

Princeton University

Honors Faculty Members
Receiving Emeritus Status



May 2012

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colleagues in the departments of those honored.

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Contents



Faculty Members Receiving Emeritus Status

Larry Martin Bartels	3
James Riley Broach	5
William Browder	8
Lawrence Neil Danson	11
John McConnon Darley	16
Philip Nicholas Johnson-Laird	19
Seiichi Makino	22
Hugo Meyer	25
Jeremiah P. Ostriker	27
Elias M. Stein	30
Cornel R. West	32

Hugo Meyer



With the retirement of Hugo Meyer this summer, the Department of Art and Archaeology will lose its specialist for Hellenistic and Roman art after 23 years of service. The Princeton community will lose an example of extraordinary conviviality and a colleague who loves to have fluent conversations in an astonishing number of what he likes to call “European dialects” with colleagues from all over the world — and recite major works of poetry in yet another language (including Celtic!).

Extensive travels in all of Europe and the Middle East, an inclination that he never outgrew, prepared the philologist, comparative linguist and literary historian for the study of Classical art and archaeology, a field in which Hugo earned his Ph.D. in 1978.

After teaching as an assistant professor in Munich and Marburg and preparing his “Habilitationsschrift” (second Ph.D.) on the figure of Antinous, Emperor Hadrian’s lover, in literary and art historical sources, Hugo took on a curatorial position at the Bavarian National Museum in 1987, in charge of its extensive collection of plaster casts of Classical sculptures, one of the best in Europe.

This period of intense study of Classical Greek and Roman sculpture might be one of the reasons why Hugo would base his further research on the object itself and used stylistic analysis as the major hermeneutic tool to assess and explore the monument he was dealing with: “Primum monumenta deinde philosophia” (roughly translated: object first, theory second) became the leitmotif of his work. Having joined the faculty of the Department of Art and Archaeology in 1989, he set out to rebuild the department’s neglected cast collection together with Professor Willy Childs, his colleague in the Classical Greek discipline. The new teaching tool comprised numerous new examples of Classical sculpture housed originally in various European museums, while others were borrowed from the

Metropolitan Museum in New York. Even today, in a time when the department's teaching mission promotes worldwide travel for undergraduate and graduate students to see the originals (not to speak of frequent trips to the Met), the cast collection, now housed on McCormick's third floor, is still in use for precepts. The 1990s saw also the publication of two books on sculptural works, first the work on Antinous, and second, contributions to a catalogue of Roman sculpture in the Princeton University Art Museum. The latter led also to the exhibition "A Seleucid Prince in Egypt," which Hugo curated as a cooperative project with the Egyptian State Collection, Munich, and an exhibition catalogue.

Much of Hugo's research and writing over the last decade or so were spent on an ambitious project, his magnum opus, a comprehensive "History of Roman Art in Case Studies: Art and Politics — Religion and Mnemonic Culture" in which he offers novel insights into a great variety of imperial Roman art. Its first volume, "Sumptuous Cameos and State Reliefs of Roman Emperors," appeared in 2000 and re-assessed and re-interpreted key artifacts of imperial Roman art, including the imperial Sardonyx cameos, the Portland Vase and the Cancellaria Reliefs in Rome. In a piece of both archaeometric and art historical sleuthing, he argued that the Grand Camee de France, originally an Augustean or Claudian object, had been recut during Late Antiquity and now represented Emperor Constantine and other members of the imperial family. This work will be continued in the near future through the publication of two more volumes, "From the Time of the Late Republic to the Flavians" and "From the Time of Trajan to the Usurption of Eugenius."

A Bavarian by conviction and origin, Hugo has returned to Munich, which now serves as his permanent base for continued research trips and travels to sites, museums and landscapes of the Mediterranean world.