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Chapter 9: Painting by Proxy:
The Conceptual Artist as Manufacturer

Introduction

> It sometimes seems to me that the labor of the artist is of a very old-fashioned kind; the artist himself a survival, a craftsman or artisan of a disappearing species, working in his own room, following his own homemade empirical methods, living in untidy intimacy with his tools … Perhaps conditions are changing, and instead of this spectacle of an eccentric individual using whatever comes his way, there will instead be a picture-making laboratory, with its specialist officially clad in white, rubber-gloved, keeping to a precise schedule, armed with strictly appropriate apparatus and instruments, each with its appointed place and exact function … So far, chance has not been eliminated from practice, or mystery from method, or inspiration from regular hours; but I do not vouch for the future.
>
> Paul Valéry, 1936[1]

In 1955, in the A.W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, the French philosopher Etienne Gilson, a member of the Académie Française, presented his analysis of the art of painting. These lectures were published in both English and French in 1958.[2] Early in this discussion, Gilson reflected on the production of paintings:

> The nature of painting is such that the artist who conceives the work is also the one who executes it. This proposition is not necessarily true of the sculptor, but it is assuredly true of the painter. Except for tasks of secondary importance that can easily be left to his assistants, it is the painter himself who confers the material and physical existence upon the work he conceives.[3]

The touch of the painter created the work of art: "It is the hand of the painter that embodies in actually existing physical objects the conceptions of his mind." Unlike poets, playwrights, novelists, and composers, who are white-collar workers, painters necessarily work with their hands: "when all is said and done, painters (and sculptors) are related to manual laborers by a deep-rooted affinity that nothing can eliminate." Gilson underscored this point: "As often as not, a painter has to don working clothes in the same way as a mechanic or any other artisan. He does

not resent dirtying his hands with paint."[4] Nor could the artist choose whether or not to execute his own paintings: "a painter is the sole and total cause of his work."[5]

In considering the issue of authenticity, Gilson described what he called an extreme case in which an artist, presented with an imitation of his work done by another artist, might add his own touches to the painting and then sign it:

> Is such a painting authentic? No, since most of it has not been done by the painter himself. Yes, since, after being done in his own manner, this work of art has been completed by the painter himself and finally acknowledged by him as his own work.[6]

The case for authenticity thus involves the physical touch of the artist. Gilson was of course aware that a number of Old Masters had routinely made paintings in collaboration with others, but he noted that in every case these collaborations involved "a master and assistants working together under his direction and responsibility."[7] In two examples he discussed, both Rubens and Delacroix used assistants to paint parts of the works that the masters completed.[8]

Gilson stressed that his account of art rested in large part on the views of artists: "painters will perhaps notice how careful I have been to listen to what they themselves had to say concerning the nature of their own work."[9] He gave no indication that his analysis of the nature of painting would meet with any disagreement from artists. Yet even when he wrote, his statement of the nature of painting had been contradicted by the practice of at least one significant painter of the early twentieth century. Interestingly, it had also been rejected in theory by the private statements of the greatest painter of the twentieth century. And more importantly, within just a few years after Gilson wrote, major artists would create important paintings that controverted Gilson's definitions, and their practices would change the mainstream of advanced art. Today some of the greatest artists do not touch their paintings, and some do not even

supervise those who do touch these works. Recent innovations in art have radically changed the nature of painting, so that many painters have joined their literary and musical peers as white-collar workers. And recent research on artistic creativity has given us an understanding of the common elements that underlie this new practice.

Old Masters

Before examining the experience of the twentieth century, it is useful to return briefly to an earlier time. Recent investigations of the practices of two great seventeenth-century painters provide some valuable clues to the source of the novel practices of more recent times.

Peter Paul Rubens and Rembrandt van Rijn were both recognized by contemporaries as among the most talented painters who worked in the seventeenth-century Netherlands. Both Rubens in Antwerp and Rembrandt in Amsterdam operated sizable workshops where they were surrounded by numerous pupils and assistants.[10] Yet the two painters ran their workshops very differently.

Rubens collaborated with his assistants in the execution of large numbers of paintings. Zirka Filipczak described his practice:

> Rubens provided the crucial invention for each piece but delegated much of the actual execution to others. To this end, he provided his pupils, assistants, and collaborators with models for the general composition of a picture in the form of preparatory drawings and, especially, *disegni coloriti* or oil sketches. He often also furnished models for individual parts of the work, such as head studies, many of which he kept on file in his studio. With works largely executed by his assistants, Rubens generally retouched the final product in order to restore the spark of life where it had been dulled by uninspired execution.[11]

There was considerable variation in the amount of work the master did personally, and the cost of his paintings varied accordingly. So for example in 1618 Rubens wrote to a patron that paintings not entirely by his hand "are rated at a much lower price."[12]

Recent scholarship has revealed that Rembrandt's practice was very different. Svetlana Alpers concluded that "So far as we know he almost never collaborated on paintings with assistants."[13] Unlike the joint products made by Rubens and his assistants, in Rembrandt's studio the works were all made separately, so that Rembrandt was "a master surrounded by student-assistants each eventually producing paintings on their own for sale."[14] Josua Bruyn stressed this difference: "being an assistant in Rembrandt's studio meant taking one's own share in the studio's output rather than – as was the case with, for instance, Rubens – assisting the master in the execution of large paintings."[15]

Alpers explained that Rubens' method of making paintings allowed a division of labor:

> He developed a painting factory: assistants specialized in certain skills – landscapes, animals, and so on – and the master devised a mode of invention employing a clever combination of oil sketches and drawings. These permitted his inventions to be executed by others, sometimes with final touches to hands or faces by the master himself.[16]

Rembrandt worked very differently, making paintings without preparatory sketches and drawings. Ernst van de Wetering concluded that "Rembrandt … rarely prepared his paintings with the aid of drawings."[17] Alpers agreed that "Rembrandt's habit was not to work out his inventions in advance through drawings, but rather to invent paintings in the course of their execution."[18] Because Rembrandt's method of working did not separate invention and execution, his workshop could not operate like that of Rubens, for without drawings or other plans to guide

them, his assistants could not actually work on his paintings: “Rather than executing his inventions … Rembrandt’s students had to make paintings like his.”[19]

Art historians have long recognized that some Old Masters worked collaboratively, like Rubens, and that others, like Rembrandt, did not. Thus, for example, Alpers observed that “While Raphael and Rubens could work with a team, Leonardo and most notably Michelangelo, could not.”[20] Alpers suggested that these differences could have been due to personality – Rembrandt “was not a man who got on easily with others” – but it is more likely that a general explanation lies in what Alpers calls the artist’s “pictorial personality.”[21] Raphael, like Rubens, was a conceptual artist who made meticulous plans for his paintings that could then be carried out by others, much as some architects make detailed blueprints that others can follow in building their projects. In contrast, Leonardo and Michelangelo, like Rembrandt, were experimental artists who were not comfortable planning their works, and who had to execute their own paintings because they did not believe in separating invention and execution.[22] Important conceptual painters who were capable of planning their works in advance could hire assistants to execute paintings, based on their blueprints – preparatory drawings and oil sketches – whereas experimental painters generally would be incapable of collaborating with others, because of their inability to anticipate the final appearance of their paintings.

Interestingly, we know that the different methods by which painters produced their works were familiar to seventeenth-century Dutch painters. In his book, *Introduction to the Higher Education of the Art of Painting*, published in 1678, the painter Samuel van Hoogstraten, a former student of Rembrandt, described a contest that was supposed to have occurred in Holland around 1630, in which three painters were given the task of painting a landscape within a specified time limit before an audience of art connoisseurs.[23] The first painter immediately began

to paint finished forms, by routine. The second painter began by covering his canvas with a variety of colors, “here light there dark more or less like a variegated agate or marbled paper,” then created houses, ships, and other forms that were suggested by these random markings: “In short, his eye, as though looking for forms that lay hidden in a chaos of paint, steered his hand in true wise so that one saw a complete painting before one realized what he intended.” The third painter initially appeared to be doing nothing – “it seemed at first even that he was deliberately wasting time, or knew not how he should begin” – but in fact he was creating a mental image of the finished work: “he was first forming in his imagination the whole conception of his work; he was first making the painting in his mind before he put his brush into the paint.” In the end, the third painter was judged the winner, for he had “in his well-chosen naturalness and in the art something extraordinary,” which was considered superior to the first painter’s works “that flow easily from the hand,” or the second painter’s works made “by searching and finding in random images.”[24]

The first artist in the account, who produced conventional and repetitive works, was not a potential innovator. The second artist was an experimental painter, who found his subject as he worked, whereas the third artist was a conceptual painter, who preconceived images before executing them. While it is suggestive that the work of the conceptual painter was deemed the best, since the academic tradition accorded its greatest honors to art that originated in ideas, Hoogstraten’s anecdote demonstrates that seventeenth-century artists were aware of both the experimental and the conceptual approaches to painting.

Understanding the differences in the practices of conceptual and experimental Old Masters provides a useful background for our consideration of the twentieth century, when some conceptual artists would delegate even more of the work involved in executing their paintings.

And for this purpose the practice of Rubens yields one more interesting insight. The specific case is not strictly relevant to this inquiry, because it involves the production of prints rather than paintings, but it is suggestive.

When Rubens completed a painting he sometimes had a printmaker produce copies of the work; this was common among a number of masters of the time, for the circulation of numerous and relatively inexpensive prints allowed their work to become known much more widely throughout Europe. Following the normal practice, Rubens would generally provide a drawing of his painting that the printmaker would translate into his medium. Late in his life, however, Rubens departed from this practice:

> In a few exceptional cases in the late 1630s, Rubens provided inventions without preparing any model. Crippled by gout, he sometimes found it difficult to work on the small scale that was necessary in preparatory drawings for frontispieces. This physical limitation led him to experiment with a novel procedure. He dictated his ideas to Erasmus Quellinus who then recorded them in a drawing. The frontispieces engraved after this type of drawing bore the following credits: "Erasmus Quellinius delineavit, Pet. Paul. Rubenius invenit, Corn. Galleus junior sculpsit." Even though he had not lifted a pencil in the manual execution of a work, Rubens was thus recognized as the inventor of a visual image – a revolutionary idea in the 17th century.[25]

Rubens' practice in these cases can logically be seen as a preview of the behavior of many conceptual painters of the second half of the twentieth century.

Young Geniuses

In the *Dada Almanac*, published in Berlin in 1920, an article jointly authored by the artist Jean Arp, the poet Tristan Tzara, and a writer named Walter Serner proposed that paintings could be executed by proxy: "the good painter was recognized, for instance, by the fact that he ordered his works from a carpenter, giving his specifications on the phone."[26] This idea evidently

resonated with Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, a young Hungarian painter who was then working in Berlin. Under the influence of Constructivism and Suprematism, Moholy-Nagy was searching for new ways of making art that would replace easel painting, in which engineer-artists would provide designs for works of art that could be mass produced. In 1922, Moholy-Nagy designed three colored compositions on graph paper and had them manufactured from industrial enamel. A biographer of the artist noted that "The result was not an industrial product, not even a model, but a perfectly composed and artistically constructed work of art: a Suprematist composition appearing not on canvas but on a slightly curved metal plate."[27] Moholy-Nagy ordered the three works in person, but when they were completed, he declared "I might even have done it over the telephone!", and in later years they were given the name "telephone pictures."[28]

Moholy-Nagy was a protean conceptual artist. He became an influential teacher at the Bauhaus, and he made contributions in areas as diverse as photography, industrial design, documentary films, and the design of stage sets for opera and theatre. He did not pursue the concept of the telephone pictures, and they did not influence the course of advanced art. Yet his execution of the Dada idea has led some art scholars to consider him "a visionary in regard to Minimal Art and the modern concept of anonymous authorship."[29]

The idea of painting by proxy did not disappear in later years. An interesting instance appears in Francoise Gilot's account of her life with Picasso. Gilot, who was herself a painter, wrote of an incident in 1948 when Picasso was working on a large painting, *La Cuisine*. After he had completed the basic forms, he told Gilot: "I see two possible directions for this canvas. I want another one just like it, to start from. You make a second version up to this point and I'll work on it from there. I want it tomorrow." Because of the little time available, Gilot called Picasso's nephew, Javier Vilato, who was also a painter, and asked him to help her. Working

together, the two completed the task, and Picasso subsequently made two different versions of the painting. Gilot recalled that she did similar jobs for Picasso on several occasions to save him time when he wanted to develop a composition in two different ways: "That gave him a chance to get to the main point quickly and work over it longer." She noted that "For Pablo my collaboration was a practical demonstration of the truth of one of his favorite aphorisms: 'If I telegraph one of my canvases to New York,' he said, 'any house-painter should be able to do it properly. A painting is a sign – just like the sign that indicates a one-way street.'"[30]

The 1960s witnessed a series of departures from Gilson's characterization of the nature of painting, the first of which occurred at the very beginning of the decade. Early in 1960, in Paris Yves Klein began to create paintings with what he called "living brushes." Nude models would cover themselves with Klein's patented International Klein Blue paint, then press themselves against large sheets of paper tacked to the wall or laid on the floor. In one production in March 1960, one hundred invited guests filled a Paris art gallery and listened to a small orchestra as they watched three nude models create the paintings that the critic Pierre Restany had named "anthropometries." Klein, dressed formally in a tuxedo and white tie, stood nearby giving the models instructions and directions as they worked. This performance was documented by hired photographers, as were a number of subsequent sessions. On some later occasions, Klein added white gloves to his formal attire, to underscore his physical separation from the execution of the paintings. As he explained,

> In this way I stayed clean. I no longer dirtied myself with color, not even the tips of my fingers. The work finished itself there in front of me, under my direction, in absolute collaboration with the model. And I could salute its birth into the tangible world in a dignified manner, dressed in a tuxedo.[31]

The process satisfied Klein's conception of the artistic process, because he believed that the artist should conceive works of art but not personally produce physical objects. Using living brushes allowed him to retain control of the production of the paintings without any direct physical contact: "Detached and distant, the work of art must complete itself before my eyes and under my command."[32]

Unlike Moholy-Nagy's telephone paintings, Klein's anthropometries became influential for advanced art. Klein was the most important French painter of his generation, and the anthropometries became his most important works.[33] Many younger artists were impressed both by Klein's detachment from the execution of his paintings and by the flair of the performances at which he produced them.

Klein eliminated the artist's touch from the creation of paintings, but retained personal control over the assistants who executed them. In 1962, Robert Rauschenberg dispensed with the latter as well. In 1951, as a student at Black Mountain College, Rauschenberg had made the *White Paintings*, a series of canvases to which he applied white paint evenly with a roller. Although these were ostensibly empty canvases, shadows and reflections served to create images, demonstrating to Rauschenberg's satisfaction that there was in fact no such thing as an empty canvas. The impact of the *White Paintings* was considerable, for when the composer John Cage saw them he responded by writing his famous *4'33"*, which demonstrated that there was in fact no such thing as silence.[34]

The original *White Paintings* disappeared; Rauschenberg often painted over his works, and these seven unmarked canvases must have been particularly inviting targets. In 1962, Pontus Hulten, the director of Stockholm's Moderna Museet, contacted Rauschenberg to request the *White Paintings* for an exhibition. Rauschenberg told Hulten the paintings had been lost, but sent

him the measurements of the panels together with samples of the white pigment and canvas, and Hulten had them re-created.[35] This may have marked the first time that an important artist had authorized the execution of his paintings without supervising the execution, or even seeing the result. It is presumed that Hulten destroyed the paintings after exhibiting them, because when Rauschenberg's dealer, Leo Castelli, wanted to exhibit the works in 1968, Rauschenberg had his current assistant, the painter Brice Marden, prepare a new set.[36]

Andy Warhol may have done more than any other artist of his generation to subvert traditional practices and attitudes associated with painting. Both his paintings and his statements about them systematically undermined the generalizations Gilson had made in 1958. Early in 1962 Warhol began to use stencils, and with them he made the 32 paintings of Campbell's soup cans that were exhibited at his first solo show, at Los Angeles' Ferus Gallery in June.[37] In July Warhol discovered that he could work much more quickly by silkscreening his paintings. During the next three months he made 100 pictures, including the portraits of Marilyn Monroe and the images of Coca-Cola bottles that became the basis for his first solo show in New York, at the Stable Gallery in November.[38]

Warhol's paintings exploded on the art world, and almost overnight he came to be seen as the leader of the controversial new Pop movement. The demand for his work soared, and in 1963 he hired Gerard Malanga as his first assistant. Later in the year, Warhol moved his studio into a warehouse and factory building that became the first of four of his studios to be called the Factory. During this time Warhol began making statements embracing the use of mechanical processes and stressing his personal detachment from the execution of his art. So for example in a 1963 interview published in a leading art magazine, he declared "I think somebody should be able to do all my paintings for me," and explained his use of screening by stating "The reason

I'm painting this way is that I want to be a machine."[39] In another interview the same year, when he was asked what his profession was, Warhol responded "Factory owner."[40] In his practice, the mechanical process of silkscreening, the use of magazine photographs as the images of his paintings, and the serial repetition of these images not only from one work to another, but often within a single work, all served to emphasize the absence of the human element in general in the execution of the works and the absence of Warhol's touch in particular.

There is uncertainty about the actual division of labor between Warhol and his assistants. In a 1965 interview he declared that "Gerard does all my paintings," and in 1966, when asked about his role in making the paintings, he replied "I just selected the subjects." Years later, however, he insisted that "I really do all the paintings," disowning an earlier statement to the contrary by explaining "We were just being funny."[41] Concerning the early years, Malanga recalled that "When the screens were very large, we worked together; otherwise I was left to my devices."[42] Malanga further explained that the need for the artist's quality control was ruled out by Warhol's philosophy:

> Each painting took about four minutes, and we worked as mechanically as we could, trying to get each image right, but we never got it right … Andy embraced his mistakes. We never rejected anything. Andy would say, "It's part of the art."[43]

The mechanical production of Warhol's paintings led to concerns about forgery. Warhol publicly dismissed these in a 1981 interview, confidently stating that "If there are any fakes around I can tell."[44] According to Malanga, however, the problem was more serious: "Unlike Rauschenberg, Andy never destroyed his screens after they were used, and for this reason he has always been worried about the possibility of a forgery. If somebody faked his art, he could never hope to identify it."[45]

Sol LeWitt was a leading member of the Conceptual art movement of the late 1960s. In a manifesto published in 1967, LeWitt stated a basic tenet:

> In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art.

LeWitt spelled out one immediate consequence: "This kind of art… is usually free from the dependence on the skill of the artist as craftsman."[46] Two years later, LeWitt again stressed the primacy of planning: "Once the idea of the piece is established in the artist's mind and the final form is decided, the process is carried out blindly".[47]

In 1968, LeWitt made the first example of what would become his trademark form of art, works drawn or painted directly onto walls. In a 1971 statement defining the genre, he described the possibility of a complete separation between the originator of the work and the person who executed it:

> The artist conceives and plans the wall drawing. It is realized by draftsmen (the artist can act as his own draftsman); the plan (written, spoken, or drawn) is interpreted by the draftsman.

LeWitt specified that the artist and draftsman would "become collaborators in making the art." He went on to treat the issue of the validity of the finished work:

> The wall drawing is the artist's art, as long as the plan is not violated. If it is, then the draftsman becomes the artist and the drawing would be his work of art, but art that is a parody of the original concept.
>
> The draftsman may make errors in following the plan. All wall drawings contain errors, they are part of the work.[48]

In the three and a half decades since this statement was written, LeWitt has produced hundreds of wall drawings. Yet he has never specified who would determine whether the plan

for a particular wall drawing was violated, or according to what criteria. In practice, this determination frequently cannot be done by the artist, for LeWitt often does not see the final works. It is possible for purchasers of the drawings to have them executed by LeWitt's designated assistants, but this is not required by any of the artist's statements, and LeWitt has encouraged the owners of simple wall drawings to execute them themselves.[49]

When the touch of the artist is no longer necessary for the creation of a painting, the question arises of what determines authenticity. Warhol never fully confronted this question. One result is that there are frequent disputes over whether specific works can properly be sold as his, and the decisions of official experts on the authenticity of particular works by Warhol often appear arbitrary. LeWitt has dealt with this problem, however. Purchasers of wall drawings receive certificates of authenticity, signed by the artist; these are often accompanied by diagrams of the works.[50] The economic value of the wall drawings is considerably increased by the fact that they can be moved from place to place, simply by painting them in a new location. Each drawing is supposed to exist in only one location at a time, so when a new version is executed the old one is supposed to be painted over.

Since the 1960s, it has become commonplace for successful painters to employ assistants who perform most or of all the labor involved in executing their finished works. There are too many cases of this to catalogue in full. Several important artists can serve as examples.

In 1988 Peter Schjeldahl remarked that Jeff Koons "may be the definitive artist of this moment," and in 2004 Arthur Danto confirmed that "It is widely acknowledged that Jeff Koons is among the most important artists of the last decades of the twentieth century."[51] The value of Koons' art is considerable; his works have sold at auction for more than $1 million on more than 20 occasions. In an interview in 2000 with the English critic David Sylvester, Koons gave

a detailed account of the preparation of seven large paintings, each more than 135 square feet in size, for an exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum in Berlin. Koons began by taking images from magazines and books, and arranging them into composites with a computer: "After I have an image on a computer file that I like, we make a digital slide. And then the slide is projected and we draw out the image on the canvas." The painting was then done by hired assistants. Because the work was done under time pressure, Koons brought in more assistants than usual:

> We were up to forty-seven at the end. There were a lot of people mixing color. And we had two different shifts, so the studio was going twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, always with half the staff there working to complete the paintings.

Koons emphasized his complete control of the execution:

> I mean, physically, I could execute these paintings, and they would look identical to the paintings that are there now. But I wouldn't have been able to finish one painting in this time frame. So the thing is to be able to bring in a staff. And I've worked with my main staff now for about five years, so they already know what I want. And they know my vocabulary and they understand that there's no room for interpretation.

Referring to the practices of Raphael and Rubens, Sylvester asked why, unlike those masters, Koons chose not to do any of the paintings himself. Koons responded not only by saying that his time was required for supervision, but also by reflecting that participating in the work of painting would actually interfere with his growth as an artist:

> When you have forty-seven people doing something, I have to be watching all the process. Also, my vocabulary isn't just the execution of it; it's also a continued conception of where I want my work to go in another area. So it has to do more with the reality of being able to be in a position where I can continue to grow as much as possible as an artist, instead of being tied down in the execution of the work.[52]

Damien Hirst is widely recognized as the leader of the young British artists, who rose to prominence in the 1990s and in the process made London the center of the contemporary art world. Commenting in 2000 on Hirst's role in London's art, an American critic remarked that "He's their prophet and deliverer, their Elvis and Ayatollah," while in 2005 a *Financial Times* columnist asked rhetorically, "Will Damien Hirst, the one-time *enfant terrible* of 'Brit art', be seen in the same light as Picasso by 2050?"[53] Unlike Koons, Hirst does not make preparatory drawings directly on a computer, but has his drawings transferred to a computer by an assistant: "I'll do a drawing and then I'll have it done by somebody who's got a computer. It's like a fabrication drawing, basically, so it can be made from that drawing."[54] When asked why he didn't execute his own works, Hirst answered in conceptual terms:

> You've got an idea, or you've got a vision, and you've got to see that vision through. It's like thinking, "I'm an artist; I've got to paint my own paintings." And the logical extension of that is "Yeh, but who's making my paints?"[55]

Although Hirst did not mention Marcel Duchamp, the last sentence appears to refer to a comment made by Duchamp in 1961, in defending his readymades against the charge that because they were manufactured they could not be works of art: "Since the tubes of paint used by the artist are manufactured and readymade products we must conclude that all the paintings in the world are 'readymades aided' and also works of assemblage."[56]

Hirst also defended his practice of using assistants to make his famous spot paintings, on the grounds that the assistants did better work than he did:

> I only ever made five spot paintings. Personally. I can paint spots. But when I started painting the spots I knew exactly where it was going, I knew exactly what was going to happen, and I couldn't be [bothered] doing it. And I employed people. And my spots I painted are [very bad]. They're [very bad]. I did them on the wrong background, there's the pin-holes [from the compass] in the middle

> of the spots which at the time I said I wanted, because I wanted a kind of truth to it. Under close scrutiny, you can see the process by which they were made. They're [very bad] compared to … The best person who ever painted spots for me was Rachel [Howard]. She's brilliant. Absolutely [very] brilliant. The best spot painting you can have by me is one painted by Rachel.[57]

When Gordon Burn observed that it seemed to be part of Hirst's aesthetic to have someone else between him and the art, with the spot paintings as an example, Hirst replied: "The dots are boring [to make]. And I love other people."[58] In discussing the exclusion of emotion by the grid structure of the spot paintings, Hirst made a comment that clearly echoed Warhol: "I want them to look like they've been made by a person trying to paint like a machine."[59]

Conclusion

In 1958, Étienne Gilson stated what he considered a basic and immutable fact about painting:

> In painting, it is impossible to distinguish between art itself and execution, as if art were wholly in the mind and execution wholly in the hand. Art here is *in* execution, and if it is true to say that the intellect of the painter is engaged in all the motions of the hand, it is equally true to say that a painter could entertain no thought about his art if his hand were not there to give to the word "art" a concrete meaning.[60]

Within just two years, however, advanced artists had begun a series of innovations that separated the conception and execution of paintings in precisely the way that Gilson had declared impossible. Yves Klein's use of living brushes allowed him to supervise the execution of his anthropometries without dirtying himself with paint. Robert Rauschenberg could provide instructions for recreating his *White Paintings* on another continent. Andy Warhol's use of silkscreens removed the human touch from painting altogether. On a number of occasions Warhol declared he played no part in the execution of his works. Sol LeWitt's philosophy of

conceptual art separated execution from innovation in principle, and his practice put this into effect. And many of the most important artists active today, including Jeff Koons and Damian Hirst, rarely if ever touch the paintings that are produced by dozens of hired assistants and are sold as works by these masters.

Gilson made two basic mistakes. One was to state rules of art, and to declare that these were immutable. In doing this he failed to recognize the force of the conceptual impulse in twentieth-century art. The story of art in the past century is in large part one of young iconoclastic innovators systematically breaking every significant rule, tradition, or convention that they could identify. Thus Klein was 32 when he first used living brushes, Rauschenberg was 37 when he authorized Hulten to recreate the *White Paintings*, Warhol was 34 when he began to silkscreen his paintings, and LeWitt was 39 when he declared the freedom of the artist from the need to execute his own paintings. Earlier in the twentieth century, conceptual artists had broken with the traditional association of painters with trademark styles by beginning to change their styles at will, and had created new genres of art that intentionally broke the rules of the time-honored forms of painting and sculpture.[61] Gilson might have anticipated that conceptual artists would find a way to break the rules of painting he stated in 1958. When Klein, Warhol, and others promptly did this, they were demonstrating that artists, not scholars or critics, determine the nature of art.

Yet Gilson did not err only in failing to foresee the conceptual innovations of the 1960s, for his account of the history of painting missed a basic distinction in artistic practice that had existed since the Renaissance. Gilson declared that “it cannot be doubted that the art of the painter resides in his hands, in his fingers, and probably still more in his wrists, at the same time that it resides in his intellect.”[62] Yet Vasari knew that the relative importance of the hand and

the intellect varied enormously in the art of even the greatest painters.[63] A number of art historians have documented, and puzzled over, the fact that some Old Masters were better able than others to delegate the work of painting to assistants, thus allowing these masters, including Raphael and Rubens, to produce many more square feet of finished paintings than such others as Leonardo, Michelangelo, and Rembrandt. The basic difference appears to lie in the ability of conceptual innovators, from Raphael on, to produce a high degree of separation between invention and execution, whereas for Leonardo and his fellow experimental innovators invention and execution were inseparable. Gilson is thus just one of many art scholars who have failed to perceive the distinction between conceptual and experimental innovators, and consequently have failed to understand its implications. For the studio practices of such conceptual artists as Klein, Rauschenberg, Warhol, LeWitt, Koons, and Hirst can be seen as logical extensions of the earlier practices of their conceptual predecessors Raphael and Rubens. This process has produced some unexpected results. So for example the touch of the artist's hand, once regarded as the tangible demonstration of genius, is now seen by one of today's leading artists as an unnecessary and time-consuming feature of painting that actually interferes with his growth as an artist.

In 1958, Etienne Gilson claimed that "The art of the painter is an art of the whole man."[64] This is no longer true. Contrary to more than five centuries of tradition, during the second half of the twentieth century many painters ceased to be manual laborers who dirty their own hands with paint, and have instead become manufacturers, who hire employees to make paintings according to their plans. As Damien Hirst recently put it, "The painter has stopped being this hairy guy with paint all over him. He became a guy in a suit, or a lab coat probably."[65] Making the touch of the artist irrelevant to the authenticity of the painting is one

significant element in the conceptual revolution that made the art of the twentieth century so different from the art of all earlier centuries.

Footnotes

1. Paul Valéry, *Degas, Manet, Morisot* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), pp. 19-20.

2. The two editions differ slightly in content, so the quotations in the following discussions are drawn from both versions.

3. Étienne Gilson, *Peinture et Réalité* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique, 1958), p. 43. This and subsequent translations are mine.

4. Étienne Gilson, *Painting and Reality* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), pp. 29-30.

5. Gilson, *Painting and Reality*, p. 38.

6. Gilson, *Painting and Reality*, p. 85.

7. Gilson, *Peinture et Réalité*, p. 78.

8. Gilson, *Painting and Reality*, p. 86.

9. Gilson, *Painting and Reality*, pp. ix-x.

10. E.g. Toshiharu Nakamura, ed., *Rubens and his Workshop* (Tokyo: National Museum of Western Art, 1994); Christopher Brown, Jan Kelch, and Pieter van Thiel, eds., *Rembrandt: The Master and His Workshop* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

11. Zirka Filipczak, *Picturing Art in Antwerp, 1550-1700* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 82; also see Nakamura, *Rubens and his Workshop*, pp. 97-118.

12. Nakamura, *Rubens and his Workshop*, p. 119.

13. Svetlana Alpers, *Rembrandt's Enterprise* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 102.

14. Alpers, *Rembrandt's Enterprise*, p. 101.

15. Brown, Kelch and van Thiel, *Rembrandt*, p. 83.

16. Alpers, *Rembrandt's Enterprise*, p. 21.

17. Brown, Kelch, and van Thiel, *Rembrandt*, p. 21.

18. Alpers, *Rembrandt's Enterprise*, pp. 59-60. Also see David Bomford, et al., *Art in the Making: Rembrandt* (London: National Gallery, 2006), p. 34.

19. Brown, Kelch, and van Thiel, *Rembrandt*, p. 83; Alpers, *Rembrandt's Enterprise*, p. 60.

20. Alpers, *Rembrandt's Enterprise*, p. 59.

21. Alpers, *Rembrandt's Enterprise*, p. 59.

22. On Raphael, Leonardo, and Michelangelo, see Robert Jensen, "Anticipating Artistic Behavior," *Historical Methods*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (Summer 2004), pp. 137-153, and David Galenson, *Old Masters and Young Geniuses* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), Chap. 5.

23. Ernst van de Wetering, *Rembrandt: The Painter at Work* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 6, 82.

24. Van de Wetering, *Rembrandt*, pp. 82-84.

25. Filipczak, *Picturing Art in Antwerp*, p. 82.

26. Richard Huelsenbeck, ed., *The Dada Almanac* (London: Atlast Press, 1993), p. 95.

27. Krisztina Passuth, *Moholy-Nagy* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), pp. 31-32.

28. Passuth, *Moholy-Nagy*, pp. 33, 394.

29. Sam Hunter, John Jacobus, and Daniel Wheeler, *Modern Art*, third ed. (New York: Vendome Press, 2004), pp. 245-246.

30. Françoise Gilot and Carlton Lake, *Life with Picasso* (New York: Doubleday, 1964), pp. 220-221.

31. Sidra Stich, *Yves Klein* (Stuttgart: Cantz Verlag, 1994), pp. 173-177.

32. Yves Klein, *Le dépassement de la problématique de l'art et autres ecrits* (Paris: Ecole nationale supérieure des beaux-arts, 2003), p. 296.

33. David Galenson, *Artistic Capital* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 68-72.

34. Calvin Tomkins, *Off the Wall* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), p. 71; Kyle Gann, *American Music in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997), pp. 127, 139.

35. Tomkins, *Off the Wall*, p. 269.

36. Tomkins, *Off the Wall*, p. 269.

37. Gary Garrels, ed., *The Work of Andy Warhol* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1989), p. 86.

38. Victor Bockris, *Warhol* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1997), pp. 150-155.

39. Kenneth Goldsmith, ed., *I'll Be Your Mirror* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2004), pp. 17-18.

40. Goldsmith, *I'll Be Your Mirror*, p. 48.

41. Goldsmith, *I'll Be Your Mirror*, pp. 119, 99, 297.

42. Bockris, *Warhol*, p. 164.

43. Bockris, *Warhol*, p. 170.

44. Goldsmith, *I'll Be Your Mirror*, pp. 297-298.

45. Goldsmith, *I'll Be Your Mirror*, p. 192.

46. Adachiara Zevi, *Sol LeWitt Critical Texts* (Rome: Editrice Inonia, 1994), p. 78.

47. Zevi, *Sol LeWitt Critical Texts*, p. 90.

48. Zevi, *Sol LeWitt Critical Texts*, p. 95.

49. Gary Garrels, ed., *Sol LeWitt: A Retrospective* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 38, 90.

50. Garrels, *Sol LeWitt*, p. 90.

51. Peter Schjeldahl, *The "7 Days" Art Columns* (Great Barrington, MA: The Figures, 1990), p. 81; Arthur Danto, *Unnatural Wonders* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2005), p. 286.

52. David Sylvester, *Interviews with American Artists* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 347-351.

53. Jerry Saltz, *Seeing Out Loud* (Great Barrington, MA: The Figures, 2003), p. 220; Deborah Brewster, "Why young, new money could fuel a bubble in hot, hip art," *Financial Times* (November 12/13, 2005), p. 7.

54. Damien Hirst and Gordon Burn, *On the Way to Work* (New York: Universe Publishing, 2002), p. 19.

55. Hirst and Burn, *On the Way to Work*, p. 85.

56. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson, eds., *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1989), p. 142.

57. Hirst and Burn, *On the Way to Work*, p. 90.

58. Hirst and Burn, *On the Way to Work*, p. 81.

59. Virginia Button, *The Turner Prize* (London: Tate Publishing, 2003), p. 116.

60. Gilson, *Painting and Reality*, p. 34.

61. E.g. see David Galenson, "And Now for Something Completely Different: The Versatility of Conceptual Innovators," *Historical Methods*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (2007), pp. 17-27; Galenson, "A Conceptual World: Why the Art of the Twentieth Century is So Different from the Art of all Earlier Centuries," NBER Working Paper 12499 (2006).

62. Gilson, *Painting and Reality*, p. 31.

63. Galenson, *Old Masters and Young Geniuses*, p. 103.

64. Gilson, *Painting and Reality*, p. 31.

65. Ann Temkin, *Contemporary Voices* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2005), p. 58.