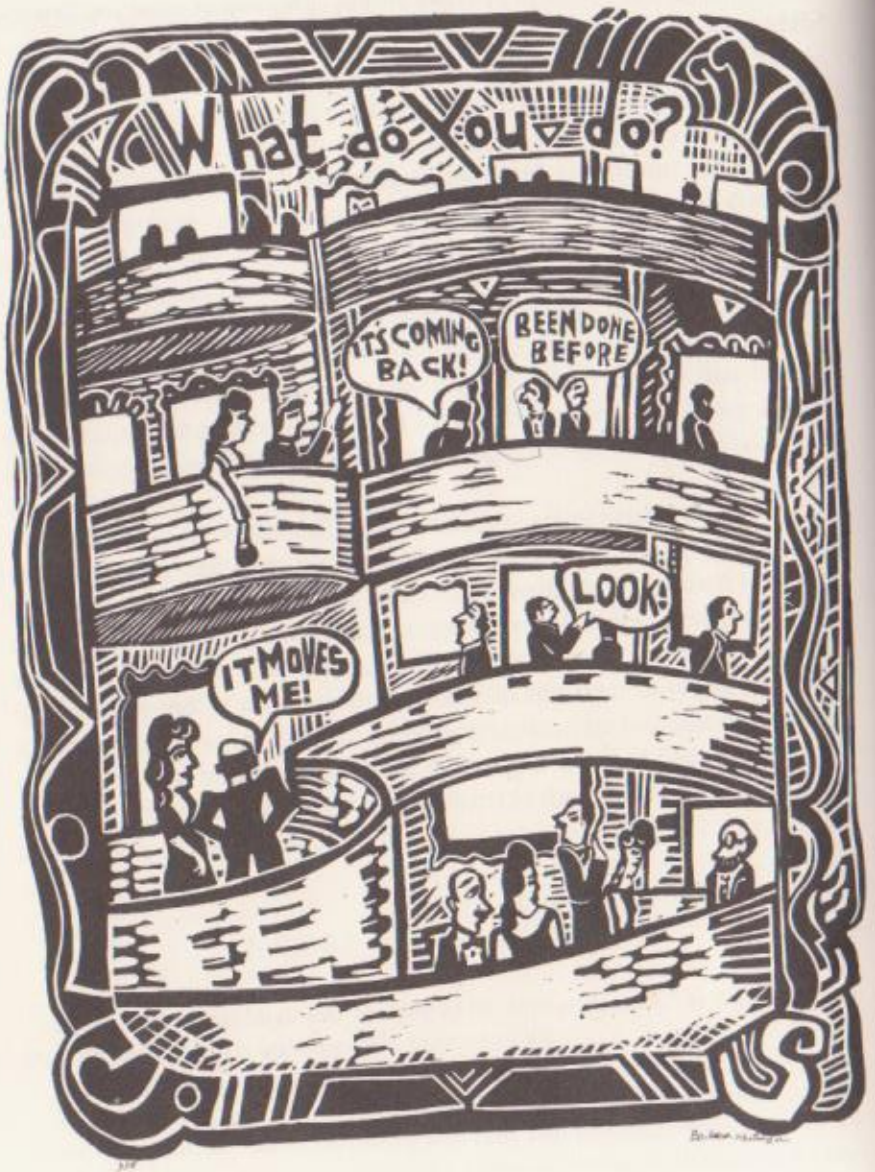


THE MONOCHROME SHOW (1995) BY BARBARA WESTMAN. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

CHAPTER NINE

The Historical Museum of Monochrome Art

In late 1993, a panel on the work of Robert Ryman took place at the Museum of Modern Art, held in conjunction with a retrospective exhibition of that singularly steadfast painter of mainly white squares. Robert Storr, who curated the exhibition and moderated the panel, gave the latter the title "Abstract Painting: End or Beginning?" His point of departure was precisely that position and indeed the very words around which I organized the last chapter: Douglas Crimp's view that painting was dead and that work such as Ryman's, with its archetypal white squares, could be taken in evidence of painting's internal exhaustion. But evidence was not something the thesis of painting's exhaustion ever required, for one could always find reasons for pronouncing its demise. Alice Neel was a robustly figurative painter, her work filled with comment and feeling, but in 1933, she recalls, Philip Rahv and his friend Lionel Phelps, "both radicals," came to her studio and said "'The easel picture is finished.' And 'Why paint just one person?' And I said 'Don't you know that is the microcosm, because one plus one is a crowd.' But they still said: 'Siqueros paints with duco on walls.' But I said 'We're not up to that, duco on walls.'"[1] Monochrome painting, even white—or at least white on white painting—existed in 1933, though it was almost certainly little known and thought of, at best, as a kind of joke. But the Left found reason enough to declare the death of painting even with so expressive an artist as Neel, if only because she used oils rather than duco, canvas rather than walls, and painted individuals rather than the masses. From time to time the death of painting is pronounced by someone, whatever painting itself may look like. Petronius's *Satyricon*, for example, includes a passage in which the narrator laments the decadence of his age, in which "the fine arts had died, and [the art of] painting . . . had left no trace of itself behind," which the author blames on the love of money. I gather the claim is that the art of painting had been cultivated

for its own sake, but no longer is, and that the chase for "pecuniae" had swamped the cultivation of technique, so that artists had "forgotten how" to make pictures of any value: "There is nothing surprising in the decadence of painting, when all the gods and men think an ingot of gold more beautiful than anything those crazy Greeks, Apeles and Phidias, ever did."[2] This in the second century A.D.!

My own claim about the end of art has to be resolutely distinguished from claims regarding the death of painting. Indeed, painting after the end of art has been extremely vital, but I in any case would not care to pronounce its demise on the basis of monochrome canvases, not unless I subscribed, as Crimp clearly did, to the modernist narrative according to which art progressively strives to achieve identity with its own material basis, and the white monochrome square could then be appreciated in terms of its substraction of color, of form other than its own form, and of shapes other than the one simple shape of the perfect square. Then the white square would seem to mark the end of the line, leaving painting nowhere else to go, and nothing much to do. In any case, Storr gave the panel its brief by opposing Ryman's own view to those of Crimp and many other advanced theorists: "From his vantage point painting in general and abstraction in particular—or what he prefers to call realism—are vital and relatively new forms." Hence the question in the panel's title: End or beginning?

It is striking that almost the same confrontation appears to have been enacted with the first appearance of serious monochrome painting in our century. When Malevich's *Black Square* was first displayed at the great 0–10 exhibition in Petrograd from December 1915 to January 1916, hung diagonally in a corner of a room and near the ceiling in the traditional position of the Russian icon, the association with death was irresistible to critics, one of whom wrote, "The corpse of the Art of Painting, the art of nature with make up added, has been placed in its coffin and marked with the Black Square."[3] The latter was identified by another writer as emblematizing "the cult of emptiness, of darkness, of nothingness." Malevich, naturally enough, saw it as a beginning: "The joy of new things, a new art, newly discovered spaces bursting into flower." Of course, he did not neccessarily mean that the *Black Square* itself was the first work of art in an entire new sequence. He saw it really as an erasure, an emblem of a wiping out of the art of the past, and hence of a break in the narrative of art. At one point he compares it with the Biblical flood. That kind of break came naturally to the avant-garde in its early history—it was part

of the rhetoric of the Armory show with its approriation of the flag of the American Revolution as its logo. So the *Black Square* really was an end, though not, for Malevich at least, the end of painting: it rather made way for Suprematism and new worlds to conquer.

It is characteristic of the inwardness of the art world in the late twentieth century that Storr should see in Ryman's white squares a beginning of a new history to which they belonged. It was, I suppose, rather late in the day to suggest that we required liberation from the art of the past: the avant-garde by 1993 carried a long chain of once revolutionary emblems, like Marley's ghost in Dickens's "A Christmas Carol." In the end, Storr wanted to know, "What does Ryman's work suggest in terms of untested painterly possibilities?" And I suppose the question might be interpreted to mean: can we imagine a narrative for abstract art, which is relatively new, which will be as rich as the narrative of illusionist art turned out to be? Of course, no one at the time of Giotto could have imagined a progress of the kind through which painting went, culminating in Raphael and Leonardo, let alone the astonishing illusionist achievements of French academic painting of the late nineteenth century, and the implication of Ryman's position is that we are, in the history of abstract painting, roughly in a situation parallel to that of Giotto's contemporaries. Can we, really, imagine that abstract painting can yield to the internal drives of a progressive developmental history? Is it thinkable that there will, say in three centuries, be an abstract artist whose work stands to Ryman's as Raphael stands to Giotto? That is a daunting test for the imagination, but it is certainly difficult to think of Ryman's work, however we appreciate it, as a beginning in the sense at least in which Giotto was a beginning in the tremendous Vasarian narrative. So neither disjunct seems altogether appropriate. That it is the end is inappropriate unless we accept the modernist narrative, and that it is a beginning is appropriate only against another narrative it is one purpose of the "end of art" theory to call into question. Of course it could, in the spirit of Malevich, be a beginning not so much in the sense of a first member but of a blank page, a tabula rasa, a symbol of a future in which abstract painting might take place but not against the subtractionist and exclusionary imperatives of the modernist narrative. It could be, as it were, the banner of an open future. That would be one way we might slip between the disjunction's horns, treating the white square neither as beginning nor ending, but as embodying a meaning analogous to that embodied by the *Black Square*. But both readings must then reject the suggestion of emptiness which comes

naturally to mind when one contemplates this genre of art. The monochrome square is dense with meaning. Or its emptiness is less a formal truth than a metaphor—the emptiness left by the flood, the emptiness of the blank page.

I am not certain, from the perspective of art criticism, that the tabula rasa reading is really at all appropriate to Ryman's work, which after all comes relatively recently in a sequence of white paintings beginning with Malevich and taken up by Robert Rauschenberg in a work done at Black Mountain College which had an immense impact on John Cage and, through Cage, on avant-garde sensibility. Ryman, intending a career as a jazz musician, began to paint at a certain point just to see what it would be like,[4] and it is interesting if not instructive to observe that his first paintings, while monochromatic, were not white but, curiously, orange or green—not even primary colors, as one might have imagined he would have used, were we to think of the austerity of white, taken as a metaphor for purity. The De Stijl movement allowed itself only three colors—red, yellow, and blue—and three noncolors—white, gray, and black. These have a certain metaphysical resonance: the colors are the primaries, and the noncolors define the end and midpoints of the axis through the center of the color cone. But orange and green, for someone with this orientation, are mere secondary hues, as suspect to the purist as diagonal lines were to Mondrian, who despised van Doesberg for indulging himself with them. So one can say that whatever the reasons were for Ryman turning to white, they were like those he held for using orange and green, with no metaphysical cosmological implication whatever. When Jennifer Bartlett executed her dot paintings of the 1960s, she arranged them like Cartesian points on a grid, and employed (shades of Duco!) just black and white and the primary colors as they come from the little bottles of Testor's enamel, used for painting models. But she later confided to her profilist, Calvin Tomkins, that "it always made me nervous just to use primary colors. I felt a need for green! I felt no need for orange or violet, but I did need green."[5] This concession to need immediately negates the Neoplatonic overtones of the primary hues and the geometrical ones of the axis of the cone, and makes plain that we are dealing with impulse and subjective inclination. My sense is that green and orange in the case of Ryman preemptively exclude the implication that the white squares have much to do with the white radiance of eternity. But that means that white is not a progressive development of Ryman's work, but rather a disclosure of a personality. His white paintings would have a very different justification and a very different meaning from, say, Malevich's, and their meaning would be somewhat less declamatory than that the tabula rasa metaphor suggests. To find that meaning out, we would have to look closely at Ryman's own thoughts and motivations. That the paintings are white and square will not tell us much: monochrome paintings underdetermine their interpretations. But this is something perhaps always true of painting, which is why, like it or not, criticism has a role to play in the art of painting it does not especially have in literature, though recent trends in literary theory tend to treat texts so much as if they were paintings that one gets the feeling that the mere ability to read will do as little good in the one case as the ability to see does in the other!

I want now to address monochrome painting, and through it the question of the "death of painting," but not directly. I want to lay out a sort of matrix for my discussion which will indicate the difficulty, which in the end is philosophical, in making judgments about beginnings and endings. Monochrome is a good way to facilitate this discussion, just because, on the face of it, it seems to offer so little to talk about. In 1992, I was invited to deliver a lecture on monochrome painting at the Moore College of Art and Design on the occasion of an exhibition of Philadelphia monochrome painters, of whom the enterprising curator, Richard Torcia, found twenty-three working in what evidently struck them as a very fulfilling way in this seemingly inauspicious mode. Had they not heard of the death of painting? The art world is a place in which news of that sort travels very fast. They felt that there was always more to be said with monochrome paintings, and in this they were, as I want to show, right. But let me embed my remarks in a piece of apparatus that at one time seemed extremely promising to me but which gives the wrong kind of reason for thinking them right. This is the *style matrix*, as I called it when, in 1964, I introduced it in perhaps my most influential text, "The Art World."[6] And let's begin by considering a stylistic characterization of an artist between whom and Ryman one might initially if gingerly suppose, in the language of the docent, an "affinity," namely Piero della Francesca.

One might strengthen the claim of an affinity if one made central Piero's preoccupation with geometry and the fact that he wrote a celebrated treatise on perspective, *De prospectiva pingendi*, and if one took the white square prototype in Ryman as some manifestation, contrary to fact, of Platonistic proclivities. In fact Ryman, a jazzman, has a clearer affinity with John Ashbery than with, say, Reinhardt, Malevich, or Mondrian, who were fairly austere at times in their aesthetics. But part of what I am

after is the danger of basing an attribution of style on what immediately meets the eye, especially in monochrome painting, where you need a lot more to go on than optical data.

The characterization I have in mind comes from that oracular aesthete, Adrian Stokes, in an essay of his titled "Art and Science,"[7] and it is difficult to detach it from the catalog he modestly dismisses as "mechanical" of detail upon detail which illustrate the style that he insists is found "in visual art alone and then solely in visual art-cum-architectural sense of form, an aesthetic communication may be explicit and immediate to the point of rebutting after-thought." The "communication" is in the work rather than between work and viewer, who nevertheless grasps it "explicitly and immediately." I believe this is the quality Stokes refers to as quattrocento, and it is a "demonstration of intellect and feeling." It is, he contends, found in Cézanne ("It is the *realiser* of Cézanne"). But it "also persisted in post-Renaissance art, 'refurbished' by Vermeer, by Chardin, and of course by Cézanne," to speak only of painting (it is a quality, Stokes insists, found "also in drawing, in sculpture, and more particularly, in architecture"). The poet and critic Bill Berkson, in his anniversary essay on Piero for *Art in America*, endeavors to extend the list:

> After Cézanne, as Piero's fame accumulated, the offshoots were mostly 'little masters' like Morandi and bizarre interlopers like Balthus. The legacy also suited the countermodernist taste of sundry neo-classicisms. (In America, starting from the 1890s, it became central to the Beaux Arts mural tradition of Puvis de Chavannes.) . . . Thereafter, one reaches, like Longhi, for parallels and adjuncts in archaic art as well as modern abstraction, and in those few contemporaries—as diverse as Alex Katz and Sol Lewitt, for the more recent practitioners.[8]

Note that we are not talking about "influence." "Only Cézanne, of the later painters, could have known even facsimiles of Piero's work," Berkson writes, meaning, by "later," Stokes's exemplars, Vermeer and Chardin. When art historians lack chains of influence is when they invoke affinity classes, but we have, I think, enough of an idea of what the quality is that Stokes strives to nail down, and have enough examples of it to be able to recognize the quality in others.

I shall, after the manner of philosophers, designate the quality Q, and for my purposes it is not especially important that it be easily defined so long as it be easily recognized, as I think it is. That is what I take Stokes to be saying when he says that it is "explicit and immediate" (in contrast, say, with implicit and mediated by inference). A good many, perhaps all,

aesthetic qualities are of this sort. They are not, as Frank Sibley wrote many years ago in his deservedly famous article "Aesthetic Concepts," *condition-governed*.[9] He meant that one cannot—whether cannot in principle or just cannot easily—specifiy neccessary and sufficient conditions for aesthetic predicates. Thus these predicates seem at once complex and indefinable, which is somewhat paradoxical, since their complexity suggests that definitions ought in principle to be found. Whatever the case with definition, the consoling fact is that any of us, once we are acquainted with Piero, Chardin, Vermeer, and mature Cézanne, can easily distinguish Q works from ~Q, with, naturally, some problems at the borderline. It is hard to imagine any baroque painting that is Q, difficult to suppose anyone would find de Kooning Q or Pollock. Certainly Sanraedem would qualify, but probably not Rembrandt. And we might dither over Modigliani. One of my favorite fantasies is to train pigeons on slides of Piero, Chardin, and Vermeer, and then expose them to a battery of slides where they are rewarded for correctly distinguishing Q from ~Q. Q-ness clearly has nothing to do with goodness or greatness, not even if a case can be made that Piero is great because he is Q. What *is* important is that negative stylistic attributes are aesthetically positive, and, at some cost to perspicuity, we could give positive names to them, as Wölfflin distinguishes *malerisch*, or painterly, from linear, and the like. The cost is that there are cases where it is impossible to say that a work is *malerisch*, and equally impossible to say that it is linear, certain of Ryman's canvases being cases in point. But it is a matter of logic that if it isn't Q, then it is ~Q. There is a further cost as well. With negative stylistic predicates we can form simple matrices, whereas when we simply use "opposites," as "open" and "closed," or "geometrical" and "biomorphic," we lose this possibility.

Allow me to illustrate. Consider once more the rather complex stylistic notion Stokes has introduced, which I shall continue to call Q, and then the stylistic predicate *malerisch*, as used by Wölfflin, which I shall call P (since after all the word means "painterly"). With these terms and their negations, we can characterize every painting there is, albeit crudely: it can be both P and Q, P and ~Q, ~P and Q, and, finally, ~P and ~Q. Cézanne is quattrocento and painterly; Monet is painterly but not quattrocento; Piero is not painterly but is paradigmatically quattrocento; and (let us say) a late-eighties white square by Ryman is neither quattrocento nor painterly. I will admit we can quarrel over cases, but let us forbear: there is always that problem with stylistic terms. The point is that as we add stylistic terms, we get larger matrices: if we have *n* terms, we get a

matrix of 2^n rows. So with three terms we have a matrix with eight rows, with four terms one with sixteen rows, and so on. Obviously it gets pretty unwieldy, but the point is that however large the matrix, every painting can be located somewhere on it, and the more terms we have to work with, the more precise our stylistic characterization of each work. Actually, each stylistic term defines what we might call an affinity class of works, though all we mean by affinity is that there is some property of style which works in different columns but on the same row of the style matrix. But of course the concept of affinity explains nothing. The interesting question is always why any given artist worked in the style he or she did.

One great advantage of thinking of negative stylistic predicates is that we are not committed to the crude concept of binary opposites which we find in writers like Wölfflin, who came up with five pairs. There is a very large, almost indefinitely large number of stylistic terms, and sometimes we have to invent terms for artworks of a kind that never really existed before. Greenberg, who found the term "abstract expressionism" faulty and the term "action painting" detestable, referred to the art those terms referred to as "New York type painting." When journalists and others set about, as they inevitably did, seeking precursors, they were looking for New York type painting in the past, by artists who may never have set foot in New York. At the time, I suppose, the "binary opposite" of "New York type painting" was "School of Paris painting." The advantage of my system is that if we want to construct a matrix with "School of Paris painting" as a stylistic term, we can do so. But for certain purposes it may suffice simply to draw the distinction between New York type painting and its negation, which will merely include School of Paris art, and a great deal more.

The moment we recognize how expansive, how indeterminately large the range of possible stylistic predicates is, the less interested we are likely to be in the sorts of laws for which Wölfflin sought. There is no need to point out the internal difficulties of Wölfflin's system, but one observation is worth making: Meyer Schapiro argues that "it is difficult to fit into his scheme the important style called 'Mannerism' which comes between the High Renaissance and the Baroque."[10] Gombrich recalled, in an interview with Didier Erebon, that

> In Vienna at that time [i.e., the thirties] the burning question was Mannerism. . . . Up till then, even for Berenson and Wölfflin, Mannerism had been a period of decadence and decline. But in Vienna there had been a strong movement to rehabilitate styles that had been despised. . . . As soon as it was decided that Mannerism was a style in its own right, just like High Renaissance, people stopped calling it "Late Renaissance" and called it Mannerist.[11]

Gombrich is especially instructive in respect to his treatment of Giulio Romano as a Mannerist architect. He argues that Romano had two distinct styles, and Gombrich was influenced in this characterization by Picasso, who had a neoclassical style and "also carried distortion to an extreme." Thus, Gombrich argues, it was possible that "an artist could have different modes of expression."[12] But this brings up two points. First, the moment Mannerism is established as a style in its own right, one can begin in a positive way to characterize any number of works as Mannerist which were made outside the specific period art-historically designated Mannerist that begins with Correggio and extends through Rosso Fiorentino, Bronzino, Pontormo, and Giulio Romano himself. Thus one might unhesitatingly identify as Mannerist certain roman stuccos, El Greco, but also Brancusi and Modigliani. But second, part of what helped firm Mannerism up as a stylistic category comes from modernist art, specifically Picasso, who sheds a certain retrospective light over the seicento. So the style matrix is historically fluid along its forward edge, in terms both of adding stylistic predicates—"New York type painting," for example—or changing older ones in such a way that what had appeared to be a phase of the late Renaissance becomes a style of its own. And who can say in advance whether the category of Mannerism itself is not too crude, that some division in the light of the future of style might not have to be effected somewhere between Correggio and Rosso Fiorentino?

Part of the interest of the style matrix lies in the status it lends to what one might term *latent properties* in paintings, properties of a kind to which viewers contemporary with the painting would have been blind, just because these become visible only retrospectively, in the light of later artistic developments. Correggio is again a good case: the Carracci, a century later, saw him as a predecessor, and hence as early baroque. Indeed, he became keenly appreciated in the eighteenth century, when his reputation was perhaps at its height, for such works as his *Loves of Jupiter*, seen as anticipating the rococo. The features that made Correggio hard to grasp as an artist by his contemporaries suddenly become clarified when the baroque style is invented, and further clarified from the perspective of the rococo. Mannerists prized grace at whatever cost to naturalness, and the disregard of the latter helps explain the term's synonymy today

with a kind of extreme artifice such as we find in Correggio's contemporary Parmigianino. But Correggio, though what was later called a Mannerist, also reacted against what his contemporaries recognized as *maniera* in the direction of something more naturalistic. So Correggio gets reinvented when Mannerism is stabilized as a concept in the twentieth century, just as he was reinvented in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and on each occasion latent features became released and made available to appreciation. In a similar way the late Monet gets to be an early New York type painter. André Breton classed Uccello and Seurat as anticipatory surrealists, but there are any number of others—Archimboldo and Hans Baldung Grien come instantly to mind—who were waiting for surrealism to be invented in order to be adequately appreciated. The heavy criticism the 1984 "Primitivism and Modern Art" exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art came under was partly due to its casual bracketing of pieces of primitive art under the same affinity classes as modern art, which overlooked, as stylistic analysis inevitably must, all the deep differences between primitive and modern art. Thus a tall thin effigy from Africa doubtless has some "affinity" with a characteristic Giacometti, but affinity overlooks the reasons why either of them is tall and thin, and this must do great damage to our perception of either. But that is one of the problems with affinities, and it is, I am afraid, one of the problems, perhaps one of the main problems with the style matrix itself. For all the historical sensitivity of the style matrix, it implies an ahistorical vision of art—and I of all people should have been alert to this. From the beginning of my speculation on art, I have worked with—worked from—examples in which two outwardly similar things may nevertheless differ in so radical a way that the outward similarity proves altogether fortuitous. The African effigy and the Giacometti are not perfect semblables, but even if they were, there would be the fact to contend with that their affinity screens their profound artistic difference. But that shows I had not really thought things through when I first presented the style matrix in 1964, in the same paper in which I laid out the approach using indiscernible counterparts and sought to solve the problems to which they give rise. That approach has generated a considerable amount of philosophical esthetics, but the style matrix has lain inert, or pretty much inert, from its debut until the present, apart from one serious criticism of it recently advanced by Noel Carroll.[13]

Suppose we were to construct a style matrix with three columns and eight rows, using Mannerist, baroque, and rococo as our style predicates:

these are more intuitive than such terms as ~ baroque and the like. It would look like this:

Style Matrix

	Mannerist	*Baroque*	*Rococo*
1.	+	+	+
2.	+	+	−
3.	+	−	+
4.	+	−	−
5.	−	+	+
6.	−	+	−
7.	−	−	+
8.	−	−	−

Every painting in history will fit somewhere on the matrix, with perhaps some jostling. Van Dyck, influenced by Rubens, is (late) baroque, and, as he is committed to a certain concept of grace in his depiction of figures, which are *svelto*, he comes out Mannerist, whatever his influences. But since I see no trace of the rococo style in him, he belongs on row 2 (+ + −). The Carracci belong on row 6 (− + −), since fully baroque (they invented it), but repudiating Mannerism and far too energized to be rococo. One feels that Malevich's *Black Square* belongs on row 8 (− − −), namely as a sum of negations, the dark hole into which all stylistic qualities disappear. (Malevich descibed one of his black squares as "The embryo of all possibility," which means in effect the absence of all actualities). Malevich's *Black Square*, which explicitly belongs to the iconic tradition—he exhibited it, remember, across a corner of a room, as an icon might be displayed—is neither Mannerist nor rococo, but might just qualify as baroque. An early green monochrome by Brice Marden, titled *Nebraska*, is witty enough to be Mannerist and decorative enough to be rococo, and hence belongs on row 3. Where would Ryman fit? My hunch is that different works of Ryman would fit on different rows. But my objective at this point is merely to indicate that monochrome paintings do not automatically fall to the eighth row by stylistic default.

So much for mock technicalities. The *vision* the style matrix underwrites—or which underwrites it—is the way works of art form a kind of organic community, and release latencies in one another merely by virtue of their existence. I was thinking of the world of artworks as a kind of community of internally related objects. There is no question but that the inspiration for this way of thinking came from T. S. Eliot's essay

"Tradition and Individual Talent," which had a great impact on me at the time. Here is the crucial passage:

> No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation, is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone, you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. I mean this as a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical criticism. The neccessity that he shall conform, that he shall cohere, is not one-sided, what happens when a new work is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives, for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered, and so the relations, proportions, values of each work toward the whole readjusted.[14]

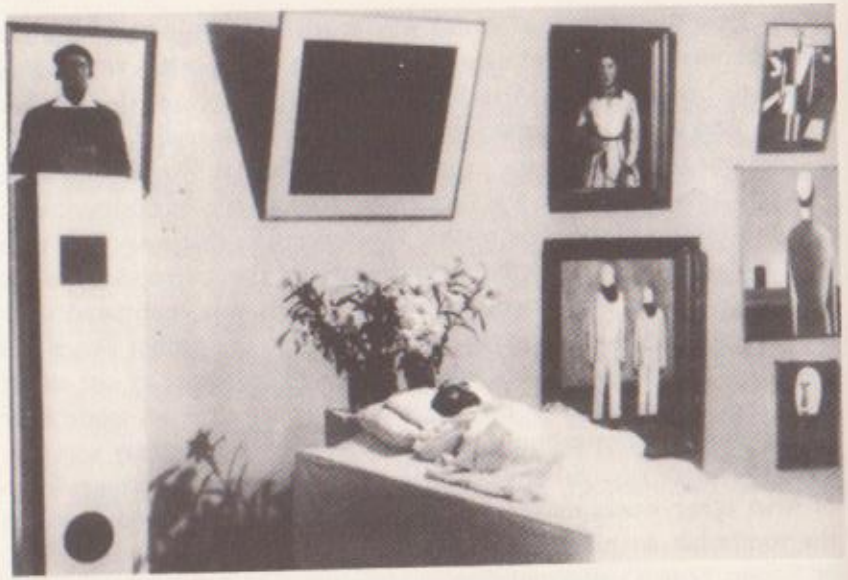
Indeed, what I meant by the expression "art world" was precisely that ideal community. To be a work of art was to be a member of the art world, and to stand in different kinds of relationship to works of art than to any other kind of thing. I even had a kind of political vision that all works of art were equal, in the sense that each artwork had the same number of stylistic qualities as any other. When a new style row was added to the matrix, everyone got richer by one property. I felt that, in point of stylistic richness, there was nothing to choose between *The Last Judgment* of Michelangelo and any black square of Reinhardt. The art world was radically egalitarian, but also mutually self-enriching. In a way, the principles of the style matrix reflected my experience of teaching the general education courses at Columbia. I was struck by how the *Odyssey*, for example, gets enriched by reading it in the context of Virgil, of the Bible, of Dante, or of Joyce. It fit handsomely the ideas of writerly reading and infinite interpretation that were to come in from Europe.

And finally, it squared with art-pedagogical practices, from the two projector art history lecture, in which works are juxtaposed and compared, however little they may have to do with one another causally or historically, to the common critical practice which nobody can resist, of saying that something reminds him or her of something else. It is to treat all works of art as contemporaries, or as quite outside time. But I am very much less persuaded today of the viability or even the usefulness of these practices. Eliot wrote, "I mean this as a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical criticism." And I think that what concerns me is the separation

of aesthetic from historical in this way. It is a move that closes the distance between artistic and natural beauty. But in doing that it blinds us to artistic beauty as such. Artistic perception is through and through historical. And in my view artistic beauty is historical as well.

That was more or less the main thesis of "The Art World," and what I had not seen at the time was the degree to which it is inconsistent with the motivations of the style matrix. My concern in that essay was with works of art that so resemble ordinary objects that perception cannot seriously discriminate between them. The thesis was enunciated thus: "To see something as art requires something the eye cannot decry—an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an art world." And you will note that there is reference to the art world built into to this characterization. I now think what I wanted to say was this: a knowledge of what other works the given work fits with, a knowledge of what other works makes a given work possible. My interest was in the somewhat attenuated objects of contemporary art—the *Brillo Box*, or Robert Morris's very uninflected sculpture, which was showing just around that time. These objects had few interesting affinities with anything in the history of art, though I have read discussions of the box which define a history beginning with Donald Judd and which included (I think altogether uninterestingly) the *Brillo Box* ("Warhol was silk-screening Brillo logos on them; Artschwager was making them out of suburban countertop formica," according to Richard Serra),[15] and I have heard formalist art historians include (as if just another box) Morris's *Box with the Sound of its Own Making*. These "boxes" arrived in the art world with such different meanings and explanatory interpretations that there is something willful in bracketing them together under the most minimal formal resemblances. But my thought in "The Art World" was that no one unfamiliar with history or with artistic theory could see these as art, and hence it was the history and the theory of the object, more than anything palpably visible, that had to be appealed to in order to see them as art. And this would be particularly the case for monochrome painting.

Clearly, what I mean by "monochrome" is not merely a single color but a chromatically uniform surface. Mantegna painted his stone and "bronze" painting, evidently meant to imitate carvings and castings, and painters had the option of working in grisaille or in sepia, repressing differences in hue for whatever reason. Today Mark Tansey is a monochrome artist (he told a questioner that he was saving color for his old age). But monochrome painting in the sense I intend cannot go back much before Malevich, and even then one has to make some distinction.



MALEVICH LYING IN STATE. PHOTO CREDIT: JOHN BLAZEJEWSKI.

His extraordinarily beautiful Suprematist *Red Square (Peasant)* of 1915 is in fact a red square on a white ground, hence more a picture of a square than a square or, to be stuffy about it, a self-portraying square. Or, to be really stuffy, it is a squarish shape in red depicting a red square, for the shape does not perfectly echo the shape of the canvas, having an eccentric perimeter. The importance of this eccentricity is brought out in Malevich's *Black Square*, again of 1915, which "acquired the force of a magic formula" in the minds of his contemporaries. Malevich described it thus: "Within the square of the canvas is a square, depicted with the greatest expressiveness and according to the laws of the new art" (i.e., Suprematism). His student Kurlov reported him as saying that he "depicted only a square, perfect in expression and in relation to its sides—a square which does not have a single line parallel to the geometrically correct square canvas and that in itself does not repeat the parallelness of the lines of the sides. It is the formula for the law of contrast, which exists in art in general."[16] But the square had to be something more than a pedagogic illustration: Malevich was buried in a "Suprematist" coffin, and one can see, in a photograph of the funeral, the black square, posed like an icon of the Madonna. It was like the death of painting, in the imagery used by the critic of Suprematism.

It was part of the high-flown purpose of Suprematism that it should remain not abstract but pictorial, depicting what Malevich calls "non-

objective reality." Until Suprematism, monochrome monotonal paintings were thinkable, but only as jokes, as pictures of an objective reality without chomatic differentiation, like an all white painting said to show virgins in their communion garments walking through the snow, or Kierkegaard's witty description of an allover red painting said to depict the surface of the Red Sea, after the Israelites had crossed over and the Egyptian forces were drowned,[17] a funny idea that got me started when I began to write *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*. But even with Suprematism, one could not easily think of paintings which were not pictures, if not of a monochrome objective reality, then, as, Malevich liked to say, of a nonobjective reality. And indeed I think that the term "nonobjective" carried that latter meaning, of some spiritual or mathematical reality, well into recent times What is now the Guggenheim Museum was called The Museum of Non-Objective Painting and my sense is that the Baroness Hilla Rebay, its director, certainly felt—certainly *believed*—that the paintings over which she presided had metaphysical importance far in excess of anything formalist analysis could hope to accommodate.

In any case, we can imagine two red squares, one executed in the spirit of Kierkegaardian jokes and one in the spirit of Suprematism, which look enough alike that the temptation would be to place them in the same position on the style matrix, but which actually have very different stylistic attributes, not to speak of different interpretations and meanings. But one can also think of monochrome monotonal paintings done in neither of these spirits, and whose stylistic similarities or dissimilarities are purely accidental. I had, as it turned out, been altogether oblivious to contemporary monochrome painting when I wrote *The Transfiguration of the Common Place*, and still thought of it, probably in consequence of having had my attention drawn to it as a possibility through Kierkegaard, as the occasion of vaguely philosophical jokes. Not long after the book's appearance, however, I met Marcia Hafif at a party, and she told me that she was a monochrome painter. She in fact proved to be the leader of a whole school of monochromists, to whom she introduced me at a party she gave for me at her loft. From them, but especially from Marcia Hafif, I learned a great deal about monochrome painting—about the artistic possibilities of what I had written off as a plain red square. The plain red square rendered me an exceptional philosophical service, but I am certain that my appreciation of the differences between outwardly similar red squares, which I learned from Marcia and her collaborators, set me on the path to art criticism.

Here is an extended passage on Hafif's "Chinese Red 33 × 33," which she says is "one painting out of hundreds by the same artist, one painting

out of thousands by hundreds of artists. How does one understand this flatly painted red square? Why is it painted with household enamel? And why on wood, why plywood?"

> First the painting functions as itself. It is red. It is square and not very big. It is placed conveniently at eye level on a wall with enough clear space around it to be able to become a figure on the ground of the wall. It has a title: the name of the commercial color with which it is painted. Looking at it one reacts to it as to any other thing in the world. One sees it and responds silently to its size and shape, to the shiny red surface and the bare plywood edges, to the distance between it and the wall. Then the mind comes in and asks, what is it?
>
> The object is fixed to the wall as though it were a painting. In fact it is painted, it is a painting. What kind of reference does it make as a painting?
>
> By now this fracture of its meaning has produced multiple references: it is seen in the privileged space reserved for a painting, the wooden support comes from the Renaissance . . . the household enamel comes from our everyday lives, the matter-of-fact paint application with a house painting brush could be used to paint a table, the plywood is very ordinary, not precious, the one color surface belongs to the tradition of monochrome paintings, the square shape is neutral and modern, the size is human, being neither large nor small, the one painting is a sample of the artist's work.[18]

That it is painted the way a chair would be painted is an artistically important fact about this monochrome: it is not brushy, the way another monochrome would be, but "neat" and clean. And it is not painted in tempera, the way a painting on a wooden base in the Renaissance would be, but in commercially available enamel. "Chinese Red" is decorator nomenclature, naming a color chosen because of the statement it makes. Of how many red square paintings would all this be true? The eye will not tell you unless and until "the mind comes in, and asks." And the information, so neccessary to the appreciation of the work, so neccessary to the aesthetics of the work, is through and through historical. I don't see how you can separate, as Eliot does, aesthetic and historical criticism. But having unifed them, the premisses of the style matrix collapse. Hegel, in criticizing the philosophy of Schelling, speaks of a certain "monochrome formalism" with its concept of the Absolute (here is a nice example of a monochrome joke) "as the night in which, as we say, all cows are black."[19] Under the auspices of the style matrix, all red squares are alike. They can be gotten to yield up their aesthetic differences only through historicization.

The history of monochrome painting remains to be written, with Kazimir Malevich, Alexander Rodchenko, Yves Klein, Mark Rothko, Ad Reinhardt, Robert Rauschenberg, and Stephen Prina taking separate chapters, and the band of monochromists around Marcia Hafif as *chef d'ecole* constituting a valuable chapter, just before the one on the Philadelphia monochromists. And of course Robert Ryman deserves a chapter to himself. What is interesting about his work is the degree to which, for all its blank whiteness, it reflects the times through which the artist lived. The work from the fifties reflects the philosophy of pigment of the abstract expressionists: the artist is alive to pigment and canvas, and forms are applied deliciously, like frosting on a cake. In the confectionary spirit of the work, the signatures are large and celebratory, and even the dates are as prominent as they would be on a birthday cake. In the sixties Ryman becomes minimalist, and in a way materialist, the paintings being surface, support, and pigment and nothing more. By the eighties and into the nineties his work internalizes the pluralism of our times; it begins to incorporate sculptural elements—steel bolts, aluminum fasteners, plastic, waxpaper, and the like. Yet all through these changes, like Candide, the work retains its white simplicity of soul. It is an allegory of steadfastness and of adaption.

Hafif writes of "Chinese Red 33 × 33" that it "takes its place in a stream of some hundreds of paintings and exists for itself alone as well as in the context of the rest of the work." This is no less true of Ryman's work, or, I suppose, of anybody's. The work draws meaning from the body of work within which it is placed, and this makes clear the degree to which the place of painting today is the exhibition, which provides the context in which the work alone is to be judged and appreciated. Not all of the energy and meaning it derives from its placement is perceptual. But the critique to which the style matrix has been here exposed is an effort to say how much our aesthetic involvement with works of visual art derives from what one might, with Malevich, guardedly call nonobjective, or in any case nonperceptual factors. That is to be expected when "the mind comes in, and asks."

I offer this discussion of the monochrome painting as a model of how to think about criticism, once we realize that we have to think, however profound the resemblances between works, of their individual histories. We have to explain how they arrived in the world, and learn to read them in terms of the statements each makes and evaluate them in terms of that statement, deciding whether they are mimetic or metaphysical, formalist, or moralist, and where they might fit on an imagined style matrix and

what their peers might be, if we happen to still be gripped by the idea of affinities. Malevich's *Black Square*, because of its play against the rectitude of its ground, might have some affinity with one of Robert Mangold's squares, which do not quite meet their obligations of perfect vertices, though they seem to live by the code of perfect vertices. But that affinity is only, really, a beginning point in the critical analysis of either work, and as we prolong our critical examinations, it is also a distinct possibility that what they have in common is the least interesting fact about either of them. There could be a museum of monochrome works, could be, indeed, as I sought to imagine at the opening of the *Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, a gallery of red squares, each of them profoundly different from its fellows, but all of them looking exactly alike.

The bare idea of such a museum is of immense philosophical value, as the museum itself would be, were it to exist. To experience the collection, from 1915 to the present, would be to learn a great deal about how to experience art and, in particular, the complex interrelationship between the visual arts and visual experience. But it would, beyond that, demonstrate that the monochrome has little to do with the internal exhaustion of the possibilities of painting, and that the existence of white squares, red squares, black squares—or pink triangles, yellow circles, green pentagons—tells us nothing about the death of painting or, for that matter, the end of art. Each monochrome painting has to be addressed on its own terms, and counted as success or failure in terms of the adequacy with which it embodies its intended meaning.

The "last stage" description of Ryman's paintings was, however, historically accompanied by the circumstance that painting had stopped seeming an adequate medium for the kinds of statements certain advanced and often not so advanced artists were concerned to make. I have in mind that some of the most interesting artists of the middle to late sixties—Bruce Nauman, Robert Morris, Robert Irwin, Eva Hesse—began as painters, but found painting constraining. It is not as though they turned to sculpture as such, for the connotation of sculpture would have been no less constraining at the time. All that the work of these artists had in common with sculpture was a real third dimension, which somehow seems of marginal relevance, the way it is undeniable but also irrelevant that dance is three-dimensional. In a certain way, the work in question was closer in spirit to literature, to a kind of concrete poetry, explicitly so in Nauman's case and in Morris's. Whatever the case, the art of the seventies felt as though painting had been the matrix which the drive towards a wider expressiveness broke asunder, leaving those artists who

persisted as painters as if out of phase with art's evolution. Painting as painting seemed in that decade increasingly marginalized and, given certain ideologies of feminism and multiculturalism, increasingly demonized. It is neither here nor there that "good painting" might have been done in that era. The criteria of goodness that applied to painting had stopped being automatically the criteria for good art.

My own sense of an ending suggests that it was the remarkable disjunctiveness of artistic activity across the entire sector, not the rather reduced formulas of monochrome painting, that provided evidence that the Greenbergian narrative was over, and that art had entered what one might call a post-narrative period. The disjunctiveness became internalized in works of art which also might have included painting. Whereas Crimp sees evidence of the "death of painting" in painters allowing their work to be "contaminated with photography," I see the end of the exclusivity of pure painting as the vehicle of art history. And Ryman's work takes on a very different meaning depending upon whether one sees it as the last stage of the modernist narrative, which after all had painting as its standard-bearer, or as one of the forms painting began to take in the post-narrative era when its peers were not paintings of other sorts, but performances, installations, photographs, earthworks, airports, videos, fiberworks, and conceptual structures of every stripe and order. There is, one might say, an immense menu of artistic choices, and an artist can choose as many of these as he or she cares to, as have Bruce Nauman, Sigmar Polke, Gerhard Richter, Rosemarie Trockel, and any number of others for whom aesthetic purity is not especially a pertinent injunction. If Ryman belongs to this art world, neither is it a pertinent injunction for him.

But I want to conclude this chapter not with that, but with the nature of painting in what I ask you to humor me by thinking of as the early post-narrative phase of the rest of history. My sense is that the pluralism of the art world has inevitably been internalized by painting, which has lost the fierce exclusionary quality it possessed when it perceived itself as the vehicle of historical advance, and necessarily struggled to purge itself of all so to speak counterrevolutionary elements. In the art world of the fifties, as we saw, the pitched controversy was between abstraction and the image. Greenberg articulated this by indicting illusionary space as not proper to painting, as you recall. Painters today have become singularly tolerant by 1950s standards. You can put real forms in real space, real forms in abstract space, abstract forms in real space, and abstract forms in abstract space, to use a simple matrix. There really are no rules. I saw at

the National Gallery a 1987 work by Robert Rauschenberg which uses a Japanese kite as a collage element in what nonetheless feels like a painting. A show of David Reed's work—and he is an almost paradigmatically pure painter—incorporated abstract paintings in an installation composed of a bed and a television set. Let me stress that if there really are no rules, it remains an open possibility that artists might pursue the art of painting in whatever way they care to, and under whatever imperatives they may care to work—it is only that those imperatives are no longer grounded in history. So there is of course room for our marvelous painters—Sean Scully, Dorothea Rockburne, Robert Mangold, Sylvia Plimack Mangold, and others. But alongside the kind of painting we associate with them, there are paintings which increasingly incorporate words into themselves. The constraints of painting which drove the pioneers of the sixties into the invention of forms more accommodating to their thoughts have inevitably relaxed and painting has been redefined so as to admit the equivalent of those new forms and hence the expression of thoughts of comparable power. It must be admitted that those constraints once gave a great power to the art of painting, which had to find ways of working within them. But accommodation is the key to survival in an art world in which everything goes. Admittedly, to take a somewhat comical analogy from contemporary American politics, it is a bit like the Democrats incorporating into their so-called vision all those things once thought of as Republican—cutting taxes, cutting spending, small government, etc. Hardly what we think of as Democrat—but perhaps needed for political survival. The politics of paintings may be like that in the era we—Hans Belting and I at any rate—have come to think of as the end of art.

With this I turn to the subject of the museum, from whose ruins Douglas Crimp pronounced the death of painting. In fact there were, in the 1970s, all sorts of reasons, most of them political, for art theorists to have thought the museum dead, and there would have been a clear connection in the minds of many between the death of the museum and the death of painting, chiefly because museums and paintings seemed internally related to the point where, if painting is dead there is no further reason for museums to exist. But then, if painting is not dead, it has certainly undergone transformations of the kind I have been dwelling on, having become simply one of the forms artistic expression in the post-historical period can take, and this raises the question of the role of the museum with the other forms. Or is the connection between painting and museum exactly as tight as the critics of both have insisted, so that the museum itself is no more the unique forum for the display of art than

painting is the favored form for artistic expression itself? And if painting has lost its uniquely privileged position in the making of art, does this entail that the museum, too, has lost the uniquely priveleged position which after all came with its status as the vehicle of art history? The end of art means *some* kind of demotion of painting. So does it also mean the demotion of the museum? These are matters I can only begin to touch upon in the pages that remain to me.

NOTES

1. Patricia Hills, *Alice Neel* (New York: Abrams, 1983), 53.
2. Petronius, *The Satyricon*, trans. William Arrowsmith (New York: New American Library, 1983), 205.
3. Larissa A. Zhadova, *Malevich: Suprematism and Revolution in Russian Art, 1910–1930* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), 43.
4. Robert Storr, *Robert Ryman* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1993), 12.
5. Calvin Tomkins, *Jennifer Bartlett* (New York: Abbevile Press, 1985), 15.
6. Arthur C. Danto, "The Art World," *The Journal of Philosophy* 61, no. 19 (1964), 580–81.
7. Adrian Stokes, *Art and Science: A Study of Alberti, Piero della Francesca, and Giorgione* (New York: Book Collectors Society, 1949), 112.
8. Bill Berkson, "What Piero Knew," *Art in America* 81, no. 12 (December 1993), 117.
9. Frank Sibley, "Aesthetic Concepts," *Philosophical Review* (1949), 421–50.
10. Schapiro, "Style," 72.
11. E. H. Gombrich, *A Lifelong Interest: Conversations on Art and Science with Didier Eribon* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 40.
12. Ibid., 41.
13. Noel Carroll, "Danto, Style and Intention." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 53.3 (Spring, 1995), 251–57.
14. T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and Individual Talent," in *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1932), 6. Noel Carroll astutely sees in this essay the source of the style matrix. But I cite it already in *Analytical Philosophy of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965) and in *Narration and Knowledge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 368, n. 19.
15. Richard Serra, "Donald Judd 1928–1994," *Parkett* 40/41 (1994), 176.
16. *Kazimir Malevich* (Los Angeles: Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center, 1990), 193.
17. Soren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, trans. D. F. and L. M. Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), 1:22.
18. Robert Nickas and Xavier Douroux, *Red* (Brussels: Galerie Isy Brachot, 1990), 57.
19. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J. B. Baillie (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1949), 78.

THE SCOTTISH SYMPHONY: CELTIC KINLOCH RANNOCK (1980) BY JOSEPH BEUYS. COURTESY: RONALD FELDMAN FINE ARTS, NEW YORK. PHOTO CREDIT: D. JAMES DEE.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ CHAPTER TEN

Museums and the Thirsting Millions

IN HENRY JAMES'S novel *The Golden Bowl*, one of the main characters, Adam Verver, is a wealthy art collector who accumulates artworks of the highest quality and in great quantity in order to stock a visionary museum in his own city—"American City," as James somewhat flatly calls it. He imagines an immense thirst for beauty on the part of the countless workers through whose labor he has become the wealthy man he is. As if in fulfillment of that debt, he will set up a "museum of museums"—a house on a hill "from whose doors and windows, open to grateful, thirsty millions, the higher, the highest, knowledge, would shine out to bless the land."[1] The knowledge was in effect the knowledge of beauty, and Verver must have belonged to a generation that still resonated to the stirring thought that beauty and truth were identical, and that "release from the bondage of ugliness" meant release from the bondage of ignorance, and hence that exposure to beauty was equivalent to a curriculum of knowledge. I think it unlikely that Verver greatly analyzed the theory that drove him, but "the urgency of release from the bondage of ugliness he was in position to measure," James tells us, for until Verver discovered the deep reality of artistic beauty, he had been "comparatively blind." At a certain moment, with the force of revelation, he discovered his own desire for perfection, to which he had previously been blind. His "museum of museums" was to be a "receptacle of treasures sifted to positive sanctity." The people of American City were to be the beneficiaries of what it took time and struggle for him to discover. I think it fair to say that something like the Verver spirit is palpable in the great museums erected in America in the *Golden Bowl* years (the novel was published in 1904).

The Brooklyn Museum, opened to the public in 1897, is a good example of Verver's spirit. It was designed by the great New York architectural firm of James's time, McKim, Mead, and White—they were responsible for Columbia University on Morningside Heights and many of the opulent structures of the city in that optimistic era—and was meant as a

museum of museums in two senses: it was to be the largest museum structure in the world, hence a museum of museums in the augmentative sense in which we speak of the "king of kings"; and it was a museum of museums in the aggregative sense, since it was to be made up of museums, each devoted to some department of knowledge (there was even, I learned, to be a museum of philosophy under its vast multidomed vault). It was to be set on the highest point in Brooklyn, and though only the west wing of the projected structure was in fact erected, it transmits its meaning through the classical temple inserted into its facade, with its eight colossal columns.There was something almost touching in the disparity between its architectural proclamation of grandeur and the limited extent of its fine arts holdings when it opened nearly a century ago. There is also something touching in the disparity between its vision and its incomplete state. The Brooklyn community clearly never rose to the tremendous vision embodied in its great architectural fragment. Its museum's circulating exhibitions are visited by the Manhattan art world; its permanent holdings are of the highest scholarly significance; its public collections are on the agenda of the Brooklyn public schools; it is a valuable resource for the increasing population of artists who live in Brooklyn but who would prefer, all things considered, to live in Manhattan if they could afford it. Yet Brooklynites who are neither artists nor scholars show no great evidence of the thirst that the high-minded Ververs of Brooklyn had in mind when they decided to build a museum "worthy of [Brooklyn's] wealth, her position, her culture and her people."[2] Aside from the throngs of schoolchildren that sweep through like flocks of shorebirds, its galleries are the kind of vast empty spaces those of a certain age are nostalgic for in the museums of their youth.

For the moment I want to leave aside the thirsting millions of the borough of Brooklyn—and of all the communities in the nation which possess largely unvisited museums erected in the spirit of the museum of museums—and reflect on what the Ververs of the nation must have supposed justified their beliefs in the museum's value. Verver had certainly experienced art before he attained his revelation—before, in James's words, "he scaled his vertiginous peak." But he had not experienced it, as we might say, using an unfashionable word, existentially or transformatively. By this I mean that he had not experienced it in a way that provided him a vision of the world and of the meaning of living in the world. There are such experiences with art, none more compelling than the one Ruskin describes to his father in a letter of 1848. It took place in Turin, where Ruskin was distracting himself with copying a detail of Veronese's *Solomon and the Queen of Sheba* in the municipal gallery. He wrote the letter after hearing a sermon, preached in the Waldensian faith, and the juxtaposition of sermon and the painting served to "unconvert" him.

> One day when I was working from the beautiful maid of honor in Veronese's picture, I was struck by the gorgeousness of life which the world seems constituted to develop, when it is made the best of. . . . Can it be possible that all this power and beauty is adverse to the honor of the Maker of it? Has God made faces beautiful and limbs strong, and created these strange, fiery, fantastic energies, and created the splendor of substance and the love of it, created gold and pearls, and crystal, and the sun that makes them gorgeous, and filled human fancy with all splendid thoughts; and given to the human touch its power of placing and brightening and perfecting, only that all these things may lead His creatures away from Him? And is this mighty Paul Veronese . . . a servant of the devil; and is the poor little wretch in a tidy black tie, to whom I have been listening this Sunday morning expounding Nothing with a twang—is he a servant of God?[3]

Ruskin underwent, through experiencing a great painting, a transformation of vision, and he acquired a philosophy of life. James has left us, so far as I can tell, no comparable episode for Adam Verver, though my sense is that it would probably have been equivalent in some way, even if it involved "the splendor of substance and the love of it—gold and pearls and crystal." Verver courts his second wife by taking her to Brighton to view a collection of Damascene tiles. James *does* describe these: "The infinitely ancient, the immemorial amethystine blue of the glaze, scarcely more meant to be breathed upon, it would seem, than the cheek of royalty." Perhaps because Adam Verver is going to propose to a young and beautiful woman, he thinks "perhaps for the first time in his life, of the quick mind alone, the process really itself, as fine as the perfection perceived and admired."[4] In any case, being struck by the gorgeousness of substance, Verver simultaneously sees the circumambient ugliness which, I at least infer, he must suppose irremediable, or he would, given his vast energies, have found some way to change those conditions directly. Instead he thinks of art as something that reveals and at the same time redeems the bleakness of ordinary life. He feels a certain bleakness even in his own widowed existence, for he would not otherwise risk so much in embarking on a second, dangerous marriage—unless he saw the beauty he would acquire as equivalent to what a great work of art would bring into his life.

These are not what one might call routine experiences of art or, in the case of Ruskin, a routine museum experience. Verver and Ruskin have encountered works of art in some existential context which the art then throws into perspective, like a piece of philosophy read at just the right moment. It is difficult to know if any other works in Turin's Municipal Gallery would have done the trick, or the Damascene tiles at any other time. It is also worth observing that the experience did not especially make either man a better person. Verver really did try to use the model of the artwork and of the museum as a model for human relationships, marrying his daughter off to what she describes as a *morceau de musée*, and turning his own ornamental wife into a sort of docent for the museum of museums. The museum is probably a very poor model for a happy life. And Ruskin's sad, unconsummated marriage with the luscious Effie Gray suggests that the robust hedonism underwritten by Veronese did not dissolve his sexual inhibitions. Doubtless a psychologist would find it significant that the "detail" that obsessed him was the flounce on the maid of honor's skirt. Notwithstanding that their lives fell short of the art that redeemed them, both men felt it imperative to extend to ordinary men and women the benefits of art—Verver through the museum of museums, Ruskin through his writings and his teaching of drawing at the Working Men's College in London. Both were aesthetic missionaries.

I think it is the possibility of such experiences as those I have described that justifies the production, the maintenance, the exhibition of art, even if the possibility, for whatever reason, is unactualized for most persons. Experiences of art are unpredictable. They are contingent on some antecedent state of mind, and the same work will not affect different people in the same way or even the same person the same way on different occasions. This is why we go back and back to the great works: not because we see something new in them each time, but because we expect them to help us see something new in ourselves. *Solomon and the Queen of Sheba* is difficult to find in color reproduction because it is now, as a result of scholarship, believed to be mainly or altogether the work of Veronese's workshop: it does not figure as one of the mandatory Veroneses. And one wonders, had Ruskin known that, whether he could have been transformed as he was. There is, so far as I know, no special condition an artwork must satisfy in order to catalyze the reaction: few works have meant as much to me as Warhol's *Brillo Box*, and I have spent a fair portion of my waking time in working out the implications of my experience of it. I would only say that art can mean very little to someone who has so far been, as Adam Verver had been while he was amassing his

great fortune, "blind" and numb to art, even if they have experienced it or even lived with it. And the museum itself is justified through the fact that whatever else it does, it makes these kinds of experiences available. They have nothing to do with art-historical scholarship, nor with "art appreciation," whatever the virtues of these. And in truth the experiences can take place outside museums as well: I sometimes think my entire involvement with painting was abruptly determined when, as a soldier in the Italian campaign, I came across a reproduction of Picasso's blue period masterpiece, *La Vie*. I thought I would understand something profound if I understood that work, but I also know that I formed the resolution to make the pilgrimage to experience the painting itself, in Cleveland, whenever I were to return to civilian life. Still, typically, it is in museums that most of us encounter the works that affect us in the way the Veronese affected Ruskin. At a press event, not long ago, someone confessed to the curator of an exhibition of difficult photographs that he could not envision living with one of them, and her response seemed to me very deep. She observed that it was after all wonderful that we have museums for work like that, work that demands too much of us to be able to contemplate having it confront us in our homes.

At the same time, these experiences now seem to many to make the museum vulnerable to a kind of social criticism. They are not what the thirsting millions thirst for. With this I return to the vast populations of Brooklyn for whom the museum is at best a childhood memory, or, at worst, an architectural pile on Eastern Parkway of no particular significance to their lives.There is a radical vision in the air these days, certainly in the United States, which shares at least a premiss with that of Adam Verver: the thirsting millions thirst for art. The art for which they thirst, however, is not something the museum has so far been able to provide them with. What they search for is *an art of their own*. In an exceptionally searching essay into what is called "community-based art," Michael Brenson writes,

> Modernist painting and sculpture will always offer an aesthetic experience of a profound and indispensable kind, but it is one that can now do very little to respond to the social and political challenges and traumas of American life. Its dialogues and reconciliations are essentially private and metaphorical, and they now have limited potential to speak to those citizens of multicultural America whose artistic traditions approach objects not as worlds in themselves but as instruments of performances and other rituals that take place outside institutions. . . . Certainly images whose homes are

> galleries and museums can do very little to respond to the present crisis of infrastructure in America.[5]

This essay appears in a volume which describes and celebrates a rather extraordinary exhibition which took place in Chicago in 1993 called *Culture in Action*. For the exhibition, a number of groups about as far in social distance from, let's say, The Art Institute of Chicago, as it is possible to imagine, were led by artists to create an "art of their own," which in its turn was about as far in terms of artistic distance as could, with qualifications, be imagined from what that great and imposing structure houses as great and imposing art. Brenson, who had been a distinguished art critic for *The New York Times*, is spiritually at home in such institutions, and he speaks about the art they contain, even in this essay, in ways that Adam Verver and John Ruskin would recognize and endorse:

> A great painting is an extraordinary concentration and orchestration of artistic, philosophical, religious, psychological, social, and political impulses and information. The greater the artist, the more each color, line, and gesture becomes both a current and a river of thought and feeling. Great paintings condense moments, reconcile polarities, sustain faith in the inexhaustible potential of the creative act. As a result they become emblems, inevitably, of possibility and power.
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> . . . To audiences who love painting, the experiences this kind of concentration and coherence offers can be not only profound and poetic but also ecstatic, even mystical. Spirit is incarnated in matter. . . . Not only does an invisible spiritual world seem to exist, but it seems accessible, within the reach of anyone who can recognize the life of spirit in matter.
>
> Painting points toward the promise of healing.

This is a fairly exalted characterization of the art of the museum, and there can hardly be any measure by which it can be rendered commensurable with "an art of their own" of the kind to which *Culture in Action* dedicated itself. Probably the most controversial such art was a candy bar that Local 552 of the The Bakery, Confectionary, and Tobacco Workers' International Union of America developed in consultation with artists Christopher Sperandio and Simon Grennan. Named *We Got It!*, the confection is described in the text as "The Candy of their Dreams." There is, as I say, no scale which would have this at one location and Veronese's *Solomon and the Queen of Sheba* at another. There is a response to this, which I regard as dangerous, but it has to be faced. It is the response that renders all art compatible through relativization: Veronese is to the group represented by Verver and Ruskin—and by Brenson in one of his

aspects—what *We Got It!* is to the group represented by the workers of Local 552. So just as the candy bar is "an art of their own" for the latter group, *Solomon and the Queen of Sheba* is an art of *their* own for—let us use the familiar expletives—the well-off white males for whom, in Brenson's explicit terms, painting is, as well as an emblem of possibility, an emblem of *power*. This position has the instant consequence of tribalizing the museum. It is valid for the group for whom the objects in it constitute an "art of their own"—and this leaves out that vast population of Brooklyn I described earlier who thirst, according to the premisses of this position, for an art of their own.

Because of the issues it raises, it seems to me that *Culture in Action* was a landmark exhibition. It crystallized so many of the issues which divide us into factions today that I hope it will be discussed until those issues are resolved. Some of them involve the museum, inevitably, and it is these about which I want to make a few comments. They are issues in which I myself have been involved in various ways, and so in part I am speaking out of my own experience.

1. *Public Art.* There has always been a certain kind of public art in America, namely, the erection of commemorative monuments. But in relatively recent times the Verver spirit has sought to meet the fact that public would not go to the museum by getting the museum to go to the public, putting nonmonuments in public spaces to which the public was to respond in the same way—aesthetically—as they would respond to works in the museum. This strategy was subtly architectural, in that it created a museum without walls by colonizing spaces in the name of the museum, ostensibly for the benefit of the public. The public itself had no say in the choice of art, which was determined by what I term the curatoriat—art experts who knew, as the public in general did not, what was good and what was not. There can be no question that this could be read as a play for power on the curatoriat's part, and it emerged as such in one of the great artistic dramas of our time, the conflict over Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* in Federal Plaza in New York. I am fairly proud that I argued for the sculpture's removal in my column in *The Nation*—a position I think could not have been argued for in any art publication in America. I remember Tony Korner, the publisher of *ArtForum*, saying that a great many there agreed with me, but there was no way the magazine could say as much. The art world drew its wagons in a circle at the hearings over the matter, though to no effect: the piece was removed, and the ugly emptiness of Federal Plaza was restored to the public for its own unexalted uses. In my own view, that controversy did more than

any single event to reveal the power component in museum reality to the larger public. Well, temples have always been emblems of power, but in a way disguised by the spirituality of their practices and their claims. As long as the museums were represented as temples to truth-through-beauty, the realities of power were invisible.

2. *The Public's Art.* There would be two ways to address this issue. One would be to give the public some greater say in the art that it was going to have to live with in extramuseal spaces. This should not present inordinate difficulties: it should indeed be one of the places where participatory democracy might in fact have a chance. The public to be involved with the artwork should participate in the decisions that are to affect their aesthetic lives. Christo engages the relevant public all the time, and indeed the decision-making process is part of the work he does, which is also, and importantly, ephemeral—later generations are not stuck with it. This decision is still, however, based upon the idea of the museum, which is wherever the art in question is to be: the extramuseal spaces are, for the duration of the art, detached museum precincts, the responses are museum responses, and the public has had input primarily as a consulting body—as a body of experts, in effect, on the subject of their own wishes, preferences, and desires. The response of some of the California landowners to Christo's *Running Fence*—which was achieved partly through their allowing it to be achieved—compare in poetry and intensity to Ruskin's response to Veronese, for those who have seen them in the Meisels Brother's film. I will return to the idea of participatory aesthetics later on.

Before turning to the other alternative—to create nonmuseal art by transforming the public into its own artist—one should recognize that once the public has been given entry to the decision-making processes of the museum, both museum and public are going to have to determine where if anywhere a line can be drawn in what can and cannot be exhibited. In the United States, our public has been greatly exercised over art with sexual content, and the concomitant issues of censorship. But in Canada, recently, there was a tremendous outcry over the acquisition of art of the most critically esteemed order—Barnett Newman's *Voice of Fire* and Mark Rothko's *Number 16*. Now one clear advantage of tribalizing the museum—of saying in effect that the museum is for *their own art* for a given "they"—is that it is up to "them" to determine what "their" art should be, and this is not the business of the public that stays out of the museum. This might make an end run around the issue of censorship and

the like, except that the burden of taxation falls on all the "theys" alike. This would not have been a problem with the museum of museums, which the Ververs of the community could support out of their deep pockets. They would have to deal with their consciences in allocating their dollars to art rather than to other good things. On the other hand, not even shows like *Culture in Action* could take place without tax considerations involving groups other than those empowered by the funding to produce an art of their own. There was major support from the National Endowment for the Arts, not to speak of a pageful of tax-exempt organizations. The text does not give us the budget for the entire operation, so I have no idea what it cost the taxpayers to produce *We Got It!* candy bars. The latter did not make much money, for all the effort that was made to sell them to the candy-hungry population of Chicago. They tasted not one bit the better for being art. On the other hand, the candy could not have been made as art had the candy-making plant not been in place, which the confectioners were able to use for the time it took to produce *We Got It!* Of course, Richard Serra was not obliged to set up a steel-rolling plant in order to get the immense plates of weathering steel *Tilted Arc* required. But that is by the way.

Now there is one feature of contemporary art that distinguishes it from perhaps all art made since 1400, which is that its primary ambitions are not aesthetic. Its primary mode of relationship is not to viewers as viewers, but to other aspects of the persons to whom the art is addressed, and hence the primary domain of all such art is not the museum itself, and certainly not public spaces constituted as museums by virtue of having been occupied by works of art which are primarily aesthetic, and which do address persons primarily as viewers. In an essay in *ArtForum* in 1992, I wrote as follows: "What we see today is an art which seeks a more immediate contact with people than the museum makes possible . . . and the museum in turn is striving to accommodate the immense pressures that are imposed upon it from within art and from outside art. So we are witnessing, as I see it, a triple transformation—in the making of art, in the institutions of art, in the audience for art."[6] I was not surprised to see this passage quoted as an enabling text in *Culture in Action*. In part I was unsurprised because my thought was in some measure inspired by the previous endeavor of the chief mover of the exhibition, Mary Jane Jacob, an independent curator of immense energy and social vision, whose exhibition of site-specific art in Spoleto-USA I thought remarkable.

Extramuseal art ranges from certain genres not easily regarded as belonging to museums, like performance art, or through art—*We Got It!* is

a signal example—which is addressed to a particular community defined along racial, economic, religious, sexual, ethnic, or national lines—or along such other lines as may come to identify communities. The notorious Whitney Biennial of 1993 was an anthology of extramuseal art suddenly given exhibition space in a museum which acknowledged through that exhibition the trend I had in mind. I am afraid that, ready as I was to support such art, I hated seeing it in the museum. But that shows my politically retrograde nature. The natural outcome of an art of their own is almost certainly a museum of their own—a special interest museum, typified by the Jewish Museum in New York in its return to tribalism, or in the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, where the experience of the art is connected to the way individuals identify with the community whose art it is, and which split the audience into those whose art it is and the others.[7] (The claim that "the" museum is already tribalized rests on the claim that it is just like museums-of-their-own for various "theys"—splitting the audience between the white male or empowered class on one side and the disempowered and marginal on the other.)

3. *But Is It Art?* Part of what makes community-based art possible, at least of the sort exemplified by *We Got It!*, are certain theories which really had not been articulated before the early seventies, or the late sixties at the earliest, though an argument can be made that the ground was laid for these theories as early as 1915, when Marcel Duchamp advanced his first ready-mades. The most radical statement of the enfranchising theories would be Joseph Beuys's, who believed not only that anything could be a work of art, but, even more radically, that everyone was an artist (which of course is different from the idea that anyone can be an artist). The two theses are connected. If art is narrowly understood in terms, say, of painting or sculpture, then the latter thesis is that everyone is a painter or a sculptor, and this is as false on the face of it as that everyone is a musician or a mathematician. No doubt everyone can learn to draw or model up to a certain point, but usually rather short of the point at which painting or sculpture as art begin. There is, so far as I can tell, no room for such invidious gradations in the Beuysian enfranchisement. It is art if it is art, otherwise it is not art. There may be special criteria by which we can tell *We Got It!* from other candy bars, but certainly not the criteria by which candy bars themselves are graded into better and worse—by taste, size, nutritional considerations, or whatever. *We Got It!* may fall short of these on all candy-bar criteria and still be art while *they* are merely candy

bars. A candy bar that is a work of art need not be some especially good candy bar. It just has to be a candy bar produced with the intention that it be art. One can still eat it since its edibility is consistent with its being art. And it is worth observing that the first in a series of what are called "multiples" by Beuys consisted in a piece of chocolate mounted on a piece of plain paper. There would certainly be a value in working out the differences between this work and *We Got It!*—and between both of these and the immense block of chocolate the young conceptual artist Janine Antoni incorporated into her 1993 work *Gnaw*. It is to begin with a difference between subsistence, snacking, and gluttony, and hence between the nutritive conditions of a soldier, someone with a sweet tooth, and a bulemic. Meanwhile, it is something of an irony that there is a sense of "quality" which derives from connoisseurship and the dynamisms of the secondary market, where someone might advertise one of Beuys's chocolates as of "especially high quality." This would mean, among other things, that the corners are sharp and the edges clean. But that has nothing, one would think, to do with the spirit of the multiple as art. It would be like asking a high price for Duchamp's snow shovel on the grounds that "they don't make shovels like that any more"—i.e., on grounds of its workmanship and the thickness of its metal. Nor has it much to do with the array of meaning made available to art when artworks themselves are made out of chocolate.

It is easy to see that "quality" has nothing to do with being art under Beuysian considerations, and it is in these terms that "quality" was questioned in a famous, controversial piece by Brenson in *The New York Times*, published under the title "Is Quality an Idea whose Time has Gone?" It is worth stressing, I think, that the irrelevance of the concept of quality is not as such a mark of "an art of their own." Women's art—and I am thinking not of the fine art women have made but of traditional women's art like quilts, which did not gain initial entry into museums of fine art—was clearly subject to assessment by reference to quality. Because of iconoclast prohibitions, Jews and Muslims did not produce painting and sculpture, but there can be little doubt that what they did produce as art was marked by criteria of quality. Even the work of Beuys, "the most prophetic voice," according to Brenson, for *Culture in Action*, is sometimes better than at other times, by criteria that the repudiation of the idea of quality threw into question. I think there would be consensus on which of Beuys's works were best and why, and what makes them good when they are good. And indeed, Beuys's work provides experiences of the same order as that provided by the Damascene tiles or Veronese's

Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. In 1970, for example, Beuys put on a performance (he used the term "action") called *Celtic (Kinloch Rannoch) Scottish Symphony* at the Edinburgh College of Art. There is a photographic record of him, in his characteristic felt hat and hunter's vest, standing in a large bleak room, or kneeling on its paint-encrusted floor, surrounded by some electronic equipment. Here is a description of part of the performance:

> His actions are reduced to a minimum: he scribbles on a board and pushes it around the floor with a stick in a forty-minute circuit of Christiansen [i.e., the pianist], shows films by himself (not entirely successful as the editing destroys the rhythm), and of Rannoch Moor drifting slowly past the camera at about 3 mph. He spends something over an hour and a half taking bits of gelatin off the walls and putting them on a tray which he empties over his head in a convulsive movement. Finally he stands still for forty minutes.
>
> Thus told it sounds like nothing, in fact it is electrifying. And I am not speaking for myself alone: everyone who sat through the performance was converted, although everyone, needless to say, had a different explanation.[8]

I draw attention to the word "conversion," which echoes Ruskin's "unconversion." And I think everyone who reads the description wishes they had been there to experience it for themselves. There is sometimes a tendency to think about Beuys as if he were someone who had been influenced by Beuys's ideas. But he was an astonishing artist with a compelling style and capable of amazing effects on people.

There is a response to these objections. It might be argued that members of marginalized communities that produce art to which value is relevant have internalized the values of the dominant but essentially alien artistic culture, and that Beuys, for all that he was a prophet, remained contaminated by the institutions that formed him. True community-based art is subject to criteria, but they are not of the kind that apply to the dominant artistic culture enshrined in museums and their satellite institutions.

But it is not my aim here to protract the argument. It is possible to suppose that the kind of art the museum defines has had its day and that we have lived into a revolution in the concept of art as remarkable as the revolution with which that concept emerged, say around 1400, and which made the museum an institution exactly suited to art of that kind. I myself argue here, and in a number of places, that the end of art has come,

meaning that the narrative generated by that concept has come to its internally projected end. When art changes, the museum may fall away as the fundamental aesthetic institution, and extramuseal exhibitions of the sort *Culture in Action* exemplifies, in which art and life are far more closely intertwined than the conventions of the museum allows, may become the norm. Or the museum may itself become aesthetically marginalized as it becomes tribalized to what might still remain the dominant artistic culture, understood now as the province of certain sexual, economic, and racial types. That would certainly take a lot of pressure off the museum, but at something of a price.

Before speaking of that, let me take up the "But is it art?" question, with reference particularly to such works as *We Got It!* It is certainly not art by "museum of museums" criteria, but to the degree that we allow the possibility of conceptual revolutions in art, that need not count for a lot. What we can say is that there has to be some extrahistorical concept of art for there to be conceptual revolutions in, and the analysis of this is a task for the philosophy of art, a task in which I feel some steps have been taken, some by me, and that enough is understood to be able to say that *We Got It!* quite plausibly qualifies as art under an adequate philosophical definition which nobody so much as surmised had to be given before relatively recent times. There will be a lot missing from it by criteria appropriate to the concept of art that has prevailed for some centuries. But then there may be a lot missing from work enfranchised by that older concept which *We Got It!* has got by criteria suited to the concept of art that work like it enables us better to understand.

4. *The Museum and the Public.* In saying that the museum is limited in what it is able to do for multicultural America, I tend to think the museum is a bit undersold. I do not think the experiences communicated by Ruskin to his father, or by James to us in describing Adam Verver, or by the witness to Beuys's action in Edinburgh in 1970 really are quite as restricted by class, gender, race, and the like as the theses of multiculturalism make out. One needs of course to have some knowledge in order to have those experiences, and that is the kind of knowledge that has to be conveyed to people if they are to have those experiences. That is knowledge of a different order altogether than art appreciation of the sort transmitted by docents, or by art historians, or by the art education curriculum. And it has little to do with learning to paint or sculpt. The experiences belong to philosophy and to religion, to the vehicles through which the meaning of life is transmitted to people in their dimension as

human beings. And at this point I return to Adam Verver's conception of the thirsting millions. What they thirst for, in my view, what we all thirst for, is meaning: the kind of meaning that religion was capable of providing, or philosophy, or finally art—these being, in the tremendous vision of Hegel, the three (there are only three) moments of what he terms Absolute Spirit. I think it was the perception of artworks as fulcrums of meaning that inspired the templelike architectures of the great museums of James's time, and it was their affinity with religion and philosophy that was sensed as conveying knowledge. That is, art was construed as a fount rather than merely an object of knowledge. I think other expectations must have replaced it, reflected in other architectures, like that of Rogers and Peano's masterpiece in Paris, the Centre Pompidou. These other expectations, whatever they may be, are probably good and valid reasons for making, supporting, and experiencing art, but perhaps the museum is more and more an obstacle to be gotten round, predicated as it is on the possibility of the kind of meaning I have sought to illustrate. My own sense is that these expectations are dependent upon that kind of meaning, and hence on the museum as dedicated to making it available. The museum has meanwhile sought to be so responsive to so many other matters that it is a tribute to Adam Verver's intuition—that there is something for which the millions thirst—that their galleries are still hung with paintings, their cases filled with marvelous objects of the kind he negotiated for with his intended betrothed in Brighton a century ago.

5. *Art after the End of Art.* That *We Got It!* should be a work of art and not a mere bar of chocolate is possible only after the end of art, enfranchised as such by certain powerful theories which emerged in the 1970s to the effect that anything can be a work of art and everyone is an artist. Its being "community-based" art rather than the work of a single individual is the achievement of certain enfranchising political theories which held, as one of their programmatic corollaries, that groups of individuals alleged to find no meaning in the art of museums should not be deprived of the meanings art might confer upon their lives. *We Got It!* does not redeem for the status of art every candy bar in creation, anymore than Duchamp made artworks of every snow shovel by making an artwork of one. Having conceded as much, let us ask ourselves where the museum stands after the concept of "an art of their own" has been accepted.

I think the first thing to be said is that not everyone for whom *We Got It!* was art belonged to that group for which the bar of chocolate was an "art of its own." As with all such cases, the work split the audiences

between those whose identity as a community was embodied in the art, and those who were no part of that community but who perhaps believed in community-based art—like Michael Brenson, for example, or the various art-world-based individuals who worked with the various communities to facilitate the different artworks which made up the exhibition *Culture in Action*. These were individuals who were themselves thoroughly at home in the world of the museum and the art gallery, the art exhibition and the art periodical. *We Got It!* was in no sense an art of *their* own. And indeed, they stood to *We Got It!* in very much the same sort of relationship in which Ruskin stood to Veronese's *Solomon and the Queen of Sheba* or in which Adam Verver did to the blue tiles of Damascus, which instantly helps to detribalize that art: it was not an "art of their own" for comfortable white males. They just happened to be the ones who appreciated it, the way the not altogether uncomfortable white men and women who formed the audience for works such as *We Got It!* appreciated that work, to be sure not on aesthetic but on moral and political grounds. So *We Got It!* is in no sense an art exclusively to those for whom it is an art of their own. It belongs to everyone, as it should, being art. Indeed, it is fair to say that while the art world did not make the chocolate bar, they made it possible for it to be art when the confectioners made it under certain auspices, and at a certain moment in history—i.e., after the end of art, when in a sense everything is possible. Whether *We Got It!* will ever yield anyone the kind of experience *Solomon and the Queen of Sheba* yielded Ruskin is quite unpredictable—after all, to how many did that very painting yield an experience comparable to Ruskin's? To someone who knows the art history of the candy, it is imaginable that they should be moved to think of all those men and women, far from the art world, thinking of what gave meaning to their lives and deciding that they could make art out of that and at the same time the best candy bar in Chicago! The mere possibility of that more than justifies putting the work in the museum. How else are we to preserve it for the edification of future generations?

NOTES

1. Henry James, *The Golden Bowl*, ed. Gore Vidal (London and New York: Penguin English Library, 1985), 142–43.

2. Linda Ferber, "History of the Collections," in *Masterpieces in the Brooklyn Museum* (Brooklyn: The Brooklyn Museum, 1988), 12. See also "Part One: History," in *A New*

Brooklyn Museum: The Master Plan Competition (Brooklyn: The Brooklyn Museum and Rizzoli, 1988), 26–76.

3. John Ruskin, communication to his father, in Tim Hilton, *John Ruskin: The Early Years* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 256.

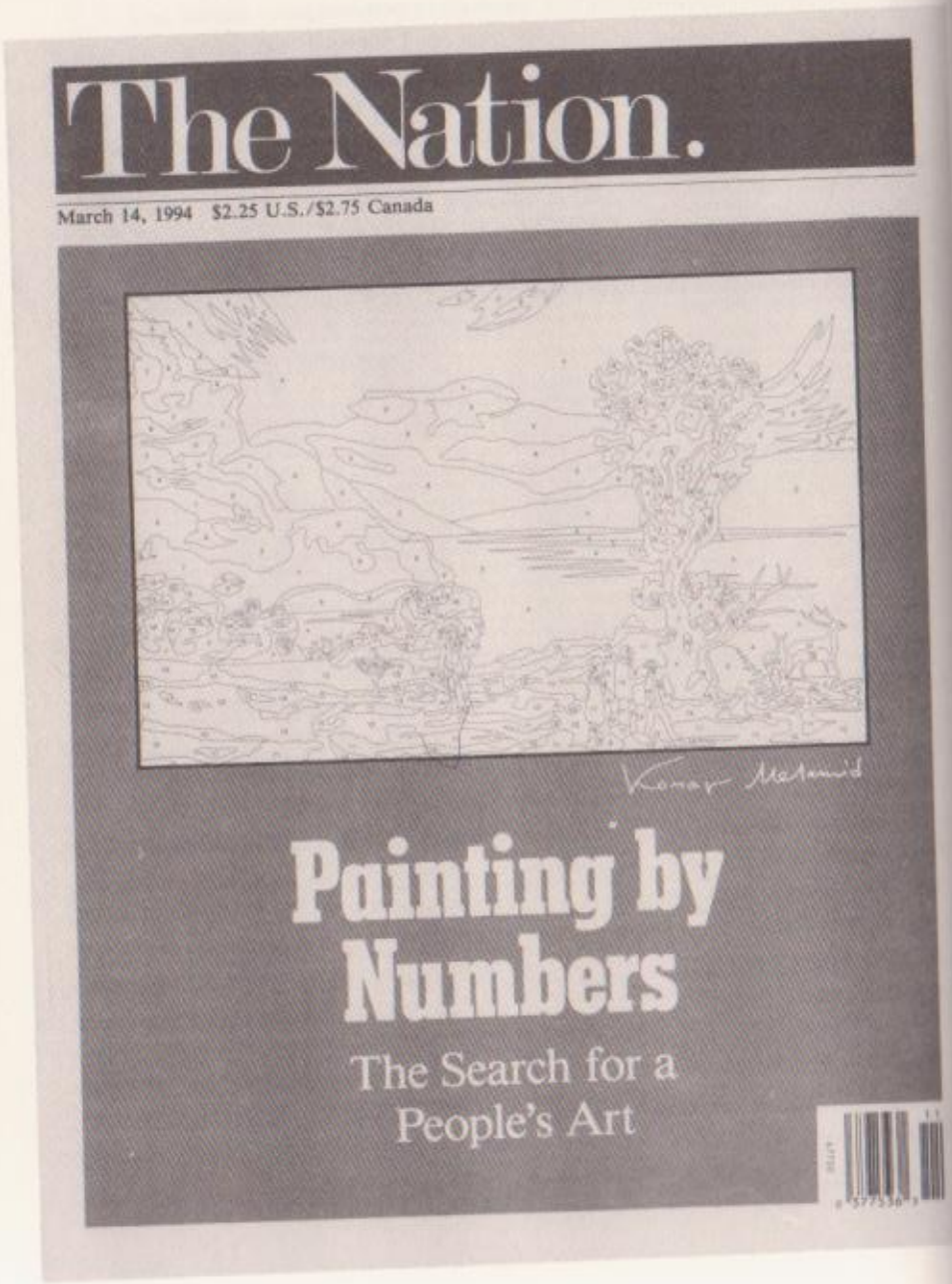
4. James, *The Golden Bowl*, 220.

5. Michael Brenson, "Healing in Time," in Mary Jane Jacob, ed., *Culture in Action: A Public Art Program of Sculpture Chicago* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995), 28–29.

6. Arthur C. Danto, *Beyond the Brillo Box: The Visual Arts in Post-Historical Perspective* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1992), 12.

7. I discuss this in my "Post-Modern Art and Concrete Selves," in *From the Inside Out: Eight Contemporary Artists* (New York: The Jewish Museum, 1993).

8. Caroline Tisdale, *Joseph Beuys* (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1979), 195–96.



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CHAPTER ELEVEN

Modalities of History: Possibility and Comedy

SOMEWHAT earlier in my analysis, I declared myself, with a certain bravura, an essentialist in the philosophy of art, notwithstanding the fact that in the polemical order of the contemporary world, the term "essentialist" has taken on the most negative of connotations. Especially in feminist discourse, merely to entertain the thought that there is some fixed and universal feminine identity is to acquiesce in a form of oppression. But I have evidently been perceived as an anti-essentialist in the philosophy of art, and hence on the side of angels. David Carrier, for example, wrote not long ago that "the target of Danto's critical analysis is the claim that art-as-such has an essence."[1] Now I would have taken the entire burden of my major work on the subject, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, to have been to underwrite essentialism in the philosophy of art, since that book takes as its program a definition of art which pretty much implies that there is, after all, a fixed and universal artistic identity. The difficulty with the great figures in the canon of aesthetics, from Plato through Heidegger, is not that they were essentialists but that they got the essence wrong. It was never an inference of mine that "if *Fountain* and *Brillo Box* can be artworks, then no longer is there some distinctive sort of thing constituting art," as Carrier evidently believes. The point is that if they can be artworks, then pretty much all the attempted definitions of the essence of art have got it wrong, not that those who made the attempts were wrong in making them. Still, if a critic as astute as Carrier has misperceived my views, I cannot be badly out of line in making the effort to state them once more, particularly since, together with the endorsement of essentialism, I claimed to be an historicist in the philosophy of art. For how these views can be compatible may be difficult for readers to grasp, and exhibiting their consistency may accordingly be a philosophical contribution in its own right, going beyond the mere satisfaction of setting the record straight.

There are two ways to think of essence: with reference to the class of things denoted by a term, or to the set of attributes the term connotes: *extensionally* and *intensionally*, to use the old terms in which the meanings of terms was often given.[2] One is functioning extensionally when, by induction, one endeavors to elicit the attributes common and peculiar to the items which form the term's extension. The extreme heterogeneity of the term *artwork*'s extension, especially in modern times, has at times formed the basis of the denial that the class of artworks has a defining set of attributes, and hence the affirmation, commonplace when I began my investigations into the philosophy of art, that art must, like games, be at best a family-resemblance class. Something along those lines, if my surmise is right, must underlie Ernst Gombrich's original intention in saying that "there really is no such thing as Art,"[3] though my overall sense is that Gombrich was not among those who took Duchamp seriously.[4] My contribution, if it was one, was precisely not to be misled by the heterogeneity in the term's extension which Duchamp and Warhol now made radical. They made it radical because from their work being classed as art, it immediately followed that one could no longer tell which were the artworks by observation, nor, in consequence, could one hope to arrive at a definition by induction over cases. My contribution was that a definition now must be found which was not only consistent with the radical disjunctiveness of the class of artworks, but even explained how that disjunctiveness was possible. But, like all definitions, mine (which was probably only partial) was entirely essentialist. By "essentialist" I mean that it set out to be a definition through necessary and sufficient conditions, in the canonical philosophical manner. So, incidentally, did Dickie's institutional theory of art set out to be essentialist in that way. Both of us set ourselves resolutely against the Wittgensteinian tides of the time.[5]

The only figure in the history of aesthetics I found to have grasped the complexities of the concept of art—and who had almost an a priori explanation of the heterogeneity of the class of artworks, since unlike most philosophers he had an historical rather than an eternalist view of the subject—was Hegel. Symbolic art, in his scheme, had to look different from classical art, as well as romantic art, and it was clear in consequence that any definition of art he might give had to be consistent with that degree of perceptual disorder and inductive impotency. In the marvelous passage where Hegel sets out his ideas on the end of art, he writes, "What is now aroused in us by works of art is not just immediate enjoyment but our judgment also, since we subject to our intellectual consideration (i) the content of art, and (ii) the work of art's means of presentation, and

the appropriateness or inappropriateness of both to one another."[6] At the conclusion of chapter five, I suggested that we need little more than (i) and (ii) to map the anatomy of criticism. There is, to be sure, the matter of sensuousness, through which stigma Hegel assigns to art a lower station in the realm of Absolute Spirit than philosophy, which is pure intellection, unsullied by the senses, though he may have had sensuousness built into his idea of "means of presentation." But it also seems to me that with all its pyrotechnics of imaginary examples and its methodology of indiscernible counterparts, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, in its effort to lay down a definition, hence chart the essence of art, did little better than come up with conditions (i) and (ii) as necessary for something having the status of art. To be a work of art is to be (i) *about* something and (ii) to *embody its meaning*. Embodiment goes beyond, or falls outside, the distinction between intension and extension as capturing the dimensions of meaning, and it will not be until Frege introduced his important but undeveloped notion of *Farbung* to supplement *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* that philosophers of meaning found (and quickly lost) a way of handling artistic meaning. In any case, my book ekes out two conditions, and I was (and am) insufficiently convinced that they were jointly sufficient to have believed the job done. But I did not know where to go next, and so ended the book. In Carrier's terms, it seems to me, I captured part of the essence of art, and hence vindicated my philosophical belief that art is an essentialist concept.

The difference, philosophically, between an institutionalist like Dickie and myself is not that I was essentialist and he was not, but that I felt that the decisions of the art world in constituting something a work of art required a class of reasons to keep the decisions from being merely fiats of arbitrary will.[7] And in truth I felt that according the status of art to *Brillo Box* and to *Fountain* was less a matter of declaration than of discovery. The experts really were experts in the same way in which astronomers are experts on whether something is a star. They saw that these works had meanings which their indiscernible counterparts lacked, and they saw as well the way these works embodied those meanings. These were works simply made for the end of art inasmuch as there was very little to them in terms of sensuous presentation, and a sufficient degree of what Hegel terms "judgment" to license the admittedly somewhat reckless claim I sometimes made that art had nearly turned into philosophy.

There is a further consideration bearing on the institutional account, and which has played a considerable role in my thinking about art, namely, that an object precisely (or precisely enough) like one accorded

the status of artwork in 1965 could not have been accorded that status in 1865 or 1765. The concept of art, as essentialist, is timeless. But the extension of the term is historically indexed—it really is as if the essence reveals itself through history, which is part of what Wölfflin may be taken to have implied in saying, "Not everything is possible at all times, and certain thoughts can only be thought at certain stages of the development."[8] History belongs to the extension rather than the intension of the concept of art, and, again with the notable exception of Hegel, virtually no philosophers have taken seriously the historical dimension of art. Gombrich, on the other hand has, and it is to his great credit that he specified that the purpose of his epochal book *Art and Illusion* "was to explain why art has a history."[9] He really explains why pictorial representation has a history, not why *art* has a history, which is why he had such difficulty in fitting Duchamp into his account, since, after all, *Fountain* has nothing to do with making and matching. Had he not taken over his colleague Popper's scorn for Hegel,[10] he might have seen that both content and means of presentation are themselves historical concepts, though the faculty of the mind to which they answer is not perception but, once again, "judgment." And in view of the historical constraints on the two, let us call them Hegelian, conditions, *Fountain* (which in any case was epicyclical on the history of plumbing) and *Brillo Box* (which alludes to the history of manufacture not to mention the history of standards of domestic cleanliness) could not have been works of art at any earlier moment. (We might define their historical moment as any time in which they could have been works of art.)

The term "essentialist" has become anathema in the postmodern world primarily in contexts of gender and secondarily in contexts of politics. Certain views of the essence of womanhood have been felt (rightly) to be oppressive to women at certain stages in the history of humankind; and the idea of participating in a single essence of Arabism has, in a celebrated polemic of Edward Said, obscured the differences among Arabs to Western eyes (let us overlook the essentialism of "Western"). So it has been viewed as morally and politically better to deny the existence of a female essence (for example) than to undertake the search for one. Or to say, of human beings generally, that our existence is our essence, following Sartre's subversion of the medieval distinction. Now I am uncertain what value it would be to try to fix essentialist definitions of women, Arabs, or human beings generally, but if we see the advantage, let alone the urgency, of doing so in the case of art, we may see that there are certain built-in safeguards against the kinds of abuses the polemicization of essentialism was intended to identify. Given that the extension of the term "artwork" is historical, so that works at different stages do not obviously resemble one another, or at least do not have to resemble one another, it is clear that the definition of art must be consistent with all of them, as all must exemplify the identical essence. And as much may be said of the extension of *artwork* across the various cultures which have had a practice of making art: the concept of art must be consistent with everything that is art. It immediately follows that the definition entails no stylistic imperatives whatever, irresistible as it has been, at moments of artistic revolution, to say that what has been left behind "is not really art." Those who have relished denying the status of art to certain works have tended to elevate an historically contingent feature of art into part of the essence of art, which is a philosophical error it has evidently been difficult to avoid, especially when there has been lacking a robust historicism to go with the essentialism. In brief, essentialism in art entails pluralism, whether pluralism in fact is historically realized or not. I mean that I can imagine circumstances in which, by means of political or religious enforcement, works of art are externally forced to comply with certain standards. We see this happening with the attempts at legislating the National Endowment for the Arts into socially acceptable grooves.

The application to other concepts with historical extensions is immediate and clear. The concept of womankind, for example, has a very complex history, so that what counts as fitting for women varies sharply from period to period and place to place. (It is no less true that "man" has an historical extension as well). This, no more than with the concept of art, entails that there is no such thing as an essence that all and only women exemplify. It means, rather, that the essence cannot contain anything that is historically or culturally contingent. Hence essentialism here, as elsewhere, entails a pluralism of gender traits, male and female, leaving it a matter of social and moral policy which if any traits to incorporate into the ideals that go with gender. These will not be part of the essence for obvious reasons, for what belongs to essences, in art or in gender, has nothing to do with social or moral policy.

The conjunction of essentialism and historicism helps define the present moment in the visual arts. As we seek to grasp the essence of art—or to speak less portentously, of an adequate philosophical definition of art—our task is immensely facilitated by the recognition that the extension of the term "work of art" is now altogether open, so that in effect we live in a time when everything is possible for artists, when in the phrase I have taken over from Hegel, there is no longer a "pale of history." What

are we now to say in response to Heinrich Wölfflin's claim, cited more than once in this text, that not everything is possible at every time? "Every artist," he specifies, "finds certain visual possibilities before him, to which he is bound," so that "even the most original talent cannot proceed beyond certain limits which are fixed for it by the date of its birth." Surely this must be as true of artists born into a pluralistic art world, and for whom everything *is* possible, as for artists born into the art world of Periclean Athens or the Florence of the Medicis. One does not escape the constraints of history by entering the post-historical period. So in whatever way it is true of the post-historical period in which we find ourselves that everything is possible, this must be consistent with Wölfflin's thought that *not* everything is possible. The gamey whiff of contradiction must be dispelled by making distinctions between the everything that is possible, and the everything that is not. And that in part is the task of this last chapter.

The sense in which everything is possible is that in which there are no a priori constraints on what a work of visual art can look like, so that anything visible can be a visual work. That is part of what it really means to live at the end of art history. This means in particular that it is altogether possible for artists to appropriate the forms of past art, and use to their own expressive ends the cave painting, the altarpiece, the baroque portrait, the cubist landscape, Chinese landscape in the Sung style, or whatever. So what is it that is *not* possible? It is not possible to relate to these works as those did in whose form of life those works played the role they played: we are not cavemen, nor are we devout medievals, baroque princelings, Parisian bohemians on the frontiers of a new style, or Chinese literati. Of course, no period can relate to the art of earlier life-forms in the way those who lived those life-forms did. But neither could they, as can we, make those forms ours. There is a difference to be drawn between the forms and the way we relate to them. The sense in which everything is possible is that in which all forms are ours. The sense in which not everything is possible is that we must still relate to them in our own way. The way we relate to those forms is part of what defines our period.

When I say "all forms are ours" I do not mean that there are not forms distinctive of our period. Looking through the catalog of the 1995 Biennale in Istanbul, for example, one cannot but be struck by the fact that virtually nothing pictured could have been done as art as recently as a

decade ago. Most of it is in the form of installations, and the artists allow themselves no limits in the media they employ. There is a sense in which the works express our times, and this will almost certainly continue to be true: the Istanbul Biennale of 2005 will almost certainly contain works we cannot today imagine. That is a consequence of the pressures on artists constantly to come up with something new, which the open extension of the term "work of art" facilitates. And it is an overall corollary of the unknowability of the historical future. Were we to imagine ourselves as visitors to the biennals of ten years hence—the 105th Venice Biennale, the 5th Johannesburg Biennale, the 10th Istanbul Biennale, the Whitney Biennial of 2005—we know almost certainly that there will be things in them different in ways we cannot imagine in any interesting detail from what we could have seen in 1995. But we also know that our definition of art is already sufficiently in place that we will have no hesitation in accepting it all as art. If that definition should differ from what we have today, that will be through the progress of philosophical aesthetics, perhaps stimulated by the unforeseen history of the future of art, but perhaps not.

Let me then return to the point that while all forms are indeed ours, we cannot relate to them the in the same way as those could whose forms they originally were. This is a special kind of price we pay for our freedom to appropriate those forms, and since it is an incapacity which helps define the historical present, it is worth spending a bit of time in analyzing the difference between the post-historical period and all previous periods in the history of art. We cannot do better than use Wölfflin, with his keen sense of historical modalities—of possibility and impossibility—as our guide.

Wölfflin's strategy is exceedingly cunning. He brackets together artists contemporary with one another who seem prima facie to be stylistically very distant, and suggests that they have in fact a great deal more in common than first meets the eye: "Grunewald is a different imaginative type from Dürer, though they are contemporaries," he writes, but "seen from a longer range, these two types re-unite in a common style, i.e., we at once recognize the elements which unite the two as representatives of their generation."[11] Or again,

> There are hardly two artists who, although contemporaries, are more widely divergent by temperament than the baroque master Bernini and the Dutch painter Terborch. Confronted with the turbulent figures of Bernini, who will think of the peaceful little pictures of Terborch? And yet,

> if we were to lay drawings by the two masters side by side and compare the general features of the technique, we should have to admit that here is a perfect kinship.[12]

There is, in brief, a common visual idiom which cuts across national and religious boundaries at a given time, and to be an artist at all is to participate in this vision. But "vision also has a history": the common visual language inevitably changes. However Bernini and Terborch differ from one another, they are far closer than either of them is to Botticelli, or to Lorenzo di Credi, who belong on a different stratum altogether: the "revelation of these visual strata must be regarded as the primary task of art history," Wölfflin thought. And of course Wölfflin's well-known "revelation" here is that Botticelli and di Credi are linear while Terborch and Bernini are painterly. And when he says that not everything is possible at every time, he means, I think primarily, that it not a possibility for those on the linear stratum to "say what they have to say" in painterly terms. Wölfflin asks, only to dismiss, the question of how Bernini would have expressed himself in linear style of the sixteenth century—"he needed the painterly style to say what he had to say." "Saying what he had to say" clearly goes beyond the history of vision, unless we accept that visual forms may be used to express beliefs and attitudes which are in no sense visual in their own right: "vision has a history" only because visual representations belong to forms of life that are themselves related to one another historically. Terborch's messages were erotic and domestic, Bernini's cosmic and dramatic. It was just that the painterly style enabled them each to say what they wanted to say in ways the linear style would not have. The forms of life to which the two artists respectively belonged overlapped in ways which neither of them overlapped with the forms of life the linear style expressed.

The art of the Counter-Reformation had as its charge to depict the sufferings of the martyrs, the agonies of Christ, the grief of Mary at the foot of the Cross.[13] The operative psychology was that those who saw the works would share the feelings, and in identifying with those who express them, have strengthened the faith for the sake of which those personages underwent so much. They had not merely to see that there was suffering, not merely to infer that someone in the situations depicted would in fact suffer: they had to feel the suffering. And ways had to be found to convey this all by means of paint and carving. But once the stylistic strategies of the baroque had evolved, they could be put to other uses—to cause viewers to feel, for example, the warmth of a room or the

cool slickness of a satin garment. And so the imperatives to which Bernini's art was a response allowed Terborch to say things inaccessible to a "linear" artist who may not even have entertained the thought that such things *could* be said. There is a philosophically instructive asymmetry in thinking of the way in which sixteenth-century artists could not so much as conceive of expressing certain things in art that really required the painterly vocabulary of the baroque style, and in thinking of how a baroque artist would be frustrated were he obliged to try to say whatever he had to say in the linear style of his immediate predecessors. How would Caravaggio have expressed himself—"said what he had to say"—in the style of Pinturrichio, and how would Courbet have managed with the constraints which defined the stratum on which Giotto worked? Viewers might have seen or inferred suffering, agony, and grief in linear figures, but *feeling* these, and bonding with those who undergo them, requires a different sylistic strategy. (Comic strips, which essentially use linear styles of drawing, resort to words or to symbols: "Ouch!" or stars in orbits around someone's bashed head.) But the constraints work in the other historical direction as well: of what use to Giotto would have been what Wölfflin describes as "the energy of the baroque handling of masses?" How would that in any way correspond to what he wanted to say through his art? There is, in brief, a certain internal correspondence between message and means.

The philosopher Paul Feyerabend once stated that "historical periods such as the Baroque, the Rococo, the Gothic Age are unified by a concealed essence that only a lonely outsider can understand. . . . We can admit that times of war produce warlike writers—but that does not exhaust their nature. One must also study those who were untouched by the patriotic fervor and were perhaps averse to it; they too represent their age."[14] The notion of an historical essence is certainly far from clear, but neither, I think, have we any particular grasp on the substance of history if we do not recognize the existence of realities to which the notion corresponds. We can speak of these as "periods" if we choose to, so long as we recognize that a period is not simply an interval of time, but rather such an interval in which the forms of life lived by men and women have a complex philosophical identity, as something lived and known about in the way we know about things by living them; as something that can be known about but not lived; and as something that can both be lived and known about, in the case of individuals who are gifted with an historical insight into their own times—who are inside and outside their period at once. *We* can know about the baroque period as scholars or, to use

Feyerabend's romantic words, as "lonely outsiders," but it is no longer available to us as something we can live. Or, in a way, we can live it only in the mode of pastiche and pretense, and that is not really living it since no one lives it with us. The paradigm of someone endeavoring to live a period in this way is of course Don Quixote, who is humored or exploited by individuals who do not really share the Don's form of life (since no one can), but who can come to know about it externally, the way most of us get to know about the lives lived in former times.

We really know very little about future forms of life, and if we try to live futuristically, we are almost certainly going to merely represent our own time's vision of the future. The futurist counterpart of Don Quixote will almost certainly be some variant of the cosmonaut which has tended to emblematize the future since perhaps the 1930s, when Buck Rogers and Wilma Dearing flitted from star to star. A fin de (vingtième) siècle Cervantes could write a novel about someone trying to live the life of the future now, but it will look as quaint when the future comes as Buck Rogers does today. He—or she, since folly knows no gender—would almost certainly resort to the kind of costume we learn about through films such as *2001*. There is nothing more sobering than the way the 1990s was perceived from the vantage point of the 1960s: we are very far indeed from yesterday's tomorrow.[15] Still, there is a deep difference in the way the future is impossible for us, and the way the past, which we can know about, is impossible for us. This asymmetry is the structure of historical being. If it were possible for someone to know the future, it would be useless knowledge, for that person could not live the form of life which defines the future since no one else does. If other people lived it, it would be present, after all.

The expression "form of life" of course comes from Wittgenstein: he said, "To imagine a language is to imagine a form of life."[16] But the same thing must be said about art: to imagine a work of art is to imagine a form of life in which it plays a role. (Try to imagine Terborch trying to imagine a form of life in which the typical installation in the 1995 Istanbul Biennale plays a role!) In my discussion of monochrome painting, I sought to imagine different forms of life in which paintings which outwardly look the same play different roles, have different meanings, and hence are subject to different art criticisms. To treat works of art purely in aesthetic terms was thought, by modernists especially, to strip them of their rootedness in forms of life and to treat them on their own. What was not recognized was that the works of art made to be addressed that way did so in forms of life in which something like artistic beauty had a role to play. Without the form of life in which it has a meaning, in which works are made for their aesthetic qualities, our relationship to aesthetics is so external that one can seriously wonder what the point and purpose of such art can be. To ask today, in the terms of a name given to a colloquium I once participated in, "What Ever Happened to Beauty?" is to ask where in our form of life something like artistic beauty has a role. But I must not allow myself to be distracted. Rather, I want heavily to stress a philosophical point about forms of life: a form of life is something lived and not merely known about. For art to play a role in a form of life, there must be a fairly complex system of meanings in which it does so, and belonging to another form of life means that one can grasp the meaning of works of art from an earlier form only by reconstituting as much of the relevant system of meanings as we are able. One can without question imitate the work and the style of the work of an earlier period. What one cannot do is live the system of meanings upon which the work drew in its original form of life. Our relationship to it is altogether external, unless and until we can find a way of fitting it into our form of life.

With this let us return to Wölfflin. The painting styles of Giotto, Botticelli, and Bernini belonged to different forms of life so intimately that it is difficult to feel that it is valid to see them as constituting a kind of progressive series, as Vasari almost surely would have, and so related to one another that Giotto, had he been given a glimpse of Botticelli through a time warp, would immediatly have appropriated its innovations—as if Botticelli had succeeded in doing what Giotto would have done had he known how. And so with Botticelli, had he been given a glimpse of Bernini or Terborch. No time-warp fiction is required to imagine Bernini knowing Botticelli, or Botticelli knowing Giotto, for the work was there to be seen. And we do know that the later artists could not have painted in the manner of their predecessors, not for reasons of skill or knowledge, but because there would not be room in the form of life of Counter-Reformation Rome or Medici Florence for painting in the older styles: Bernini fits, as Botticelli does not, with Saint Ignazio Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*; Botticelli fits, as Giotto could not have, with Lorenzo di Medici's poetry. The later artists could only have painted in the earlier manner were it part of their endeavor to paint pictures which showed paintings from the time of one of their predecessors, the way, to use my earlier example, Guercino found an archaic style for the painting of which his Saint Luke is so exultant. Had Guercino done a painting about the life of Giotto, he would have been sure, in view of his historical sensitivity, to paint the latter in what he takes Giotto's style to have been,

and not in his own: Giotto would not, and really could not, have painted like Guercino, so Guercino would have been careful, in the case described, to adjust his style to that of his subject.

Let us consider a painting in which the artist does not possess Guercino's sensitivity. There is an extremely ambitious painting, done in 1869 by the German artist Anselm Feuerbach,[17] which depicts the climactic moment of Plato's *Symposium* at which Alcibiades, drunk and surrounded by a rowdy company, bursts into the feast of reason in which one after another the guests had described and praised love. It is a vast canvas, with the figures life-size, and a certain amount of art-historical scholarship has gone into the identification of the individual guests. It is relatively easy to pick out Socrates and Agathon, and Alcibiades, of course. The remaining identifications have to be argued for, but it is inconsistent with Feurbach's high-mindedness that he would paint a kind of anonymous banquet scene. Too much thought has gone into the details—the lamps, the robes, the physiognomies, the gestures—to have settled for some anonymous extras rather than Pausanias, say, or Aristodemus. Feuerbach lived in an atmosphere which celebrated the classical world—his father had written a text on the Apollo Belvedere. And for all the raucousness of the moment depicted, the *Symposium* itself celebrates the highest and most abstract ideals of, as it happens, the intellectual as against the physical love of beauty. We know that Feuerbach aspired to a painterly style commensurate with these *beaux ideals*. He was an exponent of the so-called "Grand Manner" enunciated in the seventeenth century, in Italy, in the writings of Giovanni Bellori and embodied in the paintings of Poussin and the Bolognese masters, and given its classical statement in Reynolds' discourses. What is important to observe is that the Grand Manner was deemed suitable to historical painting, and in the ranking of the academy, historical painting is the highest and most exalted of the genres. Small wonder Feurerbach regarded himself as a very great painter indeed, and small wonder again that he was embittered by the failure of the world to share that exceedingly high opinion. Certainly, Feuerbach's painting, what he would unhesitatingly call his masterpiece, was possible in 1869 when it was painted. (But so was Manet's *Olympia* and his *Dejeuner sur l'herbe* of 1863, which was "art fallen so low it hardly merits reproach," and so were the paintings of the impressionists—the first impressionist exhibition took place in 1874.) Feuerbach's work, though he would hardly have seen it that way, was already dated, even if the Grand Manner as he had mastered it was the Grand Manner of the

mid-nineteenth century, and would perhaps have been seen by him as continuous with but having gone far beyond the work of, say, Poussin.

Within his masterpiece, Feuerbach painted a painting, also of a symposium, namely the event described by Xenophon, in which the subject was again love. This painting shows Dionysus and Ariadne, hence divine and mortal love. The problem is that, for all his extraordinary historical and archeological knowledge, Feurbach painted the painting within the painting in the same Grand Manner in which he painted everything else in it, disregarding the rule which Guercino grasped and Wölfflin expresses, that, once more, "vision has a history." To be historically consistent, Feuerbach would have had to paint the painting within his painting in a style historically appropriate to ancient Greece, even if everything else in his painting is in the Grand Manner he commanded. We in fact know almost nothing about what Greek painting looked like, though one must assume that for artists like Apeles or Parahesios to have earned their extraordinary reputation as illusionists, their art must have been closer in style to the marbles of Praxiteles than to the vase paintings of Eurphronios. Plato would scarcely have regarded the vase painters as dangerous seducers of visual belief! We do not even know if there would have been paintings on the wall, as Feuerbach shows. But we ought at least to be able to infer that if there were, they would not have been in the Grand Manner.

Logicians draw a crucial distinction between the *use* and the *mention* of an expression.[18] We use the expression "Saint Paul" when we make a statement about Saint Paul. We mention "Saint Paul" when we use it to make a statement about that expression. The same distinction is available with pictures. We use a picture to make a statement about whatever the picture shows. But we mention a picture when we use it to make a picture of it which in effect says, "That picture looks thus!" Mentioned expressions typically occur within quotation marks. "'Saint Paul' is the name now given to Saul of Tarsus." Mentioned pictures typically occur as pictures within pictures. It is not available to Guercino to use the style he ascribes to Saint Luke to paint his pictures in, unless bent upon forgery. It is only available to him to "mention" that style, by painting a picture as he imagines Saint Luke would have painted it, using the style of his time. The main use of pictorial mention is in paintings about painters, but of course also in paintings of interiors in which paintings hang as objects of interior decoration. Vermeer's style was sufficiently accommodating that he could paint the pictures within his pictures in his own style,

which also showed the style of those paintings, close in any case in style to his own. If we could represent the art of the future, we could at best mention it pictorially, since the form of life to which it belongs is not available to us to live.

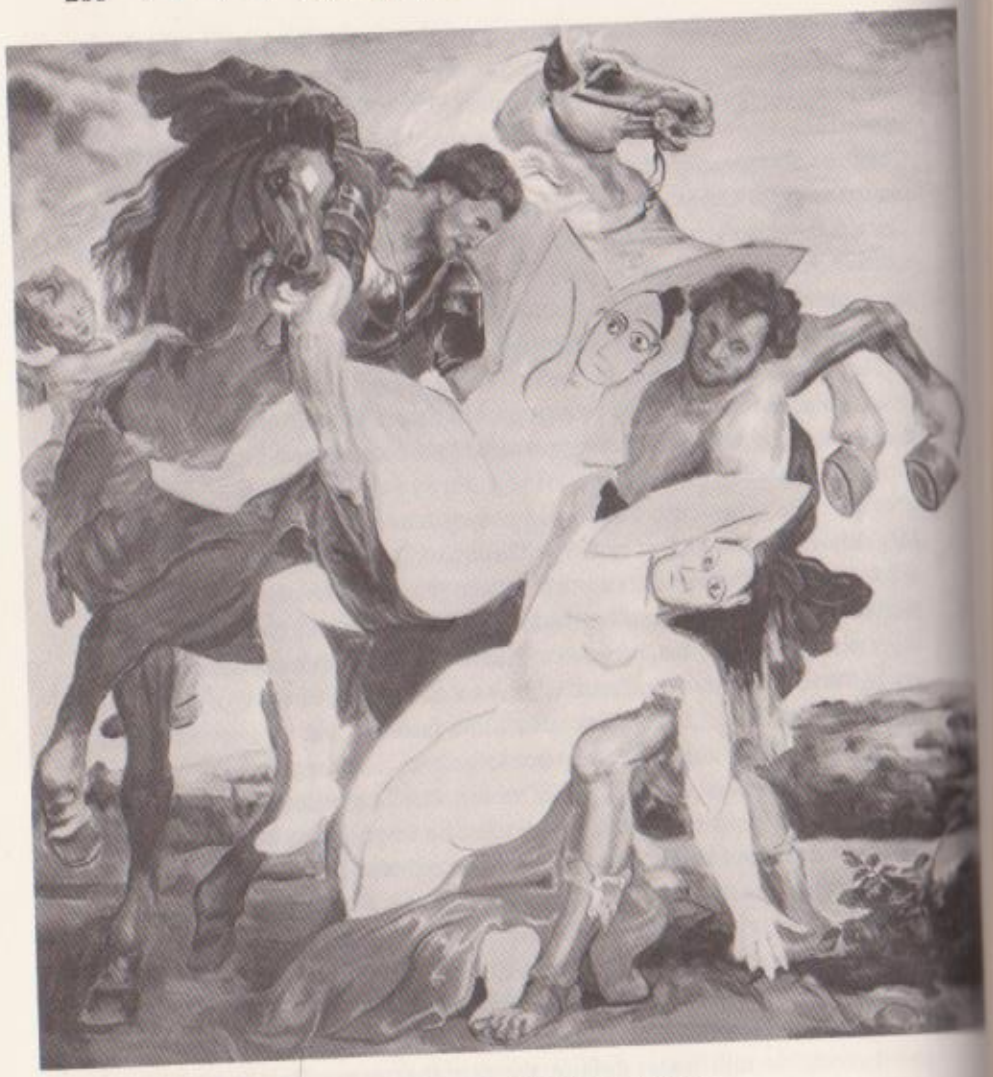
In saying that all forms are ours, then, I want to distinguish between their use and their mention. They are ours to mention in many cases, but not to use. Consider the case of Hans Van Meegeren, the remarkable forger of Vermeers in the 1940s. Van Meegeren's motives as a forger were connected with his belief that the critics did not take him as seriously as he took himself as an artist, and his aim was to paint what the experts agreed was a Vermeer. That secured, he meant to reveal the truth that he had painted what, had it instead been painted by Vermeer, the critics would have had to acknowledge was a major work. And, as the painter of a major work, Van Meegeren would have had to be considered as great as Vermeer was. The structure of implicit argument has something of the shape of Alan Turing's test for machine intelligence: it would be inconsistent to ascribe intelligence to a literary critic but not to a machine if there were no grounds for discriminating between their "outputs"—i.e., the answers to certain questions put to a source whose identity was hidden. Of course, the human all-too-human took over with van Meegeren: the money was more delicious than the revenge. Think what one may of van Meegeren's *Christ at Emmaeus*, which hangs today in the Boymans-van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam, it contributed nothing whatever to the reevaluation of van Meegeren's own paintings, though the later began to acquire a certain extra-artistic interest, the way the water-colors of Hitler or the oil paintings of Sir Winston Churchill have done. Indeed, let us imagine, contrary to fact, that viewers of van Meegeren's rather lame canvas think as well of it, as a painting, as they do of one of Vermeer's own paintings from his early Baroque phase, e.g., his *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha* (in truth immeasurably more vibrant than van Meegeren's fabrication). This would but show that van Meegeren would have been a better painter in the seventeenth century than he was in the twentieth. Unfortunately, that style, in which he might have flourished, could only be "mentioned" in his own time and not "used." He could but pretend to use it by pretending it was by Vermeer—that is, as a forger.

It is not difficult to see what would have been the case had van Meegeren simply painted his *Christ at Emmaeus* in 1936 and sought to exhibit it in Amsterdam in those years as his own. But there was, to use the

expression I have had recourse to, no room in the art world of Amsterdam in 1936 for a painting like that, even if, had people believed it by Vermeer, there would have been room in the Delft art world of 1655 for something like it (though my sense is that when we put it alongside the *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha* of that year, it would have looked pretty awful). There is in a way room in the art world of 1995 for a work like that, but only within the framework of the mention-function. It could not be accepted within the framework of use. It would have to make a statement about the kind of painting it exemplified, and not a statement about what a painting of Christ at Emmaeus is about.

The American painter, Russell Connor, recombines pieces of familiar masterpieces to make new paintings. He took the women from Picasso's *Les demoiselles d'Avignon*, for example, and substituted them for the women in Rubens's paintings of the *Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus*, giving it the witty title *The Kidnapping of Modern Art by the New Yorkers*. His title of course refers to Serge Guilbaut's *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*. The result is a postmodern masterpiece of interlocked allusions, a kind of cartoon of crossed identities, in which, of course, Connor does not pretend to be Rubens or Picasso, or even pretend to the kind of art-historical scandal Guilbaut claims to have uncovered. For Connor's paintings to work, his subjects have to be familiar and even overfamiliar. He is mentioning these famous works only to use them in new ways. A witty man, in person as well as in his art, Connor once told an audience that when he explained to his father that he intended to be a painter, his father said it would only be all right if "he painted like Rembrandt." And that he took this as a parental order. He in fact is a marvelous painter, and a tremendous visual mimic. For my purposes, however, the important fact is that he shows one way in which one can paint like Rembrandt in the post-historical moment and get away with it.

I refer to Connor here because someone who simply tried to "paint like Rembrandt" would have, despite the fact that everything is possible, a very difficult go of things today. I received a letter from just such a person not so long ago. He spoke of having been profoundly inspired by having seen some Rembrandts at a certain moment in his life. He saw, in "the self-portrait and the Rabbi, images of a dignified noble humanity that transcends its own age and ours, revealed from within a rich matrix of paint applied with the utmost intelligence." He resolved, on the basis of this "epiphany," to devote himself to the study of painting, and, from what I can gather, he succeeded in "painting like Rembrandt" to at least



THE KIDNAPPING OF MODERN ART BY THE NEW YORKERS (1985) BY RUSSELL CONNOR. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

the degree that his work could, in his view, "stand any reasonable test of quality," notwithstanding which he was told, by a curator of contemporary art in a major museum that his picture "were not for our time." He was genuinely puzzled by this, especially in view of the fact that the art world is supposed to be so open. And having read my writings he appealed to me to answer his question: "If the one thing not allowed will be

the kind of art that is measurable by traditional criteria, the very kind of art, in fact, that a great many people, if not most, still prefer?" This was rather a powerful communication, which I sought to answer as well as I could, and about which I have thought enough to have wanted to build this last chapter of my text around it.

Let us first address this artist's epiphany. I am quite prepared to accept his claim regarding Rembrandt's message to us regarding a "dignified, noble humanity that transcends its own age and ours." That message, like the one received by Ruskin from Veronese, is altogether valid, and there would be little reason to look at painting it if it did not now and again communicate such truths, valid for our time and for the time at which the painting was done. Still, it does not follow that the painting itself, as painting, "transcends its own age and ours." Rembrandt's painting, like Vermeer's, was very much of its own time and place, even if his message was less historically indexed, and speaks as fluently to us as to his contemporaries. I do not, of course, deny that the means and the message are connected, here as elsewhere. Rembrandt's heavy darks and mysterious lights almost certainly contribute to the force of his message. Still, his style is too closely identified with him, and with his time, to be available to us for use. The message indeed "transcends its own age and ours." But to transmit that message ourselves, we must find means other than those he used. We can but mention him, from across an unclosable historical distance. It is always open to us to find ways of expressing the sort of message we can derive from Rembrandt. But we shall have to find ways of doing so which *are* for our time. And unfortunately Rembrandt cannot help us there, beyond showing us that historically circumscribed art is capable of historically transcendent messages.

As far as the art that a "great many people, if not most, still prefer," the post-historical masters Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid have a great deal to tell us about this through a work which in its own way typifies the comedy and tragedy of art in our age. Komar and Melamid are emigré artists from what was once the Soviet Union, who achieved a certain celebrity in New York in the 1980s by exploiting the comic possibilities of socialist realist painting, mocking the mock heroics of Lenin and Stalin from the relative safety of the New York art scene, where they were appreciated for their wit as much as for their predicament. And, in a way which had been pioneered by Andy Warhol, they became, simultaneously, celebrities and critical successes. Their work was accessible as well as esteemed. I can think of few more delicious comic achievements than their *The Origins of Socialist Realism* of 1982–83,

which illustrates the legendary episode in which a Corinthian girl is said to have invented the art of drawing by outlining the shadow of her lover's head on the wall behind him—except that the lover in this case is Joseph Stalin, whose profile is being inscribed by young woman in classical garments. The painting itself is in the high socialist realist manner, and the malice comes only in part from using socialist realism to satirize itself and its scary inspirer who was so often the subject of its turgid celebrations. The project of cannibalizing Soviet art culminated in a spectacular May Day installation at the Palladium in New York in 1987, but, with the spirit of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, and with the breakup of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, Komar and Melamid all at once lost their best and, in a sense, their defining subject. Such are the ironies of history that the collapse of communism coincided with the collapse of the art world in the West, and the question even for the most successful artists of the eighties was, to use the title which they borrowed in 1988 from a major text of Lenin, "What Is to Be Done?"

The true genius of Komar and Melamid revealed itself when, artistic freedom being restored in their native land, they took as their subject the concept of the market, accepted by former apparatchiks with the unquestioning conviction with which the latter's ancestors accepted the rituals and disclosures of Greek orthodoxy. With the support of the Associates of *The Nation* Magazine, they decided to conduct a piece of actual market research in order to find what was termed on the cover of the 14 March 1994 issue, "a people's art," namely, the kind of art people really wanted. Once this was known, supply could be adjusted to demand in the pre-established harmony discovered by the classical economists, and society—or, since linguistic habit dies hard, "the people"—would get the art they wanted, and the artists who knew what the people wanted should be able to make a decent living. I cannot altogether imagine that this knowledge could be put into industrial practice, since it might very well be that people want art be produced in the old-fashioned one-at-a-time way, brush-to-canvas, by an artist in a beret standing before the easel. But who knew? No one had ever tried to find out. Meanwhile, painting for the American market must have seemed the way to achieve their own transformation from Russian to American artists.

The social science used was state-of-the-art.[19] There were focus groups and impeccably weighted polls, in which American households, randomly selected, were asked to respond to a set of questions regarding aesthetic preferences. The results are certified as statistically accurate "within a margin of error of ±3.2 percent at a 95 percent confidence level."

The sample was stratified according to state. Gender quotas were observed. And the answers themselves constitute a singularly interesting piece of aesthetic sociology. Blue, for example, is by far America's favorite color (44 percent), and is most appealing to people in the central states between forty and forty-nine years of age, conservative, white, male, making $30,000 to $40,000, and who don't go to museums at all. In a comparable poll, but with what I think must be incomparably higher monetary stakes, the manufacturers of M&M candy undertook to change the spectrum of colored coating by adding a new hue, and sought to find out which was the most highly preferred color which, I suppose to no one's great surprise, turned out to be blue. The appeal of blue falls off as level of education increases, but black is increasingly appealing as income drops: people making less than $20,000 are three times as likely to prefer black as those with incomes over $75,000, who are three times more likely to prefer green than those making less than $20,000. But consumers of M&Ms are not likely to be in the over $40,000-a-year class, though all their income, from baby-sitting and the like, is probably discretionary. On the basis of this massive amount of data, Komar and Melamid produced what they title "America's Most Wanted," a painting that incorporates as many of the preferred qualities as the artist could incorporate into a single canvas.

As luck would have it, the book review section of *The New York Times*, 15 January 1995, advertises "the new bestseller," by Doris Mortman, *True Colors*, with "everything you want in a novel," itemized as "family, love, betrayal, rivalry, talent, triumph." It is clearly about an artist—the full-page ad shows us a vase with brushes and some twisted tubes laid out on a piece of exotic fabric. "*True Colors* sweeps you into the international art scene, where the intense pressures of success compete with the deeper dictates of the heart." It is worth speculating whether anyone conducted a poll to find out what the people most wanted to have in a novel, but my sense is that most people want novels to come from sources other than scientifically impeccable opinion polls: they want the novel to come from the heart, from the guts, or at least the experience of the novelist—and my own sense, to be sure based on intuitions rather than science—is that the moment one learned that "everything you want in a novel" is in the novel only because you want it there, you would lose interest in the novel. This of course has to be qualified: readers of at least two sorts of novels—romances and pornographic novels—are probably only interested in "the bottom line" in compliance with a formula, and do not give two cents for creativity. The interesting question is to what degree this is

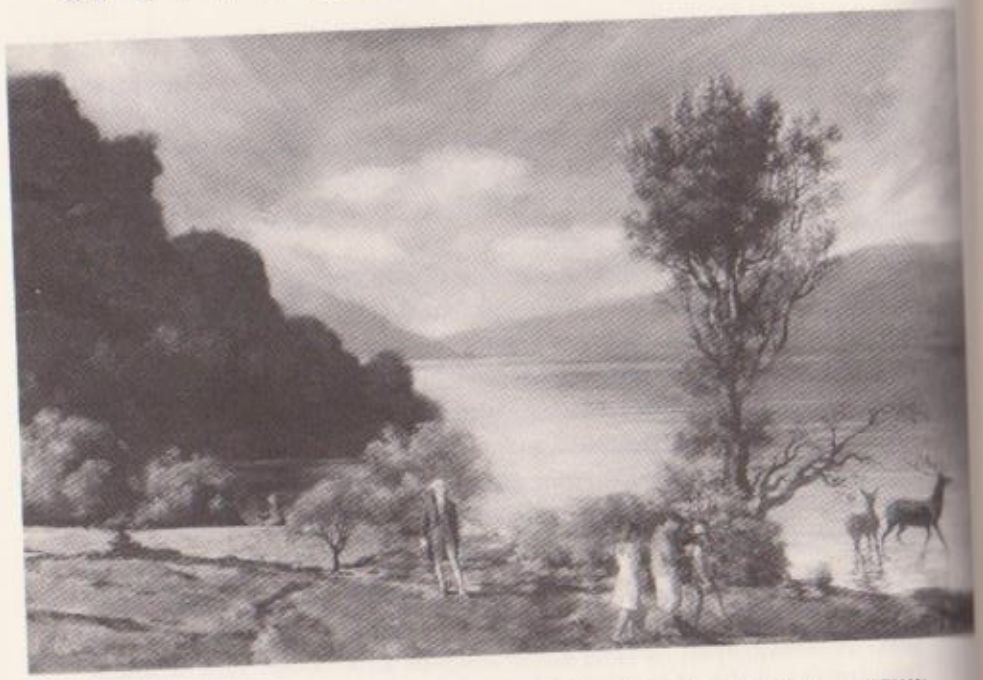
true of paintings. The artist, whose brushes and paint-tubes one sees on the jacket of the "most wanted novel" could not really be an artist whose paintings are as they are because the people want them to be that way. It should be the other way around—that the people want them to be that way because the artist is such a great success in the "international art world." It could not be the "most wanted novel" whose artist-hero or heroine traded inspiration in for opinion polls: artistic inspiration goes hand in hand with the panting romanticism, the finding of true love, in which the most wanted novel must trade.

It would have been interesting, thus, to have asked if people preferred paintings which resulted from finding out what they most wanted in a painting or paintings in which the artist painted from inspiration. People—I continue to speak without the backing of any scientific evidence—want artists to be like Buchumov, a fictive painter invented by Komar and Melamid at an earlier stage in their career, and in whose name they painted a number of exceedingly moony landscapes and kept a romantic diary. My sense, then, for what it may be worth, is that the most wanted painting is incompatible with what most people want of a painting. But that may be different from what most people want *in* a painting. Whatever the case, I have never seen *True Colors* on the *New York Times* best-seller list. I infer that something can be a "best-selling novel" without being a best-seller. A "best-selling novel" must be a kind of novel, defined by what it has in it. My parallel intuition is that something can be "the most wanted painting" even if nobody wants it.

I have the most vivid memory of the carnavalesque inaugural exhibition of "The Most Wanted Painting" at the Museum of Alternative Art on Broadway. I had been somewhat privy to the processes by which the artists had arrived at this work, inasmuch as it had been under the *Nation*'s auspices that the social science part of the undertaking was subsidized, and I was kept pretty well informed by those who worked with Komar and Melamid. But there are few secrets in the art world, and the crowds were significant. Everyone went to see what Americans most deeply wanted in our heart of aesthetic hearts, if the survey research was accurate, though it would have been exceedingly difficult, given the questions asked, to imagine that a painting like Barnett Newman's *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow, and Blue*, or Robert Motherwell's *Elegy for the Spanish Republic*, or Mark Rothko's *Number 16* would have emerged as exemplifying what America most wanted in a painting. A different kind of survey would have been needed to see what the art world would have wanted as the most wanted painting. The audience that evening, drinking blue

vodka (to emblematize the triumph of blue in the chromatic sweepstakes), exchanging gossip and wisecracks, was too skewed a population to feel anything save superiority to the implied aesthetics of the common man and woman presumably objectified in the "genuine oil painting" in the gilded frame. But would Mr. or Ms. Whoever cry out "That's it!" when presented with their presumed dream painting, so far as they dream of paintings at all?

I think that almost certainly in terms of its painterly style, Komar and Melamid's *Most Wanted Painting* really must represent what people like who "don't know much about art but know what they like." It is executed in what one might term a modified Hudson River Biedermeier style—with about 44 percent blue—and shows figures in a landscape. Somewhat surprisingly, Komar and Melamid have conducted polls and painted the *Most Wanted Painting* in a variety of countries, from Russia and the Scandinavian countries to France and Kenya, and now China, where, as I write this, poll-takers are doing a selected door-to-door canvass, as the current distribution of telephones in China would badly skew the results. The results have been surprisingly congruent, in the sense that the *Most Wanted Painting* for each country looks like, give or take a few details, all the *Most Wanted Paintings* of the other countries. There is a more saturated blue, but less of it, in *Russia's Most Wanted*. It is unclear what China's *Most Wanted Painting* will look like, but I would be rather astonished were Komar and Melamid to produce something which resembled a Sung watercolor. And it is at the very least cause for comment that what randomly selected populations the world round "most want" are paintings in the generic all-purpose realist style the artists invented for *America's Most Wanted Painting*. When I suggested to them that the paintings all looked pretty much alike, the artists granted as much, pointing out that national differences show up in the *Least Wanted Painting*. Invariably abstract and using sharp angles, it varies in colors from gold, orange, mauve, or fuschia, to teal—to scrape the bottom of Kenya's chromatic scale—and its sizes differ. *American's Least Wanted Painting* is small and mean, the French *Least Wanted* is large and vapid. But the style is invariant, national differences showing up in the details. The most wanted painting, speaking transnationally, is nineteenth-century landscape, the kind of painting whose degenerate descendents embellish calendars from Kalamzoo to Kenya. The 44 percent blue landscape with water and trees must be the a priori aesthetic universal, what everyone who thinks of art first thinks of, as if modernism had never happened.



AMERICA'S MOST WANTED (1994) BY VITALY KOMAR AND ALEXANDER MELAMID. COURTESY: RONALD FELDMAN FINE ARTS, NEW YORK. PHOTO CREDIT: D. JAMES DEE.

It is possible, of course, that everyone's concept of art *was* formed by calendars, even in Kenya, which now constitute a sort of paradigm of what everyone first thinks of when they think of art. The psychologist Eleanor Rosch and her associates have developed a branch of psychology known as category theory, based on the way in which information is stored.[20] Most people will answer "robin" when asked to name a bird, or "dog" when asked to name an animal. Few will answer "coot" to the first or "ardwaark" to the second. Asked to name a kind of dog, most people will mention "police dog" rather than "Lhasa apso." Americans, but no Chinese, will answer "George Washington" when asked the name of a famous historical person. Nobody is likely to answer "hippopotamus" to "wild animal": the usual answers are "elephant," "lion," and "tiger." It is altogether likely that what Komar and Melamid have unearthed is less what people prefer than what they are most familiar with in paintings. I would wager that the unrepresentive population at the opening share the same paradigms. That would be why, when anything deviates signifi-

cantly from the predominantly blue landscape through history, the spontaneous response is that it is not art. Why else would the Kenyans, for example, come out with the same kind of painting as everyone else even when seventy percent of them answered "African" to the question, "If you had to choose from the following list, which type of art would you say you prefer?" The other choices were Asian, American, and European. There is nothing in the least African about the Hudson River Biedermeier style of landscape with water. But it may be exactly with reference to such images that the Kenyans learned the meaning of art. It is no accident that in the Kenya questionnaire, in response to the question of what type of art people had in their homes, 91 percent mentioned prints of calendars (though in fairness, 72 percent mentioned "prints or posters").[21]

Where the differences come in is in the figures with which these landscapes are populated, and it is here that Komar and Melamid began to be mischievous. Since people prefer landscapes to nonlandscapes, and paintings with famous people to paintings without famous people, Komar and Melamid give them landscapes with famous people in them. It would be little likely that what the Russians most want is George Washington or the Chinese Jesus Christ or the Kenyans Napoleon, and it is here that the national differences begin to emerge—but so does the mischief. People, for example, cite a preference for paintings with animals, and indeed wild animals—but it would hardly have occurred to them that what they wanted was a landscape with a famous person and a wild animal unless there were some internal connection between the famous person and the animal, as between Samson and the lion, or Pasiphaë and the bull, or Jonah and the whale. There is no way in which George Washington and the hippopotamus can be connected up that way—no way really George Washington and a hippopotamus would share a pictorial environment if it is meant to be a realistic picture. And neither of them co-occur on the same level either in one of Rosch's schematisms, since Washington would be a paradigm famous person but the hippopotamus far from the paradigm wild animal (though unquestionably a wild animal). Putting Washington together with a typical American family in camping clothes violates another law of consistency, since it violates the unity of time.

What is striking about *America's Most Wanted* is that I cannot imagine anyone really wanting it as a painting, least of all any of the least-common-denominator population its taste it is supposed to reflect. No one who wants a painting of wild animals or who wants a painting of George Washington wants a painting of George Washington *and* of wild

animals. Komar and Melamid have transformed disjunctions into conjunctions, and the conjunction can be displeasing even if the conjuncts are pleasing, taken one by one. Everyone, to use a political parallel, would like tax cuts, the elimination of the federal deficit, efficient government services with few government regulations, but it is not clear that you can have all these things at once. House Speaker Newt Gingrich's "Contract with America" is the political counterpart to the *Most Wanted Painting*. There may or may not be a parable of political philosophy in this, but the painting supposed to reflect the integrated aesthetic utility curves of everyone in fact reflects the artistic utility curve of no one at all. The painting has the seeming structure of a rebus puzzle, with disjointed components thrust into the same conjoining frame. But unlike a rebus, there is no solution.There is no explanation of why anything is there other than the fact that it came up first in a question on a questionnaire. Nothing has anything in terms of meaning or causality to do with anything else. Like the Contract with America, it may be basically incoherent, and my overall view is that once everyone registers the fact that the style is what they all like, the painting would rapidly be despised because of its incoherence. Had they been questioned whether they prefered coherence over incoherence in a painting, the *Most Wanted Painting* might never have been painted.

In American English the expression "most wanted" is used to describe criminals whose apprehension the FBI considers the highest priority, not the wish list of the National Gallery. In any case, the "second most wanted" painting would not be, say, Gainsborough's *Blue Boy* or the *Mona Lisa*, but a painting by Komar and Melamid incorporating the second most highly prized aesthetic qualities. In fact, *America's Most Wanted* only belongs on a list which includes paintings by Komar and Melamid based on the same data as it. As a painting it has no place in the art world at all. What does have a place in the art world is the performance piece by Komar and Melamid which consists in the opinion poll, the painting, the publicity, etc. *That* work is probably a masterpiece. *That* work is about people's art without itself being people's art at all. That work is "post-modern, humorous, and iconic," as one observer said, as is, derivatively, the *Most Wanted Painting* itself. That the work looks unmistakably Hudson River Biedermeir shows, in point of expression, the nostalgia of these marvelous artists, but in point of identity it shows the truth that we are forever exiled from the aesthetic motherland where painting pretty pictures was the defining artistic imperative. It also shows how little distance our eyes will carry us in finding our way about in the art world of postmodern times. But finally it shows how great the distance is between where art is today and where the population is so far as, until the mischief began, its taste is captured in the *Most Wanted Painting*. The dissonances in the painting are indices of that distance.

I have been discussing two kinds of tragic artists and two kinds of comic artists. Van Meegeren is tragic because he felt he could achieve success only by painting like Vermeer, but the moment he revealed that truth, he failed because a forger. The artist who learned to paint like Rembrandt discovered that the world had no room for his gifts, which belong to another period altogether. One can be part of the present art world and paint like Rembrandt only if, like Russell Connor, one does so from the perspective of mention rather than of use, and in the spirit of the joke. The true heros of the post-historical period are the artists who are masters of every style without having a painterly style at all, namely Komar and Melamid, whose temperament is anticipated by Hegel in his discussion of comedy: "The keynote is good humour, assured and careless gaiety, despite all failure and misfortune, exuberance and the audacity of a fundamentally happy craziness, folly, and idiosyncrasy in general."[22] My sense is that these modes of artistic tragedy and comedy define the end of art, which in itself of course is not the tragedy it sounds as if it must be, but rather is the scene of the kinds of comedy that exemplify it. The comedy of Connor, or of Komar and Melamid, happens to be funny, but it is not essential to comedy that it be funny, only that it be happy. It is wholly consistent that the kind of comedy in which the end of art consists can express itself on tragedy tragically, as Gerhardt Richter does when he paints, in the appropriated blur of bad photographs, the violent deaths of the Baader-Meinhof leaders, for the comedy is in the means and not the subject.

"Now, with the development of the kinds of comedy we have reached the real end of our philosophical inquiry,"[23] Hegel writes in the penultimate paragraph of his colossal philosophy of art. It behoves me to make this the end of my inquiry as well. The history of art is a true epic, and epics in their nature end, like Dante's *Divine Comedy*, on notes of ultimate brightness. How many philosophical works not only have endings but happy ones? With all this happiness, it would be wonderful if this were a Golden Age of art, but probably the conditions of comedy are the guarantee of tragedy, if the latter means that our age is not a Golden Age. You can't have everything!

NOTES

1. David Carrier, "Gombrich and Danto on Defining Art," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 54, no. 3 (1995), 279.

2. "A term may be viewed in two ways, either as a class of objects (which may have only one member), or as a set of attributes or characteristics which determine the objects. The first phase or aspect is called the *denotation* or *extension* of the term, while the second is called the *connotation* or *intension*. Thus the extension of the term *philosopher* is "Socrates," "Plato," "Thales," and the like; its intension is "lover of wisdom," "intelligent," and so on. Morris R. Cohen and Ernest Nagel, *An Introduction to Logic and Scientific Method* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1934), 31. The distinction is standard in traditional logic texts.

3. E. H. Gombrich, *The Story of Art* (London: Phaidon, 1995), 15.

4. "There are horribly many books, which I do not read, about Marcel Duchamp, and all this business when he sent a urinal to an exhibition and people said he had 'redefined art' . . . what triviality!" (E. H. Gombrich, *A Lifelong Interest: Conversations on Art and Science with Didier Eribon* [London: Thames and Hudson, 1993], 72). I think what he meant to say was "many horrible books," and that, speaking in the Nabokovian mode to which Carrier and I are addicted, he was letting me know that he had not read *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*. Or he had read it enough to consider it trivial.

5. George Dickie, "Defining Art," *The American Philosophical Quarterly* 6 (1969), 253–56. Dickie has polished away at his original definition over the years. For a full bibliography of his wriitngs and those of his critics, see Steven Davis, *Definitions of Art* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

6. G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 11.

7. See my "The Art World Revisited," in *Beyond the Brillo Box: The Visual Arts in post-Historical Perspective* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1992) for a detailed discussion.

8. Heinrich Wölfflin, "Foreword to the Sixth Edition," *Principles of Art History* (New York: Dover Books, 1932), ix.

9. E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 388.

10. In Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), esp. chap. 12.

11. Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History*, viii–ix.

12. Ibid., 11.

13. Rudolph Wittkower, *Art and Architecture in Italy: 1600–1750* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958), 2. "Many stories of Christ and the saints deal with martyrdom, brutality, and horror, and, in contrast to Renaissance idealization, an unveiled display of truth was now deemed essential; even Christ must be shown 'afflicted, bleeding, spat upon, his skin torn, wounded, deformed, pale and unsightly.'"

14. Paul Feyerabend, *Killing Time: The Autobiography of Paul Feyerabend* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 49. Feyerabend is quoting from a lecture he gave as a soldier in 1944, and it is difficult to know to what degree he subscribed to this view at the time he wrote about his early views late in his life.

15. For exactly such a sobering list, see Rose deWolf, "Endpaper: Yesterday's Tomorrow," *New York Times Magazine* (24 December 1995), 46. The author quotes the sociologist David Riesman from *Time* (21 July 1967): "If anything remains more or less unchanged, it will be the role of women."

16. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1953), sec. 19.

17. For a beautiful discussion of Feuerbach's painting, see Heinrich Meier's "Einfuhrung in das Thema des Abends," in Seth Berardete, *On Plato's Symposium* (Munich: Carl Friedrich von Siemans Stiftung, 1994), 7–27.

18. For a lucid discussion of the distinction, see Willard Van Orman Quine, *Methods of Logic* (New York: Henry Holt, 1950), 37–38.

19. All references here are to "Painting by the Numbers: The Search for a People's Art," *The Nation* (14 March 1994). The tabular data are presented in *American Public Attitudes Towards the Visual Arts: Summary Report and Tabular Reports*, prepared by Martila and Kiley Inc. for The Nation Institute and Komar and Melamid, 1994.

20. E. Rosch and C. B. Mervin, "Family Resemblances: Studies in the Internal Structure of Categories," *Cognitive Psychology* 7 (1975), 573–605; and E. Rosch, C. D. Mervin, W. D. Gray, D. M. Johnson, and P. Boyes-Braem, "Basic Objects in Natural Categories," *Cognitive Psychology* 8 (1976), 382–439.

21. Taina Mecklin, "Contemporary Arts Survey in Kenya," *Research International* (16 May 1995).

22. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 1235.

23. Ibid., 1236.

PROFESSOR ARTHUR DANTO SHOWING THE PEAK OF LATE 20TH CENTURY PHILOSOPHY TO HIS COLLEAGUE, DR. HEGEL, BY ANTHONY HADEN-GUEST. REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION FROM *ART & AUCTION*, JUNE 1992.