



0.1 GUSTAVE COURBET *Portrait of Baudelaire*, ca. 1848. Oil on canvas, 20⁷/₈ × 24 (53 × 61). Detail

INTRODUCTION: CRITICAL ART AND HISTORY

THE FIRST MODERN CENTURY

THE ART, ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN DISCUSSED IN THIS BOOK was made in Europe and North America during a period of rapid and profound social and political modernization. The close of that epoch, now more than a hundred years distant, did not, of course, end the drama. In fact, far from slowing down, the dynamic of change begun in the nineteenth century was accelerated in the twentieth. Soon the terms “imperialism,” “assembly line,” “mass culture,” and “total war” entered the modern European and American lexicons, supplanting an earlier vocabulary that included “nation,” “industry,” “popular,” and “revolution.” Yet if actions and words were shifting their arenas and changing their meanings, the basic facts of crisis and everlasting uncertainty remained the same. Indeed, even more than before, Karl Marx’s Shakespearian-sounding phrase from the *Communist Manifesto*—“all that is solid melts into air”—summed up the experience of vast multitudes of people awed and displaced by modern forces of social and economic change. If nineteenth-century history and culture remain compelling today, it may be because the twentieth century—and now the early twenty-first—witnessed still greater and more rapid political and cultural transformations. We thus look backward with mixed feelings of nostalgia and recognition, anxiety and familiarity, anger and longing. The first task before us, therefore, is to put the nineteenth century succinctly in its place.

In Western Europe, the end of the eighteenth century marked the final dissolution of feudalism—a primarily agricultural and rigidly hierarchical productive and social order that had survived for seven hundred years. In the place of feudalism, there now arose a modern capitalist and bourgeois economic and social edifice. (The situation in Eastern Europe was somewhat different: there feudalism was intensified in the early modern period, and only disappeared *de facto* from Russia after the 1917 Revolution.) This epochal reconfiguration of economy and society—long in coming but no less dramatic in the end for its gradual preparation—was marked by outbreaks of violence and insurrection. Populations long oppressed sought the freedoms promised in liberal doctrines; communities long isolated—like the Ornans depicted by the French Realist Gustave Courbet—were brought into conformity by centralized nation-states.

Beginning in 1776, and continuing for a generation, wars of colonial independence—inspired by Enlightenment principles of political consent and social contract—were waged and won in North and South America, Mexico, and the Caribbean. These victories in turn rebounded in the core nations of Europe, accelerating already existing demands for social justice, economic equality, and political enfranchisement. Across Europe and the Americas, absolutist monarchies fell or were toppled, to be replaced by dictatorships, constitutional monarchies, and republics.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the social and political upheaval that had begun with the bloody dispatch of the French Bourbon monarchs in 1793 (the event that appears in retrospect as the exclamation point at the end of the feudal sentence) was becoming more democratic, inclusive, and organized. In 1848, the increasingly self-cognizant working classes of France, Germany, Austria, Italy, and England rose up in arms (or in the latter case formed a mass political and protest movement) to combat the vestigial aristocratic, and the new bourgeois, elites who maintained economic and political dominance. A decade and a half later, the slave plantation system of agriculture in the southern United States was overturned by black women and men motivated by the sting of the lash, and by whites driven in some cases by moral outrage and in others by economic calculation. In addition, the efforts of women to achieve emancipation began to rival in intensity the ongoing class and racial struggles.

But the “age of Revolution,” and the succeeding “age of capital,” as the historian Eric Hobsbawm called them, were not only periods of noble or elite retreat and retrenchment. The nineteenth century also inaugurated the age of imperialism—an epoch when the nation-states of Europe and the United States began to organize and coordinate their economies in order to exploit their own populations more productively, and to seize the raw materials, labor, and markets of the rest of the globe more efficiently. Democratic, revolutionary successes were often quickly reversed: emancipation and enfranchisement were rolled back with startling rapidity, and whole populations—generally darker skinned and most often living in the Southern Hemisphere—were brought into subjection. In the United States, the genocide of Native Americans reached its apogee by 1890 (the year of the Wounded Knee Massacre), even while large numbers of new European and Asian immigrants—often themselves displaced by pogroms of one kind or another—arrived at Atlantic and Pacific harbors. Lynch law, white supremacy, and Jim Crow (the popular name for the U.S. system of racial segregation) also reached their pinnacle in the 1890’s. Emergent ideologies of racism and Eurocentrism—along with legions of missionaries, bureaucrats, diplomats, police, vigilantes, soldiers, and sailors—were marshaled to support this reactionary enterprise. The occasional artist too was enlisted in the effort, though in the case of Paul Gauguin in French Polynesia, with decidedly mixed results.

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, violence, political struggle, social change, and periodic crisis seemed entrenched in the West. Though no major wars raged, present and future prospects were unclear and unsettled: many artists and writers described their time as an age of “transition,” a period of “decadence” or a “penultimate age,” implying that the approaching millennium would bring sweeping changes to an unstable or even degenerate world. Economic cycles of boom and bust followed close upon each other; new agricultural and industrial technologies for better and worse transformed countryside and city alike; and as the twentieth century dawned, the restlessness and overt and underlying violence that had characterized the former century was fully internationalized. The cyclical economic decline from 1873 to 1895 temporarily disrupted cooperation between the big political powers, and by the eve of World War I (1914), nearly the entire non-European world was divided up into colonies for the benefit of a half-dozen Northern and Western imperialist nations. Yet imperialism notably failed to secure either peace or generalized prosperity; rather, it generated its own antinomies. World wars between the imperialist nations were fought; broad (though fragile) alliances were forged among oppressed European and non-European peoples; and metropolitan bourgeois culture itself was on the point of being dethroned. The twentieth century was by far the most bloody and destructive in human history, and scholars are remiss if they do not investigate the first modern century in the sanguinary light cast by the second.

ART AND EMANCIPATION, ART AND REACTION



0.2 WILLIAM BLAKE *Songs of Experience*, Plate 46: “London,” ca. 1794. From hand-printed book, 4¼ × 2½ (11.3 × 6.8)

The nineteenth century in Europe and the United States was punctuated at its beginning, middle, and end by revolutions—political, industrial, and cultural—and by the less violent struggles of workers, women, and indigenous peoples for freedom and equality. It was also an age of economic modernization and political consolidation among the major political and economic powers—a gathering of imperial strength and speed in advance of new drives for global domination in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The visual arts of the epoch were also indelibly marked by restiveness, change, modernization, rebelliousness, and the re-imposition of authority; they too were shaped and figured by the irruption of classes and interests formerly excluded from the domain of national culture, and by efforts to vanquish this insurgency. (The insight into links between the ethics, politics, and economic life of a society and its art, we shall soon see, was itself a signal achievement of the age.) No longer the reliably pliant vehicle of entrenched elites, art was often now the contradictory, unpredictable, and critical voice of diverse individuals, subcultures, and interest groups. For the first time in European history, painting and sculpture, as well as the new reproductive media (lithography, wood engraving, and photography), were available as instruments of democracy as well as of domination. Even architecture and design, the social arts par excellence, and the ones most dependent upon the patronage of the wealthy, the entrenched and the powerful, were regularly employed to satisfy the practical and ideological needs of subordinate or dissident classes and class-factions. Apartment blocks, union halls, train stations, department stores and libraries—as well as wallpapers, textiles, glassware and metalwork—now served multiple, and often antagonistic masters.

The democratization of art—that is, the emancipation of artists from the controlling institutions of church and state—and resistance to capitalist modernization were phenomena that could be observed at the very beginning of the nineteenth century. The prints, drawings, and paintings of the English William Blake and the Spanish Francisco Goya, for example, offer clear instances of the critical attention of artists to the cultural and political crises and realignments of the moment. Each man was responsive, first of all, to his own conscience and his own talent. In Blake’s illustrated poetic books such as *America* (1793) and *Europe* (1794), and in the unpublished *The French Revolution* (1791), he celebrated the figures of the Abbé Sieyès (French author of *What is the Third Estate*) and Thomas Paine (American writer of *Common Sense*) and lamented the failure of his native country to embrace the revolutionary upwellings in the United States and France. And in “London” from *Songs of Experience* (ca. 1794), he described the combined tyrannies of commercial property, state religion, and cold, merciless reason—“I wander thro’ each chartered street,/Near where the chartered Thames does flow . . . /In every voice: in every ban,/The mind-forged manacles I hear.” Blake’s ingenuous illumination for the poem, which depicts an aged and enfeebled figure of London led by the beard by a small child, recalls similar images of innocence, experience, and inversion of morality—in J.-L. David’s painting *Belisarius Begging Alms* (1781), and at the conclusion of J.-J. Rousseau’s *Discourse on Inequality* (1755): “For it is manifestly contrary to the laws of nature, however defined, that a child should govern an old man, that an imbecile should lead a wise man, and that a handful of people should gorge themselves with superfluities while the hungry multitude goes in want of necessities.” Blake was every bit as revolutionary a figure as David and Rousseau, but far more distrustful of the power and institutions of the state than either the Jacobin artist or the peripatetic *philosophe*. He believed that ordinary men and women—drawn together by will, love, benevolence, and sexual desire—could be the instruments of millenarian transformation.

In Francisco Goya’s series of etchings, the *Caprichos* (1799), he condemned the prevailing ignorance and prejudice of the Spanish monarchy and clergy, espoused tolerance, and preached economic and political reform. “You who cannot” (*Caprichos* 42),



0.3 FRANCISCO GOYA *Caprichos 42*: “Tu que no puedes” (“You who cannot”), 1796–7. Etching and burnished aquatint, 8³/₈ × 5⁷/₈ (21.4 × 15)

is the caption for a print that depicts two laborers, bent over and with eyes closed, carrying asses on their backs. The men are being crushed by their burdens, but they are not yet ready to set them down and right the injustice. Less certain than Blake that simple artisans and workmen could combine to topple kings, but also less distrustful of reason and enlightenment, Goya asserted his own right and responsibility, in his words, to “censure human errors and vices . . . and at the same time exercise [his] imagination.” Goya saw himself as a reformer, guided by reason and the zeal for independence; Blake regarded himself as a prophet whose trumpet blasts could help bring down the walls of a corrupt, modern Jericho. But despite these and many other differences, Goya and Blake also had much in common: they each found ways to embody revolution in the technique and forms as well as the subjects of their art. Each represented the political and social crises of their day in the language of solar and Manichean metaphors: Light erases Darkness, Day combats Night, God confronts Satan, Master opposes Slave, Orc (Blake’s personification of desire) battles Urizen (his figure of oppressive reason), Truth (Goya’s preferred allegory) strives to vanquish Ignorance. Perhaps most remarkable of all, however, is the fact that Blake and Goya represent their themes and protagonists dialectically; that is, they describe them as various and mutable. Neither light nor dark, reason nor unreason, neither God nor the devil are singular and eternal; like the dawning modern age itself, they are multiple and protean, contingent upon the political and social perspectives of the spectator and upon fast-changing historical events.

Blake and Goya were surely exceptional, among nineteenth-century artists, for their intellectual independence and political perspicacity. Yet even reactionary figures, such as the arch-Classicist J.-A.-D. Ingres, often manifested so active and perceptive an engagement with the facts of modernization and social change, that their art too must be called critical. Ingres’s *The Apotheosis of Homer* (1827), for example, appears to represent Classicism as a timeless canon of physical beauty and formal perfection passed down, generation to generation, from archaic Greece, through the Christian Middle Ages, to modern, enlightened France. Yet a closer examination of the picture suggests that it represents at the same time the cultural and ethical divide then increasingly felt to exist between the antique past and the modern present.

Exhibited in 1827 at the Salon Carré of the Louvre palace (the most prestigious venue in Paris for the display of works of art), the *Apotheosis* depicts the blind Homer, enthroned before an Ionic temple and crowned with laurel by a winged Victory (or Fame). At his feet, in postures that recall the figures of *Day* and *Night* from Michelangelo’s Tomb of Giuliano de’ Medici, are seated allegorical representations of the *Iliad* (beside a sword) and the *Odyssey* (with an oar resting on her lap). To Homer’s immediate right are the three great tragedians Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, and to his left the poet Pindar (offering the lyre) and the sculptor Phidias (with left arm extended, holding a mallet). Ranged around and below these Greeks are other ancient and modern luminaries indebted to Homer: Apelles leads Raphael by the hand, Virgil guides Dante, Molière (holding the mask of drama) stands beside Racine, and Shakespeare accompanies Poussin (in the left foreground, pointing to Homer). Omitted from the picture, but everywhere implicit, is Ingres (he included himself in a preliminary version), who as recent Academician and proud recipient of the *Légion d’honneur*, saw himself as the honored heir to Poussin, Raphael, and, especially, the Greeks. In 1818 the artist proclaimed: “In matters of Art, I have not changed. Age and reflection have, I hope, strengthened my taste, without diminishing its ardor. I still worship Raphael, his century, and above all the divine Greeks.” For Ingres, therefore, ancient Greece represented both the childhood of Europe—the origin of a European classical culture that flourished from the fourteenth through nineteenth centuries—and the full swell of a maturity that could never be superseded.

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Commissioned for the ceiling of the newly decorated room of Egyptian antiquities in the Louvre, *The Apotheosis of Homer* proclaims Classicism an indisputable canon guaranteeing a stable cultural foundation for the present. The painting suggests that present French and European culture is the culmination of a continuous line of development beginning in archaic Greece, and passing through the Roman empire, the Christian Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the time of Louis XIV, and the present age of Charles X. The painter and critic Etienne Delécluze described the static and retrospective aspects of the *Apotheosis* in his Salon review for the 1828 *Journal des débats* when he praised Ingres for dispensing with the pretension of artistic originality in his painting and instead graciously accepting the formal “archetypes” provided by all the great personages he represents. Delécluze writes:

The individual originality of these men is incontestable, but what placed them beyond all comparisons were the era and circumstances under which they lived. Homer found himself at the ideal point for giving life to mythological traditions; Dante for fixing the poetic theology born in the fifth century; Shakespeare for transfusing the ideas of the south into northern brains; Phidias for clothing symbolic idols with man’s image; and Michelangelo for *incarnating* the Middle Ages. But once all these great combinations have been fashioned and fixed, all that can be done is to modify the archetypes indefinitely.

This subtle crafting and modification of the Classical corpus of “archetypes,” according to Delécluze, was Ingres’s achievement. Yet this was clearly an achievement more of a negative than of a positive kind: it involved the erasure of historic and artistic difference and dissonance and the substitution of a bland and conflict-free Classicism. Banished from the Classical tradition in Ingres’s painting are the irrational pessimism of Euripides, the devastating loneliness of Dante (as he leaves behind his guide Virgil on the threshold of Paradise), the alienation of Hamlet, and the stunning anticlassicism of the aged Michelangelo; what remains is only costume, cliché, and hollow splendor. In thus purging from the Classical past and present all that gave it complexity and vitality, Ingres’s *Apotheosis* comes to resemble an attack upon, more than an homage to, the legacy of Homer, and it should not surprise us that most critics of the painting found it objectionable. “Is this,” they must have asked themselves, “all that remains of Classicism, the prized institutionalized system of artistic training and moral instruction?”

Indeed, if we now look again at the *Apotheosis of Homer*, we notice how much more it resembles a crude pastiche than an ideal paradigm of Classicism. Figures are ranked in rigid bands echoing the horizontal and vertical steps in the foreground and columns in the background; they hold hands but fail to interact or engage the viewer, despite the grotesquely abbreviated *repoussoirs* in the extreme foreground. Can there be any other explanation for the flatness, awkwardness, and stiltedness of the picture than that Ingres was recording—poignantly, reluctantly, perhaps even helplessly—the breakdown in the authority of the Classical tradition in the modern world?

Delécluze himself half understood the problematical nature of the *Apotheosis* when he described its painter’s technique as “submitting less to the laws of linear perspective than to laws of a perspective that one could call *chronological* . . . in giving more relief to the modern figures and gradually weakening his colors as he reaches the semi-fantasy figures of Orpheus and Linus, who are on the furthest plane of the picture.” In the hands of Ingres, the ancient world is one of blindness, shadows, and loss; the great monuments of Greek antiquity are destroyed—the Athena Parthenos, the Colossus, the entire *oeuvre* of Apelles—and there are no comparable modern works to take their place. Indeed, the further you enter the modern world, as the art historian Norman

Bryson has written, elaborating Delécluze, “the more the nobility and generality of countenance evident in such figures as Phidias and Apelles gives way to the ironical peering and sardonic expressions, at their nadir in the busy scribbling and sarcastic ‘smile of reason’ of Voltaire [at the lower right corner].” Bryson’s word for this representation of absence or loss is “desire,” but the passivity of the term seems to me somewhat misleading: I am more persuaded that what is at work is an active, restless, and critical intelligence. Ingres saw and felt (however much he may have lamented) the weakness and vulnerability of the Classicism of his day and could not avoid depicting it. At about the same time, the French architects Etienne-Louis Boullée and Claude-Nicolas Ledoux also recognized and expressed in their buildings and monuments the arbitrariness of the signs of the prevailing language of classicism, producing what their contemporary, the English architect George Dance the Younger, called an “architecture unshackled” (see Chapter 7). Precisely such a knowledge of cultural crisis and change—featured in the art of conservatives such as Ingres as much as in the work of radicals such as Blake, Goya and Ledoux—is the distinguishing trait of the most salient art and design of the nineteenth century. This is the art I am calling *critical*. It is an art that does not merely describe a surface appearance, but exposes the design and form of an historical, social, and ideological edifice—what the early nineteenth-century philosopher Hegel in his *Logic* (1813) called “an objective universal” or a “concrete totality.” (This concept of totality was given greater historical and class specificity in the writings of the twentieth-century philosopher and critic Georg Lukacs.) In this way, the art and design of a Blake, Goya, Ledoux or Ingres at the beginning of the century, or a Van Gogh, Toulouse-Lautrec or Horta at the end, may be seen as generating its own interpretations: it provides its own frames of reference and highlights the salient modes of social and material life by means of which its forms, lines, and colors may be understood. Van Gogh described the awkward meeting of city and country in a series of small paintings of Montmartre made in 1887; at about the same time, Toulouse-Lautrec summarized in a number of paintings and posters the nascent struggle over urban popular culture. His *Ambassadeurs*, *Aristide Bruant* (1892) depicts a proletarian idol in the process of becoming a modern celebrity. Victor Horta in his *Maison du Peuple* conceived and built a headquarters for the Belgian Workers’ party whose forms summarized at once the imperatives of heart and head—will and intelligence—needed to drive any popular movement for social and political justice. Critical art, in short, provides its own theory, and the critical art historian needs only to follow where it leads.

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THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY ORIGINS OF CRITICAL ART HISTORY

In the nineteenth century, scholars and critics for the first time divined and theorized the interconnections between seeing and knowing, and between vision and society. Marx, Ruskin, Baudelaire, Morris, Mallarmé and a number of other authors and critics, explored the links between art, perception, and history. The most complete and widely influential discussion of the question is found in the writings of Marx. In his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* of 1844 he wrote that the transformation of the alien, objective world into a subjective world of consoling “human reality” depends upon the state of development of the human senses:

Just as music alone awakens in people the sense of music, and just as the most beautiful music has no sense for the unmusical ear . . . for this reason the senses of the social person are other than those of the non-social person. Only through the objectively unfolded richness of people’s essential being is the richness of subjective human sensibility (a musical ear, an eye for beauty of form . . .) either cultivated or brought into being. For not only the five senses but also the so-called mental senses—the practical senses (will, love, etc.)—in a word, *human* sense—the

humanness of the senses—come to be by virtue of *humanized* nature. The *forming* of the five senses is a labor of the entire history of the world down to the present.

Marx’s point is that while humans by virtue of their nature as humans have senses and perceptions, these are rude and unformed in the absence of their specific development and cultivation, which only occurs historically and in community with their fellows. Moreover, all the senses are differently developed according to the nature of the particular society in which the person lives: a capitalist society in which the sense of *having* dominates is clearly different in its sensual or perceptual capacities from a forager, horticultural, feudal or communist society which does not subscribe to the same concept of private property. And finally, Marx stands his argument about the impact of society upon the human senses on its feet by arguing that the cultivation of the senses—whether in the form of art, music or literature—in its turn plays a significant role in the historical unfolding of a society. Giving material form to our sensual instincts or capacities, both theoretically and practically, “is required,” he writes, “to make people’s *sense human*, as well as to create the *human sense* corresponding to the entire wealth of human and natural substance.”

A similar formulation of the link between history and material culture—or between art and society—was independently achieved less than a decade after Marx by the moral philosopher and esthetician John Ruskin. An important figure in the revival of architecture and the arts in mid-century Britain and in its medieval revivalism, Ruskin wrote in his essay “On the Nature of Gothic and the Function of the Workman therein” (1853), “The art of any country is the exponent of its social and political virtues. The art or general productive and formative energy of any country, is an exact exponent of its ethical life. You can have a noble art only from noble persons, associated under laws fitted to their time and circumstances.” In *Saint Mark’s Rest* (1884), he further observed that critics and spectators of works of art needed to understand and synthesize all the characteristic, expressive forms of a given epoch. He wrote that: “Great nations write their autobiographies in three manuscripts—the book of their deeds, the book of their words, and the book of their art. Not one of these books can be understood unless we read the two others; but of the three, the only quite trustworthy one is the last. . . . Art is always instinctive . . . [and we can understand it] at a glance (when we have learned to read).”

Ruskin’s art history and criticism is accordingly finely tuned to the subtlest formal and historical nuances of the works of architecture, painting or sculpture that fall beneath his gaze. His analysis of the painter J. M. W. Turner’s images of the sea, for example, proceeds from a consideration of fragmented, vaporous or liquid paint surfaces, to a discussion of geological, meteorological, and moral truths. His examination of *The Fighting Temeraire* (1839) and *Rain, Steam, and Speed—The Great Western Railway* (1844) highlights the “cold deadly shadows” of the one, and the dynamic of historical “progress and decline” in the other. The basis of these combined esthetic and ethical opinions is Ruskin’s appreciation of art as a form of labor; like Marx, he believed that creative and productive work is one of the defining activities of humans, and that to deny the one is to degrade the other. Ruskin’s insight was later summarized in a sentence by his student, the author, designer, and political activist William Morris: “Yet the essence of what Ruskin then taught us was simple enough, like all great discoveries. It was really nothing more recondite than this, that the art of any epoch must of necessity be the expression of its social life, and that the social life of the Middle Ages allowed the workman freedom of individual expression, which on the other hand our social life forbids him.”

At about the same time that Marx, a German, was composing his notebooks addressing the historical character of the senses, and the Englishman Ruskin was



0.4 JOSEPH MALLORD WILLIAM TURNER
Rain, Steam, and Speed—The Great Western Railway, 1844. Detail of Plate 5.20

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publishing his radical view that every age had its own unique vision and art which corresponded to its peculiar ethical and social life, a French poet and journalist was suggesting many of the same things. It was Charles Baudelaire who provocatively argued that artists and writers be resolutely of their own time; it was also he who established the model of the critic who is profoundly and passionately engaged with his subject and his epoch. Jettisoning any notion of Classical “archetypes,” as found for example in Delécluze, and setting the tone for future critical encomiums to modernity, he wrote at the conclusion of his review of the 1845 Paris Salon exhibition: “The true painter we’re looking for will be the one who can snatch from the life of today its epic quality, and make us feel how great and poetic we are in our cravats and our patent-leather boots. Next year let’s hope that the true seekers may grant us the extraordinary delight of celebrating the advent of the *new!*”

With this essay, and others that followed, Baudelaire, as well as later nineteenth-century critical thinkers and writers such as Morris and Stéphane Mallarmé, discovered that vision itself, as well as the artistic forms that are its sensual embodiment, is not given for all time—as the arch Classicists believed—but is contingent upon a host of changing historical and ideological factors. The “ideological” nature of seeing has a very contemporary sound to it, but in fact this concept too is a product of nineteenth-century thought, as the critic Raymond Williams and others have argued. By “ideology” is meant here the characteristic bodies of knowledge, belief, imagery, and expression that are created by a particular social class at a given moment in history. Ideologies arise largely unbeknownst to their subjects as a set of workaday assumptions or commonsense notions about the world. They provide their possessors with a coherent image of their lived relation to social reality, and thus may be an effective (because surreptitious) instrument for the domination of one class or group by another. Ideologies both follow from economic and political power, and are a tool for achieving that control. “The ideas of the ruling class,” wrote Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (the first to theorize ideology), “are in every epoch the ruling ideas.” The mid-twentieth-century political theorist Louis Althusser offered a brief but compelling example of one of the ideologies that arose at the dawn of the nineteenth century but which is still vital to class stability today:

[According to] the ideology of *freedom*, the bourgeoisie lives in a direct fashion its relation to its conditions of existence: that is to say, it comprehends its real relation (to the laws of a liberal capitalist economy), but *incorporates* it into an imaginary relation (the idea that all people are free, including “free” workers).

By this example of the way in which the ideology of freedom masks the severely circumscribed liberties of workers in a liberal capitalist economy, it can be seen that ideology *per se* is powerful precisely because it is both an imaginary representation of social and material relations and an actual lived relation to reality. Ideologies are thus like mimetic works of art in their dualism of illusory and real; they represent reality in a conventional and an historically contingent fashion. Modern art and scholarship are critical precisely to the degree that they interrogate or expose the ideological circumstances of dominant forces of political and economic modernization and consequent cultural modernity.

Taking their cue from contemporary artists and critics themselves, the authors of this book intend to consider nineteenth-century art critically—that is, to travel freely between the formal surface and the social-historical depth of works of art, architecture and design, and pay considerable attention to the space in-between. As a result, chapters include longer and more detailed examinations of individual artworks and careers

than is usually the case in books that survey nineteenth-century art. Without that close attention, the actual critical purchase of works of art on the social and material relations of their moment would be invisible. Artists, like everyone else, are human agents—they make their own history, though not under circumstances of their own choosing, in isolation from their fellows, nor apart from the ultimately controlling authority of nature. The devotion of whole chapters to Goya, Van Gogh, Seurat, Toulouse-Lautrec, and Cézanne, and large blocks of text to David, Courbet, Cassatt, Eakins and William Morris, is thus intended both to highlight the historical constraints these artists faced, and to expose the surprising extent of their artistic and ideological self-emancipation. Their critical purchase on modernity is exceptional and demands close attention.

The combined social-historical and monographic perspective taken in this book is found in many scholarly books devoted to individual artists and movements, but it has generally not been used in surveys of nineteenth-century art. The authors of most earlier survey texts, beginning with Julius Meier-Graefe (1904), Richard Muther (1907) and Léonce Bénédite (1910), and extending to Robert Rosenblum/H. W. Janson (1984) and Lorenz Eitner (1988), were empiricists in the sense that they based their research methods upon the model of investigations in the natural sciences. They proceeded by induction, collecting art historical data—artists’ names and biographies, anecdotes, titles of artworks, genres and subjects, key dates, stylistic developments, and the documented responses of patrons, critics, and the public—and then assembled them into “long chains of deductive reasoning,” in the words of empiricism’s parent, Descartes, in the confidence that “there can be nothing so remote that we cannot reach it, nor so recondite that we cannot reach it, nor so recondite that we cannot discover it.” Fritz Novotny’s idiosyncratic volume for the Pelican History of Art (1960) generally conforms to this model. Although he frames his chronological survey (1780–1880) with references to the “spiritualization” of art in the hands of Immanuel Kant and Cézanne (in this he recalls Meier-Graefe), he nevertheless speaks of his own approach in purely scientific terms. For Novotny, scholarly (scientific) method and subject matter are perfectly merged, since he sees the nineteenth century as “defined [by] the study of the external appearance of nature. [It is] the century of Naturalism.” John Rewald’s *History of Impressionism* (1946; 4th revised edition, 1973)—though an indispensable survey of the events and personalities that belong to that movement—is similarly hampered by absence of consideration for the larger social and material forces that give meaning to the facts. Thus, in his introduction, Rewald approvingly cites the words of the nineteenth-century French political historian Fustel de Coulanges: “History is not an art, it is pure science. . . . Like all science, it consists in stating the facts, in analyzing them, in drawing them together and in bringing out their connections. The historian’s only skill should consist in deducing from the documents all that is in them and in adding nothing they do not contain.”

Naive empiricism, however, can only provide, in the words of the twentieth-century philosopher Max Horkheimer, “a sum-total of facts [which] is there and must be accepted,” instead of the conscious and unconscious “activities of society as a whole.” For the critical art historian interested in holism, a scientific approach functions as a kind of sieve which holds back from view the large social, economic, and political forces shaping and defining art production, while permitting, and obsessing about, only the formal, biographical, and patronage factors to pass before the scholarly gaze. Some recent surveys of nineteenth-century and modern art, to be sure, have taken a broader and more synthetic approach to their subjects.

In the introduction to Robert Rosenblum and H. W. Janson’s *Nineteenth-Century Art* (1984; English edition *Art of the Nineteenth Century*), Rosenblum rejects “the purist tyranny of abstract and absolutist systems,” insisting that “art historians should

be as flexible, various, and comprehensive as possible in their approaches, and be willing to consider anything from the history of technology to the abiding mysteries of genius and psychology as potentially illuminating their ever more vast subject.” True to their words, Rosenblum and Janson are more inclusive than their predecessors in their near encyclopedic attention to diverse artists outside the established canon and in their wide-ranging discussions of the many sources and documents of art history. Among the relevant themes for study cited in his introduction, Rosenblum lists the Bible, opera, ballet, tuberculosis, syphilis, prostitution, and photography. Yet, however open-minded these authors are, their overall goal and achievement is similar to that of survey authors that came before: it is to construct a more or less unified art historical mechanism that functions noiselessly and without friction, and in which modern contradiction and superfluity—as well as totality—is as nearly as possible eliminated.

Rosenblum and Janson’s signal achievement—notable as well in Petra ten-Doesschate Chu’s *Nineteen-Century European Art* (2003)—was to have cogently discussed a considerable amount of Salon and academic art in addition to now-canonized modern, and to have extended their purview well beyond France. They generally abstained, however, from making critical judgments, or from trying to identify the links between artworks and their ambient social or political contexts or networks. In his *Modern Art, 1851–1929: Capitalism and Representation* (1999), Richard R. Brettell is far more responsive to the insights of recent scholars and critics from outside art history. Eschewing biography and chronology and de-emphasizing the “movement-based history of modern art,” Brettell offers a challenging collage of art historical themes, methods, contexts, and forms. His book takes seriously the Marxian aphorism, cited earlier, about the volatility of formerly solid traditions and institutions, and interrogates a very large number and range of works created from between 1851 (the year of the Crystal Palace Exhibition in London) and 1929 (the year of the public opening of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City and the stock market crash.) Unlike the art historian T. J. Clark, whose elegiac *Farewell to an Idea—Episodes in the History of Modernism* (1999) interrogates just a handful of paradigmatic works across nearly two centuries, Brettell recognizes that socio-economic modernization, cultural modernity, and modern art occurred in many different places and took many, varied forms.

In his ambitious and highly achieved series of books devoted to the *Social History of Modern Art* (1988–), Albert Boime has sought to include “the ‘Salieris’ [as opposed to the Mozarts] of the art world, the so-called mediocrities who have been ranked according to what only can be considered an arbitrary and even capricious standard.” The statement, however, purports to a breadth that cannot possibly be achieved, even by so capacious and adroit a scholar as Boime: if the entirety of an epoch’s cultural production is equally worthy of study, how can the project ever have boundaries? How can the writer avoid the historicist nightmare of simply re-presenting the entirety of the historical record—unchanged, undistilled, and endless? In addition, Boime would abjure the responsibility to which the art historian, of all scholars, must attend: the discrimination of major from minor, primary from secondary, instrumental from incidental, and critical from accommodating.

But by this relative indifference to formal quality, the social historian of art is guilty of throwing out the baby with the bathwater. By dismissing judgments of artistic and formal significance as merely “arbitrary” and “capricious,” Boime is reverting to the empiricist (or neopositivist) position of dichotomizing content (seen as primary) from form (secondary). Boime himself undercuts this view in his introduction to the first volume of *A Social History of Modern Art* when he describes visual art as “essentially a language of signs that transmits ideas.” Since all languages are social constructions, the formal language of art too must be imbued with social content. Far from merely reproducing pre-existing ideas, then, artistic form is an essential determinant of just



0.5 VINCENT VAN GOGH *Portrait of a Peasant (Patience Escalier)*, 1888. Oil on canvas, 25³/₈ × 21¹/₂ (64.5 × 54.6)

what is expressed, and thereby plays a formative material role in the evolution of society and history. No mere obedient servant (even less, passive mirror) of ideology, artworks are one instrument with which humanity makes and remakes itself. In this way, formally innovative works of visual art may in fact be judged more significant than conservative ones because they played a greater role in bringing about (or, at least, compellingly addressing) historical change.

To many late nineteenth-century spectators in Paris, London, Berlin, Brussels, Chicago, and elsewhere, the innovative, modern art, architecture and design examined in this book was in fact an affront to dominant ideas and institutions. It was seen as a challenge to ruling ideas about hierarchy and value, and as the forward, cultural wedge of insurgent classes and communities. Modern art and design—which was, to be sure, only a subset of all the art created during a century of modernization—was often exhibited at popular venues: rented halls, pavilions, tents, expositions, artists’ studios, bars, restaurants, and circuses. It was promoted by an intimate community of artists, designers, critics, and patrons, and seemed to represent at once longings for a past age when manufacture was artisanal not industrial, and dreams of a future time when craft labor would be voluntary, not forced by motives of need or profit. Modern painters, sculptors and designer, in addition, sought to establish closer connections between their works and the new, mass public than was possible at official venues, and to stave off the challenge posed by the new reproductive media that seemed to foreclose imagination and invention. These modern artists accepted as a matter of course what artists at the beginning of the century had struggled to achieve—freedom of thought and action—and tried to make their works an instrument for critical reflection and sometimes even for social change. This last especially proved chimerical, but the ambition—and the names Courbet, Van Gogh, Seurat, Morris and Toulouse-Lautrec are apposite here—reveals one more sense in which much nineteenth-century art may be called critical: to reckon with totality as did Goya and Ingres is one definition of critical; to attempt to change the world through art, as did Courbet and Van Gogh with depictions of proletarian labor and peasants, is another.

This survey does not, however, focus only on modernist works. It includes for example, discussions of late Federal Period and antebellum painting and sculpture in the United States, Georgian and early Victorian English landscape etchings and engravings, Native American ledger art, and photography. In all cases, however, the art and material culture under review is seen to engage many of the same contentious political and artistic questions concerning modernization that arose in the first modern century but that still reverberate in our own; these issues include the value of local versus national, and popular versus elite cultures, industrialization versus environmental preservation, the question of the existence of a “canon” of great authors and artists, and concerns with the artistic representation of sexuality, social class, gender, and race. Nineteenth-century artists, like artists today, also confronted the emergence of new techniques for the mass-reproduction and distribution of their works, and the vexing question of the politics of public exhibition and museum display. In addition, artists were engaged with the forms and imagery of mass and non-European culture—for example, with cartoons and caricatures, broadsides and posters, magazine illustration and advertisements, and with Native American, Oceanic and African art forms.

An insistence on the commonalities between art issues past and present may appear overstated, but the constellations are compelling. Indeed, we believe that if our texts stimulate consideration of contemporary issues concerning power, modernization, and the representation of class, race, and gender, they will have in fact succeeded in engaging more fully a nineteenth-century art in which there emerged a new historical and critical understanding of society and culture which we share today.