



*Giorgio Vasari, self-portrait c. 1567.*

*of the Artists*. Vasari's text provides us with insights into the changing roles of artists in society during this period and the developing concept of artistic genius.

Modern art history was strongly influenced by eighteenth-century Enlightenment philosophy. **Johann Joachim Winckelmann** (1717–68) was a German scholar who shifted away from Vasari's biographical emphasis to a rigorous study of stylistic development as related to historical context. Through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, art historians continued to develop approaches that placed increasing emphasis on an understanding of the interrelationship between the formal qualities of a work of art and its context.

When considering contemporary views of art history as well as perspectives on art history from the past, it is important to keep in mind that all histories are individual stories and thus will inevitably reflect certain biases. More recently, art history has been revised, particularly by feminist historians, who have noted that the traditional version of art history has largely focused on white men, whether as artists or as patrons. As a result of such revisions, art history has

expanded its scope in recent years and has become a field that is broader, more international, more multicultural, and more inclusive than in the past, often involving Marxist, feminist, and psychoanalytic methods and viewpoints. Moreover, the concern with great artistic geniuses and masterpieces has lessened as the full range of "visual culture," ranging from advertisement posters to film to photography and television imagery, has come to view.

## **BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE ART OF THE WESTERN WORLD**

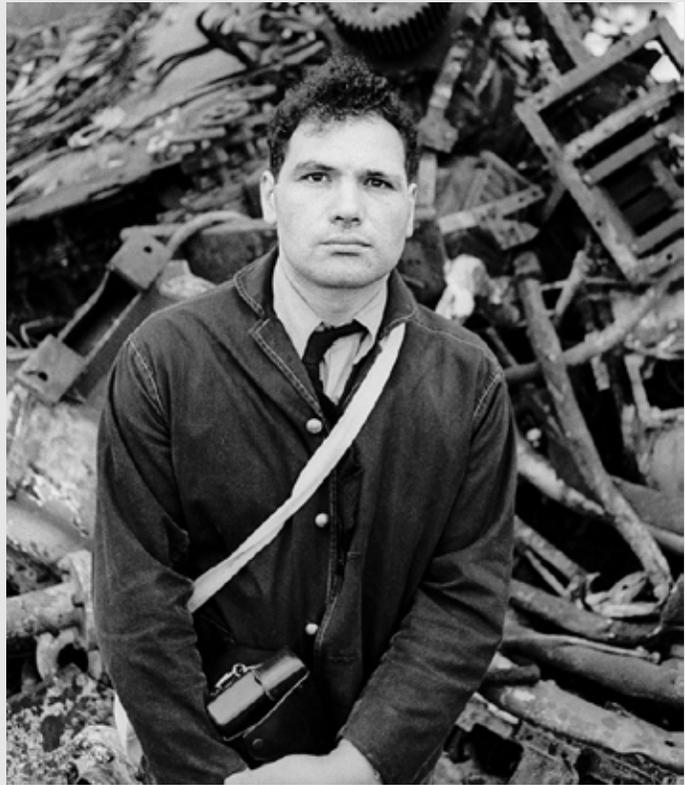
This brief overview of Western art is intended to provide you with a basic understanding of important art historical periods as they developed chronologically. This abbreviated discussion also covers some key artistic innovations that occurred over time, providing you with examples of artists and works in their historical contexts. This basic information will set the stage for our more in-depth discussion of our case study focusing on art during the Cold War. Of course, a brief guide such as this only begins to touch upon the richness and power of the stories that comprise the history of art. You may also enjoy looking at other works from each of the periods discussed, beginning your own exploration of these works in their historical contexts.

Much of what we know of the earliest life on earth has been revealed through a study of the objects or artifacts that remain from early cultures. In many cases, the objects that remain are those made of enduring materials such as stone, metal, or fired clay, as opposed to those made of perishable materials like wood or fibers. Environmental conditions also have a major impact on preservation. The hot dry climate of the desert in Egypt, for example, enabled the preservation of even delicate materials like papyrus, and the sealed atmosphere of Egyptian caves and tombs likewise helped to preserve the objects contained within them for our wonder and enjoyment centuries later. In contrast, the humid climate of West Africa means that objects made of perishable materials have had little chance of survival over the course of decades, not to mention centuries.

This is one reason that the history of art as a discipline has placed greater emphasis on Western cultures, often neglecting to focus on developments in Nonwestern cultures. It is important to recognize that the

known as the Independent Group at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), London, as an alternative to the institute's official lecture series, and they continued to hold informal meetings there until 1955. Members of the Independent Group came from a younger generation and rejected the sterile and unquestioning approach of established British critics like Herbert Read, whose aesthetic theories emphasized the timelessness and eternal qualities of beauty.<sup>35</sup>

Although they worked in different disciplines and media, from photography and photo-collage to architecture and art criticism, the artists of the Independent Group all shared an interest in exploring the function of vernacular (ordinary, everyday) and popular culture within the contemporary urban environment. Their goal was to investigate “man's changing state” in a society impacted by the advent of new technologies, like television and American mass media.<sup>36</sup> Paolozzi and other group members believed that art should not be reserved for contemplating ideal forms or purely optical sensations (as was the position of Modernist critics like Clement Greenberg), but should instead reflect on the immediate environment.



*The artist Eduardo Paolozzi, photographed c. 1962.*

Thus, at the first meeting of the Independent Group at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in April 1952, Paolozzi used a projector called an epidiascope to project a series of cut-out advertisements, magazine covers, car engine diagrams, medical photographs, and other everyday imagery without commentary in a gallery setting. This provocative gesture was shocking to many, especially the more conservative critics at the time, and it is sometimes credited as being the birth of Pop Art, which came to prominence in the 1960s.

Paolozzi had already been experimenting with popular imagery in his collage series *Bunk*, made between 1947 and 1952. The collage *It's a Psychological Fact Pleasure Helps your Disposition* (1948) from this series presents the viewer with two attractive housewives engaged in cleaning two gleaming, modern domestic interiors: a kitchen and a nursery. Both women smile eagerly, one pushing a brand-new Hoover vacuum cleaner and holding a caddy containing its many useful attachments, while the other seems to pause in thought while pushing a broom across the floor. Both environments are sparkling clean and overflow with the latest in consumer goods: home appliances, including a dishwasher, refrigerator, and stove, and an impressive array of spoons, ladles, cookware, and decorative dishes outfit the kitchen while an assortment of colorful toys are scattered around the nursery among a cheery children's bedroom set.

However, not everything about these rooms is as abundant as it seems. Both rooms have windows overlooking leafy trees and grass. With no sense of a world beyond the bourgeois domestic interiors, the women seem to be isolated, as though in a well-appointed cage. The two rooms where they cook to nourish their families and raise their children are stacked one on top of the other, forming a whole that might represent a woman's place in the postwar nuclear family as wife and mother. In this light, the absence of other figures seems peculiar. The women's roles are defined not in relation to family members,