



Stories of Art

By James Elkins

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Stories of Art By James Elkins

Stories of Art is James Elkins's intimate history of art. Concise and original, this engaging book is an antidote to the behemoth art history textbooks from which we were all taught. As he demonstrates so persuasively, there can never be one story of art. Cultures have their own stories - about themselves, about other cultures - and to hear them all is one way to hear the multiple stories that art tells. But each of us also has our own story of art, a kind of private art history made up of the pieces we have seen, and loved or hated, the effects they had on us, and the connections that might be drawn among them.

Elkins opens up the questions that traditional art history usually avoids. What about all the art not produced in Western Europe or in the Europeanized Americas? Is it possible to include Asian art and Indian art in 'the story?' What happens when one does? To help us find answers, he uses both Western and non-Western artworks, tables of contents from art histories written in cultures outside the centre of Western European tradition, and strangely wonderful diagrams of how artworks might connect through a single individual. True multiculturalism may be an impossibility, but art lovers can each create a 'story of art' that is right for themselves.

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Editorial Review

From Booklist

Intrepid, personable, and prolific art historian Elkins shifts his keen gaze from art to art history in this surefooted and amiable disquisition on how the story of art has been told, and why. Elkins assesses the standard text in the field, E. H. Gombrich's often revised *The Story of Art*, and the vision it promotes of art history as an orderly, chronological progression toward the pinnacle of art, "naturalistic skill," which the moderns then abandoned. Elkins dissects the many pitfalls of this simplistic approach, and envisions provocative alternatives, all the while musing on how to address the many tricky questions art historians confront, especially the challenge of how to integrate non-Western art into the story of Western art, and how to answer urgent questions about race, gender, sexuality, and even language itself. Elkins' smart, knowledgeable, original, and engaging multicultural analysis ultimately celebrates the ongoing conflict between art, which often seeks to defy categorization, and our desire for order and definition, all the while recognizing this irresolvable debate is a wellspring for fresh perspectives on the crucial and fascinating story of creative expression. *Donna Seaman*

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Review

"Using sketches of his own and those of his students to illustrate alternatives to the standard chronology of the historical time line, Elkins proposes a number of thought-provoking ways to organize the stories of art that are not based on a strict adherence to dates, many of which can only be surmised."

-Kirkus Review, August 1, 2002

"Eminently readable and at times outright fun, Stories of Art is a terrific and transparent meditation on what's at stake in the histories of art we all so glibly recite. Instead of writing yet another survey, James Elkins provides the little counter-narrative that rubs up against the monumental survey volumes with a kind of graceful annoyance. The little buzzing bee that worries the elephant."

-Michael Ann Holly, Clark Art Institute

"A much needed, thoughtful, and intelligent reflection on the disciplinary status and cultural function of the history of art. Stories of Art is an invaluable aid in articulating the hidden agenda that informs art history as it is currently constituted, and an indispensable addition to our increasingly self-aware art historical enterprise."

-Keith Moxey, author of *The Practice of Persuasion: Paradox and Power in Art History*

About the Author

James Elkins is Professor of Art History at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He is the author of many books. Among his books are *Pictures and Tears*, *How to Use Your Eyes*, and *What Painting Is*, all published by Routledge.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Nathan Lawhorn:

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