



Art,

Clive Bell

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In this little book I have tried to develop a complete theory of visual art. I have put forward an hypothesis by reference to which the respectability, though not the validity, of all aesthetic judgments can be tested, in the light of which the history of art from palaeolithic days to the present becomes intelligible, by adopting which we give intellectual backing to an almost universal and immemorial conviction. Everyone in his heart believes that there is a real distinction between works of art and all other objects; this belief my hypothesis justifies. We all feel that art is immensely important; my hypothesis affords reason for thinking it so. In fact, the great merit of this hypothesis of mine is that it seems to explain what we know to be true. Anyone who is curious to discover why we call a Persian carpet or a fresco by Piero della Francesca a work of art, and a portrait-bust of Hadrian or a popular problem-picture rubbish, will here find satisfaction. He will find, too, that to the familiar counters of criticism--_e.g._ "good drawing," "magnificent design," "mechanical," "unfelt," "ill-organised," "sensitive,"--is given, what such terms sometimes lack, a definite meaning. In a word, my hypothesis works; that is unusual: to some it has seemed not only workable but true; that is miraculous almost.

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