

Docent Dates

Docent meetings begin at 10 A.M., with coffee at 9:15

September 7

Weisman Road Trip

September 14

Board Meeting

September 21

First Council Meeting



Dear Docents,
How long does it take to become a docent?

In my case, ten years.

I've just returned from a road trip to O'Keeffe Country, as locals in northern New Mexico call it, as part of my ongoing study of Modernism. Once in a while you go on a docent tour and hear one thing that pulls it all together. That was Ricki's tour of the 75th Anniversary Exhibition, a passing comment at our Alfredo Lam about Expressionism. Now that I'm comfortable as a docent, I am inspired to really learn the art. The Big Picture. Abstract Expressionism. Do I really get it?

As a writer, the visual arts have not been easy for me. Part of what drew me to SBMA was the academic training, learning about art the way I would learn a new language. I clung to the history part of art history. My first 45-Minute tour included *Dead Cottonwood Tree* by Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986). I didn't like it, preferring traditional painting, order over chaos, clarity over confusion. Expressionism, as I saw it, was the work of lesser artists. Defensively, I stuck to that belief. I liked what I liked. It had nothing to do with "evolving."

It has taken ten years, countless lectures, independent study, a line-up of diverse exhibitions, and going on your tours, to stop resisting that which defies explanation. The historical primacy of European art still seems easier to grasp, and certainly to tour, than the stuff of artists' psyches. As a point of entry I may always turn to context in Cubism, Surrealism, abstraction itself. But I want to *get* Expressionism, with absolutely no motivation beyond my own curiosity. What better person to lead me than Georgia O'Keeffe, a familiar name from my first *Highlights* tour, *Dead Cottonwood Tree* an old acquaintance.

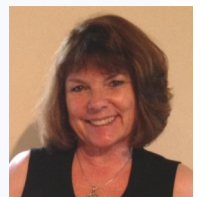
The painting looks different ten years later, color I had pointed out but hadn't seen, suddenly



Christopher Richard Wynne Nevison, 1889-1946, *Self Portrait*, 1911
Oil on wood, 20" x 16.7"
Tate Collection

On view at SBMA
September 18, 2016—
January 8, 2017
INTERNAL USE ONLY

Nevison's striking profile, set against a dark background, is reminiscent of portraits by Italian Renaissance artist, Sandro Botticelli. Nevison later became involved with the Futurist Movement. www.tate.org.uk



there. In the last year I have re-visited Diebenkorn, Ruscha, Park, Bischoff, de Kooning, Rothko, seeing beauty in the clean lines and geometric clarity, the wild dynamics of stroke, the simple, large-format, color-dominated fields.

My road trip to O’Keeffe’s world—the Museum in Santa Fe, Ghost Ranch where she painted her iconic landscapes, her home and studio in Abiquiu, confirmed what I already sensed—the power of Expressionism, in both figuration and landscape, is that it’s borne of feeling in the artist, an emotional expression that forces us to respond to our own feelings to *get it*, pushing cognition to the background. An academic approach has always offered firm footing, especially when touring. I have a job to do. In 45 minutes. The artifice and formality of a museum inhibits feeling, for me anyway, making it harder. I look at a painting, read a label. Cognitive processes.

I’ve been practicing stillness, looking, focusing on feeling. That’s where Georgia O’Keeffe comes in.

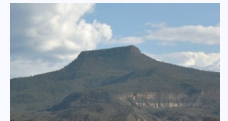
Walking in her shoes, seeing, in her words, “the wideness and wonder of the world as I live in it,” was overwhelming—the bigness, the beauty, the color, the impact of looking in a way I had never looked before, responding rather than thinking, feeling rather than understanding. For those of you who know art, who do art, that must sound silly, your reactions easily accessible, second nature. My dissonance is probably closer to that of our average visitor who looks at these paintings and concludes he/she is missing something. Now I get why.

Thinking is automatic. I don’t let myself feel in a time crunch. I don’t allow a moment in which visitors can feel. Snarky comments questioning the artists’ skill mask their discomfort, the pressure to grasp some highbrow concept when it’s so much simpler than that. What do I feel looking at this? But simple is not easy. All these years I’ve been missing the boat, trying to board a yacht instead of stepping into a canoe.

My evaluations tell me I give a good tour. Yet it has taken me ten years to become a docent.

In this issue you will find Josie’s pertinent article on *Women of Abstract Expressionism*. You will also enjoy Ricki’s review of *The Noise of Time* by Julian Barnes, which she describes as a compelling tour of one man’s psyche.

In September you’ll hear from our new board. The service year is still more than seven weeks away, plenty of time to enjoy seeing the world through new eyes. 🍷



The Pedernal, photo/Billie Frank; *Purple Mountain*, by Georgia O’Keeffe

From our Community Speakers Program



Team Leaders Kathryn Padgett and Shirley Waxman

shirleywaxman@gmail.com
or kpadgett@cox.net

We put out the call, and you responded. Our team is now rounded out with one more member. Here are the dates for August presentations:

Saturday, August 13, 3 pm

SB Central Library (next to the museum) .

Mary Winder: "Ancient Mystery Cults of Greece and Rome"

Friday, August 19th, 12 noon.

E. P. Foster Library (Main Street, Ventura)

Kathryn Padgett: "Art Floats My Boat: A History of Boats Depicted in Art"

August 24th 6 pm.

Montecito Library

Kathryn Padgett: "Art Floats My Boat: A History of Boats Depicted in Art".

Denver Art Museum: *Women of Abstract Expressionism*

By Josie Martin



Arriving on the plaza of the Denver Art Museum is exciting. One can't decide whether to "take in" this complex deconstructivist geometric structure with its twenty sloping planes jutting every which way,

or the huge sculptures around it. One of the angled titanium panels extends 167 feet over and above the street 100 feet below. Daniel Libeskind, the architect, was inspired by the light and geology of the Rockies.

Up ahead, I'm immediately distracted by "The Big Sweep," a giant broom and dust pan by Claes Oldenburg, "the mundane made large."

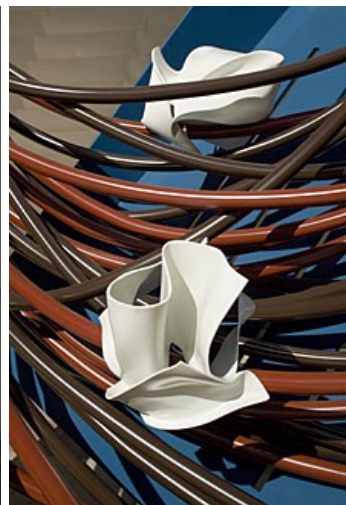
There is also a splendid steel sculpture by Mark di Suvero, and up on the restaurant roof is Red Grooms' whimsical "The Shoot Out." We're tempted to walk all around this amazing building, but it's already 90 degrees outside, so we head for Louise Bourgeois' big bronze spider at DAM's entrance. My main objective is to see the much lauded show, "The Women of Abstract Expressionism," but there are so many rooms filled with irresistible art, we decide to join the Highlights Tour to get our bearings.

Our docent is carrying a clipboard from which she will read at each stop. Soon I realize I could easily spend a few days at the D.A.M. Just the Western American collection deserves an afternoon. One enticing exhibit "Rhythm and Roots" displays captivating paintings, sculptures, photographs, and video installations all relating to American dance.

At two o'clock I join a large group of people for the main show. This second docent is also carrying a clipboard with a thick sheaf of papers from which she will read, almost as if from a script. Her introduction starts with a careful explanation of what abstract expressionism is. She quotes the critic Harold Greenberg: "The canvas appeared as an arena in which to act...what was to go on the canvas was not



The Frederic C. Hamilton Building designed by Daniel Libeskind. Photograph by Jeff Wells. *Courtesy Denver Art Museum*



go on the canvas was not

Claes Oldenburg, Big Sweep Denver Art Museum, Denver, Colorado
Stainless steel, aluminum, fiber-reinforced plastic; painted with polyurethane enamel
31 ft. 4 in. x 25 ft. 4 in. x 15 ft. 1 in. (9.6 x 7.7 x 4.6 m)

a picture but an event.” Action Painting—free from geometric forms or any recognizable image. Paint was flung, poured from coffee cans, squirted with turkey basters, splashed or stained directly onto a canvas. A woman nearby mumbles to her friend, “But could they draw?” The friend replies, “Who knows?”

The docent reads on, “There is no reference to visual reality. It’s very emotional; it’s not based on some pre-conceived idea, but of the creative process.” She emphasizes the importance of this show, looking up from her notes she says, “This exhibit proves American Abstract Expressionism wasn’t just a “guy’s club.” I wander away to read Lee Krasner’s quotation on the wall:

“I’m always going to be Mrs. Jackson Pollock. That’s a matter of fact, but I painted before Pollack, during Pollack, and after Pollack.”



Helen Frankenthaler, *Mountains and Sea*, 1952
Oil on canvas, 7' 2 5/8" x 9' 9 1/4"

white, grey, ochres, and yellow that look like runny eggs. It is full of heat and passion, but would I have thought that if I hadn’t been told the back story?

There is a wall of large photos of the artists in their studios with lots of fascinating biographical material. I’m astonished by how beautiful some of them are. Grace Hartigan could be mistaken for Grace Kelly. Mary Abbott is drop-dead gorgeous. Several women are shown painting with cigarettes dangling from their lips. Only a few are holding brushes.

Our docent provides intriguing stories about the artists living in that creative Bohemian era. I stare at Joan Mitchell’s “Hudson

Elaine de Kooning, *Bullfight*, 1959
Oil on canvas, 77 5/8 x 131 1/4 x 1 1/8 in



Joan Mitchell, *Hudson River Day Line*, 1955.
Oil paint on canvas; 79 83 in

Our docent tells how Krasner painted in a small closet-like studio while her husband painted in the big barn. Only after his death did she take over the barn.

In the show there are 12 artists, 51 works. All of them large wall-sized canvases. Of course there is also Elaine de Kooning, Joan Mitchell, and Helen Frankenthaler, but the other 8 artists are unfamiliar to me. Ethel Schwabacher, whose family was riddled with mental illness such that she spent years in psychoanalysis... “She had an affair with her analyst,” the docent reads from her clipboard.

I study Schabacher’s “Antigone,” (next page, top) a brilliant canvas of vermilions with slashes of black,



River Day Line" 1955. There is no focus point, no horizon line, no foreground, no background, none of the traditional elements of landscape art. There are only "scribbly, darting strokes of yellow, blue, paint on a plain white field." It looks as if it was done in a "blaze of improvisation." Mitchell wrote: "The idea of 'action painting' is a joke...there's no action here. I paint a little. Then I sit and look at the painting, sometimes for hours. Eventually the painting tells me what to do."



Ethel Schwabacher, *Antigone I*, 1958 Oil paint on canvas 51 × 85 in

Helen Frankenthaler, who was briefly married to Robert Motherwell, has a quote above the piece, "Mountains and Sea." (*Previous page*). It says, "A good picture looks like it happened all at once." She took unprimed canvas, laid it on the floor and poured thinned house paint and enamel from coffee cans directly onto it, causing a stained effect. Yet there are childish scribbles here and there. One looks suspiciously like a 5 year-olds version of a cat, beneath it, a vague crustacean, a crab? When we get to Elaine de Kooning's vivid slashes of hot colors, "Bullfight," (*previous page, lower right*) the docent asks if we can actually see the bull? Most of the group shake their heads; it takes me a long moment, but yes, the vague black rump and tail appear.

Judith Godwin's quotation: "I don't think a painter decides, I want to be an abstract painter, it's just a natural thing." Her somber painting, "Lamentations" is a tribute to Martha Graham.

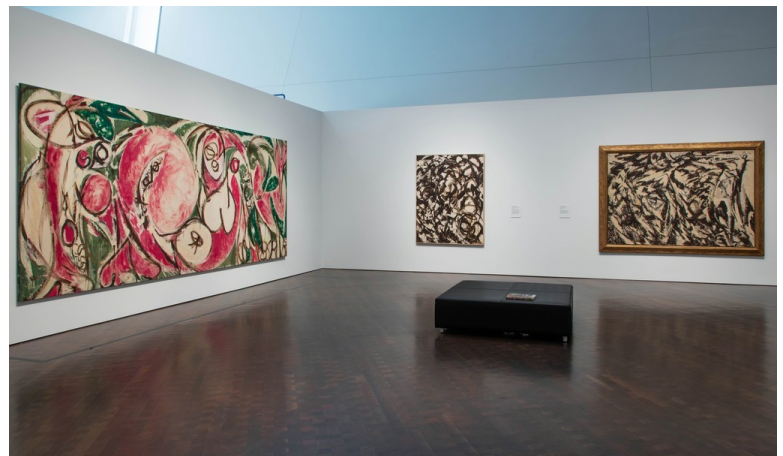
Jay de Feo was a radical innovator. The molten black 500 pound "Incision" (left) is made with a trowel, string, and humps of dry oil paint, giving it a third dimension. She was inspired by Mt. Everest, but a very black Mt. Everest.

It's a great show from a period when American art stole Europe's position as "Keeper of the Cultural Flame." And finally, the women who participated, but weren't allowed a place in the "guy's club" get their much deserved dues.

The show will come to Palm Springs in January. We can make it a docent trip; I would love to see it again. 🍷



Left: Jay De Feo *Incision*, Oil and string on canvas mounted on board. 118 x 55 5/8 x 9 3/8 in.



Excursion to the Weisman Foundation

Wednesday September 7

Sponsored by the Carpinteria Arts Center

Submitted by Nicola Gershen



Let's take the Santa Barbara Airbus down to Los Angeles and visit the **THE FREDERICK R. WEISMAN ART FOUNDATION**, a modern art gallery in a home setting with more than four hundred works of modern art on display.



Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation

265 N. Carolwood Drive, LA

Wednesday, September 7, 2016

Be at the Carpinteria Art Center at **8:15 a.m.**

Tour is at 10:30. We'll stop for lunch on our way back at 1:00.

Shuttle returns to CAC at approximately 3:30 p.m.



\$55 member/\$60 non-member includes airbus, tour and registration fee.

Payment is requested by August 15. It's first come, first serve for a maximum of 23. Bring your check to the Carpinteria Arts Center to sign up, or mail a check to Carpinteria Arts Center P.O. Box 597, Carpinteria, CA. 93014

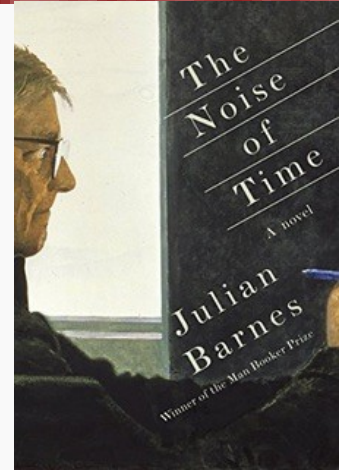


Celebrating *The Noise of Time* By Julian Barnes

Reviewed by Ricki Morse



This slim, complex and compelling novel is an elaborate act of legerdemain. The year is 1936. We meet Dimitri, a young family man, composer of music in Leningrad, Soviet Russia, standing all through the night in front of the 5th floor elevator in his apartment building, his mind buzzing “like a bluebottle fly,” alighting on a childhood memory, then the fear that engulfs him, then on Tanya, his first love.



Julian Barnes, *The Noise of Time*, Knopf, New York, 2016, 197 pages.

This is the noise of time which shifts in volume and focus throughout the book, sweeping us along through Dimitri’s ruminations and self-recriminations. He has chosen to be standing at the elevator when the police come to take him, naively hoping that his availability will lead them away from his wife and children, embodying his powerlessness to protect them or himself. His first opera has just been declared “formalist,” “abstractive,” an affront to “the people.” He expects to be killed by the state irrespective of the world wide praise the opera received.

We immediately think *Shostakovich*, but his full name is not mentioned until a quarter of the way through the book. And this is the magician’s wand at work, because by that time we have inhabited Dimitri’s mind so intimately and minutely that he cannot be the great Shostakovich. He is our Dimitri. We suffer his wounds, feel his fear and share his capitulation to Power, grasping fully the tortured choices he must make.



Dimitri Dimitreivich Shostakovich in the early 1940s

On balance with the buzzing of Dimitri’s mind is the economical, almost pristine, organization of the book. Three roughly equal sections, spaced in 12 year (leap year) intervals. The first is in 1936, the second in 1948 when he traveled to New York City representing The Soviet Union of Composers and the third in 1960, when, after the fall of Stalin and the rise of Khrushchev, he joined the Party, his ultimate act of self-immolation. The clarity of its structure allows the book to carry the enormous subtlety and multiplicity of Dimitri’s loyalty to Russia. He does not leave, as did his own idol, Stravinsky. Nor does he become an exile, as did Prokofiev. Photographs of Mussorgsky and Stravinsky held places of prominence under the glass of his desks and urged him to write the very best music he could. However, even more telling was the Titian postcard of *The Tribute Money*, 1516, which always stood on his nightstand. In it we see

Christ being offered a gold coin by a man with a ruby earring. Dimitri, a modest man, certainly did not equate his dilemma with that of Christ. He did, however, spend his life dealing with betrayal: his own, his country’s, his marriage’s. And even more importantly he felt an inherent loyalty to the purity of music itself. Though there are many interpretations of “render unto Caesar’s what is Caesar’s and unto God what is God’s,” Dimitri’s dilemma was how to render unto Art what is Art’s.



The Renaissance Venetian painter Titian's masterpiece, *The Tribute Money*, 1516, which captured for Shostakovich his dilemma as an artist caught between his art and the state.

trick him into recanting his support of the Stalinist party line. As Dimitri listened to the translator, "he felt the trap door opening under his paws," and in a monotone affirmed the Stalinist statements as views he supported.

But it is the world of music, close musical friends and Julian Barnes' familiarity with the world of musical performance that sustained not only Dimitri Dimitrievich Shostakovich but the reader through the machinations of the People's Republic. From his earliest works Dimitri drew the adulation of the musical world. For serious music lovers this book is a special gift, a work of art about great musicians, their insider stories, wit and idiosyncrasies. But for the lover of novels, it is astonishing—not a biography, as it tells us things about Dimitri that Julian Barnes could not have known. It is not a novel because the central character is a famous man about whom many books have been written. It is a submersion into the mind of Dimitri, who is also Shostakovich, so compelling that we feel his passions, wrestle with his ghosts, celebrate his victories while they are being smudged and torn by circumstances and his own internal conflicts.

The Noise of Time is musical and chaotic all at once, passionate and despairing, ironic and funny, much like a Shostakovich symphony—a uniquely astounding read. 🍷

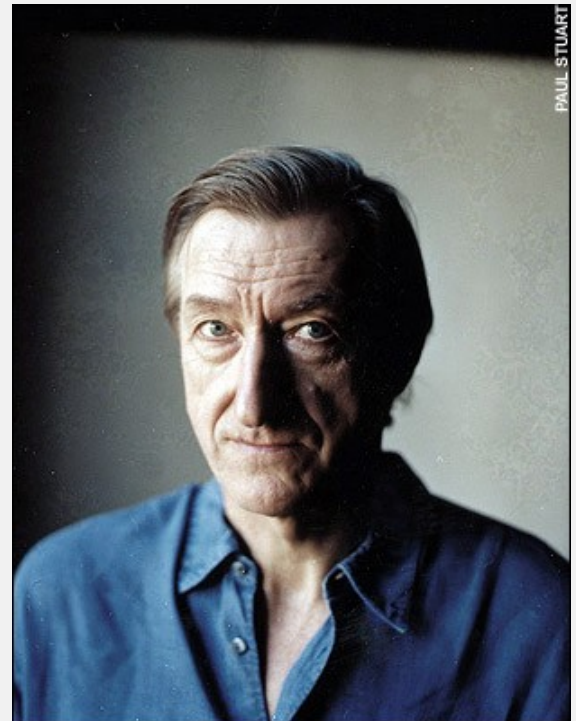
As a Russian, he considered irony a deeply developed art for dealing with despotism. The old saying went, "Russia is the homeland of elephants." Repeat something often enough, and it will be accepted as fact, no matter how absurd. He quoted to himself each morning a poem by Yetuchenko:

*In Galileo's day, a fellow scientist
Was no more stupid than Galileo.
He was well aware that the Earth revolved,
But he also had a large family to feed.*

And each New Year's Eve he offered the same toast to the successes of Stalin's paradise for the people,

"Let's drink to this—that things don't get any better."

Dimitri's only trip to the West, to New York City in 1948, was crowned by his Fifth Symphony being performed in Madison Square Garden before 15,000, with Dimitri on piano. The cheering crowd gave him the greatest resounding applause he had ever received, though his 5th was already widely acclaimed as a masterpiece. On this same trip he spoke before a literary group and was cross-examined by a Russian ex-patriot, presumably hoping to



Julian Barnes is one of the most prolific and widely acclaimed writers in England today author of 20 previous books and winner of the Man Booker Prize.

Art that makes us uncomfortable can make us smarter, more empathetic citizens

By Amy Herman, July 3, 2016

Art that makes us uncomfortable can make us smarter, more empathetic citizens. The canon of Western art is replete with images of the sublime and inspirational. But it also includes myriad pieces that depict violence, racial injustice, and pain—from Nicolas Poussin's *Abduction of the Sabine Women* (above right) to Picasso's *Guernica*. Such art forces viewers to confront what makes us uncomfortable. We learn the value of looking closely at things that we don't like or understand—a habit that many of us otherwise seek to avoid.

As an instructor in visual analysis, I believe that examining art with a critical eye and an appreciation for artists' perspectives is an invaluable skill. In doing so, the viewer can actually refine the lens through which he or she sees the world. In the age of Photoshop perfection and Snapchat ephemera, I want more people to practice looking at what appears ungainly, misshapen, disturbing, and cruel—all the more so if they feel personally affronted by it. Learning to thoughtfully move past these reactions can teach us more effective ways to contend with the economic, political, and cultural injustices that we face today. *To read more...*



<http://qz.com/716873/art-that-makes-us-uncomfortable-can-make-us-better-social-justice-activists/>

Is Our Art Equal to the Challenges of Our Times? By A.O. Scott, November 27, 2014, New York Times

A.O. Scott and a panel of cultural figures ponder whether and how artists should address social issues like race and class through their work.



A protest over the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo. *Jewel Samad/Agence France-Presse, Getty Images*

Ever since the financial crisis of 2008, I've been waiting for "The Grapes of Wrath." Or maybe "A Raisin in the Sun," or "Death of a Salesman," a Zola novel or a Woody Guthrie ballad — something that would sum up the injustices and worries of the times, and put a human face on the impersonal movements of history. We are in the midst of hard times now, and it feels as if art is failing us.

To read more: http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/30/arts/is-our-art-equal-to-the-challenges-of-our-times.html?_r=0

SBMA Event: Warrior Chorus

Sunday, August 28, 2016

At 2:30 in Mary Craig Auditorium sbma.net



For the third time, the Museum pairs with the Aquila Theatre Company to present award winning, humanities-based performances that provide a new model for veteran engagement in public programming.

Warrior Chorus is a national initiative that trains veterans to present innovative public programs based on ancient literature. Programming performed by veterans

focuses on critical social issues including war, conflict, comradeship, home, and family and includes veteran-led readings, discussions, and the innovative use of new media. In the short film *For the Greater Good?*, the Warrior Chorus retells Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, the story of a wounded hero who was abandoned by his own friends and countrymen, but ten years later is needed again. In both film and live performance, the group explores the concept of heroism, the ethics of war, and the treatment of male and female warriors on and off the battlefield.

After Public Appeal, Queen Elizabeth Portrait Will Stay in Britain

New York Times, July 28, 2016

A total of £10.3 million was raised, with 8,000 individuals contributing a total of £1.5 million.

Starting October 11, the portrait will hang in the Queen's House, on the same site as Greenwich Palace, where Elizabeth I was born.



The "Armada Portrait" of Queen Elizabeth I, at the National Maritime Museum in London. Credit Michael Bowles/Getty Images

The \$44m for Georgia O'Keeffe's work shows how little female artists are valued

Jonathan Jones The Guardian, Friday, 21 November 2014



The art historian Linda Nochlin posed a very good question in 1971 and it still has not been answered. “Why,” she asked in an essay that helped to shape feminist art history, “have there been no great women artists?” She asked what obstacles have kept women out of the canon for so long?



Some of those barriers are obvious, especially in the past – from the male-only structure of the guilds that controlled painting in the Renaissance to the dismissal of female creative endeavours as the “accomplishments” of brides in training in the age of Jane Austen.

Yet even as modern society has changed, and the structures that controlled art before the modern age crumbled – suddenly, in the early 20th century women became far more visible as participants in such movements as dadaism and surrealism – the achievements of women as artists have been subtly underplayed and undervalued. They still are today, in the age when names such as Richter and Kiefer have so much more cachet, somehow, than Emin or Sherman or Whiteread, and so many more TV programmes are made about David Hockney than they are about Bridget Riley. Women are allowed to do art, nowadays, of course. They are just not permitted to be great at it.

With its special blend of excess and cynicism, the art market this week made this brutally plain. Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986) had earned the highest price ever paid for a painting by a woman at auction. It's a hefty sum of cash, but so much less than the most expensive works by men that it is far from something to celebrate.

Cezanne's *Card Players* was bought for \$259m in 2011; Picasso's *Nude, Green Leaves and Bust* for \$106.5m in 2010; Jackson Pollock's *No 5, 1948* for \$140m in 2006. Money speaks volumes.

The reason there are no great female artists is, in short, because of men like me. Art criticism defines the lofty peaks of the canon and it is, let's say, a macho trade. I'd go further. I think to feel a passion for an artist – a real passion – involves a kind of deep identification, a sense of meeting your double, the artist who speaks for you. At certain points of my life I loved both Jackson Pollock and Damien Hirst like the brother I never had. Their art spoke to me, man. And you can't imagine artists more male than those.

I confess to this not in some agony of self-loathing, but just because, when we talk about art, we are discussing our deepest needs and natures – and if we are not, we're just gossiping. The market, too, is passionate – when someone pays out millions for a painting it is not a sombre investment but an act of love and self-discovery: a way to say who you are and what you believe in.

If Pollock rings the till so many notches higher than O'Keeffe it's because something in the bidder's heart, as well as the male critic's mind, identifies more deeply with his rangy cowboy grandeur than her sensual ranch-house splendour.

This irrationality is hard to get rid of because loving and hating art is not in any sense objective. Tracey Emin is a greater artist than David Hockney. Why does that sound like some sort of sacrilege? 🍷

The record bid for her White Flower painting is far lower than for male 'greats'. And it's because of people like me.

The Last Page

