BLACKWELL COMPANIONS TO THE ANCIENT WORLD

A COMPANION TO

GREEK ART

EDITED BY TYLER JO SMITH AND DIMITRIS PLANTZOS

VOLUME II

CHAPTER 35

Myth and the Ideal in 20th c. Exhibitions of Classical Art

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35.1 The Rise of Idealism

Much of the current discussion of museums revolves around art exhibitions. While modern and contemporary art is, for the most part, shown in 'white cube'-like rooms with almost no interpretive means, Greek art has many faces in museum displays. In Greek museums, recent redisplays present antique objects in thematic constellations, which bear proof of their original cultural contexts and elaborate the traditional chronological arrays of pedestals and glass showcases. However, residues of the aesthetic paradigm cut through late modern cultural approaches in order to preserve the aura of the 'masterpiece'. An excellent illustration of this is the display of the Parthenon marbles at the New Acropolis Museum (Plantzos 2011). Those residues are flashes of a powerful discourse, one of the most powerful of modernity, the *humanist–idealist* discourse, which has influenced museum collecting and exhibiting in the course of the last couple of centuries.

The humanist–idealist discourse treats classical beauty as a means of reaching inner truths. Its main argument, *simplicity*, is first formulated with the Enlightenment and becomes the core principle in classicist revival from the 18th c. onwards in art and in other life practices, including politics (Greenhalgh 2005). The Antique, from the viewpoint of an emancipatory era, is renegotiated as the absence of the superfluous. It incarnates pure beauty freed from authority, and reveals inner harmony. Thus, it is the nest of ideal subjects, of people nurtured with values that overcome the mundane and search for eternal truths. In visual terms, the absence of ornament and the effacement of

A Companion to Greek Art, First Edition. Edited by Tyler Jo Smith and Dimitris Plantzos.
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the excesses of the princely Rococo style turned Neoclassical theorists into 'protestants', reacting against anything that could contaminate their project and block the way to the beholder's spirit. One compelling exemplification of modern simplicity is the rhetoric of white marble. White marble was conceived as nonpersonal. It seemed to mask individual features, any flaws in the skin, any sign of veins, of blood running, of human traits that could reveal the futility of the absolute. Long before confirmations from biology and race theory, whiteness substantiated purity, which the 20th c. imposed as an authoritative formal language in the arts, namely abstraction. In the colorless museum rooms of the greatest art museums worldwide, the two ends of modernity, Neoclassical simplicity and pure abstraction, map out their common historic horizon.

What this chapter is about, then, is how idealized simplicity, either in the form of the perfect nude standing outside history (the *beau-ideal* tradition) or in the form of scientifically based approaches raising claims to truth (the *historical-archaeological* tradition), offers museums their most important organizing principle as shrines of classical values. Establishments such as the British Museum, the Louvre, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, as well as the National Archaeological Museum at Athens, reworked the idea of antiquity on the basis of the contrapuntal relation between art and archaeology, or else, beauty and system. Such a process, not without tensions and compromises as regards idealism and materialism, kept on tantalizing the imagination and feeding the myth of antiquity well into the 20th c.

35.2 The *Beau-Ideal* Tradition

The 18th c. was the decisive moment for some of the most dominant ideas about antiquity to take visual form. It was the moment in Western thought when representation became the social barometer of fair judgment, and a source of pleasure to the eye. In the mid 18th c., almost a hundred years before the major excavations on the Greek peninsula, the islands, and Asia Minor uncovered contested facts, the German (Prussian) historian and classicist Johann Joachim Winckelmann laid down his utopian conception: the reinvention of the unity between ideas and matter so that the essence of art could be uncovered. What is, in this view, the essence of art? For Neoclassical idealism, the essence of art is the essence of humanity having reached its apogee in the mid 5th c. BC, in so-called Periklean Athens. As much as Winckelmann lamented what was past and gone, namely the 'noble simplicity and quiet grandeur' of Classical Greece, he searched for a way out of the impasse. The painstaking study of classical texts and antique fragments – at the time understood as original Classical Greek statuary – was, he thought, the only way to

attain the heights of ancient Greek thought and thus to reconstruct the Greek ideal, the incarnation of the simple, the pure, the core of beauty. Beauty in idealist terms rises above nature, above humanity, and becomes divine. 'The highest beauty is in God' (Winckelmann 2006: 196). If, then, the 16th and 17th c. were times of infinite curiosity, experiment, and gradual alienation from the mystical cosmology of earlier stages, where material objects – rare and *curieux* – were thought to be carriers of strong but hidden resemblances with things lying beyond visual perception, a century later, connoisseurship, or else the ability to argue about beauty and taste, set new ground rules in the domain of art. Even though the ultimate goal was the definition of ideal art through the exploration of the dynamics of style – in other words, why this particular statue is more pleasing than that, why this form of art is inferior or superior to that one, and how style changed – the criteria were more subjectively rooted in the assessment of the connoisseur and his (almost never *her*) 'intuitive sensitivity' (Winckelmann 2006: 24).

Within this broader context, the *beau-ideal* tradition can be seen as a form of critical judgment constitutive of the 18th c. classical revival, or Neoclassicism. It has to do with the pursuit of 'colorless, unclassified purity of life' (Winckelmann 2006: 36), which is more an idea in the mind than something external that should be faithfully represented. So pervasive was the myth of the white marble statue and so ambitious was the attainment of simplicity through the negation of color that, albeit with periods of regression to colorful nostalgia, especially in the 19th c., archaeologists and curators attempted to erase traces of ancient coloring or further whiten the marbles.

35.3 Ideal in Style – Ideal in System

However, Winckelmann's bequest to modern culture was not only his – consciously futile – *pathos* for the ideal. His contribution to art history and theory, and to theory in general, consists of something more concrete. It lies in the fact that Winckelmann was the first to systematize objects of antiquarian interest into a logically classified system bearing its own rules and shortcomings on the basis of *style* (see Chapter 2). In *History of the Art of Antiquity*, published in German in 1764, the systematization of style under the broader sphere of idealism created a new language of receiving classical art. The perfection of Athens at the time of Perikles is measured by means of two distinct styles: the *high* and the *beautiful*. The high style, epitomized in the work of Pheidias and Polykleitos, rises above nature and humanity to render the immaterial, the sublime, the hidden essence of mankind, that which stirs wonderment and leaves the beholder speechless. The beautiful style, seen later in the 5th c. BC in the work of Lysippos and Praxiteles,

exemplifies the sensuous, the flesh, the material aspect of beauty that exists in external reality and can be savored by the trained eye, described by punctilious writing.

Yet the high and beautiful styles would not have had the same impact had they merely been treated as singular phenomena of 5th c. Athens. Winckelmann conceptualized those styles within a scheme of rise and decline, which included four phases: (i) the Archaic phase – source of inspiration for later artistic production; (ii) the austere Early Classical phase of Pheidias; (iii) a Late Classical phase, that of Praxiteles; and finally (iv) the phase of imitation and decline associated with Hellenistic and Imperial Roman times (Potts 1994: 15). The classification of style into chronological periods was the turning point from plain antiquarianism to a more coherent whole prevailed over by the notion of *sequence*. Put otherwise, it was the shift from isolated descriptions of objects of art, or even from attempts *à la mode* of the Enlightenment to contextualize art and its origins according to the makers, the climate, the mode of governing and so on, to a schematic, still fragmented, narrative of art.

From the closing decades of the 18th c. onwards, chronology enters museum space and becomes the device that orders styles, schools, artists, and eras in a line heading towards the future. Museums found the idea of a historical progression very useful for didactic purposes. The linear movement of time, on the one hand, and the Enlightenment belief that life, history, and art production evolve from more primitive forms to refinement on the other, made it possible for museums to narrate culture(s) by setting European culture as the guardian of the Antique. Told this way, the story of humanity both aestheticizes and historicizes the past, as it exhales classical beauty while at the same time giving it a place in chronology. An articulation between pure beauty and beauty-as-history has constituted the basic framework of exhibiting Greek art ever since.

35.4 The Overtly Political Louvre

The politics of beauty in Europe during the last couple of centuries has had a constant point of reference: the Louvre. The story unfolds by tracing the origins of the museum in royal collections, royal ambitions, and the attempt of the pre-Revolutionary (*ancien*) regime to create a Museum of Fine Arts for the education of the artists. The predecessor of the museum was not only the famous salons of the 18th c. (temporary exhibitions of contemporary art), but also the innumerable collections of the aristocracy and high-bourgeois class, who amassed decorative objects for their gardens and voluptuous interiors. The royal palace of the Louvre, with its age-long

tradition of status and insignia, did not find itself strained to incorporate the few originals and the many casts of the early 19th c. As a trace of Neoclassical taste, the sculpture collection became the mainstay of the Louvre's educative role with regard to the cultivation of steadfast aesthetic values.

To start with, the *beau-ideal* tradition manifests itself in Visconti's vision of turning the new museum into an apparatus of politics: the politics of taste hand in hand with the politics of the mighty. Visconti was a dreamer of the Napoleonic kind and in 1802, when the museum of the Revolution, known as the Musée Central des Arts, became the museum of the Emperor Napoleon and was renamed the Musée Napoleon, Visconti set out to visualize a national goal. He conceived and supervised the display of sculptures, mainly from Rome, and made sure that no minor objects, such as coins, medals, inscriptions, and the like, would impure the grandeur of the galleries. Objects of secondary choice were mounted on the walls, with the bulk housed in the Cabinet des Médailles at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. The sculptures in the Louvre were often chosen to match the ornamentation of the ceilings, which bore heavily sculpted mythological scenes (Laugier et al. 2004: 200). Even after the defeat of France and the restoration of monarchy, classical sculpture in the Louvre remained under the spell of subject-based classification, as Visconti had primarily wished it.

From 1802 to the early 1930s, the concept of the display of Greek and Roman art in the Louvre stayed more or less the same (see Figure 35.1). Despite certain efforts during the 19th c., and especially in its second half, to incorporate new acquisitions from excavations, to expand the museum, and to follow British empiricism in terms of chronology and cultural contexts, the Napoleonic project was not really questioned. The *beau-ideal* tradition resumed its course and remained the norm for classifying classical collections. Eventually, materials and types of construction were understood as valid modes of classification within the broader aesthetic standard. The objects acquired a certain 'technical' character in comparison to earlier classifications, yet still the pace was slow.

Change became evident in the decades that preceded World War II. As the publication of Étienne Michon's guide in 1922 shows, chronology had started replacing classification by subject and Greek art was finally separated from that of the Romans (Michon 1922). The aesthetics of simplicity veered towards modernism. The rooms appeared plainer and better lit, the statues shed restored parts, and a number of objects that did not fit the chronology found their way into the museum storage rooms.

The new entrance to the museum, marked by the inauguration of I.M. Pei's Glass Pyramid in 1989, disturbed the timeline and put into question the whole concept of display, but that's another story.

Figure 35.1 View of the Victory of Samothrace dominating the Daru staircase in the Louvre, c.1921–22 (Photo Giraudon/The Bridgeman Art Library).

35.5 Epistemological Tension at the British Museum

While the Louvre did not face serious dilemmas in its policy of the beautiful, the British Museum was strongly affected by the tension between the idea of a system (historical approach) and the *beau-ideal* tradition (nonhistorical approach). Indeed, there was a marked discord between two parties involved in the museum's affairs: on the one hand, the emerging cast of professional archaeologists, who saw in the collections the possibility to reconstruct the linear progression of civilization according to Darwinian principles, and on the other hand, the *aesthetes*, inspired by the quasi nontemporal values of Winckelmann's idealism (Jenkins 1992). The Elgin (or Parthenon) Marbles exemplify this tension, which manifests itself in the 19th c. and becomes the explanatory force for many of the decisions made in the course of the 20th.

From the first display of the Elgin Marbles in the Temporary Elgin Room in 1817 to the final arrangement in the Duveen Gallery well into the 20th c., a number of changes in the location and mode of exhibiting took place. Each and every time, the display gave evidence of shifts and rifts in the ideas

that dominated the museum's intellectual milieu. In studying the history of the collection at the British Museum, however, one thing remains clear: the display in 1817 and that in the Duveen Gallery have more in common with each other than with the rest of the redisplays in the 19th c.

Specifically, the first display in 1817 was aesthetically appealing, and the objects, aligned to the walls, were for the most part used decoratively and out of context, be it chronological, geographical, or cultural. On the other hand, the displays in 1831 and in 1873 showed an increasing interest in the invocation of the temple where the fragments once stood. Those tentative suggestions of an architectural context for the fragments (where the picturesque was not altogether out of the picture) were to become a constant source of concern not only for the custodians of the Greek and Roman Collection at the British Museum but also for the curators of classical art in general. How were the Elgin Marbles to be better viewed? Mounted upon a natural-scale model, thus revealing their initial origin and purpose, or as isolated fragments pointing to an unattainable ideal? Archaeology or idealist art? Obviously, the clash between archaeologists, who favored the idea of visual context, and aesthetes such as Richard Westmacott, who could only tolerate an array of cords to evoke the shape of the pediment (Jenkins 1992: 95), was unremitting. Indeed, a number of proposals in the 1850s underlining the educative role of architectural reconstructions for both the expert and the layman hinted that the *beau-ideal* tradition had somehow become old-fashioned, and that the archaeologists were gaining ground.

Moreover, the British Museum was constantly expanding. The old Montagu House was demolished, and new wings were constructed. So strongly was the taste of the times marked by Neoclassicism and the admiration of Periklean architecture that it demanded an adequate building for the recently acquired treasures. The decision to transform the existing building into a Neoclassical Museum right at the heart of the British Empire was the sign of a transition from the old British Museum, committed to the collection of books and natural specimens, to a museum that would bear proof of its universal humanist mission (Caygill 2002). As Jenkins points out, the entrance to the new building was crowned by a pedimental synthesis entitled 'The Progress of Civilization' and sculpted by the custodian of the Greek and Roman Collection, Richard Westmacott. This was the core of the museum's ambition in the 19th c., particularly the second half, to visualize the concept of progress as a 'chain' bringing together the milestones of ancient art chronologically. However, typology and Darwinian discourse in archaeology mostly affected the domain of prehistory and early English history. The Three Age System, a mode of chronological classification based on the combination of stratum and material (stone, bronze, and iron in successive strata) was applied to prehistoric material in Denmark and Britain during the 19th c., but not to collections of classical art (Renfrew and Bahn 2000: 264–268). The systematization of prehistory and early history was a menace to the *beau-ideal* tradition, as it shook the fixed platonic archetypes,

of which the Elgin Marbles stood as the best example. In the course of the 20th c., however, many museums worldwide chose to treat prehistoric collections as curiosities instead of chronological specimens, thus gradually ascribing to prehistory a fetishist fixation with the exotic nature of 'primitive' art.

Notwithstanding the ambition and its epistemological literacy, the British Museum did not manage to comply with the principle of chronological arrangement, which was to become a new display paradigm around the turn of the 19th c. at the Munich Glyptotek. The museum was vacillating between theory and praxis, between the past and the present. In theory it was becoming an academic institution propagating the succession of civilizations, from Assyria and Egypt to Etruria and Greece. In praxis, the British Museum was striving to prove the excellence of classical art, which was never really considered an equal partner in the chain. The arrangement of the exhibits was largely based on the concept of the Athenian grandeur. This was eloquently communicated by the location of the Phigaleian Room (anteroom to the Elgin collection): even though chronologically later, the Phigaleian marbles from Bassai in the Peloponnese (see Chapter 34) were stylistically prior to the glorious Pheidian masterpieces. They stood as an overture to true art. Only later, in 1891, was a room devoted to the Archaic period created, assembling sculptures from various locations in the museum. The museum went that far towards chronology (more likely in the Winckelmannian sense) regarding the Elgin 'dream collection'.

Be that as it may, the victory of context-based didacticism over pure contemplation characterized the closing decades of the 19th c. and intensified in the early 20th c. (Figure 35.2). This was, for instance, reflected in the *Guide to the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities in the British Museum* issued in 1908, where curatorial concerns focused upon the 'historical progress of each class of objects' (British Museum 1908: 1). Specifically for the Elgin Marbles, formal descriptions were combined with descriptions of the sculptures' locations on the monument, and the mythological backdrop was amply described. However, in the same catalogue, the spirit of the ideal manifests itself by references to 'the serene grandeur and simple power of sculptures of the school of Pheidias' (British Museum 1908: 21), the 'dignity and beauty' of a Late Classical Demeter (British Museum 1908: 12), and the grotesque of the Archaic production (British Museum 1908: 27) and its role in the transition to a fully developed art (British Museum 1908: 9). These are indirect references to Winckelmann's *History*, combining his admiration for the high style with his concern for a chronological system that could explain the rise and decline of true art.

Grains of the *beau-ideal* survived, then, within more positivist conceptions of archaeology. They re-emerged, for example, in the closing years of the 1920s. In a report to the Royal Commission on National Museums and Galleries in 1928, John Beazley, Donald Robertson, and Bernard Ashmole give strong evidence of the shift in mentality:

Figure 35.2 The British Museum, London. The Elgin Room in 1934 (© The Trustees of the British Museum).

> The Parthenon Marbles, being the greatest body of original Greek sculpture in existence, and unique monuments of its first maturity, are primarily works of art. Their former decorative function as architectural ornaments, and their present educational use as illustrations of mythical and historical events in ancient Greece, are by comparison accidental and trivial interests, which can indeed be better served by casts (Jenkins 1992: 225).

The spirit of Winckelmann, as interpreted by 20th c. purists, prevailed. It brought back the love for the revered, isolated antiquity and placed enormous distance between art and the newfangled science of archaeology. The Duveen Gallery, which was about to open in 1939 just before the outbreak of the World War II, exemplified change. Donated to the British Museum by Sir Joseph Duveen and built by J. Russell Pope, an American architect of Duveen's choice, the gallery became the final destination of the Elgin Marbles and a fine example of the *beau-ideal* revisited. The architectural-didactic approach was abandoned and the casts were removed from the display. In the name of clarity and decorative harmony, the frieze and metopes mounted high up on

the walls and bearing anatomical and chronological gaps visualized idealist simplicity. The Duveen Gallery officially reopened in 1962 and has more or less remained intact to date. In the current floor plan, Room 18 is the Parthenon Room, together with two annexes accommodating minor fragments and pieces of architecture, as well as audiovisual material. The museum Web site includes a video of the Marbles, where the narrator 'celebrates the enduring beauty and humanity of the Parthenon sculptures' (http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/galleries/ancient_greece_and_rome/room_18_greece_parthenon_scu.aspx; last accessed January 18, 2010): there is no better argument for a Universal Museum (ICOM News Magazine 2004).

35.6 The Educational Aspect of Beauty at the Metropolitan Museum of Art

On the other side of the Atlantic, the Metropolitan Museum of Art was founded in the 19th c. to promote the beautiful and the industrious. But there was more to it than that. In the closing decades of the 19th c., the museum showed explicit interest in educating the public. My main source in this matter is *A History of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (Howe 1913). The catalogue presents in detail the birth and evolution of a museum aiming to cultivate on the basis of beauty. It comprises that part of the story that spans from the closing of the 18th c. to the first decade of the 20th.

From the very first meetings to discuss the founding of the museum in the 1850s, the committee of the most renowned personalities in New York City made clear that the museum should not become 'a gallery of painting and sculpture' (Howe 1913: vii). Instead it should develop into a place where 'complete collections of objects illustrative of the history of "all the arts, whether industrial, educational, or recreational, which can give value to such an institution"' should be amassed (Howe 1913: viii).

Thus, from early on, the museum expressed interest in collecting (i) objects of the same type ('complete series of objects') and (ii) objects that could document diverse aspects of material culture production, spanning from industry to art. While the former proved that scientific criteria informed collecting, the latter drew a dividing line between the Met and what was fashionable for an art museum in the 19th c., namely Classical Greek, Renaissance, and Baroque art. Reading the catalogue, one realizes the subtle balance between the role of beauty and the concern for the people.

Prior to the foundation of the Met, the American Academy of Fine Arts (1802–41), one of the first six art institutions established in Manhattan during the opening decades of the 19th c., aimed to 'procure casts in plaster of the most beautiful pieces of ancient Sculpture now collected in the National

Museum' – that is, the Louvre (Howe 1913: 8). However, in order to complement viewing as a means of educating people about art, the permanent and temporary exhibitions were strengthened by lectures, education, a library, and other instructive approaches to create a context for the works after the model of the Royal Academy in London. Faith, then, in republicanism and the elevating though pragmatic nature of art, slightly twisted the reception of Winckelmann's 'classical ideal'. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, during its many phases of organization and relocation, carried in the 20th c. the mission of its pioneers:

> Besides the cultivation of the sense of beauty – in other words, the perception of order, symmetry, proportion of parts, which is of near kindred to the moral sentiments – the intelligent contemplation of a great gallery of works of art is a lesson in history, a lesson in biography, a lesson in the antiquities of different countries. Half our knowledge of the customs and modes of life among the ancient Greeks and Romans is derived from the remains of ancient art (Howe 1913: 111).

Since the aim was to create a public and popular art institution for all layers of the population, the display mode could not be merely aesthetic but had also to be illustrative of the educational process. Chronological progress was both fashionable and highly edifying. By the time the museum moved to Central Park, in the 1880s, the distance from the idea of a *cabinet de curiosités* – a place of strange and rare objects with no obvious visible or historical connection – was great. In the beginning of the 20th c., the objects were rearranged with the major purpose of enhancing their educational value. Moreover, contacts with schools were established by the appointment of the Supervisor of Museum Instruction. The museum had entered its phase of national pride and the trustees made that clear. The rearrangement of the collections aimed to 'group together the *masterpieces* of different countries and times in such *relation* and *sequence* as to illustrate the history of art in the broadest sense, to make plain its teaching, and to inspire and direct its national development' (Howe 1913: 295, my emphasis).

The classical ideal at the Met was scientifically inspired. The presence of the classical archaeologist Gisela Richter, who in 1925 became Curator of Greek and Roman Art, stressed the aesthetic-formalist approach of the displays. Richter placed particular emphasis upon the rigor of style that dictated the classification and study of the collections. In the 1940s, the bulk of the Greek and Roman collections was put in storage, and it remained hidden from the public eye for almost sixty years (Nørskov 2002: 158–163). The new Greek galleries opened in 1999 (Figure 35.3), comprising the Archaic and Classical periods and presenting the objects under a whole new concept of thematic and contextual arrangement. Finally, in 2007, the impressive restoration of

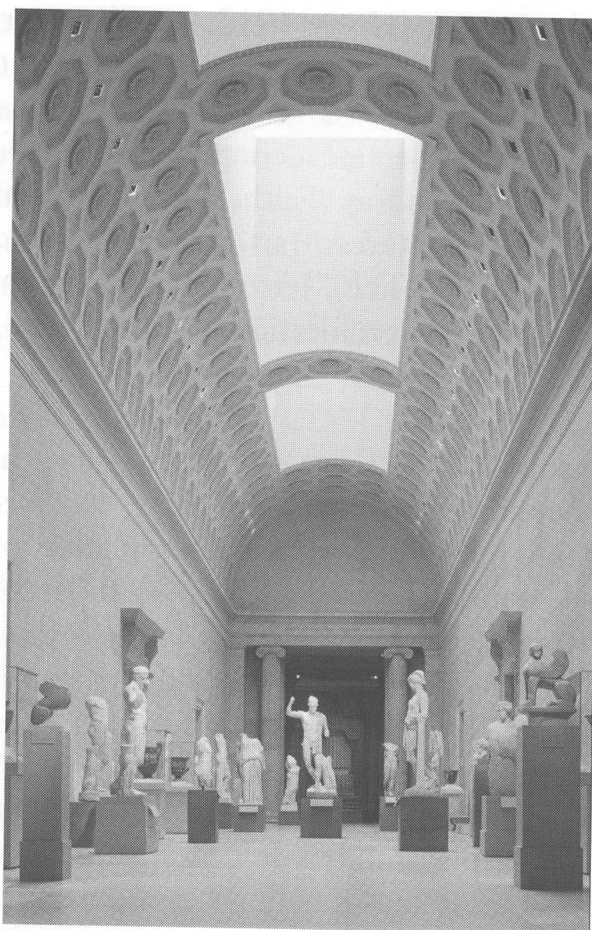

Figure 35.3 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The Mary and Michael Zaharis Gallery, opened in 1999 (Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource/Scala, Florence).

the Leon Levy and Shelby White Court, housing Hellenistic, Etruscan, and Roman art, allowed the rest of the collections to be publicly accessible.

Obviously, the aesthetic element is far from absent in the redisplay. The majestic refurbishment in impeccable classicist style and the restorations of Roman interiors and frescoes combine the everlasting charm of the picturesque with the educational goal that the museum has always prioritized (http://www.metmuseum.org/collections/new-installations/greek-and-roman-galleries; last accessed November 30, 2011). As for the online displays, the Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History helps visitors, from their own homes, to explore collections from Paleolithic times onwards, according to chronology, geography, and themes (http://www.metmuseum.org/collections; last accessed November 30, 2011). This dominant visual feature proves that the old project of art history as the linear recount of cultures lives on in the 21th c. It is true that neither the notion of progress as a constant refinement in art, nor Winckelmann's scheme of rise and decline, prevails in the displays. Yet Winckelmann's proto-historical attempt to classify cultures into confines of

chronological periods and artistic styles, and the eventual emergence of the timeline as a narrative device, was the bedrock for later exhibitions of classical art. Even though Greek antiquity at the Met was not traditionally shown as the zenith of artistic production, the 'forest of the nude' (Figure 35.3) looms behind contemporary beliefs in cultural differentiation, relativity, and multiculturalism. Museums are places where ideas form collages of the most startling patterns.

35.7 Antiquity at the National Archaeological Museum at Athens

The figure who sealed exhibition practice with regard to classical antiquity in 20th c. Greece is without question Christos Karouzos. For a period of more than twenty-five years (1942–64), Karouzos held the position of Director at the National Archaeological Museum. Together with his wife Semni, an archaeologist and curator at the museum, who served their common goal after her husband's death, Karouzos renewed the paradigm of archaeological displays. The ambition was to turn away from the treasure-like presentations that had packed the rooms of the museum during the first decades of the century (Gazi 2008; Mouliou 2008). Karouzos's sturdy intellectual baggage, his strong affiliation with German culture and methodology, and his faith in the humanist project shifted the emphasis from overtly national claims and romantic overtones to archaeology as a way of understanding the nexus of ideas that enlivened artistic production in different periods (cf. Plantzos 2008b). The means to reach higher levels of consciousness was, in his view, the meticulous study of classical form in its more refined version (namely, the period between 450 and 420/10 BC), where form attains architectural solidity, balance between movement and stillness, and, more importantly, depth. Depth was a crucial concept in Karouzos's understanding of ancient Greek art. It was his way of talking about the essence of the world: art as if shaped by gods. This kind of art results in the elevation of the human spirit and makes classical production vivid and euphoric for the viewer.

In the redisplay of the collections that took place in the 1950s, which had been anticipated by a temporary exhibition organized by the couple in the closing years of the previous decade, theory was put into view. The focus was upon the aesthetic education of the public in a manner of subtle didacticism revolving around the objects themselves. Owing to space limitations, marble statues, bronzes, and vases were combined together, close to each other but not too close, so as to reveal both affiliations and the power of each individual item. The particularities of the various workshops and of artists in different

geographical areas, and the overall arrangement in chronological and typological series, were of great interest to the curators. From the perspective of pedagogy, Karouzos believed that the museum should be able to recount the story of art history, as had been the tradition since the late 18th c., when the Belvedere Palace in Vienna opened to the public. An archaeological museum, especially a national archaeological museum, should first and foremost forge links among the objects, links so vivid and self-evident that additional information would be superfluous. For Karouzos, archaeology was understood as art history rather than history. The museum should look at historical and social processes, yet only indirectly should it disclose elements related to contexts. The museum need *not* discuss and visualize the processes themselves. That was the role of the objects. So, the collections were more or less left to 'speak themselves' (Barthes 1967). Detailed knowledge of history, philosophy, and literature was, in Karouzos's view, a far better background for the display than pedagogical and learning theories could possibly be. The role of the museum was to make the objects talk just on the basis of their powerful truths. Be this as it may, the visual connections made by the archaeologist who wished to unveil 'the superior artistic beauty springing from marble, bronze and clay' were not transparent to the layman (Karouzos 1981: 142, trans. author).

Finally, if we wonder how much of Winckelmann's writing is present in Karouzos's thinking, there is no easy answer. On the one hand, certain aspects, such as the belief in the essence of art as something evolving in humankind itself, the aim of the artist towards clarity and simplicity, the particularity of the self-reflexive Pheidian style bespeaking the awakening of individual consciousness, the awe and empathy on the part of the viewer during the act of contemplation, the connection of poetry and visual arts, and the painstaking study of form to disclose the *psyche* (the spiritual content) of the object, all point to the ethos of Winckelmann's passion with respect to the redemptive power of the antique. On the other hand, Karouzos himself was an anti-classicist. He believed classicism, first seen in Hadrian's time in the 2nd c. BC and then again in 19th c. Europe, diminishes the luminous power of ancient art and transforms it into a ghost, a gloomy representation of nostalgia, which has nothing to do with the warmth of the original context. Classicism constitutes a historical category emerging within the distinct historical and social horizon of the 19th c. and should not be taken for an eternal given. It is the beauty of the statues themselves that never ceases to amaze us.

In theory, then, Karouzos retained many of Winckelmann's observations regarding the virtues of the Antique, namely the articulation between anatomy and inner spiritual force, light and depth, subject and freedom, archaeology and art. Yet, as a true modernist and a person who had seen the originals, Karouzos had faith in the idea that art history evolved linearly (not just in schemes of rise

and decline) and expressed itself in taxonomic series that the museum should represent, without dismissing the ideal of pure, inner beauty. This was also his point in the National Archaeological Museum – that is, to keep additional features to a minimum and to emphasize the purity of ancient art, be it Geometric, Archaic, Classical, even prehistoric, against a neutral exhibition space.

35.8 Conclusion

The rise of idealism and the distinct interpretation which Winckelmann offered with regard to classical art has never ceased to concern museums since the Louvre turned itself into the popular shrine that we are familiar with today. Idealist simplicity, whiteness, and spiritual elevation marked the museum-icons of modernity and ascribed to Greek art a touch of veneration close to the nature of a secular religion. And while for its Classical sculpture the Louvre remained faithful to the *beau-ideal* tradition until the third decade of the 20th c., the British Museum went the other way and abolished the quasi educational principles that it had adopted in the 19th c., at least as far as the Elgin Marbles were concerned. The Metropolitan Museum struck the balance more effectively between the beauty of Roman copies and conscious educational policy in the 20th c., while the National Archaeological Museum reinterpreted Winckelmann as the aura that enlivened the original universal heritage.

Simplicity is, then, a notion that extends from naked bodies open to contemplation to naked environments, unobtrusive colors, and the new austerity of the 20th c. Even at the opening of the 21st c., the austerity of the new Acropolis Museum is deemed the right environment for the ritual of displaying the local Parthenon marbles. This is what makes the gap between original and reconstruction so great. Reconstructions, particularly virtual reconstructions, which seem closer to fiction even though they raise claim to utmost authenticity, have not subdued simplicity. On the contrary, they are allowed to show color, restored parts, alleged environments, and hyper-realistic lighting. Interactive and virtual-reality platforms, where ancient cities come back to life and the body feels kinesthetically involved, place the experience of the visitor at the core of current museological requirements. While Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology seems to be reinstated, positivism hides behind the frenzy of the accurate reconstruction and the idea of the past 'as it was'. Is it possible that we are going through a phase like that in the mid 19th c., in which the ideal is treated as something concrete, open not only to contemplation but to scientific accuracy and didacticism? In the 19th c., the attempt to present the Elgin Marbles at eye-level in the British Museum brought changes to the way artists and the public had fathomed classical art until then. Today, digital heritage promises to create truthful

electronic representations of ancient architecture. The essence of art becomes the fidelity of the simulation. And yet, this is not completely true. The story of the reception of classical art tells us that didacticism and the *beau-ideal* tradition have never really coexisted in museum displays. We would hardly find classical statues flanked by introductory panels and lengthy captions. Even though the *beau-ideal* (and its aesthetics of simplicity) is nowadays just one of the display modes encountered in the museums discussed above, in the case of universal masterpieces, the notion of the original whitens the display and leaves no space for color, mock-ups, scale models, and fancy simulations, at least not in the same room.

If we understand aesthetics from the point of view of the history of ideas and social theory, we realize that rifts do not happen abruptly and that continuities live on into the next era. Maybe even longer than that. The humanist–idealist discourse is still being flagged, like a national or universal emblem (ICOM News Magazine 2004). What might be noted is that we enter a new phase of the ideal by having to redefine the national versus the universal. While the ideal is retreating to its 18th c. context, humanity, by distancing itself from the short interval of the national museums of classical art, should begin to ponder seriously the terms according to which Neo-Humanism is to be interpreted and staged.

FURTHER READING

On the emergence of museums in modernity and the social and ideological implications involved, see Bennet (1995). For further research into the issue of museums as Foucauldian 'spaces of knowledge', see Hooper-Greenhill (1992). For the much-debated dissonance between emotional and more intellectual approaches in museums, including the issue of virtual reconstructions, make-believe spectacle, and living history, see the informed critique of Hein (2000). On the same topic, albeit from a more historical viewpoint, see Samuel (1994). For an investigation into contemporary Greek cultural politics, see the introduction and papers in Damaskos and Plantzos (2008). Finally, the joint work of Bourdieu and Darbel (1990), first published in French in 1966, is a seminal research into the sociopolitics of art museums, discussing issues of taste and cultural exclusion. On the diverse contemporary readings of Winckelmann's work, see particularly *Winckelmann: La Naissance de l' Histoire de l' Art à l' Époque des Lumières* (Pommier 1991). On Winckelmann's mode of detailed description in *History of the Art of Antiquity* and the semiological status of word and image in his writings, see Décultot (2006). The origin of the ideal in Vasari's thought and its impact on Winckelmann's rationale is dealt with in Belting (1989); the book points to the end of art history as a 'grand narrative'.