

Laudatio for Griselda Pollock upon awarding her the title of doctor honoris causa of the Estonian Academy of Arts

It is my great pleasure and honour to deliver this *laudatio* celebrating the career of Professor Griselda Pollock and on the occasion of her being awarded the degree of Doctor *honoris causa*.

Griselda Pollock is a Professor of Social and Critical Histories of Art at the School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies, at the University of Leeds in the United Kingdom. She is also the Director of the Centre for Cultural Analysis, Theory and History at that university. Professor Pollock is a world-renowned feminist art historian and cultural theorist, and is regarded as one of the most influential scholars of modern and contemporary art. She is known for her longstanding commitment to increasing acknowledgment of the creativity of women and artists from across all cultures.

I

Born in South Africa, Griselda Pollock grew up in both French and English-speaking Canada. She later moved to Britain and studied history at Oxford University and history of art at the Courtauld Institute of Art, London. She received her doctorate in 1980 for her study *Vincent van Gogh and Dutch Art: A reading of his notions of the modern*. Following teaching positions at Reading and Manchester Universities, she began work at the University of Leeds in 1977 as Lecturer in History of Art and Film and was appointed as Professor in Social and Critical Histories of Art in 1990. In 2017, she celebrated forty years of teaching at the University of Leeds. During her active teaching career, students from the United Kingdom, Europe and across the world were drawn to the department at Leeds to undertake graduate and postgraduate studies with her.

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Griselda Pollock is a prolific writer and has published more than thirty books as well as hundreds of articles in leading academic journals such as *Art History*, *Oxford Art History*, *Visual Culture*. In 2003, she was included in the Routledge book *Key Writers on Art: The Twentieth-Century*, by which time she had established herself as one of the most influential founding voices of feminist art history.

In bringing new methods and approaches to art history, she rose to prominence with research on late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century European modern art, writing on impressionist and postimpressionist artists like van Gogh, Mary Cassatt, Degas, Berthe Morisot and others. Together with other colleagues who were also

questioning the traditional methods of art history, she became part of the methodologically and theoretically innovative project that became known as New Art History. Her writings on modern and avant-garde art brought together analyses of gender, social history, poststructuralist ideas and psychoanalysis, forming new models for understanding a work of art within the context of networks of institutions and ideologies. According to her own words, this meant approaching art as a text of society—a text that has unique qualities of being aesthetically conceived.

Since the early days of her academic career, Professor Pollock has continued to act not only as a critical historian, but also as an active participant in the current art-life. Being involved in the Women's Liberation movement in England in the 1970s, she was closely allied with women artists of that time. This engagement with history, on the one hand, and with contemporary art, on the other, characterizes her academic work and research throughout her career. She has written for the catalogues of many internationally known contemporary artists; she has acted as an advisor to the Istanbul Biennale; one of her long-term research projects was dedicated to in-depth study of Kassel documenta; and she continues to be involved in discussions about current exhibitions in her home town of Leeds.

In the early 2000s, she founded the trans-disciplinary research Centre for Cultural Analysis, Theory and History at the University of Leeds, which aimed to bring together critical researchers and theorists from different fields of the humanities. Many of the Centre's research themes, events and publications, reflect the strong ethical foundations that have always underpinned Griselda Pollock's academic work. For instance, one important research theme of the Centre has been the study of European totalitarianism in the twentieth century and its effects on present societies and their cultural memory. This interest is reflected also in her most recent monographs, which focus on Jewish identity, trauma and the Holocaust.

III

Professor Pollock has visited the Estonian Academy of Art on two occasions. In 2013, she was an invited speaker in the series of public lectures organized by the Institute of Art History and Visual Culture. In 2017, she was invited back to the Academy to teach a master course at the Doctoral School. She is always remembered by her students as a brilliant speaker and a supportive, intellectually challenging teacher who pays attention to the specificity of local culture and is eager to learn about it.

Her earlier contacts with Estonian art historians and artists go back to late 1990s, when her art-historical and theoretical work started to influence the development of feminist art research and curatorial practices in Estonia. In 1999, a chapter of her

seminal book *Vision and Difference* was translated into Estonian language; and several interviews with her have been published throughout the years. In the early 2000s, Griselda Pollock was the PhD-supervisor of Katrin Kivimaa, who has since worked as a professor of art history and senior researcher at the Estonian Academy of Art.

Over the years, Professor Pollock's texts have been essential reading in the art history curriculum at the Academy. Her contribution towards understanding art and visual culture through new models and critical concepts is especially vital for students of art history as they learn how to understand art history and interpret contemporary art. But the influence of her ideas extends beyond the discipline of art history: importantly, her texts have also inspired both students and practitioners of contemporary art.

We warmly congratulate Griselda on behalf of all members of the Estonian Academy of Arts.

Prof Liina Siib, Dr Katrin Kivimaa

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