**Panofsky, Erwin (1892-1968)**

Erwin Panofsky was a German-American art historian who from 1926 to 1933 worked alongside Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945) at the University of Hamburg and at the Bibliothek Warburg. From the outset, he was critical of approaches (such as Heinrich Wöfflin’s [1964-1945]) that divorced form from content. Panofsky first outlined his historically and socially based iconological approach to the analysis of an art work in *Hercules am Scheidewege und andere antike Bildstoffe in der neuen Kunst* (1930), and elaborated it in a more systematic form in *Studies in Iconology* (1939). Panofsky’s approach distinguished three levels of reading an image: the ‘pre-iconographic’, which is the level of ‘natural meanings. . . or artistic motifs’; the iconographic, which involves understanding the image through stories and conventions; and the iconological, which ‘conceives of these pure forms, motifs, images, stories and allegories as manifesting underlying principles, . . . [interpreting] these elements as what Ernst Cassirer has called “symbolical” values’ (Panofsky 1955, 40-41). Panofsky’s interests were wide-ranging and he published several important works on subjects other than art history: he wrote illuminatingly about Mozart and published reflections on the detective novel. His ‘Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures’ (1934) is a central text in early film theory.

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**List of Works**

Panofsky, E. (1924) *Idea: Ein Beitrag zur Begriffsgeschichte der älteren Kunsttheorie*, Leipzig and Berlin: B. G. Teubner. (Early formulation of Panofsky’s ideas on iconology.)

------ (1927) *Die Perspektive als symbolische Form*, Leipzig and Berlin: B. G. Teubner, trans. C. S. Wood as *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, New York: Zone Books, 1991. (A key work on linear perspective that highlights the influence of Panofsky’s colleague, Ernst Cassirer.)

------ (1939) *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance*, New York: Oxford University Press. (The most important systematic statement of Panofsky’s ideas on iconography and iconology.)

------ (1943) *Albrecht Dürer*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2 vols.

------ (1953) *Early Netherlandish Painting: Its Origins and Character*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2 vols.

------ (1955) *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, Garden City: Doubleday.

**References and further reading**

Holly, M. A. (1984) *Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press. (Expands the usual view of Panofsky’s contributions to art history by presenting the evolution of Panofsky’s thought from the beginning, including discussions of early writings by Panofsky that are often overlooked.)

Ferretti, S. (1989) *Cassirer, Panofsky, and Warburg: Symbol, Art, and History*, New Haven: Yale University Press. (Highlights the importance that Warburg’s interests played in the development of ideas of symbolic form and iconology.)