



The Book on the Floor: André Malraux and the Imaginary Museum

By Walter Grasskamp

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In 1954, the French writer, politician, and publisher André Malraux (1901–1976) posed at home for a photographer from the magazine *Paris Match*, surrounded by pages from his forthcoming book *Le musée imaginaire de la sculpture mondiale*. The enchanting metaphor of the *musée imaginaire* (imaginary museum) was built upon that illustrated art book, and Malraux was one of its greatest champions. Drawing on a range of contemporary publications, he adopted images and responded to ideas. Indeed, Malraux’s book on the floor is a variation of photographer André Vigneau’s spectacular *Encyclopédie photographique de l’art*, published in five volumes from 1935 on—years before Malraux would enter this field. Both authors were engaged in juxtaposing artworks via photographs and publishing these photographs by the hundreds, but Malraux was the better sloganeer.

Starting from a close examination of the photograph of Malraux in his salon, art historian Walter Grasskamp takes the reader back to the dawn of this genre of illustrated art book. He shows how it catalyzed the practice of comparing works of art on a global scale. He retraces the metaphor to earlier reproduction practices and highlights its ubiquity in contemporary art, ending with an homage to the other pioneer of the “museum without walls,” the unjustly forgotten Vigneau.

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Editorial Review

Review

“German art critic Walter Grasskamp (formerly, Academy of Fine Arts, Munich) presents a careful reconstruction of Malraux's project, pointing out its indebtedness to Andre Vigneau's *Encyclopedie photographique de l'art* (first published in 1935) and a possible connection to the ideas expounded by “Walter Benjamin in his influential *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility* (1936).”—*Choice*

About the Author

Walter Grasskamp is an art critic and held the chair in art history at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Munich from 1995 to 2016.

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