About Painting

THE OLD PARADIGMS: ARE THEY STILL WITH US?

Dennis Young
NSCAD Professor
Emeritus of Art History

[1] A lecture given at Dalhousie University Art Gallery in November 2002, during the city-wide collaborative exhibition, *About Painting.*

In 1846, the 25-year-old French poet Charles Baudelaire published a 72-page, pink-covered book reviewing the Paris Salon. It was his second attempt at art criticism, and he was feeling bold enough to commend very little of what he had seen. He paid tribute to Delacroix and Ingres and a few others, but went as far as declaring his hatred for the work of Horace Vernet. "We are in the hospital of painting," he said. "We are probing its sores and its sicknesses." And he identified these sicknesses as the "chic," the "stereotype" and the "eclectic," concluding with his now familiar assertion that the "great tradition" had been lost. It is the paradigms of this tradition that, in the main, I propose to examine in what follows. I shall also comment further on Baudelaire and his review.[1]

Let me emphasize at the start that the "paradigms" refer to painting rather than to "art;" for painting existed long before the wider concepts "art" and "artist" we use today – concepts scarcely 300 years old.[2] Michelangelo, for instance, was known simply as a painter, architect or sculptor, depending on what he was up to at the time, and French texts still referred to him as an "artisan" in the 18th century – there was no other term to use. When his younger friend, the painter and self-styled historian Giorgio Vasari, wrote his account of Michelangelo and their predecessors, he therefore called the book *The Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects,* not *The Lives of the "Artists."* Yet this latter is the title under which it is often misleadingly translated. Similarly, the French Academy began as L'Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture, and only became L'Académie des *Beaux-Arts* in 1816. So my subject is *painting,* and, since the significant paradigms of painting developed over a period of 500 years, I shall move back and forth over the centuries to demonstrate their waxing and waning.

In the Middle Ages, it was commonly supposed that a painting would be carried out "in the accustomed manner." Paintings were *useful* objects, tendentious, didactic and ritualistic, and paid for according to the amount of lapis lazuli or gold leaf specified in the contract, their size, or the number of figures to be painted – and their production was regulated by the local guild, if indeed a painters' guild existed (if it did not, painters were usually required to join the local saddle-makers' guild, since their occupation was frequently that of painting saddles). As for aesthetics, Johan Huizinga, in his *Waning of the Middle Ages,* and Umberto Eco, in his *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages,* agree that if Medieval writers experienced anything like what is today called "aesthetic," they thought of it as communion with God and expressed it in terms of amazement, rather than beauty, even though theories of beauty figured in their writings. "Beauty," for them, was entangled with the pleasures of interpreting symbols, with the cosmic proportions of the universe, with Platonist "divine light," with "goodness" and *moral* harmony, and sometimes even with size – in contrast to the hedonistic *pleasure* provided by richly embellished objects, which was recorded at length by Abbot Suger at St. Denis (and denounced, predictably, by Bernard of Clairvaux). It is not until Poussin, in the mid-17th century, that we find a painter claiming that the aim of visual art is "delectation" – a statement that Erwin Panofsky regarded as revolutionary.[3] Eco concludes that "the medieval philosophy of beauty was cut off from its artistic practice as if by a sheet of glass." It would have been more correct for him to have said "artisanal practice," for the reason I have given; but, that apart, he is obviously correct – the artisans were too lowly for anyone to want to get inside their heads, whether they were weavers, shoemakers, jewellers or painters.

An occupation known as painting

The evolution from "painters" to "artists" was slow, and for our purposes may be said to have begun in a manuscript book written around 1400 by the Italian painter Cennino Cennini (none of whose actual works have come down to us). This book he called "*Il Libro dell Arte*" (correctly translated as "The *Craftsman's Handbook*" because, to underline the point again, "arte," like the word "craft" in Germanic languages, in those days meant "skill"). Cennini tells us that he is writing about "an occupation known as painting." This occupation, he says, "calls for imagination and *skill* of hand" – and he goes on about the "aim" of such skill, which turns out to be "to discover *things not seen,* hiding themselves under the shadow of natural objects." I interpret this as a statement about the noumenal, or spiritual – or, about ways ▶

of *signifying* these (I realize that "noumenal" is a term invented by Kant, but Cennini's reference to "things hiding themselves under the shadow of natural objects" is surely close). Equally important, Cennini moots the word "imagination" for the first time since antiquity, even though "imagination" by no means then implied that the painter could depart from the traditional repertoire of images (given free reign in that regard, imagination was seen as potentially diabolical and likely to produce what today we might call "the return of the repressed"). The appeal for "imagination" was simply for more freedom in the composition of the prescribed images, which Cennini connected to something he called "individual style." He says that, having acquired the manner of one master, the painter, if he has "any imagination at all," should be able to proceed to a style *individual to himself* – curiously enough by "copying from nature." Exactly what he meant we can never know, though it sounds like an embryonic version of what we mean today. Nevertheless, set in their 14th century context, these prescient assertions, evoking "imagination," "individual style," and "copying from nature" (as opposed to using pattern books), create a nice paradox: the painter is supposed to copy nature, but his aim in doing so is to signify something supernatural or noumenal that nature obscures from everyday vision. Cennini thus stands, Janus-like, at an end and a beginning – for the idea of copying from nature was to gather momentum so rapidly that talk of "things not seen" was largely eclipsed within 30 years of his book. True, it would return briefly at the end of the 1400s as Neoplatonism, and again in the 19th century in the doctrines of Swedenborg, Blavatsky and Steiner, to give us *The Symbolist Manifesto* of 1886, but for the best part of the 500 years following Cennini, painters would work within the paradigm formed by his notions of imagination, copying from nature, and individual style.

Cennini also promoted the opinion that painting deserved better than its classification among the so-called "Mechanical Arts," where saddle-making was itself only a sub-section of armouring, and where it was often painting's dismal fate to have to look up to both. And his solution was ambitious – he packaged his new theses as an appeal for painting to be reclassified among the so-called Seven Liberal Arts of the universities (by the side of rhetoric, dialectic and grammar and, above all, geometry). Such a move would have stood to raise the social status of painters nearer to that of poets, although it would not have found much support among poets themselves (who were often wealthy amateurs) or among the theologians and philosophers who had entrenched the medieval division of labour in terms of a numerology laid down by their classical forebears. As far as they were concerned, there was an absolute barrier between the intelligentsia of the seven liberal arts, who worked with their heads and communicated in Latin, and the rest of the world, including painters, who worked with their hands and spoke and read, if they read at all, in the vulgar tongue.

Perspective

However, the status of painters was to take a significant jump due to something Cennini had not foreseen – for within 20 years or so of Cennini's handbook , the architect Brunelleschi was to announce the first unified method of monocular perspective. The fact that unified perspective should have been rationalized by an architect has never been adequately explained, for painters themselves had long struggled unsuccessfully to achieve it. However that may be, by 1435 the elements of perspective drawing had not only been invented but laid out theoretically in a treatise by Leon Battista Alberti, in complete opposition to Cennini's assertion that the role of painting was "to make visible the invisible." The aim of painting now became the reproduction of the visible. Thus, on the very first page of his treatise, *Della Pittura*, "About Pictures," Alberti states specifically "The painter has nothing to do with things that are not visible." And he adds, "a picture is nothing other than a cross-section of a visual pyramid upon a certain surface." Painters, he says, take a surface and "*present the forms of objects on this surface as if it were transparent glass.*" This new paradigm of the canvas surface as "transparent" came not only with a perspective formula for creating the illusion, but with much more. For instance, Alberti took up Cennini's assertion that painters should have the status of poets, and, going further, launched the idea of the "learned painter" – learned in geometry and perspective, but also in classical mythology and the Christian stories.

In contrast to Cennini, Alberti wrote from a philosophical point of view that may be called Aristotelian, or even positivist, in its emphasis on observation and experiment – and if we look at the rejection, 450 years later, of his view that "painters have nothing to do with things that are not visible," that rejection (by the French Symbolists whom we have already noted), was accompanied, predictably, by polemics *against* positivism and materialism – and even *for* hierarchy, as opposed to democracy.

Perspective drawing, then as now, relied upon a fictive monocular peephole, through which the painter was assumed to be regarding the world as he built up an illusionist representation of it. So, to experience the illusion perfectly, the viewer should really have stood at a peephole with her eye in a position replicating the painter's. However, painters took little regard of the fact that viewers might never be able to place themselves at such a spot and that they would for this reason actually receive a distorted, or "anamorphic," view of the representation. In fact, this anamorphosis had been understood, and compensated for, prior to Alberti, in the Gothic cathedrals, where sculptures to be seen from below were often elongated. However, we have all had the experience in the movies where our perception quickly compensates for the anamorphic distortions that occur when we sit at the side of the screen, and it would have been odd if the early perspectivists had not understood it too. Indeed, by 1550, highly distorted anamorphic images began to proliferate just for amusement – and 200 years after Alberti the Baroque muralists even solved the anamorphic problems presented by painting on the inside of a dome. However, it is likely that no painting, however ambitious, conforms to every last refinement of perspective theory – which would mean not only the precise positioning of the observer but also a specially conceived concave surface to support the painting at a constant radius from the eye.

Of course, there is no such thing as *binocular* perspective (though Cézanne seems to have attempted a kind of binocular painting with shimmering contours), and perspective was not really a science, though it was often called such. Perspective was an invented tool. Still, its
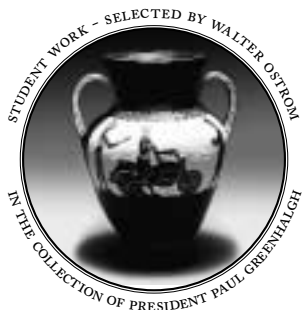
raison d'être was, like that of science, to provide ordered representations of the phenomenal world, and until the invention of photography it remained, in this, supreme. Nor did the advent of photography end its utility – for it became something called "engineering drawing" without which the design of the machinery of the industrial age would have been impossible – an ironic ending to what began as a *humanistic* triumph of the intellect.

Correspondences

However, the Renaissance conquest of the phenomenal world did not immediately eclipse the medieval concept of "things not seen, hiding themselves under the shadow of natural objects," a concept which gained new legitimacy on the formation in Florence, in 1457, of an academy for the study of the manuscripts arriving there after the fall of Constantinople. This academy expanded a notion from Plato, dear to various medieval philosophers, that the final aim of human existence was a vision of beauty and light – a notion that evolved into a species of sun worship that even seems to have been behind the theory of the heliocentric universe proposed by Copernicus (one of the great paradigm shifts of all time). Michelangelo attended this Neoplatonist academy from the age of 15, and, like Botticelli, derived from it the inspiration for some of his more bizarre imagery (as in the tomb of Giuliano de'Medici). Leonardo, in contrast, defied the trend and effectively backed Alberti, insisting that truths must be tested by the senses ("all else is clamour," he is supposed to have said).

As the Catholic Church's Counter-Reformation began, however, Neoplatonism waned for several centuries, until the Symbolists resurrected it. For instance, Gauguin's adoption of Symbolism was coincident with his encountering a circle of younger artists who claimed to be reading Plotinus and the Cabala and adopting the cult of Mithras. Hence the appearance of dreamscapes and of the Tau cross in his paintings of that time. The circle also read fragments from the self-styled 18th century mystic, Emmanuel Swedenborg, who had borrowed from Plotinus a theory of "correspondences" which held that all things in the phenomenal world have a corresponding echo in the spiritual. This convenient discovery had been taken up by Baudelaire in an essay of 1855, and elaborated in a poem by him, actually called "Correspondences," in 1857. Indeed, Baudelaire was so intrigued by the ideas of Swedenborg that the hero of his early novel *Le Fanfarlo* was cast as actually keeping a copy of Swedenborg's writings by his bed; and Baudelaire's poem, whose Swedenborgian first line states, "Nature is a temple – with living pillars," thus became an anthem for the symbolist movement. In the same poem Baudelaire also confirmed his interest in synaesthesia (that colours could be *heard* and sounds be seen as colours, and so on), something that Kandinsky was later to claim he actually experienced (hence Kandinsky's woodcuts called *Klange*: "Sound"). The poet Mallarmé, who succeeded Baudelaire among the Paris intelligentsia, also espoused the noumenal, which he thought could be achieved by, among other methods, what he called "vagueness." Hence the vagueness of formal definition in *faux naïf* paintings of that time by Vuillard, Bonnard and others, and hence the later co-opting of Monet to the symbolist camp at the time of his almost unreadable paintings of the façade of Rouen cathedral (a complete turnaround from the earlier casting of him as a "positivist" with the other impressionists). Ultimately, the theory of vagueness amounted to offering a poem or a painting as an object open to a multitude of shifting perceptions: an object that supposedly carried intuitions of the noumenal *by its very manner of being in the world*. This idea still clings to the arts, in spite of the critique from semiology which asserts that what we really see or hear are the *signifiers* of a theory, and it is surprising how many abstract painters have rationalized their work this way: not only Kandinsky, Malevich and Mondrian, but also Rothko and Barnet Newman, and, most recently, the American painter Brice Marden. Commenting on this in the 1890s to his son Lucien, the aging socialist vigilante, Camille Pissaro, saw it as "the bourgeoisie restoring superstition to the people," while the great 20th century skeptic, Marcel Duchamp, one of the few people of the past century who actually made a *study* of perspective, began a monumental work, *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even*, which displays astonishing perspective skills in order to collapse the tension between noumenal and phenomenal in sardonic laughter. As you may know, Duchamp then went on to invent a method of creating stereoscopic illusions for persons with only *monocular* vision – something that until then had been thought impossible.

Academy

The institutions within which the old paradigms evolved were, of course, the academies. The first academy of visual arts came about in Florence in 1563. It was a product of complex motives, but it will suffice to say that it came in response to appeals by the aging Michelangelo and his friend Vasari (who wrote the "Lives"), who together persuaded the Medici family to do for painting, sculpture and architecture what their earlier "Academy of Letters" had done for the Tuscan language. The result was a drawing academy (the Academia del'Disegno) emphasizing perspective, mathematics, geometry, optics, and the study of the human frame. Indeed, the emphasis on geometry in the drawing academy was so strong that one of the two chairs of mathematics in the University of Pisa was transferred to Florence, and in 1610 Galileo himself moved there. This was encouraging: painters and sculptors now met with practitioners of the liberal arts on a more equal footing, and with the official sanction of the state. Indeed the title of "academician," conferred on selected painters from time to time, became a minor order of nobility. However, the academies did not teach painting. You learnt to draw in the academies, but to learn to paint you had to enrol in the studio of a painter, preferably a member of the academy, very much as the medieval apprentice had been indentured to a master painter of the painters' guild – and your experience there would have been similar. After all, the academicians needed cheap labour too.

Silent Poetry

Needless to say, academic theory leaned on Alberti's *Della Pittura*, since it is there that we first read that the aim of painting should be to retell the history and myth found in biblical or classical writings. Indeed, soon after Alberti, it was popular to quote the Greek Simonides, who had decreed that painting should be seen as "silent poetry" and poetry heard as "a speaking picture." Leonardo, standing aside from his contemporaries, as usual, and actually attempting to raise painting *above* poetry, made fun of this and called poetry "painting for the blind." But the academies made it a doctrine, and seeking other snippets from the past came upon an essay, *The Art of Poetry*, by the Latin poet Horace, which produced the phrase "*ut pictura poesis*" ("as painting, so poetry").[4] They also adopted Aristotle's *Poetics*, where, in his section on "the objects of imitation," Aristotle says that poets, *like painters*, imitate men in action and make them better or worse than average – a statement ▶

taken to mean that the human body in action gave a picture of the human soul.

As these bits and pieces were distilled over the years, they were assembled into a theory formalized around the time of the Drawing Academy by Ludovico Dolce. This formalization of the paradigm "*ut pictura poesis*" produced five restrictive precepts that were to serve the academy for almost 300 years. The precepts concerned "instruction and delight," "imitation of classical models," "invention," "decorum" and "expression," and I shall discuss them in that order.

The first restrictive precept, that of "instruction and delight", came from both Horace and Aristotle – it meant that the aim of the chosen story (the "*istoria*", or "history painting," as it came to be called), must be to instruct the viewer in noble and decorous behaviour, though in a manner that would please the eye, as poetry pleased the ear. This marriage of "instruction" and "delight" survived for 200 years, and began to falter only after the death of Louis XIV of France, when "delight" was severed from the equation during the period of the regency, to became an excuse for hedonistic and erotic indulgence, as portrayed for instance in the works of Watteau, and later actually realized in the paintings of Boucher (what the theorists of the rococo period called "*divertissement*"). You can follow this hedonistic element through revivals of the rococo, like that which produced Renoir's *Bathers*, through Gauguin and *art nouveau*, and then through Bonnard and Matisse – the latter writing his own hedonist manifesto in 1908. After World War II, the New York critic Clement Greenberg actually appealed for a "bland Apollonian art" (a way of characterizing Matisse's hedonism). It can be argued that to some extent his appeal was successful, but the existentialist temper of the time frowned upon it and painters were always averse to seeming "merely decorative" (something Matisse managed to avoid).

However that may be, the didactic aspect of "instruction and delight," though increasingly ignored, was not entirely discarded, since a travesty of it remained in the state propaganda machine, particularly in the form of portraits. Furthermore, aristocratic hedonism was to provoke a bourgeois moralist reaction that produced the sentimentality of Greuze and, eventually, a return to themes of Roman republican virtue, in the work of Jacques-Louis David, which helped to bring about the downfall of the aristocracy itself. And, of course, a version of "instruction" continued through the 19th century, both for and against the various regimes, producing Goya's attacks on corruption and war, Courbet's "Realism," the journal *Le Réaliste* and, as the newspaper industry flourished, a mountain of caricature dominated by Daumier. Later, in Stalin's Soviet Union, Zhdanov transformed it into Socialist Realism, and a variation is alive today in the tendentious works of Hans Haacke, and text pieces by Les Levine, Barbara Kruger and others – but not really in painting.

The second restriction within "*ut pictura poesis*," that on "imitation," followed from the "instruction" idea. It was pointed out that, for instruction in *ideal* human nature, it was no use looking to living people – and the painter should therefore look to classical sculptures. Hence the portrait painter's sitter would be posed after an image from the antique and hence David's quotations from such sources – and hence also the practice of drawing from the antique in art colleges that continued through much of the 20th century, where students were to be found, drawing from casts of the antique, whose instructors were ignorant of the high-minded reason for which the practice had been initiated.

The third restriction was on "invention," which had remained unchanged since Cennini declared that it could apply only to the *composition*, not to the subject, of the painting. In other words, Christian stories and classical myths were supposed to provide the themes by which "instruction" in noble behaviour would take place, and painters were not encouraged to provide themes of their own, unless they chose inferior subjects. In fact the academies for this reason created an actual hierarchy of subjects based on the antiquated "Great Chain of Being" – antique stories, or "history paintings," coming at the top, along with portraits of the monarch, then portraits of the nobility (often with poses taken from classical sculpture); then animal paintings; then landscapes (because trees were lower in the Great Chain than animals); then still lifes; and finally "genre" or "low life" paintings not fit to be seen in a palace. The ideological implications of this are obvious to us but were not, of course, to the painters themselves, although, not surprisingly, painters of prestige bridled under such restraints. For instance, when Veronese was brought before a tribunal of the Inquisition in Venice, for being over-inventive in his portrayal of *The Last Supper*, he not only pleaded that painters had been granted the same license as poets, but, when ordered nevertheless to alter the work, he avoided doing so by changing its title to *Christ in the House of Levi*, a theme where the same restraints did not apply! Thus was the way prepared for Baudelaire, in his reviews, to actually give marks for "invention."

It is the fourth and fifth of these restrictions that are the most interesting. The fourth, that of "decorum," forbade excesses, exaggerations and repulsive scenes, and required that every gesture of limb and drapery be appropriate to the purpose of the story portrayed. Horace (the Latin theorist) had insisted on similar limits, though his examples seem odd. For instance, he warned against joining a human head to a horse's neck or spreading varicoloured plumage over the limbs of animals. This almost sounds like a tract against 20th century surrealist imagery (after all, the so-called "surrealist marvelous" was supposed to come exactly from the "chance encounter" of such incompatible things). However, although the concept of decorum had been tested from time to time (think for instance of Carravagio painting St. Matthew with dirty feet), its erosion was slow. According to Walter Benjamin, as late as 1830 de Vigny's translation of *Othello* failed because it was unacceptable for a handkerchief to figure in a tragedy! However, de Vigny was still alive to see Baudelaire make his notorious and calculated break with decorum by the publication in 1857 of his collected poems, *Flowers of Evil.* Baudelaire's poem "Carrion" in that book already sounds like something from Salvador Dali: "Flies swarmed over the putrid belly / From which emerged black battalions / Of maggots, which flowed like a thick liquid / Along those human rags...." *The success de scandale* of Surrealism came from similar breaches of decorum. Indeed, without a principle of decorum, *scandale* would be impossible – just as, with few taboos to break today, scandals have become an uphill task for painters and poets alike.

Sculpture, Greek, Hellenistic
Laocoon Group, Marble, 2nd-1st century B.C.
Rome, Vatican

Lebrun, C. 1619-90
Expressions: Top: Horror, Fear; Below: Admiration, Rapture (detail)
engraving, 1732

Expression

The final precept in the doctrine of "*ut pictura poesis*" concerned "expression." In its earliest form, this was a matter of getting right the gestures and facial emotions in the painted images, so that viewers might experience those emotions themselves through an assumed "sympathetic" faculty (something that psychology has to some degree confirmed – pointing out that if you contort your face to *look* sad you can actually *feel* sad). However, in practice it is not so easy. Even Alberti's *Della Pittura* had come with a discussion of the problems that arise in depicting emotions: "Think," says Alberti, "how, if you try to paint a laughing face, it can come out as a weeping face." The problem remained so pressing 200 years later that the first president of the French Academy, Charles Le Brun, attempted a so-

called "Anatomy of the Passions," based on Descarte's theories about the pineal gland, which aimed at communicating the emotions *directly*. At first glance this book seems astonishing: "rage" really seems to communicate rage. But then you find that so does "fear," and you begin to see why he needs labels! In fact, he had unwittingly devised a code, with the book as its key – and *unmediated* communication was as far away as ever. It was still in dispute only 20 years ago, when the editor of the journal *Modern Painters*, the late Peter Fuller, referring to the classical sculpture of Laocoön and his sons being strangled by serpents, asked historian Grizelda Pollock, "How do we know that Laocoön is supposed to be in pain?" and she replied, "Because we have studied the mode of production prevailing in Greece at the time, and the signifying practice to which it gave rise." "But," said

Fuller, "Laocoön is being *strangled by a sea monster!*" and her response was, "Yes, but just by looking at the sculpture we have no way of knowing he is not enjoying it." Fuller seemed to think that she had thereby reduced her case to absurdity, but many think that she had not. Psychology has shown that although visual forms may be "expressive," it helps to have cues to tell us what they are expressive of (tears of joy, or of sorrow?). I am reminded of an experience I had years ago when, glancing at a muted television, I saw a crowd of obviously Arabic people waving white scarves and dancing in what appeared to be a jubilant parade – then I turned up the sound and learnt that they were people from the village where President Sadat of Egypt had been born, who were mourning his assassination in a fashion customary to Egypt. I should have remembered my Alberti. ▶

Essay

Gogh, Vincent van 1853-90
Olive Trees, Oil on Canvas, September-November 1889
(49.2 x 62.9 cm) (detail)
Edinburgh National Gallery

Munch, E. 1863-1944
The Scream, 1893 (detail)
Oslo National Gallery

Expressionism

However, the limiting of "expression" to *the figures portrayed* was to die with the advent of van Gogh, who, as he acquired the knack of the Impressionist brush stroke and encountered Gauguin's use of colour, thought he could convey *his own* state of mind through clashing colours, writhing contours and the ostensibly vigorous application of the paint . Thus began the view that "expression" need no longer be confined to the figures acting out their theatrical roles within the picture, as decreed by "*ut pictura poesis.*" Instead, "expression" could be extended to the painter whose colours and marks brought into existence the figures on the picture surface – colours and marks which by their lurid nature and agitated handling, in paintings by Van

Gogh, Munch or Nolde, could transmit the painter's *own* exacerbated emotional states. However, it has to be said that claims to communicate emotional states *directly* by colour and the handling of paint are at least as problematic as Le Brun's efforts to do so with physiognomy. It can be shown here too that such claims are mistaken and that Expression*ism* is in fact a second order image repertoire, relying, like all pictorial art, on external sources, contexts and cues – such as the letters that Van Gogh wrote to his brother Théo, or the journals in which Munch once wrote "Art is your heart's *blood.*"

It is no accident that the idea of expression*ism*, as a movement, became fashionable just as the Nordic/Teutonic countries of Europe were creating new national identities (Germany was unified in 1871, the composer Sibelius completed his Finlandia Suite in 1899 just prior to the independence of Finland, and Munch's Norway separated from Sweden in 1907). In short, an important part of their nationalist agenda was a disengagement from the classical heritage of Greece and Rome that had been enshrined in "*ut pictura*

poesis." The Swedish novelist Pär Lagerkvist, writing "anguish, anguish, is my heritage" as the epigraph to all his books, can scarcely be confused with Rabelais. The cultural side of such nationalistic differentiation, warranted perhaps by what we now call "seasonal affective disorder," followed from theories of cultural relativism set afoot by the German "Storm and Stress" movement of the late 18th century – theories that were later condensed into the snappy catch phrase, "race, milieu and moment," by the French theorist Hippolyte Taine, professor of art history and aesthetics at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris from 1863 (a significant date, as we shall see). It is worth adding that Baudelaire, who had discussed the contrast between Northern and Southern temperaments in his *Salon of 1846*, proposed a formula that cited "*l'époque, la mode, la morale, la passion*" as the determinants of style – adding a dandyish note to his compatriot's scientism.[5]

Grand Manner

As we have already said, the paradigm "*ut pictura poesis*" determined the ranking of painters within the academy, where the high-

Essay

est ranked painters were always the painters of the *istoria* (the "history" painters) – and not without justification, since the skills involved in the design of a grand figure composition were considerable, and the demand for such works in public places, palaces and churches was heavy. "We measure a king by the grandeur of his surroundings", said Jean-Baptiste Colbert, soon after the French Academy was formed. This was a sentiment understood later by both Napoleon I and Napoleon III, as well as by Louis XIV's successors, and dozens of petty tyrants since. Colbert, who was both the Controller General of Finance and Superintendent of Buildings under Louis XIV realized early in the construction of the palace of Versailles that to fulfill his agenda of aggrandisement it would be as well to have more academies – so, besides the Académie Royale de peinture et de sculpture, he created academies of music, dance, architecture and science and even an academy of medals, as well as a French Academy in Rome and the famous Rome Prize to go with it. And, with Charles LeBrun, whom he appointed Director of the Académie, he then determined a style suitable for his project – the style known as "The Grand Manner." Needless to say, the (now hilarious) subject set by Colbert for the first Rome Prize competition turned out to be "Fame Proclaiming the Marvels of the Reign of Louis XIV and Presenting his Portrait to the Four Corners of the Globe," while six years later it was "The King Granting Peace to Europe." It is interesting to note that the Rome Prize com-

Rigaud, H. 1659-1743
Portrait of Louis XIV, Oil, 1701 (9'11" height)
Paris, Musee du Louvre

petition was not to be abandoned until 1969, following the French campus rebellions of 1968 – when it was replaced by letters of recommendation similar to those used for Canada Council grants today.

There was trouble in the French Academy from the start. Le Brun's chief rival refused to join at all, and others joined mainly to object to Le Brun and his promotion of Poussin. These were the followers of Rubens – led by a theorist called Roger de Piles who produced an assessment of the great painters of history in order to give high marks to Rubens and lower though not disrespectful marks to Le Brun and Poussin. Le Brun, the leader of the Poussinistes, held views so rationalistic that he had not only drawn up the physiognomy of the emotions that we have noted, but had refused even to *discuss* colour, because it was not determined by reason – a somewhat extreme version of the attitude of formalist painters down to the present day.

Inspired Genius

This lengthy quarrel, between the Poussinistes and the Rubenistes, was to end in favour of the Rubenistes with the redefinition of two ancient concepts – those of "inspiration" and of "genius." The Greeks had understood "inspiration" (being "breathed into" by your muse) mainly as it affected actors and professional rhapsodes – the reciters of poetry. But Plato, with his distrust of poets, had laughed at it in his dialogue *Ion*, and, since it was held that inspiration could not be *taught*, the academy, like Plato, had given it a back seat. However, with the redefinition of the word "genius," as the word we know today, "inspiration" also got a lift.[6] In classical times, that is to say, "genius" had referred simply to the "spirit of the family," or the genetic make-up that fathers handed on to children, and for the medievals it had even been associated with the demonic because of its link to concupiscence. However, as "inspiration" was rehabilitated and "genius" redefined, they were, as we shall see, not only to encourage the more painterly, sketch-like approach of the Rubenistes', but were to undermine the notion that rigorous training was necessary to become a painter. They were also to encourage the hyperbole of Shelley, who had actually translated Plato's *Ion* yet in whose essay "The Defence of Poetry," we find the claim that poets (and, by implication, painters) are "the unacknowledged legislators of the world" who, like the ancient seers, are able

to read "the shadows which futurity casts upon the present" – a notion amplified from Aristotle's identification of poets as melancholics, to cast them as pondering the human predicament from a lofty mountain top, disdainful of the world below. This theme was also available from the Latin poet Horace who had coined "*ut pictura poesis.*" Horace had dismissed the common people with the phrase *profanum vulgus* – an expression that two thousand years later lay in wait for Shelley's contemporary Delacroix to repeat in his journal.

Genius and Sketches

The paradigm that equated inspiration and genius *with the painters' sketches* was less lugubrious and became enormously influential. Its traces survive even today. It too was first mooted in Vasari's *Lives*, where he observes, "Many painters…achieve in their first sketch a boldness as if guided by the fires of inspiration…while, in finishing, the boldness vanishes." But, in this, Vasari was once again ahead of his time, and the idea only took off during the 18th century mutation of the word "genius" that we have just described. This occurred alongside the emergence of art criticism – so that an early critic, Denis Diderot, having been electrified by watching the painter Greuze make sketches (and almost certainly recalling Vasari), could write, "A sketch is the artist's work when he is full of inspiration and ardour, before reflection has toned things down. It is the artist's soul expressing itself on canvas." If the word "authenticity" had been around in those days Diderot would no doubt have used it too. Diderot's contemporary, the German art historian Winckelmann declared the same about modeling in clay, saying, "Modeling in clay is to the sculptor what drawing on paper is to the painter…in the soft clay, the genius of the sculptor is seen in its utmost purity and truth." Diderot, of course, had been the principal editor of the great Enlightenment project, *The Encyclopaedia*, where it is explained for everyone to see, that "genius" and "enthusiasm" are innate – that they are "natural" and therefore cannot be taught, any more than "inspiration" could be taught in classical times. Such thinking added fuel to the dying embers of the quarrel between the Poussinists and Rubenistes – the Rubenistes arguing for the marks of "genius" inscribed during the sketch, or what the Academy called the "generative," phase of the composition, while the Poussinistes believed that the "generative" ▶

phase must be followed by an "executive" phase in which the work would indeed be completed. Thus the quarrel between the Poussinistes and the Rubenistes became transformed into a new dispute, during the 19th century, between the so-called "sketchers" and the "finishers". Delacroix's *Death of Sardanapalus* was not only condemned for lack of decorum but also for his "failure" to distinguish a painting from a sketch, – though his critics were to moderate their language later as the tide began to turn in favour of the "sketchers."

Sketch and Salon

The dispute was particularly exacerbated by the method of examination for the Rome Prize.[7] This required that a painted sketch be completed on the first day of the competition and a tracing of it left with the examiners – the student being expected to research the project over the next weeks and produce a "finished" painting that exactly matched the sketch. Students thus spent time rehearsing the all important "generative" or "sketch" phase of the process, at the expense of "finish." The chief promoter of this method of examination was the painter Geurin, significantly the teacher of both Géricault and Delacroix – both in their different ways Rubenistes. However that may be, the situation permitted students with less and less training in "finish" to enter the competition, and encouraged well-trained artists to entrench themselves against the sketchers – so that the conflict quickly embroiled the juries of the Salon (the annual exhibition event of the Academy, was called the "Salon" because it was at first located in the *Salon Carré* in the Louvre Palace). From its very beginning, it had been important for a painter to get work into the Salon. And from the beginning the juries had manifested bias - - both political, and art-political. So much so that, after his rejection in 1769, the painter Greuze was to boycott the Salon for the rest of his life, and to prosper without it. The event caused such turmoil that the French Revolutionaries declared an unjuried "Open" Salon in 1791, which was followed in 1806 by a "Salon des Refusés" (an exhibition to show the rejects). There was a show of rejects in a dealer's gallery in 1827, and during the 1848 Revolution, 5,000 works were shown in another "Open" Salon – all of them setting a precedent for the famous Salon des Refusés of 1863.

The jury for the official Salon of 1863 was to reject roughly 4,000 paintings, among which were works by Manet, Cézanne, Jongkind, Bracquemond, Pissarro, Fantin-Latour, Legros and Whistler – the last three of whom, all admirers of Delacroix, were to found the first explicitly avant-garde group of painters, the *societé des trois* ("We three, we shall be the front runners," wrote Legros to Whistler). The protests that followed this massive rejection, were so vociferous that they persuaded Napoleon III not only to decree that the refused paintings should have a show of their own, but also to decree that instruction at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, with its insistence on "finish," had suppressed the "creative genius" of students and that the Academy would therefore lose control of the teaching there. The decree of 1863 may thus be said to mark the triumph of the "sketchers." Not surprisingly, Ingres, who had himself boycotted the Salon for the preceding 30 years, called the decree "the destructive language of Romanticism which expects to *know everything* without an effort to *learn* anything."

Opaque

Napoleon III, himself, might never have sponsored these changes (the "sketchers" were not exactly Bonapartists, and portraits of Napoleon and his family were painted mostly by Winterhalter, an expert in "finish"), but Napoleon was in the process of a liberalization of his regime, partly as the result of a series of articles by the architect Violet le Duc, who had pointed out that the British World's Fair of the previous year had revealed the Brits ahead of France in numerous sectors of the economy, and also in design. It is true that after Napoleon III was deposed in 1871, the Academy regained control – but things were never to be the same. The "sketchiness" of the late works of the British landscape painter Turner, advocated by John Ruskin, became popular in France, and were to influence not only Monet (whose "sketchy" *Impression: Sunrise* came eight years after the decree), but also Whistler, the first painter to pour liquid paint onto canvas, and the first to appeal to the public to look not *through* the painted surface, but *at it* – *exactly reversing Alberti's "transparent glass" metaphor of 400 years earlier, and stressing instead the "opacity" of the canvas surface and the "foregrounding" of the medium*. Whistler, as you may know, was to sue the critic John Ruskin, over the question of whether his paintings could be called "finished," and though he was awarded only a penny in damages, he nevertheless did win his case, his success confirming *in law*, as it were, the paradigm of the sketch – a paradigm where temperament alone, or even eccentricity, could be seen as the sufficient basis on which to produce a painting, eventually persuading even Emile Zola that art was simply "nature seen through a temperament." It is worth adding that this "foregrounding of the medium" was also vindicated by the Italian Giovanni Morelli who created from it his influential theory of connoisseurship, by taking photos of the least "finished" details in paintings, such as ears or fingernails, where he theorized that an artist's personal calligraphy would show best. In this way, from 1880 onwards, Morelli was actually able to reattribute a series of old master works in galleries throughout Europe.

Silent Music

The mention of Whistler brings us to the paradigm of music. During the 3,000 years when painting was regarded as mimetic it was easy enough to claim its parallel with poetry, because according to the ancients, they both "imitated" human action (Greek poetry not being published in books, but in public forums where it was declaimed theatrically by the reciter, or *rhapsode* – he whom Plato had mocked in *Ion*). Aristotle even discussed music as mimetic, though he did not marry it to painting as he married poetry. Then, too, in a quite other dimension we find that the Seven Liberal Arts of the classical period placed music side by side with geometry – a classification so firm that 1,500 years later, on the Royal Portal of the cathedral at Chartres, there is a depiction of Pythagoras himself holding a *musical instrument*. And he appears again in Raphael's *School of Athens*, working on the mathematics of musical intervals. This was because the Pythagorians had investigated the relation of musical pitch to the length of the monochord in single string instruments, and had thereby bequeathed a musical substratum to all geometric proportions – including those of architecture and painting. Thus Poussin quoted Greek musical parallels and Joshua Reynolds, the first President of the British Royal Academy,

knowing what the painting represents you can be caught by this musical harmony." In his "*Salon of 1844*," the critic Théophile Thoré took up the same theme in reviewing Delacroix's work, asking, "What is the dominant note in the harmony of the picture?" and replying, "Velasquez would have said, 'I am in the silver-grey tones,' and Delacroix, 'My symphony begins in purple major and continues in green minor'." Similarly, Baudelaire, an admirer of Delacroix, as we saw earlier, wrote in his Salon of 1846, "A good way to tell if a painting is melodious or not is to look at it from a distance too great to understand its subject. If it is melodious, it already has meaning." These references all suggest that the paradigm of painting as silent *poetry* was about to be replaced by the paradigm of painting as silent *music* – an absolutely radical change brought about as attention was drawn to the colour and *facture* of the paint on the canvas surface, by the quarrel between "sketchers" and "finishers" that we have just discussed. In fact, the new paradigm was made explicit in 1859, in an article in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* by the critic Louis Viardot, who coined the phrase "*ut pictura musica*" to replace what he now saw as the obsolete "*ut pictura poesis*". So it was that in the 1860s Whistler began to call his paintings "symphonies," "nocturnes" and "arrangements," and that in 1890 Seurat, in a now well-known letter to his friend Maurice Beaubourg, outlined a quasi-scientific theory of how to create mood in painting by the use of line and colour.

Abstract Language

However, it is the English essayist, Walter Pater, to whom we turn for an ultimate definition, which we find in his 1877 essay "The School of Giorgione." In this essay, Pater asserts that all art "aspires to the condition of music" and even speaks of an "abstract language" and of "abstract colour" (words then only beginning to gain currency). However, it is significant that in this epoch-making statement Pater speaks of the *condition* of music – he is not suggesting that paintings *become* music, since he insists that "each art has its own peculiar and untranslatable sensuous charm… its own special responsibilities to its material" – and he adds that the function of criticism is to "estimate the degree to which a given work fulfils that responsibility." Seventy five years later, the New York critic Clement Greenberg was shamelessly to claim these insights as his own by rephrasing them as the "area of proper competence of the medium," and demanding ▶

Delacroix, Eugene 1798-1863
Portrait of Frederic Chopin, Oil on Canvas, 1838 (45 x 38 cm) Paris, Musee du Louvre

held that "architecture applied itself *directly* to the imagination, like music," because it came *without the mediation of subject matter* (more problematic semiotics). And, just prior to Reynolds, there was a chapter in Charles Avison's *Essay on Musical Expression*, of 1771, that affirmed the parallel of music and *painting* not only by expounding on the Pythagorian references to geometrical proportion, but also by adding a concept of "expressiveness" which, according to Avison, had the power of "exciting the most agreeable passions of the soul."

The heavy duty philosophers of the following century were to identify music with Kant's noumenon – as "the thing in itself," where all else was "merely appearance." Music, according to Schopenhauer, represented the "will" (or life-force) *directly*; and Schiller asserted

that "The plastic arts at their most perfect must become music, and move us by the *immediacy* of their sensuous presence." The key, as Reynolds had said, lay in music's "immediacy," something that painting lacked because its subject matter (its "iconicity" or "mimesis") supposedly got in the way. Nevertheless, in 1834 the critic Gustave Planche, writing on Delacroix's highly mimetic *Women of Algiers*, was to see in that work "the art of painting itself, reduced to its own resources *without* the aid of a subject"! It is significant that among Delacroix's friends were the great musical virtuosi Paganini and Chopin, and that Delacroix had painted sketchy portraits of both, naming music as the source of his deepest artistic experience. Thus Delacroix could write in his journal of "an arrangement of colours, lights and shadows….that is called the music of the picture," and add, "*before*

from criticism the same measuring rod, without mentioning his source in Pater.

The musical analogy was continued in the 20th century, André Derain even taking a cue from Schoenberg's "emancipation of the dissonance" of 1906 and announcing the same dissonant principle in the painting of the Fauves. The broader paradigm spread to North America at the time of World War I, and Greenberg used it somewhat obliquely during World War II. I shall come back to that in a moment. Meantime it is worth noting that the painter Jackson Pollock and the sculptor Anthony Caro, endlessly discussed by Greenbergians, both invited the viewer to see their work as "music," *and in 1989 Gerhardt Richter, for whom Greenberg had not the slightest affection, said the same.* It seems they understood music as a surrogate for the idea of the aesthetic object as "autotelic," as the thing that is an end in itself – that has no purpose other than its own existence. It was a way of avoiding further speech.

Medium Specificity

These notions of Pater's and Greenberg's may be said to take up a discourse on "medium specificity" begun in an essay of 1766 by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. This essay, written at the very time that Avison's musical analogy hit the streets, actually sets out to attack the theory of "*ut pictura poesis*" by another route – by criticizing an interpretation of the sculpture we have already visited in our discussion of the semiotics of expression, the sculpture of Laocoön and his sons being strangled by serpents. The subject is found in a poem of Virgil's, and Lessing points out that in the poem Laocoön lets out a cry of anguish as he struggles, whereas in the sculpture he seems only to sigh. Here, says Lessing, is an example of sculpture (and, *pari passu*, of painting) *not* doing what poetry does – the explanation being that they exist in different media. In a diachronic art like poetry, he says, you *can* have someone scream (because the scream is only a fragment of time in the unfolding story),

whereas a wide screaming mouth in a synchronic art like sculpture remains fixed for all time, looks hideous and does a disservice to the artist's aim. It may well be said that while Lessing here successfully attacks "*ut pictura poesis,*" he is at the same time inadvertently defending its principle of decorum in his assertion that a screaming mouth is beyond the limit. Certainly Edward Munch saw it this way, because it was *after reading a new translation of Lessing* that Munch set out to make a painting of a "scream" in defiance of both arguments. Following the trend of the time that we have already noted in Taine's "race, milieu and moment," Munch evidently set out to create *the* signifier of the Nordic-Teutonic expressive temperament, by theorizing that a scream *can* be portrayed without a breach of decorum – so long as the painter is Norwegian!

The fact was, however, that what Lessing also wanted to do was to start a debate on the semiotics of the different media by contrasting the signs of which pictorial art is composed (what today we call iconic, or "motivated" signs) and the words of which poetry is composed (what we call "arbitrary" signs). In fact, in that way, Lessing's essay makes an excellent introduction to the high cubism and *papiers collés* of Picasso's and Braque's, where the two types of sign (the iconic and the verbal) are welded together – except that Lessing is a century and a half too early.

The combination of Pater and Lessing, both of them demanding respect for what Greenberg came to call the "proper competence" of the medium, resulted in an essay of Greenberg's of 1940, significantly entitled "Towards a Newer Laocoön," where he identifies progress towards "the area of proper competence" as the task of Modernism itself, and in an essay of around the same time, "Avant-garde and Kitsch," he draws on semiotics to reinforce the point, taking on even Aristotle himself, over Aristotle's view that music imitates the state of the soul "immediately." Here, Greenberg astutely points out that Aristotle omitted to say that the Greeks used music only to accompany verse and that *the words of the verse therefore actually mediated the meaning of the music*. Greenberg quotes Plato's earlier saying that "when there are no words it is always difficult to recognize the meaning of the music or to see that any worthy object is imitated by it," and he, Greenberg, goes on to say that as this function was abandoned, as the words and music got separated, music

was forced to withdraw into itself to discover its own *raison d'être -- as has been the case with painting of the modern period*. This withdrawal of painting into itself, he says, has meant that the best artists become "artists' artists" and are cut off from a public unwilling to become initiated into their esoteric discourse – with the result that the survival of culture is threatened as the field is left to "kitsch." This, with significant qualifications (for it is really too simplistic), is still true, though it is not my intent to elaborate upon it here. It may be added, however, that a species of "reductivist" painting was to follow Greenberg's, though without his blessing, further restricting the idea of "proper competence" to the *processes* by which the paint might be applied – a paradigm still functional in North America today.

Sublime

Some artists of whom Greenberg thought well, particularly Barnett Newman, evoked an old paradigm that he did not espouse. This was the "Sublime," a concept of the late 17th century that had grown from an examination of ancient writings on rhetoric, especially where rhetoric discussed the kind of elevated speech that produced "marvelous" effects (early translations even contained the word "marvelous" in their title). By the mid-18th century, however, the notion had been developed, particularly by Edmund Burke, into an aesthetic of the terrifying applied to such events as shipwrecks, volcanic eruptions, hurricanes, sharks and so forth, that over-awed the viewer by their incalculable power, size or violence – whether portrayed or actual. The concept was made fun of by Pope, whose formalist aesthetics were opposed to it,[8] and there are critics today who view it as reduced to the "ridiculous" by advertising; but when one realizes that the hypnotic horror of the twin towers exactly fits Burke's definition, the sublime bears further thought. Like the notion of genius, it was a timely idea for the Romantic movement. It gave permission for everything from "Gothic" novels to the nightmare paintings of Fuseli and the molochism of Delacroix's *Death of Sardanapalus*. At the end of the century, Emmanuel Kant found it necessary to deal with the sublime, in his "Critique of Judgement," as an issue apart from the beautiful (which for Kant was always experienced in front of things bounded or contained, and never evoked by the vast and unbounded). Kant's account is complex, but the fact that

he tackled it at all helped to perpetuate Burke's more available conception – which in the 20th century became the "Futurist marvelous" when applied to the love of danger, war, speed, electric tramcars and confrontations with the public, and the "Surrealist marvelous" when applied to the indecorous results of various chance procedures,[9] becoming briefly respectable again in the New York of the 1940s, as the "abstract sublime," from which was eventually to come that Canadian *cause célèbre* Barnett Newman's *Voice of Fire*.

A variant of the sublime has been promoted by Jean-François Lyotard as the essential motor of modern art – though, on examination, this turns out to be a version of the symbolists' preoccupation with the noumenal – an important but by no means sufficient source of the modern. In proposing it, however, Lyotard had a motive – which was to undermine what he calls the "grand narratives" of historiography, like those produced by Marxian theory, and to substitute a mixed bag of "less oppressive" little narratives; though it remains unclear whether the two are mutually exclusive.

Modern Life

The "great tradition" that Baudelaire had proclaimed lost, in his *Salon of 1846*, was essentially that of "*ut pictura poesis*," or what he called there "the habitual, everyday idealization of ancient life." Of course, by "lost," he meant, as much as anything, "enfeebled;" and, though he had espoused the musical analogy that would later feature in the shaping of abstraction, he suggested, as the remedy for this enfeeblement, a dose of "modern life." Unfortunately, the only exponent of modern life that he could find was the tepid, minor painter-illustrator, Constantin Guys. You might have thought he would have mentioned Gustave Courbet, just two years his senior, who by 1853 would paint his portrait. But Courbet's heart was with the peasants of Ornans with whom he had grown up, while that of Guys' was in the great faubourgs of Baudelaire's Paris. In the end, the painter who would come to fill the bill was Edouard Manet; but he was just 14 in 1846, with no idea that he would be inspired by Baudelaire, on meeting him in 1859, to produce his first mature work. This was a sketchy, "low life" painting called The *Absinthe Drinker*, in seamless lineage with the "great tradition" but viewed today as sig-

naling the modern period – the promised land that Baudelaire, who died in 1867, was not to see.

Milling About?

So: *are* the old paradigms still with us? Obviously, some survived, somewhat transformed, throughout the modern period and some did not, while some were "partially eclipsed" (a phrase that Malevich in 1914 actually inscribed on a collage that displayed the *Mona Lisa*). Their history may be seen as that of the rewriting of earlier achievements in new terms – terms which, once established, modified the template taken for granted in the production of paintings, the template of what was "given". It was this that Marcel Duchamp understood in 1912 when he began the notes towards his so-called "Large Glass" with the phrase "*Etant Donnés*" ("Being Given"). In Duchamp's eyes, the rate of paradigm change had so accelerated as to make nonsense of the current definitions of art, and to make this point the "Large Glass" was to become a portmanteau into which he stuffed various old paradigms, however disjunctive – to disrupt once and for all the race for the new and introduce a definition of art that would accommodate his "Readymades." Once the implications of this were understood some 50 years later, it became possible for philosophers like Arthur Danto to declare the *history* of art to be over, and all the old paradigms thus made available, if only through a rear-view mirror in a Looking-Glass world ruled by irony. This seemed to be a cause of consternation among painters on the panel "Issues in Abstract Painting," promoted by the Dalhousie exhibition *Hungry Eyes*. The panel several times repeated the view that words like "pluralism" and "post-historical" define the current situation. They gloomily surmised that "forward-looking trends affiliating several artists" were dead, and that, instead of "movements," what we had was a "directionless milling about" that left no scope for originality, except through nuanced reruns of abstraction from the past.

But the paradigm changes that were once called "progress" can equally be seen as the creation of an expanding universe of texts, all "nuanced reruns" from the past (there really isn't an alternative to that): a view that still leaves viable the old formula "instruction and delight," that does not limit the scope of painters to raise our consciousness of some issue, private or public, with enough freshness, subtlety or *éclat* to hold our attention; nor limit

intellectual enterprise, or forthright, hedonistic works – though there, of course, the painter, skating around obstacles of taste, between high art and kitsch, will find thin ice. But that is every artist's lot, remembering that kitsch (what Baudelaire complained about in 1846 without that word to hand) need not be held at bay only by novelty, transgression or scatology. And as for the "sublime," it begs for rehabilitation in the face of current theories of the "abject;" for paintings also can be made, like those of Anselm Kiefer's, that speak the rhetoric of tragedy, of guilt and solitude and desolation, as no other medium can. We might all ponder that. ●

[2] See P.O. Kristeller: "The Modern System of the Arts," part 1; *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Oct. 1951

[3] Erwin Panofsky: *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (New York, 1955), p. 10. Panofsky acknowledges that "*delectatio*" was understood by certain medieval writers as the signifier of beauty, but he emphasizes that they never claimed that it should be the end of painting.

[4] See Rensselaer W. Lee: *Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting* (New York, 1967).

[5] What Baudelaire actually said was, "Beauty is a divine gateau around which the period, its fashion, its morale and its passion form a titillating crust to the *eternal* element inside" (emphasis added). He was to elaborate exactly this in a more complete account of his aesthetics, published in the newspaper *Le Figaro*, in 1863 under the title "The Painter of Modern Life."

[6] Early indications are in Vasari, who refers to Michelangelo's "divine talent" (*divinis ingegno*) anachronistically changed to "inspired genius" by George Bull in the 1965 Penguin Classics edition. Vasari also refers to "*tre nobilis arti*" (three noble crafts), translated by Bull as "three fine arts," a category not then available (see Kristeller, *op. cit.*)

[7] See Albert Boime: *The Academy and French Painting in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1971).

[8] Alexander Pope: *Peri Bathous, or the Art of Sinking in Poetry* (1727).

[9] In the 1930s, the dissident Surrealist, Georges Bataille, attempted to subvert Breton's "marvelous" by promoting what he called the "abject," the very obverse of sublime. He developed this, ultimately scatological, program in largely unpublished notes, translated by French psychoanalyst Julie Kristeva in her *Powers of Horror* (1982). Scatological imagery, mostly humourous, has always existed at the margin of the visual arts and the act of painting as a barely sublimated version of infantile faecal daubing is a commonplace of psychoanalysis. Bataille therefore aimed at what he called *desublimatory* "transgressions," some of which showed up at the time in works by Miro and Dali. Leaning on Kristeva's book, they showed up again in the aesthetically deprived 1990s – as an act of desperation.