

Chapter 1 : Michael Baxandall (Author of *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*)

Michael David Kighley Baxandall, FBA (18 August - 12 August) was a British art historian and a professor emeritus of Art History at University of California, Berkeley.

Share via Email Michael Baxandall, who has died aged 74, was an art historian of extraordinary perceptive and analytical powers whose writings on painting and sculpture are as important as they are original. Baxandall was born in Cardiff, where his father was a keeper at the National museum. The family moved to Manchester in when his father became director of the City art gallery and Michael attended Manchester grammar school. His close attention to text was to be fundamental to his scholarly and intellectual approach. His own words were always chosen with precision; he cultivated a style that was elevated yet simple, bold in its very reticence, and at times teasing in its apparent clarity. It was only after leaving Cambridge that Baxandall decided to study art history, which he did largely in Italy and Germany. On his return to England, in , he was, to his delight, offered a job as assistant in the photographic collection of the Warburg Institute at London University. The interdisciplinary atmosphere that characterised its community of cultural and intellectual historians suited his temperament - it was only grudgingly that he ever accepted the restrictive label of art historian. It was at the Institute too that he met Kay Simon whom he married in . Already, in , he began formulating a thesis topic on concepts of decorum and restraint in the Italian Renaissance and, in , he was awarded a two-year fellowship at the Warburg to work on this, under the direction of Ernst Gombrich. He began investigating how humanist literature on art was shaped by the traditions of classical rhetoric. Although this research never resulted in a PhD, it provided material for his acclaimed first book, *Giotto and the Orators* , which acutely highlighted the limitations as well as the achievements of Renaissance discourse on art. When he returned to the Warburg in , as a lecturer in renaissance studies, he came with a new interest in the social and practical aspects of the production of art, and the evidence for this in documents of the period. The course on the Renaissance which he taught to undergraduates exploited this experience and bore fruit in the bestselling *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* . Lucid and provocative, this "primer in the social history of pictorial style", as he called it, continues to interest countless readers in early Renaissance pictures and the society in which they were created. The notion was further refined in relation to sculpture in *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany* , in which, for example, the scrolls of Nuremberg calligraphy were related to stylistic elements. This book, which evolved from the Slade lectures at Oxford in , was awarded the Mitchell prize for the history of art. In *Limewood Sculptors*, the period eye was, however, subtly inflected with criticism of a more timeless sort. These issues, articulated in *Patterns of Intention* , were encouraged by his friendship and then collaboration and close association with Svetlana Alpers. Together they wrote *Tiepolo and the Pictorial Intelligence* , an intriguing mix not only of art criticism and art history but of the styles of two contrasting personalities. By the time these latter works were published, Baxandall was an academic celebrity. He had been given a London University chair in and been elected to the British Academy in ; he had also held a visiting professorship at Cornell University in New York state and a fellowship in Berlin, and been awarded prizes by the University of Hamburg and the MacArthur Foundation both . Since he had held a part-time post at the University of California, Berkeley, initially in combination with his job at the Warburg Institute. Thereafter, until his retirement in , he spent part of the year in California. But he retained old habits of thought along with old ties and loyalties. The work of Gombrich on perception remained an important point of reference as he himself became increasingly interested in modern as well as historical theories about visual attention, especially primary focus and peripheral vision. The most important publication of his later years, however, was *Shadows and the Enlightenment* , in its persuasive juxtaposition of scientific analyses of shadows with the pictorial practice of 18th-century artists, notably the quiet, but "in some ways slyly showy" Chardin. These words might almost describe the work of the author himself, and some of his most evocative prose, in this book and in *Patterns of Intention*, was devoted to characterising the decorous restraint of the great French painter. He had never relished large gatherings and with the progression of illness, he tended to avoid any encounters in public places. It provided a close reading of the fresco, using insights

gained from psychological theories of perception. In a famous passage in *Patterns of Intention*, Baxandall lamented the widespread and unthinking use by art historians of the word "influence", to account for stylistic similarity. It is all the more significant that, in the preface to *Words for Pictures*, he observed that Gombrich was the art historian by whom he had been "the most influenced, of choice". And many art historians, old and young, have chosen to be influenced by Michael Baxandall; his argument for the relationship of rhetoric and art, his penetrating dissection of the language of criticism, his concept of the period eye and his late work on the science of perception have all spawned not merely followers but whole fields of research. Baxandall had one of the most fruitful minds ever to enter the field of art history. He is survived by Kay, daughter Lucy and son Tom.

Chapter 2 : Baxandall, Michael [WorldCat Identities]

A distinguished group of art historians reflect on the work of Michael Baxandall, in terms of its importance for their own formation, its location in the development of a new art history, and its influence on the broader languages and theories.

Michael Baxandall Art historian who addressed the broad sweep of cultural history and expanded the frontiers of his discipline. If art history is now a field that can hold its own with more established areas of the humanities, it is largely because Baxandall had a talent to transmit to others through the printed page the powerful intellectual resources he had built up through tireless inward reflection. These resources he applied with equal engagement to Italian Renaissance art criticism, German wood sculpture, the understanding of shadows in the 18th century, the planning of the Forth Bridge and the functions of the neural structure of the retina. An intellectual pied piper, he showed with charm how a lofty mind could be at home not just with the intellectual and the aesthetic but also with the material, the physical and the mechanical. The first hint of his impatience with convention was his departure, in 1951, for the Continent. In 1952 Baxandall was offered a post teaching English at Baghdad University, but was prevented by revolution from taking it up. Instead he made a contact that changed his life, meeting Gertrud Bing, then director of the Warburg Institute. The Warburg, founded in Hamburg before the war, was concerned with a broader cultural history than the Courtauld Institute of Art, where he took an external degree at that time, and it was as an historian in this sense that Baxandall always saw himself. Gertrud Bing offered him a position in the Photograph Collection, and it was there that he met his future wife, Kay Simon, who happened to be mounting prints at the same table – they married in 1953 and were to have a son and a daughter. From 1954 to 1956 he was a junior fellow, working for a PhD on the highly original topic "Restraint in Renaissance behaviour", supervised by Ernst Gombrich. In 1956 Baxandall moved to the Victoria and Albert Museum, where John Pope-Hennessy asked him to catalogue the German sculpture; but by 1957 he was back at the Warburg as lecturer in Renaissance Studies. He never completed the PhD, but the research provided the foundation for his first book, *Giotto and the Orators*. This wide-ranging study of the fruitful relation between art and rhetoric in the 14th and 15th centuries abruptly woke art historians to the need to pay much more attention to intellectual context, and made many question the assumptions with which they had been fed. More shocking to art historians, though, was his most influential book, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy*, which demonstrated that context should be taken much more widely, to include not just the learning of humanists, but also practical skills – and not just those of the elite, such as dancing and manners, but also those of the merchant and the artisan, such as the valuation of minerals and the gauging of barrels. The way the varying practical interests of different individuals in different cities influenced artistic patronage he captured in the concept of "the period eye". This term he brought even closer to earth in the crucial paragraph with which he introduced it, by treating the eye not metaphorically, in terms of cultural perception, but biologically. As he said, vision involves not only constancies for example, the way light and colour are reacted to by the "several million receptors, the cones" in the retina but also equally important differences in the equipment of the individual brain, due to differences in our experiences: Many asked themselves, if that complex work was a primer, what would a more advanced text be like, and that question was soon answered in two very different books. It introduced readers to the little-known practices of craftsmen and merchants in the cities and countryside and of central Europe, and used as he said in the typically elegant and compressed formulation of its opening paragraph "carvings as lenses bearing on their own circumstances". *Patterns of Intention* was the worked-up version of another lecture series, this time at the University of California at Berkeley in 1964, using the term "intention" as a prism to capture critical reflections on the mental activity of a variety of creative individuals in widely differing contexts, one of the most brilliant cases being that of Chardin. By this stage Baxandall was clear that his enterprise was not limited to exploiting the knowledge of a particular social context, but was aimed at establishing models which could be applied almost universally. Still, there was an increasingly clear focus, and that was not on patronage and social context, which others, inspired by his earlier work, had adopted as their prime concern, but on the mental activity of the artist. This was the focus of *Tiepolo and the Pictorial Intelligence*, which he wrote with Svetlana Alpers.

He had long known her and her work, and in the late s and early s discovered in her an engagement with the mental processes involved in art-making which resonated with his own. They became collaborators on Tiepolo, colleagues at Berkeley , and were close companions for the last 25 years of his life. He showed how, in the case of such exceptionally visually alert artists, specific combinations of neurobiological constraints and resources could be seen to shape the turning points not just in individual careers but in the whole history of art. Baxandall always kept moving, contributing in the last years of his life to a volume on the contemporary German artist Baselitz and on kitsch Still, although he had constantly sought freedom from institutions, he remained to the end faithful to earlier commitments.

Chapter 3 : Obituary: Michael Baxandall | Art and design | The Guardian

About Michael Baxandall: Art historian who developed the theory of period eye. He worked as a curator at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London as well a.

Chapter 4 : About Michael Baxandall : Adrian Rifkin :

A distinguished group of art historians reflect on the work of Michael Baxandall, in terms of its importance for their own formation, its location in the development of a new art history, and its influence on the broader languages and theories of contemporary cultural theory.

Chapter 5 : Michael Baxandall - Wikipedia

Michael Baxandall, who has died aged 74, was an art historian of extraordinary perceptive and analytical powers whose writings on painting and sculpture are as important as they are original.

Chapter 6 : Michael Baxandall - MacArthur Foundation

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Chapter 7 : Period eye - Wikipedia

Michael Baxandall begins by describing the physical constitution and different varieties of shadows. He then sketches the eighteenth-century empirical/nativist debate on the role of shadows in the perception of shape.

Chapter 8 : Michael Baxandall - Telegraph

Michael Baxandall was a historian and critic of European art, who brought new life to familiar images, texts, and cultural artifacts of the past. Baxandall was a curator in the Department of Architecture and Sculpture at the Victoria and Albert Museum (). He was later professor emeritus of.

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Michael David Kighley Baxandall was born on August 18 , the only son of David Baxandall, CBE, a curator of art who became director of the Scottish National Gallery; Michael's paternal.