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PATINA

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It. *Patina*; Fr. *Patine*; Germ. *Patina*; Span. *Pátina*. Generally speaking, patina refers to a (thin) layer on the surface of objects (it. *patina* = 'thin layer', 'coating'), which is either the result of the natural aging of objects over time or which is artificially added to the objects by means of specific processing techniques. The changes primarily affect the structure and color of the surfaces and are caused by sedimentation and chemical, physical, and mechanical weathering as well as reaction processes. Particularly well-known and obvious is the greenish-brownish discoloration of metals containing copper (such as the statue of liberty). The patina serves as proof of the object's age, which has implications, on the one hand, for the process of natural aging and thus for the restoration practices and, on the other hand, for the artificially induced aging and therefore for the processes of patination. Patina is considered as witness of the past; it influences the discourse of authenticity and has the potential to become a key concept of the relation of objects and time in general and art and time in particular.

The term 'patina' is derived from Latin '*patina*' as well as Greek '*patánē*' (*πατάνη*), denoting 'bowl, pan'. Presumably, the term initially referred to the bowl in which the treatment agent for application on works of art was kept, then to the treatment agent itself, and, eventually, to the discoloration caused by the treatment agent (cf. Pfeifer 1993, also Starn 2002: 86). The German synonym of patina '*Edelrost*' literally translates into 'premium rust' and directly refers to the term's originating from observing the changes in color and material on metal objects – such as pans and other items.

THE CONTEMPORARY DEBATE

Passages in two works of art treatises of the 17th century are considered one of the first usages of the term and a kind of proof of the appreciation of patina in the context of artifacts – especially paintings: "La Patina del tempo fa do efeti, i colori vien sempre piu perfeti, e in mazor stima l'istessa fatura" (Boschini 1660, 8, quoted following Bäschlin 2020, 122, transl. "The patina of time has two effects: the colors are

always becoming more perfect and the handling receives greater appreciation.”). And “ed è quella universale scurità che il tempo fa apparire sopra le pitture, che anche talvolta le favorisce” (Baldinucci 1681, 119, quoted following Bäschlin 2020: 122, transl. “it is about the universal darkness which is formed on the paintings over time and which also at times favours them”). The benefiting aspect consisted particularly in a mitigation and harmonisation of strong color contrasts and a fine facing effect in the case of color transitions. The increased appreciation of paintings with patina partially resulted in the artificial production of it on new paintings by means of yellowing varnish oil to achieve an “attractive mellowing effect” (Chilvers 2015). Likewise, during the Renaissance bronze statues were often treated with acids. Today there are multiple methods of processing specified according to profession (sculptor, carver, painter, jeweler, metal artisan etc.), types of material (wood, paper, canvas, steel, copper, brass, silver etc.) and different ways of treatment (brush application, immersion, fuming, layering etc.) (see for example Runfola 2014).

The resulting manifold characteristics of patina play an important role, *materialiter* as well as *idealiter*, in art history discourses, restauration studies and conservation and restoration. For the term patina is not limited to paintings and metals but is broadened to include works of art and everyday items like glass, pottery, (gem)stones, ivory, fabrics and textiles, paper, furniture, musical instruments, vehicles and many more (Brachert 1985, also Chilvers 2015 and Koller 2013). Depending on the material, usage or value of objects, it is possible to distinguish real and unreal patina, accessible and destructive patina, patina contingent on age, time and fashion as well as aesthetic and unaesthetic patina. In this respect, it is important to not confuse patina with dirt or damage phenomena (Brachert 1985: 10). The patina is the signum of accepted signs of aging, i.e., changes in and of the material that, sped up by weathering effects, use or type of care, lead to tarnishing, yellowing, scratching, dulling, cracks or erosion of layers. In an interactive sense, the patina develops when the material is exchanged for environmental influences; additively, it is an additional characteristic feature of apparition on the object, and, in terms of subtraction, it is the product of harmonization of contrast peaks. Mere dirt and therefore material deposits, which do not belong to the objects and can be easily removed without damaging the original material, are to be marked-off from the patina (cf. Brachert 1985: 11). Since conservational measures always have an impact on the object and its appearance, the material authenticity of an object is subject to negotiation. On the side of reception, questions regarding originality, the aging value, and the necessity to treat the objects (e.g., reduction of patina, impregnating to prevent patina) arise. On the practical side, material knowledge as well as analytical procedures and processing options are refined (e.g., the possibility and necessity to reduce and also to apply patina).

The ideational surplus value of patina, which hints at the material private life of an object and, in doing so, provides it with “historical aura” (Soentgen 1998: 202, transl. AR), is the reason behind nostalgic glorifications – of the objects themselves as well as their proveniences. This points at forms of aesthetic capitalism (see Böhme 2019) which foreground the staging value of an object and, hence, turn patina as an aging value into an aesthetic and economic category. The material private life also gives rise to genuine aesthetic experiments, to artistic investigations of the vitalization of surfaces by means of specific applications of material and color. Observation of and dealing with the processes of decay and

disintegration allow for reflecting on the relation of painter and painting tools as an element of the oeuvre in its own respects, which sometimes resists artistic conceptions (cf. Herberts 1989). Contemporary forms and materials of art like photography, video art, installations as well as plastics, natural materials or even groceries are particularly challenging for the thematisation of aging and temporality of art. In contrast to the processes of classical works of art, the aging processes in the case of modern art are different, faster, and often uncontrollable. The questions whether patina has an unattractive and thus disturbing effect, whether it should be removed or deliberately remain, and whether shifts in the assessment of the value of patina occur, are not always settled on a technical level but are subject to perceptual habits of the art public. The mid-19th century 'cleaning controversy' may serve as a paradigmatic example: the patina of numerous paintings in London's National Gallery was removed which resulted in the faded colors' shining bright and which, in turn, was met with heavy criticism (Baro 2015: 124). The public was used to the soothing effects of the patina and approved of it as signs of the times (rather than the ravages of time).

In the context of time, poetic connotations of the auratically as well spatially-atmospherically effective patina become apparent: nature with its patinating effect "develops that fluid causally grown out of the original that only time can bring forth. Yet, inimitable for imitation and counterfeit, it compensates for the process of gradual decay by means of the poetry of picturesque evanescence" (Brachert 1985: 9, transl. AR). With the help of this characterization, a timeless, broad form of patina is addressed, which, as an aesthetic factor of perception, does not only refer to an object but to constellations of objects and entire spaces – such as the furnishing of one's private home (cf. Griffero 2019: 123) or entire architectures of (urban and rural) landscapes (cf. Rauh 2018). Patina here designates the mutual and characteristic referentiality of conditions and contents of perception, which evolves over time in the sense of natural and cultural rhythms. The patina, however, is the time-given surplus that can only be imitated by the staging of space and the arrangement of material. In such a way, it participates in the design and perception of space-related atmospheres (Griffero 2018). Aging of material, uses and wearing off shape the atmosphere of the things encountered, whose rearrangement and renovation are capable of sparking similar debates like the 'cleaning controversy' in the context of paintings. The poetical and atmosphere-related understanding of patina leads to the realization that humans do have patina. Time gone by, experiences with atmospheric situations build up a kind of background experience that leaves an imprint on the aesthetic perceiving and sensing. In the case of designers, this patina is characterized by professional experience and implicit creative knowledge; in the case of connoisseurs, it is characterized by the ability to atmospherically enjoy.

Apart from aesthetic perspectives, patina, in a philosophical approach, serves as a layer on texts of all kinds that conceals ideas and can be lifted, which is why the reader, by means of the epistemic and semiotic removal of 'scientific patina', becomes the 'restorer of knowledge' (cf. M. Ortega-Calvo *et al.* 2014). In material culture history, dust as patina becomes the sign of time which covers everything and sinks in everywhere. Dust itself occupies an interim state – between surface dirt and the patina growing out of the object. As a medium of traces, dust rests on surfaces and, simultaneously, points beyond the concrete surface and, also in the sense of auratic perception, beyond the concrete place and the concrete

time. In terms of everyday aesthetic sensing, dust plays a similar role as the real patina does for the art world: it is cause and catalyst of debates on authenticity and appreciation.

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