



Introduction

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SPECIAL ISSUE
EDITORIAL

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FACULTY OF ARTS
Charles University

ABSTRACT

Over the past decades, much attention has been paid to Immanuel Kant's aesthetic theory and theory of fine art. Yet not very much has been written on Kant's reflections on the actual artworks, artists, and art forms he engaged with, or on how these might inform his theory of art. This special issue seeks to address this fundamental gap. It aims to explore Kant's theory of art in light of his reflections on the actual art he was aware of.

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KEYWORDS:

Kant; Kantian aesthetics;
aesthetic theory; fine arts

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Lemos, João. 'Introduction.'
*Estetika: The European
Journal of Aesthetics*
LXII/XVIII, no. 2 (2025):
pp. 93–98. DOI: [https://doi.
org/10.33134/eeja.695](https://doi.org/10.33134/eeja.695)

In 2024, the philosophical community celebrated the tricentenary of Immanuel Kant's birth. Numerous prominent events took place around the world. I myself contributed by organizing the international conference Kant, Art, and Beautiful Art, with Robert R. Clewis as the keynote speaker. At the same time, *Estetika: The European Journal of Aesthetics* and I were already preparing a special issue of the journal, 'Kant and Art'. The issue is dedicated to Kant's often-overlooked reflections on the actual artworks, artists, and art forms he engaged with, aiming to assess their significance within his theory of art as presented in the *Critique of the Power of Judgement*.

The issue features contributions from two invited authors – Clewis and Aviv Reiter – as well as from Moran Godess-Riccitelli, Kadir Kılıç, and Iulia Mitu, selected through an open call for papers. The issue also features a book review by Ekin Erkan.

The issue opens with an article on a largely overlooked topic in the literature on Kant's aesthetics: the transcendental philosopher's noteworthy interest in, and particularly puzzling comments on, mime, pantomime, and commedia dell'arte. In 'Illustrating Kant's Aesthetic Theory: Mime, Pantomime, Commedia dell'arte', Clewis examines Kant's remarks on these art forms across his writings, from minor publications to the third *Critique*'s two references to mime.

Clewis argues that Kant's remarks about these art forms are couched in terms of his evolving account of aesthetic pleasure, which develops from the principle of sensible comprehension to Kant's mature conception of the free play of the imagination and the understanding. While Kant's remarks on Arlecchino are more closely tied to the physiological and mechanistic account of humour reflecting Kant's anthropological writings, his critical references to mime and gesture are presented as an intuitively given play of shapes and thus more in line with the philosopher's mature aesthetic theory. Clewis suggests that, by considering Kant's reflections on mime, pantomime, and commedia in the context of his evolving theory, readers can make sense of these otherwise seemingly marginal notes in the Kantian corpus. Moreover, Kant's reflections on these art forms shed light on key aspects of his mature aesthetic theory, such as disinterestedness, the free play of the faculties, and the expression of aesthetic ideas. In this context, it becomes particularly intriguing to consider how a play of shapes could evoke or elicit such ideas, especially given that Kant does not directly explain how this is possible. Clewis's conjectures on how mime, pantomime, and commedia might achieve this are not only engaging; they ultimately prompt a reconsideration of the place of these art forms within Kant's broader hierarchy of the fine arts.

The second invited article of this special issue examines why Kant does not express his conception of fine art through the use of particular works as examples of beauty. In 'From Zeuxis' *Helen of Troy* to Molière's *Le Misanthrope*: Kant and Artistic Exemplars', Reiter claims that this is due to Kant's philosophical commitment to aesthetic cognitivism.

Reiter draws on Charles Batteux's description of the creative processes resulting in Zeuxis' *Helen of Troy* and Molière's *Le Misanthrope* to critically trace a crucial development in theory of art from Batteux to Kant, suggesting that Batteux, too, was more of a cognitivist than is often recognized. She ultimately argues for a direct connection between Kant's cognitivist understanding of artistic beauty and his refusal to use masterpieces in his theorization of fine art.

According to Reiter, Batteux's descriptions provide the key to understanding the modern shift of ideas from formalism to cognitivism. While Batteux's account of the

creating process resulting in *Le Misanthrope* clearly positions him as an early proponent of aesthetic cognitivism, his description of the creation of *Helen of Troy* already reflects a shift from the formalist method for attaining beauty towards his new cognitivist view, one in which art is concerned with the embodiment of the discursive content of human thought. More significantly, neither of these stories, as told by Batteux, offers a practical abstract formula or guiding precept for artistic activity.

Reiter contends that Kant amplifies Batteux's demand for the cognitive value of art and emphasizes the impossibility of a method guiding artistic practice. However, according to Reiter, a crucial difference between the two thinkers is that, whereas Batteux seems to treat conceptual perfection as already given, though perhaps not yet portrayed artistically, Kant sees the product of the creative process as a new way of thinking envisioned by the artist, one that forges a new aesthetic language, offers an original perspective on an idea, and aesthetically enriches that idea in an unprecedented way. If the genius's work is indeed original, then no method can be prescribed either for creating or judging its artistic beauty – in short, there is no method for fine art. This explains why Kant, unlike Batteux, does not base his description of fine art on any particular masterpiece, not even *Le Misanthrope*, despite the fact that Molière's work and characters made a notable impression on the philosopher.

According to Reiter, there is a direct link between Kant's aesthetic cognitivism and his exclusion of exemplars from his theory of art. If the cognitive value of a beautiful artwork is that it aesthetically captures a rich pattern of thought in a way that has not yet emerged, then treating any past work as a fixed standard for artistic beauty, regardless of its greatness, compromises the freedom essential to the creation of artistic beauty and contradicts the reflective aspect in our appreciation of fine art. For Kant, such a position would be unacceptable.

The next article focuses specifically on the idea of an aesthetic methodology for fine art. In 'A Kantian Sense of Aesthetic Methodology: "Manner" Instead of "Method"', Godess-Riccitelli examines Kant's foundational distinction between method and aesthetic manner with the aim of exploring a potential avenue for applying aesthetic methodology – namely, one that addresses the questions of what serves as the standard for correct aesthetic judgement in the absence of specific rules and how one can teach others to appreciate beauty without a systematic methodology.

Godess-Riccitelli's first claim is that analysing the creative process of the genius artist – in light of Kant's proposal of a *modus aestheticus* for fine art – offers insight into the nature of aesthetic judgement. Specifically, she argues that there is a structural parallel between the two: just as the genius is both original and exemplary, the aesthetic judgement is both free and lawful. In other words, both the genius and the aesthetic judge operate reflectively and are guided by the same subjective lawfulness. According to Godess-Riccitelli, this ultimately means that the distinction between method and manner is central not only to understanding the nature of artistic production but also to grasping a broader range of aesthetic processes, including acts of aesthetic judgement.

Godess-Riccitelli also claims that an analogy can be drawn between aesthetic judgement and the process of teaching beautiful art. According to her, a properly formed aesthetic judgement serves as a guide for how others might form their own responses to beautiful objects – namely, by drawing upon the same subjective conditions that made the original response possible. Rather than being a mere report of subjective pleasure, an aesthetic judgement thus enacts a form of engagement that

aspires to universality by offering a paradigm that others can observe and emulate. Within this framework, Godess-Riccitelli emphasizes that what can be taught and learned is not the content of the judgement but the manner in which the judgement is formed as a model – by considering how every individual would potentially respond to the object. In other words, with a commitment to disinterestedness, communicability, and the *sensus communis*, the aesthetic methodology is activated not as a system of rules, which it is not, but as a reflective activity structured by free lawfulness.

In conclusion, Godess-Riccitelli argues for a direct link between Kant's concept of humanity and the aesthetic manner as a way of teaching. According to the author, one way we effectively practise our humanity is through concrete aesthetic judgements of beauty. Therefore, she claims, not only does aesthetic methodology maintain our intersubjective connections as human beings; it also facilitates their enhancement.

The issue continues with an article on a key aspect of Kant's theory of genius that runs throughout the Kantian corpus – namely, whether genius is continuous or discontinuous with imitation. In 'Genius and Imitation: Kant's Examples and Impasses', Kılıç examines Kant's diverging responses to this question, with particular focus on his examples of geniuses (primarily John Milton but also William Shakespeare and Michelangelo) and non-geniuses (such as Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock).

In the first part of the article, Kılıç analyses passages in which genius and imitation are not only described as discontinuous, but in which imitation is actually portrayed as harmful to genius. In the second part, he turns to passages in which Kant suggests a continuity between the two, even regarding imitation as necessary for a genius to create a beautiful artwork and surpass their predecessors.

Arguing against scholarly attempts to reconcile Kant's internally diverging views, Kılıç contends that Kant's positions on genius and imitation remain in an irresolvable contradiction that, he argues, appears on multiple levels, from the descriptive and normative levels of artistic production to the level of art history.

Kılıç also reflects on how Kant's impasse regarding the relationship between genius and imitation both shapes and destabilizes fundamental concepts and distinctions in his philosophy of art, particularly the distinction between genius and non-genius. More specifically, he argues that the impasse underlies the circularity of Kant's reasoning in deeming Milton (but not Klopstock) a genius, rendering the underlying criterion – namely, functional deformity – inoperative.

One possible resolution of Kant's contradiction might be to elaborate on the notion of free imitation and suggest that genius operates discontinuously with mechanical imitation (genius does/should not imitate mechanically) but continuously with free imitation (genius does/should imitate freely). Yet, Kılıç notes, Kant never fully articulates this line of thought in a way that would allow to resolve the contradiction. Instead, he maintains both a hierarchical distinction between free originality and mechanical imitation and the necessity of imitation for the production of beautiful artworks. According to Kılıç, this precludes resolving the contradiction through the concept of free imitation.

Consequently, Kılıç concludes that, without a radical transformation of Kant's framework, including the underlying presuppositions of his concepts of genius and imitation, there can be no resolution to Kant's impasse on the relationship between genius and imitation, or to his circular reasoning in distinguishing geniuses from non-geniuses.

The final article of this special issue focuses on poetry, the art form that Kant appears to value the most. In 'Between Perfection and Freedom: Kant and the Aesthetic Truth of Poetry', Mitu addresses the question of how Kant can allow poetry to express a certain form of truth without imposing external constraints on the freedom of poetic imagination. Drawing mainly, though not exclusively, on Kant's lectures on logic, and making significant use of his remarks on prominent poets, Mitu argues that this is only possible by clearly distinguishing the activity of poetic imagination both from excessive emotion and from distinctness as a logical perfection.

Mitu begins by referring to Kant's comparisons between Virgil and Homer and Milton and Klopstock to argue that limiting emotional intensity is a prerequisite for the freedom and originality of poetic imagination. Without denying the essential role of emotion in the aesthetic experience of poetry, Mitu contends that Kant sees excessive emotional intensity as an obstacle to the spontaneity of productive imagination. Accordingly, she suggests that poetry should aim for forms of empathy that do not rely on arousing passive emotions in the reader. Rather, poets should challenge readers to recreate the original poetic images through their own imaginative power.

Mitu goes on to show how Kant seeks to demarcate poetic activity from distinctness as a logical perfection. She observes that he does so while maintaining a tension between logical and aesthetic perfection that is essential to poetic experience: in poetry, logical perfection serves as a basis for aesthetic perfection, yet the latter holds a certain priority over the former, and the two must remain in a constant struggle with each other.

At this point, Mitu proposes that the notion of aesthetic truth should be brought into discussion. She suggests that it is precisely through the interplay between aesthetic and logical perfection that poetry becomes capable of expressing its specific form of truth, one that stands in tension with logical truth, while not deceiving the reader in any way.

A key point in Mitu's approach to the freedom of poetic imagination is that the boundaries she identifies as separating poetic imagination from both excessive emotion and distinctness as a logical perfection are not based on external constraints. That is, they do not arise from viewing poetry as a means to a non-poetic end. On her reading of Kant, the boundaries regulate the seemingly unconstrained play of poetry from within the very process of creation itself, aiming at the expression of aesthetic truth and thus forming part of the essence of poetry as such.

In this light, Mitu proposes that, when considering the cognitive value of poetry, one should not adopt the lens of conceptual thought or focus on its conceptual meaning. Instead, one should have in mind that poetic meaning may consist in images – in Mitu's terms, spontaneous associations of different representations – thus acknowledging and experiencing the peculiarity and novelty of the poetic act, and fully appreciating poetry's specific contribution to thought.

Kant and Art – A Special Issue of *Estetika* closes with Erkan's review of Clewis's book *The Origins of Kant's Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

FUNDING INFORMATION

The year 2025 marks the launch of the project *KantArt: Kant's Theory of Art in Context*, which I am conducting at the University of Turin. This special issue of *Estetika* is the first

scientific output of this project. The project is funded by the Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo in the context of TRAPEZIO – paving the way to research excellence and talent attraction.

Lemos
Estetika
DOI: 10.33134/eeja.695

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COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:
Lemos, João. 'Introduction.'
*Estetika: The European
Journal of Aesthetics*
LXII/XVIII, no. 2 (2025):
pp. 93–98. DOI: [https://doi.
org/10.33134/eeja.695](https://doi.org/10.33134/eeja.695)

Published: 15 September
2025

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Journal of Aesthetics* is
a peer-reviewed open
access journal published by
Helsinki University Press in
cooperation with the Faculty
of Arts, Charles University in
Prague.