



Painting as an Art (A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts)

Richard Wollheim

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In *Painting as an Art*, which began as the 1984 Andrew Mellon Lectures at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., philosopher Richard Wollheim transcended the boundaries and habits of both philosophy and art history to produce a large, encompassing vision of viewing art. Wollheim had three great passions-- philosophy, psychology, art--and his work attempted to unify them into a theory of the experience of art. He believed that unlocking the meaning of a painting involved retrieving, almost reenacting, the creative activity that produced it.

In order to fully appreciate a work of art, Wollheim argued, critics must bring to the understanding of a work of art a much richer conception of human psychology than they have in the past: "Many [critics] . . . make do with a psychology that, if they tried to live their lives by it, would leave them at the end of an ordinary day without lovers, friends, or any insight into how this came about." Many reviewers have remarked on the insightfulness of the book's final chapter, in which Wollheim contended that certain paintings by Titian, Bellini, de Kooning, and others represent the painters' attempts to project fantasies about the human body onto the canvas.

Reviewing the book in the *Los Angeles Times*, Daniel A. Herwitz asserted that Wollheim had "done no less than recover for psychology its obvious and irresistible place in the explanation of what is most profound and subtle about paintings."

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