

INTRODUCTION

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Renate Wagner-Rieger, c. 1975
Photo: Gudrun Vogler, Department of Art
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Renate Wagner-Rieger (1921 – 1980) – University Professor, Historicism Researcher, and Advocate for the Preservation of Vienna’s Townscape

On the occasion of the 100th birthday of the art and architecture historian Renate Wagner-Rieger, the University of Vienna in cooperation with the Austrian Academy of Sciences organized an international conference in November 2021.¹ Wagner-Rieger, who died in 1980, was the first female full professor at the Viennese Institute of Art History. On one hand, the conference showed the impact of her scholarly work in her time, and on the other hand her legacy and reception in current research. A second conference in early July 2022 focused on the genre of 19th-century sculpture, which as an art form closely related to architecture² and was also an essential research interest of Wagner-Rieger.

The 2021 conference was a further contribution of the Institute of Art History to its past. The focus of the institute’s self-reflection so far had contained several main representatives of the Viennese School, such as Rudolf Eitelberger, Alois Riegl, Julius Schlosser and Josef Strzygowski.

In the course of the conference, various perspectives on Wagner-Rieger’s oeuvre were presented, such as her engagement with Cistercian and mendicant architecture, early modern art, and nineteenth-century art. The possibilities and limitations of her methods and their exportability were also discussed. With contributions from Budapest and Zagreb, it was also possible to show the scope of the reception of her theories beyond Austria in Hungary and Croatia.

It therefore also seems consistent that Dragan Damjanović was able to convince the editors of *Peristil* to publish the majority of the contributions. We would like to thank him and Martina Petrinović and all the peer reviewers who made the effort to evaluate the contributions.

Renate Wagner-Rieger was born in Vienna in 1921 and, after an apprenticeship as an accountant and a job at the patent office, she decided to quit and study art history. In 1945, she earned her doctorate under Karl Maria Swoboda, and soon after she also completed the academic course at the Austrian Institute of Historical Research. Already during her studies, she was able to work at the Institute as a librarian and was employed as an assistant during the difficult years of World War II. The contribution by Friedrich Polleroß (Vienna) provides insight into her activities as a young scholar. In the 1950s, she was involved in the first attempt after World War II to research the founding fathers of

the Viennese School of Art History. In this context, the estate and library of Josef Strzygowski and Julius Schlosser were acquired. With the acquisition of Josef Thorak’s bust of Julius Schlosser for the scholars’ gallery of the arcade courtyard of the University of Vienna, another founding father was honoured with a sculptural monument. Interestingly enough, the sculptor’s National Socialist convictions played no role.

In 1971 Renate Wagner-Rieger was appointed the first female full professor of Art History at the University of Vienna and thus became also one of the first female full professors at the University in general.³ From 1978 until her untimely death in 1980, she prudently

directed the Institute. With her position, which was defined at that time as a chair for "Austrian Art History", she was committed to representing this region in its relation within Central Europe in teaching and research. In this context, she not only provided an overview of art in Austria from the Middle Ages to the early 20th Century. She also devoted herself to functional and typological problems of buildings such as monasteries, castles, central-plan constructions, and chancels, but also to questions of style such as Palladianism and her special field of interest, historicism. She always incorporated current research questions into her teaching, inputs which were followed up by her circle of students. From a gender history perspective, her strong role as a female scholar in a scholarly community still dominated by men is noteworthy. Wagner-Rieger maintained close contacts with colleagues in Austria's neighbouring countries. Through these personal contacts and her extensive publication activities, her writings were particularly well received in the countries succeeding the Habsburg monarchy. Her research ranged thematically from the Middle Ages to the early modern period, with a focus on 19th-century architecture, which until then had been negatively evaluated.

In this volume, Mario Schwarz and Wolfgang Schenkluhn discuss how her theses on medieval architecture are viewed today.

Mario Schwarz (Vienna, Palermo), a former PhD student of Wagner-Rieger probably knew her best and collaborated with her on exhibition projects. He pays tribute to her research work in the field of medieval architecture in the Austrian territories and particularly emphasizes her consideration of historical contexts which were always based on source studies, above all the commissioning of building projects. This contradicts the repeatedly expressed thesis that she was purely interested in questions of style. Schwarz derives her eye for historicist phenomena in the Middle Ages from her preoccupation with 19th-century architecture.

Wolfgang Schenkluhn (Halle a. d. Saale/Wittenberg), since his dissertation a specialist in medieval religious architecture, has dealt early on with Wagner-Rieger's extensive work on late Romanesque architecture in Italy too. From a greater spatial and temporal distance, he sees her theses more critically; the influence of the Cistercians on the mendicant orders in Italy is no longer a current research opinion, but Wagner-Rieger correctly identified the reception in Italy. Schenkluhn appreciates her "keen eye for the typology of architecture".

Renate Wagner-Rieger is internationally known primarily for her rehabilitation of historicism. With her lecture "Style and Tradition" at the 1964 Congress of the Comité International d'Histoire de l'Art (CIHA) in Bonn, she initiated a research topic that was to help awaken the appreciation of historicist buildings and thus ensure their preservation; it was to occupy her for the rest of her life. Influenced by the Viennese School of Art History, she rejected the idea of historicism as a "lousy stylistic splash". On the contrary, she even recognized successive stylistic phases, which she elaborated form-analytically. She coined terms such as "Romantic Historicism", "Strict Historicism" (the idea of stylistic purity), and "Late Historicism". The success of her appearance in Bonn was the initial spark for the large-scale project to research the Vienna Ringstraße, sponsored by the Thyssen Foundation. Following her proven working method, collecting and evaluating as many available sources as possible, and her organisational talent, Wagner-Rieger, with the help of a motivated team of young art historians, succeeded in preparing the basic data for the authors of the volumes. Thus was born the Ringstraße Archive, which today is housed as part of the collections of the University of Vienna in the rooms of the Institute for Art History.⁴ It contains extensive photographic documentation and thousands of hand- and typewritten index cards with information on buildings, architects, sculptors and painters, citing the sources like documents or newspaper articles. Collecting such archival material corresponded to the working method in the pre-digital age. The eleven-volume edition published by Renate Wagner-Rieger between 1969 and 1981, *Die Wiener Ringstraße. Bild einer Epoche*, remains a fundamental opus of art historical research on the architectural and monumental history of Vienna.⁵

One focus of the conference in Vienna was therefore the question of Wagner-Rieger's significance for the study of historicism. Three lectures were devoted to her conception of historicism as an "artistic phenomenon" from different angles. Dieter Dolgner (Halle a.d.Saale/Wittenberg), an author of numerous publications on 19th-century architecture, has kindly made his contribution to this anthology available for publication. He appreciates Wagner-Rieger's commitment to the recognition of 19th-century architecture as equal to older style periods. He is critical, however, of the limitation to a mere analysis of form; he misses the "examination of historical models of style as carriers of ideas that served both architects and developers in many ways as the basis of their social and political representational intentions during this period of

uncertainty and upheaval". Werner Telesko (Vienna) judges Wagner-Rieger most sharply.⁶ Telesko, who distances himself from the stylistic-historical method of the Viennese School of Art History, follows a media-historical approach. He explains her model of stylistic division into romantic, strict and late historicism from her formation in Vienna. He misses a methodical discussion of the positions of the art historians Hans G. Evers, Nicolas Pevsner and Ludwig Grote, which were developed in the 1960s.

Jinřich Vybřral (Prag/Praha) agrees with Telesko in criticizing the sharp periodization of historicist architecture.⁷ His article, therefore, focuses on the analysis of the conceptual framework in which Wagner-Rieger's methodological considerations, principles of classification, and lines of development are based. From this analysis, Vybřral also critically examines the theoretical adequacy of her theses. Nevertheless, he emphasizes the survival and esteem of her writings for art historical research in the Czech Republic today. Both participated in the conference, but published their articles in journal *Umění*.

In this context of Wagner-Rieger's reception in today's neighbouring countries, József Sisa (Budapest) describes the contribution her writings made to a new, positive evaluation of nineteenth-century architecture in Hungary. Especially, because in the postwar period the socialist view of art considered historicism as a style of capitalism and imperialism. At the same time as Wagner-Rieger, the architect, architectural historian and monument conservator László Gerő initiated a re-evaluation in the 1950s (he uses the term eclecticism instead of historicism). Gábor Winkler, who reviewed the Ringstraße edition, referred directly to the author by adopting her stylistic periodization, for which he was severely criticized by Gerő. Regarding this point, Sisa also has to agree with him, who eventually mentions the current questions in Hungarian research: the origin and interweaving of stylistic elements, the questions of patronage, Hungarian representation after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise, the establishment of autonomous teaching institutions in Hungary versus the training of Hungarian architects abroad, as well as sociological and material-semantic questions. Anna Zádor, the "grande dame" of Hungarian art historiography, had personal contact with Renate Wagner-Rieger and also wrote an obituary for her Viennese colleague. She concludes: "Her main merit as a university teacher lies in the untiring energy with which she helped her students, but also others who came to her for advice, among them researchers and students of various nations".⁸

Dragan Damjanović (Zagreb) explained that in Croatia Wagner-Rieger was received primarily through her writings. Research on historicism was predominantly driven by female art historians, as shown by the research of Olga Maruševski. The study of historicism was also groundbreaking for the research of specific Croatian art and architectural characteristics. Wagner-Rieger's typology of architecture (residential buildings, sacral architecture, public architecture) as well as her criteria for periodizing nineteenth-century art were also transferred to Croatian art historiography. Wagner-Rieger's writings also proved fruitful for Baroque research in Croatia as shown by Dubravka Botića (Zagreb). One of the most important theses of Wagner-Rieger, which was adopted in Croatian research, was the typology of Jesuit churches, adopted by Đurđica Cvitanović (1924 – 2009); another was the perception of stylistic pluralism as the most important characteristic of the Mariathesian period in texts by Anđela Horvat (1911 – 1985).

Anna Mader deals with the relevance of Wagner-Rieger's writings on Classicism. From 1959 her interest was drawn to the architecture of historicism, also focusing on its precursors. In doing so, she turned to an epoch that in surveys of Austrian architecture had hitherto been perceived only as a fading-out of Baroque formal language. Wagner-Rieger, on the other hand, characterized the phase from 1770 to 1830, "in which the phenomenon of 'classicism' rolled out in its full range of variations", as an "interweaving of a whole series of currents" in Viennese and Austrian architecture (Wagner-Rieger, 1970). For the first time, she worked out the stylistic pluralism of this epoch, deliberately directing her gaze beyond the borders, above all to Hungary, whose pioneering role in the development of a classical formal language in comparison to Vienna she always emphasized.

As a further aspect of the conferences, it was possible to shed light on Wagner-Rieger's public work regarding monument preservation and university policy, also in the sense of a "female agency". Her energetic commitment to the Viennese townscape may be explained by her appreciation for the architecture of the 19th century. She also supported initiatives for the preservation of endangered buildings on a European level, including the Berlin Cathedral. She represented Austria at international symposia on the preservation of monuments, such as the one in Prague in 1971.

Paul Mahringer (Vienna) uses expert reports by Wagner-Rieger to show her role in controversial building projects, especially those involving 19th-century

architecture, in which she supported the Federal Monuments Office against the interests of owners and architects.

Her strong commitment to the preservation of the Ringstraße buildings is explained by Wagner-Rieger's grand disciple Andreas Nierhaus (Vienna) due to her biographical experiences of the destructions during the Second World War. With her research on historicism, he explains her positive reassessment of a period that had previously been viewed predominantly negatively. With Wagner-Rieger, historicism was no longer perceived as an aberration on the road to modernism but as an epoch in its own right.

The second conference on July 1, 2022, was held under the title "Renate Wagner-Rieger (1921-1980) weitergedacht – Forschungsperspektiven zum Historismus im 21. Jahrhundert" (Renate Wagner-Rieger (1921-1980) thought on – Research Perspectives on Historicism in the 21st Century). Martin Krummholz (Olomouc) showed in his lecture "Modernism versus Academicism" that "modern" monument art developed independently from Vienna and in clear and deliberate distinction from the residential city and the German milieu. This aspect of the reception of modern monument art in Bohemia against the background of the emerging nationality conflicts was illustrated by the example of the monuments of Stanislav Sucharda. Elisabeth Dutz (Vienna) used Othmar Schimkowitz and his networks to trace the phenomenon of "stylistic pluralism" within the architectural sculpture of Vienna around 1900, drawing international comparisons with works in Prague, Budapest, and Riga.

Since the sculptor Caspar Zumbusch and the Viennese School of Sculpture, which he was instrumental in establishing, received little attention in the compendium on the Vienna Ringstrasse by Renate Wagner-Rieger, this research gap was amended in Caroline Mang's (Vienna) contribution. Using statistical methods, the paper for the first time outlines the origins of the Viennese School of Sculpture and deals with Caspar Zumbusch's students, who came from various parts of the monarchy to study in Vienna. After their return to the crown lands, they were commissioned with numerous monuments to Habsburg rulers. Often destroyed in times of crisis, especially after the collapse of the monarchy, many were rebuilt in the 20th and 21st centuries. Some monuments to Habsburg rulers have been completely redesigned recently, and now once again characterize the townscapes of former crown lands.

As representatives of Wagner-Rieger's students and grand disciples, we are grateful that, based on this

pioneering compendium, a fresh point of view on her research could be opened up.

The internationally relevant and ongoing perception of Wagner-Rieger's writings – created almost half a century ago, is beyond question. Nevertheless, the contributions of this volume also reveal that the current methodology necessarily evolved, just as stylistic and typological categories for the classification of architecture must be questioned and rewritten.

NOTES

- 1 Renate Wagner-Rieger. Leben, Werk und Wirkung (online, 11-12 Nov 21). In ArtHist.net, Nov 3, 2021. <https://arthist.net/archive/35242>
- 2 Friedrich Polleroß, *Workshop & Ausstellung zu Renate Wagner-Rieger* (Vienna: Institut für Kunstgeschichte, 2022). <https://kunstgeschichte.univie.ac.at/ueber-uns/mitarbeiterinnen/institutsnachrichten/wagner-rieger-workshop/>
- 3 On the biography, see Ingeborg Schemper-Sparholz, "Ein Tor der Erinnerung ist noch lange keine Triumphpforte. On the Biographical Traces of the Art Historian Renate Wagner-Rieger (1921-1980)," in *Science Tracing. Traces and Signs in Public Space*, edited by Marianne Klemun, Hubert D.Szemethy and Fritz Blakolmer (Vienna /Cologne 2021), 193-218.
- 4 Wiener Ringstraßen-Archiv (Vienna: Institut für Kunstgeschichte). https://bibliothek.univie.ac.at/sammlungen/wiener_ringstrassenarchiv.html
- 5 Renate Wagner-Rieger, ed. *Die Wiener Ringstraße – Bild einer Epoche. 1969 – 1982*, 11 vols. The volumes published are: Volume I: *Das Kunstwerk im Bild*. Introduction by Renate Wagner-Rieger (Graz: Böhlau, 1969); Volume II: Elisabeth Springer, *Geschichte und Kulturleben der Wiener Ringstraße* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1979); Volume III: Kurt Mollik, Hermann Reining and Rudolf Wurzer, *Planung und Verwirklichung der Wiener Ringstraßenzone* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1980); Volume IV: Alois Kieslinge, *Die Steine der Wiener Ringstraße: ihre technische und künstlerische Bedeutung* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1972); Volume V: Franz Baltzarek, Alfred Hoffmann and Hannes Stekl, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft der Wiener Stadterweiterung* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1975); Volume VI: Elisabeth Lichtenberger, *Wirtschaftsfunktion und Sozialstruktur der Wiener Ringstraße* (Graz: Böhlau, 1970); Volume VII: Klaus Eggert, *Der Wohnbau der Wiener Ringstraße im Historismus 1855-1896* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1976); Volume VIII: *The buildings and their architects*. Volume VIII/1: Hans Christoph Hoffmann, Walter Krause and Werner Kitlitschka, *Das Wiener Opernhaus* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1972); Volume VIII/2: Ulrike Planner-Steiner, Friedrich von Schmidt and Klaus Eggert, *Gottfried Semper und Carl von Hasenauer* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1978); Volume VIII/3: Norbert Wibiral and Renata Mikula, *Heinrich von Ferstel* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1974); Volume VIII/4: Renate Wagner-Rieger and Mara Reißberger, *Theophil von Hansen* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1980); Volume IX: *Plastic*. Volume IX/1: Gerhardt Kapner, *Ringstraßendenkmäler* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1973); Volume IX/2: Maria Pötzl-Malikova, *Künstlerische Entwicklung 1890-1918* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1976); Volume IX/3: Walter Krause, *Von der Spätromantik bis zur Wende um 1900* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1980); Volume XI: Manfred Wehdorn, *Die Bautechnik der Wiener Ringstraße* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1979).
- 6 Werner Telesko, "Renate Wagner-Rieger and 19th-century historicism – 'purely artistic' view," *Umění / Art LXX* (2022): 142-148.
- 7 Jiří Vybíral, "History of style in the view of Renate Wagner-Rieger," *Umění / Art LXX* (2022): 149-155.
- 8 Anna Zádor, "Professor Renate Wagner-Rieger 1921-1980," *Acta Historiae Artium* 27, 1-2 (1981): 374.