



Committee for the Evaluation of Art History Study Programs in Israel

General Report

Evaluation Report

June 2013

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Chapter 1- Background

At its meeting on November 13th 2012, the Council for Higher Education (CHE) decided to evaluate study programs in the field of Art History during the academic year of 2013.

Following the decision of the CHE, the Director General of The Council for Higher Education, appointed a Committee consisting of:

- Prof. Herbert Kessler, Department of the History of Art, Johns Hopkins University, USA – Committee Chair
- Prof. Aileen Ajootian, Department of Arts, University of Mississippi, USA
- Prof. Anne Dunlop, Department of the History of Art, Yale University, USA
- Prof. Esther Levinger, Department of Art History , University of Haifa, Israel
- Prof. Steven A. Mansbach, Department of Art History and Archaeology, University of Maryland, USA
- Prof. Peter Parshall (retired), Curator, National Gallery of Art, USA
- Prof. Sandy Prita Meir, School of Art and Design, Center for African Studies, University of Illinois, USA¹

Ms. Alex Buslovich was the Coordinator of the Committee on behalf of the CHE.

Within the framework of its activity, the Committee was requested to:²

1. Examine the self-evaluation reports, submitted by the institutions that provide study programs in Art History, and to conduct on-site visits at those institutions.
2. Submit to the CHE an individual report on each of the evaluated academic units and study programs, including the Committee's findings and recommendations.
3. Submit to the CHE a general report regarding the examined field of study within the Israeli system of higher education including recommendations for standards in the evaluated field of study.

The entire process was conducted in accordance with the CHE's Guidelines for Self-Evaluation (of October 2012).

¹ Prof. Sandy Prita Meir joined the committee at a later stage, after the first round of visits in April 2013, thus did not take part in the evaluation of BGU and BIU.

² The Committee's letter of appointment is attached as **Appendix 1**.

Chapter 2-Committee Procedures

The Committee held its first meetings on April 19th , 2013 during which it discussed fundamental issues concerning higher education in Israel, the quality assessment activity, as well as Art History Study programs in Israel.

In April 2013, the Committee held its first cycle of evaluation, and visited Ben-Gurion University of the Negev and Bar Ilan University.

In June 2013 the Committee conducted its second evaluation cycle, and visited Tel Aviv University, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Haifa University. During the visits, the Committee met with various stakeholders at the institutions, including management, faculty, staff, and students, and toured the visited departments.

This report deals with the general state of Art History Programs in Israel.

Chapter 3: Evaluation of Art history Programs in Israel

This Report relates to the situation current at the time of the visit to the institutions, and does not take account of any subsequent changes. The Report records the conclusions reached by the Evaluation Committee based on the documentation provided by the institutions, information gained through interviews, discussion and observation as well as other information available to the Committee.

Art History is an intellectually healthy discipline in the universities the Committee reviewed. This is remarkable, given the fact that all five departments have had to manage the transition from a founding generation of scholars during the current period of financial constraint, the apparent contraction in the numbers of students pursuing humanistic work worldwide, and a dramatic shift in the discipline itself since the 1980s (the so-called “theoretical turn”). Of course, as the report details, some departments have confronted the challenges more effectively and creatively than others. One or two are leaders in the field and make significant contributions within their faculties and broader communities. Others are troubled and demand immediate attention and tending. The disparity among the departments notwithstanding, the Committee found students in all five programs to be energetic and generally satisfied with the various curricula that are, by and large, well thought-out. And although Israel’s small university base does not provide a large number of career opportunities within the academy, students are enthusiastically applying their art history training in museums and galleries, at colleges and high schools, in tourism, and even in art therapy.

That said, university administrators often do not understand the field itself, confusing art history, which is a humanistic study akin to History or Literature (but with visual products as its materials of investigation), with the practice of art (studio). One consequence of this failure of comprehension is the fact that all of the departments have been shifted from one faculty to another, or are being reviewed with that intention. In the case of the strongest departments, whether they are in a faculty of arts or in faculties of history or humanities makes little difference; the faculty members and students take advantage of all university resources and find ways to contribute to the larger intellectual enterprise. Smaller departments, however, are buffeted by the context in which they find themselves and become defensive and weakened further.

Given art history’s basic interdisciplinary nature, the Committee recommends that, wherever structural barriers inhibit interaction with art historical work not formally located in the art history departments (e.g. archaeology or classics, Islamic studies, studio arts, etc.), those barriers be removed. Even now, the field’s interdisciplinary foundation attracts students from many different departments of study; however, the Committee is dismayed that sufficient credit is not assigned to the departments for this “service” aspect of their work. It recommends that the universities review the ways in which they apportion funds, so that art history departments are credited for their investment in

teaching students in general and not only for the number of students registered in art history degree programs.

Until now, art history in Israel has adhered closely to the European and American traditions of its founding scholars, subdividing the material chronologically into the traditional periods of Western art: Ancient, medieval, Renaissance and Baroque, and modern and contemporary. Some departments have also acknowledged Israel's uniqueness by teaching and studying Jewish art, Israeli art, and—here and there--Islamic art; but these fields are mostly secondary in the mission. Moreover, even Jewish art is thought of primarily as an outgrowth of Western art history, while the art of Israel's own closest neighbors is considered, somehow, non-Western. The Committee recommends that the new generation take greater cognizance of Israel's pivotal place and develop programs that look to Asia and Africa, as well as to Europe, America, and Israel itself. At all institutions, both faculty members and students expressed a strong desire to expand the curriculum to include new research fields and approaches. To do so would also align their subject of study with the current interest in "global art history" and would tap into anthropological, economic, and other paradigms that have invigorated art historical methodology in western Europe and North America. The Committee advises that productive clusters of teaching and research be constructed in universities that have special missions and resources in related disciplines, e.g. Islamic art at the University of Haifa and Ben Gurion University, and African art at Tel Aviv University. If one or more of the departments position themselves in this way, Israel will be able to contribute something unique, characteristic, and truly innovative to the discipline more broadly.

At the moment, the five departments largely replicate each other in the focus on European art studied according to traditional periods. B.A. studies are divided into medieval, early-modern, and modern fields, with students typically concentrating in one field by the end of the degree. The curriculum typically begins with required and general survey courses organized by time period, followed by increasing chronological specialization in upper-level seminars and pro-seminars. The stress on periodization is also a feature of M.A. programs, and it creates a tension between the need for depth in each existing field and the desire to expand course offerings to embrace new areas, particularly in non-Western art. One consequence, especially during this period of budgetary restrictions, is a lack of room to expand the discipline in Israel, either in its geographic and temporal range or in its methodology. The teaching of art history in Israel is at a crossroads - one that faces all art historians in the medium and longer term. There are finite resources, and this has been the case for a decade; new appointments are rare, and even replacements have not been regularly made. In practice this has meant that the aim to incorporate new fields of study is constantly trumped by the needs of the existing curriculum to offer sufficiently broad historical coverage. One solution, as mentioned above, is to create specific research and teaching clusters at the different institutions; this is dependent, however, on the ability and the will to allow students to move among institutions, something that is currently very difficult, and, the Committee heard, often actively discouraged.

The problem is exacerbated because there is also a goal to offer a wider range of theoretical and methodological approaches. In practice, undergraduate students often 'do theory' as part of a methods course or exclusively in classes on contemporary art, rather than seeing a reflection on method as integral to all art-historical practice regardless of the field of study. Furthermore, several departments are also trying to offer B.A. students at least basic training in art studio practice. Understanding how art objects are made is a first step in any art-historical analysis, but the departments the Committee visited generally did not have the resources to offer this training in a meaningful way.

Because early and mid-career scholars remain closely tethered to the first generation of art historians (usually their teachers), they, understandably, perpetuate the history. As in most academic disciplines, especially the smaller ones in the arts, humanities, and social sciences, the need to teach in Hebrew limits the pool of candidates eligible for appointment. A result in some has been inbreeding that leads to an uncritical perpetuation of inherited research and pedagogical traditions. The Committee notes an inverse correlation between the quality of art history departments and inbreeding; and it recommends that open, competitive faculty searches be instituted for all tenure-track positions and also those for more than one year so that the best candidates are always selected, with attention paid especially to those who have studied or worked abroad for some time. To help alleviate over the long term what the Committee sees as debilitating isolation, funds should be provided to Israeli graduate students who seek to study abroad and return to teach in Israel. As a further means for dealing with this problem, financial support should be granted for recruiting non-Hebrew speaking scholars and for providing them with the necessary time and technical support to acquire the language.

By and large, the junior faculty is overworked. Ways need to be found to lessen the burdens so that promising young scholars can attend properly to their research. Even if additional funds are not available, relief could be provided through release from some administrative and teaching duties during the first three years. The Committee was also dismayed by the great amount of teaching carried by adjunct faculty members.

Students at all levels were generally pleased with the courses they had taken, even as they asked for a greater range of materials and fields. They are being well trained in the traditional fields and approaches of Western art, and the Committee was impressed by their quality and commitment. This is a notable accomplishment given the fact that many of the divisions and departments operate with such limited pedagogical resources. Furthermore, the syllabi examined by the Committee were, overall, well-organized around key concepts, and drew on a representative range of readings.

The need to share limited resources is already built into the interlibrary loan program, which facilitates the exchange of research materials (though even the current modest ILL charge is a burden for students). The Committee therefore believes that more planning is desirable, either through the CHE or, preferably,

by greater recognition within the individual units that they cannot cover everything and must forego some material, subdisciplines, or training programs. One example of (actual and potential) redundancy is curatorship. Responding to student demand, every department has or would like to offer the M.A. degree in curatorship. A far better idea, the Committee believes, is for one university to invest sufficient resources in the subject and develop programs with real muscle—involving professional museums, internships, conservation, and other aspects relevant to the profession. Another example is Jewish and/or Israeli art. These subjects are usually listed among fields for expansion; and that seems, at first, to make sense. However, Bar Ilan University is a logical venue for the teaching of Jewish art; and, because art of the State of Israel is a subset of modern and contemporary art, it can (and should) be taught by scholars of those periods in other departments. Haifa already has a successful program in Art Therapy that does not merit duplication; Hebrew University has strong connections to Archaeology, etc. The Committee recommends that potential graduate students should be encouraged to go the strongest department in their chosen field of study and research and that to reduce redundancy, any constraints or pressures that inhibit students from moving around the universities should be lifted.

Except in the Israel Museum and Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem and the Hecht Museum in Haifa, Israel has relatively little accessible historical art, which puts Israeli students at a great disadvantage compared to their counterparts in Europe and even America. The Committee was therefore dismayed to learn that students are seldom taken to these venues or to the numerous archaeological sites and remains of medieval buildings in the country. An investment in subsidies for fieldtrips would have abundant returns in the quality of education, as would increased funding for travel abroad. In contrast, Israel is notably rich in modern art. The Committee was impressed by the abundance of public sculpture and by galleries at several universities and the ways in which the departments take advantage of these sources of visual experience. Insufficient institutional support generally is especially serious for art historians in Israel, especially graduate students, because of the fundamental need for students to examine the original materials of their subject first hand; the Committee urges that additional funds be made available to travel to historical sites and collections.

Teaching art history requires specially fitted classrooms; not only projectors with sufficient resolution to convey the quality of works of art, but also screens of adequate size installed at a proper distance from the audience, room darkening, and controllable lighting that allows the lecturer to read a text and students to take notes in the darkened classrooms. The Committee was shocked by the inadequacy of the teaching environments at most universities. The same is true of so-called studios used to introduce art history students to the rudiments of art making.

Art history teaching and research also depend on the availability of good-quality digital reproductions of works of art. One department maintains a “slide” collection staffed by a full-time curator and half-time assistant; others expect the faculty and students to make their own slides, download pictures from the web, or scan digital images from printed materials. This is a significant burden on new teachers and researchers and, in practice, means that the teaching and research resources at some institutions are much better than at others. Given the fact that there are currently special funds available from the CHE for shared infrastructure initiatives, the Committee recommends that the CHE fund a central database of images of works of art, housed at one university and professionally staffed, that could be added to, shared and accessed online by all members of the faculty and students of these five departments as well as others in the system. The public art museums should be included in this endeavor and encouraged to digitize their own collections. The database could be compiled from the materials already available at several departments and then augmented by donations over the course of years. It should also include the materials in the Center for Jewish Art so that scholars and students throughout Israel could benefit from this exceptional research tool at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

The Committee also notes that the distinction between refereed and un-refereed publications is quite fluid in the field and urges the CHE to reconsider its criteria for funding research because of the discipline’s custom of publishing books and conference papers, not only articles in “refereed journals.” It also recommends that the CHE find more subtle ways than the mechanical criteria it deploys to evaluate scholarship and reward faculty members who are producing serious research.

Finally, the Committee points out that, despite the often-repeated claim that the Humanities are in decline and that economic pressures are driving young people into other areas of study, students in Israel are uniformly enthusiastic about their training in art history, be it as a career path or an avocation. It recommends that, rather than folding it into other fields (as the Committee often was told it might), enhancing the presence of art history would serve the populations of the five universities and pay untold dividends.

In short, art history is faring well in Israel; but the weak departments demand attention, and the field would benefit from greater integration of departments within the country and much greater coordination effort. Modest further investment would raise the training, practice, and service of the discipline to a still higher level.

Chapter4: Summary of Recommendations and Timetable

Short term [~ within 1 year]:

the Committee recommends that, wherever structural barriers inhibit interaction with art historical work not formally located in the art history departments (e.g. archaeology or classics, Islamic studies, studio arts, etc.), those barriers be removed

The new generation needs to take greater cognizance of Israel's pivotal place and develop programs that look to Asia and Africa, as well as to Europe, America, and Israel itself.

The committee recommends that open, competitive faculty searches be instituted for all tenure-track positions and also those for more than one year so that the best candidates are always selected, with attention paid especially to those who have studied or worked abroad for some time

The Committee advises that productive clusters of teaching and research be constructed in universities that have special missions and resources in related disciplines, e.g. Islamic art at the University of Haifa and Ben Gurion University, and African art at Tel Aviv University

Ways need to be found to lessen the burdens so that promising young scholars can attend properly to their research. Even if additional funds are not available, relief could be provided through release from some administrative and teaching duties during the first three years

The committee urges that additional funds be made available to travel to historical sites and collections.

Intermediate term [~ within 2-3 years]:

Universities need to review the ways in which they apportion funds, so that art history departments are credited for their investment in teaching students in general and not only for the number of students registered in art history degree programs.

Funds should be provided to Israeli graduate students who seek to study abroad and return to teach in Israel

More planning is desirable, either through the CHE or, preferably, by greater recognition within the individual units that they cannot cover everything and must forego some material, subdisciplines, or training programs. One example of (actual and potential) redundancy is curatorship. Responding to student demand, every department has or would like to offer the M.A. degree in curatorship

Potential graduate students should be encouraged to go the strongest department in their chosen field of study and research and that to reduce redundancy, any constraints or pressures that inhibit students from moving around the universities should be lifted.

The Committee recommends that the CHE fund a central database of images of works of art, housed at one university and professionally staffed, that could be added to, shared and accessed online by all members of the faculty and students of these five departments as well as others in the system. The public art museums should be included in this endeavor and encourages to digitize their own collections. The database could be compiled from the materials already available at several departments and then augmented by donations over the course of years. It should also include the materials in the Center for Jewish Art so that scholars and students throughout Israel could benefit from this exceptional research tool at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

The committee recommends that the CHE find more subtle ways than the mechanical criteria it deploys to evaluate scholarship and reward faculty members who are producing serious research.

The committee strongly recommends that, rather than folding it into other fields (as the Committee often was told it might), enhancing the presence of art history would serve the populations of the five universities and pay untold dividends.

Long term [until the next cycle of evaluation]:

Financial support should be granted for recruiting non-Hebrew speaking scholars and for providing them with the necessary time and technical support to acquire the language.

Signed by:



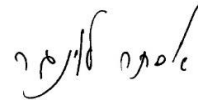
Prof. Herbert Kessler, Chair



Prof. Aileen Ajootian



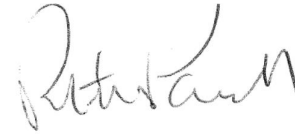
Prof. Anne Dunlop



Prof. Esther Levinger



Prof. Steven A. Mansbach



Prof. Peter Parshall



Appendix 1: Letter of Appointment



הוועדה להכנת התקציב | Planning & Budgeting Committee

09/04/13
Jerusalem

Prof. Herbert Kessler
Department of the History of Art
Johns Hopkins University
USA

Dear Professor Kessler,

The Israeli Council for Higher Education (CHE) strives to ensure the continuing excellence and quality of Israeli higher education through a systematic evaluation process. By engaging upon this mission, the CHE seeks to enhance and ensure the quality of academic studies, provide the public with information regarding the quality of study programs in institutions of higher education throughout Israel, as well as ensure the continued integration of the Israeli system of higher education in the international academic arena.

As part of this most important endeavor, we reach out to world-renowned scientists to help us meet the critical challenges confronting the Israeli higher education system, by extending our invitation to participate in an international evaluation committee. This process represents an opportunity to assess the current and future status of education. This systematic process of quality assessment also establishes a framework for the interactive consultative process taking place between scientists around the globe regarding common academic dilemmas.

I am honored to inform you that on February 12, 2013, the CHE approved your appointment as Chair of the Council for Higher Education's Committee for the Evaluation of Art History. The composition of the Committee will be as follows: Professor Herbert Kessler, Committee Chair, Professor Aileen Ajootain, Professor Anne Dunlop, Professor Esther Levinger, Professor Steven A. Mansbach, Professor Sandy Prita Meir and Professor Peter Parshall.

Ms. Alex Buslovich will coordinate the Committee's activities.

In your capacity as Chair of the Evaluation Committee, you will be requested to function in accordance with the enclosed appendix.

I deeply appreciate your willingness to join us in this crucial enterprise.

I wish you much success in your role as the Chair of this most important committee.

Sincerely,

Dr. Avital Stein
Director General,
The Council for Higher Education

Enclosures: Appendix to the Appointment Letter of Evaluation Committees

cc: Ms. Michal Neumann, The Quality Assessment Division
Ms. Alex Buslovich, Committee Coordinator

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