

***HIPPOLYTE
TAINÉ***

An abstract geometric artwork featuring overlapping shapes in various colors: red, blue, teal, black, white, and yellow. The shapes are arranged in a way that creates a sense of depth and movement, with some shapes appearing to be layered on top of others. The overall composition is dynamic and visually engaging.

***THE PHILOSOPHY
OF ART***

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Hippolyte Taine

The Philosophy of Art

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PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION.

The translation herewith presented to the reader consists of a course of Lectures delivered during the winter of 1864, before the Students of Art of the *École des Beaux Arts* at Paris, by H. Taine, *Professeur d'Esthétique et d'Histoire de l'Art* in that institution.

These lectures, as a system of *Æsthetics*, consist of an application of the experimental method to art, in the same manner as it is applied to the sciences. Whatever utility the system possesses is due to this principle. The author undertakes to explain art by social influences and other causes; humanity at different times and places, climate, and other conditions, furnish the facts on which the theory rests. The artistic development of any age or people is made intelligible through a series of historical inductions terminating in a few inferential laws, constituting what the title of the book declares it to be—*the philosophy of art*.

Such a system seems to possess many advantages. Among others, it tends to emancipate the student of art, as well as the amateur, from metaphysical and visionary theories growing out of false theories and traditional misconceptions; he is not misled by an exclusive adherence to particular schools, masters, or epochs. It also tends to render criticism less capricious, and therefore less injurious; dictating no conventional standard of judgment, it promotes a spirit of charity towards all works. As there is no attempt to do more than explain art according to natural laws, the reader must judge whether, like all systems assuming to bring order out of confusion, this one fulfils its mission.

Readers familiar with M. Taine's able and original work on English literature (*Histoire de la Littérature Anglaise*) will

recognize in the following pages the same theory applied to art as is therein applied to literature.

J. D.

LONDON, *November 9*, 1865.

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

Since the publication of the first edition of the "*Philosophy of Art*" seven years ago, in London, its author has become deservedly popular, and especially in this country. His writings are sought for, read and translated both in England and on the continent of Europe, and it would be but refining gold to say aught in his praise. Like every man of genius he has, as time moves on, improved in his order of thought and in his wonderfully artistic style. His latest work, "*On Intelligence*" ranks him as high among thinkers, as his former works among men of letters.

The present edition is a careful revision of the former one, and amounts, indeed, to a new translation. Were either to be compared with the original, no change of sense could probably be detected. The present edition, however, being much more literal, the translator considers it an improvement, and hopes that it will be found more worthy of its gifted author, the publishers, his indulgent critics, and the public generally.

J. D.

SOUTH ORANGE, N. J. *January*, 1873.

ON THE NATURE OF THE WORK OF ART.

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GENTLEMEN:

In commencing this course of lectures I wish to ask you two things of which I stand in great need: in the first place, your attention; afterwards, and especially, your kind indulgence. The warmth of your reception persuades me that you will favor me with both. Let me sincerely and earnestly thank you beforehand. The subject with which I intend to entertain you this year is the history of art, and, principally, the history of painting in Italy. Before entering on the subject itself, I desire to indicate to you its spirit and method.

I.

The principal point of this method consists in recognizing that a work of art is not isolated, and, consequently, that it is necessary to study the conditions out of which it proceeds and by which it is explained.

The first step is not difficult. At first, and evidently, a work of art—a picture, a tragedy, a statue—belongs to a certain whole, that is to say, to the entire work of the artist producing it. This is elementary. It is well known that the different works of an artist bear a family likeness, like the children of one parent; that is to say, they bear a certain resemblance to each other. We know that every artist has his own style, a style recognized in all his productions. If he is a painter, he has his own coloring, rich or impoverished; his favorite types, noble or ignoble; his attitudes, his mode of composition, even his processes of execution; his favorite

pigments, tints, models, and manner of working. If he is a writer, he has his own characters, calm or passionate; his own plots, simple or complex; his own dénouements, comic or tragic, his peculiarities of style, his pet periods, and even his special vocabulary. This is so true, that a connoisseur, if you place before him a work not signed by any prominent master, is able to recognize, to almost a certainty, to what artist this work belongs, and, if sufficiently experienced and delicate in his perceptions, the period of the artist's life, and the particular stage of his development.

This is the first whole to which we must refer a work of art. And here is the second. The artist himself, considered in connection with his productions, is not isolated; he also belongs to a whole, one greater than himself, comprising the school or family of artists of the time and country to which he belongs. For example, around Shakespeare, who, at the first glance, seems to be a marvellous celestial gift coming like an aerolite from heaven, we find several dramatists of a high order—Webster, Ford, Massinger, Marlowe, Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher—all of whom wrote in the same style and in the same spirit as he did. There are the same characters in their dramas as in Shakespeare's, the same violent and terrible characters, the same murderous and unforeseen occurrences, the same sudden and frenzied passions, the same irregular, capricious, turgid, magnificent style, the same exquisite poetic feeling for rural life and landscape, and the same delicate, tender, affectionate ideals of woman.

In a similar way Rubens is to be judged. Rubens apparently stands alone, without either predecessor or successor. On going to Belgium, however, and visiting the churches of Ghent, Brussels, Bruges, or Antwerp, you find a group of painters with genius resembling his. First, there is Crayer, in his day considered a rival; Seghers, Van Oost, Everdingen, Van Thulden, Quellin, Hondthorst, and others, with whom