

# ART

A HISTORY OF  
Painting · Sculpture · Architecture



VOLUME II

RENAISSANCE · BAROQUE · MODERN WORLD

Frederick Hartt

Volume II

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Painting • Sculpture • Architecture

RENAISSANCE • BAROQUE • MODERN WORLD

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# Foreword

This book is primarily intended to be used in courses in the general history of art in colleges and universities. I believe that the nonacademic reading public interested in art also will find it useful.

No one-year introduction to the history of art can possibly utilize all the material and all the illustrations offered in these two volumes. I have deliberately erred on the side of overinclusiveness in order to provide individual teachers with a wide possibility of choice, according to their own judgments of what should be presented to the beginning student. After much painful deliberation, the publishers and I decided to omit consideration of the art of the Far East. To do justice to the arts of China, Japan, India, and Southeast Asia in anything like their due proportion to Western art would have meant expanding these volumes beyond the limits of what is economically practicable, or else reducing the arts of East and West alike to a skeletal state. Also, to the best of our knowledge, most introductory courses do not take up Far Eastern art, but leave it for another course.

It has always seemed to me that the first thing a student wants from a book of this sort is a gateway to a new and unfamiliar world. I have tried to keep this primary purpose of the book in mind in writing every page.

At this juncture I look back on my increasingly remote youth with a nostalgia colored by warm gratitude to the great scholars who taught me about many of the works I describe in the following pages, and above all to Meyer Schapiro, my first teacher in the history of art. Not only did he introduce me to the fields of medieval and modern art, in which his knowledge is vast, but also he opened my eyes to the meaning of art-historical studies and to methods of art-historical thought and investigation. Here and there throughout the book Meyer Schapiro's name is mentioned, but to acknowledge my full indebtedness to

his intellect, his erudition, and his imagination it should appear on every page.

In my special field of Italian art, I shall always be grateful to the teaching and example of Millard Meiss in the study of Italian painting, and of Richard Krautheimer in that of Italian architecture. In innumerable ways I am grateful to other magnificent teachers now no longer living, especially to Walter W. S. Cook, Walter Friedlaender, Karl Lehmann, Richard Offner, Erwin Panofsky, George Rowley, and Rudolf Wittkower. The faith, advice, and inspiration of Bernard Berenson stood me in good stead in many a difficult moment. I am not likely to forget what I owe to the knowledge, generosity, and courage of Katherine S. Dreier, who opened to me in 1935 her pioneer collection of modern art. At this moment I think also of all my classes since I began teaching in 1939 and the host of students who have accompanied me in the exploration of the world of art.

My colleagues at the University of Virginia—Malcolm Bell III for ancient art, John J. Yiannias for Byzantine and early medieval, Marion Roberts Sargent for late medieval and Northern Renaissance, Keith P. F. Moxey for Baroque, and David Winter for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—read the sections of the manuscript that pertain to their special fields, gave me the benefit of their learning and insight, caught errors of fact and interpretation, and made many crucial suggestions.

I am deeply appreciative of the confidence of Harry N. Abrams for having entrusted me with the task of writing this book, and grateful to the unforgettable Milton S. Fox for starting me off on it, and to the patient Paul Anbinder for having put up with the innumerable delays in completing it. My thanks also go to Margaret Kaplan and to John P. O'Neill, who has an eagle eye in the pursuit of an error, for their invaluable editorial assistance, and to Barbara Lyons, who—with infinite labor—assembled all the illustrative materials.

**My final debt is to Janice F. Gurley, for four years the faithful secretary of the Art Department at the University of Virginia, who typed every word of the manuscript in her spare time.**

Frederick Hartt  
Old Ordinary  
Charlottesville, Virginia

May 25, 1975

The news of Professor Meiss' tragic death has reached me only after this manuscript went to press. Now I must add to my acknowledgment of lifelong indebtedness to Professor Meiss this halting expression of deep personal grief at his loss.

Frederick Hartt  
Bergen, Norway

July 6, 1975

Editor's Note: In the preparation of Volume I for publication, the editor wishes to acknowledge the assistance of Stephanie M. O'Neill, Ann Luce (captions); Thomas W. Hut (time lines); Grace Sowerwine (glossary); Neil D. Thompson (bibliography); and Nora Beeson (index). In the preparation of Volume II for publication, the editor wishes to acknowledge the assistance of Thomas W. Hut, Maryan Schachter (captions); Thomas W. Hut (time lines); Grace Sowerwine (glossary); Neil D. Thompson (bibliography); and Ellen Grand and Susan Bradford (index). The maps for both volumes were created by Rafael D. Palacios.

Volume I was designed by Michael Perpich, and Volume II was designed by Nai Chang. Preparation and production were by Patrick Cunningham, Ashton Newton, Julie Bergen, and Robin Fox.

John P. O'Neill, Editor

# The Nature Of Art

What is art? That question would have been answered differently in almost every epoch of human history. The word *art* comes from the Latin *ars*, meaning skill, way, or method. It could in ancient times be applied to professional occupations, such as *artes ingenuae* (honorable professions), as distinguished from *artes sordidae* (the occupations of slaves). It could mean the rules or theory of an occupation, such as *ars poetica* (the laws of poetry), the products of the various arts, or even the conduct or character of a person. In the Middle Ages the word meant almost exclusively activities or professions. There were the liberal arts, consisting of the trivium, concerned with words: grammar, logic, and rhetoric; and the quadrivium, dealing with numbers: arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy. The mechanical arts, which required from the beginning the use of the hand, could include any number of pursuits, not excepting painting, sculpture, and architecture. In medieval Italy the *arti* were the guilds—associations of tradesmen, manufacturers, and craftsmen—on which the political structure of the republics was based.

Many of the ancient and medieval meanings of the word *art* are still in force. We speak of the art of cooking, without implying that its practitioners are to be ranked with Michelangelo or Monet; of the art of medicine, without ascribing to that essential profession any “artistic” qualities. We can even call a person’s behavior “artful,” without implying a compliment, or a woman’s appearance as determined less by nature than by art, without suggesting inspiration. We have the current term “performing arts,” which has come in the second half of the twentieth century to mean any artistic activity that takes place during a period of time before an audience. The expression “liberal arts” still persists, and in modern education has come to include every subject from algebra to zoology, as long as it does not specifically prepare a student to embark on a moneymaking activity, in contradistinction to “professional education” and “vocational training,” which do.

In the course of time, however, at least since the sixteenth century, the term *art* has taken on in most modern societies the implication of aesthetic appreciation, that is, of enjoyment through what are considered the nobler senses of sight and hearing. It does not matter whether such enjoyment is the primary purpose of a work of art, as long as it is a major factor in determining character, appearance, or style. That consideration is crucial in regard to architecture, which exists first of all to provide shelter. A great building is a work of art by general agreement quite as much as a great statue or a great painting, regardless of its purpose, if it provides enjoyment. But great speeches, on the other hand, no matter how moving they were when originally delivered, or in such cases as Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address still are, experience difficulty in being admitted to the category of art, since their skill is directed not to pleasing the listener but to convincing him. And works of philosophy, no matter how magnificently written, are not generally considered art since their absorbing purpose is the consideration of abstract ideas, in the course of which their beauty of phrase is incidental.

Music, the dance, and every form of literature are arts in the modern sense of the word, since the energies of the writer, composer, or performer are dedicated to an enjoyable experience. It should be noted, however, that intense enjoyment can and often does consist in the appreciation of the artist’s skill and understanding in the presentation—of anything whatsoever, even an object or person generally considered ugly, or a situation, which, if it occurred to the spectator in real life, or to anyone else before his eyes, or even to distant persons in a newspaper account or on a television screen, would be experienced as acutely painful or distasteful—as long as the observer is convinced that that situation has been conveyed with a full realization of the human values involved.

Finally, when we refer to art today we generally mean activities that appeal to sight alone and do not require temporal performance, the so-called visual arts. When



we speak of an artist, we think first of all of a painter or a sculptor, and secondly—perhaps—of an architect, even though a great architect *is* a great artist and in many regions and periods, such as ancient Greece and Rome and the Middle Ages in Europe, architecture was the leading art. Art schools, or schools of fine arts, may or may not include music or drama, never include professional writing, but never exclude painting and sculpture. Often, due to its special technical nature, architecture requires a separate school. In England, where architecture was a respectable profession for a gentleman when painting and sculpture were still viewed with some distrust, the titles of books can include the phrase “art and architecture,” although in the United States the term art is all-inclusive.

That the purpose of a work of art is to be enjoyed means, of course, that the experience of works of art can greatly enrich our lives, not only while we are actually looking at them but also in retrospect. The comparison of works of art with each other, and the analysis of their style and character, can be a rewarding intellectual occupation, from which we emerge with sharpened perceptions and enlarged mental horizons. The experience of the vision of artists from many periods can also draw our attention to aspects of our surroundings that we had previously overlooked, and can greatly enhance our awareness of beauty (and ugliness) in daily life, everywhere.

But there is a bridge that must be crossed before we can readily understand works of art, and that bridge is experience. It is difficult to enjoy something that seems strange and, therefore, uncomfortable. (On the other hand, it is difficult to enjoy something we have seen or heard too often; Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony is a sublime work of music, but after the Beethoven Bicentennial of 1970 some listeners would willingly give it a rest.) Few great works of art seem great the first time we see them unless we can establish some connection between them and our own lives. But the more works of art we see, and the wider their variety and the contrast among them, the more our artistic experience deepens and strengthens. It is thus much easier for people who have seen and analyzed a great many works of art over a period of years to understand something new, as long as such observers do not come to new experiences with their minds already made up.

I clearly remember periods in my youth when works of archaic, medieval, or contemporary art seemed remote, strange, and even repulsive. It is easy for me to put myself in the place of today’s student, who may at first experience many of the same reactions. Even after many years of looking at contemporary art, I found it difficult to accept immediately the work of Jackson Pollock; conversely, after ten years of enjoyment of Pollock and the other Abstract Expressionists, the shaped canvases of Frank Stella seemed completely unacceptable. The only cure for hostile reactions is constant exposure, study, and

analysis. Interestingly enough, however, works of art without real quality or depth, such as most advertising art, let us say, or the mass-produced pseudolandscapes sold in department stores, will not get better no matter how long one looks at them. Analysis discloses only their utter emptiness. Conversely, to observers with long experience of works of art strangeness and newness may seem virtues, and the new may be automatically accepted as good just because it is new. Again, time tends to bring to the surface any errors implicit in such hasty judgments.

One highly successful course at an American university starts the student with what is easiest for him to understand and like, and that is French Impressionism of the nineteenth century, which in these days of beautiful colorslides packs more students into classrooms than any other style or period. This is not surprising, as enjoyment of sunlight and the out-of-doors is a vivid aspect of the experience of late twentieth-century youth. From Impressionism, with its dazzling views of sunlight translated into spots of colored paint, the course works backward to other less familiar periods, which bring out other aspects of human life, and finally moves forward to those innovations of contemporary art that are less easy to accept at first.

If our appreciation of art is subject to alterations brought about by time and experience, what then is quality? What makes a work of art good? Are there standards of artistic value? These essential questions, perpetually asked anew by each person contemplating the nature and meaning of art, elude satisfactory answer on a verbal plane. One can only give examples, and even these are sure to be confusing and contradictory. The nineteenth-century American poet Emily Dickinson was once asked how she knew when a piece of verse was really poetry. “When it takes the top of your head off,” she replied. But what if a work of art that ought to take the top of your head off obstinately refuses to do so? Demonstrably, the same work that deeply moves some viewers is totally unrewarding to others. And, as we have seen, time and experience can change the attitude of even a relatively experienced person.

Often a dynamic new period in the history of art will find the works of the preceding period so distasteful as to invite destruction, and countless works of art, many doubtless of very high quality, have perished simply because the next generation did not like them. (As we shall presently see, there are other motives for destruction as well.) Interestingly enough, even observers of long experience—in art there really are no “experts”—can disagree in matters of quality. The author recalls a recent discussion between two equally sensitive and learned colleagues in the field of nineteenth-century painting over the relative merits of Manet and Monet, contemporaries in the evolution of French nineteenth-century Impressionism. To one scholar Manet was a genius and

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Monet a relatively weak painter, while to the other Monet was one of the great innovators of history and Manet a sharply limited artistic personality.

The twentieth century, blessed by methods of reproduction of works of art never before available, has given readers an unprecedented possibility of access to works of art of the widest variety of styles, periods, and national origins. Incidentally, André Malraux in his book, *The Museum Without Walls*, has pointed out the dangers of this very opportunity in reducing works of art of every size and character to approximately the same dimensions and texture. There is, of course, no substitute for the direct experience of the real work of art, sometimes overwhelming in its intensity no matter how many times the student has seen reproductions in books and on the lecture screen. One cannot truly understand a painting until one can see in person the quality of its actual surface, nor a work of sculpture until one can walk around it. Most of all, the space and scale of architecture can simply not be reproduced on a flat surface and on the scale of a book illustration. Even the best of slides can give the observer little idea of how it feels to be enveloped by the space, forms, and colors of a Gothic cathedral. But at least modern methods can afford the reader the possibility of comparison between artists, periods, and styles seldom easily available for experience in the same museum, no matter how large and comprehensive.

The ideal of the twentieth century is to like every good work of art. There is an obvious advantage in such an attitude—one gains that many more wonderful experiences. But total catholicity of taste is probably impossible. There are inborn differences between people that no amount of experience can change. Some will always prefer classical, balanced works of art, others romantic and dynamic ones. Some will enjoy the most refined and sophisticated periods in the history of art, others the most direct and primitive. If after reading many books and seeing many works of art the student admits to ineradicable personal preferences and even blind spots, he should by no means be ashamed of them. Barriers of temperament are natural and should be expected. But—and this is all-important—such admissions should come *after*, not before, a wholehearted attempt to accept the most disparate works of art on their own grounds; one must not merely condemn them because they are unfamiliar. The world of art is wide and rich, and there is room in it for every person who wants to learn, to experience, above all to *see*.

## THE PURPOSES OF ART

Why do people make works of art? In modern life the question is not hard to answer. People make works of art because they want to, because they enjoy the excitement of creation and the feeling of achievement, not to speak of the triumph of translating their sensory impressions of

the visible world into a personal language of lines, forms, and colors. We must remember, however, that such enjoyments, stronger in some than in others—in fact, at times so strong that for their sake an individual will willingly renounce the relative security of a niche in commerce or industry for the unpredictable life of an artist—relate to our contemporary, predominantly secular Western society, in which everyone has had some chance, no matter how elementary, to draw, paint, or model in grade school, and in which individual talents and preferences are usually discovered quite early.

This was not always so. Even in the relatively recent past artistic activity of any sort played no part whatever in education in any country, yet art flourished nonetheless. Today the artist is, with the exception of the architect, characteristically on his own. He generally works to please himself, and seldom on commission. Often he complains that a commission hampers him in the development of his individual style, or in the “expression” of himself. This, too, was not always so. Throughout most of history, with the exception of a relatively late period in the development of Greek culture, and up to the seventeenth century in certain European countries—even later in others—the artist worked characteristically on commission, and never thought of undertaking a major work without the support of a patron and the security of a legal contract and a substantial advance payment. In most periods of history the artist in any field had a clear and definable place in society, and his creations thus inevitably tended to reflect the desires of his patrons and the forces in his human environment.

Today the desires that prompt patrons, whether private or corporate, to buy works of art are, on the surface at least, aesthetic. Collectors and buyers for museums and business corporations do really like certain kinds of painting, sculpture, and architecture, and experience a deep pleasure in surrounding themselves with beautiful things. But there are other purposes, even today, often as strong as the aesthetic sense and sometimes stronger. Patrons want to have the best, or the latest, which is often equated with the best, in order to acquire or retain social status, sometimes without really seeing or understanding what they buy. An artist who, by whatever means—and these are not always praiseworthy—has “made it” with any well-known New York gallery is relatively certain of selling his works. Without the gallery label, as without the couturier’s label, these works will attract only the most independent and discerning collectors who are willing to risk their money. Inevitably, the thought of eventual salability can, and often does, play a formative role in determining aspects of an artist’s style. It takes a courageous artist to go on turning out works of art that will not sell.

In earlier periods in history these dominant modern factors of aesthetic enjoyment and social prestige were

also important. A great monarch or pope enjoyed hiring talented artists not only to build a palace or a cathedral, but also to paint pictures by no means restricted to portraits of the patron and his family, to carve statues, to illustrate rich manuscripts, or to make splendid jewels—even to complete a magnificent tomb during the patron's lifetime—partly because he enjoyed the beautiful forms and colors, the richness of marble, and the radiance of colored paint or glass, or the glitter of gold and precious stones, but partly also to increase his apparent power and prestige not only in the eyes of his contemporaries but also in the eyes of posterity.

But there were other extremely important factors involved in the production of works of art in past societies; if these factors operate at all in the twentieth century (and they probably do), they are much harder to locate and define now than in previous epochs. These factors may be considered under the heading of social demands on art, and they are by no means chiefly aesthetic. Such demands could, in theory, be satisfied with works of art of a wide variety of styles, as long as the subjects are rendered according to the patron's wishes. In almost every society, up to and probably including the present, what we call today *iconography* (from two Greek words meaning *image* and *write*), that is, the subject matter of art, is of primary importance. Even today, amusingly enough, a painting of an attractive young person will sell more easily and at a higher price than a work of equal quality by the same artist representing an old person, because in contemporary Western society few enjoy contemplating the results of the aging process. And even with the phenomenon of what is known as "aesthetic distance"—the barrier placed by the canvas or the stage, the very idea of representation, between the viewer and reality—there are pictures of violence that few would enjoy in their dining room or bedroom.

In the past iconography was generally related predominantly to religion or politics or both, and was therefore likely to be systematic. In a religious building the subjects of wall paintings, stained-glass windows, or sculpture were usually worked out by the patron, often with the help of a learned adviser, so as to narrate in the proper order scenes from the lives of sacred beings, or to present important doctrines in visible form through an array of images in which degree of sanctity, not aesthetic preference, determined order and placing, and even color might have been theologically prescribed. The artist was usually presented with such a program and required to execute it. Sometimes, as in the wall paintings in the interior of Byzantine churches, the subjects, the ways of representing them, and the places in which they could be painted were codified down to the smallest detail. Such matters were keyed delicately to the Liturgy, and no variation could be permitted without doing violence to the very reason why such a church was built.

In such cases, before passing aesthetic judgment on what is known as a cycle of religious works of art, which

may often assume the character of a clear-cut visual pattern, we have to consider the ritual and the theology on which the order of the scenes was founded. Such knowledge does not merely help us to understand certain aspects of order and pattern, it quite literally explains them. Even in those periods in history in which powerful artistic personalities were consulted on the order of scenes and on the manner of representation, and worked in sometimes sympathetic, sometimes controversial relationship with the patron and his advisers, the artist was still not free to choose any subjects his fancy might suggest.

Obviously, in regard to secular subjects as well, when the patron wished to commemorate in form and color his historic deeds, those of his ancestors and allies, the quality of his government, and the defeats of his enemies, he was certain to direct the artist as to how these should be represented. Only an extremely learned artist, in certain relatively late periods of historic development, might occasionally be in a position to make crucial decisions regarding secular iconography on his own, and even then only with the general approval of the patron. Often in regard to both religious and secular subjects the artist worked with the aid of iconographic handbooks compiled for the purpose.

Often the patron, religious or secular, dictated some of the principal colors to be used, such as gold or blue, and in what proportion. Also, although we have little documentary evidence, the desires of the secular or religious patron for an effect aiming at such qualities as grandeur, magnificence, austerity, or delicacy were perforce taken into consideration by the artist, and therefore determined the prevailing mood of a work of art. We know of many instances in which religious or secular works of art were refused as being unsuitable to the purpose for which they had been commissioned, or in which the artist was required to change certain crucial aspects that offended the patron. A sensitive and discerning study of the subjects of contemporary art—in those cases in which subjects are still recognizable—might well suggest patterns of social preference that have influenced the artist without his being fully aware of them.

In a somewhat less precise manner patronage, in exercising an influence on iconography, may also affect style. For example, Christianity held the representation of the nude human body in horror, save in such specific instances as when the soul appears naked before God for judgment or when a saint is stripped (shamed) before martyrdom. It is not likely, therefore, that art thoroughly dominated by rigorous forms of Christianity, as in certain periods during the Middle Ages, could show much comprehension of or interest in the movement of the clothed human figure, which can only be understood through careful study of the human body, its structure and possibilities, in an uncovered state. Similarly, a culture that placed a high evaluation on the total human being, including his physical enjoyment and athletic

prowess, such as that of ancient Greece with its divinely protected Olympic Games, and displayed images of the nude human body in places of great prominence is likely to place certain instinctive restrictions on the use of colors and ornaments that would surpass the body in brilliance, and render it insignificant in an artistic whole.

The study of iconography can also assist us in the understanding of what one might call the magical aspects of works of art. For the process of representation has always seemed to have something magical about it. Totems and symbols in early societies warded off evil spirits and propitiated favorable ones. Even today certain still primitive peoples will defend themselves by force against the taking of photographs, which might drain off some of their strength. In many societies the injury of an image of a hated person is deemed to aid in bringing about his illness or death. Enemies are still burned in effigy, and a national flag, an object devoid of any inherent material powers, is so potent a symbol as to be able to excite enormous emotional reactions; laws are made to govern its care and use, and to protect it from disrespect.

In ancient times, when a Greek or Roman city-state was defeated in battle, the conquerors often made a point of destroying or carrying off the statues from the enemy's temples, because in so doing they deprived the enemy of his gods and, therefore, of his power—even though the defeated inhabitants might profess to believe their deities resided in some aspect of nature, such as the sky or the sea. The instances of miracle-working images in the history of Christianity are innumerable, and still occur from time to time. In Serbian medieval frescoes few saints within reach of the worshiper retain both eyes; one has usually been gouged out and ground to powder, which was popularly believed to have a curative effect on eye diseases. During World War II in Tuscany, by no means an uneducated region of Italy, rural populations who seldom or never looked at their religious images, sometimes locked up in unused churches, refused to allow them to be removed for urgently needed restoration for fear of losing their magical protection.

Many today feel a power emanating from a great work of art so strong that it cannot be explained on material grounds. A picture may be said to "fill a room" in which it occupies only a small fragment of wall surface, or a building to "dominate a town" when in reality it constitutes a negligible fraction of the total volume of the place, simply because of the supernatural power we still instinctively tend to attribute to man-made images or forms. There are actions we hesitate to perform or words we refrain from saying in the presence of certain kinds of images or symbols, or in certain interiors, although no words of ours, nor even actions short of physical contact, can have the slightest effect on these inanimate objects or environments.

Finally, the very existence or nonexistence of works of art has been until relatively recent times due first of all to their subjects. The patron wanted a statue or a picture of

a god, a saint, an event, or a person, not primarily because of its beauty—although this has always been an exceedingly important factor—but for a specific iconographic purpose. Even in seventeenth-century Holland, in the early days of the open market for works of art, the artist often painted certain kinds of subjects rather than others because he thought they would readily find buyers.

The converse is often true. The Second Commandment, when taken literally, severely limited if it did not indeed rule out entirely the creation of religious images by the Hebrews, the Muslims, and the Calvinists. Even more unhappily, strict interpretation of this and other religious prohibitions has resulted in the mutilation or total destruction of countless works of art, often of the highest quality, and sometimes in the presence of their creators. Many of the tragic losses of Greek, Roman, early Byzantine, medieval English, and Netherlandish art have been due to what we might term destruction for anti-iconographic purposes, even when the very groups carrying out the destruction nonetheless encouraged the production of secular images or decorations, such as plant and animal ornament, portraiture, landscapes, or still lifes. Even in the primarily utilitarian art of architecture the deterioration or demolition of historic churches and country houses in twentieth-century England is often traceable to their being no longer needed as symbols of a church that is losing its adherents or a ruling class that has been prevented by economic means from continuing to rule. Often these very structures could conceivably have been utilized for other purposes, but perish because they are felt to be unsuitable.

It is the iconographic purpose of art, especially in the representation of events or ideas but also in the depiction of people and of nature, that has given the work of art its occasionally quite strong affinity with religion. An artist can be so deeply moved by religious meditation, or by the contemplation of human beauty or human suffering, or by communion with nature that he can create compelling works of art that offer a strong parallel to religious experience. The present century began with a meticulous, dispassionate, and impersonal study, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, by William James in 1902, and has offered few celebrated examples of individual religious experience that could compare to those that abound in past ages. In the twentieth century, then, at least in the great urban centers of Western civilization, the religious art of the past generally offers the most persuasive access to religious ideas. So effective can be religious art that many scholars who profess agnosticism find themselves unconsciously dealing with religious images with the same reverence as if they were confirmed believers; some, indeed, are converted by prolonged contact with religious art, music, or literature.

The links between art and religion are observed at their strongest in the creative act itself, which mystifies even the artist. However carefully the process of creation can be documented in preparatory sketches and models for



the finished work of art, or in the twentieth century by photographs of successive stages in the evolution of a single canvas, or even filmed while the artist is actually at work, it still eludes our understanding. We know it exists, it commands our awe, but we cannot hope to define, analyze, or explain it. In the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition, and in many other religions as well, God (or the gods) plays the role of an artist. God is the creator of the universe and of all living beings, chiefly man. Even those who profess disbelief in a personal god nonetheless often speak of creative power or creative energy as inherent in the natural world, although they are at a loss to explain such a concept.

In medieval art God is often represented as an artist, sometimes specifically as an architect, tracing with a gigantic compass a system and an order upon the earth, which was previously "without form, and void." Conversely, in certain periods artists themselves have been considered to be endowed with divine or quasi-divine powers. Certain artists (alas, all too few) have been considered saints. Soon after his death Raphael was called "divine." Michelangelo was often so addressed during his lifetime, in his presence or on paper. The intense emotion art lovers sometimes feel in the presence of overpowering works of art is clearly akin to religious experience. An individual can become carried away and unable to move in the presence of the stained-glass windows of Chartres Cathedral, let us say, or of the *David* by Michelangelo.

This is not to say that those who do not react so strongly, or even those works of art that were not made to inspire such feelings, do not deserve their own important place in the world of art. Many works of art in the past, and many more today, were made for purposes that have a merely peripheral iconographic intent. We enjoy a well-painted realistic picture of a pleasant landscape partly because it is a pleasant landscape, with no purpose in any iconographic system, and partly because it possesses in itself agreeable shapes and colors. Furthermore, a jewel, an arch or column, a passage of nonrepresentational ornament, or a work of abstract art may be felt as beautiful entirely in and for itself. In every country and period there have been visual configurations that are difficult or even impossible to trace to any overt symbolic purpose, yet people have ordered them, made them, bought them, or imitated them just because they are felt to have strong aesthetic properties in themselves.

In most societies, however, such configurations have been limited to decoration, sometimes to personal embellishment. Only when such nonrepresentational images as those in Christian art (the Cross, the Alpha and Omega, the initial letters in illuminated manuscripts) are endowed with strong symbolic significance have they been raised to a considerably higher level, and permitted to assume prominent positions (except, of course, in architecture, where certain basic forms exist primarily of constructional necessity and often symbolize nothing). Only in the twentieth century have people created works

of painting, sculpture, or graphics with no recognizable subjects, the so-called abstractions.

Abstractions often do suggest some external object or event, but such suggestions generally tell us more about the observer's psychological makeup, on the analogy of a Rorschach test, than about the artist's intention. Generally, abstractions have been made to stand or fall on their own merits as beautiful—or otherwise impressive—objects without reference to a subject. Abstractions, too, can excite strong emotion (negative, if we are not attuned to looking at them). But they can please quite independently of the change of taste and fashion. Abstractions depend on the operation of form, line, color, mass, space, rhythm, and other aesthetic properties on the human consciousness. "Laws" have been designed to explain or even supposedly to limit such effects, but these laws seem to have been honored as much in the breach as in the observance.

Abstract art is frequently paralleled with music, which, at least since the Middle Ages, very often symbolizes or represents absolutely nothing, and has its own laws, formulated as harmony, counterpoint, and so forth. Historically, all artistic laws exist to be broken. Contemporary music disobeys all the time-honored rules of Western tradition, sometimes at its peril, but often with great success. The variety of forms and images produced by the new abstract art is no less rich than that of past works of representational art, and places the same strain on our catholicity of taste.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF STYLES

Why do styles in art change? Since the impressions of man and nature transmitted by light to the retina follow the same principles with any healthy pair of eyes in any era, why are the accounts of visual experience given by artists so strikingly different from one period to the next? Are there laws that govern and, therefore, if discovered can explain to our satisfaction the transformation between the style of one period in the history of art, such as Gothic, Renaissance, or Baroque, and the next? Or the change from one phase of style to the next in any given period, or within the work of a single artist? Questions such as these would seem to be basic for our understanding of the history of art. Yet, although the literature on the history of art is colossal and ever-growing, and comprises countless studies on almost every aspect of the art of every period and every region, these basic questions do not seem to have been often asked in modern times. Generally, however, we can deduce an art historian's underlying assumptions about the principles of historic change from the way his account proceeds from the analysis of one stylistic phase to the next.

The earliest explanations of stylistic development we know anything about can be classified as *evolutionary in a technical sense*. We possess no complete ancient account of the theory of artistic development, but

references to lost Greek writings, especially those of the Hellenistic sculptor Xenokrates, have been preserved in the *Natural History* of the Roman writer Pliny the Elder (A.D. 23–79). The Greeks appear to have assumed a steady progression from easy to constantly more difficult stages of technical achievement, such as that from pure outline drawing to the use of a single color, then of two colors, then of a number of colors, and in a culminating stage of technical perfection to the total harmony of all the colors, exemplified in the art of the perfect painter of the fourth century B.C., Apelles (none of whose works survive). This kind of thinking, which parallels progress in representation with that in the acquisition of any other kind of technical skill, is easy enough to understand, but tends to depreciate the importance of early stages in any evolutionary sequence. Implicit also in such thinking is the idea of a summit of perfection beyond which no artist can ascend, and from which the way leads only downward, unless every now and then a later artist can recapture the lost glories of a Golden Age.

The Middle Ages, for which history was already fixed in all its major outlines by the drama of the Fall and Salvation of man, had little notion of history in the modern sense of the word, and gave us only chronologies of events. Artists were seldom named, since they were considered mere mechanical executants of the commissions of great patrons, such as princes or bishops. But since the beginning of the revival of interest in Classical antiquity in Italy in the fourteenth century, a revival of ancient artistic style has always been possible. The conviction that such a revival was taking place was clearly expressed by a number of writers and artists, such as the poet Petrarch in the fourteenth century and the sculptor Ghiberti in the fifteenth.

A new pattern of art-historical thinking, which can be characterized as *evolutionary in a biographical sense*, is stated in the writings of the sixteenth-century Italian architect, painter, and decorator Giorgio Vasari, who has often been called the first art historian. Vasari undertook an ambitious series of lives of the artists, first published in 1550 and then revised and enlarged in 1568; his account began with Cimabue and arrived at Vasari's own time. He was the first to compare the development of art to the life of a human being, saying that the arts, "like human bodies, have their birth, their growing up, their growing old and their dying." For him Cimabue and Giotto (see fig. 513, colorplate 70) represented the birth (or more properly the rebirth) of art, after its eclipse during the Middle Ages, the fifteenth century its youth, the High Renaissance—especially Michelangelo—its maturity, and his own period, during Michelangelo's last years and after his death, its old age.

Vasari refrained from making uncomfortable predictions about the death of art after his time, but his successors were not so wise. Much of the theoretical and historical writing on art during the seventeenth century looks backward nostalgically to the lost glories of the

High Renaissance. In such works only those contemporary artists are praised who attempted to revive High Renaissance principles, and little sympathy is shown with the vital artistic currents of the Baroque, then going on in force on every side of the writers. This Vasarian pattern of thought underlies a surprising amount of writing about art well into the eighteenth century, during which the three main phases of Greek art—archaic, Classical, and fourth-century—were paralleled with the three principal stages in the development of Renaissance art. Roman art became at best an attempt to revive the Golden Age of fifth-century Greece, at worst the decadent precursor of the "barbaric" Middle Ages. Every now and then one can still read contemporary accounts of the death of art, invariably, to borrow Mark Twain's famous remark about his own reported demise, "greatly exaggerated."

Meanwhile, many adventurous persons in the mid-eighteenth century had already begun to devote considerable interest and study to medieval art, and the problem of art-historical development took on a new dimension, which gradually superseded the biographical-evolutionary premise. In the formerly despised art of the Middle Ages, sensitive observers began to discover considerable aesthetic charm, which had little or nothing to do with ancient Greek principles. No attempt was at first made to impose on this newly evaluated art any system of development; the facts had first to be ascertained. Then in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries followed an awakening of interest in the art of the Near and Far East and in the twentieth a fascination with "primitive" art as having an aesthetic as well as a merely ethnological attraction.

Imperceptibly, the ideas of Charles Darwin (1809–82) began to affect the thought of art historians, and a third tendency, seldom clearly expressed but often implicit in the methods and evaluations of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century writers, began to make itself felt, tending to explain stylistic change according to an inherent process that we might call *evolutionary in a biological sense*. Ambitious histories were written setting forth the art of entire nations or civilizations, and monographs analyzing the careers of individual artists, in an orderly manner proceeding from early to late works as if from elementary to more advanced stages. The biological-evolutionary pattern may recall that of the Greek technical theory of evolution, save that it presupposes an underlying affinity with the evolutionary process in nature rather than being derived from the acquisition of increasing technical competence, and was never to recognize any stage of ultimate perfection.

The biological-evolutionary tendency underlies much art-historical writing and thinking even today, and is evident in the frequent use of the word *evolution*, generally in a Darwinian sense. Clear evolutionary patterns can be persuasively demonstrated in the arts of certain countries, such as ancient Greece, for example, or in the architecture of French cathedrals during the Gothic



period. The German art historian Heinrich Wölfflin (1864–1945) published several important studies culminating in 1915 in a highly influential work called *Basic Concepts of Art History* (now translated as *Principles of Art History*), in which he developed a set of five carefully contrasted categories to demonstrate the change from Renaissance to Baroque as a model for the evolution of style in general.

As we examine the art of many eras, however, it becomes apparent that artistic evolution does not always proceed in an orderly fashion. In ancient Egypt, for example, after an initial phase lasting for about two centuries, a complete system of conventions for representing the human figure in painting and sculpture was devised shortly after the beginning of the third millennium B.C. (see fig. 55) and changed very little—with the exception of a revolutionary period during the reign of a single monarch—for nearly three thousand years thereafter. Certainly, one cannot speak of evolution from simple to complex, or indeed of any evolution at all. Even more difficult to explain in terms of any evolutionary theory is the sudden decline in interest in the naturalistic representation of the human figure and the surrounding world in late Roman art (see fig. 281), as compared to the subtle, complex, and complete Greek and early Roman systems of representation, which had just preceded this problematic period. It looks, on the surface at least, as if the evolutionary clock had been turned backward and now moved from the complex to the simple.

There are other cases of striking *devolutions* closer to our own time. Jacques Louis David (1748–1825), a painter brought up in the highly developed tradition of Rococo art, with its soft figures, fluid colors, and easy movement of forms in space (see Vol. 2, fig. 330), understandable according to Wölfflin's theory as the ultimate phase of the Baroque, suddenly reverted to a strict Classicism of form and design based partly, at least, on the Renaissance (see Vol. 2, fig. 366). And artists of the twentieth century have deserted the "late" phases of the developmental cycle en masse, often taking as their models the arts of extremely early phases in man's development (or so they thought)—especially those of Africa and the South Seas (see fig. 35). Obviously, there must be some other explanation of such striking reversals of the evolutionary process.

A fourth major tendency of art-historical interpretation, which might be described as *evolutionary in a sociological sense*, has emerged during the twentieth century. Many historians have written about separate periods or events in the history of art along sociological lines, but the most ambitious and comprehensive attempt has been the *Social History of Art* (1951), strongly colored by Marxist theory, by the Hungarian-born art historian Arnold Hauser. Both Hauser and others have been able to demonstrate what appear to be strong interconnections between forms and methods of representa-

tion in art and the demands of the societies for which these works were produced.

Often, however, sociological explanations fail to hold up when examined minutely in an attempt to demonstrate specific examples. How does one explain, for example, the simultaneous coexistence of two or more quite different—even mutually antagonistic—styles, representative examples of which were bought or commissioned by persons of the same social class or even by the selfsame person? Or how can one detect any sociological reason for the frequently abrupt reversal in styles that characterizes the twentieth century, when a whole school of art, formerly accepted as the latest and best, can suddenly find itself out on a limb, the victim of a new and completely unforeseen stylistic innovation?

In these volumes no single theory is consistently followed. Stylistic tendencies or preferences are regarded as individual instances, often explicable by widely differing interpretations (the notion of cause and effect in the history of art is always dangerous), sometimes not responsive to any clear-cut explanation. Three of the four theories discussed above are still useful in different ways and at different moments. The second of the four, the biographical premise beloved by Vasari, his Renaissance contemporaries, and his seventeenth-century followers, is generally renounced as suffering from a fallacious kind of reasoning by analogy. Vasari's premise was probably abandoned as an indirect consequence of the reevaluation of the Middle Ages, which he had consigned to outer darkness.

There is, however, something inherently valuable about the Greek theory of technical evolution. This can be shown to correspond, for example, to the learning history of a given individual, who builds new experiences into patterns created by earlier ones, and may be said to evolve from stage to stage of always greater relative difficulty. The stopping point in such a cycle might correspond to the gradual weakening of the ability to learn, and varies widely among individuals. Certain artists never cease developing, others reach their peak at a certain moment and repeat themselves endlessly thereafter. From the achievements of one artist, the next takes over, and the developmental process continues. The element of competition also plays its part, as in the Gothic period when cathedral builders were trying to outdo each other in height and lightness of structure (see fig. 476), or the Impressionist period, when painters worked side by side attempting to seize the most fugitive aspects of sunlight and color (see Vol. 2, fig. 421). Such an orderly development of refinements on the original idea motivating a school of artists can also be made to correspond to the biological-evolutionary theory, showing (as it seems) a certain inherent momentum. So, in point of fact, the Greek theory perhaps stands up a little better than the pseudo-Darwinian one, which like the notions of Vasari suffers somewhat from the effects of reasoning by

analogy. At least the Greek account corresponds to the observable circumstances of life in a studio or a workshop, or for that matter a scientific laboratory.

But what of the sudden about-faces, like that of David, whose art might be considered to fit the biological-evolutionary notion of a mutation, a sharp change that produces, unpredictably, an entirely new species? Such mutations have often been explained on sociological and historical grounds, and in certain instances they may well be susceptible to such interpretations. David, however, has been the most striking example because during the French Revolution he was artistic dictator of France and responsible for all artistic standards. His first thoroughly Neoclassic picture, the *Oath of the Horatii* (see Vol. 2, fig. 366), would seem at first glance to be sternly republican in subject as well as revolutionary in form. This probability is clouded by the fact that the work was painted in 1784–85, after David had been living in Rome for years, far from the French political scene; that it glorified an incident that was supposed to have taken place under the Roman *kingdom*; and that it was com-

missioned by King Louis XVI, at that time in little danger of losing either his throne or his head.

Changes of style may result from sheer boredom. When a given style has been around to the point of saturation, artists and public alike may thirst for something new. Or mutations may even occur from time to time through purely accidental discoveries, a factor that has yet to be thoroughly explored. On investigation, apparent artistic accidents may turn out to be in reality the result of subconscious tendencies that had long been brewing in an artist's mind, and that almost any striking external event could bring into full play. The only certainty in art-historical studies is that as we try to penetrate deeply into the work of art, to understand it fully, and to conjecture why and how it came to be as it is we must examine carefully in each individual instance all the factors that might have been brought to bear on the act of creation, and regard with healthy skepticism any theory that might tend to place a limitation on the still largely mysterious and totally unpredictable forces of human creativity.

