

Harmen de Hoop



PAINTINGS

Gustave Courbet
L'Origine du monde
1866





Gustave Courbet's *The Origin of the World* still seems to provoke viewers more than 150 years after it was painted. For the greater part of its history, Courbet's painting was hidden in private art collections, now it hangs in the Musée d'Orsay for everyone to see. Is that the problem? In 2014 performance artist Deborah de Robertis sat in front of Courbet's painting in the Musée d'Orsay exposing her vagina and was arrested. What is the taboo? Nudity, female sexuality or the male gaze?

Heinrich Knirr
Adolf Hitler, der Schöpfer des Dritten Reiches
und Erneuerer der deutschen Kunst
1937





A favored theme for Third Reich artists was a portrait of the Führer. These became so numerous that Hitler finally decreed that only one would be displayed at the annual Greater German Art Exhibition. The official portrait of Adolf Hitler for 1937 was painted by Heinrich Knirr (1862 – 1944). After studying at the Academy of fine arts in Vienna, Heinrich Knirr opened a private art school in Munich. It gained a good reputation throughout Europe. During the Nazi régime he painted the portraits of Adolf Hitler, Rudolf Hess and others, and Albert Speer often referred to him as ‘the court painter’. Isn’t it ironic that a former member of the progressive Munich Secession and Vienna Secession paints a portrait of Hitler in the style of Anthony van Dyck and Joshua Reynolds and then calls it *‘Adolf Hitler, the Creator of the Third Reich and Renewer of German Art’*?

Louis-Michel van Loo
Denis Diderot
1767



NEDERLAND

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Did we lose faith in the values of the Enlightenment? What is left of the belief that to be informed is manifestly better than to be ignorant or prejudiced? Denis Diderot, the main editor of the *Encyclopédia* (1751 - 1772), wrote 'our aim is to bring together all knowledge, to present its overall structure to our contemporaries and to hand it on to those who will come after us, so that our children, by becoming more knowledgeable, will become more virtuous and happier'. So how did that turn out? It does feel like there is an overwhelming sense of pessimism at the moment and a worrisome trend toward increasing polarization with a willingness to wreck the precious institutions of liberal democracy. So who is going to fight tribalism, nationalist fervour, religious ecstasy, medical quackery and conspiracy theorizing, and make a case for reason, science and humanism?

Don Ivan Punchatz
Ayatollah Khomeini
1984





Often revolutions are met with great enthusiasm. Iran's 1979 revolution, that replaced a pro-Western authoritarian monarchy with an anti-Western theocracy, was initially supported by various leftist organizations and student movements. The new leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, declared that Muslims should reject the influence of both liberal capitalism and communism, and that Muslims needed supervision by leading Islamic jurists in all aspects of daily life. That's when the unity of the revolution broke down. Iran's democratic secularists and Islamic leftists regretted participating in the revolution, acknowledging they had failed to see past the short-term goal of removing the Shah. The revolution was supposed to bring 'freedom, independence, and a just and prosperous economic order' to the people of Iran, but this has not been the case.

Philip Guston
The Studio
1969

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bétou
STOFFHÖR
modulor Stoffe.de





In 2020 four museums announced that they would postpone the planned Philip Guston retrospective, citing the need to better contextualize KKK imagery in Guston's work in the wake of the death of George Floyd. Over 2,900 artists, curators, and critics signed an open letter, accusing the institutions of 'fearing controversy and lacking faith in the intelligence of their audience', they asked the museums to show the work 'without reductive characterizations, in all its complexity'. As a Jewish artist involved with left-wing politics, Guston tried to make paintings about the evil of systemic racism, and the potential for evil in all of us. But some people find Guston's brand of ambiguous humor out of place. They say that addressing public issues through an autobiographical filter does not suffice; that in today's America, because Guston appropriated images of Black trauma, the show needs to be about more than Guston.

Emil Nolde
New-Guinea Wilder
1915





In 1913 Emil Nolde took part in a government-sponsored medical-demographic expedition in German New Guinea. The expedition's aim was to find the reason for the high mortality rate and the declining birth rates among the colonised population. As an artist, he was inspired by ethnological and anthropological museums, whose collection strategies were fundamentally racist, but he rejected colonialism, claiming it was harmful to the pure racial integrity and creative originality of indigenous peoples. Nowadays scholars say he worked from a basis of inequality, namely the white male's sense of entitlement rooted in colonialist structures. So, what do we really see in his pictures? His own longing for a pure and simple life in harmony with nature and his dislike of the industrialized world? Or a patriarchal view on so-called primitive people and their pure and childlike way of life? Is an innocent fascination for other people and other cultures still possible today? How?

Tang Yin

Landscape: Thatched Huts under the Apricot Flowers
n.d.





Some say the idea that different cultures are equally valuable in their own right, is nonsense. They are convinced that Western culture is superior. They argue that democracy, respect for human rights, accepting the contributions of women, tolerating homosexuality, etc. are superior values and characteristic of the West. But how can you measure civilizations and cultures objectively when orientations and objectives are different? Western civilization, for example, defines history through human-related events (wars, rulers, etc.) while other civilizations define history in earth-related terms (seasons, droughts, etc.). Western culture is driven by individualism, with a strong believe in science, while other cultures value myths, social interdependence and collective harmony. So what about Chinese culture? What do we really know about one of the oldest cultures in the world?

Chaim Soutine
Chicken, hanging in front of brick wall
1924





Chaim Soutine, born in a shtetl in the Lithuanian part of Russia, emigrated to France in 1913. Living in Paris, he struggled constantly with both poverty and ill-health. A life of hunger and drinking resulted in stomach ulcers that caused him pain. That's why he had to stay away from rich foods like meat. Soutine's repeated use of plucked fowl and bloody animal carcasses as the subject matter for still life paintings likely stems from his complex relationship with food. Buying meat in the first half of the twentieth century was quite different from what it is today. Unlike the sanitary, shrink-wrapped packages of today, customers got closer to the original flesh, including bones, offal, and blood. Since then the scale of food production has increased radically. Chickens are now forced to live on factory farms, and many suffer from serious health problems. Not poverty or stomach ulcers, but animal suffering is the reason more and more people stop eating meat. Not so long ago one of Soutine's carcass paintings sold for US\$28 million.

Vincent van Gogh
Stilleven met viscaria
1887





Stilleven met viscaria is a painting by Vincent van Gogh with an estimated value of US\$50 million. It was stolen from Cairo's Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil Museum twice; first in 1977 (and recovered after a decade), then again in August 2010 and has yet to be found. Egyptian officials erroneously believed they had recovered the painting only hours after its theft when two Italian suspects attempted to board a plane to Italy. So who did steal the painting, and why? To sell a Van Gogh painting on the open market is virtually impossible. Stolen paintings are often found in the possession of the mafia. Not because they have an eye for art, but as a negotiation tool for reduced prison sentences or to use as collateral on loans and in a barter system for other illicit goods. For example, a stolen Gabriel Metsu painting was swapped for a shipment of heroin. So who gets to determine the true value of *Stilleven met viscaria*? Art dealers or criminals?

Pablo Picasso
Le pigeon aux petits pois
1911



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POLITIE

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Painted in 1911, Pablo Picasso's *Le Pigeon aux Petits Pois* (with an estimated value of US\$28 million) was stolen from the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris in 2010, together with paintings by Matisse, Braque, Leger and Modigliani. Due to the value of his works and his prolific output Picasso is the world's most stolen artist. The Art Loss Register lists some 550 missing Picasso pieces. The thief was identified as 49-year-old Vjéran Tomic. For the crime, he was sentenced to eight years in prison. One of Tomic's accomplices claimed that, in a panic, he had thrown all the stolen paintings into a rubbish container. When the police searched the rubbish container he directed them to, they found nothing. Most investigators believe that the paintings were not thrown away and that they are still out there.