

Stephen Chow

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

BORN in Boston, Massachusetts and raised nearby in Brookline, I earned a degree in Art History from Brandeis University and have studied painting and drawing extensively with Jason Polins, Dennis Cheaney, Timothy Stotz, and Michelle Tully. I attended Conceptart.org workshops in Montreal and Seattle as well as the first Illustration Master Class at Amherst College. Brief visits to Rome, Naples, Pompeii, Herculaneum, Kyoto, Antwerp, New York, Paris, Yellowstone and the Badlands National Park have instilled a deep reverence for natural and cultural heritage.

Among other things, I love: Black Metal, Baroque Ensembles, Antiquarian Books, Catholic Orthodoxy, Letterpress Printing, Typography, Museums, Libraries, Saddleback Leather Co., and NBA Basketball. A recent interest has been the study of the Bhagavad Gita.

I have always been passionate about art, but it wasn't until I found out about traditional painting ateliers when I was 18 years old that I gradually moved away from fantasy and imaginative art, and focused on pursuing an optical approach to the study of nature. This information can be found in: *Drawing with an Open Mind* and *Light for the Artist*, by Ted Seth Jacobs, and *The Artist's Complete Guide to Figure Drawing*, by Anthony Ryder.

It is by painting and drawing from life that I am furnished with a perception of reality that quite often leaves me speechless—so profoundly beautiful, harmonious, and unexpected are the things that I am being taught to see in nature, that I was led to the contemplation of God in search of answers to these mysteries. Louis of Granada has recently provided the grounds for an answer:

"But if, in this land of death inhabited by mortal beings, so much beauty and perfection are found, what must be the splendor and magnificence of that heavenly country whose inhabitants will live forever?"

If the beauties of nature are the work of God, then sharing an appreciation of such beauty with the utmost sincerity is my primary aim, in order that each new artwork will better represent a glimpse of that heavenly beauty which is to come.

EDUCATION

- 2010 Studio Escalier 12-week Summer Intensive in Argenton-Château, France
- 2009 Studio Escalier 10-week Autumn Intensive in Argenton-Château, France
- 2008 Vergilian Society Summer Tour *"In the Footsteps of Poets and Painters, Proletarians and Princes: Rediscovering the Bay of Naples in Greek and Roman Times"*
- 2008 Conceptart.org workshop in Seattle, WA
- 2008 Illustration Master Class in Amherst, MA
- 2007 Studio Escalier 12-week Summer Intensive in Argenton-Château, France
- 2006 Conceptart.org workshop in Montréal, QC
- 2005-2009 Jason Polins weekly classes in Somerville, MA
- 2005-2009 Brandeis University, Bachelor of Arts in the History of Art
- 2005-2008 New England Realist Art Center weekly classes with Dennis Cheaney in Boston, MA

The Chow Collection

MISSION

TO COLLECT objects of art that match or exceed in quality select oil paintings, sculptures, and artifacts from institutions like the Boston Athenæum, the Mead Art Museum, the National Gallery of Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Louvre Museum, and the Yale Center For British Art. Finding the portrait of Thomas Hill, Esq. by John Linnell early on, and finding a trove of literary connections through subsequent research, inspired me to collect hundreds of works over my lifetime. To ensure that each new acquisition improves upon the standards of the former—and, when more than one work by the same artist is acquired, it is not by association, but by merit, that such a choice is made—I leave no book unturned, no song unheard, no art unseen, that will be of help.

For two years I collected antiquarian books before realizing that I could find works by artists represented in major museums, albeit for much more than I was spending on books. Suddenly it became clear that unless I found the most beautiful of a type of work, my estimation of it would deteriorate over time. The books that I initially collected suffered from being deficient in their quality of materials, printing, binding, writing and typography. Rather than collect books at a higher level, I found that my background in oil painting made original art a field in which I could more easily find objects of the utmost beauty. As a result, collecting physical copies of music and books fell out of favor, and I was left to browsing recordings and books freely available online. These may turn into physical collections in the future, but for now all of the music and most of the books remain virtual.

Acquisitions Policy

PAINTINGS

I WILL only buy oil paintings that have been painted on rigid panels, including copper, masonite, and wood panels. No stretched canvases—their durability is suspect, specifically the dangers of: paint flaking off the surface, severely increased risk of tampering, and the tautness of the canvas being sensitive to changes in temperature and humidity. It terrifies me that paintings can disintegrate in this manner. Even if I find a painting that is clearly a masterpiece, I will be extremely leery if it is painted on stretched canvas. As a general rule, anything with stretcher bars are forbidden.

I dislike oval-shaped canvases.

In terms of subject matter portraits and figures hold the highest place because of their singular association with the divine. This includes allegories, historical scenes, and scenes with classical or religious architecture. Still life, landscape, and animal subjects are systematically avoided.

Because modern art has departed from tradition and cultivated beauty, it lies beyond the scope of my collecting interests. The antidote to fraudulent contemporary art is not criticism, but admiring, collecting, and promoting its stated enemies.

SCULPTURE

WHEN collecting sculpture the nude forms of bodies are paramount, so when props or clothing must appear they should only: (1) provide structural integrity, (2) tell the story with the utmost economy, and then (3) get out of the way. The full-length figure is preferred.

The use of bronze or other metals on a marble statue, or using a mixture of two or more types of stone, is almost always grounds for dismissal. A single carved stone is preferred.

The Zhou Dynasty style bronzes that I am trying to collect are typically in an unwashed state with ornaments in repeating patterns. There is an appearance of symmetry that, upon closer inspection, reveals that every form is unique in a subtle way.

I dislike cast bronze sculptures of human figures in all traditions and cultures because they are not carved or molded directly by the sculptor's hands. I make an exception for the Zhou bronzes because hand-carved examples do not appear to exist.

BOOKS

AREAS OF interest include: poetry books, essay collections, letters, primary sources of eastern and western mysticism, and museum catalogs and books on art collecting. The books on mysticism interest me the most, because they suggest, like my favorite works of art or music, that there are far more exquisite realms that exist than are suggested by mundane reality. The mystery of that, and the many suggestions that they are attainable, are irresistible to me. They claim to present better, albeit very challenging and disruptive, alternatives to how I currently live, and I wish to understand them as authentically as possible.

PHOTOGRAPHS

WHENEVER I can find them I collect photographs of the artists and subjects of the works that I acquire. I also collect digital photographs of eminent people who have notable private study rooms. This collection serves as a way to examine their individual tastes in art, books, and interior design.

MUSIC

BY BROWSING online recordings, I look for composers from the 16th and 17th centuries whose works are admirably performed by Baroque ensembles on period instruments. The instruments involved are mainly: Baroque violins, viola da gambas, harpsichords, viola d'amores, theorbos, and occasionally organs. With few exceptions I dislike Baroque performances with wind instruments, pianos, cellos, or voices of any kind.

Acquisitions Method

I.

GO TO museum databases that photograph and catalog a large percentage of their holdings (MFA Boston, Five Colleges Collections Database, Rijksmuseum, Google Art Project, etc.) and keep a record of all the objects that you want. Do the same in person at local museums and libraries that you admire. Approach museums and libraries as if everything had a price tag, because most of them once did. Museums traditionally seek the best examples of any particular object, so they are your best resource for cultivating your tastes. For books, it is often better to examine the personal libraries of great men and women, so I would point you to a combination of LibraryThing Legacy Libraries and archive.org to find exemplary books to browse through. If you're looking to collect books for their bindings or typography, the auction sites will be of more use.

II.

GO TO auction websites and look up those objects in past lots to see what kind of market there is for them (Blouin Art Sales Index, eBay completed listings, Christie's past auction sales, Liveauctioneers past auction sales, etc.). Constantly write down everything about your favorite objects: distinctive materials that they're made out of, construction methods, associated time periods and cultures, associated artists, teachers, and students, subject matter, etc.

III.

IF YOU have been keeping good records, you will now have a huge supply of keywords with which to search for live auctions. On a site like eBay, I like to think of auction searching like an archaeological dig: the more specific and targeted your keywords are, the more effective you will be at sifting away the dirt. And there is a *lot* of dirt. For every object that I think is worth collecting, there are about 3,000-5,000 objects that have to be brushed aside. It is safe to assume that a great many of the best objects in museums are found by culling for months or years at a time. You can expect to find the best objects now on eBay, because almost anywhere else the objects have been screened by curators in order to attract the largest amount of bidders, and do not have the benefit (for you, the savvy collector) of being hidden in the dirt from all but the most discerning. On eBay you must find the non-professional sellers who have great items but don't know how to market them—this is where the great finds for the lowest prices happen.

You must put yourself in front of tens of thousands of objects and compare them. You can start with the online image databases of all major museums. In some cases they represent 95% of museum holdings. Compare these museum-quality works directly to the paintings and sculptures on eBay. And also learn what it takes to create a terrible artwork, a mediocre artwork, a decent artwork, and a masterful artwork, and attribute value to how well it was made, how expensive the materials are, and what effect it has on you aesthetically. At this point I can tell if something is good as soon as it scrolls across the screen. However, it usually takes looking at 5,000 terrible objects before this happens. With all of those comparisons under your belt, you'll be able to recognize immediately when something is a copy of an old master, is made of fraudulent materials, or when the hand of a great artist is at work.

You have to have the patience to wait three, four, five years for something good to appear, recognize the rarity of the situation, and have the confidence to out-bid everyone else. The challenge is learning how to cast a large enough net that can capture at least one interesting work each month. I try to find at least three candidates, and choose from among them.

CONCLUSION

PART OF the motivation for art collecting is to prove that it doesn't require vast fortunes to buy original art. I began to realize that I was overpaying for antique books, and paying very little comparatively for culturally and aesthetically significant original art. In addition:

- For most of these objects I was the only bidder, so I feel a personal responsibility for buying them and sharing what I can about them—in the same way that museums present their objects with historical and literary supplements. I do extensive research while the auction is live so I can get a handle on what I'm looking at, and then I present this information on the site if I purchase it. The objects usually have much more cultural and aesthetic significance than the sellers seem to recognize.
- There is a history of collectors that I want to participate in.
- There is an overwhelming need for collectors of traditional art to preserve cultural memory. We live in a culture where library books that don't get checked out after so many years are thrown away to make room for the new ones. The same thing is happening to art and architecture, and this is a devastating betrayal of cultural heritage for us and for posterity. Primary documents are being permanently erased for the sake of space-saving.
- Art seemed to be the only reliable way to encounter a sincere devotion to religion and mystical or sublime beauty.
- Art also seemed to be, ultimately, the best way to spend money, and therefore the best motivation for working hard at my job.

On top of all of this, the sector of the art market over which auction houses have no control is disorganized, scattered, and obscured. The collector who can navigate such treacherous and uncharted territory is at a great advantage, because the field is ripe for discovery.

The Art-Lover's Enchiridion

I. NORTON SIMON [1974]

I AM NOT essentially a religious person, but my feeling about a museum is that it can serve as a substitute for a house of worship. It is a place to respect man's creativity and to sense a continuity with the past. It is a place to give us a feeling of the dignity of man and to help us to strive towards our own creativity and fulfillment.

II. WILLIAM HAZLITT [1824]

THROW OPEN the folding-doors of a fine Collection, and you see all you have desired realised at a blow—the bright originals starting up in their own proper shape, clad with flesh and blood, and teeming with the first conceptions of the painter's mind! The disadvantage of pictures is, that they cannot be multiplied to any extent, like books or prints; but this, in another point of view, operates probably as an advantage, by making the sight of a fine original picture an event so much the more memorable, and the impression so much the deeper. A visit to a genuine Collection is like going on a pilgrimage—it is an act of devotion performed at the shrine of Art! It is as if there were but one copy of a book in the world, locked up in some curious casket, which, by special favour, we had been permitted to open, and peruse (as we must) with unaccustomed relish. —*Sketches of the Principal Picture-Galleries in England.*

III. WILLIAM SARTAIN [1917]

WE ARE BETTER and greater in proportion to our appreciation of what is fine and noble, and by the cultivation of our finer taste we are helped to see and enjoy the beauties of nature...it poetizes us. Surround yourself with fine works of art, read the greatest works of literature, hear the finest music—and you increase your capacity for understanding and enjoyment and are ennobled by the emotions they call forth. By ignoring the gratification of such instincts the latter become atrophied—as the fishes of the Mammoth Cave, living in darkness, have lost the sense of sight. —*Thoughts on Art and the Art Collector*

IV. OTTO WITTMANN [1974]

IN THESE precarious and unsettled times in which we all live, there is a great hunger for a sense of lasting significance. We live among objects designed to be bought, used and thrown away without ever acquiring any sense of identity or relationship to ourselves...The very nature of art and of the museums which preserve and present works of art reassures people of the continuity of human vision and thought and of the importance of their place in the vast stream of significant developments over centuries of time. This is why art must belong to all. It is not a mere commodity to be traded, hoarded and hidden in the vaults of some vast warehouse. —*Art Values in a Changing Society*

V. G.K. CHESTERTON [1913]

I SHOULD therefore urge the re-publication of old and good pictures as a real part of that grossly neglected thing—public education. Our historians lie much more than our journalists; our fashionable conceptions of the past change with every fashion; and like most fashions, are fantastic and hideous. But the old colours and the old canvases do not lie; they were really achieved in the ages which we parody or pervert; and the squareness of their drawing, the brightness of their colours, the substantial sincerity of their subject, will still tell us something of the fathers we have forgotten. I do not go so far as to say we have relapsed into barbarism. But I do say that we can just now learn best from picture writing. —*Famous Paintings selected from the world's great galleries and reproduced in colour.*

VI. JONATHAN RICHARDSON [1719]

WHAT IS Beautiful, and Excellent is naturally adapted to Please; but All Beauties, and Excellencies are not naturally Seen. Most Gentlemen see Pictures, and Drawings as the Generality of Peo-ple see the Heavens in a Clear, Starry Night, they perceive a sort of Be-auty there, but such a one as produces no great Pleasure in the Mind: But when one considers the Heavenly Bodies as other Worlds, and that there are an Infinite Number of these in the Empire of God, Immensity; and Worlds which our Eyes assisted by the best Glasses can never reach, and so far remote from the most distant of what we see (which yet are so far removed from us that when we consider it our Minds are fill'd with Astonishment) that These Visible ones are as it were our Neighbou-rs, as the Continent of *France* is to *Great Britain*; When one considers f-arther, That as there are Inhabitants on this Continent tho' we see them not when we see That, 'tis altogether unreasonable to Imagine that tho-se Innumerable Worlds are Uninhabited, and Desart; there must be Be-ings There, Some perhaps More, Others Less Noble, and Excellent-than Man: When one Thus views this Vast Prospect, the Mind is Otherwise a-ffected than Before, and feels a Delight which Common Notions never can administer. So those who at Present cannot comprehend there can be such Pleasure in a good Picture, or Drawing as *Connoisseurs* pretend to find, may Learn to see the same thing Themselves, their Eyes being once open'd 'tis like a New Sense, and New Pleasures flow in as often as the Objects of that Superinduc'd Sight present themselves, which (to Pe-ople of Condition Especially) very frequently happens, or may be procu-r'd, whether Here at Home, or in their Travels Abroad. When a Gentle-man has learn'd to see the Beauties and Excellencies that are really in good Pictures, and Drawings, and which may be learnt by conversing with Such, and applying himself to the consideration of them, he will look upon That with Joy which he Now passes over with very little Plea-sure, if not with Indifference: Nay a Sketch, a Scrabble of the Hand of a Great Master will be capable of administering to him a Greater Degree of Pleasure than those who know it not by Experience will easily believe. —*Discourse II. An argument in behalf of the science of a connoisseur; wherein is shewn the dignity, certainty, pleasure, and advantage of it.*

VII. FREDERICK S. ROBINSON [1897]

EACH OBJECT is the record of a human effort, short or prolonged, as the case may be, but still human, not of the machine—an effort, too, of the highest part of our nature, that which competes and strives to obtain the best of which it is capable. For in the realms of the finest art there is no standing still, no attaining to a fixed level of capacity. A man shall not say, “I will execute this adequately, and so succeed.” No, of the most that we see here the craftsman has said, “This time I will surpass myself.” So it is that these objects of art which thousands pass by with a careless glance to gaze at something which bulks larger to the eye, are so many expressions of the unspoken poetry of art, so many examples of the effort for perfection. Often, too, the craftsman has been in his grave a thousand years or more before the full meed of appreciation is paid him. By then his name has long been lost, and his handiwork, perhaps, is crumbling to decay. Then at last we awake to the artistic value of some neglected trifle of which the original giver but lightly thought, and the recipient valued only for the giver’s sake. The artist cherished his work, no doubt, and was loath to part with it, as every artist is, even for the sum received, which was not great, but was consoled to think that perhaps one here or there might appreciate its delicacies. Years pass by, and at last there are found a few who can enter into the feeling which inspired the patient skilful craftsman, can note his advancement in design, and appraise the freedom of execution which the hesitating hand has at last attained. Those who can do this are collectors born. To them the artist and the craftsman need no justification. They know that his art was to the artist in great part his religion, and that no bad way of praising God is to do the best with the artistic talent He has given you. —*The Connoisseur: Essays on the Romantic and Picturesque Associations of Art*

VIII. HORACE WALPOLE [1825]

I PREFER PORTRAITS, really interesting, not only to landscape painting, but to history. A landscape is, we will say, an exquisite distribution of wood and water, and buildings. It is excellent—we pass on, and it leaves not one trace in the memory. In historical painting there may be *sublime deception*—but it not only always falls short of the idea, but is always *false*; that is, has the greatest blemish incidental to history. It is commonly false in the *costume*; generally in the portraits; always in the grouping and attitudes, which the painter, if not present, cannot possibly delineate as they really were. Call it fabulous painting, and I have no objection.—But a real portrait we know is truth itself: and it calls up so many collateral ideas, as to fill an intelligent mind more than any other species. —*Walpoliana*

IX. RIGBY & RIGBY [1944]

OVER OUR possessions we exercise a definite control; and when we “love” them, it is in part because they are fallen to us and become of us. Since the ego demands that whatever has become a part of itself should be as important as possible, there arises out of this a kind of protective proprietorship—as in the case of the “beloved,” possessed of the lover—which tends to magnify the virtues of the possessed. The game of conquest, the sense of triumph in victory, also plays its part; driving men on to seek ever more and more possessions, more conquests, which, once attained, enhance by just that much more the importance of the victor, the possessor. For the collector, the case has been most simply stated by Arnold Bennett when he says: “The collector has a museum of his own and he is the curator.” In other words, where his gathered possessions are concerned, if nowhere else, he is supreme master. And whatever other value his collection may have in the eyes of the collector, and there are usually many and more obvious ones, this extension of the “dominant and triumphant self” contributes the vivifying spark. —*Lock, Stock and Barrel: The Story of Collecting*

X. CHARLES C. COLTON [1822]

EVEN HUMAN knowledge is permitted to approximate in some degree, and on certain occasions, to that of the Deity, its pure and primary source...What so hard, so cold, and so insensible as marble? Yet the sculptor can warm it into life, and bid it breathe an eternity of love. What so variable as colour? so swift as light? or so empty as shade? Yet the pencil of a Raphael can give these fleeting things, both a body and a soul; can confer upon them an imperishable vigour, a beauty that *increases* with *age*, and which must continue to captivate generations. —*Lacon: Or, Many Things in Few Words; Addressed to Those Who Think*

*XI. BERNARD BERENSON & ISABELLA STEWART
GARDNER [1900]*

ISABELLA: The outside world seems to have got an idea that I have millions. Everyday the post brings me eleven letters (that is the average) asking from \$500 to \$1,000. One day a cool million was asked for! As I can give one as well as the other, I can throw away every letter, and try to laugh at the daily plague. Probably much of the misunderstanding comes from the way I spend my money. I fancy I am the only living American who puts *everything* into works of art and music; I mean, instead of into show, and meat and drink. I wish they would understand, and leave me in peace.

BERENSON: Your last letter has made me feel you to a singular degree as a friend. Without ever having known, or even inquired into your financial position I always more than suspected that you were really spending all your fortune on works of art. No other living person can claim such a title to glory. There are plenty who will relieve need, and found institutions of obvious good but man does not live by bread alone, and a collection like yours will one way have the refined and elevating effect that not one of our universities, at least as at present constituted, can hope to produce. Great shall be your reward; for centuries after the very names of your ridiculous and vulgar detractors will have perished, America will still thoroughly appreciate what you have done for her. But I must make a sign against the evil eye, touch wood, or do something that will draw off the envy of the gods. —*The Letters of Bernard Berenson and Isabella Stewart Gardner*

XII. ALFRED NORTH WHITEHEAD [1933]

THE MERIT of Art in its service to civilization lies in its artificiality and its finiteness. It exhibits for consciousness a finite fragment of human effort achieving its own perfection within its own limits. Thus the mere toil for the slavish purpose of prolonging life for more toil or for mere bodily gratification, is transformed into the conscious realization of a self-contained end, timeless within time. The work of Art is a fragment of nature with the mark on it of a finite creative effort, so that it stands alone, an individual thing detailed from the vague infinity of its background. Thus Art heightens the feeling which is supernatural. A sunset is glorious, but it dwarfs humanity. It gives an elation of feeling which is supernatural. A million sunsets will not spur on men towards civilization. It requires Art to evoke into consciousness the finite perfections which lie ready for human achievement...In a sense art is a morbid overgrowth of functions which lie deep in nature. It is the essence of art to be artificial. But it is its perfection to return to nature, remaining art. In short art is the education of nature. Thus, in its broadest sense, art is civilization. For civilization is nothing other than the unremitting aim at the major perfections of harmony. —*Adventures of Ideas*

XIII. JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE [1845]

THROUGH THE contemplation of the works of art, to keep alive in the mind a high, unapproachable ideal; by our judgments of what the artist has accomplished, to fix the great scale whose divisions are made after the best we know; earnestly to seek out whatever is most perfect; to point out the fountain head to the lover of art as well as to the artist; to place him on a high point of view; to let history as well as theory, criticism no less than practice, all centre in a single aim; this is praiseworthy and beautiful, and such a labor cannot be unprofitable. —*Essays on Art*

XIV. WILLIAM BECKFORD [1830]

WILLIAM WAS strongly of opinion that the collection should be purchased for the nation, and lamented that, with the exception of a handful of people, there was in England no sound taste for the arts. "Collections are made from ostentation by people of wealth, who do not know a good from a bad picture. The government is not sensible of the value of art to the nation. It will lavish money upon anything else, but it grudges money for the arts. A minister picks a committee of taste out of the House of Commons, as he would a committee for any other purpose, and his committee does nothing but blunder. There must be a feeling for art—mere admiration won't do—people admire, and affect to be struck with works of art, because others affect the same thing, just as an opera audience cries, 'Wonderful!' at a performance of which it does not comprehend a syllable. The beauty of art must be inwardly felt—the mind in it must be read, interpreted...A just taste for art is a cultivated taste; there is no royal road to it, as too many think there is." —*The Life and Letters of William Beckford, of Fonthill*

XV. OSCAR WILDE [1897]

THERE IS NOT a single flower, or the curve of a shell, to which, by some subtle sympathy with the very soul of things, my nature does not answer. Like Gautier, I have always been one of those *pour qui le monde visible existe*. Still, I am conscious now that behind all this beauty, satisfying though it may be, there is some spirit hidden of which the painted forms and shapes are but modes of manifestation, and it is with this spirit that I desire to become in harmony. I have grown tired of the articulate utterances of men and things. The Mystical in Art, the Mystical in Life, the Mystical in Nature—this is what I am looking for. It is absolutely necessary for me to find it somewhere. —*De Profundis*

XVI. LONGINUS [1ST CENTURY CE]

HE WHO HAS a competent share of natural and acquired taste, may easily discover the value of any performance from often hearing it. If he finds that it does not transport his soul, or exalt his thoughts—that it does not leave in his mind matter for more enlarged reflection than the mere sounds of the words convey, but that on attentive examination its dignity lessens and declines—he may conclude that whatever pierces no deeper than the ears can never be the true sublime. For that is truly grand and lofty, which the more we consider the greater ideas we conceive of it; whose force is hard, or, rather, impossible to withstand; which sinks deep, and makes such impressions on the mind as cannot be easily worn out or effaced. In a word, you may pronounce that sublime to be commendable and genuine, which pleases all sorts of men at all times. For when persons of different pursuits, habits of life, tastes, ages, principles, agree in the same joint approbation of any performance, then this union of assent, this combination of so many different judgments, stamps a high and indisputable value on that performance which meets with such general applause. —*On The Sublime*

XVII. MARTIN ARCHER SHEE [1809]

THE REALMS of Taste are, indeed, peculiarly exposed to the inroads of vanity and presumption. In those airy regions the most callow understanding conceives itself equipped for flight. The dominions of the Muses are held to be a sort of free territory, where all plead nature's claim to commonage, and let loose their pretensions without fear of restriction or reproof...An acquaintance with pictures is commonly mistaken for a knowledge of art; hence, many persons of learning and ingenuity labouring under this delusion, imagine that they must be critics, because they are collectors, and suppose themselves qualified to discuss the principles of painting without understanding even its rudiments. But every day's experience proves, that it is very possible, to have visited all the great cabinets of Europe, to have lived familiarly with the ablest artists, and to have collected gems, vases, and antiques, in all their virtuoso varieties, without having made any considerable proficiency in true Taste. Even the proudest attainment of critical ambition, that acmè of accomplished connoisseurship—a knowledge of hands, may be acquired beyond the poring sagacity of a Picture-dealer, without producing a sound judgment in Art, or a sufficient knowledge of nature: as we may be able to distinguish accurately the hand-writing of different persons, and yet prove very incompetent judges of the sense which is intended to be conveyed. —*Elements of Art*, p. 20-21