what was repeated in the Committee's report several times, ***there are NO multiple-choice exams (and there never have been) in the Introductory courses!***

The General Introduction course was cancelled because it adversely affected the development of the students' research perception, by inducing them to adopt old dogmas. Next year a new obligatory BA course in methodology will be introduced. The course will discuss various theories and concentrate on a specific theme. The



same format was given this year as a non-obligatory course for BA and an obligatory course for MA. In addition, the second-year advanced courses will be replaced by methodological courses which will enable the analysis of works of art in small groups and on specific themes.

Broadening interdisciplinary Practices

Art History is basically an interdisciplinary field. Interrelations with other departments within and outside the School of Arts have been always developed. A special relation between our Department and that of Musicology has existed continuously and several joint seminars have been taught in the past. The relations with the School of Arts as a whole have been significantly strengthened during the last year. Because of the fundamental differences between the departments, the crystallizing of the School as a meaningful entity is a challenging task. The different departments of the School currently hold open, sincere, and fruitful discussions. The joint, interdisciplinary course on "Passion" is a successful, enthusiastic experience, which will serve as a model for further formats. Concerning the "Gateway" course discussed in the report, the criticism came from the students and not from the Department (the students' reports can be found on the University website).

The Department of Art History explores paths to establish interdisciplinary contacts with other departments as well. One example is the newly founded honors masters' program in Late Antiquity Studies that brings together teachers and students from various departments at the Hebrew University, including: Art History, History, Archeology, Literature, Philosophy, Classical Studies, Talmudic Studies, Islamic Culture, and Near Eastern Studies. Another example of cooperation between various departments dealing with visual culture is the interdisciplinary group: "Picture Power: Kings and Rulers in the Middle East 3000 BC - 1700 AD", where experts in Archeology, Egyptology, Islamic art, and Christian art are working together on visual



expressions of royal charisma in the Near East. The three-year project is supported by Scholion: an Interdisciplinary Research Center in the Humanities.

The Recommendations of the Committee and the Present Situation of the Department

1. The introductory courses are crucial for the building of the first stages of the discipline of Art History. The analytical aspect of these courses is dominant and various methods are involved. Strengthening the theoretical facet is a continuing process, and has been taking place during the last few years.
2. As mentioned above, there are **NO** multiple-choice exams in these courses.
3. A departmental seminar for advanced students has been successfully instituted since 2012/13.
4. The Department encourages students to study foreign languages crucial for conducting serious research. The obligatory program is adjusted to the general policy of the faculty. Each BA student is required to take the basic course in a second foreign language (4 annual hours), and each MA student is expected to take the advanced course (another 4 annual hours). Obligations regarding additional (third and fourth) foreign languages depend on the topic of each PhD student and are decided on by his personal doctorate committee.

Changes in the Study Program since 2012/13

1. A new obligatory BA course in methodology, based on a specific theme was added (since 2012/13 was given as a non-obligatory course for the BA and as an obligatory course for the MA).
2. Specific second-year courses were replaced with methodological courses concentrating on different methods of analysis of works of art (beginning next year).



3. A new obligatory general MA course was added: “Analysis of Works of Art: Different Perspectives: Theoretical Research and the Visual Language” (since 2013/14)
4. The field of photography was developed, stressing its theoretical aspects and strengthening ties with the Israel Museum, where the lessons will take place (beginning next year, already started this year in a different format).
5. A departmental seminar for advanced students was added successfully since 2012/13.

Although the staff members are of high quality in research and teaching, the future of the Department depends on new positions in modern and contemporary art.

The Center for Jewish Art

We share the worries about the Center’s present situation and hope that the faculty and authorities of the University will help us to transfer the Center and its archives to a safer place, and to raise the money for its digitization.

On April 9, 2014, The Hebrew University Academic Policy Committee held an extensive discussion, in cooperation with the Office of Assessment & Evaluation at the Hebrew University, regarding the Department. The Committee reviewed the Evaluation report, and discussed the findings with the Head of the Department of Art History. The Academic Policy Committee thanked the Kessler Committee for its report. It praised the members of the Department of Art History for the important steps it has taken in the last two years to maintain and improve the high academic quality of research and study programs. It also asked the Department to prepare a five-year strategic plan, in cooperation with the Office of Assessment & Evaluation at the Hebrew University.



THE FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
SCHOOL OF THE ARTS
Mount Scopus, 91905 Jerusalem

הפקולטה למדעי הרוח
בית הספר לאמנויות
הר הצופים, ירושלים 91905

Sarit Shalev-Eyni

Chair, Department of Art History
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem