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MARK TWAIN

History does not repeat itself, but it does rhyme.

The Middle Ages hangs over history's belt like a beer belly. It is too late now for aerobic dancing or cottage cheese lunches to reduce the Middle Ages. History will have to wear size 48 shorts forever.

TOM ROBBINS


ROBERT GRAVES (Observations on Poetry)

Rhymes properly used are the good servants whose presence at the dinner table gives the guests a sense of opulent security; never awkward or over-clever, they hand the dishes silently and professionally. You can trust them not to interrupt the conversation or allow their personal disagreements to come to the notice of the guests; but some of them are getting very old for their work.
As a teacher [of art history at the University of Berlin, Adolph Goldschmidt] was the very opposite of a flamboyant performer, but he captured the attention of his students by the wealth of his material. He was a small man, his nose buried in the papers from which he had lectured for decades. He had no need to raise his eyes to the screen, because his assistant had run the slides for him forever, and when the professor said, "In the lower left corner we see the figure of the Evangelist," it would have amounted to the unthinkable collapse of preestablished harmony if the Evangelist had not held his appointed place on the screen at that exact moment.


A. J. BALFOUR History does not repeat itself. Historians repeat each other.

EDWARD THOMAS The past is the only dead thing that smells sweet.

CLAUDE DEBUSSY
Music is the arithmetic of sounds as optics is the geometry of light.

JAMES A.M. WHISTLER
As music is the poetry of sound, so painting is the poetry of sight.

ELBERT HUBBARD
Life is just one damned thing after another.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED
Bruce I. Bustard, A New Deal for the Arts (Washington DC: National Archives and Records Administration / Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997). ISBN 0-295-97600-4. In 1933, when U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt offered "work relief" to unemployed Americans through the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Civil Works Administration, he was persuaded to create comparable jobs for artists in which, for example, painters would be hired "at plumbers' wages" to create murals for government buildings. One consequence was the Works Progress Administration (WPA), opposed by conservative Congressmen, through which the government used tax dollars to employ thousands of artists, musicians, actors, writers, photographers, and dancers over a period of more than ten years. Published as the catalog for a 1997 exhibition of New Deal art at the NARA, this book offers dozens of examples of work produced for the WPA, a narrative of the agency's controversial duration, and a helpful bibliography.

He [a 13-year-old British boy, blind from birth, whose sight was restored] was very much surprised, that those things which he had liked best, did not appear most agreeable to his eyes, expecting those persons would appear most beautiful that he loved most, and such things to be most agreeable to his sight, that were so to his taste. . . . Being shewn his father's picture in a locket at his mother's watch, and told what it was, he acknowledged the likeness, but was vastly surprised; asking, how it could be, that a large face could be expressed in so little room, saying, it should have seemed as impossible for him, as to put a bushel of anything into a pint.


ANON Who was that ladle I saw you with last night? That was no ladle, that was my knife.
HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

John Willats, Art and Representation: New Principles in the Analysis of Pictures (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997). ISBN 0-691-08737-7. One of the chief innovations of the Renaissance was the systematic use of linear perspective, by which an illusion of depth is conveyed on a flat surface. Assumed to be a requirement of "realistic" representation, it remained more or less unchallenged until the emergence of Modernism, when alternative systems of drawing were stressed in studies of Japanese prints, African art, children's drawings, expressionism, and so on. In 1972, British artists Fred Dubery and John Willats described and analyzed alternative methods of "projection" in Drawing Systems (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold). In this elegant, well-illustrated volume, Willats, who has degrees in engineering, sculpture, and psychology, returns with a lengthy, fascinating discussion of why alternative drawing systems commonly found in engineering diagrams (orthogonal, horizontal oblique, vertical oblique, oblique, and isometric and axonometric projections) have historically also appeared in the art of children and of adults from different time periods and cultures.

ABOVE


JULIE STEINBACH (Prairie Rambler) If a parsley farmer is sued, can they garnish his wages? When you open a new bag of cotton balls, is the top one meant to be thrown away? Should vegetarians eat animal crackers? How can there be self-help “groups”? Why doesn’t glue stick to the inside of the bottle? If builders are afraid to have a 13th floor, are book publishers afraid to have a Chapter 11?
HIGHLY RECOMMENDED
Mimi Cazort, et al., The Ingenious Machine of Nature: Four Centuries of Art and Anatomy (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada / distributed by University of Chicago Press, 1997). ISBN 0-888-84657-6. With the development of printing around 1500, the relationship between artists and medical scientists grew to be symbiotic: Anatomical studies were required of artists in the process of learning to faithfully draw the human figure, while anatomists needed artists to illustrate their medical tracts. This lavish, large-sized volume is the catalog for an exhibition of the same name that opened last fall in Canada, and is now at the Philadelphia Museum of Art until June 14. Beautifully designed, and strengthened by scores of astonishing plates of the dissected body, the book's marrow are scholarly, readable essays about the collaborative relationship between artists and anatomists, books about anatomy for artists, dissection theatres, attitudes about female anatomy, and even a sampling of caricatures of anatomists.

ANDRÉ BRETON
(Manifestoes of Surrealism) The simplest surrealist act consists of going down into the streets revolver in hand, and shooting at random.

BRAD HOLLAND
Surrealism: An archaic term. Formerly an art movement. No longer distinguishable from everyday life.

The really terrible thing about life is not that our dreams are unrealized but that they come true.

MALCOLM MUGGERIDGE

Laborers, or navvies, were then [in 19th-century London] a separate race, with red handkerchiefs knotted around their necks and corduroy trousers strapped below the knee; and my father described seeing one of the sewer rats that haunted every piece of waste land leap up a navvy's trouser leg; at which the man had grasped it through the fold of the heavy stuff and quickly crushed it to death inside his iron palm.

PETER QUENNELL
The snake, it is known, is the animal most monkeys dread. Hence when men give their devil a definite form they make him a snake. A race of super-chickens would have pictured their devil a hawk.

One of my uncles [as a child in 19th-century England] had selected “The Dance of Salome” [as a subject to draw], and was portraying the dancer as a Middle Eastern houri, in voluminous silken pantaloons and a small embroidered jacket, between which he permitted to appear a narrow strip of skin. My grandfather had entered the room, taken a coldly considered view of his children’s various works, then picked up a brush, charged it with a lurid purple and, silently leaning over the artist’s shoulder, painted out Salome’s midriff. No less silently he had turned and gone his way. My uncle accepted the implied reproach, and hastened to destroy his drawing.


Louise Fili is a prominent New York designer; Steven Heller, her husband, has produced more than 50 books on graphic design and is a senior art director at the New York Times. In the past few years, they have co-authored a series of dazzling yet very affordable books on historic design artifacts, all published by Chronicle, including Italian Art Deco: Graphic Design Between the Wars, Dutch Moderne: Graphic Design from de Stijl to Deco, and Streamline: American Art Deco. In this, the latest title in the series, they offer a breathtaking full-color tour of French advertising art (posters, signs, advertising fans, books, packaging, toys, point-of-purchase displays) from the 1920s and 30s, including chapters on culture, fashion, beauty, food and drink, industry, travel, and typography.

Each section is introduced by a brief, helpful narrative, but the book's most gratifying aspect (as is true of the entire series) is the richness and variety of its reproductions.

The name of the professor [of art history at the University of Berlin] who examined me in the orals was, I believe, Edmund Hildebrandt. He was a specialist in the Quattrocento and had agoraphobia, so that for his lectures the students had to squeeze into a small auditorium, where people fainted for lack of oxygen. He remains in my memory because in the orals he asked me to describe, without the benefit of illustrations, the stylistic differences between the tails of the horses on the two equestrian figures of Donatello's Gattamelata and Verrocchio's Colleoni.

“'It takes two to paint,' Chase said, 'one to paint, the other to stand by with an axe to kill him before he spoils it.'”


We have no art; we do everything well.


FINLEY PETER DUNNE (Mr. Dooley's Philosophy) Most vigiitarians I ever see looked enough like their food to be classed as cannyballs.
Years ago the photographer Alfred Steiglitz reportedly told Pablo Picasso, "I don't understand your paintings. They don't look like anything." With that he showed the artist a photograph of his wife, the painter Georgia O'Keeffe. "This is my wife," he continued. "This is exactly what she looks like." Picasso looked at the snapshot, then replied politely, "Small, isn't she?"


BERKELEY RICE Visionary people are visionary partly because of the very great many things they don't see.

"I'd found the answer [to how and what to paint] when I joined a school of painters in Paris after the war who called themselves neomeditationists," he [Grant Wood] later said to the amusement of the American press (and certainly the delight of many Iowans). "They believed an artist had to wait for inspiration, very quietly, and they did most of their waiting at the Café du Dome or the Rotonde with brandy. It was then that I realized that all the really good ideas I'd ever had came to me while I was milking a cow. So I went back to Iowa."


ABOVE A geographical goat by cartoonist Richard F. Outcault, creator of The Yellow Kid, from the New York World (February 23, 1896).

Abdul Kassem Ismael, Grand Vizier of Persia in the 10th century, couldn't bear to part with his 117,000-volume library when he traveled, and he had the books carried by a caravan of 400 camels trained to walk in alphabetical order.

WOODY ALLEN (Side Effects) Paris: Wet pavements. And lights—everywhere there are lights! I come upon a man at an outdoor café. It is André Malraux. Oddly, he thinks that I am André Malraux. I explain that he is Malraux and I am just a student. He is relieved to hear this, as he is fond of Mme. Malraux and would hate to think she is my wife. We talk of serious things, and he tells me that man is free to choose his own fate and that not until he realizes that death is part of life can he really understand existence. Then he offers to sell me a rabbit's foot. Years later, we meet at a dinner, and again he insists that I am Malraux. This time, I go along with it and get to eat his fruit cocktail.

ANON Two musicians: Who was that piccolo I saw you with last night? That was no piccolo, that was my fife.

MALAYSIAN PROVERB He can see a gnat as far away as China but is blind to an elephant in his own nose.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED Sister Wendy Beckett, The Story of Painting (New York: DK Publishing / Washington DC: National Gallery of Art, 1994). ISBN 1-56458-615-4. The author is a Catholic nun who has become widely-known in England through a series of popular television programs, such as Sister Wendy's Odyssey and Sister Wendy's Grand Tour. This is an art appreciation text, a narrated pictorial history of Western painting, from the Paleolithic cave paintings in northern Spain to the abrasive yet classic expressionist art of Lucian Freud (the psychoanalyst's grandson), Anselm Kiefer, Frank Auberbach and others. While the text is both intelligent and persuasive, it's a more or less typical journey, and no great surprises occur on the way. On the other hand, it is chiefly intended as an introduction for laymen, for whom it undoubtedly ought to provide any number of insights, with exquisite color reproductions of more than 450 masterpieces.

PETER QUENNELL (The Marble Foot) Heaven is more difficult to describe than Hell; the pains of a childish imagination are less elusive than its pleasures.

ANON Who was that lady I saw you outwit'?
HIGHLY RECOMMENDED Steven C. McGough, Thiebaud Selects Thiebaud: A Forty-Year Survey from Private Collections (Sacramento CA: Crocker Art Museum / Distributed by University of Washington Press, 1996). ISBN 1-884038-00-X. Thiebaud of course is Wayne Thiebaud (pronounced TEE-bow), the California-based painter who, in many circles, is among the most highly respected of living artists. Born in 1920, he worked briefly as a Disney animator, then turned to painting, and held his first one-person show at age 31 at the Crocker Art Museum. This is the catalog for a 1996 exhibit, in which the artist returned to the Crocker to select a retrospective of his work, including still lifes, figure studies, landscapes, and cityscapes. A total of 69 pieces were shown (the earliest from 1955, the latest 1996), 22 of which are reproduced in color. While his paintings are always satisfying (he is particularly admired for his color), it is also of interest to look at the show as a composition, to ask what he chose to exhibit and why. The book opens with a fascinating 9-page interview, in which there is generous evidence of Thiebaud’s kindness, his serious commitment to teaching, and a balanced regard for traditional art.

Newton saw an apple fall and discovered the Law of Gravity...Eve made an apple fall and discovered the Gravity of Law.


SIR E.H. GOMBRICH [to Joseph Podlesnik, after reading his MFA thesis] You quote me so much, I would be perverse if I did not agree with you.

WOODY ALLEN (Getting Even) Picasso was a short man who had a funny way of walking by putting one foot in front of the other until he would take what he called “steps.” We laughed at his delightful notions, but toward the late 1930s, with fascism on the rise, there was very little to laugh about. Both Gertrude Stein and I examined Picasso’s newest works very carefully, and Gertrude Stein was of the opinion that “art, all art, is merely an expression of something.” Picasso disagreed and said, “Leave me alone. I was eating.” My own feelings were that Picasso was right. He had been eating.
**HIGHLY RECOMMENDED**

William R. Everdell, *The First Moderns: Profiles in the Origins of Twentieth-Century Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997). ISBN 0-226-22480-5. This is an unorthodox narrative on turn-of-the-century art, literature, music, science, and philosophy. It opens in 1872 with a little-known German mathematician named Richard Dedekind ("the West's first Modernist") and concludes in 1913, as World War I begins. The author, Dean of Humanities at St. Ann's School in Brooklyn, is both a historian and a poet. As a historian, he blazes a trail through the tangle of names, events, and inventions that, from the rear-view mirror of our own fin de siècle, appear to take on the discernible shape of something called "Modernism." At the same time, as a poet for whom journeys are as important as destinations, he is forever enriching the trip with shifts of emphasis, incongruous bedfellows, and rhymes of intention, location, and time. Along the way, we bump into dozens of marvelous minds, among them Ludwig Boltzmann, Scott Joplin, August Strindberg, and Edwin S. Porter. Modernism is an old story, and there are hundreds of more or less typical books on its unfolding; this one is among the more interesting, the least typical.

**WAYNE THIEBAUD**

*(Thiebaud Selects Thiebaud)* One of the great joys of being a painter is just the pleasure of being so intimately connected to this community [of the tradition of art]....I mean, the longer you work, the more you appreciate what those marvelous painters did, and how damned good they are. Ye God! And it's a little bit of a paradox. You think, "I think I'll give up right now—I've seen the Vermeer show." But, he's a human being like us, and, by God, you can just keep going!
Dylan Thomas [the alcoholic Welsh poet] made no attempt to conceal or excuse the capricious disorder of his daily life; and I remember that he once advised me to use a barber’s shop in Soho, adding that the barber was a sensible sort of person who did not at all object should a client succumb to morning nausea while in the midst of being shaved.


Marvin Bell [when asked how to tell a good poem from a bad one] A bad poem stinks.

Arnold M. Ludwig, The Price of Greatness: Resolving the Creativity and Madness Controversy (New York: Guilford Press, 1995). ISBN 1-57230-117-1. Actually, this may not resolve anything, but it is fascinating, and undoubtedly sheds some statistical light on the question of whether "madness" (depression, anxiety, substance abuse, suicide) is an inevitable consequence of extraordinary achievement.


Cheryl Besenjak, Copyright Plain and Simple (Franklin Lakes NJ: Career Press, 1997). ISBN 1-56414-273-6. Photocopying, scanning, and new laws have confounded copyright. This clear, simple, inexpensive overview includes informative chapters about fair use, printed texts, visual arts, music, and performing arts.

Rudolf Arnheim, Film Essays and Criticism. Translated by Brenda Bentheim. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997). ISBN 0-299-15264-2. Arnheim, a gestalt psychologist and art theorist, worked as a film critic during the Weimar Republic, and wrote a pioneering book on Film as Art. This is the first English anthology of the feuillétons or short essays about film that he wrote between 1925 and 1940.

Ballast is published in Iowa, about 45 miles from the birthplace of the expatriate painter William Edwards Cook (1881-1959), who lived much of his adult life in Paris, where he taught Gertrude Stein to drive.

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E. B. White (One Man's Meat) A poet's pleasure is to withhold a little of his meaning, to intensify by mystification. He unzips the veil from beauty, but does not remove it.