

Press release

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Do artists make knowledge? A new Max Planck Research Group investigates artists' knowledge in Pre-Modern Europe

October 1, 2011 saw the start of the international Max Planck Research Group, "Art and Knowledge in Pre-Modern Europe" at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science (MPIWG). The project aims to explore how early modern artists transformed and transmitted knowledge and is led by the Belgian historian of science, Prof. Dr. Sven Dupré, who heads a group of young historians of art and science.

The Max Planck Research Group studies the transmission and circulation of knowledge by early modern artists. Knowledge was not only transmitted through oral communication between master and apprentice, material objects of several types mediated the exchange of knowledge in the artist's workshop. The transmission of knowledge through books, drawings and objects brought together by artists as working collections was closely connected to the increasing intellectualization of the artist's profession. The research group investigates how artists read the books in their libraries and how painters collected and used antiquities, instruments and naturalia.

The question of the value of artist's knowledge is still relevant today. Current debates on the validity and significance of 'artistic research' and divided opinions at universities and art academies on the 'doctorate in the arts' show that the question is as pressing now as it was in the early modern period.

The Research Group links the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science with the Institute for Art History at the Freie Universität Berlin. The group is part of the cooperation in the history of knowledge between the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science and the three main universities in the German capital, the Freie Universität Berlin, the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, and the Technische Universität Berlin. Other collaboration partners include the Biblioteca Hertziana (Max Planck Institute for Art History) in Rome, the Centre Alexandre Koyré in Paris, the Museum Kunstpalast in Düsseldorf, and the Institute for Art History in Bern.

The latest about the new research group can be read in the Feature Story at www.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de.

For more information contact:

Prof. Dr. Sven Dupré, dupre@mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de, tel. 030-22667-280

Information on the Website: www.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de

Press contact: Dr. Hansjakob Ziemer, hziemer@mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de