



the HISTORY of ART

A. N. HODGE



PAINTING FROM GIOTTO TO THE PRESENT DAY

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INTRODUCTION

This book was designed to map out a popular history of painting in the western world, from medieval times to the present day. Rather than focusing on the biographical details of individuals and their specific contributions, I have looked in detail at where artists were located in time, with which movements they were associated and who or what inspired them to work in the way that they did.

It is no straightforward task to present painting as a chronological history of styles and movements. The history of painting is not a neat, tidy affair. Labels are inconsistent and often overlap. Sometimes it is difficult to sort out exactly who belongs where and whether the fact that they belonged to a particular grouping at one point in their career was relevant to their later, and perhaps more mature, work. In some cases painters have been brought together here under one umbrella, not necessarily because they worked together or even had any contact, but because their work shares common themes and ideas. Rather than airbrushing out all the

imperfections, I hope that my idiosyncratic, narrative approach gives you a greater understanding of why, say, Vermeer worked in a particular style, as well as where he stands in the greater scheme of things.

Inevitably a book of this kind demands that choices be made; not every painter worthy of inclusion can be represented. The selection process is, of course, subjective and guided by personal taste. On that basis it may be possible to detect a bias towards living artists, as well as a celebration of the many women artists who are still excluded from most considerations of the 'Old Masters'.

I have tended not to rely upon any particular definition of what constitutes a painting. Hence, in this survey, I have considered painting in its widest sense, from the wooden tempera panels of the medieval painters to the diverse media applied to the canvases of contemporary practitioners.

Painting is an exciting medium and I hope this book demonstrates that it always has been. Although at times

painting has been knocked off course by photography, video, installation, sculpture and performance, in the end artists return to paint because in no other medium is it possible to experience the thrill of applying a brush to the surface or of squeezing paint from the tube as well as the visceral, intuitive process of creating an image from raw materials.

Currently, it seems that painting is as popular as ever, and that old hierarchical distinctions are largely meaningless. Without wanting to suggest that all contemporary painting is of a quality to compete with the very best of the traditional painters, there seems to be a visual richness about much recent work that relates to the past, while projecting firmly into the future.

Through knowledge of public collections I have tried to include as many images of accessible works as possible. Take time to go and visit the originals; there is simply no substitute for standing in front of a painting and really looking. There is no experience that can match the moment when you feel that a painting has

really spoken to you: the moment which critic Jeanette Winterson so memorably described in her book, *Art Objects, Essays on Ecstasy and Effrontery* (Jonathan Cape, 1995), as when 'my heart flooded away'.

I hope that this book will appeal as a reference work to students, the general reader and artists looking to refresh their knowledge of the story of western art. The text here is really only the start and I hope that the book will inspire you to make your own links with the work of some of the artists presented. Reading about painting means starting to think seriously about painting – after a while you become more confident in your opinions and begin to see, for example, the connections between the paintings of Manet and Goya, or the equivalence between the emotional weight of a Rothko and a Caravaggio. The challenge for *The History of Art* has been to guide you to make these associations, as well as to inspire and inform.

A. N. Hodge, London 2007

THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE

c 1250 – 1550

In the late medieval period, from about AD 1,000, painting mainly took place in the monasteries. Here, monks would use gold leaf and a range of stylized imagery to illuminate manuscripts, while occasionally the walls would be decorated with some simple scene from the Bible. Most, if not all, of the imagery that was produced during this time was religious. There were no true portraits until the late Middle Ages, no real landscapes either and very little attempt to draw from life. Consequently, there were no painters of any real significance. There were sculptors in the 13th century in the cathedral cities of Strasbourg and Naumburg whose knowledge of the human body led them to make lifelike and convincing statues, but this was not true of painting. Painting was flat and lifeless.

All this changed with the arrival of Giotto in Florence. Not only did Giotto's work signal a complete break with tradition, but it had a far-reaching influence on subsequent generations of Florentine painters and hence on western art. Giotto created a window on the world the like of which had never been seen before. His

figures were no longer stiff, cardboard cut-outs but had solidity and depth on both a physical and emotional level. With his gift for portraying a range of human emotions, Giotto was able to convey religious stories that were convincing, compelling and deeply compassionate. For the first time, the viewer could empathize with key characters in the narrative and the impact that this radical approach had on painting cannot be overstated.

Renaissance means 'rebirth' or 'revival' and central to its development in Italy was the rediscovery of classical antiquity by the cultural elite. By the time Giotto was painting the walls of small churches in Padua and Assisi in northern Italy at the beginning of the 14th century, the world around him was beginning to change. Trade routes into northern Italy had opened up new markets and prompted new networks of exchange both in terms of goods and ideas. With the new wealth and the rise of the merchant class, old certainties like the authority of the church were brought into question. Wealthy patrons emerged as the humanistic revival of the classical influence in arts and architecture began to gather pace.



1254
Birth of Marco Polo, explorer, who was to bring pasta to Italy from China

1297
Magna Carta, confirmed by Edward I – entered English statute rolls as law

1347
Bubonic plague in Europe; originated in India, 1332. 75 million deaths

1430
Joan of Arc captured, taken to England. Later she was publicly burned in Rouen, France

1454
Italy divided into five major regions: Venice, Milan, Florence, the Papal States and Naples