

Art History

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On 22 February 1848 in Paris near the Place de la Concorde, just before nightfall a soldier provoked by the crowd stuck his bayonet into an unarmed man's chest. This was the first bloodshed of the revolution of 1848, which led to the downfall of Louis Philippe. The journalist Charles Toubin recorded this scene. Two days later, on 24 February, one man who had witnessed this episode was found carrying a shotgun from a looted store shouting: "We must go and shoot General Aupick." Aupick, the director of the Ecole Polytechnique, was preoccupied with persuading his students not to join the revolution; he was the stepfather of this man, the poet and art critic Charles Baudelaire.

In January 1881, Georges Jeanniot visited the studio of a friend of Baudelaire, where he saw a painting in progress. Jeanniot's account, published in 1907, describes the artist's posing of the model, the style of the work, and other visitors to the studio. Like Baudelaire, this artist probably believed that he was suffering from syphilis. He told Jeanniot that he needed to remain seated and spoke optimistically of expecting an early recovery. Overoptimistically, for two years and three months later Edouard Manet died. The work Jeanniot saw, *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (Plate 10.1), was Manet's last large painting.

Like Toubin, Jeanniot recorded an event interesting to historians because it is an incident in the life of a man who became famous. In his 1846 Salon, Baudelaire records a curiously optimistic political viewpoint; in his later writings he spoke bitterly of politics. Soon after his death in 1867, Baudelaire became famous, and so any documentary evidence about him became precious. Toubin's story would be interesting even were Baudelaire not involved, for it provides information about the events discussed by Alexis de Tocqueville and Karl Marx. But what now inspires the particularly intense interest in Baudelaire's 1848 activities is the highly influential Marxist commentary of Walter Benjamin. Any evidence about Baudelaire's actions during the 1848 revolution is extremely welcome. By the 1880s, Manet had achieved substantial recognition. *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* was resold a number of times, at increasing prices, before being given to the Courtauld Institute in 1931. In 1965, Clement Greenberg described Manet as the first modernist painter; more recent commentators identify him as an artist whose work makes a political statement. Since he was not an especially verbal person, any early record about his painting is very valuable.

This description of these two anecdotes may suggest that historians and art historians work in essentially similar ways. Their raw materials are such stories,



10.1 Edouard Manet, *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, 1882. Courtauld Institute Galleries, London.

which they present in a narrative giving information about the past. The goal of history is to identify, describe, and explain noteworthy events; it does in a very broad way what art history does in its narrower fashion. The story of the production of the artifacts preserved in the museum is part of a broader history. Historians study French nineteenth-century politics, economics, and social history; art historians are professionally concerned with only a small subset of the artifacts produced in that culture, the artworks.

Historians, like art historians, are centrally concerned with explaining change. Toubin's story is revealing because it helps identify the moment when the government of Louis Philippe lost its ability to command allegiance. What then needs to be added to create a history is background information about how this happened and why the authorities quickly lost control of events. The art historian, analogously, uses stories like Jeanniot's to explain the place of an individual artwork in an artist's oeuvre. In an essay begun in 1859, just before Manet produced his first independent works, Baudelaire presented the ideal of a painting of modern life. Contemporary artists need not repeat the themes of the old masters, he argued; contemporary life also presents heroic themes. *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* seems an obvious realization of this prophecy, the culmination of twenty-some years of Manet's exploration of such themes.

We understand change by setting events in a broader historical framework. Linking the revolution of 1848 to the end of the Second Empire and the commune of 1871, a political historian will explain how finally the monarchy, a vestige of the ancien régime, was abolished. The street scene Baudelaire witnessed is part of this larger process. Analogously, a large-scale art-historical narrative can study the art of the painter Baudelaire admired and Manet copied, Delacroix. The first work in the 1983 Manet retrospective was *The Barque of Dante, after Delacroix* (1854?), hung at the entry of a show culminating in *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*. A full political history of Baudelaire's France could look back before 1830, identifying the ways in which already Louis XIV was concerned with centralizing power, partly in response to a seventeenth-century rebellion, the Fronde. Analogously, a fuller account of Manet's sources would need to look at more distant influences, such as Venetian oil painting.

There is a certain arbitrariness to the ending point of such a story; history, like art history, naturally leads us towards the present. Just as a large-scale history incorporating Toubin's story might extend into the twentieth century, so an account building upon Jeanniot's anecdote could lead into a discussion of Manet's influence upon postmodernist art. The obvious analogies between the revolution of 1848 and the failed French student and worker revolts of 1968 may influence how those modern historians who experienced 1968 think about political change in the nineteenth century. Similarly, Manet's image appropriations and his play with gender roles influence viewers of Cindy Sherman's 1978 *Untitled Film Stills*. All the questions which Manet poses about the identity of his barmaid on display take on new significance when now an artist photographs herself engaged in role playing. Like the historian, the art historian is essentially a storyteller. All the conceptual problems that the historian faces in identifying an origin, and a conclusion for his or her narrative and finding a way to narrate that story are also concerns for the art historian.

Yet it is also arguable that art history is essentially different in kind from history. Treating Toubin's story as equivalent to Jeanniot's anecdote may mask this difference. A history is a story about events of importance told by a skilled witness. A written history presents events the reader could not have viewed. Tocqueville's *Recollections* and Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* make the events of 1848 in Paris "come alive"—a revealing metaphor—as if they were taking place in our presence. History writing is essentially concerned with re-creating the past. Although art history writing uses similar evidence, it has very different goals. I can stand in front of *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*; I cannot view the revolution of 1848. Stories like Toubin's constitute the primary materials for the historian, the starting point for speculations about why in February 1848 Paris was ripe for change. Jeanniot's recollection is secondary material for the art historian, evidence to be tested against what now we can see in Manet's picture.

The revolution of 1848 exists today only as re-created in historians' narratives; Manet's painting is an object we observe. It is not surprising that various

historians describe that revolution very differently, for identifying the historical event requires picking out a group of actions by many men and women. Tocqueville's personal involvement in those actions means that he gives a very different reconstruction of the events from Marx. It may seem more surprising that various art historians give radically different interpretations of *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, for they are describing the same physical object. Identifying the revolution of 1848 is complex, for the events in Paris may be linked with what happened as far away as Russian Poland; identifying the start and finish of that revolution requires controversial judgments about the causes of the scene Toubin witnessed. Manet's painting is a relatively small physical object, created in a temporal moment, 1881–1882, whose bounds are defined relatively precisely.

The art historian need not re-create past events, for what we experience is that very artifact made by the artist him- or herself. When I view Artemesia Gentileschi's *Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting*, Berthe Morisot's *Portrait of Cornélie Morisot and Edma Pontillon*, or Agnes Martin's abstract masterpieces of the 1980s, what need have I for a history? I can see for myself what they made; I am present directly in front of the surfaces they painted. Certainly I read art historians to learn about these works' historical context. I may compare Gentileschi's allegory with baroque variations on her theme; relate Morisot to her contemporary, Mary Cassatt; and contrast Martin with a younger painter like Elizabeth Murray. But my primary source of information about these artworks is the paintings themselves. Learning that good judges think a Martin painting I do not initially admire excellent, I look more closely; reading about Gentileschi's iconography, I discover that her portrait may be symbolic. But nothing that I read could outweigh my immediate visual experience of the pictures.

When there is a conflict between what the books tell me about a painting and what I see for myself, it would be absurd to think I have two kinds of evidence which need to be compared. I might, of course, be influenced by what I read to see a picture differently. (And reading that it was damaged or cut down could influence me.) But if there is a conflict between what the books tell me and what I see, unless I can learn to see this way for myself, what can I reasonably conclude except that the books are wrong? In reconstructing what happened on 22 February, I may need to balance Toubin's report against other evidence. In trying to understand such events, such an anecdote has value if we may support it with evidence from other observers. Jeanniot's account of Manet doesn't have this status, for it must be weighed against the obvious authority of my experience of Manet's picture. The historian reconstructs events. The documents read or sites visited provide starting points for the narrative. The art historian is concerned with describing artifacts. Documentary evidence is ultimately of value only because it suggests ways of seeing the artwork itself.

Is it possible, still, to question this distinction between history and art history? The assumption that the unit of discourse is the individual painting may seem problematic. When in one sentence I mentioned paintings by Gentileschi,

Morisot, and Agnes Martin, pictures I have seen only over some years, in Rome, Washington, and New York, I focus attention on these individual artifacts by linking them together in a narrative. Identifying the distinctive shared qualities of these paintings, I create a history, a fragment of my autobiography. Even as I describe art history as concerned with such individual pictures, my writing thus inevitably takes me away from these pictures themselves. Speaking of the individual painting as a self-sufficient object is a questionable convention. When I stand before Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* in London, I can also think of that individual painting as one element in various sequences of works: Manet's oeuvre; nineteenth-century French painting; modernist art. What is within that frame in London, that thing I can see at a glance, is really but one small piece of these groups of things. The object I see in splendid isolation in the modern museum is but a fragment of a larger whole described in the art historians' narratives.

This argument against isolating the framed artwork is simplest to understand if we consider not this Manet, but another painting in London, Piero della Francesca's *Baptism of Christ* in the National Gallery. Originally it was the central panel of an altarpiece. The original frame has been dismantled; the panels originally set on the sides and at the bottom were not taken to London. The picture was removed from its original site, a now-deconsecrated church in Borgo Sansepolcro whose landscape may be shown in Piero's background. A detailed reconstruction of its original setting may be necessary to understand the meaning of Piero's image. Perhaps only when such paintings are preserved in situ, as they are still in some Italian churches, is it possible to see them as part of the social fabric. Seeing a photomontage of Piero's full original altarpiece, it is visually obvious that viewing in isolation the panel in London is almost as misleading as looking at a painting which has been cut down.

A very similar argument can be mounted, social historians of art argue, when we isolate a work from its original culture. *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* is an easel painting; but today Manet's 1880s Paris, like Piero's Sansepolcro, needs to be reconstructed to explain what is within his image. Merely looking at the picture could not tell us that it depicts an expensive music hall; the legs of a trapeze performer at the far upper left corner are hard to see. Manet's and Piero's pictures can no more be understood in isolation than can any artifact. Were only one automobile tire to survive, a future archaeologist might reconstruct an automobile and envisage the roads and service stations needed by automobiles. Historians studying Manet and Piero are more fortunate; we know much about these artists' cultures.

To understand an artwork we need to adopt structuralist ways of thinking and see it as part of such a larger system. The methodological implications of these everyday working procedures of the art historian were made explicit by the philosopher Arthur C. Danto in his 1964 article "The Artworld." (A French form of structuralism was later popularized by various art critics, most notably

Rosalind E. Krauss in the influential essays collected in her *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*.) Danto shows that these ways of interpreting an artwork have far-reaching implications for the ways we understand art history. The individual "postmodern" work—Warhol's *Brillo Box* (1964) is his example—achieves its identity only in relation to other works. Warhol's work becomes an artwork only by an act of negation. Not expressive; not a representation of anything; not an attractive artifact: it is something more than a handmade copy of the Brillo boxes sold in grocery stores because it is situated within the art world. Using *Brillo Box* we can construct a simple chart. All artworks are either representations or not, and expressive or not. Warhol's work belongs within this structure because it is neither a representation nor expressive. The temporal development of art is mapped onto this spatial structure. Of course this four-place diagram is very simple, but it would be easy to work it out in more detail. This is a task for art historians. The philosopher's goal is understanding this procedure.

Even a simple-looking object can become richly meaningful when thus set in context. The social historian of Warhol's art would be interested in explaining why he picked this artifact and not something else from 1960s grocery stores. What interests the philosopher are the implications of Warhol's choice for how we think about all art. For the structuralist, the exact individual characteristics of the individual artwork don't matter. What is important about *Brillo Box* is not its individual characteristics, but that it permits the construction of this diagram, in which it is juxtaposed with earlier works which are representations or are expressive. A chess game is defined by relative positions of king, queen, and pawns, not by the color or size of these pieces. Analogously, what counts about Warhol's work is its role within art history. The individuating features of that object become irrelevant. *Brillo Box* is interesting because it generates a chart displaying the logical structure of art's history.

Earlier aestheticians compared spatial ways of thinking, associated with visual art, with writers' interest in temporal succession. Lessing's *Laocoon: An Essay upon the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (1766) contrasted succession in time, the province of the poet, with what interests the visual artist, coexistence in space. Lessing's concern was to contrast the goal of Virgil, who describes a sculpted shield, and the concerns of sculptors or painters who make something visible all at once. But his analysis extends, in an obvious way, to the contrast between the art writer, who must describe in a text, and the artist, who may feel that such a narrative takes us away from the artwork itself. Danto's structuralism provides a new perspective on Lessing's argument. If the art historian's narrative can be diagrammed in this spatial structure, then ultimately the visual artwork can be described in a spatial format.

Danto's analysis seemingly assumes that there is one correct way of identifying the structure within which to set *Brillo Box*. Poststructuralists such as Jacques Derrida questioned that claim. Is there one definite way of identifying

the context in which to set the artwork? It is hard to know why we would believe that, for it is easy to identify alternative contexts. The simple structure Danto imagined had no place for such novel modernist art forms as film or comic strips; nor did it deal with one kind of visual artwork which fascinated eighteenth-century aestheticians, the landscape garden. Identifying such additional structures permits us to deconstruct Danto's analysis.

Here, the poststructuralist can observe, treating chess as a model for art history is misleading. In chess, the ways in which king, queen, and pawns move are fixed by convention. But in art history the rules of the game are not fixed, except by tradition. And tradition teaches that there can be indefinitely many ways of setting any artwork within a structure. Since in identifying that structure we are not dealing with the artist's intentions, who has the right to say that an alternative to Danto's analysis is wrongheaded? There are, it would seem, as many ways to interpret Warhol's art as there are ingenious historians. Certainly some interpretations are more original, suggestive, or unconventional than others, and maybe some day historians will cease to find novel ways of describing his art. But until that happens, why think that any particular structure is in principle unacceptable? Interpretation of artworks may be an open-ended process.

Danto's argument against this form of poststructuralism emerged only in his writing of the 1980s. If, as the poststructuralist imagines, Willem de Kooning's painterly art changes how we see his source, Venetian painting, could not future art—in its turn—change, in as yet unpredictable ways, how we understand *Brillo Box*? The interpretation of art, this way of thinking suggests, is as open-ended as the history of art making. Danto's response is to claim that the history of art has ended. The structural chart is effectively complete. Much new art will be made, but no new kinds of art will appear—so Danto claims—for all the possibilities have been discovered. As in chess, the essential rules of the game have been laid down; all that now is possible are moves following those conventions. Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his *Humanism and Terror* (1947) drew one consequence of this way of thinking about history. How can we evaluate an action, he asked, until we consider the way it fits into a larger pattern of events? Some moralists think that an action can be judged abstractly, in itself. But this belief supplies little guide in politics. Perhaps an action which itself is wrong will turn out to be the best action possible in the circumstances; every other act, we may discover, would produce worse consequences. We can only finally evaluate an action, Merleau-Ponty suggested, at the end of history. For Danto, analogously, we can today identify the structure of art history only because we know that the history of art is concluded.

Is Danto's view of art history plausible? In his 1820s lectures on aesthetics, Hegel appears to claim that the history of art had ended. Today that seems an amusingly overoptimistic vision. Hegel knew little of non-European art; he could not imagine the modernism of Manet, Mondrian, and Pollock; and he

died too soon to witness the rediscovery of pre-Renaissance European art. Nor has Hegel's philosophical reasoning in support of this view withstood the test of time. He claimed that history has ended because he believed that in his day that Spirit whose life story is world history had found an adequate way to express itself in social institutions. Few present-day aestheticians or philosophers can accept this argument. But although Danto finds Hegel's particular view of art history hopelessly parochial, he accepts the crucial conceptual claim: the history of art ends when art becomes philosophically self-conscious, which is what occurred when Warhol's artifact was created. Now the structural relations within which individual works can be set have all been identified. Just as, for Claude Lévi-Strauss, the structures of what he calls "the savage mind" are revealed in the premodern human cultures studied by the anthropologist, so the nature of art is demonstrated by these categories. There are no new kinds of art to make, although of course new art continues to be made.

Claims that the history of entities such as states have ended are always questionable. The Venetian republic, after existing for a millennium, was destroyed by Napoleon's troops less than two centuries ago. But who knows what is possible in the future? Maybe the state of Italy will disintegrate, as did the former U.S.S.R., and Venice again will become independent. Even if that doesn't happen, surely other states will be created. Danto's argument doesn't rely upon such empirical considerations. The history of art ended, he claims, because everything had been done which could be done. Once it was discovered that objects like the readymades could be artworks, then what else could there be to discover? Once we learned that any object could be an artwork, then the field of artworks could not continue to expand. Danto's claim differs from the view developed by the Hegel scholar he cites, Alexandre Kojève, who believed that human history had ended. Kojève, following Hegel, identifies history as the grand narrative of significant events. Nothing of great significance remains to happen, he thought. Hegel's or Kojève's view of the end of history seems extremely vulnerable to counterexamples. Surely there will continue to be wars, revolutions, and other political changes. Danto makes a very different and much more precise claim. Now when anything can be placed in the museum, what more can happen? Of course there can be unpredictable combinations of objects, but that is not deep enough change to count as history.

No one would deny that Warhol made a very radical move. When the modern museum was created, around the time of the French Revolution, the concept of the readymade would have been impossible to understand. Eighteenth-century gardeners were interested in the ways in which nature could be seen "aesthetically," but they had no idea that someday ordinary artifacts could become artworks when set in the museum. Still, it is arguable that the way Danto thinks of this discovery shows he overestimates the importance of historical ways of thinking. In a 1965 essay naming the art movement called "minimal art," the philosopher Richard Wollheim reflected upon the way that Duchamp

and Rauschenberg made artworks. Making traditional artworks requires much labor; to create minimal art, the artist need only select an already existing object.

Traditionally, Wollheim argued, when viewing visual art we concentrate upon small individual portions of the world; we focus close attention on a canvas, or piece of paper, or stone. We look at these things for themselves. Nothing could be more deeply opposed to Danto's structuralism than this way of thinking of the aesthete. Wollheim rejects the view that an object like *Brillo Box* is as much an artwork as *Baptism of Christ*. Warhol made an impoverished kind of artwork. Structuralism overestimates the importance of gestures like Warhol's. Of course, Wollheim is not denying that we can treat an artwork in an essentially historical fashion. As Vasari already understood in the mid-sixteenth century, art making has a history. (And Vasari merely applies to contemporary art a historical view already developed in the ancient world by Pliny.) But Wollheim argues that Danto's focus on the historical nature of the artwork takes us away from its essence, as art. For the aesthete, a painting is first and foremost an individual artifact whose surface we attend to. Only in secondary ways are artworks elements which can be deployed in structuralist diagrams. Vasari would have a very hard time understanding the abstract expressionist art championed by Greenberg; but he could identify their shared conception of "the aesthetic." There are enough similarities between the art Vasari knew and abstract expressionism to speak of the concept of art shared by Titian and de Kooning. Treating an artwork as the basis for a historical analysis may be intellectually fascinating, but it does not treat artworks as works of art; it is like using a painting to cover a cracked wall or a sculpture to hold a door ajar. The readymades are only minimally artworks. Revealing the boundaries of our concept of art, they show the importance of the traditional link of art with "the aesthetic."

Wollheim's approach derives very naturally from his fascination with connoisseurship. Identifying the corpus of genuine works by Giorgione, distinguishing them from wrongly attributed works by other painters of his era and from later copies or forgeries are essential activities for the museum. Unless we can make good attributions, why take so much care with collecting and preserving these objects? This important practical task may seem unexciting. Social histories of art make it relevant to the historian; grand historical art histories suggest analogies between art's development and the history of the larger culture. By contrast, connoisseurship focuses on the individual artifacts. Some people distrust connoisseurship because of its obvious associations with collectors, art dealers, and museums. Connoisseurs like Bernard Berenson are often closely linked with the rich and powerful. (So too, of course, are many "anti-aesthetic" artists such as Warhol.) However we judge these political issues, what is philosophically important about connoisseurship is its challenge to the tendency of such otherwise diverse writers as Hegel, Wölfflin, and Danto to think of visual artworks essentially in historical terms. When Wollheim criticizes minimal art for undercutting our ability to focus on the individual artifact, he

really is pointing to the way in which preoccupation with art's historical character takes us away from considering its aesthetic qualities. The aesthete rejects the historical way of thinking of the structuralist.

Wollheim's demand that we see the artwork for itself is complex. We cannot do that merely by looking at it, for in many cases we bring to the artwork irrelevant associations or ideas. One natural goal of art history is to clear away any such sources of potential misinformation. The introduction to Heinrich Wölfflin's *Classic Art* explains how the word "classic" has come to have unwelcome associations. Here he reasons like a structuralist. It is hard to understand High Renaissance art, he claims, when we compare it to more seductive early Renaissance works. Unless we think historically, Wölfflin warns, we will find Raphael's *School of Athens* bewildering; we will ask why did not Raphael paint more attractive-looking scenes showing simple peasants. (Reading his text, we may recall, or guess, that when it was published in 1899 the reputation of Botticelli was being revived.) We need to understand, he is saying, how this classical style evolved out of the early Renaissance.

Wölfflin's elegant analysis raises, but does not solve, a deep methodological problem: How can we achieve an objective viewpoint on art of a historically distant period like the High Renaissance? Suppose we acknowledge that in 1899 the new interest in Botticelli made it hard to properly appreciate Raphael's work. Then a real problem arises for the structuralist art historian. Today, when Caravaggio, little discussed in 1899, has been revived, his "naturalism" will, for similar reasons, surely distort our view of art of Raphael's era. If our sense of art of any period is influenced by all the other works in our art world, how can we ever achieve an objective viewpoint?

In his critique of Wölfflin's methodology, Ernst Gombrich offers a highly ingenious response to this problem. The hidden norm, to which Wölfflin always appeals, is that of the High Renaissance. We cannot legitimately set the art of figures from two different periods, like Raphael and Botticelli, in one structural diagram. Since Botticelli did not know Raphael's paintings, it makes no sense to imagine him choosing not to paint in the manner of Raphael. (Nor can we say that Raphael chose to work differently than Caravaggio.) What an artist did not know, he cannot have rejected. Gombrich is giving an argument against Danto's structuralism, which in a far more sweeping way compares historically distant works. No doubt Gombrich is right: Botticelli did not choose to paint unlike Raphael, nor Raphael unlike Caravaggio. But does this show that a structuralist analysis is inevitably flawed? When Wölfflin compares fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italian painters, or Danto compares the old masters with Warhol, we need not assume that these structures were graspable by all the artists included within it. Perhaps only the historian presenting that structure can understand all the elements within it. From his privileged position, the historian can understand that history better than those artists could.

This way of identifying the shared concerns of Danto and Wölfflin helps

explain Wollheim's opposition to structuralism. A modern historian would not hesitate to explain sixteenth-century politics using theories of economics or psychology unavailable within that culture. What prevents Gombrich from doing something analogous is his belief that Raphael's art should be interpreted in the terms in which it was described in the artist's culture. He is contrasting Wölfflin's historical vantage point on Botticelli with the view provided within that artist's own time. It is anachronistic to contrast Botticelli's figures with Raphael's.

It is easy to understand how these problems with an art history arise in reading a grand narrative like Wölfflin's, which aims to set the individual artworks in a broad history. But something similar happens, it is worth observing, when an art historian seeks merely to have us attend closely to an individual picture. When Robert L. Herbert discusses Manet's *Bar at the Folies-Begère*, he unavoidably is caught up in a tradition of recent debate about this picture and the role of women depicted in French art. In order to describe the woman in the picture Herbert needs to tell a great deal about such music halls, the social status of Manet's model, and the way the painter arranged the mirror reflection. Reading his analysis, I naturally find myself moving back and forth between his words and the excellent color reproduction in his text. What is most revealing is how arbitrary, at a certain level, is this distinction between what is inside the frame and what remains outside. Since standards of beauty change, when Herbert speaks of the beauty of the model, he must study sociological evidence. (Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* of 1978, with its references to women in 1950s films, already needs explanation.) Without such background information, how could we even guess how Manet wanted his model to be seen? Herbert, as much as Wölfflin, must go outside the picture itself.

This simple example points to the central paradox implicit in the conjunction of words in the seemingly simple phrase "art history." The concept of a history is antithetical to the demand that we attend to the here and now for its own sake. To respond aesthetically to a painting is to see it for its own sake, as opposed to identifying it as a sacred image, a political statement, or a historical document. Very often, paintings have religious, political, or historical importance as well as aesthetic value. Of course, visual artworks have many legitimate functions. But the important conceptual point, which sometimes gets lost in critical historical accounts of "the aesthetic," is that identifying the genealogy of this way of thinking does not necessarily undermine its importance or diminish its value. No doubt the aesthetic way of seeing can seem apolitical, even antipolitical. But seeing an artwork aesthetically by no means excludes looking at it in other ways; no more than enjoying the language of Yeats's late poetry excludes critical evaluation of his political ideas.

Wollheim's aestheticism, implicit in the practice of many traditional art historians, finds its most challenging presentation in the beautiful writings of the English art writer Adrian Stokes (1902–72). Stokes thought that certain art-

works, those he identified as "Quattro Cento," communicate their meaning immediately, without reference to any iconography. (Stokes uses the Italian word "quattrocento," fifteenth century, with his idiosyncratic spelling, to describe such work from any period. He believed that much of the best Quattro Cento art was made in fifteenth-century Italy.) To understand these sculptures or paintings, we need know nothing of history. Carved stone reveals the medium, expressing its history in a way that is immediately accessible for a sympathetic viewer. Quattro Cento painting—Piero is Stokes's prime example—uses color in ways which avoid the tensions and rhythms of narrative art. We can read from the color relationships the story told in Piero's pictures without needing to study his iconography.

Art historians find much to question in Stokes's approach. There is little historical evidence that quattrocento carvers thought of their activity in his terms. As Stokes himself acknowledged in his later writings, his conception of the Quattro Cento is a kind of myth. By presenting the notion of "the aesthetic" in this extreme way, Stokes very usefully shows what is fascinating and problematic in this way of thinking. Can we ever really focus completely and entirely on an isolated material object? Probably not, for all perception involves making comparisons with other artifacts. But if the aesthete is involved with a myth, so too is the structuralist, who reduces the individual artworks to placeholders in a diagram. Manet made a succession of works, objects which can be arranged in chronological order in a retrospective exhibition. But the tendency of art historians to present these objects in retrospectives, each inevitably leading to the next in historical order, treats his oeuvre as a unified body of work. Is that not also a myth? Art historians tend to move from the observable discontinuities found when the works are set in chronological order to belief in an underlying continuity, identified by appeal to a theory of style.

Danto's structuralism and Wollheim's aestheticism are the two essentially opposed approaches to visual art. I do not believe that any argument can tell us how to choose between Danto's historical and Wollheim's antihistorical ways of thinking. What, for the philosopher, is interesting about visual art is that it can be understood in these essentially opposed ways. The problems art historians face really differ from those of historians. Probably art historians will continue to be fascinated by both the approach of the aesthete and that of the structuralist, for it seems natural to value artworks both for themselves and for their historical role. The task of art history is to do justice to the concerns of both the structuralist and the aesthete.

Stokes's view was anticipated in Walter Pater's *The Renaissance* (1980; 1st ed. published 1873), which treats one individual picture, Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*, as a condensation of the whole history of European culture. To see this picture properly, Pater implies, is to grasp not only the story of Leonardo's life, but also the entire history of oil painting. When we correctly attend to this one symbolic work, we can unpack a far-reaching history. At the same time,

Pater also offers a historicist reading of what I have called "the aesthetic." For Pater, following Hegel, this way of seeing artworks is a characteristic product of modern, that is, romantic, culture. The recent debate between Danto and Wollheim about the value and significance of the aesthetic, and the importance of "art history," was anticipated a century earlier. Pater is both an aesthete and a proto-structuralist. He both defends the view that the true value of the artwork is available right here and now to the sensitive viewer and offers a historicist way of understanding that aesthetic value. As Paul Barolsky has observed, when Pater collapses the distinction between these positions, he also is a proto-deconstructionist, anticipating in his elegantly condensed book both modernist and postmodernist ways of thinking about art history.

SUGGESTED READINGS

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