



# PANORAMA

Journal of the Association of Historians of American Art

ISSN: 2471-6839

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In the May 1941 issue of *Parnassus*, Sumner Crosby, President of CAA, announced to readers the permanent suspension of the journal. Writing that the “reasons . . . are numerous,” he nonetheless listed just three: financial pressures, content overlap with other periodicals, and an editorial program out of step with the association’s mission. Crosby insisted that the economic issue was “foremost,” noting CAA’s need to maintain its sound financial footing through “sharp curtailment” of its expenditures.<sup>1</sup> But as Stephen Pepper, the Art Department Head at the University of California, Berkeley, pointed out in the same issue, there was no reason for *Parnassus* alone to suffer for the organization’s fiscal shortfall. Pepper urged Crosby to divide “the financial deficiencies of which your announcement spoke between *Parnassus* and the [*Art*] *Bulletin* instead of making *Parnassus* bear the whole brunt of economy.”<sup>2</sup> While a fiscal defense of the need for programmatic cuts is among the most potent weapons in any administrator’s arsenal, it was evident that the board of directors aimed to do more than solve a purely fiscal problem.

The decision was surely driven by ideological differences, even if it was not presented to the membership in such explicit terms. Kroiz recounts that *Parnassus*, under the editorial guidance of Lester Longman, sought to bring together art historians and artists to better produce thoughtful, discerning citizens. In Kroiz’s words, Longman believed that “art historians would improve studio art by providing artists more influences from which to build their own work, while artists would improve art history by forcing art historians to recognize their scholarship as an effective force in the present.” Concerned that the majority of art historians dedicated themselves to the mere recovery of facts and techniques, he sought to infuse art history with a questioning, inquisitive mindset, which might serve as a bulwark to the sway of Nazism and Communism, then so threatening to the democracies of Europe.

There is little doubt that the directors of CAA, in their drive to solidify the academic legitimacy of the then-marginal discipline of art history, focused on its scholarly resemblance to more established fields. The “creativity” valued by Longman, and self-evidently at the root of artistic practice, had no place in the fact-based practice of art history. When Crosby distanced art history from studio art by linking it to the disciplines of “history, literature, and philosophy,” he performed complex cultural work.<sup>3</sup> Most obviously, the maneuver linked art history into respected lineages of academic study, but it also emphasized its rootedness in “scientific” modes of humanistic inquiry. Evidently lost on Crosby and the directors was Longman’s observation in *Parnassus* in January 1941 that art historians who fixate on the recovery of facts and techniques buried in art, allow artists “to lead the way, while they . . . only follow and interpret.”<sup>4</sup> In defending art history as it was then practiced, and rejecting a dynamic exchange between art historians and artists, Crosby tacitly accepted a system in which dead artists (with all their messy creativity) set the terms for historians of art. In tamping down efforts to advocate for the creative and critical art history that Longman valued, CAA complicated the efforts of art historians and artists to meet on equal terms, while inadvertently *elevating* artists above their colleagues, given that art would continue to provide the code that historians worked to decipher. If “Longman’s journal accomplished precisely the opposite of what he had hoped, driving [contemporary] artists and art historians further apart,” as Kroiz has argued, how ironic that CAA’s suspension of the journal—far from protecting art history from the taint of studio art—

inadvertently preserved the subservience of mid-century art historians to artists from the distant past.

## Notes

1. "C.A.A. Policy Altered: Parnassus Abolished," *Parnassus* 13, no. 5 (May 1941): 162.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Lester D. Longman, "The Responsibility to Educate," *Parnassus* 13, no. 1 (January 1941): 5.