Learning to Look: Navigating the Mysteries of the Art World

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Is it possible to know *everything* about Art?

There are no “plain facts” in the history of art – or in the history of anything for that matter, only degrees of plausibility.

H.W. Janson, introduction to first edition of *History of Art*, 1962
Why do we want to learn about Art?

Art speaks to us, and we can get a great deal out of it – just by looking. But if we know more about what the artists were trying to say, who they were talking to and why, our experience is hugely enriched. Looking through history alters how we see art.

Martin Kemp, from Art in History, 2014
What do we bring to looking at Art?

We don’t see things as they are, we see them as we are.

Anais Nin
A caveat: in these lectures...

• There will be some nudity
• There will be some depictions of war
• There will be one swear word
• There will some irreverence
• There will be humour
• There will be sadness
• There will be discovery

• In other words, there will be ART!
Weekly Themes

• Week 1: Who am I? A Closer Look at the Art of Portraiture
• Week 2: The Changing Nature of Landscape Art
• Week 3: Whose History is it Anyway?
• Week 4: Hidden Meanings in Still Life
• Week 5: Photographs – Capturing the Moment
• Week 6: “My kid could do that!” The Perils of Abstraction
Some mysteries we will solve:

• Week 1: *Why is the Mona Lisa so famous?*
• Week 2: *How many members did the Group of Seven have?* (Hint: not 7, and Tom Thomson wasn’t one of them)
• Week 3: *How can you make a portrait of someone you have never seen?*
• Week 4: *When is an apple not an apple...?*
• Week 5: *When was the first “selfie” photograph taken, and who took it?*
• Week 6: *Could my kid do that...?*
Questions we have when looking at art:

• What is it?
• What is it made of?
• What is the context in which I am seeing it (gallery/museum, private home...)?
• Why is it here?
• Is it an original/copy/one of a series?
• What’s it worth? Who owns it? Could I buy one?
• Is it sized ‘true to life’ or much smaller/larger?
• Is it in good condition/damaged?
• Is it 2D, 3D, does it move...?
More questions:

• Does it purport to represent reality or does it exaggerate it in some way?
• Is it meant to shock me/make me happy/sad?
• Is it meant to be ironic, ‘preachy’, generate other emotions/effects?
• Is it designed to glorify someone/something in particular, or is it more universal in what it portrays?
• Was the artist paid to create it (commissioned), or did they do it ‘on spec’?
• Is it a preparatory sketch/model or is it a finished work?
• What do I notice first: the subject-matter, or the formal elements (colour, line, shading, technique, texture...)?
• How do I feel about the art work after my initial impression?
Early examples

Roman-Egyptian Funeral Portrait of a Woman, 3rd cent. AD (discovered at Fayum, Egypt, now in British Museum)

Roman coin
Some terms for stylistic periods:

- **Proto-Renaissance Art** (c. 1300-1400)
- **Early Renaissance Art** (c. 1400-90)
- **High Renaissance Art** (c. 1490-1530)
- **Mannerism** (c. 1530-1600)
- **Baroque** (c. 1600-1700)
15th c.: Increasing naturalism of the Renaissance
(B. Gozzoli’s Virgin and Child w. Saints, c.1476, NGC)
15th Century – rise of the portrait

The Virgin and Child with St. Anthony Abbot and a Donor, by Hans Memling, 1472. NCG

Portrait of a Lady, Antonio del Pollaiuolo, c. 1465 (Gemaldegalerie, Berlin)
16th c. Renaissance

Portrait of a Man, Bernardino Licinio, c. 1520 (NGC)

Mona Lisa (*La Gioconda*), Leonardo da Vinci, c. 1503-1506, up to 1517 (Louvre, Paris)
The One that got away....


Head of a Girl, Leonardo drawing, 1483 (Uffizi Gallery, Florence)
The most famous painting (Mona Lisa)... 

Study of hands by Leonardo (Royal Library, Windsor collection), c. 1490
Leonardo’s *Vitruvian Man*, c. 1490
(Accademia Gallery, Venice)

“Painting is the origin of all arts and crafts, is also the source of all science.”

“Painting is not only a science, it is even a divinity, because it transforms the painter’s mind into something similar to the mind of God.”

Leonardo da Vinci, from his treatise on art.
The artist as *Genius* (16\textsuperscript{th} century)

Anatomical drawings by Leonardo, c. 1510-11, Royal Library, UK

Sheet of studies for the “Libyan Sibyl” in Sistine Chapel (red chalk drawing), Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564) Met, NY
The $450M Leonardo.... “It has that kind of presence that Leonardos have...that uncanny strangeness that the later Leonardo paintings manifest...we cannot reasonably doubt that here, we are in the presence of the painter from Vinci.” Martin Kemp

Leonardo’s (?) Salvator Mundi, c. 1500 (Abu Dhabi Louvre) Pre-restoration photo of the painting, from c. 1910
Portrait of a young man?
A Couple Reunited:
Ludwig X, Duke of Bavaria, and his consort Ursula von Weichs, Barthel Beham, 1531 (NGC)
The story of another couple

Mary Neville, Lady Dacre, Hans Eworth, c. 1555-58 (NGC)

Detail of painting...
More Renaissance portraits in the NGC

Daniele Barbari, Titian, 1545

Pierantonio Bandini, Bronzino, c. 1550-55
Titian’s Portrait of Francis I (1539), Louvre
A couple of 17th c. self-portraits...

Self-Portrait, age 23, Rembrandt van Rijn, 1639 (Gardner Museum, Boston)

Self-portrait (at 54), Rembrandt, 1660 (Metropolitan Museum, New York)
Rembrandt’s *A Woman at her Toilet*, 1632-33 (NGC)
Pope Innocent X, Diego Velazquez, c. 1650 (Pamphilij Gallery, Rome), vs. Study for Portrait No. 1, Francis Bacon, 1956
Detail from another version of “Pope Innocent X” by Velasquez in National Gallery, Washington DC
Portraits in marble

Maffeo Barberini, Pope Urban VIII, by Gian Lorenzo Bernini, c. 1632

General James Wolfe, Joseph Wilton c. 1760
Two ‘Saint Catharines’:

**Medieval (International Gothic) style:**
Simone Martini, c. 1320-25 (egg tempera and gold leaf on wood) NGC

**Baroque style:**
Artemisia Gentileschi’s *Self-portrait as Catherine of Alexandria*, c. 1615-17 (oil on canvas) UK Nat'l Gallery
The Family Portrait
Jean le Juge and His Family, Hyacinthe Rigaud, 1699 (NGC)
The Artist’s materials

Charles Churchill, Joshua Reynolds, 1755 (NGC)
Sir Jeffrey Amherst, Joshua Reynolds, 1768 (NGC)  Thayendanegea (Joseph Brant, age 33), by George Romney, 1776 (NGC)
Laurence Sterne: “but tis no uncommon thing, my good Sancho, for one half of the world to use the other half of it like brutes, & then endeavor to make ‘em so.”
Mythologizing the Queen

Marie Antoinette as Minerva (model 1778-79) porcelain made at Sèvres Factory, France (NGC)
Heights and depths

Archduchess Marie Antoinette, Queen of France, Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1778 (Kunst. Mus., Vienna)

Marie Antoinette Led to Her Execution, sketch by Jacques-Louis David, October 1793
Pierre Sériziat, Jacques-Louis David, 1790 (NGC)

The Death of Marat, David, 1793 (Royal Museums of Fine Arts, Belgium)
| Self-Portrait by Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun, 1790 (Metropolitan Museum, NYC) | Countess Anna Ivanova Tolstaya, 1796 (NGC) |
Portraits of John Hookham Frere, painting by John Hoppner (1806) and Sculpture by Francis Chantry (1817-18), NGC
Classical inspiration

Thayendanegea (Joseph Brant), William Berczy, c. 1807 (age 64) NGC

Apollo Belvedere, c. 120 AD, Roman marble copy of Greek bronze from c. 350 BC. On display in the Vatican, Rome since 1511.
Classical inspiration in a modern context: Canadian Firefighters Memorial ("We Were There"), Douglas Coupland w. Mary Tremain, 2012
19th century Canada

Lt. Provo William Parry Wallis, R.N., by Robert Field. 1813

Sœur Saint-Alphonse, by Antoine Plamondon, 1841 (NGC)
Portraits of 19th c. Canadian Indigenous people

Josephté Ourné, Joseph Légaré, c. 1840 (NGC)

Zacharie Vincent, Last of the Hurons, Antoine Plamondon, 1838 (NGC)
19th c.: Pre-Raphaelite portrait of an Ottawan...

Henry Wadsworth Monk, William Holman Hunt, 1858 (NGC)
Impressionism and Symbolism

Claude and Renée, Pierre Auguste Renoir, 1903 (NGC)

Portrait of Elisabeth Lederer, Gustave Klimt, 1914-16 (NGC)
Post-impressionism

Portrait of a Gustave Boyer, Paul Cezanne, c.1871 (NGC)

Portrait of a Peasant, Cézanne, c.1900 (NGC)
Cubism: “The world today doesn’t make sense. So why should I paint pictures that do?” Picasso

Portrait of Ambroise Vollard, Pablo Picasso, 1910
Sketch of Vollard, Picasso, 1915 (Metropolitan Museum, NY)
Vorticism and Futurism/Cubism

Rock drill, Jacob Epstein, 1913-16 (NGC)  The Mechanic, Fernand Léger, 1920 (NGC)
Portrait of Diego, Alberto Giacometti, 1954 (bronze, NGC)
Some great 20th c. Canadian portraits

Rollande. Prudence Heward, 1929 (NGC)  Detail...
Varley’s *Vera*

_Vera_, F.H. Varley, 1931 (NGC)  
Detail...
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A portrait of sadness:

Ludivine, Edwin Holgate, 1930 (NGC)
Portrait of a sculptress:

‘Gesture’ and Elizabeth, Gordon Davies, 1936 (NGC)

Gesture (sculpture), Elizabeth Wynn Wood, 1927 (carved 1967) beside her portrait in the NGC Canadian galleries
Portraits of migration and misery

Migrant Mother, Dorothea Lange, 1936

Syrian refugees Taha with sons Yaie and Yemen, in Macedonia, Thomas de Wouters
“We just existed. We survived. Let’s put it that way.” Florence Owens Thompson

Family portrait in better times: Florence Owens Thompson with daughters Katherine, Ruby, Norma in 1979 (43 yrs later)
Yousuf Karsh: Master of the Photographic Portrait

Winston Churchill, 1943

Self Portrait, 1951
“Paintings are too hard. The things I want to show are mechanical. Machines have less problems. I’d like to be a machine, wouldn’t you?”
Andy Warhol, 1963
A Waxy Warhol (at Madame Tussaud’s, Orlando, FL)
Two Hockey stars

Wayne Gretzky 99. Andy Warhol, 1984

Cassie Campbell, Bryan Adams, National Library and Archives Coll.
An Indigenous perspective:
Norval Morrisseau’s Self-portrait Devoured by Demons, 1964 (Art Gallery of Ontario)
Untitled (Shaman), Norval Morrisseau (called Copper Thunderbird), c. 1971 (NGC)
“I’m ready for my close-up...”:
Calgary artist Gary Olson’s *I am Up Against the Picture Plane Again*, 1977 (Glenbow Museum)
“Hyper-realist” artist Chuck Close: Mark, 1978-79 (Metropolitan Museum)
Left: acrylic painting with viewers, Right: Detail of eye
Now we’ve seen it all! Ron Mueck’s *Head of a Baby* (2003, NGC)
Notable portraits of His and Her Excellencies

Gabrielle and Jules Leger, official portrait by Jean-Paul Lemieux, 1977

Mary Pratt and Adrienne Clarkson with Pratt’s 2007 official portrait
21st Century Royalty

Artist Nicky Philips with Prince William and Prince Harry, 2010 (Royal Trust Collection, UK)

Prince Harry and Ms. Meghan Markle, photo by Alexi Lubomirski published on Kensington Palace’s Twitter account, 21 December 2017
21st Century Celebrity

The Carters at the Louvre (Beyoncé and Jay Z), video for release of latest album (2018)

Photographer Annie Leibovitz capturing the moment Kanye captures the moment with Kim Kardashian and son North (2014)