

An interview with Ernst H. Gombrich

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ES: Would you be interested in commenting on your opinions on your book *The Sense of Order* and any reactions you might have had that you consider interesting?

EG: You know I worked on this book for more than ten years, perhaps rather twelve years, and my opinions haven't changed much since it was published. I do think it is a long book and a difficult book. I don't envy anybody who has to review it, but I don't think that many of those who reviewed it so far (summer 1979) have actually read it very carefully, or have taken in what I intended to convey. There is always an element of one's own thought in this matter. It is an ambitious and difficult book and it can't just be tasted and sampled. It has to be read. I am sorry for them, but they needn't have accepted it for review. I don't want to give you the impression that I am terribly bitter about the response. There have been excellent and tremendously kind and immensely generous reviews of that book which really flattered me more than I deserved. But others I found disappointing, because I think they haven't taken in what I wanted to say. In one case, that of Zerner in *The New York Review of Books*,^[2] I actually have written a reply which should soon come out.^[3] I don't think that there is very much else I would like to say about it. I am an optimist. I think sooner or later people will cotton on to what I wanted to say. It takes a little time.

I think there is a basic misunderstanding which may have had to do with certain responses, and that is that it was taken by some, by no means all, as a book on aesthetics. It is not a book on aesthetics. It tries to ask even more fundamental questions than traditionally are asked in aesthetics. I do not ask primarily which decoration is beautiful or what makes for a good shape. I ask what has prompted mankind to go in for these regularities, making dots and stripes everywhere and what may be the psychological functions of this, regardless of whether we happen to like this particular piece of embroidery or this particular string course in a building or not. So if you approach the book as a guide to what should be done about ornament, you will inevitably be a little disappointed.

The question is tremendously fundamental and therefore very general, as if someone were to ask in music what is the function of rhythm. Rhythm exists in very poor rock music and also in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. I am talking about rhythm as such, rather than about a particular realization of this element. As you know and as I said in my preface, the book is in that sense very ambitious, perhaps so ambitious that it tries to supplement the book *Art and Illusion* by asking the converse question, as it were, and trying to lay the foundations, or at least questions which may help to lay the foundations, about the whole range of image making. The one is about the imitation of nature; the other is about shapes.

As I said in the preface, I have also written on symbolism and on narrative and with all these beams directed towards this enormous field of image making, I had hoped to make some people think about fundamental questions. That is really what I feel is necessary.

Mind you, I don't think that it is at all necessary for a friend of art, or a student of art, or a lover of art to ask these questions any more than someone who is interested in poetry or in literature need read Chomsky. The two things are something quite different. Fundamental questions of linguistics are not the questions of poetics, and the fundamental questions of what I call image making are not identical with the evaluation of art, least of all in our own or in any particular period.

This is really one of my hobby horses, if you like; that we should supplement the study of Art with a capital "A" by the study of what I call image making, which includes commercial art, even maps,

diagrams, demonstrations, travel posters, whatever you like, which tells us a lot about the function of the image. At present I am writing some lectures on a subject which has always interested me; caricature and cartooning. There you have some of these fundamental questions, and I wouldn't claim for a moment that all cartoons are great works of art. In fact, many are very boring after a time. Would that answer your question?

ES: Yes. Would you care to comment on Rudolf Arnheim's review?

EG: I think that I must say that considering I have criticized his pet theory, Gestalt theory, I found that his review was quite generous. I had expected worse, because after all he is totally wedded to a theory which I consider outmoded, and he is quite right when he says that the questions which I asked are far down below the peaks of art. I never said they weren't. It was perhaps unnecessary to rub it in as if I hadn't noticed that, but he is right.

I have known Arnheim for many, many years, and I have always liked him. We have got on together very well. I think he wrote a rather unfair review of *Art and Illusion*, though I had expected worse, as I said. What he said, if I remember, was that it was like being led through an empty opera house. That is perhaps the difference between him and me. In fact, I had a wonderful experience being led through the empty opera house of Drottningholm which is an 18th century opera house with the old stage props still there, and this is a very fascinating experience. As distinct from going to an opera there which is an even more fascinating experience but a different one, so that is roughly what I would think.

ES: Do you find that criticism typical or do you get that often, that you haven't dealt with all issues in art, of the highest questions in art, therefore your work is...

EG: No, I wouldn't say that I often get it. But many reviewers of course approach any book with the idea of what they would like to know. I must say that I once referred to this situation in a later preface to *Art and Illusion* in which I said that those who made some progress in the knowledge of the metabolism of the heart should not be reproached for not having solved the mystery of life. I was referring to the work of a dear friend of mine who has worked for his life time on the metabolism of the heart, and he said, "But of course, I want to solve the mystery of life." So there it is. It was a kind of private joke, you see.

ES: In terms of development of the idea of *The Sense of Order* would you like to comment on your interest on that idea and its formulation?

EG: Well, I can talk a little about it. As you know, I have for many years been very close to the philosopher Karl Popper. We are very great friends and have been since the days of our youth. When he is in England, we telephone practically every other day or so. Of course, I read what he writes, and he reads what I write. I was struck by the idea that there is a demand for regularities, inborn expectation of regularity. It was his idea and I quoted him in the motto of my introduction, so that I wouldn't claim any particular originality for this idea.

It is of course in a way a development out of Kant, as you would recognize, the idea of some sort of given framework without which no experience is possible is very much a philosophical idea. What distinguishes this idea from that of the Gestalt people is, they believe it is a particular quality of the visual cortex which creates this configuration, but I do believe that it extends beyond vision, to hearing and other sense modalities. This is a criticism of Gestalt theory which was long ago made by Revesz who wrote on tactile sensations, and challenged the Gestalt people to say something about it, but they never did.

So not only is it very much an extension of that; my approach like that of Popper is an evolutionary approach; that is to say, I think that some qualities which organisms have and need for their survival can be traced back very far down the evolutionary scale to...I don't know...amoebae or worms. That's what Arnheim doesn't like, because for him this is, of course, an investigation of human perception. I believe that these things do go down very far, and that without it you could never explain how a squirrel can jump from branch to branch. That tells the difference in our

views. Not that the Gestalt people are not interested in animal experiments. I knew Wolfgang Kohler and talked to him and admired him tremendously. Of course he was interested. He did all this work on the apes, as you know. Even so, the perspective is a different one, from an investigation of vision alone or mainly of vision to a generalization which I attempted.

ES: Are there people who are following through on some of the ideas that you put forth in the books? Are there people whose work you would recommend?

EG: Well, of course I have friends and students who are interested and occasionally follow them up but I would not say that I have some disciples who now put these things through tests, no. I think one meets with reflections and echoes of one's work, very gratifying, in many books. Strangely enough, *Art and Illusion* may have had more effect on students of literature than on historians of art. Altogether I think that the people who read me the least are historians of art. I am not quite serious, but I think that students of more general subjects have responded with more interest. You see, historians of art, as you know, are often centered on connoisseurship. They want to know whether this print is or isn't by Rembrandt or is it the second state or the third state. To this I have no answer in this particular book, so they don't really know what to do with it. Still, for instance, to return to *Art and Illusion*, students of Constable have been interested in my remarks on Constable and I think it has influenced them up to a point. There have also been students of Dutch landscape painting and so on; I mean I wouldn't say that there was no reflection.

ES: How about the psychological aspects, the psychology of art; have the people...

EG: I don't know. I haven't read very much which has been written in this field. I couldn't say. I am not quite sure that there is such a thing. I apologize if I put it in this way, but I am not so sure there is a psychology of art, *tout court*, you see, so I don't quite know whether this would have had any influence. Neither is aesthetics taught in this country. You probably know that there is no aesthetics as a subject in British universities.

ES: No, I didn't know that.

EG: No. it doesn't exist. It may come up in a philosophy course, but there is no chair for aesthetics or anything of that kind. There is a lot in Italy, and actually I find there is a great deal of response to my ideas in Italy.

ES: Among historians?

EG: No, among people interested in semiotics and things of that kind. They all write to me.

ES: In terms of potential of experimental work, what do you think? Does it have a contribution to make on the problems that you bring up or...

EG: It is a little remote, perhaps. I am sure that some things could be subject to experiment, but I am not quite sure how one would set about. I have actually criticized, as you know, the experiment made in the evaluation of shapes, because I think that one tends so easily to ask leading questions in this, but I am sure that certain questions of hearing and seeing... One very good friendly reviewer rightly remarked that I don't deal with doodling. He is quite right, and that has of course its whole exercise of rhythmical good shapes which one could certainly investigate.

ES: On the idea of the leading questions, you talk about Croce's dismissal of experimental psychology: the love letters versus the business letter. You mentioned Osgood's work on aesthetics response. You said they are all based on using leading questions.

EG: Not all, but often, yes.

ES: And that they ask people to consider the potential of design; at the same time, you warn against brainwashing.

EG: Yes.

ES: And you mention art educators' complaints that so few people attend to design. Now you say we don't understand the nature of metaphor or this process completely.

EG: Yes

ES: What do you see as an appropriate course of action for art educators? Would you be open to seeing people encourage people to formulate these metaphors, or do you feel...

EG: Certainly, I think that if I were an art educator I would let them read Osgood, for instance, *The Measurement of Meaning*, and play with it. Certainly I think it is immensely interesting. I think that it is a very interesting book, though I am not sure whether, in postulating exactly three dimensions along which he wants to plot his semantic space, this wasn't a sort of love of tidiness that it should be a "space", you know. Even so it is an immensely interesting book.

ES: And you wouldn't be afraid that it would lead to the suicide of criticism as you mentioned in "Meditations on a Hobby Horse"? You seemed to be afraid of the overindulgence in one end of the process. You wouldn't be afraid of that?

EG: It all depends on what you want to do. I think art criticism can no longer commit suicide because it no longer exists.

ES: What do you mean by that?

EG: Well, I mean, mind you I must say again I don't read so many of these things, but when I do, I have the feeling that people who write newspaper criticism of gallery shows and things of that kind see -themselves rather as commentators than as critics. It is no longer considered right, proper, or even ethical to say, "This is rubbish." They want to explain. They are interpreters of the signs of the times. You mustn't say that "this is no good" or "I think that this is just silly" or whatever, because then they will be told, as people have been told who criticize the notorious bricks in the Tate Gallery, that Constable too wasn't recognized in his time which is (a) a total untruth and (b) irrelevant. So I think that we have very few people who have the courage of honest criticism. They have been steamrolled by what Popper calls "historicism", the cult of progress, the fear that they might find themselves on the wrong end of this, that they might be considered philistine, reactionary, that history will condemn them, and so on. I think if they don't have the courage to face the risk that history may condemn them, they shouldn't be critics.

ES: In *The Sense of Order and Art and Illusion* you stress the idea of the artist's working from existing patterns and modifying them in a way, such as Beethoven and his music, etc. You stress your opposition to the romantic idea that the artist is divine and transforms chaos into order through creativity. You have gone to lengths in *Art and Illusion* to show how artists' work is related to previous works. Now, do you think that people with equivalent knowledge of art, if you can have such a thing, differ in their ability to modify and transform the given?

EG: Well, of course! They are tremendously different.

ES: Are you willing to speculate on the basis of the differences between the people?

EG: Well, gift, isn't it? Talent. Of course people differ tremendously. I have never denied that there are great artists with incredible originality and routine artists who have no originality. - So what makes for such originality I don't know. Among other things, a very developed feeling for nuance. What I miss in so much modern criticism is this stress on calibration, on the finesse. You know the Hans Christian Andersen story about the princess and the pea? I think any great artist suffers if the stroke is just a *little* too strong or too weak. He has this immense feeling for every shade, which makes for the difference. My life was spent among musicians. My wife is a musician, my mother was a musician. I know, therefore, a little about this feeling for nuance, because if you perform a Beethoven sonata or whatever it is, the difference between various performances is, in a way, very small, but it is all important. Therefore, I think that it is really this sensitivity to nuance which is one of the conditions of the great artist. It isn't the only condition but it is one. We kill this feeling unfortunately with bad reproductions which we show our students. What do we in fact show them! It is shocking.

ES: You talk about conditioning to style, that we cannot separate the problems of perception of form from that of the process of conditioning that comes from repeated exposures to certain style,

citing Milizia's confusion over Gothic style and his ease with seeing classical decoration. About this conditioning process: I know it must not be strictly physical; I wonder about...

EG: Well, yes. I would say that there is an element which *is* something almost parallel to what ethologists call imprinting, only almost. What I mean is that in formative years we learn our categories and we stick to them to such an extent that, as you notice from the way I speak, you can never learn another accent of language once you have learned your own language. Therefore one is totally conditioned to the expectations and categories in which one was brought up. I do think that the famous complaint that old people no longer understand new art, etc., is totally justified. They don't, because they have developed their own system up to a certain degree of refinement and find it, perhaps, impossible to readjust to a completely different language. I don't think that is something culpable, because art is there to be enjoyed. But maybe this is an enjoyment which one will have to miss after a certain age. It's quite likely. The more, of course, someone is steeped in a tradition, the harder it may be for him to learn a new idiom. He may understand it intellectually, but that's not the same thing as responding to it. Style conditions us very, very much. It conditions us even in the way in which we judge deviations from a particular thing. Fashion makes this very clear, doesn't it?

ES: You talk about the people's ability to acquire a greater range of expectations. Is that ability related to this?

EG: Yes, it would be related to this. Certainly those of us who, let us say, have studied the history of art and have seen Chinese art and Indian art. I have just looked at a book which I happen to possess of the year 1813 in which is the first historical sketch of the history of caricature, which in the first chapter treats both primitive art, that is to say, Hawaiian feather heads and things of that kind, and medieval drawings as grotesque, as comical. The author J.P. Malcolm doesn't think that these were intentionally grotesque, but he found it laughable. He was so unadjusted to this kind of style that he used it as an example of caricature.

ES: I am wondering about, from an educator's point of view, acquiring a greater range of expectations, like the role other people might play in helping people acquiring a greater range. Do you think there is a role there in teaching or in interaction with people, friends, etc.?

EG: Of course, there is. Oh, I have no doubt. After all, both for the original impact of art and for acquiring greater range, there is nothing like the awareness that other people enjoy something and that they genuinely enjoy it, and that they want to communicate this enjoyment. It's immensely important, I think.

ES: I was also going to ask you about how you think this ability, the power of suggestion you talk about, the unconscious calculations, underline our anticipations in perception of phantom percepts and the artist's power of suggestion and his ability to mobilize the beholder's share. This is a quote, I think: "Maybe they find it necessary to respond in this way to a rapid sketch or to an Impressionist picture. This is also an acquired skill, but a skill. Skill comes about and in what way from inborn capacity." I was interested in the idea of skill. How skill comes about and in what way from inborn capacity. What do you think of that? And is it through experience? Can it be taught? What might be the role of other people?

EG: Surely it can be taught, though probably not by verbal percepts, but by seeing a lot. That seems to me quite clear. What I mean by the inborn capacity is simply that there is a good deal of evidence now that even animals respond to images. It didn't use to be believed, but I am impressed by the book of John M. Kennedy who is actually a Canadian, in Toronto: *A Psychology of Picture Perception*. I think that the evidence is accumulating of responses by animals to configurations. Today, you could perhaps see what happens if you gradually leave out more and more and see how far they would still respond if you conditioned them; I don't know. It's not terribly important. Once you realize that this is so, you don't really have to go much further. So there is an inborn capacity

to respond to images. Everybody has always known it, as far as anglers have always used flies or baits and made the fish bite.

ES: Two other ideas, the idea of the break spotter. Given a knowledge of a style of art, I am wondering if the incongruity that a new form might present, would be a variation that would arouse the viewer or attract the eyes in terms of...

EG: Yes, but it needn't always be pleasing, but of course it would attract the eye.

ES: The idea of "chunks" in perception of structures...

EG: Yes, I have ideas about chunks in perception. Look at this oriental rug here. These particular chunks are called motifs; they are traditional ones. Some of these motifs and other decorations you find here, we take in with great ease because we are used to them.

We see flowers and we see stars and we see other things, because they are familiar like words in a text. Words are, of course, chunks in that sense. In music such things as chords or scales are chunks which are easily learned.

ES: And then in visual material you would think there could be organized hierarchies of chunks.

EG: Yes, surely.

ES: So that we could predict the kinds of differentiations that would be made, or not?

EG: "Predict" is always...well...one can try. Yes, maybe.

ES: But that it really wouldn't be that consistent from person to person, is what you're thinking?

EG: Maybe; not necessarily though. There may be such things. After all, one of the great things of the last few decades is how many people of other cultures have learned Western music; particularly Japan, of course, but others too, have learned to admire this and to enjoy it. So there must be some structural affinities which make this possible. And to play it, there are some excellent Japanese virtuosos, Korean virtuosos and others.

ES: But given a realm such as a rug, people might have different hierarchies.

EG: Yes, definitely.

ES: They might be organized in similar fashions but against different qualities.

EG: Yes, that's right.

ES: You say art educators sometimes try to make us feel guilty for our eyes and to pay attention to the riches which artists spread before us. You have stressed how the seeing is always selective.

What course do you consider open or advisable to the art educators? How does attention to these riches develop? Can it be facilitated?

EG: I think so; the first thing is that people should not be brainwashed; that is to say they should - I am particularly speaking of children - they should be allowed to enjoy what they like and not be discouraged, by saying "But that isn't art" if a child enjoys the way Terborg paints velvet. The way he paints velvet is in fact admirable. I once talked to a picture restorer who said he would have loved to have watched him doing it, because he had no idea how he did it. You should not say "Ah, yes, but you should look at the balance of the shapes or something." No, you should find a point of entry from which you gradually spread out, and the point of entry for most people is a human interest.

I said that in the introduction to my book, *The Story of Art*, and I still believe it to be true. It must be a human interest, even the facial expression of a kindly person in a Rembrandt; I mean, why not?

Only when you have that human interest can you articulate it; also by attending to all the other things. There should be a kind of core which should gradually spread from there, illuminating the rest, rather than having this discouraging view. Because as I say, you can't see everything at the same time; even if you tried to, you couldn't. There are so many peaks you can process.

I once returned to this question in an address I gave to museum people [4] when I told the story of a nice young lady whom I met at a party in the United States, who was an art educator at the museum. I asked her what she was doing, and she said, well, she was an educationist. So I said,

"What did you do today?" and she said, "I scolded the children because they couldn't remember the sights of the houses on the way to the museum. I responded: I said, "Those who go to hear the B minor Mass by Bach are under no obligation to remember the traffic noises on the way to the concert. These are two different things."

I think that is the fallacy in the idea of perception which I am trying to combat: that it is a general blanket; one must register everything. One just can't, and one should not. I believe that if you get a hearing aid, you find it immensely distracting that you suddenly hear the impact of the fork on the plate and every irrelevant noise. It is not selective; it cannot filter. We must always filter.

ES: It mechanically amplifies every sound.

EG: Exactly.

ES: So you're objecting to the prescribing of a particular perception, really.

EG: I am objecting to two things: one is to the naive ideas of the innocent eye which takes in everything, and secondly to directing attention too exclusively on one thing which happens to interest the art educator.

ES: Right. So you might encourage methods that try to find out what the student might be thinking.

EG: First see, and then go from there, yes.

ES: Are there particular problems or ideas that you would like to see tackled within the theory of psychology of art, although you have said you don't know what it means?

EG: No, perhaps I should explain what I mean when I say I don't know what the psychology of art is. You see, as a historian, I am very much aware of the fact that the term "art" is applied to very different activities in different ages. Whether there is one psychology which links Jackson Pollock with an Egyptian carver, I am not so sure, and that is really my problem.

Again, if I may be a little anecdotal, I can tell you that I attended the annual conference of the American Psychological Society and there was a section on aesthetics. Somebody had interviewed San Francisco Bay artists and traced with tape recorder the various stages of their work and so on. I remember one stage where the man did something and the panel fell into the dust, and it was all covered with dust and he said he liked it better now. Then he stuck in some glass and the glass was splintered in the show, and again he said that it was a good idea and so on. I sat there. I didn't say anything, but in the end when I was asked, I said that this was interesting but they should not think that Michelangelo worked in this way, and there was an element of surprise, you see.

ES: I see, so there is no general or one psychology.

EG: So that's what I mean. But of course it is interesting. It would be lovely to know how Michelangelo worked, but one can have some idea. Certainly there was more self-criticism in Michelangelo and hard work. I once told this story, in the work of a student of Titian. Titian, after he had finished a painting, turned it to the wall and after two months he would turn it around and look at it as if it was its own worst enemy. That's part of the story.

ES: You mentioned you are continuing your work on caricature; with what questions are you dealing or what are you doing with the...

EG: I can tell you very specifically because when I was a young man more than forty years ago, I worked, collaborated with Ernst Kris, the psycho-analyst, on a book of caricature which never quite saw the light of day. That is to say, we jointly published two things, but the war broke out and there were other impediments; the book never came out. I was asked to give the Freud Lectures in Yale, and I said I could only do it if I did it in memory of Ernst Kris and talked about our joint work. This is what I am just now writing; I am writing three lectures on, what do I call it? "Wit in the visual arts' in memory of Ernst Kris", and so talk about portrait caricature, about political satire and about humour in art from that point of view.

So that is an earlier phase of my development; I learned a tremendous lot from Ernst Kris at the time. That, if you like, is psychology of art, certainly. I am just now interested in the real effects of a cartoon. I am not satisfied with much of what's *been* written about it. So it is things of that

kind which I like to find out about. I mean there is the political cartoon; I think that the emphasis has been too much on propaganda. I don't think anybody has ever been converted by a cartoon.

ES: Our own attitudes are reinforced.

EG: We like to be flattered.

ES: Well, I think that this clarifies some of the questions, especially about your attitudes toward teaching and toward other people's role in helping people's attitudes in art. Is there anything else you would like to comment on?

EG: I don't know what you teach, but I think the real problem in teaching art now is really, how should I say it, its permissiveness, isn't it? It has become very, very difficult to know what an art teacher is teaching at all, and art teachers don't seem to know what they are teaching. I have often asked them. You may know what you are teaching; I don't know; I don't want to say that you don't, but I had some very significant experiences of this kind. I like to be concrete, you know, and I went to a famous art school which I better not identify. I was sitting with an art teacher there, and I said, "What are you teaching?" He sort of hunted for words, and I said, "What did you do this morning?" He said, "Well, I went to a student and I asked him how his work is and he said 'Oh, awful', and I said, 'Why is it awful?' and he said, 'I don't really want to talk about it', and so we talked about other things."

However, I don't envy art teachers; it is very hard to know what they should teach. I know the teaching of anatomy is out. The teaching of perspective is out. These basic courses, these sort of Bauhaus-derived things, well, they remain on a rather trivial level to my mind. So what actually is going on except for a little psycho-therapy which is maybe very valuable to the individual. I find it very hard to know. I have no prescription to offer. I don't want to say that everybody should now again learn perspective and anatomy, though I do think that some art students want to learn it.

ES: Yes, recently there seem to be more who do.

EG: EG: I know that in one university where I was, the students petitioned the school that where I was, the students petitioned the school that there should be a course in anatomy. The school didn't want to put it on, probably because there was nobody who could teach it, you see. It's gone. The knowledge has largely been dissipated, but I wouldn't want to be dogmatic and say that if they do it they will all paint wonderful paintings. It seems to me very unlikely.

The problem is really much more what we need paintings for, nowadays. And to that, the answer is not so easily given. But you can teach anything if you have an aim. You can teach Chinese or Japanese or whatever method of painting, but I don't think you can, again, teach "art" as such. I once read an article which I think summed it all up. It is precisely the opposite of what I believe, but it was clearly put. Somebody who wrote that art cannot be taught because art is only originality, and what has been done is not original, and you can only teach what has been done and therefore you cannot teach art. All right, if you accept this syllogism, as I don't, then you should close the art schools. The dilemma is a very simple one from that point of view. You can't do both. You can't have it both ways. Maybe there are too many art schools; that is a possible interpretation; I do think that, in some respects, again it has to do with permissiveness... I don't know how it is in Canada. I can't tell about that, but I did teach at the Slade when I was Sterling Lawrence Professor and I always tell a little story of one of the students who did a shocking exam. I had talked more or less a whole term about Egyptian art and things of that kind. I asked him, "Why did you do so badly in your exam?" and he said, "I am not a verbal type, sir." I said, "All right, you are a visual type so here is a pencil and a piece of paper, draw for me a typical Egyptian figure," and of course he couldn't, not at all. Well, what was it? He was at school and he was probably very bad at math and history and everything else. He never learned to spell, and his kindly teachers said, "Yes, I know you are not a verbal type, etc., etc." But he was nothing, good for absolutely nothing, and that was all there was to it, you see. That I think is a danger.

ES: That was a good test, for his statement. We hear that, "I am a visual person." Our tradition is strongly romantic, I think, especially in teaching.

EG: I had an interesting conversation recently in the Midlands somewhere where a person in a museum told me that they had such difficulty in getting the art teachers to send their students to the museum. I said, "Why?" and he said that they were all still dominated by Herbert Read and the romantic idea that people were spoiled by looking at works of art. I think this is going out gradually, but it is still quite strong because it sort of filtered down. I knew Herbert Read, and liked him very much, but obviously he did a lot of harm.

ES: That's our tradition in educating teachers to educate people as artists doing their own studio work.

EG: And never see anything.

ES: Well, that's right, pretty much, other than their own work. I think that this is the main tradition.

EG: The situation in art is such that one can't even say that they should all look at Michelangelo, but certainly in all other fields nobody would say that one should become a writer by not reading or a musician by not knowing music, or an architect by not knowing architecture. It seems to me a very strange idea of what art *is* about.

Reference notes

- 1 This interview was supported by a research grant from CASA, Concordia University, Montreal, Quebec.
- 2 *The New York Review of Books*, 28 June 1979.
- 3 This reply is published in *The New York Review of Books*, 27 September 1979.
- 4 This address is now published in *Ideals and Idols*, Oxford: Phaidon, 1979.