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# Introduction

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THIS BOOK IS A COLLECTION of essays on sixteen of the most influential books of art history published during the twentieth century. Written by a range of leading scholars and curators, the essays reconsider these major texts and, taken together, offer a pathway through the often daunting bibliographic maze of literature on art; a roadmap of sorts for reading art history.

The books were chosen for their trailblazing qualities, for the way in which they forged entirely new ways of seeing the history of art. Their subjects range from medieval architecture to the work of Matisse, from Byzantine icon painting to postmodernism. Whereas many books introducing art history do so from the perspective of theories and methods, this volume alights rather on the landmark publications that have shaped the subject, as well as the personalities and stories behind those texts.

Great books have lives of their own that grow over time, through translations, new revisions and editions, and above all through reading and re-reading by generations of scholars and art lovers. Re-reading is the crucial step towards grasping the character of a book, what it stands for, and what we think of it, be that a matter of admiration or antagonism. Re-reading can also bring to light the disputes and debates between books, intellectual conflicts that can consolidate positions as well as create completely new ways of seeing and describing. Re-reading may also remind us of when we first became fascinated by art, not just as a matter of visual pleasure but also of intellectual nourishment, and may in addition help us to recall our developing awareness of the strange and elusive concept of art itself.

The earliest book considered in this volume is Emile Mâle's magisterial study of thirteenth-century French art, *L'art religieux du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle en France: Etude sur l'iconographie du Moyen Age et sur ses sources d'inspiration*, first published in 1898. The great innovation of this text, as Alexandra Gajewski writes, was to elucidate the meaning of the French Gothic cathedral by relating it to the liturgical texts of the time. Mâle pioneered an 'iconographic' approach to this task,

which involved finding the textual sources for images and using these to unlock their narrative or their spiritual meaning. Although lurking in the background was the importance of asserting the French-ness of medieval art – thus his focus on the ‘glorious’ thirteenth century – the *Geist* of Mâle’s book is not overtly nationalistic, but rather Catholic, and the true works of art liturgical – the *Stabat Mater*, the liturgy of Holy Week, the Gospels, authentic and apocryphal – which find themselves naturally mirrored in the Gothic cathedral, that ‘encyclopaedia in stone’. At the end of his book, Mâle proposes the cathedral as a refuge, an indestructible ark, against whose walls ‘the storm of life breaks’; ‘no place in the world fills men with a deeper feeling of security’. Mâle’s book, as it went through multiple editions into the twentieth century, was to be a time capsule itself for his iconographic, literary method, from which he was unable to depart in favour of the broader cultural–historical approach of those such as Aby Warburg, or indeed any of the other scholarly–scientific methods that evolved in the new century.

No greater contrast could be found to Mâle’s book than Bernard Berenson’s *The Drawings of the Florentine Painters Classified, Criticised and Studied as Documents in the History and Appreciation of Tuscan Art, with a Copious Catalogue Raisonné*, first published in two volumes in 1903. It had in fact been written at around the same time as Mâle’s volume, but was delayed by six years for publication. It remains a primary work of reference for Renaissance drawings to this day – a remarkable achievement considering the amount of books published in the area. This is in part because it was the first book on the subject, as well as being the first scholarly catalogue that had been written about a school of drawing. It was, as Carmen Bambach’s essay claims, ‘groundbreaking for the sheer novelty of its subject’ – simply put, nobody else had thought of compiling such an authoritative catalogue. It is very likely that at the time nobody else could complete so daunting a task. Berenson provides text and catalogue entries on a corpus of artists working in Florence, beginning with the achievements of the earliest Florentine painters such as Fra Angelico and Benozzo Gozzoli, through to a powerful description of Leonardo’s drawings and those of Michelangelo (one of the most problematic chapters, in Bambach’s view), and ending with a descent from Olympus, as Berenson puts it, to the Mannerism of Pontormo and Rosso. As Bambach writes, Berenson’s method of connoisseurship, which privileged the intelligent eye over the intelligible document, has by no means been eclipsed by more recent, more overly ‘intellectual’ approaches to the description of old-master drawings.

Berenson's heroic cataloguing efforts, applied to the relatively untouched and undervalued field of old-master drawings, may be set against the excitement of Mâle's book and his strong belief in the importance and innovation of his comprehensive, accurate method. Both happily dispense with vast swathes of previous literature. The Swiss art historian Heinrich Wölfflin, in his 1915 book *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe* (*Principles of Art History*), also gives the sense of a door opening onto a whole new epoch of study and thought – although his target is much wider, and his brief more philosophical. In his analysis of the transition of the formal language of art from the Renaissance to the Baroque, Wölfflin calls for a 'descriptive art history', scrutinising and comparing works of art on the basis of style, expressed in terms of fundamental concepts. Wölfflin's may be the most challenging text in this volume for readers over one century later; even for the specialist, his abstract argument is frequently difficult to grasp. Yet in some senses Wölfflin was ahead of his time, particularly in terms of the technical tools at his disposal. He often laments the inadequacy of reproductions to illustrate his point – if only the photographer of Sansovino's St James had stood five feet to the right, his point about the classic silhouette effect would be perfectly clear. Yet, as David Summers shows, Wölfflin's identification of five incredibly simple paired concepts to demonstrate the transition to Baroque art had a universal relevance and powerful legacy, particularly for a type of art history based on hard sober looking and formal analysis. He is one of the great initiators of discourse in the field – prophetic even; much subsequent art-historical writing is in effect a selective reading of Wölfflin's 1915 classic.

Roger Fry once wrote that Wölfflin 'begins where most art historians leave off', examining the formal structures of works of art in relation to the 'mental conditions' in the mind of the artist who produced them.<sup>1</sup> It is precisely this ability to see deeply into the creative process that makes Fry's own study of the work of Cézanne 'arguably still the most sensitive and penetrating of all explorations of Cézanne's pictures', as Richard Verdi writes. *Cézanne: A Study of His Development* was published in English by the Hogarth Press in 1927, after first appearing in French in the magazine *L'Amour de l'Art*. Fry was pioneering not only in his championing of Cézanne as a master on a par with Rembrandt, but also in his sustained scrutiny of his paintings and the refined nature of his formulations in describing them. Aside from its piercing intellectual qualities, it is a beautifully written book, a testament to the pleasures of looking and thinking about works of art. Although his earlier collection of essays, *Vision and Design* (1920), might also be considered a strong contender for classic status for its continuing impact, particularly

on artists, the volume on Cézanne remains the most succinct statement of Fry's formalist approach, and is the text that shows him most thrillingly absorbed by, and in tune with, his subject.

The German-born architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner was more directly influenced by Wölfflin, having studied under the Swiss art historian in Munich before completing a doctorate in Leipzig. Pevsner emigrated to England in 1935 as a result of Nazi anti-Jewish employment laws, and it was there that he wrote *Pioneers of the Modern Movement from William Morris to Walter Gropius* (1936), which, as Colin Amery describes in this volume, has been received as a 'gospel' of modernism. Pevsner's genealogy of modern architecture and design, showing how the utopianism of William Morris became the utilitarianism of Walter Gropius, could not in truth be further from Wölfflin's deeply felt philosophical relativism, and bears more the imprint, as Amery demonstrates, of Pevsner's doctoral supervisor Wilhelm Pinder, whose notion of *Zeitgeist*, a spirit-of-the-times explanation of artistic style, dominates Pevsner's volume. *Pioneers* is itself a pioneering book, the result of an extraordinary task of information-gathering that looks forward to Pevsner's later architectural guides, *The Buildings of England*. Like many trail-blazing books (and as such it may be compared with Alfred Barr's monograph on Matisse), its value is due less to its definitive nature than to the freshness of its approach. Pevsner's comments on Impressionism and Art Nouveau are now curiosities; the true value of his book lies in its discussion of nineteenth-century engineering and in the incisive nature of Pevsner's architectural writing, capable as it is of characterising and animating the structures and façades of the buildings of Charles Voysey, Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Peter Behrens. It is also representative of the study of modern architecture and design in the crucial decade of the 1930s. David Watkin's attack on Pevsner's moralising approach in the former's 1977 book *Morality and Architecture* is well known, but from a later perspective it has become important to see Pevsner's writing in context, particularly as the work of a German émigré with an ambiguous relation to his native country. For its authoritative and opinionated analysis, *Pioneers* remains one of the most readable and provocative guides to modern architecture, written by someone, in addition, who could draw on personal correspondence with some of its key protagonists, notably Gropius and Henry van de Velde.

For his now legendary monograph *Matisse: His Art and his Public* (1951), Alfred H. Barr, Jr. was also able to make use of correspondence, in his case in the form of endless questionnaires to the artist and his family. By contrast with Fry's *Cézanne*, Barr's book is a factual-historical account of Matisse's work, drawing on



a range of documents and aspiring to scientific exactitude, for example by providing a chronology of paintings rather than a deep understanding of the artist's creative process. The enduring excitement of this book arises from the manner in which Barr wove together this fresh research, in many cases writing the first account of certain periods of Matisse's life or of groups of paintings, or reproducing major works for the first time, for example *Luxe, calme et volupté* (1904–05), which for forty years had hung in Paul Signac's dining room until it was photographed in 1950 at the Paris retrospective of Matisse's work.<sup>2</sup> Barr recognised that such information-gathering was a crucial new impulse in art history of the modern period; in 1941 he reminded graduate students that while they could not contact the old masters, 'they can air-mail Maillol or Siqueiros and write or phone for an appointment with Wright, André Breton, Stieglitz', giving urgency to this statement by adding that it was already too late to try Paul Klee or Edouard Vuillard in this manner.<sup>3</sup> Barr's account of Matisse was hailed on publication as one of the greatest monographs of any modern artist, and in this volume John Elderfield describes how Barr's pioneering documentary approach 'moved the literature on Matisse from criticism to art history'. It was certainly the last moment to get the facts straight with Matisse himself, who died three years after Barr's volume appeared. With the exception of the late collages and cut-outs, *Matisse: His Art and His Public* is a complete account of Matisse's life and work (and was for this reason selected for inclusion here over Barr's 1946 monograph on Picasso).

If any book of art history deserves to be considered monumental, it is Erwin Panofsky's *Early Netherlandish Painting: Its Origins and Character*. First published in America in 1953, more than a decade after the author emigrated from Germany, it was Panofsky's last major book, and the culmination of a life engaged with Renaissance culture, particularly that of the northern Renaissance. It was also a lasting statement of Panofsky's iconographic method. As Susie Nash points out, where Mâle's iconography dealt largely with questions of liturgical sources, Panofsky considers a much broader historical perspective, tracing the evolution of individual styles as much as the development of a whole tradition of painting. He locates the origins of Early Netherlandish painting in fourteenth-century French and Flemish illuminated manuscripts and in 'pre-Eyckian' regional schools of painting in the Netherlands around 1400, before moving on to what he describes as the main subjects of his book, 'Hubert and Jan van Eyck, the Master of Flémalle, and Rogier van der Weyden'. Panofsky's descriptions are often mesmerising: gazing at Van Eyck's paintings is likened to being 'hypnotized by precious stones', or 'looking into deep water'. But it is his demonstration of the integration

of Christian symbolism and painterly realism, and his seemingly endless expansion of ideas in footnotes, that give the book its majestic gravity. Dense, brilliant and controversial, *Early Netherlandish Painting* is also a monument to the pleasures of reading and humanistic scholarship, and is possessed of a 'narrative drive', as Nash puts it, derived from Panofsky's ability to arrange the facts (and sometimes bend them slightly) to tell an engaging story.

Kenneth Clark likewise considered writing about art as the opportunity to tell a very good story. In his own work, he freely confessed, the truth was occasionally sacrificed for the sake of a well-turned sentence, justified by his observation that in the end the history of art is largely 'an agreed fable'.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps this is the case for all writers, but for Clark it resulted in a unique combination of great writing and serious scholarship. Of all his publications, *The Nude: A Study of Ideal Art* is the book that most memorably draws together his innovative approach to scholarship and ability to crystallise his response to works of art in unforgettable formulations. It was not by chance that Fry, as an early mentor, was a clear influence on Clark's literary style. *The Nude* was first given as a series of Mellon lectures at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, in 1953, and published three years later. That Clark could cover the entire history of art in seven short chapters was due not only to his economy with words, but also to the training in connoisseurship that he had received as an assistant to Berenson, an experience that helped him build up a vast mental library of works of art that could be summoned in the process of writing. Yet *The Nude* was not written in a Berensonian mould; Clark's quality of style marks a deep intellectualism, strongly influenced by the type of art history being pursued at the Warburg Institute, a resource Clark had drawn on heavily for his earlier monograph on Leonardo da Vinci.<sup>5</sup> He was a long-term correspondent of Fritz Saxl, Gertrude Bing, E.H. Gombrich and others, and realised the advance their scientific methods had made over the intuitive approach of Berenson. It was his ability to transform the often abstruse enthusiasms of the Warburg scholars into books with general appeal that gives Clark's writing, and *The Nude* in particular, its enduring power.

E.H. Gombrich's *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (1960) also began life as a series of lectures given at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, in 1956, under the title 'The Visible World and the Language of Art'. Like Clark, Gombrich understood the importance of epitomising his argument with a simple slogan, but where Clark's distinction between 'naked and nude' was in fact a mere attention-grabber, Gombrich's formula 'making precedes matching' distilled the essence of his series of lectures into

a compelling philosophical statement. As Christopher Wood writes, Gombrich constructs a 'powerful case' against the concept of the 'innocent eye' by showing how all representation is inflected by mental concepts and cultural circumstances. Simply put, *Art and Illusion* is an exploration of the question as to why artists rely on conventions of representation to depict the world, rather than simply copying what they see. The resulting paradox is that, as Gombrich writes at the end of his book, 'the world can never quite look like a picture, but a picture can look like the world'. In his essay, Wood shows how influential and also how controversial Gombrich's argument was to become, and how his treatment of broad questions of culture, nature, psychology and representation were to have an impact beyond art history, not least in the field of *Bildwissenschaft*, or 'visual studies', and on the more general theories of images that have arisen in the 'altered conditions of modernity'. Despite these wider ambitions, Gombrich's book remains vivid, enlivened by numerous poetic examples – in contrast to a portrait by Fantin-Latour, he writes, Manet's *Madame Michel-Lévy* must have appeared to its first viewers 'as harsh and glaring as sunlight looks to the deep-sea diver'.

In the introduction to *Art and Illusion* Gombrich expresses the hope that his book could be considered as a 'much-needed bridge between the field of art history and the domain of the practising artist'. The same might be said of Clement Greenberg's *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (1961), the first collected volume of his reviews and articles, which had a seismic impact, initially on the New York art world but also much further afield, for at least a decade following publication. It was read avidly by artists who, if they did not use it as a vade mecum, found that their work was being judged negatively in terms of Greenbergian criticism. He may not have been the only critic to have evolved a solid philosophical underpinning for the evolution of modern art, based on Hegelian notions of self-fulfilment and truth to the medium, but he was the only one to express it in a prose style that can be ranked among the finest art writing. Like Kenneth Clark he was able to draw his deep observations up to clear air in limpid formulations that seem to define once and for all the matter in question. As Boris Groys argues, Greenberg's description in the famous essay 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch' of modernist art as an 'imitation of imitating' rather than as an imitation of nature also makes a fascinating point of comparison with Gombrich's notion of 'making and matching' in *Art and Illusion*. Both identify technique as a crucial question, with its own logic of development distinct from the need to transcribe natural appearances. Unlike Clark and Gombrich however, Greenberg argues from a strongly

partisan viewpoint, and proposes a connection between the philosophical analysis of artistic form and a political viewpoint as the basis for art criticism.

From a different perspective, the relationship between art and society also underpins Francis Haskell's *Patrons and Painters: A Study in the Relations Between Italian Art and Society in the Age of the Baroque* (1963). Haskell's study of the patronage of Baroque painting, sculpture and architecture spanning two centuries and moving from Rome to Venice is a pioneering work that consolidated a new type of documentary art history, based on meticulous interrogation of archival sources. As Louise Rice describes, Haskell presents an alternative to the ideologically driven Marxist approach of Frederick Antal and Arnold Hauser, shying away from any theoretical underpinning of his findings, animating them rather through the personalities and historical circumstances within which Baroque art evolved. A long book (it could have been two, on Rome and Venice, Rice suggests), *Patrons and Painters* looks forward to Haskell's equally important volumes *Taste and the Antique* (co-authored with Nicholas Penny, 1981) and *History and its Images: Art and the Interpretation of the Past* (1993), both of which are based on a similar archival impulse. Enlivened by Haskell's own extremely vivid prose and his ability to bring to life a character or a setting, this trio of works remains an inspiring lure to the antiquarian, archival approach to art-historical writing – one quite foreign to those such as Panofsky and Clark, who depended instead on the existing literature and the works of art themselves. As Rice outlines, Haskell's research has since been updated and revised, and his method questioned by those who prefer a little more complexity, at least for the sake of argument. None of this, however, detracts from the towering importance of *Patrons and Painters*, which remains, as Rice puts it, a 'prolegomenon to a branch of art history that was still in its infancy'. This sapling was soon to grow into one the most profoundly original approaches to art history: the social history of art.

By the late 1970s the question of what makes art history was being asked with renewed vigour by many art historians. The rise of the social history of art entailed a rethinking of the relationship between art and history, and forwarded the claim that a work of art could be a piece of history, like any other historical event, and could be analysed as such.<sup>6</sup> Two major publications in the field of social art history appeared early in the decade: Michael Baxandall's *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (1972) and T.J. Clark's *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (1973). The opening sentence of Baxandall's book – 'a fifteenth century painting is a deposit of social relationships' – was as good as a slogan for the new



approach. Yet as Paul Hills argues, it has tended to mask the book's truly innovative nature, its close attention to the way in which the style of a painting can be read in relation to its historical context. Baxandall focuses on the connection between fifteenth-century Italian painting and the economic and religious circumstances of its time, taking close readings of certain works in relation to contemporary mentalities. He achieved what all art historians wish for: the coining of a phrase that is used across fields, in this case the notion of the 'period eye', which suggests that we must understand how things were seen at a certain moment in history to begin to comprehend how they were designed. Wölfflin's edict that 'vision itself has a history' finds in Baxandall one of its most engaging elaborations. Baxandall's book seems to draw the psychological arguments of Gombrich together with Haskell's meticulous research on patronage, resulting in a pithy, readable book that embodies the new art history at its most sophisticated.

Baxandall was reluctant to be termed a 'social art historian', and once wondered if he was not simply 'doing Roger Fry, you know, in a different way'. He was indeed held to account by those for whom it was imperative to see art as an instrument of political will, and for whom the 'aestheticism' of Fry's arguments about artistic form were no longer valid. In the scintillating first chapter of his *Image of the People*, which was drawn (like Mâle's study of thirteenth-century French art) from his doctoral dissertation, T.J. Clark sets out his ambitious goals for a social history of art on such a basis. He stresses the importance of moving beyond a simple scenario of 'influence' – history as 'background', biography as 'context' – to evolve instead a language that is able to say more about the complex political interaction of art and history. As Alastair Wright notes, Clark's neo-Marxist position was a criticism not only of Hauser's *Social History of Art* (1951), but also of Gombrich's concept of the 'pictorial schemata' in *Art and Illusion*, which implied that our notion of art necessarily blinded us to nature; for Clark, the blinkers we wear are always ideological. Clark takes as his subject the works of Courbet during the Second Republic (1848–51) and his preoccupation with republican politics, moving beyond questions of patronage and psychology to weave a complex web of references that bring to life Courbet's great works from this period, such as *Burial at Ornans* (1849–50). Wright shows how Clark's densely argued account places the idea of destabilisation at the heart of Courbet's imagery, treating this as the source of his political engagement. The polemical power of Clark's argument arose without doubt from the fact that he was writing as a Marxist in the aftermath of 1968 about another failed revolution, that of 1848. It is the combination of time and place, as well as Clark's own unrivalled sense

both of history and theory, that makes *Image of the People* one of the formative books in the field.

The restlessness with traditional methods of art-historical analysis that characterises Clark's book appears in even greater measure in Svetlana Alpers's *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (1983). Where Clark's introduction lays out a manifesto, of sorts, for a social history of art, Alpers provides a similar argument for a method that takes a step further away from tradition, an approach she describes with the phrase (borrowed from Michael Baxandall) 'visual culture'. To renew the study of seventeenth-century Dutch art, Alpers contends, it is necessary to move away both from the stylistic analysis of Wölfflin and the iconographic method of Panofsky, for the simple reason that they are rooted in the study of Italian art, and therefore unable to address the particular nature of Northern art in general and Dutch painting in particular. As Mariët Westermann writes, the 'visual culture' of Dutch painting for Alpers was 'a capacious matrix of seeing and picturing that includes optical magnification, camera obscura projection, educational drawing, map making, inscriptions in or as images, and theoretical models of images projected onto the human retina'. Her book opens out Dutch painting onto this world, like so many windows flung wide, creating a vivid context that was no longer dependent on theories generated elsewhere and at different times. Of the connections she makes, the most famous hinges on the 'mapping impulse' in Dutch art, for which she acknowledges the important influence of Gombrich as a teacher. Maps are a golden example of how life can flow into art and vice versa – it is a question of 'mapping as picturing, painting as participating in a cartographic moment', as Westermann puts it. *The Art of Describing* remains a powerful statement of the multiplicity of ways in which 'art' and 'history' fit together, despite the impossibility of ever reducing one to the other.

This question – about the relation of art and history – was addressed by Rosalind Krauss in a very different way at the beginning of her remarkable collection of essays written from 1973 to 1983 and republished together in 1985 as *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*. As Krauss makes clear, both the model for and the target of her writing is the critical approach of Greenberg as it appeared in his 1961 *Art and Culture*. In a series of essays devoted first to paragons of modernism, including Rodin, Picasso and Giacometti, and then moving to the post-War American art of Jackson Pollock, Sol LeWitt and Richard Serra, Krauss proposes a 'radical inversion' of the premises of Greenbergian formalism on the basis of structuralist and poststructuralist philosophy. As Anna

Lovatt argues, Krauss's pioneering use of French theory had an extraordinary impact on art history as an academic discipline, ferociously questioning many of its underlying assumptions, and introducing a new critical term, postmodernism, into the field. The myths that Krauss attacked – principally those of authorship and originality – were often myths that had arisen in the context of curatorial scholarship and essays in exhibition catalogues, but her target was the far wider problem in art history of unexamined appeals to biography as a source of aesthetic explanation. Yet it would be wrong to see Krauss as an outright opponent of academic art history, or indeed her book as one that has 'de-shaped' the subject. As Lovatt points out, the 'art history without proper names' that Krauss advocates – 'questions of period style, of shared formal and iconographic symbols,' as she puts it<sup>7</sup> – in fact looked back to the founding texts of art history, of style (Wölfflin) and interpretation (Panofsky and Alois Riegl), as models to follow, and as the basis for new theories of representation. In her rejection of biography Krauss also stands in curious comradeship with Berenson. Krauss's enduring legacy lies in the power of thinking that she applied to this theoretical work, as well as in her polemical stance that introduced an entirely new level of critical passion and dispute into the study of art.

Hans Belting's *Bild und Kult: Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst* was first published in 1990, with an English translation appearing four years later as *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art*. Its wide-ranging ambition and potential to redefine the subject of art history place it among the most radical and provocative texts discussed in the present volume – a notable achievement for a book about Byzantine art. As the title suggests, Belting's extended account of holy images – icons of Christ – stretching back to early Christian times is set within a broader conceptual argument about the reach of conventional art history and the status of images that have traditionally fallen outside the remit of 'art'. The 'Era of Art' noted in Belting's subtitle begins, conveniently enough, around 1500, and is therefore coeval with the Italian Renaissance; this book is about what came before 'art' in this sense, and is (like Alpers's text) a challenge to art history formed by the study of the Italian Renaissance. Belting goes much further though, and may be more closely allied with Krauss in his severe challenge to the limits of traditional art history and in raising the possibility of a new discipline of the study of images. Although it may be too soon to assess its true impact, Jeffrey Hamburger nevertheless recalls the 'refreshing shock' Belting's book conveyed to the young art historian 'eager to think in terms of the function, not simply the attribution, dating and iconography, of medieval

images'. *Bild und Kult* opened up the study of medieval painting by bringing together methods and evidence from a variety of disciplines, not least in its synthetic account of Eastern and Western traditions of icon painting. Belting's more recent work on modern and contemporary art suggests how a focus on the 'image', rather than 'art', can allow study of a much broader range of artefacts and overcome traditional art-historical prejudices. Hamburger points to two other books, David Freedberg's *The Power of Images* (1989) and W.J.T. Mitchell's *Picture Theory* (1994), both of which make the claim for a 'pictorial turn' – that is, a move towards the study of 'images' rather than 'art' – yet, as Hamburger also explains, on divergent grounds. It may be that a survey of the books that shaped 'art history' in the twenty-first century – if indeed such an old-fashioned term continues to be used – would take Belting's book and cognate volumes as the foundational texts for a much-expanded and infinitely more nuanced discipline.

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In shortlisting the books discussed here as a proposed canon of twentieth-century art-historical literature, many important texts, regrettably, had to be left in the wings. There are pragmatic reasons for this: it is easier to bring together sixteen rather than sixty books, although the latter may offer a more realistic, though less detailed and instructive, picture of art history as a whole. The criterion 'book' should not, furthermore, be taken for granted. Outstanding lectures do not always find their way into print, just as influential articles and reviews are not always anthologised. Sometimes great art history is not published at all, but exists in the form of an inspiring individual whose method is so strange and original that it can only really be apprehended in the publications of their pupils and followers. Aby Warburg's *Gesammelte Schriften* appeared in 1932, a bad year for scholarship in Europe, and was only translated into English more than sixty years later. Warburg's influence was largely through his innovative methods, such as the famously unfinished 'Mnemosyne Atlas', an 'image-atlas' of art history, and through the teaching institute that he founded in Hamburg, and which was later to move to London; it is for this reason that his contribution is traced here only in the many texts that he influenced.

Certain landmark texts are frequently referred to in this book and could well have been included on an expanded list. Julius von Schlosser's *Die Kunstliteratur: Ein Handbuch zur Quellenkunde der neueren Kunstgeschichte* (1924), Rudolf Wittkower's *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism* (1949) and John



Shearman's *Mannerism* (1967), among others, provided the giant's shoulders on which Baxandall stood to gain the depth of vision to write his *Painting and Experience* – as well as Wölfflin's *Classic Art* (1899). Riegl's *Spätromisches Kunstindustrie* (1901) appears as a constant point of reference, although, as Gombrich points out in *Art and Illusion*, this dense volume is 'hard to read and even harder to summarize'. Alongside Barr one could place John Rewald's pioneering *The History of Impressionism* of 1946. And why not Clive Bell's *Art* (1913), George Kubler's *The Shape of Time* (1962) or Anthony Blunt's *Poussin* (1967)? A reassessment of these volumes would be as interesting to read as of Michael Fried's *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (1980). Art history as a subject is thriving today, and significantly more books are being published than at any other moment; professionalisation continues apace and more topics are being covered in more depth than ever before. Recent titles however have not yet been subject to the re-reading and engagement that is the necessary path to being considered a 'classic'.

And it is of course easier to propose a canon of foundational books than to state what actually 'shaped' art history. What are the fundamental themes that hold together a subject wide enough to take in proto-geometric Greek art and poststructuralist film? The question becomes even more pressing in a global age, and one, moreover, in which the texts of art history are so readily available in a digital format. As noted above, some compelling recent accounts take the basic category of 'images' to be common currency for all art historians; yet perhaps more truthful would be to say 'photographic images', for it is on the basis of photography that most works of art are known and compared, a point frequently made by contributors to this volume. But can objects really be known in this way? Photography is a poor substitute for physical encounter. The variety of objects and approaches to art history may lead us to the conclusion that there is no golden thread drawing the subject together neatly as a 'discipline'.

Perhaps, to adapt the phrase of one great practitioner, there is really no such thing as art history, there are only art historians. And in the long run there are only the books that they write. Some of the best of those books are gathered together here not just as a core library of art history, but also as a demonstration of the diversity of the subject and its openness to redefinition as a living and certainly very youthful intellectual endeavour. Together they provide a picture of the field, and an argument for its vital importance in changing times as a way of understanding and preserving the most important objects in human history.