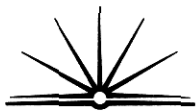


Q4

"Art critics and historians comment on artworks and their comments give rise to further commentary and re-evaluation", this quotation from art critic Alberto Manguel ~~emphasises~~ emphasises the role of art critics and historians as a catalyst for ~~the~~ debate and myth. To explore this point further I will refer to two very distinct methodologies and how these methodologies reach different viewpoints on Degas's Bathers series.

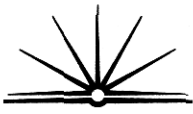
There are many different methodologies used by art critics and historians. These range from sequential which is a study of art in chronological form, to Generational and Psychological which looks at the findings of Jung and Freud.

The methodology of connoisseurship looks



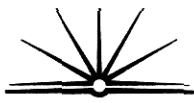
at the aesthetics of the artwork. Critics and historians who use this practice look at the style, form and technique shown in the artwork. Thus the styles/techniques discovered are then compared to other "great" artwork or "canon" art. An example of this in relation to Degas's Bathers can be found in Kendall's comment, "In the late 1880s ~~the~~ Degas started over again, attempting to rebuild his art from its very foundations by returning to colour and drawing. In doing so he must have been aware of the 19th Century Art theorists who were comparing the rivalling claims for superiority of ~~Degas's~~ Delacroix's colour and Ingres draughtsmanship."

The start of the quotation by its reference to dates shows another aspect of



connoisseurship, its study of art history, and particularly, detailed study of the artist in question. The next part of the quote refers to other "great" artists such as Delacroix and Ingres which clearly shows Kendall's method of connoisseurship. Art critic and historian Robert Hughes makes a similar comment referring to Degas as "the synthesizer of Ingres and Delacroix". Connoisseurship is an established method of art critical practice however it does have its critics in both the art world and media. A London art critic noted, "Although connoisseurship is a perfectly legitimate method, it has tendencies to pretentiousness which have made it a target of popular-writers in the media".

✦ An art historian by the name of



Anthea Callen also believes that some of an artwork's meaning is lost in the method of connoisseurship. Hence by looking more closely at Critics such as Hughes, Kendall and others and comparing their interpretation with Callen we will see how their practice creates both myths and debates.

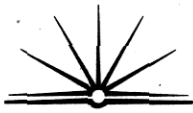
To examine their methodologies further we must compare ~~connoisseurship~~ connoisseurship and Callen's cultural and contextual methods, in relation to the conceptual framework. In the conceptual framework triangle Callen looks more at the world in which the artwork was created. In doing this Callen judges the audience reaction at that time and discovers one interpretation of the artwork. Callen's methodology is best summed up in conceptual artist Sol Lewitt's



quote "One usually understands the art of the past by applying the conventions of the present, thus misunderstanding the art of the past." LeWitt obviously believes Callen's method to be the right one hence there would be some cause for ~~to~~ debate between that method and Hughes method. Hughes looks more at the artist ~~the~~ and relates the technique of that artist to other artists of the past. He does not look as closely at the social context of the 1880s when Degas painted.

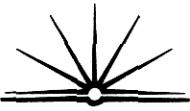
Other critics including Hughes and Kendall use ~~can~~ connoisseurship. Kenneth Clark's quotation on Degas also shows how the method can be used to aid interpretation.

"If we allow the word



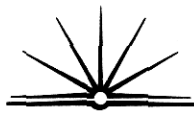
"drawing to ~~mean~~ the same  
have the meaning implied  
by a 16th Century  
Florentine when he said  
disegno, then Degas is  
the greatest draughtsman  
since the Renaissance".

Critics using connoisseurship often use  
hyperbolic language such as "greatest".  
This is because their methodology  
encourages an idolization of a  
"master" painter or sculpture. Quotes  
from other critics also emphasize this.  
"Degas' unique ability to express  
movement through posture", "his  
ability to communicate vividly the  
idea of movement". Degas' Bathers  
were painted as he described himself  
as though the audience is "looking  
through a keyhole". Some describe this  
as perverted but Hughes looks upon it



as a compositional choice and applauds DeGas "exquisite clarity of profile".

Callen looks at DeGas / Bathes with a more critical eye. In her assessment of Bathes Callen researches heavily the social and philosophical paradigms of the 19th Century. She discovered in this process the connotations related to water and Bathing. Religious leaders of the time thought Bathing brought about "indecent self awareness". Hence bathing along with all this "sensual and Sexual" was discouraged. Water too carried these suggestions and was even thought by some to constitute a ~~dream~~ "surrogate lover". Hence Callen unveils a very sexual side to the Bathes. Callen also reminds us in Politics of Bathing of the issue of access. For



To see images of women bathing men had to visit brothels or be in a studio painting such women. Begas created a source of "easy access" for bourgeois men to access such images.

Hughes disagrees with this interpretation. "to find Begas true feelings about women one should consult the pastels and oil paintings of nudes he made... their bodies are radiant, powdered and reworked almost to a thick crust of pastel, blooming myriad strokes within rough winding contours, all mechanisms of flesh, all joints and protrances, ~~not~~ ~~not~~ not personalities nor pin ups".

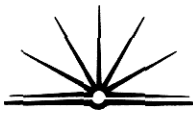
Here two very different perceptions are portrayed here. Caller believes





Degas' Bathers debate women to conveyors of "carnal pleasure" which Hughes believes Degas' Bathers liberate women from the "hypocrisy of the ~~salon~~ nude." The tension and debate created by such opposite viewpoints is obvious.

Callen believes that Hughes and critics like him "create a gloss of safe jargon to mediate between the raw image and the audience". Indeed we can see the jargon to which she is referring to "cust of pastel, mechanisms of flesh, blooming Stokes", however do we agree with her interpretation? Callen also says the ~~begs~~ begs ~~Connoisseurship~~ "allows us to sanitise and celebrate disturbing, intimate, ~~picture~~ obsessive pictures which have ~~be~~ been hung on the walls of public galleries and



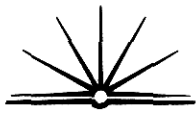
bourgeois walls." Callens use of emotive language such as "disturbing, obsessive" allows the strength of her viewpoint to be carried to ~~us~~ us. However Hughes allow believers passionately in his interpretation.

The conclusion to this debate cannot be with one interpretation valued over the other. The commentary and debate that critics and historians opposing views inspire only further ~~her~~ her the <sup>value and</sup> varied <sup>an</sup> meaning of ~~the~~ artwork.

Indeed critics evaluate artworks and this gives rise to further evaluation <sup>and discussion</sup>. As

The art critic Graham Dixon once said "Artworks say something now because of how artists then learned to speak, artists say something too because of how anyone today has learned how to listen". And by this <sup>comment</sup>

Dixon seems to value neither above or below the other.



to go in ~~is~~ a in first booklet

\* ~~the~~

Callen was influenced by the thoughts and theories of her friend and fellow art critic Griselda Pollock. Pollock is a feminist art critic and provides a different interpretation of art, one that critic is cynical of past art criticism which is dominated by reference to mainly ~~European~~ white male artists.

Pollock does ~~not~~ refer to describe the artist as a genius

or special individual.

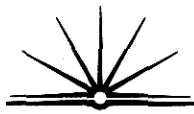
~~She~~ She believes

that proclaims the right that

artists are perfect and

many are not.

Pollock's view point is emphasized by her quote "I look at the forgotten voices, the voices of female artists, the voices the old categories <sup>and</sup> clichés ~~and~~ exclude". This



interpretation has influenced.

Callen but Callen has also

looked at the ~~How~~ Rather

using contextualisation to a

greater degree. (return to

first booklet)