

Why Realism?



You will want to read this major new addition to the ARC Philosophy which proves the decisive importance and value of traditional Realism. In "Why Realism", Mr. Ross supplies the expanding Realist movement with the strongest rationale yet, why Realist images are the only way possible to achieve the primary reason that fine art exists.... which is to communicate with poetic beauty the ideas and passions of our shared humanity. ARC for many years has focused the debate about Realism vs. Modernism whose definition is characterized by celebrating the destruction of realism. ARC Chairman Fred Ross in his speech delivered at University of Connecticut, February 7, "knocks it out of the park."

To read the full speech, click [here](#).

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"Nobody who has invested much time down a blind alley likes the messenger who shines a light at the brick wall up ahead."



OR OVER 90 YEARS, there has been a concerted and relentless effort to

disparage, denigrate and obliterate the reputations, names, and brilliance of the academic artistic masters of the late 19th Century. Fueled by a cooperative press, the ruling powers have held the global art establishment in an iron grip. Equally, there was a successful effort to remove from our institutions of higher learning all the methods, techniques and knowledge of how to train skilled artists. Five centuries of critical data was nearly thrown into the trash. It is incredible how close Modernist theory, backed by an enormous network of powerful and influential art dealers, came to acquiring complete control over thousands of museums, university art departments and journalistic art criticism. We at the **Art Renewal Center** have fully and fairly analyzed their theories and have found them wanting in every respect, devoid of substance and built on a labyrinth of easily disproved fallacies, suppositions and hypotheses. If, dear reader, you are not already one of their propaganda successes, I encourage you to read on.

Against all odds, and in the face of the worst kind of ridicule and personal and editorial assault, only a small handful of well-trained artists managed to stay true to their beliefs. Then, like the heroes who protected a few rare manuscripts during inquisitional book-burnings of the past, these 20th Century art world heroes managed to protect and preserve the core technical knowledge of western art. Somehow, they succeeded to train a few dozen determined disciples. Today, many of those former students, have established their own schools or ateliers, and are currently training many hundreds more. This movement is now expanding exponentially. They are regaining the traditions of the past, so that art may once again move forward on a solid footing. We are committed in every way possible to record, preserve and perpetuate this priceless knowledge.

We have painstakingly unraveled an understanding of how and why great traditional art nearly perished. For the sake of our children, our culture, and posterity, the **Art Renewal Center** is dedicated to traditional humanist art, which is essential to the health and welfare of mankind, and to a critical and truthful analysis of the modernist onslaught by which it was nearly consumed.

As you read, you will be seeing images of masterpieces by some of those artists whose names and art were so ruthlessly maligned: [William Bouguereau](#), [John William Waterhouse](#), [Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema](#), [Leon L'hermitte](#), [John William Godward](#), [Edward Coley Burne-Jones](#), [Jules Joseph Tissot](#), and [Lord Frederick Leighton](#), amongst others. All giants in their lives, they were amongst history's greatest, yet prior to the last fifth of the twentieth century, virtually no mention or knowledge of their work was being taught, analyzed or exhibited anywhere.

If you studied art history anytime between 1945 and 1980, you were told that there were great old masters that existed from the early Renaissance to the time of [David](#), [Constable](#) and [Turner](#) in the early 1800's. Then you were taught about [Corot](#) and [Courbet](#) and the Pre-Impressionists and then finally the Impressionists themselves who led the way into Modernism. Most of the period from 1850 to 1910 was described as a terrible cesspool of official art where petty academic artists painted inane

silly paintings that cared only for technique, that were devoid of emotion and who didn't recognize the genius of the Impressionists. Maybe one paragraph about that long was all you read. Possibly they mentioned the leaders of this rogue's gallery and so they might have said once the names of [Meissonier](#), Bouguereau, [Cabanel](#), Gé:rôme, Alma-Tadema, Lord Leighton or Burne-Jones, and never showed you any of their works. If they did show anything it was always a bad example. I think we all know that [Rembrandt](#) and [Raphael](#) painted some mediocre works too.

The period of art history from 1850 through 1910 was thrown into near obscurity. But it was precisely this period that produced some of the greatest art and artists in the history of humanity. I will show you fine examples of that art, why it is amongst the world's greatest, and explain just what happened to cause its near total annihilation from the art history that has been taught in most of the 20th Century. It was a period when 500 years of accumulated knowledge, stretching from the early Renaissance to the present, reached its absolute peak of development. It was a time when the techniques and knowledge of how to produce great art, and pass down that knowledge to the next generation, was at its absolute zenith. It was a time when the work and sweat of 30 prior generations of devoted artists achieved a codification of methods, standards and techniques, which produced the very pinnacle of what Traditional Realist art could achieve.

"Men like Henry James, Frederic Chopin and Charles Dickens idolized these academic masters."

In the last half of the 19th century there were literally scores of great art ateliers and academies turning out thousands of highly trained and accomplished artists, painting in dozens of different styles and on countless different subjects. The best of the best of these were clearly amongst the greatest geniuses in western civilization. It is an incredible irony that this greatest of all periods should have become the most denigrated. Men like William Adolphe Bouguereau, [Jean-Léon Gérôme](#), [Jules Breton](#), [Jules Bastien-Lepage](#), [Jean Francois Millet](#), [Jehan Georges Vibert](#), Edward Burne Jones, Fredrick Lord Leighton, [Edward Poynter](#), Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, John William Waterhouse, Leon L'hermitte, [Sir Frank Dicksee](#), [Sir John Everett Millais](#), Alexander Cabanel and [Jules Lefebvre](#). These names, many of which may be new to you, were as well known by the cogniscenti in the 1890's as Cezanne, Picasso, Matisse, de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, and Andy Warhol are known today. They were household names. People would line up sometimes for blocks to see exhibitions of their works. The rich, and the poor, the humble and the famous alike adored their work.

Men like Henry James, Frederic Chopin and Charles Dickens idolized these academic masters. Could such men that we all agree were beyond question great artistic geniuses themselves have had such bad taste so as to idolize art that today's ideologues would have us believe was so bad?

Bouguereau is one of the chief villains in tales told by modern historians. I shall

especially refer to him in this discussion, for he is being increasingly revered by thousands of scholars, collectors, curators and art lovers as one of history's all time greats, ultimately deserving to stand shoulder to shoulder with [Leonardo](#), [Caravaggio](#) and Rembrandt.

But just as Rembrandt was relegated to near oblivion for over 100 years after his death, so too was this to be Bouguereau's fate. One of the most famous stories about Rembrandt concerns his painting [Night Watch](#). After his death, no one wanted it. Finally, a gymnasium agreed to hang it on their back wall if the top foot of the painting would be cut off so it would fit. Today, this artistic masterpiece is known only in a mutilated form.

The overwhelming preponderance of the art of the 19th century in Europe and in America has been described as Academic. This term is used to be dismissive or disparaging as petty and uninspired. In truth, however, Academic more accurately means a dedication to standards of excellence both in training and in artistic execution, and a dedication to learning with great discipline and devotion, to the methods, developments and breakthroughs of prior generations. The idea is to build on the past accomplishments of art as we go into the future by knowing thoroughly those accomplishments of the past. This is the true meaning of academic.

These artists trained in ateliers. What was an atelier? For those of you that don't know: an accepted master who had himself been trained by a prior master, would pick out 6 or 8 highly talented young aspiring artists, who would move in with him as apprentices. They would be trained in depth with him, and literally eat, drink, sleep and breathe art 24 hours a day 7 days a week. For the first 6 months of their training they would do nothing but copy old master drawings, for drawing was considered the backbone of all achievement in art.

Then they would draw studies from plaster casts to learn modeling, and then spend at least another year drawing from live models. Only then were they allowed upon mastering the craft of drawing, to pick up a brush and start learning the craft of painting. Then possibly after 5 or 6 years of training, they could start to create works of art that could be considered truly professional. Suffice it so say that the atelier methods, which were started in the early Renaissance in the guilds and studios of [Giotto](#) and [Rogier Van Der Weyden](#), transmitted knowledge down from generation to generation. Some of these students became masters in their own right, adding to that knowledge and then teaching yet another generation. In the 19th Century this concept gained additional momentum reflecting the acceleration of learning in every other field of human endeavor. The industrial revolution was codifying the belief in ever expanding progress at an ever-faster pace. This most clearly exhibited itself in the art of painting and sculpture as well.

"It included city life, country life, religious painting, literary painting, relationships

between friends, family life and lovers, the plight of the downtrodden and the abuses of society, the spoofed pompousness of high society and holier-than-thou clerics hypocritically living in the lap of opulence and luxury."

The result was that during the 19th century there was an explosion of artistic activity unrivaled in all prior history. Thousands of properly trained *atelier* artists developed a myriad of new techniques and explored countless new subjects and perspectives that had never been dealt with before. They covered nearly every aspect of human activity. It included city life, country life, religious painting, literary painting, relationships between friends, family life and lovers, the plight of the downtrodden and the abuses of society, the spoofed pompousness of high society and holier-than-thou clerics hypocritically living in the lap of opulence and luxury. There was beauty for its own sake in the English Aesthetic movement, and in the French and German Romantic movements, and a full and comprehensive exploration of literature and the fantasies, hopes and dreams of humanity.

These academic artists are more accurately described as "Humanists." As you read, keep your thoughts on the term Humanity or Humanism. It's probably the chief defining characteristic of the art of the 19th century. It is the most evident concept that distinguishes it from the bulk of the current establishment-celebrated art of the 20th century, which is more accurately understood as existential, destructive and nihilistic. So if it makes it easier to categorize these artists, I suggest, as the appropriate descriptive term, Traditional Humanism. I want to give you an overview of the types and styles of painting that were popular in the 19th century, then briefly explore the reasons for its unceremonious decline into near oblivion until the end of the 1970's. Then I will explain to you the reasons why a re-appreciation for 19th century Realism started in the late 1970's and early 1980's, and now over the last ten years has finally hit a critical mass - a titration point where it is rapidly becoming a tidal wave exploding onto the consciousness of the art world.

Why were some of these artists considered amongst history's greatest in their own lives, why did they fall from grace, and why are they once again gracing the walls of the majority of the most prestigious museums in the world?

In fact in the last two years alone, there was a major retrospective of the works of [Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema](#) at the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam. There was an exhibition of [Lord Frederick Leighton](#), President of the Royal Academy for 20 years from 1875 to 1895 at the Royal Academy in London. There was, in the summer of 1998, a major retrospective of the works of [Edward Coley Burne-Jones](#) at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, in which they hailed him as one of the three greatest 19th century British artists along with [Turner](#) and [Constable](#). Also in 1998 there was an exhibition featuring all the greatest British artists of the last century at the National Gallery in Washington called [The Victorians](#), with Waterhouse's [The Lady of Shalott](#) on the cover of the catalog.

Currently in the winter and spring of 2000 there is an exhibit of women artists of the Academy Julien in Paris, which started at the Clark Museum in Williamstown Massachusetts, and is traveling until May of 2000 to the Daheh in Manhattan and the Dixon in Memphis through September, called Overcoming All Obstacles. None of these artists could be found anywhere 25 years ago. Now they are everywhere.

What happened? What could possibly have happened to cause an artistic heritage and tradition, after 500 years, to fall this low in the esteem of the eyes of the world?

Three things explain half of it: World War I, World War II, and the Great Depression. What terrible catastrophes held the world in their grip in the first half of the 20th century? What unspeakable atrocities and tragedies caused the deaths of tens of millions of people, from want and war? Somebody was to blame! Some one had to be blamed. This could not have just been written by the fates. God could not have wanted mankind to suffer so.

The clear, evident, and easy scapegoat for all that went wrong was quite simply "The Old Order".

It wasn't just the leaders that were guilty. The entire last generation was to blame. This seems now a rather absurdly all-sweeping attribution of culpability. And with them everything that they believed and respected was impugned, discredited and desecrated. The artists they loved were pigeonholed as their lackeys and supporters, and their art was debased in every possible way by every possible format. People stopped even looking at the art of these great Traditional Humanists of the 19th century. It just had to be bad. After all, look who supported it; the old order! No attempt for decades was ever again given to looking with an un-jaundiced eye at what these artists were doing, saying, and achieving.

Let me state in the strongest possible terms that the art history textbooks since the middle of this century are filled with nothing but distortions, half truths and out and out lies in their description of this era. They have failed in their responsibility as historians to report the truth of what occurred as objectively as possible. These texts amount to no less than propaganda brochures for modern art.

"Incredible fortunes were made from all of this. Incredible fortunes are still at risk invested in these works."

Then, the other critical cause was the consideration of powerful economic reasons for dealers to wholeheartedly espouse this new modernist ethic. If you were an Alma-Tadema or [Bouguereau](#) dealer, you had a list of a hundred clients wanting to buy their work. But their technique permitted them to only paint one canvas every 3 to 8 weeks, so you stood biting your nails waiting for each canvas that you knew was sold long

before it was completed. Modernists, however, could often complete a single canvas each and every day. Some did even more than that. This was certainly true with all of the biggest names. Whether we are speaking of Picasso, Modrian, Matisse or de Kooning. Many of their works could be completed in a couple of days or a couple of hours. Their dealers now had an enormous supply to meet whatever demand they could generate. They had high motivation to prove that these paintings were not only as valuable as the prior generation's, but that they were even better. And when the money pouring in from this consummate con game, they were able to buy themselves historians, writers and critics, who happily developed complex, convoluted arguments to justify their philosophical positions.

Incredible fortunes were made from all of this. Incredible fortunes are still at risk invested in these works.

I will deal with explaining the changes that have occurred in the acceptance of this era in two ways. First, I will examine the myths that have been perpetuated about this era using Bouguereau as the best specific example, for after all, he was the most vilified by modernism. Then, secondly, I shall explore with you the philosophical underpinnings of modernism, which have come under increasing criticism and analysis as they are laid bare in the blinding light of rational scrutiny. One of the greatest of these myths was the claim that Bouguereau and his colleagues were not relevant to their times; that they copied the styles of earlier times. This argument is without a shred of truth. Bouguereau was born in 1825, shortly after the American and French Revolutions. These upheavals were the most tangible results of the new ideas generated by the Enlightenment, whereas earlier centuries were controlled by ideas of the primacy of religion and monarchs ruling by "divine right." Major writings held the day, works such as John Locke's The Rights of Man, Thomas Hobbes' The Leviathan and Alexis de Tocqueville's Democracy in America. In prior times we had great religious paintings of the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries, paintings of the aristocracy and nobility as well as important historical scenes during the 18th century.

With the new democratic philosophies came a new ascendant respect for all mankind. "*Liberté, Fraternité, Egalité*," cried the French; and the Americans, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, the rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." These words sum up perfectly the new philosophical and cultural advances of Western civilization that occurred in the late 18th century and that were being popularized and codified in the 19th. Both America and France were at the cutting edge of the changing Western world. It is no coincidence that some of the greatest works of art of the 19th century came from these two societies. And with these changing ideas, art too changed, generating the many new groups and styles. There were the Realists who showed the nobility of the common man straining under the yoke of a hard life. They tried to show rural life, as it really was.

Then there were the Idealists and Romantics, who celebrated all humanity in keeping with the democratic principles and a respect for human rights and dignity. Bouguereau

was undoubtedly the greatest of this group. In much of his work he uses peasants and gypsies for his subject matter. How fitting to choose society's lowest to exalt all mankind to the highest, for if we could appreciate the value of the peasants and gypsies, then certainly all mankind must be valuable.

Additionally, the Victorian Age through freedom of the press and artists and writers of the time brought to public opinion the plight of the downtrodden. They shined a clear light on the unfair treatment of women, children and minorities-most of which had been inherited from prior generations and prior centuries.

Rather than dumping on the Victorians, one might just as readily credit them and their era with setting in motion all of the societal changes that led to the undoing of most of these injustices.

"They come to life like no previous artist has ever before or ever since achieved."

The Victorian artists like [Waterhouse](#), [Burne-Jones](#) and [Bouguereau](#) loved and admired women. It's no coincidence that women's rights were championed openly for the first time during this era, and incrementally over the next 100 years, to be nearly equalized (for the first time in history) with those of men. Louis Sonolet, wrote in the October 1907 issue of [Masters in Art](#) "A Series of Illustrated Monographs", page 28:

Bouguereau's first wife was a French woman, who died early in their married life. In 1896 he married [Miss Elizabeth Gardner](#), of Exeter, New Hampshire, a painter of recognized ability, who had been one of his pupils in the Julian art schools. It was due to Bouguereau's efforts, himself influenced thereto by his American fiancée, that both the Julian studios and the École des Beaux-Arts broke their hitherto cast-iron regulations and admitted women as students to their classes.

Bouguereau also celebrated humanity's culture and literature in his paintings, as seen in his mythological scenes of nymphs, cupids, satyrs and his scenes from the Bible. These wholly original compositions are handled with an emotional force second to none. [The Flagellation](#) and [First Mourning](#) (Adam and Eve grieving the death of Abel) are both consummate masterpieces of this type, with figures painted so lifelike that you feel you're looking through a window at an event frozen in time. One can sense the blood rushing in their veins and the life in their eyes, accomplishments for which no words can do justice.

Even beyond this, he captured the very souls and spirits of his subjects. They come to life like no previous artist has ever before or ever since achieved. He didn't just paint their flesh better; he captured the subtlest tender nuances of personality and mood. He took no shortcuts.

Every composition is incredibly original with perspectives and foreshortening and interweaving of figures more complex and successful than of any other artist of his time.

His paintings never feel busy. There are never unnecessary elements strewn around. The landscaping is rendered just enough to focus the viewer's attention on the figure. He masterfully brought together the elements of exquisite drawing, incredible coloration, perspective, brilliant modeling and composition, all working together in harmony. All elements reinforce the emotional thrust of each work. To achieve this, he developed his own idiosyncratic techniques, often creating new methods on the spot to solve an immediate problem. There have been extensive analytic treatises written by a number of recent scholars trying to technically dissect how Bouguereau managed his totally unique magic.

It was the artist's goal to show humanity as beautifully real and ideal as possible, encouraging all to strive for such ideals. The message is that while mankind may not be perfect, life can still be good. Implicit is the moral imperative that all people are worthy of love and respect. So not only was it untrue that Bouguereau, Burne-Jones, [Alma-Tadema](#) and their brethren were irrelevant; the exact opposite was the case. He and the other academic artists were at the cutting edge of the changes that were occurring in Western civilization, asserting that each individual was unique and valuable. Only a society such as this could generate people who would even be permitted to dribble paint on a canvas and call it a work of art. A hundred years earlier, somebody trying to do that would probably have been thrown into an institution or worse. We must realize that modern art could never have existed save on the back of the Humanist art that preceded it. One can't help but be struck by the irony that the chief benefactors of these "liberated" and "enlightened" artists are their chief detractors. The knife of ingratitude cuts deep.

The next myth perpetuated about Bouguereau by his critics was that he painted just for the bourgeois in order to get rich.

Let's dispel that once and for all. He prided himself in never needing to take commissions. He painted what he loved and believed, often laboring 16 hours a day, seven days a week, much like [Michelangelo](#). His fame became so great that his dealer, Goupil, was able to charge \$10,000 for a single canvas (equivalent to more than \$300,000 today). The bourgeois couldn't possibly buy his paintings, and they were eagerly acquired by the wealthy Mellons, Rockefellers, Vanderbilts and Carnegies. Let me ask who has been buying Matisse, Picasso and Gauguin, or de Kooning, Rothko and Pollock? The Mellons, Vanderbilts and the Carnegies, or their equivalents! I don't hear anyone claiming that these artists painted just for the bourgeois in order to get rich. Certainly Picasso was far wealthier when he died than Bouguereau at his death. [Rubens](#), [Gainsborough](#), [Church](#), [Rodin](#), [Boucher](#), de Kooning and Frank Stella all made or are making substantial sums on their art. The fact is that most often, it is the wealthy who buy art. Rather than using this fact to condemn the artists, it should be the basis for praising those individuals who recognized and helped support greatness. What would the Renaissance have been without Lorenzo de Medici?

Bouguereau captured the very souls and spirits of his subjects. They come to life like no previous artist has ever before or ever since achieved.

Then again, we should ask what is wrong with being part of the bourgeois? It was their existence more than anything that helped to create our culture as we know it. The bourgeois mostly came from poor roots and rightly felt that they were as worthy of love and respect as the nobility before them.

Some of the best examples of Bouguereau's work are among the greatest masterpieces in Western art. Because his work had been unfairly denigrated, the resulting low prices much of the 20th century allowed private collectors to acquire or keep his work, including some of his greatest paintings. In the last 20 years, however, his prices have increased astronomically. Paintings that would have sold for \$5,000 in 1970, were worth \$50,000 in 1980, and would currently sell for over a million. In November of 1998, the world record for Bouguereau was broken twice, with [Cupid and Psyche as Children](#) selling for \$1,760,000, and [Alma Parens](#), an allegorical painting of mother France nurturing her children, brought \$2,650,000 at Sotheby's. Of course, price and quality don't necessarily go hand in hand. But this is a strong indicator of changing perceptions. In Bouguereau's case his work is still undervalued when a Picasso sold the same year for \$48,000,000, an Andy Warhol for \$17,000,000, and a [Van Gogh](#) self portrait for \$71,000,000.

Another myth concerns the accusation that most of the work of these traditional Humanists or Academic Realists is just petty sentimentality. In fact, most modernist critics consider any hint of positive human emotions as petty sentimentality. I would agree that an adult's abnormal attachment to a high school ring or cheerleader pompoms is petty sentiment. But, what of the incomparable joy of a child taking his or her first steps? Is there anything more beautiful, and could anything be more fitting subject matter for art? Is this petty sentimentality? What of depicting a young person's first moments of sexual awareness as childhood passes into adulthood? What of the cruelty of the industrial life in the cities with the cold and homeless lining up for bread on a wintry night? This was subject matter that had never been dealt with before and wouldn't have been deemed appropriate in earlier centuries. Of course, many academic artists of the period unsuccessfully tried such subject matter and it often did look over-sentimentalized. But in every period in history most of the work being done was mediocre. That doesn't prevent us from separating the wheat from the chaff. So it was true too in the 19th century. There were those like Bouguereau and Lord Leighton who pulled it off with poetic brilliance.

If we claim that these works are petty sentimentality, then wouldn't the same logic apply to the great Renaissance artists who attempted to capture the joys of religious exaltation or overly idealized heroism of kings? Or there were 17th century Dutch artists who painted rigid noblemen or carousing peasants in taverns? [Caravaggio](#) and [George de La](#)

[Tour](#) painted fortunetellers and card cheating gypsies. Is this petty sentiment too?

Modernism endeavors to outrage, insult and defile human feelings (i.e., sentiment) and to belittle and dismiss any expression of our sense of passion and beauty as just no more than mere sentiment, and in the next breath want us to think their work is passionate and beautiful. In 1964 the Metropolitan Museum in New York, was offered one of Frederick Church's greatest masterpieces of landscape painting for a mere \$30,000. They dismissed the offer with the comment that they don't buy picture postcards. It was put down specifically due to its appeal to sentiment. Today, the Met has dozens of such works on permanent display in the 19th Century American wing. All the great 19th century masterpieces that depict universal human emotions of any kind are denigrated and lumped together as only appealing to petty human sentiment. However, it's not just sentiment that was dismissed as worthless, but the depicting of all human emotions.

I'm not saying that there aren't any paintings that are maudlin and overly sentimental from the 19th century, but the modernists dismiss them all out of hand, whether bad and silly or inspired and brilliant.

"I know very well that it is neither drawn nor painted as correctly as a Bouguereau, and I rather regret this, because I have an earnest desire to be correct."

Next, I wish to address the myth that [Bouguereau](#), [Meissonier](#), [Cabanel](#), and [Gérôme](#) stopped the Impressionists from showing in the salons and working at the academies and *ateliers*. In their youths, [Monet](#) and [Renoir](#) worked next to the great academic artist Gérôme in the atelier of [Charles Gleyre](#). [Degas](#) was accepted and worked successfully in the atelier of [Hippolyte Flandrin](#) and [Ingres](#). [Edouard Manet](#) worked in the atelier of [Thomas Couture](#). And in every salon from 1873 forward there were always impressionist paintings shown. The reason that there were only a few during the earlier years was because there weren't yet many impressionist artists. In a typical salon show in the 1870s, of 200 artists, perhaps 10 or 12 were impressionists. It was also untrue that [van Gogh](#) despised Bouguereau's work. Critics like to point to one letter where van Gogh said that he would be able to sell his paintings more readily if he painted pretty things like Bouguereau. They always conveniently overlook another letter in which van Gogh expresses his deep disappointment that he'll never be able to draw as well as Bouguereau, and yet another, "I know very well that it is neither drawn nor painted as correctly as a Bouguereau, and I rather regret this, because I have an earnest desire to be correct. But though it is doomed, alas, to be neither a Cabanel nor a Bouguereau, yet I hope that it will be French."

These can readily be found in the published letters of Vincent van Gogh, and are a testament by Van Gogh to the critical importance of drawing.

In addition, I am always amazed at modernist critics like John Russell or Hilton Kramer of [The New York Times](#). They will review museum shows of old masters such as [Raphael](#), [Caravaggio](#), [Titian](#) or [da Vinci](#), refer to the exquisite drawing, the balance of

composition, accuracy of perspective and modeling, subtlety of coloration, and then conveniently fail to notice over-sentimentalized subject matter or over-dramatized gestures. These same critics will then look at Bouguereau, Gérôme, [Burne-Jones](#) or [Alma-Tadema](#) and totally ignore all of the above-mentioned parameters and with a "double-think" right out of Orwell's [1984](#), see nothing but the so-called sentimental subject matter. These critics like to say Bouguereau's work is really only derivative, harking back to earlier artists. Only in the 20th century has such a thing ever been scorned. To this I have one thing to say.

JUST WHAT IS WRONG WITH BEING DERIVATIVE?

That's one of the core beliefs of modernism that must be soundly vanquished by self-evident logical analysis. Nobody can accomplish anything of merit if they are in fact *not* derivative. Only by mastering the accomplishments of the past and then adding to it can we go still further. Every other field of endeavor recognizes this truth. Without the knowledge of the past we are doomed to everlasting primitivism.

And, as far as holding our works up to the old masters -- that's what we want to happen. If we are to accomplish things of true merit and excellence, we must germinate and nurture great masters in the next millennium too. Bouguereau was quite aware that his work would be compared on the altar of past accomplishments, as were his contemporaries. It was precisely because they mastered the techniques of the past, built upon them and opened them up to an avalanche of new subject matter and Enlightenment ideals, that they accomplished the greatest half-century of painting in art history.

The word "derivative" comes from the word "derive" or to come from, not to copy. Bouguereau, [Lord Leighton](#), Alma-Tadema, Gérôme, [Vibert](#), Burne-Jones, etc. did not copy the art of earlier eras, but they most certainly derived from the prior schools. Many of the methods of learning the skills of drawing, modeling, perspective, composition, the sourcing and preparing of pigments, canvas preparation, paint application etc., were developed before them.

You could also say [Michelangelo](#) was derivative from [Donatello](#), whose [David](#) was sculpted decades before. Leonardo and Raphael were derivative of [Giotto](#) and [Rogier van der Weyden](#). All of 17th century Dutch art built on the breakthroughs of the High Renaissance, which itself derived from the accomplishments of the early renaissance. Praxiteles in ancient Greece most certainly derived much technique and knowledge from those sculptors that came during the centuries before him.

All we really care about today is that he did it the best. And when we talk about the basic criteria and parameters of the academic tradition that built from the 14th through 19th centuries, Bouguereau, Lord Leighton and Alma-Tadema were second to none.

Could Bach and Beethoven and Mozart have composed their masterpieces if someone before had not discovered scales and the circle of fifths? Does that mean these musical

giants were nothing but derivative too? In fact all great literature exists due to the existence of advanced language. This upside down thought process would make Dostoevsky, Balzac, Checkov, Shakespeare, the Bronté sisters, Steinbeck, Sallinger and Toni Morrison, derivative as well. If you think about it you will see that these are exact analogies. There is nothing anymore derivative about these 19th century Traditional-Humanist-Academic-masters.

Our 20th century has marked a period that celebrated the bizarre, the novel and the outrageous for its own sake.

Being derivative is entirely different from copying. Copying itself can have value, but only for the purposes of instruction. Obviously a copied work is not original art. But modernist ideologues have disingenuously dismissed all realist art as "derivative" as if that were the same as copying.

We cannot with any justice crucify these Humanist Masters on the altar of modern art. Modern art theory has a completely different and as we shall see an entirely flawed way of viewing art. I want to take a second here to make it clear that I don't consider Impressionism as part of Modernism. It was still firmly planted in human values with the intention of creating works of great beauty. Modernism truly dates from the Post-Impressionists forward. With the exception of Van Gogh, it became the intention of artistic endeavor to expand the boundaries of what could be called art and to celebrate the breaking of standards and convention for its own sake.

While it is assumed that Bouguereau did not like Renoir and Monet and Renoir didn't like Bouguereau, it is hardly an indictment against either of their works. [Rembrandt](#) hated [Rubens](#) and Michelangelo despised Leonardo. It's an old story - genius is often intolerant of other genius that is oriented somewhat differently. This said, however, it is not true that Bouguereau was scorned by all of the Impressionists. In fact, at the Universal Exposition in Paris on New Years Eve of the year 1900, a newspaper reporter approached Degas and Monet who were conversing together, and asked who in their opinion would most likely be considered the greatest 19th century artist in the year 2000. After a brief debate they both agreed on one man: William Bouguereau.

But there is another reason that Academic Realism or Traditional Humanism is coming back. It has to do with a widespread reevaluation of the ideological underpinnings and theoretical framework of Modernism and Post-modernism.

Our 20th century has marked a period that celebrated the bizarre, the novel and the outrageous for its own sake. The defining parameter of greatness to Modernism is "has it ever been done before," "is it totally original where there is no derivation from any former schools of art," "does it outrage," "does it expand the definition of what can be called art?" I propose to you today that **if everything is art then nothing is art**. If I

call a table a chair have I expanded the definition of the word table? Would this make me brilliant? If I call a hat a shirt have I expanded the definition of hat? If I call a nail a hammer, have I expanded the definition of the word nail? Am I now a genius? If I call screeching car wheels great music have I expanded the definition of music?

Or in reality have I perpetrated a fraud on the people who wanted to buy tables, hats, nails and music and instead got chairs, shirts, hammers and a headache.

Modernists have not expanded the definition of art at all. What they have done is attempted to destroy art, created icons that represent this destruction, and then called these icons the thing that they have destroyed i.e. works of art. A urinal or an empty canvas, hung on the wall of a museum, are especially pure examples of this. They are not works of art but symbols of the victory of the Huns, who have sacked the bastions and forums of our culture. It would be like saying that the Roman Forum today is far greater architecture than it was when all the buildings and streets were intact.

"Clearly Degas would vehemently disagree with the quick pose."

Next, you know those 5-minute poses that have become so popular in today's few begrudging drawing classes that are offered in most university art departments? The "five minute study" is supposed to train the artist to get the quick impression of the figure. Students are told that the first impulse is somehow fresher and more honest. In fact it's a contrived and debilitating concept. How can a student possibly develop advanced drawing skills without lengthy poses that enable them to seek out and find their errors and then truly perfect their methods by which to find the right lines? In support of these comments let me quote [Edgar Degas](#), one of the icons of Impressionism and Modernist ideology.

Edgar Degas, is quoted by [Ives Gammell](#) in his book [The Shop Talk of Edgar Degas](#) on Page 22 as saying:

"I always tried to urge my colleagues to seek for new combinations along the path of draftsmanship, which I consider a more fruitful field than that of color. But they wouldn't listen to me and have gone the other way."

And to others he was quoted as saying, "I am a colorist with line."

Then Gammell says,

"In Degas' time the acquisition of this indispensable skill (drawing) was taken for granted as the essential part of a painter's early training. When he had established his shapes he worked over them tirelessly until he had given them the maximum significance."

Degas said,

"Make a drawing. Start all over again. Trace it. Start it and trace it again. [...] You must do over the same subject ten times, a hundred times. In art nothing must appear accidental even a moment."

This would seem in direct contradiction to the assertions of most current teaching that the first immediate impression of a form is what is most important and valuable. Current teaching tends to say that if you need to work over a line it lacks truth and sincerity. What it lacks is quality and clarity. Only the most talented artists who had built up drawing skills over half a lifetime got to the point where they could find the right line on the first try. Clearly Degas would vehemently disagree with the quick pose.

What was clearly of greatest concern to him was that the artist finds the correct line that conveys the feeling or form that he wished to, and not how quickly or automatically he achieved it. This is a crucial point, as it undermines the myth of the modern teaching that the gesture must be captured in the first initial stroke to be great. If students can never perfect their lines they can never learn the skill of recognizing the 'right' line when it is found.

Page 23. Degas said, "Once I have a line I hold on to it, I do not lose it again."

Modern artists are told that they must create something totally original. Nothing about what they do can ever have been done before in any way shape or form otherwise they risk being called "derivative" How utterly absurd.

They've been indoctrinated with the concept that bad = good. Every parameter upon which any standard for quality and excellence can be deduced, they have been told is improper because it's "limiting to freedom of expression."

1. There can be no *story* for then you have to stay within the "tight boundaries" of the tale.
2. There can be no *illusion* for then you are "chained" by the need to recreate a sense of three dimensions.
3. There can be no *drawing*, as that can be "limiting" to objects of people or things taken from the real world.
4. They want to remove the "shackles" of *modeling, perspective, or subject matter* of any sort.
5. There certainly can be no attempt at *harmonizing* of the above parameters with *composition, color and tonality*, for that would "restrict" one to making everything work together.

On the contrary they have been propagandized by modernism into believing that only those works that break boundaries, ignore standards, and show no interest in skill or technique can be truly "original" or "inspired."

Modernism is art about art. Whereas all of the great art in history is art about life.

In fact, originality of methods takes precedence over everything else. If something has

been done before, or is derivative in any way of anything that was done before, it thereby loses value proportionate to those similarities. In such a "through the looking glass" world, every would-be "artist" is placed in the untenable position of trying to create an entirely new art form in order to be considered relevant.

The sheer glaring reality is that nothing could be more imprisoning, binding, restricting, chaining and shackling than the impossible limitations of modernism and post-modernism, that remove from the would be artist every tool (including training) that could give them the ability to create great works of art. The simple truth is that each and every one of us is capable of thinking of something that has never been done before. Does that make it worth doing and the work of genius?

For example:

1. I could carefully (with enough money) dig up an old bombed out tenement building in the Bronx, and have it transported to a special slab built for it in Central Park. Rope off the structure, aim lights at it, give it a title and with enough pomp and circumstance think of twenty reasons why this is sheer brilliance in its commentary about the inner city.
2. I could boil the entrails of several different animals and then preserve them by imbedding them in clear plastic. I could then hang them from a mobile with similarly preserved body parts of cadavers, and have critics claim that this is the greatest artistic statement about the horrors of war since Guernica.
3. I could imbed into the walls, ceiling and floors of a small room, pieces of neon lights, parts from broken machines and engines, and broken pieces of structural building materials like bricks, beams and cinder blocks. Then I could glue between everything millions of nails, nuts and bolts, and have clever writers and critics point out how this room (which could be installed at MoMA or the Guggenheim) is the quintessential statement of the effects of the industrial age on human psychology.

Well, those three ideas took all of 3 minutes to think of. MY GOD! This must mean I'm three-geniuses-rolled-into-one. Why at this rate I could come up with more brilliant ideas for modernism, than all of the modernist geniuses put together, if I just would put aside a week or two.

The thing here that really *is* interesting, is not their art at all, but the statement it makes about the nature of our species - **that so many seemingly intelligent people have been so easily snookered by the tongue twisting, convoluted, illogic of modernist rhetoric.** Clearly for many people it is more important to feel that they are some part of an elitist in-group that is endowed with the special ability to see brilliance where most people see nothing and are afraid to say so. Since most people aren't devoted or educated in fine art, **they have successfully intimidated the bulk of**

humanity into cowering away in silence, feeling foolish for their inability to understand. By having successfully gained control of the institutions of higher learning and the major museums of the world, they have been able to perpetuate their fiction under the guise and force of their power and credentials. **The average person shrinks away from believing the reality of their own senses** in the face of seemingly overwhelming numbers of people in this 20th century "establishment" who authoritatively dictate what is great art and what they should be seeing.

Modern and post-modern art is nihilistic and anti-human. It denigrates humanity along with our hopes, dreams, desires and the real world in which we live. All reference to any of these things is forbidden in the canonistic halls of modernist ideology. We can see that their hallowed halls are a hollow shell, a vacuous vacant vault that locks their devotees away from life and humanity, while stripping mankind of his dignity. It ultimately bores the overwhelming majority of its would be audience who can find nothing with which to relate.

It has been called exciting and "avant-garde," but the sad truth is that it is incredibly humdrum and monotonous. Whether you glue together pieces of plastic or shards of glass, assemble metal scraps or piles of feathers. Whether you dribble little dollops of colors or drag fat uneven slashes of black. Whether you compile a mountain of paper or wrap the statue of liberty. The effect is always the same: meaningless primitivism. Modernism is art about art. It endlessly asks the question ad nauseam: what is art? What is art? They believe that only those things that expand the boundaries of art are good; all else is bad. It is art about art. Whereas, all of the great art in history is art about life.

"If you take the time to understand Abstract Expressionism, Minimalism, Colorfield, Pop-art, Op-art etc. you will find clever con game perpetrated by a sophisticated gang of public relations experts that figured out a great tactic to make millions."

Of course, this isn't exactly the first time that ideas that were complete shams managed to engulf the belief systems of entire cultures and civilizations. In many of those in the past, the lunacy was enforced by the severest of punishments for anyone who would dare to speak out. At least we live in a time and place where it's possible to speak against this consummate con that has been perpetrated against the greatest period of artistic achievement in history. Three quarters of the 20th century will go down in art history as a great wasteland of insanity - a nightmarish blip in the long road of the development of human logic and reason, from which we are only just starting to awake.

The artists of the 19th century exhibited a deep abiding respect for humanity and human feelings; a respect for our minds, our spirits and our reason, and a love of beauty, grace and true excellence and accomplishment. [Bouguereau](#), [Lord Leighton](#), [Waterhouse](#), [Burne-Jones](#) and the other giants of the 19th century tried to exemplify all that is good and decent in our species. Their accomplishments are the quintessential high point of hundreds of years of human study and development in the

art of painting. They are arguably the greatest painters that history has ever produced. Bouguereau especially fits this description. How fitting and sadly obvious that he should be characterized as the chief villain by those who would destroy rather than build-who celebrate chaos and would deprive the artist of any skill needed to portray anything.

If someone with intelligence takes the time to understand advanced mathematics and physics, computer science, or biogenetics, there is something there to understand. If you take the time to understand Abstract Expressionism, Minimalism, Colorfield, Pop-art, Op-art etc. you will find a clever con game perpetrated by a sophisticated gang of public relations experts that figured out a great tactic to make millions.

The underlying philosophy is totally without merit, and amounts to nothing more than a misuse of language, which is sufficiently complex as to be usable in the wrong hands to justify nearly anything. If you read their discussions of what makes a Rothko or a de Kooning or Jackson Pollock painting great, you discover an enigma wrapped in a paradox and embedded in a quandary. With looping cadences of illogical chaotic thought, usually vocalized by individuals with flowery credentials next to their name, the average listeners, who lack self-confidence in their understanding of the arts and are intimidated by their inability to understand, usually meekly back away. Or they protect themselves by proclaiming that they do fully understand, so that they too may feel part of the anointed. The effect of "prestige suggestion" could never be seen more clearly. Many of us here have said it countless times before, but apparently it needs to be said yet again.

THE EMPEROR HAS NO CLOTHES!

Just because other fields of discipline are hard to understand by the layman, does not in any way justify the incomprehensibility, lunacy and fakery of most modern art.