

the plight of those with even smaller means.

Meryl Streep's performance in *She-Devil* (Orion) is frightening. Obviously she wanted to change pace by appearing in a wild farce, but it's appalling that she chose this abysmal piece of junk. Adapted from a novel by Fay Weldon, the film is about a successful writer of romance novels who lives in a meringue mansion and dallies with a humdrum accountant, husband of a dumpy woman. Every gag, every scene, every item of supposedly comic design is so wretched that the whole doesn't

even rise to the level of the trite.

Most frightening is Streep's performance. At her worst up to now—say, in the thriller *Still of the Night*—she has shown herself a good actress who made a bad choice. And it isn't that she lacks comic sense, as, for instance, *The Seduction of Joe Tynan* showed. But in this heaving extravaganza she is shockingly inept, like a gifted singer who is startlingly off-pitch and doesn't know it. Clearly the director, Susan Seidelman, was completely useless, but didn't Streep see the rushes as the film went along? Can she have thought that what she was doing was funny? That's scary. •

the image in favor of more tractable qualities that can be caught in a net of expertise and described from a position of detached superiority. He cites the main flavors in which art-historical talk comes. First, there is the High Formalist Method, whereby works of art are discussed as if they were exercises in formal strategy based on earlier achievements using similar strategies, so that the whole aim of art appears to be reference to itself. And second, there is the more recent Original Context Recovery Plan, according to which works of art are perceived to be chained like slaves to their own time and place, so that nothing true can be seen in them, and nothing truthful said about them, except in the light of other days. Both these ways of dealing with art render it harmless in itself, and they guarantee a refined immunity to its troubling power in the here and now. There is some idea behind them that art—especially great art, says Freedberg—cannot be truly redemptive, that it does not directly change or save the fallen world.

Freedberg wants the critical study of art to confront exactly what is troubling or exciting in it. The barrier between the legitimately affecting arts (or non-arts) and the contents of galleries and museums must be collapsed, he says, and all images must be considered together, as he considers them in this volume. Freedberg's claim is that art can learn a lesson from non-art in the matter of response; and he advocates the right application of Nelson Goodman's theory that "in aesthetic experience the emotions function cognitively. The work of art is apprehended through the feelings as well as through the senses."

This is plainly true. Museum-goers do seek to receive art directly with open hearts and tingling nerves, just as they do movies and television (perhaps all the more now because of movies and television), although they usually don't faint, scream, embrace the statues or kneel, and most don't slash, even if they feel like doing all these things. In Freedberg's view, such direct responses universally precede the quick, covering moves that people make toward aesthetic detachment, the distancing mechanisms that denature what he calls "the hard, brute, sweet reality of the image." Immediate reactions are obviously not the same for everyone, he will allow; but in his view they are always there and always denied in modern art writing. Studying art must, he says, include the study of how we know it, which begins with how we feel it.

The problem with Freedberg's view is that in the apprehension of art, instant cognition is larger than feeling, even if it is dependent on it. The inherent power

The Secret Life of Art

BY ANNE HOLLANDER

The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response by David Freedberg

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The theme announced in the title of David Freedberg's book is illustrated on the dust jacket by a glowing reproduction of Poussin's *Dance Around the Golden Calf*. Inside, the disturbing frontispiece shows the same painting after it was attacked with a knife in 1978, its surface crossed by long slashes that focus on the calf itself. Freedberg wants to dwell on strong effects: the force inside the idol whipping the people into dance, and the force inside the picture striking the eye so hard that an armed hand rose up to strike back. When he begins by saying that his book is not about the history of art, but about "the relations between images and people in history," we already know he means passionate relations.

Freedberg, however, is an art historian. His dense and challenging book is rooted in a dissatisfaction with the way his fellow art historians and art critics have consistently written about images so as to deny the importance, or even the existence, of such responses as Poussin's picture records, or its unnamed assailant acted out. Far from considering such behavior relevant to the study of art, they have consigned it to the domain of the "primitive" and the "magical," or to the realm of the sensational and the psychopathic.

Open acknowledgment of the physical effect of images is thus made out to be

either a matter strictly for psychiatrists and anthropologists, or else vulgar, and only a matter of crude reaction to vulgar kinds of art, some of which may even be called non-art—pornography, cult images, waxworks, and the like. If raw power is ever allowed as the property of High Art, it is supposed to work only on unsophisticated children, uneducated people, or madmen like Poussin's slasher. According to Freedberg, the very ranking of images into categories of serious and vulgar, high and low, is a way of creating an artificial barrier that limits the whole domain of emotional response to images that are not taken seriously, and sanitizes the effects of great works.

Even the deep respect of critics for the vivid objects in ethnographic collections, formerly called Primitive Art, emphasizes a gap between the reactions that the objects may originally have evoked and detached Western appreciation of them—or even Western emotional reaction, which is scrupulously assumed to be different from what was intended. We are also prone to call the style of figuration in such works "symbolic," Freedberg thinks, partly to retreat from the idea that the figures are meant not to stand for, but to be, or to resemble, real beings living and divine—to contain divinity and life, not refer to them.

Freedberg would say that critics and scholars do the same thing with Western paintings and statues, denying the life in

in the work of art is not all of one kind, although it may be so in a work of non-art. Freedberg would say that we fear the power in the things we call art, that we have in fact called them "art" so as to be safe from them, though we don't fear it in all the other kinds of images to which we assign lower status. We relish the fantasy that the department-store dummy might come to life, but fear the same potential in a Rubens nude—and so we keep the Rubens in a museum and decline to feel, and therefore to discuss, its department-store features. But the immediate responses to a Rubens nude include other forms of cognition—the instant knowledge that it is a Rubens, for example, and therefore gets responses engineered by Rubens himself, who knew perfectly well that they all depend on your immediate sense that the woman lives and breathes, but who never left it at that. Surely aesthetic appreciation of the picture is not really a defensive move toward detachment, since it yields a stronger engagement with more, not less, of the power in the image, and allows even more excitement than the plain naked lady can give you.

The main body of Freedberg's book deals with the overwhelming evidence of what images have done in history to make people feel and know them, and also with what has given them their active power—the power to heal and to slay, to appease lust and to arouse it, to chastise, to console, to receive legal punishment, to save from harm, to speak and to move, to give milk, to bleed, to weep, to fly. Such evidence is largely ignored by historians of art, or simply disbelieved. And yet the amount and persistence of such lore have a telling weight—a force that still promotes pilgrimages all over the world. Freedberg is concerned to describe the exact form that such evidence has taken, to anatomize and to specify the kinds of close relations that people have formed with images and the kinds of reports they have left, including not only historical chronicles but all sorts of tales and legends, even literary tropes and figures of speech ("The eyes follow you around the room!"); and then to account for the power itself, the apparent capacity of many images not just to reflect life but to live and act.

Images are, of course, dead. Their life,

therefore, has been a matter of investiture, of evocation, of attribution and projection, of consecration, of creating or recognizing a vitality in them that can be activated in certain ways. At what point, and by what means, does a collection of marks or a piece of shaped clay acquire its undeniable life? When and why does the crude matter wrought by the artist separate from him and take on a potent independent existence? The agreements about all this have differed according to time and place and purpose. Freedberg describes many of them, and the practices founded on them. These include the naming, embellishing, and enshrining—the "finishing"—of unformed stones fallen from the sky and worshipped by ancient Greeks, and the "eye-ceremony" of the



VELAZQUEZ, *THE ROKEBY VENUS*, SLASHED IN 1914. (COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL GALLERY, LONDON)

Theravada Buddhists of Ceylon, in which the statue of the Buddha gets its potency and becomes a god only when the artist finally paints in the eyes during a dangerous and exacting ritual. After this ceremony, the artist's own gaze is thought to have a destructive power, and so he is blindfolded until he can look at something he can also shatter with a sword.

Freedberg doesn't follow up the meaning of the artist's dreadful burden in this story; and he only occasionally touches on the artist's role in the drama of image and response. But he does recount the impassioned artist's prayer to Venus in the moving fable of Pygmalion, whose superb masterpiece was forced by the goddess to give up its immortality and become a living girl, fit only to love and die like the others. And it is the very fear of this, Freedberg would say, that

keeps scholars of art from dealing in such matters—the common fear that an image really might come to life and wield its power among the living instead of staying safely lifeless in a controllable world of painted canvas or carved marble. Denial of the vital power of images is bound up with a need to deny the power of all material objects, of which the human body is by far the most troublesome: objects forming images of it thus only compound the trouble. A further common fear is the fear of perfect likeness, the sense that a completed portrait draws into itself the soul of the original. This fear is not confined to unlettered barbarians; it appears everywhere, sometimes disguised as a pleasure, as in the case of memorial portraits that can preserve the living presence of the dead, or photographs of loved ones far away.

Even the artistic impulse away from figuration can be seen, thinks Freedberg, as another example of such a fear. Perhaps the non-figurative artist flees nature so that he needn't dread returning Pygmalion-like to the studio, to find his work offering an unholy invitation or making a fearful claim. But this idea fails to account altogether for Abstract Expressionism, for example; and in fact there is no lack of life in unfigured objects, as Freedberg elsewhere notes. Even about the maker of lifelike images, there are other myths that he leaves out. What about doomed Narcis-

sus, and all the makers of self-portraits? What about our intense response to the living artist who breathes so palpably in any image he makes, right along with the subject?

Indeed, in the apprehension of abstract art, it is precisely the artist's own beating pulse that we usually feel first. Surely a non-figurative painting can be a deeper mirror than any other, a gathering place of private forces unscreened by the veil of surface likeness. Response to abstract art can be called aesthetic, but it is certainly not detached, since it is based on the same empathy with which we follow, holding our breath, the antique sculptor's quest for the perfect image of perfect bodily beauty—the creation of something close to divine that we have not yet seen, something always yet to come. Apprehension of the effort and the result are fused in the beholder's re-

spouse; the object can't be disconnected from its maker. Freedberg seems to want to wrench them apart in his program for the study of response, to insist wrongly that our first perceptions of art wholly exclude our sense of the artist's own desire, and ally themselves only with the feelings we have when we are stunned by the photo in a full-page ad or feel our flesh creep in the waxwork museum.

To discuss the large issues at the root of his subject, Freedberg naturally must penetrate the linked realms of sex and religion, where art has led most of its life. Consequently, apart from the history of art itself, his book is built on scholarship in anthropology and theology, in patristic writings and church history, in the cultural history of both East and West, in ancient history, and in several branches of psychology and philosophy. It is hard for his own clear thought to shine through the thick hedge of learning that surrounds it, all bristling with quotes and references and tags in several ancient languages, and blossoming with small phrases and asides in many modern ones. Nor is it easy to persuade us effectively while his esoteric vocabulary in English hampers the march of exposition like a cumbersome suit of armor. The book is so jammed with words like "teletic," "catachrestic," "apophantic," "syndetic," "eristics," and "iconodule," along with recent critical terms such as "ekphrastic" and "hermeneutic" and philosophical terms like "ontology" and "hypostasis," that it is too bad of him to insist on "temerarious," "patriarchality," and "soteriological." (I like "salvific," though.)

Freedberg is inventing a new subject, one that clearly needs heavy support from many other subjects and also some powerful defenses, just like a new republic. A nervous donnishness, or donnish nervousness, informs these pages; but it can't snuff the flame of original thought and rebellious feeling in them. He rightly wants to expound his daring subject from a firm position high inside the academic citadel, but since his scholarly caution is at war with his private zeal, the result gives the impression of being written through clenched teeth. Religion and sex are volatile topics in any milieu, and they are positively explosive in connection with art, vision, and feeling, and so this weighty book has a bomblike aura.

The lifelike image has been a figure in erotic mythology all over the world, not just in Ovid. Everybody knows how eagerly love comes in at the eye, and that looking at a lifeless image can arouse desire even more promptly than the sight of a live body, and even without hope of seeing one. It follows that love in its de-

votional form may also be aroused that way, since the lust of the eye has such a force of its own. Religious devotion may receive its greatest stimulus from a compelling visual rendering, especially if the deity is supposed to have its true being only in the spiritual universe beyond the grasp of the senses.

There is a long history of the ways that sexual desire works in relation to modeled and pictured figures. Some examples given here are suggestive. It was once thought that a wife's lust, kindled by an arousing picture hung in just the right place in the marital bedroom, might benignly affect the character of the child she conceives by her living (but perhaps less arousing?) husband. How nice to find an old story saying that pure female lust, born of a picture and not a partner, is creative and auspicious. And then there are all the tales of men bewitched by amorous statues whom they are forced to espouse in place of the beloved, or of men compromised by clever simulators of themselves into entanglements with lustful sorceresses, who have made and manipulated the figures to entrap them.

In action, the intense fetishizing gaze that art lovers turn on images feels as delicious and dangerous as sex, and just as much in need of controlling sanctions, internal and institutional, especially in the sphere of religious art. Sexual and sacred energy combined in the image of the Virgin, whose bodily beauty expresses her virginal and maternal character. Her power is bound up with her female physical being, and making images of her has never seemed to need an excuse. Making them beautiful, and therefore even desirable, was both a duty and a risk. She had to have a perfect beauty free of sin, but the image-maker was not accountable for the responses of the sinful viewer, who had the burden of sorting out the kinds of love he felt.

Making the image "true to life," however, was essential. St. Luke was believed to have painted a portrait of the Virgin from life, of which the many copies and copies of copies formed a foundation for the spread of her image, together with the belief that each is authentic. To modern eyes, the realism of many such Virgins seems swallowed up in what looks like a purely stylized, somewhat hieratic formula, often stiff and harsh; but in their time they were seen as tender and truthful, real and not symbolic, receptive to real love.

Many are still seen that way, right along with the vividly natural Madonnas sanctified by the history of art. The Virgin's image has been fragmented into

hundreds of working versions, each distinct, each with its history of special deeds and effects, each giving the Virgin's blessings and benefits in unique ways and receiving the love and thanks of her local devotees. All such images somehow are the Virgin: they don't stand for her, they embody her completely as she does her holy work in each of their shapes. The true Virgin is perceived to inhere in her authentic image, just as the soul of an individual is perceived to be "captured" in a perfect likeness, and to have a real life there. Similarly, when the Roman emperor's image was carried about to remote parts of the empire, the event counted as a visit from the emperor himself; homage rendered to the image was considered to be received directly by him.

While Renaissance artists were perfecting the human face and figure in paint and stone, absolutely lifelike effigies were also being made in wax, with real hair, real clothes, and glass eyes, to be treasured as memorials of the virtuous dead. But on certain occasions such effigies were also made expressly to be tried and condemned in court and then publicly beheaded, eviscerated (animal guts being previously inserted), or otherwise tormented and executed in place of an absent malefactor whom they had been made to resemble. The man himself might be long gone, or dead already; but public feeling and justice were apparently both satisfied by such proceedings. The realism of the figure was a necessary feature: it was not a crude stuffed mannequin with a cartoon head, but a perfect reproduction of the man himself, made (and perceived) to house his actual spirit. As in the case of the revered funeral effigies, the making was often overseen by well-known artists.

Holy figures for narrative scenes were sometimes made life-size in wax, or in painted wood with real hair and glass eyes, and arranged in realistic settings, the better to impress the faithful with the immediacy of sacred events—but again Freedberg points out that such startling groups are fastidiously ignored by modern historians of art, unless a famous artist's name is associated with them. Gradually, during the 17th and 18th centuries, wax images lost caste altogether and slowly became marvels entirely of the entertainment business, made to arouse cheap thrills rather than authentic family piety, spiritual enlightenment, or any serious artistic consideration.

Baroque art abandoned an ideal of death-mask realism in favor of dramatic stylizations that irreversibly stretched the perceived capacities of stone, paint,

and wood. The use of glass eyes and actual cloth came to seem naive, and eventually tawdry and vulgar. The aim of exactly reproducing the look of human life had reached a certain peak, and with it the artist's fame for achieving that effect above all others. In the apprehension of art, a division became conventional between the direct perception of reality and the perception of a realistic image, which was acknowledged to be obeying laws of representation, not of life. And it follows that the sense of what the artist was doing in making the image, rather than what the image itself might do, gradually became primary.

Still, the legends of miracles continued to pile up, including those of saints whom the painted Jesus leaned down to embrace from his painted cross, or to whose mouth the carved Virgin would direct a stream of real milk from her carved breast. In such cases, as in most cases, the image was understood to remain an image: its living powers came from just that fact, that it had been made so vitally and truthfully, and consecrated so correctly, that divinity was pleased to course through it when a miracle was needed, like electricity through a well-made appliance.

Artists themselves might receive divine help from their own works. An especially realistic Virgin might reach down to save her sculptor from falling off his ladder, as if his superior gifts made him deserve saving, just as Pygmalion's gave him the right to wed his own creation. These stories suggest that it is precisely the best art, not the tackiest, that permits the most intense connection with humans. Great artists have always enjoyed such intimacy by right; and others who give themselves the chance can share in it.

But the images that once leaned out of their frames or gestured from their pedestals were free of their makers and ready for intimate engagement with any human being; and the images we now know as art can't do that any longer. Our awareness of them contains a sense of their bondage to their parent; we know they cannot call their souls their own, and that they can't allow themselves to form those ties of which Freedberg has found so many in the eventful lives of images from the past. Modern intimate relations with works of art can't, and shouldn't, have the unencumbered and unenlightened quality that Freedberg would like to believe in and preserve; but they have something else instead.

Freedberg's rhetoric suggests that we willingly relinquish something of value in favor of a dilute or ersatz product. But in fact we have not reduced or vitiated

our perceptions of the Virgins of Piero della Francesca, for example, or even of the Mantegna that Freedberg mentions. We have intensified them, since we learned to take more into account than Mantegna's ability to make the Virgin seem real. The impact of a Piero Virgin now contains more than the force of her perpetual beauty and holiness, because it contains the palpable drive of the artist to make a perfect vision, to create that heaven on earth that can be so moving even in non-figured paintings, so that the beauty of the Virgin and the beauty of the picture both strike at once. The tears of awe must now be a response not just to her, but to what Piero has done to make a world for her to move in. The image comes to more than life.

Of all the acts people engage in with art, the most intense is destruction. Nothing demonstrates belief in the power of images more keenly than the need to get rid of them—and Freedberg thinks that the wish to keep some of them at an elevated distance in museums is a version of the same need, a similar index of their dread force in emotional life. He has elsewhere written extensively on iconoclasm. Here he discusses the various moments in the history of religious images when they have been in real physical jeopardy, and often systematically wiped out along with much secular art. In the early centuries of Christianity, images were associated with paganism, and the use of them for the new faith had to be strongly defended. Idolatry, meaning chiefly the worship of the many old gods, was a present danger. But the need for holy images remained, and stories arose of them aiding in conversions by surpassing the powers or even toppling the figures of Venus and the other pagan deities.

Conflict between those who advocated Christian images and those who would forbid or destroy them arose again during the Byzantine Iconoclastic Controversy in the seventh and eighth centuries, and again after the Reformation. In antiquity, many had believed in the moral danger of devotion to beautiful objects. It was thought by Greeks and Romans to have a softening effect, rendering one too much like the Persians or other Asiatics—that is, like the enemy, with all his disgusting habits and vile beliefs. Later, many Christians believed that God alone might create, and feared not only the inherent sacrilege in making images of natural things, but the worse one of presuming that they might have their own power. Many also believed that God alone had the right to create Beauty, that any of man's works made to please the eye were bound to

displease him, even if put to sacred use.

But far beyond a mere love of beautiful things, the wish to contain and to circumscribe the all-encompassing and endless God in finite man-made figures was deeply repugnant to many. The famous stricture in the Old Testament against graven images, which Freedberg tendentially claims was in large part metaphorical and simply cautionary against false gods, was adduced again and again by the fervent enemies of religious art. Yet people continued to need and to love images, which had their staunch defenders. Among these was Gregory the Great, who is responsible for the famous idea that holy pictures are the books of the illiterate, and therefore good for supporting their simple faith. He is thus also responsible for the disgraceful but enduring notion that the direct power of images only works on the lower classes (women, children, and madmen being naturally among those), and that strong, rational, superior persons are naturally immune to it.

The thought that God might be properly accessible to everyone only if contained in some comprehensible vessel, just as an idea is formed by language, and that the container of holiness might rightly fuse with holiness itself and be the just recipient of worship, was frightening. The lame notion that images only stand for what they represent, and so may be harmlessly admired while the prototype receives the true worship, is also obviously false to the way images actually are perceived and truly operate; and that is frightening, too. But clever Byzantine apologists for images pointed out that Christ is himself the physical image of God, the living proof that the unknowable deity did make himself known to us as a finite and mortal man, manifestly for our salvation—and so the Incarnation justifies not just the making but the worship of holy images, being the first instance of one made for the purpose. The idea nevertheless sustains the view that the Old Testament God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob should still not be offered in an image for worship, as Christ may; but that God the Father may appear as part of the Trinity, and as part of the drama of Christ's life and lineage.

Freedberg claims that those most drawn to images are the ones who often feel compelled to destroy them—those who feel the power of art, "who cherish it and are afraid," are the very ones who wish to attack it, reform it, censor it, or sweep it away. That clearly includes the ones who live close to it, study it, and so must try to keep its power within bounds. As a nation we are certainly

conforming to his view in our treatment of works by Richard Serra and Robert Mapplethorpe, and in the rising anti-pornography movement: a recurrent iconoclasm accompanies our obvious reverence for the priesthood of artists and the sacred mysteries of art, along with our consuming passion for visible and tangible objects, often called materialism.

Just because of the deep emotional importance of images in modern life, individual cases of iconoclasm are even more sensational than the institutional kind. Freedberg's book contains pictures not only of Poussin's wounded *Calf*, but of Michelangelo's exquisite *Virgin of the Pietà* with her face smashed, Rubens's fleshy *Fall of the Damned* scarred by a big

splatter of acid, Rembrandt's *Night Watch* bearing an array of vertical knife-slits, and—most dreadful of all—Velázquez's delicate *Roqueby Venus* stabbed again and again in her naked back as she quietly lies down to study her mirror.

Among all the legends surrounding works of art in history, Freedberg cites not one about an image that healed itself. However charged they are with power, the inert stuff of which they are perilously made has none of living matter's rich defenses. The iconoclast knows his target offers no resistance; his act is total injury. Mighty efforts are made to mend the thing so that the damage is hardly noticeable, but it can never really be the same again. And yet for all that, short of absolute destruc-

tion, its life (by contrast with its vulnerable body) is often quite untouched. Once the wounds are repaired, Venus's pliant spine, luminous buttocks, and brooding gaze remain serenely unaffected by what she has been through. Her real wholeness has defied being hacked apart.

The attack was made on her in 1914 by a suffragist named Mary Richardson, who was protesting the imprisonment of Mrs. Pankhurst. For Richardson, the constant homage paid to beautiful Venus, luxuriating calmly in her public boudoir and her privilege as a national treasure, and especially to Venus made of dead paint and canvas, was in too sharp a contrast to the heartless neglect of the living, breathing Mrs. Pankhurst, confined out of sight and forced to sacrifice her comfort and liberty to the cause of legitimate rights for real women.

But what could be done for Mrs. Pankhurst by stabbing the poor picture? Decades later, Richardson confessed she simply couldn't stand the way men looked at it all day. And there lies another general motive for iconoclasm: jealousy. Images have enough power to steal the rights of others, to be preferred in place of those who know they have a better claim, to supplant the rightful prophet in the spreading of the true word, to seize and to attach the gaze that should be free to fall elsewhere. And so images are at risk from disappointed lovers of persons and causes, from too-clear-sighted visionaries, from unrecognized knowers of better truths, from unsuccessful artists—and sometimes, though Freedberg doesn't talk about this, from the very artist who made the work.

Although the newspapers have made much of attempted image murder, those who run galleries and museums tend to keep the matter quiet, "so as not," one of them has said, "to put ideas in people's heads." The slashing lunatic is always carefully categorized as quite separate from the sane public. Freedberg believes, however, that close behind every art lover's eyes, the idea is already there. The arrogant fragility of art, with its motionless components so minutely arranged, with its false life so undeniably able to compel true love—to say nothing of respect and awe—is an offense to the intractable, absurd, horrific, and chaotic state of real human life, and a goad to the latent righteous anger against it in all of us. Images take their chances when they go into the world and try to live there without getting involved.

Titian's *Venus of Urbino* is another famous nude with a long emotional his-

Night Subway

The nurse coming off her shift at the psychiatric ward
nodding over the *Post*, her surprisingly delicate legs
shining darkly through the white hospital stockings,
and the Puerto Rican teens, nuzzling, excited
after heavy dates in Times Square, the girl with green hair,
the Hasid from the camera store, who mumbles
over his prayerbook the nameless name of God,
sitting separate, careful no woman should touch him,
even her coat, even by accident,
the boy who squirms on his seat to look out the window
where signal lights wink and flash like the eyes of dragons
while his mother smokes, each short, furious drag
meaning *Mens no good they tell you anything—*

How not think of Xerxes, how he reviewed his troops
and wept to think that of all those thousands of men
in their brilliant armor, their spearpoints bright in the sun,
not one would be alive in a hundred years?

O sleepers above us, river
rejoicing in the moon, and the clouds passing over the moon.

From a Notebook

The final vanity, to think
you're not your life, that even today
at the last possible moment
you can walk away, as out of a cheap hotel,
leaving ten dollars under the key on the bureau.
Why bother to lock the door? The fuzzy TV,
the footsole-colored bedspread,
the quart of milk souring on the windowsill,
you always knew they had nothing to do with you
although you were used to them,
and even grateful
alone as you were in a strange city.

KATHA POLLITT

tory, although Freedberg has no stories of physical attacks on her. For him, she illustrates the way that images are considered harmless once they have been categorized as Great Art, even though they obviously keep their power and simply operate without a license. Unlike Velázquez's introspective Venus, Titian's is an explicitly inflammatory erotic picture. The naked woman lolls on her back, one hand in her crotch, her nipples erect, gazing moistly right at you. Mark Twain was outraged to realize that while she might freely stretch out and fondle herself before the very eyes of inquisitive little girls, old maids, and impressionable boys, he would not be able to publish an accurate description of the picture without being severely censored. Twain smelled hypocrisy. Freedberg calls it repression. In modern art-historical writing, he scathingly notes, pages are written on the deeper meanings of this Venus in its Neoplatonist context, or with respect to other social and intellectual forces at work in Titian's time, without ever mentioning her direct message.

She certainly has one. In the Uffizi, the lascivious gentlemen still gaze from under half-closed lids and the agitated children are still nudging each other and whispering; and everybody else still stops to look and swallow hard. Elsewhere in Florence, giggling throngs of young girls also cluster around the pedestal of Michelangelo's *David*, milling about under the electrifying impact of his gigantic young bare body. Others who don't giggle nevertheless feel the force in those huge genitals, those great veined hands, that bony chest and tense neck. Not much dispassionate critical discussion can be heard in either of these shrines, or in other museums; the public seems not at all at the mercy of distancing mechanisms.

Yet Freedberg is unfair to sneer at scholarly efforts to explain the Venus, or elsewhere to ridicule Janet Cox-Rearick's calm and learned study of a Saint Sebastian by Fra Bartolommeo, which in its day was so lusciously disconcerting to the female worshippers in the church where it hung that it had to be moved to the sacristy. I think it can be presumed that the erotic impact of *David*, Venus, and St. Sebastian goes without saying; and that what must be said is that in each case there's more to it than raw sex. Even realistically sexy nudes don't all come across in the same way. The power of Titian's Venus comes from Titian's ability to fuse the complex surface with the simple subject, so that the smooth naked woman with the knowing gaze and gesture is simultaneously a vision of cosmic repose, of a kind that living prostitutes do not usually suggest.

This picture reveals something that immediately feels more potent and more interesting than the straight invitation that it portrays. Titian has seen to it that we can't get hot for the woman without simultaneously getting hot for the painting. The repression, if any, has been foreseen and organized by Titian himself. Sex and aesthetics together give you the charge; and that's what all the people feel who stare at Venus. Michelangelo and Fra Bartolommeo managed the same amazing thing. And figuring out how they did it seems honorable work.

Freedberg is keenly interested in the discrepancy between what official texts say about images and what people actually do about them. There have been many times in history when images were forbidden in religious practice by decree, or when rituals were described as lacking them, and yet the material evidence shows that they were indeed made and used in abundance. The ancient association between high spiritual longing and the rejection of images, the old connection between true holiness and the invisible, has persisted and given rise to what Freedberg calls "the myth of aniconism"—the idea that certain cultures, such as the Jews and others who invented monotheistic religions, were so spiritually advanced that they transcended the need for images and therefore did not make them.

Freedberg states that there is absolutely no physical evidence for such a notion: all cultures, Jews included, have needed and made images, whatever the texts say, and there is no evidence that spiritual purity requires the lack of them. Jewish fear of idolatry comes down to the fear of that same "fetishizing gaze" that feels just like lust in action, a fear that therefore must ideally seek to wipe the whole potential array of images off the retina like a feast of forbidden erotic delights—but failing that, at least to sweep them off the altar. If the one true God is to be the one true fate of the Jews, they must keep their deepest passion strong and free from the casual entrapment of the eager eye by art, and keep faithful intercourse with the deity unsoiled by wanton visual living.

To say that Jews have loved, made, and feared images in their time is to say that they are human; but Freedberg the art lover seems also to suggest that the fear forbidding the image of God can have long-term pernicious side effects. It can try to prevent the benign power of visual art from holding its proper sway over the visible world, over the satisfying apprehension of natural appearances and over all the imaginative seeing that permits the truest relish of God's handiwork and

man's; it can distrust the delicious machinery whereby staring makes the fields look like Constables, the city like a filmset, and Swann's coachman like a Bellini doge. This inward process can be thwarted. "We see, we gaze, we create false idols we must destroy," says Freedberg, as if loving to look at things were indeed a painful moral burden full of desperate conflict. He even has a wry note on himself about the fell heritage of a Jewish art historian with additional Calvinist elements in his upbringing. He plainly feels the weight of all those centuries of fear pulling heavily against the demands of his own eyes and heart. His move to slash the art historians may represent a struggle for some relief.

Freedberg thinks that pure aesthetic appreciation ought not to exist, that it has been a false goal cravenly set up to aid the repressed efforts of art critics, and to make other people feel small if they can't manage it. Purely abstract decoration is something he believes does not exist at all, but he thinks that others believe it does. Again it seems to be the "purity" of the aesthetic response that is at issue, his strange idea that critics all think it is their high task to keep the appreciation of lines, forms, colors, and textures, or even of all those things in a carved or painted nude, free

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But I don't think that people, even art historians, believe in this at all any more, or in the "purity" of abstract decorative form. We are all aware that the impulse to make figures informs all decorative effort, and know that waves and snakes and leaves and beasts lurk in all ornament along with bodies and parts of bodies. The experience of apprehending art is well understood to be aesthetic and emotional together. I don't believe that critics really repress raw feeling because it might cloud the purity of high aesthetics, even when they write only about the latter and keep silent about the former.

I suspect that many of the art historians Freedberg chastises did go into the field out of an obsessive desire to be forever looking at works of art, on purpose to feel and even to wallow in the sense of their power. But no doubt such seekers found it necessary to control their lust simply in order to move forward at all, to get somewhere beyond staring transfixed, to try penetrating the mystery of the object by any means, so as not to feel so helpless in its spell; and that attempt might well mean giving up strong personal response as a subject, since one can so easily talk only about oneself instead of trying to find out how the image got that way. (Leo Steinberg is one of the exceptions.)

To get on further with trying to understand the force of art, and how it actually works while people are looking at it, Freedberg is undoubtedly right: we need to invite our modern souls, and consult them once more. His turgid, demanding, powerful book, however, only projects the need by describing some of the failures that have caused it, and showing in broad, rich detail just what we have been missing. At the end, the power of images remains almost the same mystery as before.

Trying to discover the sources of art's power ought not to preclude continuing to feel it, nor helping to preserve the feeling in others. The dissection of art, like the slashing of it, cannot truly murder. The invention of ways to get a grip on art by conceiving of it as part of history was a boon to people struggling to understand, to people feeling so much moved and yet so ignorant in the presence of the life that burns in painted eyes and vibrates along granite limbs, and even now continues to explode in unfigured structures of twisted iron and poured acrylic wash.

ANNE HOLLANDER is the author most recently of *Moving Pictures* (Knopf).

Quiet Desolation

BY HERMIONE LEE

The Remains of the Day by Kazuo Ishiguro

(Knopf, 245 pp., \$18.95)

An Artist of the Floating World by Kazuo Ishiguro

(Vintage, 208 pp., \$8.95)

A Pale View of Hills by Kazuo Ishiguro

(Penguin, 192 pp., \$4.95)

On the strength of three dazzling short novels, Kazuo Ishiguro is now, at 35, a famous prize-winning writer in Britain. (Hardly anyone in America had heard of him until this year, but that's changing.) Still, I notice that people are always getting the titles of his books slightly wrong. Is it *A Pale View of the Hills*? *The Artist of the Floating World*, or *Artist of the Floating World*, or *The Artist of a Floating World*? *The Remains of the Day* sometimes loses its first definite article. Like all slight but persistent mistakes—Ishiguro's characters are much given to them—these are symptomatic slips.

For Ishiguro's titles do indeed contain evasive articles. "An" artist (unlike Joyce's definitive portrait of "the" artist) is open to amendment and uncertainty, and the floating world he portrays, and betrays, is "transient, illusory." It's not "the hills," but "hills"—some, where?—and it's not they that are pale, but the view of them, as if paleness were a quality of the haunted, ghostly viewer, who describes herself as having "spent many moments—as I was to do throughout succeeding years—gazing emptily at the view from my apartment window . . . a pale outline of hills . . . not an unpleasant view." The "remains" are ambiguous, too: Are they waste, ruins, leftovers, or are they what is salvaged? Is this a metaphorical day, as in "our day is done," or is it "a day in the life"?

The titles hover on the borders of allegory. The openings of the three novels give off a similarly puzzling and contingent air:

Niki, the name we finally gave my younger

daughter, is not an abbreviation; it was a compromise I reached with her father. For paradoxically it was he who wanted to give her a Japanese name, and I—perhaps out of some selfish desire not to be reminded of the past—insisted on an English one. He finally agreed to Niki, thinking it had some vague echo of the East about it.

[*A Pale View of Hills*]

If on a sunny day you climb the steep path leading up from the little wooden bridge still referred to around here as "the Bridge of Hesitation," you will not have to walk far before the roof of my house becomes visible between the tops of two ginkgo trees. Even if it did not occupy such a commanding position on the hill, the house would still stand out from all others nearby, so that as you come up the path, you may find yourself wondering what sort of wealthy man owns it.

But then I am not, nor have I ever been, a wealthy man.

[*An Artist of the Floating World*]

It seems increasingly likely that I really will undertake the expedition that has been preoccupying my imagination now for some days.

[*The Remains of the Day*]

All three speakers introduce themselves by way of fine distinctions between appearances and actuality, intentions and achievements. The effect is punctilious but cryptic. All three demur from the positive: the apparent nickname, the commanding house, the preoccupying journey are not straightforwardly arrived at. Something is being denied or held off. The artist's invitation into his floating world is itself a "bridge of hesitation," picking its way through hypotheses, negatives, qualifiers, so that "you may find yourself wondering" about the

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