A NEW HISTORY OF WESTERN ART

KOENRAAD
JONCKHEERE

FROM ANTIQUITY TO THE PRESENT DAY

HANNIBAL | Yale

FOREWORD 6

INTRODUCTION **FROM BLACK SQUARE TO KALEIDOSCOPE** 8

CHAPTER 1 **ART AS PRODUCT** 17

City-state rivalry 29
*Bronze and the lost-wax technique** 34
Mass production 35
Marble 40
Art for Church and State 41
Fresh dynamism 54
Prints 66
Printmaking techniques (I) 68
Booming business 71
Successful formulas: the seventeenth century 80
Rubens's workshop 88
Collecting 90
Extravagance 91
Plunder for the people 96
Stifling academicism, liberating modernism 97
A new clientele 103
Printmaking techniques (II) 112
Craft, connoisseurship and economics 113

CHAPTER 2 **ART AS IDEA** 115

Thinking about art in Antiquity 121
Mimemata 122
Plato and mimesis 125
Emotion and expression 128
Pliny the Elder 129
'Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image' 131
Old questions, new premises 136
Florence 136
Drawing 141
The North: art as theory 145
Iconoclastic controversy 147
Giorgio Vasari 149
Outside Italy 152
France, Spain and Portugal 161
The discovery of the beholder 165
Noble simplicity and quiet grandeur 177
Sublimation 178
Art as theory 181

CHAPTER 3 **ART(S) AND SCIENCE** 187

Ideal proportions 191
Artes 194
Fresco 200
Rethinking 203
Perspective 206
Tempera and oil paint 212
Van Eyck and oil paint 216
Panel or canvas? 217
Broader horizons 217
New knowledge, different challenges 223
The discovery of reason and emotion 234
Pathos in a world of reason 244
Clarity 248
Euphoria to despair 251
Photography: the ultimate marriage of art and science 253
Art, science and poetry rethought 258
Art as catalyst of emotion and knowledge 260

CHAPTER 4 **ART, POWER AND FAITH** 267

From Pericles to Alexander the Great 271
Rome as a world power 274
Searching for new balances 281
Different power relations, different art 287
Experimental art in a century of power struggles 297
Show of power 309
The call of Rome 309
The heavens open 323
Fragile ideals 328
Revolutionary urge 333
Freedom 339
Salon des Refusés 342
Art and ideology 346

CHAPTER 5 **FORM AND CONTENT** 349

Style and meaning 352
The problem of 'style' 353
Meaning 358
Antiquity 363
Rome 367
Early Middle Ages 370
Refinement 374
Rinascimento en Ars nova 376
The sixteenth century: strengthening ties 392
High Renaissance 397
Venice 402
Germany and the Low Countries 407
Big ambitions 413
Baroque and Classicism 415
The Dutch Republic 424
Rococo: watchword 'excess' 428
Back to the source 434
Romanticism and Realism 436
Impressionism and the revolution in art 440
Isms 443

EPILOGUE **ART AS INTERACTION** 445

CONCISE BIBLIOGRAPHY 448
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS 455
INDEX 467
Photographic credits 471

* *Titles of text boxes are in italics*

FOREWORD

This book began to take shape by chance a few years ago when I lost my way while visiting the Frieze Art Fair in London, one of those big and exclusive art-world events. Stylish pavilions had been set up in Regent's Park to display the contemporary art while limos shuttled back and forth outside. Inside, people were getting down to some serious negotiation, champagne glass in hand. For an art historian accustomed to the sedate rhythms of centuries-old works, modern and contemporary art's explosion of form, colour, light and decorum was something of a vision, another 'garden of delights', like stepping into the world of Hieronymus Bosch.

Not that I don't visit big art fairs regularly, but what goes on in and around the stands generally passes me by. It's the artworks I see that stay with me rather than the people or the other goings-on. So my experience in London was unusual for me. As I wandered around the fair, engrossed in images and impressions, I was startled by a crowd of people pursuing someone down the long aisle between the different stands. It turned out to be Jeff Koons.

'There really is no such thing as Art. There are only artists,' I thought as I watched the spectacle. Was Ernst Gombrich right in the opening sentence of the best-selling art-history book of all time? Are there really only artists? People who make things that other people love? It's a *bon mot* that every student of art history comes across at some point, but one that I never actually believed, having grown up – unlike Gombrich – in the early years of the digital age. As a kid, I learnt to draw simple figures on a Commodore 64, virtual drawings that existed only in the projections of a cathode-ray tube and the black hole of a floppy disk. I bought my first laptop when I was a student. Via a dial-up modem, it could connect to the Internet, at which point simple drawings were replaced with lifelike images. Nowadays, of course, the entire world flashes by on my smartphone. From time to time, I've also explored augmented realities and immersive spaces generated with the assistance of artificial intelligence. You no longer need artists to create images of amazing landscapes in which you can mentally lose yourself. Art doesn't even have to be an object any more: it can now also consist of colours and lines flashing by on holo-lenses – ideas mined from big data. Are there only artists? It might have been true once, but what about now and in the future?

When I spotted the rock-star artist being pursued by his groupies through Frieze, I felt a pang of doubt: might Gombrich have been right after all? It wasn't Koons' work that his admirers were swooning over, it was all about the man himself, the mythical demigod [**6**]. In other words, the artist is still clearly an important factor, even for digital natives.

It got me thinking. Would it be possible to write a history of art that was not simply a succession of artists' lives embellished with historical interludes? As if the phenomenon of art were the result of rare genius and chance encounters? Could a history be imagined which, without veering into either idolatry or iconoclasm, would explain how we got to the point where thirty groupies would chase their hero across an art fair? It was this mental exercise rather than the potential result that piqued my interest in the first instance. As I began to write, however, a magical and inexhaustible world of images opened up for me, in which I was once again able to wander around, full of amazement. While you can't neatly demarcate the infinite spectacle offered by art history, a framework plotting the edges of this endlessly complex visual narrative gave me something I could work on. Viewing the history of art through five different lenses struck me as an interesting idea, and in due course I began – naively perhaps – to work it out. It gradually became a fascinating experience that led me away from the familiar cocoon of academic micro-research within tightly defined boundaries. The alienating effect was at once liberating and oppressive. Above all, though, it brought me back to the wonder, to the reason why I studied art history in the first place, and why I still

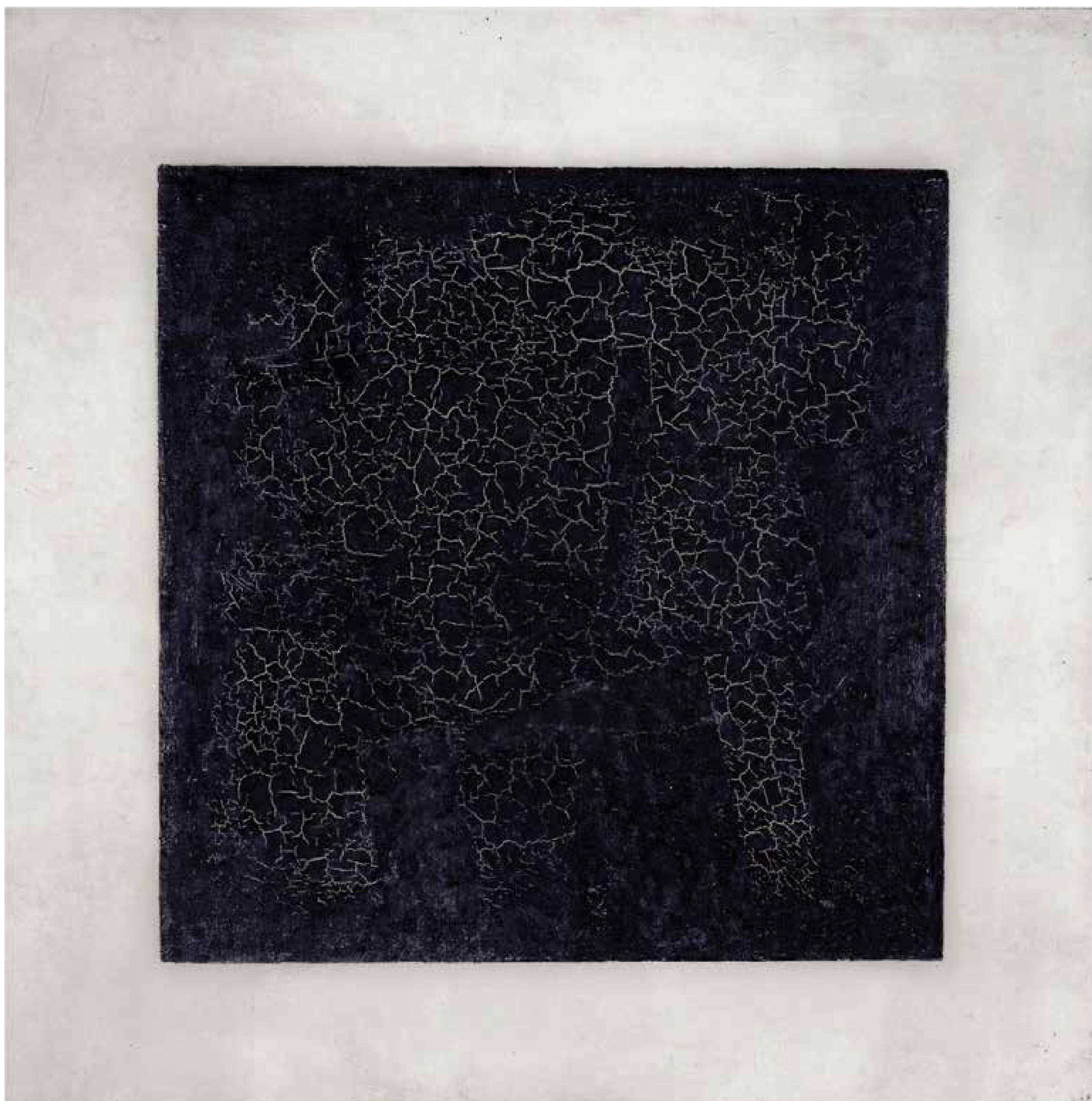
love to wander anonymously, happy as a child, through museums and fairs to see what's going on in my personal garden of delights. It goes without saying that aesthetic pleasure has a recurring part in this, but so do the people who pore over every label rather than looking at the works of art. Or the attendants who tell you enthusiastically about works they have been seeing for years. The fancily dressed ladies and gentlemen at the art fair, a glass of wine in one hand and their chin in the other as they wonder whether the colour of that Lucio Fontana would go with the couch. The lone figure with the sketchbook who has come to imitate the great masters. All these people too are an integral part of the phenomenon of art.

Now, as I put the finishing touches to this book, I'm looking at a picture of a banana duct-taped to the partition of a gallery stand at Art Basel Miami Beach [**1.133**]. An admirer paid $120,000 for one of the three 'editions', while critics and apologists fell over each other to comment on the piece in the opinion pages and on social media. A banana, twenty centimetres of silver sticky tape and a name: Maurizio Cattelan. It added up to a small fortune and the full attention of the global media. How much does a banana and twenty centimetres of standard tape without a name cost? Are there only artists, I ask myself again?

This book would never have been written without the input and confidence of many people who came into my life at different moments and helped shape it. Beginning with my parents, who passed their love of art on to me through their genes and in the way they raised me. Or my great uncle, who spoke so fondly of Donatello that I have a soft spot for that master to this day. The French teacher who brilliantly explained the imagery of *Le Petit Prince*. The guide at the Hermitage St Petersburg who, in a few sentences in excellent Dutch, summed up virtually every cliché about Rembrandt and handed me a textbook example of the reductive, authority-based view of art that I have resisted ever since. Katlijne Van der Stighelen, who wrongfooted me with Duchamp's *L.H.O.O.Q.* as I trained to be an art historian and has been there ever since, including today with a reading of this book. Tine, whom I have to assure of the beauty of art and who still has her doubts, and our children, who blush and pull faces whenever dad starts to pontificate. Marten Jan Bok, who drew me down the towpath of academia, and Eric Jan Sluijter, who's always been there to cast a critical look over my shoulder. Gijs and Cornelie Key, Nancy and Thomas Leysen, who love art so much that it's inspiring. And not to forget the students who've been putting up for years with my occasionally eccentric mental leaps: they've helped keep me on the straight and narrow.

Then there are the dozens of colleagues and art lovers who have crossed my path over the years and have helped me as I wrote this book, from both near and far, practically and in other ways, especially Elizabeth Vandeweghe, Aurelie Daems, Abigail Newman, Joannes van den Maagdenberg, Hugo de Block, Anne-Laure van Bruaene, David Freedberg, Matt Kavaler, Marisa Bass, Jürgen Müller, Ralph De Koninck, Bernard Aikema, Nils Büttner, Filip Vermeylen, Reindert Falkenburg, Ann-Sophie Lehmann, Elmer Kolfin, Till-Holger Borchert, Manfred Sellink, Sabine van Sprang, Tine Meganck, Bart Ramakers, Walter Melion, Barbara Baert, Maximiliaan Martens, Steven Jacobs, Marjan Sterckx, Wouter Davids, Marc Leman and many others besides. They asked me questions that continue to resonate. Which is what questions ought to do. Invitations to wander endlessly through the world of ideas.

For this book, I was helped by some of the very best. Paul van Calster (editor of the original Dutch edition), Gert Dooreman (graphic concept), Ted Alkins (translator), Derek Scoins (copy-editor), and Hadewych Van den Bossche and Gautier Platteau (publishers). Paul, not least because of how he has been drumming into me for years – with Giovanni Pico della Mirandola in mind – that true researchers can never lose. Because when they're right, they learn something. And when they're wrong, they learn something too.



1.
Kazimir Malevich. *Black Square*, 1915.
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.
The network of drying cracks that disfigures the picture surface was caused by painting either 'lean over fat' or on a previous layer that had not sufficiently dried.

INTRODUCTION FROM BLACK SQUARE TO KALEIDOSCOPE

A BLACK SQUARE

In 1915, the Russian artist Kazimir Malevich painted a black square on a canvas with a white background [1] – a painting that is now viewed as an absolute masterpiece and a highpoint of European art. It is a sublime and concentrated synthesis of five centuries of that history: the end of an era and the beginning of something entirely new.

Yet when all is said and done, Malevich's painting consists of little more than a bit of black paint laid down in a geometric figure on a piece of whitened fabric stretched over a wooden frame. It does not amount to much in terms of either materials or painterly technique: anyone could have made it and it cost next to nothing. Without context, in other words, there would be no reason to view this work as an art-historical landmark, let alone one worth tens of millions of dollars. Jan and Hubert van Eyck's *Ghent Altarpiece* [**1.65**] or Michelangelo's frescoes in the Sistine Chapel [**2**], by contrast, are unique technical *tours de force*: one aspect, therefore, that we might adopt as a hallmark of artistic quality. Damien Hirst's *For the Love of God* [**1.15**], meanwhile – a skull encrusted with 8,601 diamonds – is almost priceless because of the intrinsic value of the materials used to make it. Many, however, question the work's artistic credentials. Hirst is known, moreover, for coming up with left-field ideas (the title of the diamond skull was prompted by a comment by his mother), virtually none of which he executes himself, leaving it to his assistants instead. All the same, each of these very different works falls within the single category of 'art'. An apparently meaningless object becomes so meaningful as to assume an extraordinary emotional, social and financial value. But what is it that makes *Black Square* such an absolute pinnacle in the history of Western art?

Malevich was a member of the Russian avant-garde and was present at the birth of Suprematism. Around the time of the Russian Revolution (1917), the movement took up Cubism and Futurism and carried their respective principles to the logical extreme, reducing all visual means to an absolute minimum. No colour, minimal lines, no depth, no

figuration. Artists had been seeking ways to imitate reality since the beginning of the Renaissance around 1400, five centuries earlier. This reflected both their natural inclination and, above all, the influence of the recently rediscovered art theories of Graeco-Roman antiquity, in which the imitation of reality – *mimesis* – played a central role. In the centuries that followed, the perfect imitation of reality, and even the pursuit of such perfection, were considered to be the epitome of art [**5.64**]. Linear and colour perspective were crucial tools to this end. They allowed the illusion of depth (a third dimension) and hence of reality to be created on a flat surface. The invention of photography in the nineteenth century placed these efforts under intense pressure. Was there any point in still seeking to represent reality as faithfully as possible when a photographer could achieve the same in a fraction of the time needed by a draughtsman or painter, let alone a sculptor? Whatever the answer to that question, the advent of photography sent a shockwave through the visual arts, permanently changing their appearance and aspirations.

Malevich's painting, stripped of perspective and colour, was one of the first non-figurative works in the history of Western art. It fundamentally undermined the basic rules of mimetic art, opening the way to a new artistic mentality. Malevich's *Black Square* challenged twenty-five centuries of art history: is technical skill a prerequisite for art? Is art possible without some form of illusionism? Without figuration? Without a subject? Or, to put it another way, how can a painting of a black square be as important a work of art as the frescoes on the ceiling and walls of the Sistine Chapel [**2**]?

After all, the idea that art is (or ought to be) the epitome of technical skill is still widely held. It reflects the notion, long since superseded, that craft skills are the *ne plus ultra* in art, and that those with the greatest technical knowledge and accomplishment are, by definition, the greatest artists. Even in antiquity, however, and again from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the intellectual element of artistic practice was held in at least equal esteem with the craft. Polycletus' famous *Doryphoros* (spear carrier) statue, for

2.
Michelangelo.
The Last Judgement, 1535–41 (detail).
Sistine Chapel, Apostolic Palace, Vatican City.

instance, was underpinned by a mathematical world of proportion and balance [**2.2**], while some two thousand years later, Michelangelo argued for the superiority of what is referred to in Italian as *disegno* – a term with the dual meaning of 'drawing' and 'design' [**3**, **2.35**]. The Florentine artist felt that the idea was the essence of the work of art, and that, in many cases, its execution could be left to studio assistants. The concept embodied the mental image from which the finished work sprang. The drawing, the design, was its first physical rendering: the *disegno* was, in other words, the realisation of the *prima idea*. It played the same crucial role in 1953 when Robert Rauschenberg literally erased the *disegno* of his great idol, Willem de Kooning [**4**]. To his mind, this might simply have been a different way of formulating the question of the essence of art.

The growing aspirations of painters, sculptors and architects can best be illustrated using two drawings: one by Giotto (c. 1300), which artists' biographer Giorgio Vasari described in his *Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori* (1550); and the other created around 1598–1600 by Rubens in an *album amicorum*. Vasari identified Giotto as the first true artist of the Renaissance and founder of the 'Florentine' school of painting, the pinnacle of which he considered to be Michelangelo. Giotto is held out as a poor shepherd boy who learnt to draw by scratching on rocks and walls with little stones. Much later in his life, Vasari continues, the pope began to show an interest in the, by now, famous artist, and Giotto was asked to do a drawing that would persuade the pontiff of his talent. Giotto dipped his pen in a pot of red ink and drew a perfect circle freehand. This, he declared, ought to be enough to demonstrate his skill as a draughtsman. Three centuries later, the erudite Baroque master Peter Paul Rubens drew a perfect circle with a dot at the centre in the friendship album of Filips van Valckenisse, art collector and Municipal Secretary of Antwerp. He inscribed the drawing with the words, 'God is all things in the middle of the field' [**5**]. The exceptionally talented draughtsman also limited himself to drawing a circle, but unlike Giotto, Rubens also took an intellectual stance, the inscription making his drawing a metaphor of his Neoplatonic philosophy. All the same, like Giotto, he was displaying not only his skill but also his ambition. Rembrandt might have done something similar in one of his self-portraits [**5.114**]. Since antiquity, anecdotes of this kind had been part of the arsenal of *topoi* or commonplaces that could be deployed in different

3. Michelangelo. *Archers Shooting at a Herm*, 1530.
Red chalk. Royal Collection Trust.

circumstances and for different artists. According to a legend recorded by Pliny the Elder in the first century BCE, Apelles – the greatest Athenian painter of the fourth century BCE – once drew a straight line of unsurpassable perfection on a panel by his rival Protogenes.

Even though 'craft' – the heading under which we might classify all of this – no longer topped the list of required qualities after Malevich, for practical reasons it had been an essential precondition of artistic practice for centuries. Without such experience, knowledge and technique, it was simply not possible to create high-quality works of art. Art-historical changes are not only caused by what we might term advances in aesthetic understanding, therefore, but also very much by the possibilities arising from technological developments. While it might not always appear so, colour, line, texture, perspective, anatomy and so forth have all changed drastically over the centuries in response to (occasionally minimal) technical developments and the availability of new materials. Or, as Pliny put it, painting arose when someone picked up a piece of charcoal and traced around a person's shadow – and it developed when artists began to colour in those outlines with new pigments, binding agents and brushes.

Yet art is so much more than the acme of technical skill: it is like a gazing ball, a philosopher's stone, as Jeff Koons has called it [**6**]. Art creates a chemistry between artists and their timeless audience. It rarely offers formal answers, but presents itself more as a question, and an open one at that. Artisanal quality and aesthetic power are two of its most accessible characteristics, but there are dozens of others too, and none, it would seem, is indispensable in itself. Questions that became intertwined with works of art over the centuries or at unguarded moments now form an inseparable part of their power.

Perhaps I might use an anecdote to clarify the issue – one thought up centuries ago by Johannes à Porta in a now-forgotten little book from 1591 entitled *D'net der Beeltstormers* (The Net of the Iconoclasts), in which he set down his thoughts

on art and on the 'Iconoclastic Fury', a wave of religiously inspired and unprecedently destructive image-smashing that swept the Low Countries in 1566. To explain the nature of art, à Porta came up with an affecting metaphor. Imagine a young woman, he wrote, recently married and still deeply in love. But her husband must go to war (an everyday reality in 1591). He will be gone for months at least and might never return. Just before he leaves, he gives her a small portrait of himself – her only keepsake. What happens then, Johannes à Porta says, is magical: the meaning (the declaration of love) merges with the object. You could imprint it on your memory, you could even create a perfect copy, yet the relic value assumed by that original portrait makes it irreplaceable. For the young woman, the likeness of her husband could never be replicated. The panel would become her treasured possession. It is the same reason you carry a crumpled photo of a loved one in your wallet for years and cannot bring yourself to tear it up, even though nowadays you could easily copy or digitise it.

According to à Porta, this is precisely what happens with art: if a powerful connection arises between the meaning of an object and its viewer/owner, that meaning will merge with the object itself. The work of art or the image becomes the physical relic of a raw emotion or a compelling memory. Something irreplaceable. Art to à Porta was a question of faith: a work of art becomes important if you believe in its history, its significance, and so forth – in every layer of meaning, in short, that inheres within the object. The stronger the cognitive and emotional bond, the more powerful the effect. It is for the same reason that a mechanically produced urinal can become a world-famous work of art. If it is presented as art at the right time, in the right place, in the right context and by the right artist, the original does not even have to be preserved. I refer, of course, to *Fountain* (1917) by Marcel Duchamp, which now exists purely in the form of replicas. Yet placed on a pedestal behind glass in the world's most prestigious museums, even those appeal to the imagination [**3.103**].

4. Robert Rauschenberg. *Erased de Kooning Drawing*, 1953. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

5. Peter Paul Rubens. Entry in the *Album amicorum* of Philips van Valckenisse, c. 1598. Pen drawing. KBR, Brussels, II.1688, fol. 127v. Inscription: 'Medio Deus omnia campo'.

6. Jeff Koons. *Gazing Ball (Titian Pastoral Concert)*, 2016. © Jeff Koons – Courtesy of the artist and Almine Rech Gallery.

Countless factors go towards determining the value of an object like this, whether to an individual or to an entire continent: universal aesthetics, for instance, as in classical Greek sculpture [**2.2**]; an iconic role at a key moment of world history, like Jacques Louis David's *Oath of the Horatii* [**4.86**]; the mysterious and the mystical, such as Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* [**3.36**]; or supreme technical skill, as in the Van Eyck brothers' *Ghent Altarpiece* [**1.65**]. The options are virtually infinite. What they have in common, however, are the stories, emotions and perspectives that have become intrinsically interwoven with the object: not so much for individuals, but frequently for millions of people. It is this that makes Malevich's *Black Square* so special. It was created at the epicentre of an immense revolution in European art history, since when, this black square has come to acquire more and more layers of meaning for more and more people. And you only find this in Malevich's moment in art history.

Yet what goes for Malevich's work also holds true for many other highpoints in the history of Western art. Most works of visual art have little or no value in terms of the materials from which they are made or, in some cases, even in aesthetic terms. Without context they are all but meaningless: paintings are traditionally just paint on canvas and sculptures lumps of worked stone or wood (or cast or assembled metal). Since the early twentieth century, moreover, just about anything can be used as the raw material for making art. The true value of an artwork generally has nothing to do with the time it took to produce (labour) or the cost of the materials (Damien Hirst's skull being a rare exception). As Johannes à Porta already knew, the added value lies in the magical moment in which stories and emotions merge with an object.

This book takes a similar approach to art history as Johannes à Porta did to art. It questions that history from different angles and explores how these emotional and cognitive layers of meaning have come to bestow 'value' on such an endless multitude of objects: so much value in some cases that – prior to the Covid pandemic, at least – millions of people are willing to fly halfway around the planet to see the object with their own eyes rather than make do with ultra-high-resolution surrogates on digital screens. A canvas with a black square on it? Hang that same canvas in any conference room and no one will pay it the slightest attention. Yet precisely that one canvas is an icon, thanks to the many layers of meaning that have inhered within it over time.

KALEIDOSCOPE

The opening up of the discipline of art history in the twentieth century provides the basis for how this book is structured. Art history took off in the previous century, with increasingly frequent attempts to explain artistic developments from new and interdisciplinary angles. These innovations relied on a succession of big names: art historians who creatively scrutinised the history of their own field before thoroughly transforming it. Some of them – Heinrich Wölfflin or Max J. Friedländer, for instance – developed classic models for the study of style and authenticity, while others presented new interpretative concepts and structures. One such was Aby Warburg, who pioneered iconology – an innovative discipline that evolved out of iconography, with the goal of interpreting visual

language within a broad context. Furthermore, the focus of art historiography has shifted in recent decades away from the relationship between artist and artwork towards 'reception aesthetics' (the way the work has been received by the public over the centuries) on the one hand and 'technical art history' (the study of the material and technical characteristics of the objects) on the other.

The fresh interest in an artwork's various layers of meaning ranged from the elementary analysis of their iconography through to their complex contextual interpretation. In pursuing that interest, the aforementioned art historians were among those who, from the twentieth century onwards, consistently drew on insights from other academic disciplines: economics, the history of science, neurology, sociology, anthropology, religious studies, chemistry, mathematics etc. As a result of this, art history is no longer purely 'historical' (based on source research) or formalist (stylistic history), but has transformed itself into a *Bildwissenschaft*, the study of visual culture. In this way, art has increasingly been examined from entirely new perspectives, with the emphasis in many cases no longer on aesthetic value but rather on the way in which its visual language functions within a given culture and context. This tendency has been reinforced by the steadily advancing visualisation of communication in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Today's newspaper front pages are filled with photographs rather than text. Images capture the stories told on social media, with millions of photos and videos uploaded to the Internet every day. In this digital world, even the physical relationship with the material object seems to be disappearing. Aesthetic images flash by and seldom appear in physical form any more. Prolonged contemplation has given way to fleeting stimuli.

This book considers art as a catalyst: the object that absorbs meanings and history and drives the chemistry of thought processes. Separate from the aesthetic experience or intriguing concept alone, art is the materialisation of new technologies, the visualisation of new societal paradigms or even the financial valorisation of a perception. Art is the instrument of politics and religion, the pacesetter of revolutions and the spark that triggers extreme reactions, such as image-smashing. Art is a visual idiom, the vehicle of unlimited meaning but, above all, an exceptionally powerful form of communication, all with a touch of magic, as Johannes à Porta recognised.

The book does not agree in this sense with Ernst Gombrich's famous statement that 'There really is no such thing as Art. There are only artists.' To claim the opposite would be going too far, but the least we can say is that it is the works of art that call the shots. They are first and foremost wonderful objects in which an infinite number of stories that appeal to the imagination cohere. The upshot of this is also that beauty and taste are not the be-all and end-all either; they are merely one link in a complex of factors.

To grasp these multiple layers of meaning, I examine the history of Western art here from five different angles. The first chapter explores the economic aspects of the art business, while the final chapter (5) rounds off with style and meaning. Those in between consider the impact of art theory (2), of the mutual influence of the arts and the sciences (3), and of politics and religion (4). These and other connections have lent value and meaning to art for centuries. In each chapter, we return to the source of Western visual culture, ancient Greece, before floating back up through time to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Highpoints in the history of art are used to illustrate the shifts, both major and minor, that have altered the development of art: great revolutions and small evolutions.

The book is constructed, in other words, as a matrix. Each chapter runs through the history of art from a different perspective. Different phenomena obviously stand out in different eras, which understandably means that not every stylistic period, and certainly not all the artists discussed here, receive the same attention in each chapter. What is striking, however, is that these defining moments in art history were also ones in which exceptional synergies were created. To cite just one example, Michelangelo's *David* [**5.64**] – just about the most famous statue in the history of art – is unique for its artisanal quality, its political and

religious impact, its intellectual importance and much more besides. The narrative lines of art history converge in an image like this, as they do for *Black Square*.

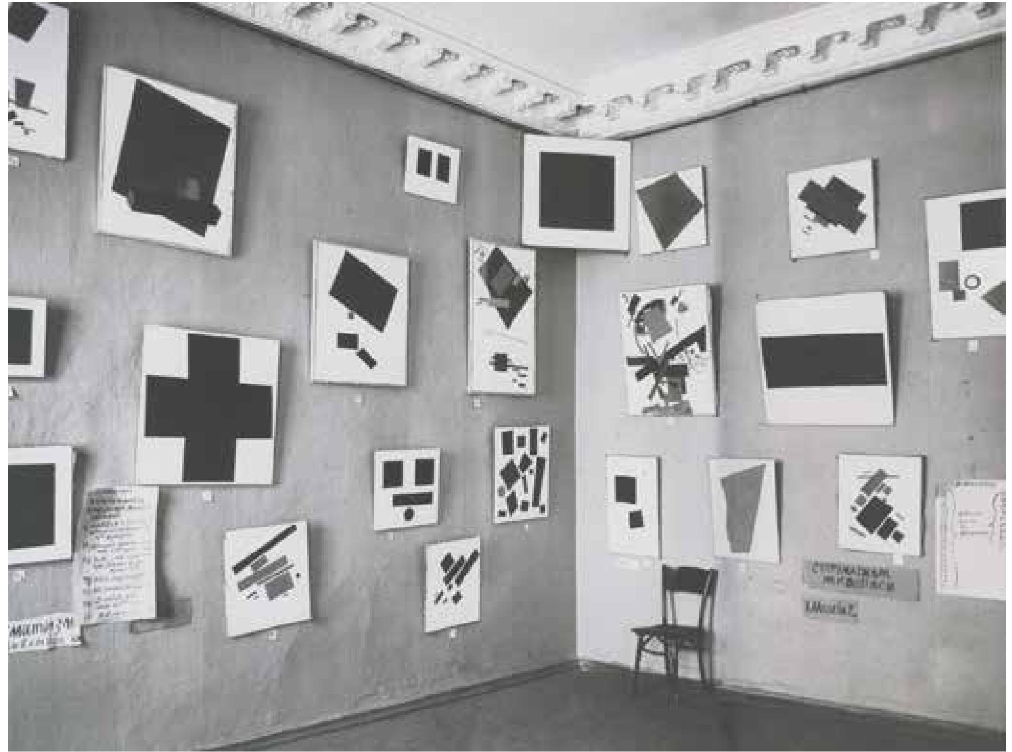
A great many aspects of art history necessarily have to be left unaddressed in a book like this. Some stories have yet to be told, while others are unfolding right now. The interaction of European art with that of other cultures, for instance, is a field that is currently being rewritten. It makes all sorts of fresh analysis possible, but also stirs up powerful emotions. The same goes for gender issues and many other aspects of society. These recent approaches are sure to secure their place in the fabric of art history now and in the near future. They will merge with it and new objects will become new relics in a world of reason and emotion. Reactions are inevitable, and that is a good thing – because art is not what it is, but what it becomes.

By implication, therefore, this book cannot be, nor would it wish to be, an end point. The aim is to show that works of art are closely bound up with the historical dynamics in which they arose and the shifting perspectives from which they are viewed. It is not an ambition prompted by any post-modern motivation, merely the upshot of the fact that throughout my life I have been much more fascinated by the phenomenon of art than by that of the artist. This survey deals with European – specifically Western European – art, as that is the field with which I am best acquainted. In the process, I have no doubt paid too much attention to certain aspects and figures while neglecting others. The picture I sketch will certainly be distorted in places – all of which is inevitable given the principles underlying the format. Art history is ungraspably complex and calls for considerable modesty. All the same, the chosen form also provides opportunities.

The book will hopefully enable the reader to view familiar and less familiar movements, works of art and artists in a different way, and hence to discover further new perspectives within the inexhaustible domain of art.

I. ART AS PRODUCT

1.1.
Willem van Haecht. *The Gallery of Cornelis van der Geest*, 1628 [detail of 1.95]. Rubens House, Antwerp.
Rubens, in the left foreground, explains the finer points to Archduke Albert and the Infanta Isabella, governors of the Southern Netherlands. Cornelis van der Geest points to the painting with the *Virgin and Child*, while behind him Van Dyck chats to another man.



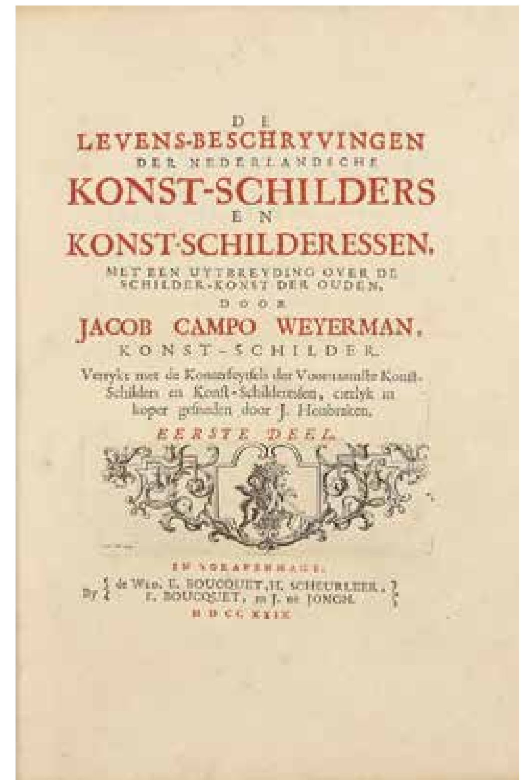
1.2.
Works by Kazimir Malevich at *The Last Exhibition of Futurist Painting 0.10*, St Petersburg, 1915. State Russian Museum, St Petersburg.

How might Joos Vijd have justified the undoubtedly hefty sum he paid Hubert and Jan van Eyck for the polyptych with the *Adoration of the Lamb*, commonly known as the *Ghent Altarpiece* [**1.65**]? He would have argued, perhaps, that the brothers were the leading painters of the day, that the materials they used were very expensive and that Jan's fee had to compete with the generous annual stipend he received from the Duke of Burgundy. The gigantic *Ghent Altarpiece* took several years to complete. A painting like Malevich's *Black Square* (1915) [**1**], swiftly executed using inexpensive materials, lies at the opposite end of the spectrum, yet this famous work, too, is virtually priceless today. In this case, what you are paying for is the idea.

Art might be difficult to capture within traditional economic models, but it is subject to the laws of supply and demand all the same. A photograph taken at one of the Suprematist exhibitions offers a glimpse of both the strengths and weaknesses when art and economics intertwine [**1.2**]. It illustrates the tension between production and consumption, which presents the artist with a difficult balancing act. Having formulated the initial idea, the obvious next step would be to create a large number of compositions by repeating, varying and adjusting the basic principle – in Malevich's case a simple geometric figure on a differently coloured background – and then to exploit it to the full. Repetition is needed to heighten awareness of the original concept – no different essentially to what the Old Masters termed *inventio* – and hence to create a market. Yet each new version also attenuates the significance of the idea since it is a mere reflection of that initial discovery. In short, 'production' is required to set the market in motion, but overproduction will undermine unicity, excitement and demand.

In some ways, the relationship between art and money is a successful marriage of convenience. The unbreakable bonds between the two can be seen almost daily at auctions, where tens of millions are sometimes bid for objects that, in the final analysis, are no more than a bit of paint on a canvas or a line on a piece of paper [**1.3**]. While they have virtually no intrinsic value, these objects can be

1.3.
Amedeo Modigliani. *Nu couché (sur le côté gauche)*, 1917.
Sotheby's (New York), 14 May 2018.
This Modigliani raised $157 million at auction in 2018 – a record amount at the time.



DE
LEVENS-BESCHRYVINGEN
DER NEDERLANDSCHE
KONST-SCHILDERS
EN
KONST-SCHILDERESSEN,
MET EEN UYTBREYDING OVER DE
SCHILDER-KONST DER OUDEN,
DOOR
JACOB CAMPO WEYERMAN,
KONST-SCHILDER.
Verrykt met de Konterfeytsels der Voornaamste Konst-Schilders en Konst-Schilderessen, cierlyk in koper gesneden door J. Houbraken.
EERSTE DEEL.

IN 'SGRAVENHAGE,
By de Wed. E. BOUCQUET, H. SCHEURLEER, F. BOUCQUET, en J. de JONGH.
MDCCXXIX

1.4

worth an absolute fortune due to a complex combination of factors that are extremely difficult to define and which might be referred to, for convenience, as their 'inherent value'. A small painted panel that turns up in an attic today could fetch millions tomorrow if it can be linked to an illustrious name. The examples are legion, with masterpieces seemingly 'discovered' every five minutes and their sale making the front pages.
'Yet a wise connoisseur would laugh himself half to death to hear the ignorant art-owl stutter out the names of a few fine artists' the Dutch artist and satirist Jacob Campo Weyerman wrote in the early eighteenth century: 'For he would treat such a one as a little boy who has only recently learnt to read....' To Weyerman, the kind of people who 'buy names' know nothing of art. But he was equally scathing about artists themselves and about dealers.
'A modest appearance and the air of a fine gentleman are the mark of the earnest, modern art buyer and seller' he noted in the same manuscript. Weyerman's analysis is venomous but far from exceptional. In the aftermath of the 2017 sale of

1.4.
Jacob Campo Weyerman. 'The Lives of Dutch [male and female] Painters' (*De levens-beschryvingen der Nederlandsche konstschilders en konst-schilderessen ...,*) I, The Hague 1729.
Weyerman (1677–1747) trained as a painter, but is best known as an author, including this idiosyncratic take on the genre of artists' biographies in 1729–39, in which he frequently lacerates his colleagues while gleefully engaging in gossip and backbiting. The art market also comes in for a lashing, as in the unpublished manuscript quoted in the main text. For all his cynicism, though, Weyerman offers an unusually humane understanding of his milieu.

1.5

1.5.
Leonardo da Vinci (attributed).
Christ as Salvator Mundi, c. 1500.
Christie's (New York), 15 November 2017.
This panel painting of Christ as 'Saviour of the World' changed hands in 2005 for less than $10,000. When it came under the hammer again in 2017 at Christie's in New York, the final bid was over $450 million. The panel had been thoroughly restored in the interim, with several experts endorsing it as the work of Leonardo da Vinci.

Christ as Salvator Mundi [**1.5**] attributed to Leonardo da Vinci, Thomas Campbell, the former director of New York's Metropolitan Museum, concluded in a tweet that whoever had restored the work was now officially the best-paid contemporary artist. The relationship between art and money remains as fraught as ever.

As in classical economics, study of the art market identifies three factors: demand or a need on the part of the consumer; a market (physical or virtual) in which trading can occur; and supply or production to satisfy this demand. On the production side we find the artists who produce 'goods', often in collaboration with a studio, while on the demand side we have clients and collectors of various types. A third group operates between these two: the dealers who mediate between the artist and the client/collector in return for a share of the proceeds. These middlemen worked directly in some cases, as gallery owners do today, but they were equally likely to do business indirectly, through Old Master auctions, for instance. This form of trade involves objects that are no longer linked directly to their producer but refer to the artist only by name, and not even that if the maker remains anonymous.

Interaction between these three groups has had an immense impact on art over the centuries, with the economic conditions of the market largely responsible for shaping the modalities within which artists could practise their craft. A socialist regime presents different obstacles and opportunities compared to a liberal one, while an artist choosing to operate out of sixteenth-century Ghent was subject to different economic exigencies compared to a colleague making their living at the same time in Rome. Market conditions varied substantially because of regulatory differences (guild or otherwise), social diversity, and so on.

Only relatively recently has serious attention been paid to the interaction between art and economics – the kind of asides we find in Jacob Campo Weyerman are historically few and far between. Francis Haskell's famous book on the Italian Baroque, *Patrons and Painters* (1963), was one of the first to highlight the economic circumstances in which artists have to operate, but

1.6. Jan van Goyen. *The Valkhof in Nijmegen*, 1641 [detail of 5.102]. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

even so, it only considers one aspect of the art market, namely the role played by patrons. The first thorough analysis did not come until *Artists and Artisans in Delft: A Socio-Economic Study of the Seventeenth Century* (1982) by John Michael Montias. The economist's statistical research into sources such as estate inventories enabled him to show how market mechanisms also governed the production of art in the 'Golden Age' of the Dutch Republic. Montias built on this approach in later publications, with his 1990 essay 'The Influence of Economic Factors on Style' proving especially influential. In it, the author highlights the way artists can benefit financially from judicious technical and stylistic choices, while also musing about whether some of them did not deliberately gear their style and technique towards certain market principles with a view to increasing their revenues. He cites the example of Jan van Goyen [**1.6**] who, in a second phase of his career, began to paint rapid little monochrome landscapes, which he then sold as exquisite examples of his brilliant technique. It enabled him to increase his turnover and reduce his production costs, while still charging stiff prices: all in all, a shrewd move.

Montias' analysis did not go down at all well in some quarters where it was seen as denigrating the importance of artistic intuition, conceptual genius, and artisanal quality as the yardsticks by which art ought to be measured. Despite these criticisms, however, the economic insights that Montias provides into product and process innovation proved groundbreaking. They overturn the notion that stylistic choices relate purely to the artist's technical and intellectual skills and paved the way towards interpretive models of art that were not simply based on content and aesthetics but also explored more prosaic aspects. What Haskell, Montias and many others did, in fact, was to show that good artists also tend to be good businesspeople. Raphael, for one, had to manage a large studio in order to complete the decorations for the papal *Stanze*. The economic implications of well-structured operations like this were equally significant. Raphael asked one of his collaborators, the engraver Marcantonio Raimondi, to translate some of his most important inventions into prints, bringing Raphael both financial benefits and greater public exposure [**1.7–8**] as prints could be produced in large numbers and distributed all over Europe. They magnified Raphael's impact on the art market and sparked even greater demand for his work. At the opposite end of this scale we find Johannes Vermeer, who spent months at a time in seventeenth-century Delft labouring in solitude on a single painting. His works attracted hardly any collectors during his lifetime, and when they were auctioned off years after his death, they commanded no more than a few dozen guilders. Vermeer was basically out of sight and out of mind. It was not until the nineteenth century and the revival of interest in 'la vie moderne' under the impetus of the poet Baudelaire, the painter Manet and the Impressionists, that there was a re-evaluation of seventeenth-century works. The French journalist and collector Théophile Thoré-Bürger (1807–69) held up Vermeer's work as a model for the painting of everyday life. Vermeer – whose technique can, moreover, just about be construed as pointillist

1.7

1.9

1.8

1.10

1.7.
Raphael. *The Massacre of the Innocents*, c. 1510–14. Drawing. The British Museum, London.

1.8.
Marcantonio Raimondi after Raphael. *The Massacre of the Innocents*, c. 1510–14. Engraving. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Raphael was one of the first artists to discover the possibilities offered by the new medium of printmaking, to which end he collaborated with the engraver Marcantonio Raimondi who translated Raphael's sketches into detailed prints. The drawing and the print of *The Massacre of the Innocents* neatly illustrate the interaction between the master, responsible for the *disegno* (design), and the engraver, who worked up the composition in detail and engraved it.

1.9.
Pieter Bruegel. *Big Fish Eat Little Fish*, 1556. Pen drawing. Albertina Museum, Vienna.

1.10.
Pieter van der Heyden after Pieter Bruegel. *Big Fish Eat Little Fish*, 1557. Engraving published by Hieronymus Cock, with the inscription 'Hieronÿmus Bos. inuentor'.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

In 1556, Pieter Bruegel's publisher, Hieronymus Cock, commissioned the artist to draw a design for a print in the style of Hieronymus Bosch, who was much in demand at the time on the international art market. To encourage print sales, Bosch's name was inscribed on the plate as 'inventor' of the theme. There is no mention of Pieter Bruegel, who was still largely unknown at the time, although we know for certain that he was the designer as the original drawing bearing his signature has survived. As is generally the case, the print is a mirror image of the design due to the way the latter was transferred to the printing plate.

1.11.
Johannes Vermeer. *The Milkmaid*, c. 1660.
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

avant la lettre – became the figurehead for a forgotten but inspirational group of artists [**1.11**].

For all the economic models applied to their interpretation, however, works of art are not everyday products nor utility objects in the traditional sense. If you hang a painting on the wall, barring accidents (or ham-fisted restoration), it can be kept and resold with no significant loss of quality for centuries. The same obviously cannot be said of more mundane products, such as a pair of shoes, which are subject to wear and tear. Furthermore, there are few products where the value of the brand – the maker – has such a profound influence on the price [**1.9–10**]. From the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as artists gradually became aware of their unique position in society and began to emphasise the intellectual and conceptual aspect of their work, a huge disparity arose between the *valore di fatica* and the *valore di stima*: the value of the artisanal work (*fatica*) could differ tremendously from the price someone was ultimately willing to pay based on their appreciation (*stima*). A found object, like Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917) [**3.103**], has little value in terms of its production costs as it consists of a standard factory product (a urinal). Yet this has done nothing to prevent the market price of 'official' copies (the 'original' did not even survive) from sky-rocketing, and rising even higher ever since.

The 'Old Masters' were well aware that there was an indefinable difference between the production costs and the actual value of a work of art. Towards the end of the Dutch seventeenth-century Golden Age, Adriaen van der Werff – one of Europe's best-selling artists – carefully accounted for the phenomenon in his record books [**1.12**] noting, with a precision worthy of the 'fine painter' that he was, the cost price of his materials and the hours worked in order to calculate the final value of a painting. Before setting the sale price, however, he consulted his gut feeling and added a substantial mark-up for good measure [**1.13**].

The tension between the 'craft' value of art and the economic reality is the point of departure for the rest of this chapter. In it, we will explore how local and international economic conditions helped

1.12.
Adriaen van der Werff. *The Holy Family*, 1702.
Alte Pinakothek, Munich.

1.13.
Adriaen van der Werff. Notes in his personal record book, 1716–22. Het Utrechts Archief: Familiearchief Van Beuningen, toegang 1339 inv. 1062.
Adriaen van der Werff – one of the most sought-after artists on the international art market around 1700 – kept detailed accounts. In one of his surviving notebooks, he drew a line to record each part of a day he had worked on a particular panel and then used the total to calculate the true cost price. But this was not the amount he charged his customers: next to each piece, he added '(but) in words' – (*maar*) segge – followed by the sale price he himself considered reasonable.

1.14. *Art by Telephone*. Exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, November–December 1969.

1.15. Damien Hirst. *For the Love of God*, 2007. Skull set with diamonds. © Damien Hirst and Science Ltd. All rights reserved, DACS/Artimage 2020. Photograph: Prudence Cuming Associates Ltd.
As in the field of jewellery, the cost price of this contemporary *memento mori* depends substantially on the value of the materials used (8,601 diamonds) and the cost of production, reportedly totalling £14 million.

1.16.
Piero Manzoni. *Merda d'artista*, 1961. Tin can and contents. Tate, London.
In *Merda d'artista* (Artist's Shit), the Italian Piero Manzoni explored the relationship between the work and the price that art lovers are prepared to pay for it. He had his own excrement tinned and offered it for sale on the market. Astonishing sums have since changed hands for the work, of which a total of ninety tin cans were produced. A more recent example of an artwork in the scatological niche is *Cloaca* (1999–2000), Belgian artist Wim Delvoye's defecation machine.

1.17. Wim Delvoye. *Action Doll 1*, 2007. Multiple; mixed media. Self-assembly kit with an action figure of the artist and a scale model of his *Cloaca*.

1.18. Michaël Borremans. *Angel*, 2013. © Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp.

influence and shape the essence of art over the centuries, addressing the three most fundamental factors in each instance: production, consumption and trade. As the sixteenth-century theoretician and Bosch collector Felipe de Guevara had already realised, buyers and collectors of art are at least equally responsible for its appearance, as artists will chiefly produce what they can readily sell. By this logic, anyone who buys mediocre art is thus partially responsible for it…

Production

Any form of trade, including the art trade, obviously begins with production, that is to say, with all objects that are made or traded as art. Not everything that is sold as art was necessarily conceived as such. In principle, works of art are produced by artists. As we will see, however, artists often had – and still have – large studios to handle some of their output, or the production process is outsourced, possibly even to a traditional manufacturer. A well-known example in this regard is the conceptual exhibition *Art by Telephone* (1969), for which the American artist Sol LeWitt, among others, phoned his instructions for creating a wall drawing to the curator [**1.14**]. In circumstances like this, the artisanal role of the artist – under pressure since the end of the nineteenth century – disappears entirely.

It hardly needs to be said that a studio or company can produce a much greater volume than an artist working alone, or that the way of working, the production process, can also influence this volume. It is much faster to paint an abstract, black square than a traditional still life, to cite just one example. Wim Delvoye's mechanically produced *Dolls* [**1.17**] are less labour-intensive than the works Michaël Borremans paints with such brio [**1.18**]; and in material terms, it is hard to compare Piero Manzoni's *Merda d'artista* [**1.16**] with Damien Hirst's diamond-encrusted skull [**1.15**].

What motivates artists can also vary widely, with two broad tendencies: producing on commission or doing so 'on spec'. In the first case, the initiative lies with a client who calls on an artist for a specific project. How much say the artist has in the execution depends on the client. Alternatively, the artist can

1.19.
Willem van Haecht. *Apelles Painting Campaspe*, c. 1630. Mauritshuis, The Hague.
Picture galleries – real or imaginary – were a popular genre in 17th-century Southern Netherlandish art [see 1.95 and 1.109 for more examples]. Here we see a fictitious collection made up of well-known works by Flemish and Italian masters (including Rubens, Metsys, Titian and Correggio) used as the setting for the story of Apelles, Alexander the Great's court painter. Apelles painted the portrait of Campaspe, his patron's lover, and Alexander was so taken with the finished work that he opted for the portrait and left his mistress to the painter.

take the initiative and produce the work 'on spec' (speculatively) in the hope of finding a buyer on the open market. In this case, the artist enjoys much greater freedom, but it is countered by the risk associated with producing for the market, which comes down to correctly anticipating the wishes of potential buyers. As we will see, a radical shift has occurred in recent centuries in the share of total artistic output accounted for by commissions on the one hand, and by art made on spec on the other. It is a shift with immense stylistic implications.

Consumption

The second factor in any economic model is the consumption of or demand for a particular product. In the case of art, we refer to patronage and collecting – jargon allowing art buyers to suggest that they are a cut above ordinary consumers [**1.19**]. The buyers in question have frequently been private individuals, although official bodies such as guilds, church administrators and museums often provided the initiative too.

Trade

A whole army of people operate between the artist and the consumer, looking to secure an income within the ups and downs of the market. Art dealers, auction houses and agents mediate between artists and collectors, between different connoisseurs, and between patrons (the government, for example) and the artist. In return, these dealers, gallery owners, auctioneers, brokers, experts and other interested parties charge a fee or a percentage of the sale price.

Broadly speaking, there are two types of art trade. The first is the direct intermediary trade, in which the dealer maintains contact with the artist and with customers. The many commercial galleries are a familiar contemporary example. They market the artist (by participating in art fairs, organising solo exhibitions and through publications) and arrange the sale of the work, taking a percentage of the proceeds in return. An equally familiar, though considerably more complex approach is the indirect art trade, the second-hand market, which is enormous in the case of art since its product is a durable one that essentially does not wear out or perish. Auction houses are a striking example of this side of the market, where individuals and institutions sell works of art (the maker of which is generally deceased) to the highest third-party bidder.

While the art trade has had a minimal influence on the production process, it has always played a substantial role in the development of the market, and hence also that of art. The trade has had a major impact on production since the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries by investing venture capital or stimulating demand, thus helping to determine the type of art that came onto the market. Dealers frequently acted as taste-makers (although 'taste' is such a loaded term that we would do well to use it sparingly). The archives of the Forchondt family in Antwerp, for instance, show precisely how speculation, economic intuition and an extensive network of agents and trading partners influenced the dissemination of Antwerp art in the seventeenth century, from the Habsburg court in Vienna to the colonists of South America. They differentiated their offering according to the end market.

1.20. Philips Galle after Maarten van Heemskerck. *Statue of Zeus in Olympia*, 1572. Engraving. Rijksprentenkabinet, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

Bear in mind that art history has traditionally focused solely on the very highest segment of the market. Art economists, by contrast, set out to study the art market in its entirety and to understand why certain works are so exclusive from an economic point of view – because 'art' as a category includes exceptional, rare and expensive objects on the one hand, and a mass of artworks that are anything but exclusive or unique on the other.

CITY-STATE RIVALRY

We know relatively little about the connections between art and economics in antiquity: rulers and their entourages in both ancient Greece and Rome seem to have been the most important customers for art, although there is little certainty in this regard. What information we do have is mainly gleaned from classical literature. The sanctuary of Olympia in the Peloponnese, where the Olympic Games were held, was a place of unfettered artistic and architectural rivalry between the different

1.21.
Goddesses from the east pediment of the Parthenon, c. 438–431 BCE. Marble. The British Museum, London.

1.22.
Aphrodite of Knidos. Roman marble copy after the Greek original by Praxiteles (360 BCE). Musei Vaticani, Vatican City.

1.23.
Discobolus (Discus Thrower). Roman marble copy after the Greek bronze original by Myron (c. 450 BCE). Museo Nazionale Romano, Rome.

ancient Greek city-states. Rulers and governments of these competing polities vied to please the gods and glorify Olympic heroes. The seeds were sown in the mythical city of Olympia for an artistic competition that would fuel an explosion in creativity and lay the foundations of 2,500 years of art history. Politics, religion, economics and artistic ambition became intertwined, creating unprecedented opportunities. It was in Olympia, therefore, that Phidias made his legendary statue of Zeus on behalf of the small city-state of Elis [**1.20**].

The art economy shows signs in certain periods – including the age of Pericles (fifth century BCE) in Athens, the reign of Alexander the Great, and the early Roman Empire – of having been planned, with the government accounting for the lion's share of commissions. Alexander the Great (356–323 BCE) and later Roman emperors used the arts to position themselves as rulers, surrounding themselves with artists who developed a visual language to represent their power. Art was produced on a near-industrial scale, certainly in the first centuries of the Roman Empire, and distributed to its furthest corners. Production itself also swiftly expanded, resulting in greater stylistic diversity.

Conversely, a high degree of stylistic unity is a typical characteristic of a centrally controlled art economy [**1.21**]. Consciously or otherwise, artists working in a context of this nature conform to the desired or customary visual language, resulting in what we might term 'visual stability'. The age of Pericles in Greece and the first centuries of the empire are perfect examples of this phenomenon. Powerful rulers exploited art as a visual weapon in the politico-religious arena, resulting in a constant flow of public commissions. The best artists were hired to decorate palaces, public squares and aristocrats' villas with murals and sculptures, for which they were richly rewarded. According to Pliny the Elder (Gaius Plinius Secundus, c. 23–79 CE), for instance, Apelles was paid twenty gold talents for painting Alexander the Great with a lightning bolt in his hand for the Temple of Diana in Ephesus. The public nature of these prestigious projects resulted in a degree of standardisation, which tended, almost by definition, to stifle stylistic innovation.

Periods like this of stable visual culture do not necessarily have negative connotations in art history as, in retrospect, they make the era seem accessible and coherent, apparently based on clear paradigms. Unsurprisingly, these are the periods that appeal most to the imagination. In the High Renaissance too, the experiments of the first Renaissance masters crystallised in a visual culture that seems to us, viewed from a distance of five hundred years, exceptionally coherent, so that we readily conflate the era with its paradigms. The same goes for classical Greek art, which laid the foundations in the first century CE for far-reaching innovations in Roman art.

Besides the many official commissions, other economic factors saw to it that Greek art flourished from the fifth century BCE – a success story that only ended when Rome conquered the Peloponnese in 146 BCE. New economic opportunities arose through migration and the construction of settlements in the Mediterranean basin, and the associated trade. Artists could readily migrate in person or sell their art via the new channels of trade. Pliny's account of Greek art includes the striking information that it was not only in Athens but throughout the entire Mediterranean region that artists emerged who, with the support of local elites, were able to become successful masters. The Attalids in Pergamon (third and second century BCE) were legendary patrons of the arts and, as loyal allies of Rome, served as an example to the Roman elite [**1.24**].

There is anecdotal evidence that an open market for art must also have existed in antiquity. We know, for instance, that Apelles had a room in his house where he exhibited his own work, and that he also occasionally displayed paintings in the street. Praxiteles, meanwhile, made two statues of Aphrodite (Venus), one of which showed the goddess wearing clothes, while the other was nude. The inhabitants of Kos had first choice and opted for the clothed sculpture, which was more in

Text
Koenraad Jonckheere

Translation
Ted Alkins

Copy-editing English edition
Derek Scoins

Editing original edition
Paul van Calster

Cover and design
Dooreman

Image research
Séverine Lacante

Printing
die Keure, Bruges, Belgium

Binding
IBW, Oostkamp, Belgium

HANNIBAL
BOOKS

© Hannibal Books, 2022
www.hannibalbooks.be

Publishers: Gautier Platteau and Hadewych Van den Bossche

Distribution in Belgium, The Netherlands and France:

Hannibal Books
www.hannibalbooks.be
D/2022/11922/10
NUR 642
ISBN 978 94 6436 630 3

Other territories:

Distributed by Yale University Press
Yale University Press
302 Temple Street
P.O. Box 209040
New Haven, CT 06520-9040
yalebooks.com/art
ISBN 9780300267525

Library of Congress Control Number: 2022937865

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any other information storage and retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

Cover images
(front) Kazimir Malevich. *Black Square*, 1915.
Oil on canvas, 79.5 × 79.5 cm (detail).
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.
(back) Maurizio Cattelan. *Comedian*, 2019. © Zeno Zotti / Courtesy Maurizio Cattelan's Archive.

Frontispiece
Hieronymus Bosch. *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, c. 1495–1505 (detail of left panel). Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, P002823.