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What is Quality in Art?

A Meditation Based on European Paintings from the 15th to the 18th Centuries

Alejandro Vergara-Sharp

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- In-depth art-historical reflection on value judgments in art by one of Europe's leading curators

'That this is a legitimate question, even a necessary one, is argued by Vergara in a pleasurable manner, with the pace and attitude of a peripatetic thinker. There is something here that reminds one of Montaigne or Stendhal.' – El País

Throughout history, human beings have excelled at creating art of the highest quality. Aristotle wrote that Homer "surpassed all others" and Pliny the Elder referred to "masterpieces that we never tire of admiring". Velázquez distinguished between portraits "made with art" and those that were not. What did they all mean exactly? What do we mean when we say that a work of art is good, of high quality? This book is an attempt to explain this central question, which remains surprisingly unexplored.

Alejandro Vergara-Sharp argues that "a deep knowledge of the history of art provides us with the tools to approach this issue objectively". He then invites the reader to share with him a Socratic voyage of discovery, gradually unveiling arguments that can assist us in understanding this elusive and crucial concept.

Alejandro Vergara-Sharp (Washington D.C., 1960) is Senior Curator of Flemish and Northern European Paintings at the Museo del Prado in Madrid. He is an expert on the art of Rubens, and more generally on Flemish and Dutch art of the Early Modern period.

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