

# Reflections on teaching art history in art schools paper given, 4th January, 1966\*

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

When Professor Pevsner honoured me with an invitation to address this important meeting I replied, as he will confirm, that the word address frightened me, but that I was very ready and indeed anxious to talk about the topic of this conference for I think it needs talking about and an intensive exchange of views. My main problem, I warn you, is not what to say but when to stop. Not that I am particularly qualified to set the ball rolling. I have only taught at the Slade for about three years and that is the sum total of my immediate contact with the problem under discussion.

Vicariously, I dare say, I have had more contact for though I never intended my book *The Story of Art* as a textbook I know it is frequently used in this context and the mixed feeling with which this fills me contain misgivings and pride in about equal proportions. In fact I have recently accepted the fact that the book is now so used and have allowed myself to be persuaded to bring it up to date, as it were with a new chapter on the contemporary situation and a revised booklist. Doing this chore I became once more aware of the extreme difficulty with which those of you must be faced who have to teach this subject to artists now. For of course if there is any creed that unites many young artists today it is the creed of anti; anti-intellectualism, anti-academicism, anti-authority. Art history is intellectual, it is academic, it is even authoritarian, for it teaches that Michelangelo was a great artist and you can like it or lump it. I am told by my friends that the hostility of art students to art history can nevertheless be exaggerated. It is art teachers rather than our students who may be suspicious of the whole exercise. Now I am not going to tell you that art history is wonderful and that it will always be good for you. It happens to interest me very much, but the world would be a dull place if we were all interested in the same thing. Even so I think that it should be one of the functions of this conference to bring out this conflict into the open - should it turn out in the end that there is no conflict, so much the better.

Judging by the few discussions I have attended and by the rumours which have reached me, there are really two quite distinct questions here which are too frequently confused. The first should be easy to dispose of. It is the question why art history should be taught for the diploma. The answer surely is quite simply that it must be taught because it forms part of the diploma, just as the psychology of education must be taught at teacher's training courses because the certificates which these graduates will get will state that they have learned that subject. The possession of the diploma in other words implies the claim that its holder knows some art history. I have at least once at our meetings suggested a compromise with those

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who want us to be flexible about this claim. I suggested that a pass in art history might be waived for those candidates who are willing to sign a binding undertaking that they will never henceforward hold forth about the history of art and make no statements which imply a knowledge of this intricate subject. Any breach of that covenant would make the person liable to forcible feeding with art historical dates and facts.

Speaking more seriously, it really seems to me a waste of time to argue at length whether or not you can be a great artist without knowledge of art history. No person in his senses can ever have doubted this, but it really is not the question at issue. You can certainly be a great artist without holding any diploma. As an art historian I know several such examples.

But underlying these protestations I think I can discern another proposition which is a little more serious and certainly much more widespread. It is the suspicion that art and history may be mutually exclusive. That those who make and those who comment have nothing to say to each other and that indeed it may be bad for an artist to become too much involved in intellectual talk which may deprive him of his spontaneity and corrode his instinct for forms and colours. It is a belief that is closely connected with a certain doctrine about the nature of art, a doctrine which I think is demonstrably false but none the less worth taking seriously as a force in contemporary life.

I personally encountered the doctrine when I taught at the Slade and had to call a student to my room who had done quite disastrously badly in his slide test. I asked him what was the matter with him, and he said quite proudly "I am not a verbal type, sir". This cannot have been his own discovery. I conclude that he was rather bad at school and that some kindly art teacher consoled him or his parents with this catchphrase that though the boy might be bad at reading and writing he was just not a verbal type and should do art instead. In this particular case I tried to test the claim. I asked the student to draw a typical Egyptian figure, for we had looked at Egyptian art almost throughout the term. He was not an image type either.

Nevertheless I do not want to deny the possibility that there are people who are in some such sense 'not verbal types'. The human brain is an incredibly complex instrument and the varieties of its functions and malfunctions are legion. Cases have been reported of people who could do lightning calculations of the most startling kind, working out the correct week day of any date centuries ago within a matter of seconds, but who were otherwise imbecile. There were, I believe, even chess champions who were otherwise subnormal. There is no reason to believe that such freaks may also happen in the field of art. My mother who is a piano teacher was once taken in by an infant prodigy who had the most incredible grasp of harmonic relationships. He would beam over his whole face when an unexpected modulation pleased him, but he was unfortunately quite incapable of playing a piece of music through, because he could not concentrate for so long. He would stop at any odd moment in a Beethoven sonata to say "last night my granny asked me to buy some vinegar for her".

I do not doubt, in other words, that gifts are unevenly distributed and that gifts that would make an artist may be found among students incapable of intellectual performance. No doubt there are also students of art history who can

easily memorise all the dates and names and are incapable of looking. But these are at the most psychological problems, not philosophical ones. The idea, of course, that the artistic gift as such is incompatible with intellectual discipline is a philosophical doctrine. As a passionate historian I am very interested in the antecedents of this curious creed. I wish somebody would write its history. I believe it is rooted in that old but specious analogy between the ages of men and the ages of mankind. Just as the child lives in his imagination and in his dreams which it acts out in play and fantasy so mankind, we are told since the 18th century went through a phase where imagination was strong. This childhood of mankind was the golden age of art, when language was still the same as poetry and every tool was a work of art. And just as adolescence dispels the dream of the child and leads to a loss of creativity that goes with the painful problems of growing up, so it was believed by Vico and Herder that the march of progress was spoiling and corrupting the springs of creativity in mankind. This, of course, is a thoroughly reactionary creed, reactionary in the strict sense of the term; it gained ground in the eighteenth century as a reaction to the Age of Reason and blossomed forth in Romanticism as a reaction to the claims of the French Revolution. The prose of life, industry and commerce had destroyed the tender plant of tradition and only a return to the Age of Faith could rescue poetry and art from inanition and death.

Of course a creed might be reactionary and yet true. There are problems which the artist has to face in our civilization which he did not have to face in the closed societies of the more distant past. But the idea that he can retreat from rational thought into the shelter of unspoilt spontaneity merely by ignoring the world he lives in is surely utopian. Moreover if we are to have dubious analogies between the life of the individual and that of kind let us at least have them straight. We cannot remain as little children, we cannot escape the crisis of adolescence, we cannot opt out of the open society in which decisions depend on us.

If artists are to survive in our society they must come to terms with its intellectual demands not only by parroting its catchphrases, but by understanding and criticizing them precisely as fully grown up people should come to terms with life. The nostalgic aesthetics of primitivism is a poor and feeble creed, however much it may disguise itself as revolutionary and aggressive. The dumb animal idea of the artist is plain silly. Some artists were tremendously articulate, and I am not only thinking of Leonardo, the great scientist, of Michelangelo, the great poet, or of Rubens, the scholar and diplomat, but also of Delacroix, the diarist, of van Gogh, the incomparable letter writer, even of Cezanne whose correspondence with his school friend Zola shows a most educated and a most articulate writer. None of these masters came to grief through contact with books, with knowledge, with reason. There is no evidence I know of, that anybody ever did. Not in our world at least. For art in our world has become, for good or ill a reflective pursuit. Every picture painted, every sculpture made relates to the past and aims at the future. No artist today wants to do what has been done before. You may regret the cult of originality, but whether you do or not, you cannot combine it with a rejection of art history. It is only meaningful within history. And so, of course, is that overworked concept of the protest, of the revolution, of the manifesto. Art today is a cumulative, a continuous activity and does not allow the artist to opt out of the history of art. I would go further, I would say that even those who want to fight this tendency of our time to

turn everything into history - and I sympathize with such a desire - first have to know what they are facing and what they are fighting against.

I do not therefore think that we need have a bad conscience if we try to teach art students art history. Of course, it depends what history. Art history largely grew up as an adjunct to collecting. Its primary function is and has been the identification of styles for the purpose of dating and attributing works of art, for dividing the genuine from the spurious and the authentic from the imitation. It is obvious how much we all owe to this preliminary work of sorting and sifting that has gone on for a century and more. It is reassuring to have the correct labels on the frames of paintings in the National Gallery and that impeccable scholarship that marks the catalogues of all our great museums. It would be a good thing to instil artists with a reasonable respect for the achievement that is presented by these catalogues, all the detective work of authentication that has gone into them, for some of it is of real elegance and even beauty. But it is quite clear that we cannot want to turn out students into connoisseurs of this kind. First of all this usually demands specialisation of the strictest observance. You must have seen countless Italian drawings of the sixteenth century to be able to pick out the authentic Peruzzi drawing with the assurance a Philip Pouncey has acquired. A Courtauld student can at least be set on this road which in a lifetime of gifted application may lead him to some such goal. Art students cannot become art historians in this technical sense of the term. It is a full time job, if ever there was one. But though all art history rests on connoisseurship and profits by its results, there are other aims for the art historian than that of becoming a first class connoisseur. He may want to ask different questions. I am myself such an art historian. I have never made an attribution, though I suppose I have doubted a good many which others have made. This type of art history which is relatively independent of Museums and Collecting was long cultivated on the continent before it reached the more practically minded Anglo-Saxon countries. In this tradition the history of art is treated as a guide to the past. For Winckelmann art was the key to Greek civilization and Greek civilization the key to Greek art. The nineteenth century extended this approach, as you know, the Gothic cathedral was the perfect embodiment and expression of the Age of Faith, the Renaissance in art illustrated and illuminated that discovery of man of which Burckhardt wrote. The changes of styles, in other words, were seen as reflections of the changes of man in history. German writers indeed came to speak of Gothic man or baroque man as if they were talking of different species.

It is clear that this approach has great attractions for the teacher and populariser. He can conjure up the spirit of past ages by means of well chosen lantern slides, without making too great demands on his students. A good many survey courses in America and probably also in this country by now use this technique to introduce students to the main epochs of European civilisation. Coffee table books do the same. You get the dark ages or the age of humanism in capsuled form and at least you may learn through this method that there were these ages or periods in our past. For as you must have noticed I am in an awkward position here. Perhaps I should describe myself as a disappointed lover of this tradition. I cannot accept the premises on which it was based. To confess the awful truth, I have come to prefer honest connoisseurship to any dishonest or misguided use of art history. I have a feeble constitution and such clichés as that of Renaissance art reflecting the

discovery of man tend to make me ill. Not that I do not admire Burckhardt in his own time and context, but the dilution of these ideas in the inflated currency of journalistic verbiage brings out the worst in me. I want to ask what men did - and especially women - before the discovery of man, whether the middle ages had only known tigers? I do not even feel apologetic for this dislike of all these clichés, for what is our function as academics if not the constant questioning and probing of accepted beliefs?

It is this above all, I believe we should teach whether we teach art history or any other academic discipline. A healthy distrust of clichés. As my colleague Mr Pope Hennessy once put it at a meeting of the Board of Studies in Art History - we should teach facts and doubt. Artists may find it hard to absorb the first but they should like the second. But neither is easy to teach.

I should like to say a word about facts first. It should not be hard to explain to art students that the canvas of art history must be stretched on a frame of chronology just as their painted canvasses must be stretched. I suppose that the establishment of this chronological framework is the most difficult part of our task. For students who have never learned history, dates tend to sound as meaningless as telephone numbers. To an historian any date has of course a cluster of associations. 1483 is not only the year of Raphael's birth but also of Luther's. 1564 is not only the year of Michelangelo's death but also of Shakespeare's birth and so on. I find it hard to conceive of any historical study, least of all of art history without some knowledge of such crucial dates as the Fall of Constantinople or of the French Revolution. I hope this is a point on which pretty well everybody is agreed. If art students are to learn art history they must learn that minimum of history that alone can give meaning to this operation. I remember a very nice young student who had written a so-called thesis under the previous dispensation on Goya's Disasters of War. He did not know what war it was about but it turned out that he thought Napoleon had lived in the sixteenth century. I am under no illusion about the difficulty you are facing in trying to bring some order into this kind of chaos. To establish any such framework as an incidental to the teaching of art history and other general studies is really a tall order. But tall or small there is no sense in telling students that Roman art was largely derived from the Greeks if they do not know who the Greeks were and how these Romans got into the story. Let me say again that I regard this as the toughest implication of the new demands for the diploma and the one that will need most thorough study. I suppose the working out of simple chronological tables for use in such courses is the best palliative. When I was at the Slade I prepared a two page sheet called Art History in a hazelnut shell in which I tried to characterise every century except that I believe I forgot the seventh. I also explained afresh every time that the sixth century A.D. extends from 500 - 600 and the fourteenth from 1300 - 1400 but that the quattrocento is our fifteenth century, things which must inevitably sound confusing to newcomers. And we must avoid confusing or intimidating them. History as it appears to the historian is a complex web of events interacting like innumerable eddies in a turbulent river. Our maps of history must at first ignore these. They will have more in common with the schematic Underground maps of London Transport than even with a street map of London. We all carry such schematic maps of the past in our heads, and provided we do not take them too seriously they do serve orientation. I suppose that where

there is resistance to the teaching of art history there may be double resistance to the memorising of these maps, why should an artist know the date of the Fall of Constantinople, etc. Well, why should a Londoner know Oxford Circus? - Because he needs a point of reference.

I suppose we might find a number of such points of reference which link history and history of art in a simple and obvious way which therefore might be singled out for memorising. The Bayeux Tapestry is an obvious example, for it was probably still done within living memory of 1066 and all that, and those who remember its style have some kind of sample of what 11th century art looks like. It should be easy to remember that the Acropolis was rebuilt after the Persians had destroyed it and this drama took place in the 5th century B. C.; that the Arch of Titus commemorates the Destruction of Jerusalem, that the San Vitale Mosaics coincide with Justinian's rule, that the rebuilding of St. Peter under Bramante and Raphael links up with the selling of indulgences and therefore with Luther's Reformation, that Monet and Pissarro were in England during the Franco-Prussian War and Picasso painted *Guernica* during the Spanish Civil War. I would think that it might not be asking too much to select such nodal dates and ask for them to be entered on a chronological chart and to be memorised and understood. I have always advised my students to draw themselves chronological tables which could serve their orientation. They could see there at a glance that from Ravenna to Michelangelo more than twice as much time elapsed than from Michelangelo's death till now. They can read off from their chart that Perugino survived Raphael and that Matisse was older than Beardsley.

But what should we put into the frame once we have established it? Here no two teachers are likely to agree, and I do not see why they necessarily should. The selection must be left to their interests and their competence, the more personal their enthusiasm, the more genuine their own wish to find out, to reject the fable convenue and the tired cliché, the more exciting and the more memorable will their courses obviously become. If I shall nevertheless venture to make a few suggestions I hope you will not think that I would want to press my own personal interests on others, least of all on all the art schools of this country. But if I were given the task of teaching art students now (and, in addition, a few sabbatical years to prepare myself for such a course) I should not try to teach them the history of styles which marches from Romanesque via Gothic to the Renaissance. I should try to investigate with them what it was like to be an artist in the past, what tasks he had to perform and in what concrete contexts the works of art took shape which we still admire. It sounds easy and even trite, but if you tried to take this programme seriously you might soon find that the relevant information has hardly begun to be sifted and assessed. Follow me in your mind to the National Gallery - where do these paintings come from, what was their original function? Why are there none, as far as I remember, dating from earlier than the 13th century. Was painting only discovered then? The question leads us of course right into the history of the panel painting, and its function in the Latin Church. Many of the earlier panels in the Gallery are of course Altar Paintings. Why altar paintings? Is it not partly because of the change in liturgy? In the earlier period the officiating priest stood behind the altar facing the congregation. When he turned his back to the congregation an altar frontal was desirable. The role of the Byzantine icon as a model, its imitation in Italy during the

dominance of what Vasari called the Byzantine manner, its transformation in the North as the changeable polyptych, etc., all this is not of course unknown. But try and probe a little further and ask what exactly the religious status of an altar painting is, do the Saints represented on it always mark the consecration of the Altar? Who determined the subject and so on. You may soon find that things are far from simple, let alone trite. And as with altar paintings so with frescoes. We all know of Giotto's Scrovegni Chapel and of Masaccio's frescoes in the Brancacci chapel. What were the exact functions of those family chapels? Were all the members of the clan buried there? Were masses read there for the dead of the family, and if so how many and how long? They were of course usually endowed through the income from some property, but how did it all work, what rights did the Church retain? If we asked such questions in a more concrete, matter of fact way, the golden haze would recede from the word patronage, and the William Morris or Ruskin atmosphere around the word [should "word the" be "world of the"?] the medieval craftsman who dedicated his skill to the church would be dispelled, not in order to debunk the past but to see it as it was.

If we could extend this programme to practically every article we see in our collections, the bone caskets with illustrations of medieval Romances produced in such profusion in the workshop of the Embriachi in fourteenth century Venice, the tapestries in the Victoria and Albert, the showpieces of armour in the Tower or the Wallace Collection, the statuary from tombs and from pulpits, not to speak of illuminated manuscripts, stained glass windows, copes and croziers, reliquaries and all the appurtenances of religious and secular life, we would build up a more concrete picture of the history of art than the traditional account ever was. Most of all there would be a chance of some specimens of such works still existing in their original context in a nearby village church or in one of the Great Houses. It is customary to bemoan the need of so many courses in provincial art schools to rely so much on lantern slides. Here you would have an opportunity of at least partially counteracting this bane. I should like to reiterate that such an introduction would need more knowledge of local history and local practice than I for instance possess. I wish we had a book or books which provide this information handily.

Professor Pevsner, with his unrivalled experience, would of course be an ideal author or at least editor of such a book. But even without it, it should become clear when you take your students to a church and let them study the chancel or the font, a brass or an organ loft, what art was once about in its modest setting. I say it would become clear, but would it? Not unless you supplemented the information from your knowledge of social history. I do not mean the kind of social history which talks exclusively in terms of classes, though we can also learn from that one. I mean again something more vivid and concrete. How many of the travellers who trudge through the stately homes or through the palaces of Italy ready to gape at anything from a signed photograph of Queen Victoria to the portrait which always follows you with its eyes - how many of those, I say, can still have a concrete knowledge of what a stately home or a palace really was, how it was lived in, what the Lord of the Manor or the Signore stood for, what it was altogether like to live in a hierarchical society where everybody knew their place and nearly everybody took it for granted that God himself had ordered society in such a way that the nobleman had blue blood and had to guard his honour with his sword, and the craftsman had

to seek protection of the guild. Without some understanding of this world we cannot understand the ideal of decorum, the fitting style and behaviour, and without this, in its turn, we cannot grasp the context of works of art created in these societies.

It has been said that there are two ways of making history interesting. One by stressing how different everything was in the past from what we know now, the other how little things have changed. A gifted teacher will use both approaches, but I think for the art historian the first may be more important.

We, alas, live in the space age. Our students were probably born into the Atomic Age. They only know the new society, the mass society of social and actual mobility. What there is of remnants of the feudal past they cannot possibly understand, let alone love. I would not ask them to do the second but without understanding the enormous gulf that separates our social existence from that even of Jane Austen's days I regard it as hopeless even to appreciate a portrait by Reynolds.

And if you are asked what can this world be to us, which sounds more remote than the Congo, you must tell your students that whether we like it or not it is the world from which we have just emerged.

Not that I would therefore exclude the art of other civilizations; on the contrary, if any teacher is fortunate enough to have had contact with exotic societies, with anthropology and comparative religion it would be most thrilling to explain the use and context of these ritualistic objects, of masks and images in their setting, and to tell the students what we know about those living crafts which have survived the tourist trade. But of course the demands which this kind of material makes on both teachers and students are even greater and we may not be able to achieve more here than a dim awareness of the difference between our civilisation and that of a tribal culture.

You may perhaps have been waiting by now, for the Director of the Warburg Institute to advocate the study of iconography for it is widely believed, alas, that this is what we are doing all day on Woburn Square. Obviously there are many instances when a cult object proclaiming the legend of a Saint or a marriage chest glorifying a story of marital faithfulness cannot be understood without reference to the text. But this is only one side to the larger question of the function of these works, and it was with the larger aspect of this function of these images within the life of those who commissioned them that Warburg was in reality concerned with throughout his life.

One of the pleasant by-products of such an approach might be that in presenting the realities of art in its earlier setting the students would come to see why the craftsman with his workshop and his pattern books was not in need of historical knowledge, and in what respect the situation has changed so much. I would try to investigate the way in which the craftsman's standards were in fact discussed in their earlier context, the admiration for skill and intricacy, the emphasis on precious materials and on subtle finish. And I would therefore attempt to show how these ideas which look rather naive to us only became vulnerable with a kind of sophistication that rested on comparison and competition.

I have recently become almost obsessed with the inscription that is to be found on a Greek amphora in Munich dating from about 510 B.C., that is from that

period in Athens just before the Persian wars, when things began to stir in the arts, when age old rules and taboos were questioned and a new conception of the artist's power arose. The vase I have in mind is signed by one of these craftsmen, Euthymides. It represents some Bacchic revelry, three men dancing, their bodies twisting so that we see one from the back. Euthymides must have been mightily pleased with this achievement, for he wrote on the vessel, *hos oudepote Euphronios*, Euphronios never did a thing like this. We know Euphronios, he was another Greek vase painter of the period, and an excellent one who also experimented with the rendering of bold movements and foreshortenings. Here you have the spirit of competition, the awareness of what other artists are doing at the same time that marks the simultaneous birth of our idea of art and of art history. The artist does not only fashion a beautiful vessel for the delectation of the rich or powerful. He makes a contribution which he measures against that of others.

I do not think it is an accident that the idea of art history, the idea of such cumulative efforts made by each generation towards a given goal was born in Greece and revived in the Renaissance at a time when artists were dominated by similar ideas of progress. I am also convinced that for teaching the idea of art history, the idea of a visible chain of efforts, these periods of Greek art and Renaissance art are still the most suitable despite the fact that the progress towards naturalism which they record may not appeal to our students. The reason why this should not deter us is I hope clear by now. It is precisely because here we have a formulated goal, a competition between artists to do a given thing better and better. Euphronios never did anything like this. It is relatively easy for us to guess what Euthymides meant with this boast, what 'this' was which not even Euphronios had achieved. The mastery of movement and of foreshortening, for instance, which was to make such strides within the next few decades that only two generations separate Euthymides from the Parthenon frieze.

The very fact that many of your students may prefer archaic art to the achievement of mimesis should afford you ample opportunity of discussing the idea of progress in art, the balance of profit and loss that goes with the pursuit of a particular aim which must of necessity be at the expense of other qualities. Once this is grasped it should become a fascinating spectacle for the student to see how this common pursuit developed into the idea of an Art with a capital A of which artists are only the servants. The idea that Art is long and life is short comes from science for the Art of which this quotation speaks is the Art of Healing, the Art of Hippocrates. But it was through the admixture of science, of anatomy, of optics and geometry that art developed into this cumulative effort that singles out the artist who has made a significant contribution.

I remember George Braque shortly before his death giving an interview published in a Sunday paper in which he said that the Renaissance was a great mistake. I told my students at that time that this may well be so, but without the renaissance Braque could certainly not have been asked to give an interview; nor, of course, would have the reaction of cubism have been possible unless this fresh context had emerged for painting. If we can put this simple fact across we may have won the day in convincing our students that art as we know it is inseparably mixed up with history. I have written a certain amount about this and I need not repeat myself here. It is clear that it is only in such a context that the making of images can

develop into this rich and subtle game in which every move acquires meaning also from what it leaves undone. Not to colour your statue, not to hide your brushstroke but rather to show off the ease with which you conjured up this image - all these moves acquire meaning and therefore expressiveness within the context of the new elite of artists and connoisseurs. But even this meaning, as I need hardly remind you, is inextricably interwoven with the values of the society - my example of the apparently careless brushstroke, after all, comes out of Baldassare's Handbook of the Perfect Courtier where it illustrates the ideal of *sprezzatura*, of elegant nonchalance and effortless mastery. All artistic ideals, I believe, are thus impregnated by social norms both in the past and now.

Once more this could be easily demonstrated to your students by looking more closely at the way artistic values were described and discussed by contemporaries. It is here that we might bring in the ideals of style and talk about their roots in the theory of literature. The word style, after all, is such a term from literature. The strength and the weakness of this literary model could here form a fascinating topic for discussion which need not be all that remote and erudite if you take the styles of various current newspapers or novelists as your starting point.

I am in danger here of wanting to ride one of my hobby horses, and one moreover on which I have not yet published my meditations.....

Let me return therefore to my main theme, the unwritten history of art in terms of objects. It would try to explain how in this new context a work of art could be so famous outside its original purpose or function that it would be copied and sold to art lovers for its sheer fame and beauty - as happened to many a Greek masterpiece under those Romans whose dates I wanted to be remembered.

It happened again in the Renaissance when Italian collectors prized Netherlandish paintings in the fifteenth century and when the inventions of a Raphael or Michelangelo in the sixteenth were distributed far and wide by the engraver's art, when small bronzes were collector's pieces and when the new genre of landscape and still life betokened a new kind of interest in the portable easel painting leading to a flourishing art trade.

Among the many questions I should like to study there would be the simple one to find out how pictures were actually hung, where they were placed and so on, a subject for which there is a good deal of material but which has never to my knowledge been looked at as a whole.

It is along some such road that I would gradually work my way towards the emergence of the great art collections of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, of the grand tour and the new idea of art as an indispensable ingredient of the gentleman's education, of the Salons and the critic in the eighteenth century and of the slow but sure involvement of art in the intellectual movements of the times when a style began to betoken an allegiance - when Neo-Classicism became for a while identified with Republicanism and the French Revolution while the Gothic reaction was linked with the rejection of the age of Reason and a longing for the Age of Faith.

If I could, I would try and spend a good deal of time on this emergence of a new idea of art as a badge of allegiance, for it is a problem that is of course still with us. I should try all the more to show how incomplete was this identification between artistic and stylistic issues, how tangled the situation became and how far removed

from historical truth is the fable convenue that we are taught about the nineteenth century.

The battles of the nineteenth century belong of course to the treasured legends of the tribe. I do not think many art students need a lot of persuasion to listen once more to the story of the Salon des Refusés and of the rejection of the Impressionists. I would not dampen this enthusiasm, for if anywhere it becomes clear here why the practice of art has become so much entangled with its history, why the issues raised at that time reverberate to the present day. But I hope it might be possible to enlist this very interest for a more thorough assessment of what actually happened and how it happened, for a study of how the fronts were drawn and who was in which camp and why.

This might give plenty of opportunity again to discuss the relation of the idea of art to that of progress and of modernism and awaken the students to continued relevance of such analysis. They could perhaps be made to see how this all links up with their very existence and aspirations now, how the Academy became identified with reaction and the break-away art school with progress, how art teaching changed in consequence and how the ideology of a non-conformist art pervaded the whole of our lives till today the conformism of non-conformity presents perhaps the most urgent problem. Unless I am far behind the times it is this ideology, after all, that has brought many of the students to the art schools. Here, too, history is a great educator, breaking down frozen attitudes and bringing back reflection and discrimination into the world of adolescents which is so easily a crude world of black and white.

Indeed I regard this historical analysis as so important a test case for the teaching of art history to art students that I have wavered whether I should not recommend to you to begin your courses this way; to start with the present, and to make the students find out when art schools were formed, when art became an item of the curriculum in schools and when teaching at an art school became the accepted mode of livelihood for a young painter. You might want to experiment with this approach, moving backwards in time, *cancrizans*, as the musicians call it, but I personally think that understanding should come more easily if you try to follow developments as they unfolded.

I have spent a good deal of the time you kindly allotted to me in sketching such a curriculum, but I do not want you to think that I would ever wish this approach to monopolize the courses. Clearly the approach that stresses the difference between the past and the present can and must be counterbalanced by the approach that stresses continuity and allows the students to identify with the problems of the past. I believe such opportunity for identification is best given by the intensive study of individual masters whether it is Michelangelo or Rembrandt, van Gogh or Picasso. Nor do I think that there would be any conflict between the approach I sketched and such studies in depth - for what could be a better preparation for a study of Rembrandt than an outline of the situation of picture making in Holland, the rise of the specialists, the spread of the demand for portraits, the range of art dealing and collecting with which, after all, Rembrandt got involved, the new esteem for prints and drawings that contributed to his fame in Italy and the shifts in collecting fashions that affected his career.

I am sorry if I have laboured the obvious. I know that the real problems only start after the fixing of the syllabus. One of them seems to me the problem of time - how the art student will ever find enough time to read, to look, to memorise, to learn and most of all to react. I know that competition for this time is intense at art schools and I have no answer to that question except the anecdote told of a German professor of Greek with whom his students expostulated that he gave them too much to do. But how? was his astonished reaction. The day has 24 hours, and if that does not suffice you can always use the night as well.

There is a second question with which I must close. We all can think up ideal syllabuses and ideal students working more than 24 hours a day - but what should be the minimum we are prepared to tolerate and to let through? I do not know. I am a burnt child. I once told my students at the Slade that nobody would pass who could not spell the names of Leonardo, Michelangelo and Raphael about whom I had talked the whole term. I am afraid I had to relax in the end for too many would have failed. I am not proud of that weakness. We really must not simply go through the motions of teaching the history of art without enforcing the discipline historical thought demands. There must have been many great artists who could not spell these three names, and there will we hope be many more in the future who have the right and the talent to ignore such pedantries. But there cannot and must not be holders of the Diploma who cannot spell these or similar names and who do not know at least the century and the country of these masters. If there ever should be such people we shall have made a mockery of the diploma and a thorough mess of our job.

**Professor Sir Ernst Gombrich OM** was born in Vienna in 1909 and died in London on November 3, 2001, aged 92. He studied at the Theresianum and then at the Second Institute of Art History at the University of Vienna under Julius von Schlosser (1928-33). He then worked as a Research Assistant and collaborator with the museum curator and Freudian analyst Ernst Kris. He joined the Warburg Institute in London as a Research Assistant in 1936. During World War 2 he was employed by the BBC as a Radio Monitor. After the war, he rejoined the Warburg Institute eventually becoming its Director in 1959. His major publications include *The Story of Art* (1950), *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (1960), *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography* (1970), *Symbolic Images* (1972), *The Sense of Order: A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art* (1979). A selection from his work, *The Essential Gombrich* was published by Phaidon in 1996. His book, *The Preference for the Primitive*, which he completed before his death, was published by Phaidon in July 2002. The long-awaited English translation of *A Little History of the World* (*Eine kurze Weltgeschichte für junge Leser*), authorised by Gombrich himself, was published by Yale UP in October 2005 and republished in a newly illustrated edition in 2011. A full bibliography of his publications to 2000, edited by J. B. Trapp, *E. H. Gombrich: A Bibliography*, was published by Phaidon in 2000.



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