

**THINK  
LIKE AN  
ARTIST  
DON'T  
ACT LIKE  
ONE**

**KOOS DE WILT**

#7

# SHOW THE HUMANITY

Giotto di Bondone (1266-1337), The Lamentation of Christ, 1304-1306,  
Cappella degli Scrovegni, Padua

Renaissance art only really began with the Tuscan painter Giotto di Bondone. For the first time since Antiquity, here was someone who depicted his characters as people of flesh and blood. In the Middle Ages the human figures in art had been little more than walk-on players in retellings of Bible stories, about as animated as puppets and with their emotions – if they had any at all – little more than caricatures. After many centuries of passive torpidity, in this fresco we finally see real people racked by grief. At last, Mary's despairing gesture and tortured facial expression reveal the heartfelt suffering of a mother who has just lost her son. The emotion is real – it touches us. Giotto shows us the person behind the caricature. ■





# 16

# YOU ARE ALREADY NAKED

Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni (1475-1564),  
The Last Judgement, (1534-1541), Sistine Chapel, Vatican City

Steve Jobs knew he was not blessed with eternal life, so he had nothing to lose. “You are already naked,” he said. Centuries earlier, Michelangelo had captured that same outlook on life in paint. He almost reached the age of 89, and spent a large part of that long life at the top of his game. It was not until he was 60 that the Pope commissioned him to paint The Last Judgement for the Sistine Chapel. The fresco took six years to complete, and he deliberately used it to put his reputation on the line. In this holiest of settings, he covered the vast altar wall with naked figures. The controversy split the Vatican, and a year after the artist’s death large sections of the work were overpainted. But Michelangelo had taken the risk and followed his heart. ■



# 21

# BE STILL

Pieter Jansz. Saenredam (1597-1665), Interior of the Sint-Odulphuskerk in Assendelft, 1649, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Pieter Janszoon Saenredam was an introverted type. We know him primarily from his depictions of church interiors, such as this one in Assendelft where his father was buried. These scenes are the pinnacle of painted stillness, yet far from cold. They exude serenity, atmosphere, and warmth. The extreme precision of the brushstrokes reflects the fact that the artist might easily spend a year on one work in order to perfect its superb perspective and lighting. Saenredam painted some fifteen different churches all over the Netherlands, making him the founding father of a unique genre. Constantijn Huygens, the artistic giant of the day, wrote of his good friend's work, "Looking at a painting by Saenredam is like looking at a portrait of God himself." ■



# 34

# KEEP YOUR DISTANCE

Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890), *Café Terrace at Night (Place du Forum)*, 1888, Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterloo

Van Gogh moved in artistic circles all his life. He first trained with his older cousin by marriage, Anton Mauve, where he came into contact with well-known Dutch contemporaries like Maris, Weissenbruch, Mesdag, Breitner, and Israëls. Later he moved to Paris to live with his younger brother, Theo, and there met such great names as Toulouse-Lautrec, Bernard, Seurat, Gauguin, and Pissarro. Ultimately, though, he ended up in Provence, and the only people he had regular contact with were the postman and a local doctor. It was hardly the hub of artistic and cultural life, but nonetheless it was here, in the remote provincial countryside, that Vincent carved out his leading place in art history. Confined to a clinic in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, he painted vases of irises, the starry night, and a café he had often visited in Arles. In the final months of his life he lived in the village of Auvers-sur-Oise, just north of Paris, where he depicted a local church, a village doctor, and ominous fields of corn. The further he removed himself from the rest of the world, it seems, the more impressive his work became. All the know-how he had built up in the previous years now manifested itself there, in his own distinctive style. ■



# 37

# LET THE COLORS SPEAK

Henri Matisse (1869-1954), *The Green Stripe*, 1905,  
Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen

The work is called *The Green Stripe*. But what we see is a portrait of Amélie – or rather, Madame Matisse. Suddenly we discover the green stripe on her nose. This divides her face into a warm and cool side, against a background in opposing colours. Colours which, apparently, tell us rather more about how she was as a person than what she looked like. As the nineteenth century drew to a close, painting entered a revolutionary new phase. No longer did artists strive to produce the most accurate reproduction of reality as they saw it. Instead, they turned the whole process around. The purpose of art now was to stimulate the viewer to look at the world in a different way. Chromatic effects – novel use of colour – were used for this purpose. Matisse's portrait is friendly and accessible, yet at the same time enigmatic. The colours evoke personal emotions, thus creating a whole new experience. ■



#41

# SEX COMPLEX

Egon Schiele (1890-1918), Wally in Red Blouse with Raised Knees, 1913,  
Private collection

Enfant terrible Egon Schiele was not one to iron out rough edges. In fact, he was more likely to accentuate human imperfections than traditional beauty. He had no qualms about portraying either frank eroticism or existential angst. Here we see a sultry Walburga Neuzil – Wally for short – the 23-year-old artist's teenage lover. And she is looking straight back at us. This is a work typical of Vienna in the time of celebrated psychiatrist Sigmund Freud, a city in search of an escape, through art, from its own suffocatingly bourgeois way of life. Schiele caused an outcry when he started painting young girls masturbating, ending up with a prison sentence for indecency. Wally visited him there and looked after his affairs, yet in the end Schiele traded her in for a respectable middle-class girl. Sex may be liberating, but it can also really complicate things. ■



#49

# TRUST THE PROCESS

Jackson Pollock (1912-1956)

Once upon a time, every stroke of the artist's brush was considered and deliberate. But Action Painting changed all that, to a great extent separating the act of painting from the creator's ego and self-expression. In a sense, the work seems to paint itself. Pollock laid his canvases on the floor of his studio and walked over them again and again, allowing gobbets of paint to drip from a brush, stick, trowel or knife. Sometimes he even threw paint straight from the tin. In his "drip" works, Pollock wanted to give the creative process a role of its own. And somehow the composition always succeeds, simply because he trusted in that process. But trust can be a dangerous thing. Caught up in an extramarital affair and his battle with the demon drink, Pollock crashed his Oldsmobile into a tree. The crash proved fatal. Trusting the process turned out to have its limits. ■



# 68



# BEAUTY MARK

Zhang Xiaogang (1958), Big Family Girl, 2006

At first sight they look like innocent family portraits made during the Cultural Revolution, when Chinese artist Zhang Xiaogang was growing up. Everything seems so organized. All ideal people, exactly as the regime wanted to see. And then you notice the little patches of color disrupting the perfect image – the irregularities which actually imbue the subjects with something real, something individual. These are the cracks in the masks of power, through which real people can emerge. Just as a beauty mark can make a person more interesting to look at. Only then do we realize that we are looking at portraits revealing the new China. ■



#73

# MAKE EYE CONTACT

Marina Abramović, (1946) 'Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present', 2010, Museum of Modern Art, New York

We spend so much of our days in meetings, or on our phones, texting. But only by looking each other straight in the eye, without words, do we really make contact. Marina Abramović devoted a piece of performance art to that deeper communication. For Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present she spent every day for three months sitting silently at a table in the atrium of MoMA, the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Visitors were invited to sit down in a chair opposite and look her in the eyes. They could stay as long as they wanted, providing they did not speak. Some started laughing, some became emotional, some just looked relieved when the whole experience was over. It was the museum's most successful event ever. In total, the artist spent 736 hours and 30 minutes eyeball-to-eyeball with 1,500 different people – none of whom will ever forget those moments. ■

**For thousands of years, artists have tried to answer questions about success, love, work, friendship, life, and death.**

**Unfathomable topics for which they have found countless answers.**

**Think Like an Artist Don't Act Like One is not another foray down that intellectual path, but simply a selection of 75 amusing, serious, and inspiring life lessons from art history.**

## **THINK LIKE AN ARTIST DON'T ACT LIKE ONE**

**looks at what Leonardo da Vinci has to teach us about curiosity, and Rembrandt about honesty. At how Vermeer helps us to appreciate the everyday, Monet the here and now. At Picasso teaching us to lie truthfully and at Nauman questioning truth itself. A humble offering for anyone who wants to learn how to live through art. Whether you are 10 or 110.**

**"For everyone who dares to think in proposals not in opinions"**

Daan Roosegaarde, artist

**"For art there is no leaflet and no guarantee. Koos shows why"**

Taco Dibbts, Rijksmuseum's General Director

Product of buro van Ons

ISBN 978-90-6369-468-5



**BIS PUBLISHERS**