

Abstract

Heinrich Wölfflin (1864–1945) is considered one of the most influential art history scholars. His study entitled „Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe“ („Principles of Art History“), published in 1915, gained considerable response, both critical and favourable. In the study, Wölfflin attempted to explain transpersonal principles of periodically repeating artistic evolution. This evolutionary process, culminating in two phases, conditions entire artistic output (architecture, sculpture, painting, artistic craft), which thus develops within predetermined limits. Wölfflin defined each phase by concepts-pentad that gives a true picture of its character. First of the climaxes is the art oriented according to the analogy with the sense of touch; the second one is the artistic output defined by the analogy with the sense of sight. Wölfflin deduced the contradiction of the „linear style“ (fixed to objects) and the „painting style“ (wedded to purely optical qualities) from evolutionary degrees of human imaginantion, which develops precisely from haptic to visual projections. This progression – as emphasized by him – is always one-way and can not be reversal. Both these style-types are being permeated by various, historically conditioned culturally-historical contents that represent an outer component of the artwork (including a specific artistic manifestations of individual nations). Wölfflin thus in his style-historical approach linked the postulate of natural evolution with the physiological theory of cognition. Residues of metaphysical concepts of the so called „German idealism“ are penetrated here with the 18th century rooted empirism and sensualism.