

Art For Art's Sake

By
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Pieter Breughel and the Resurgent Modernists

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The cover picture is a detail from "The Artist and The Connoisseur" by Breughel. Drawn circa 1565, it is thought to be a self portrait.

Dejeuner Sur L'Herbe

"I don't understand, Monsieur Manet, why would you think that anything has happened to this young lady." The gendarme was finding it difficult to make any sense of what the gentlemen was saying but you got all sorts here in Gennevilliers. They come from the city with their strange ideas. Across the Seine. These Parisians were all the same. The gendarme did what he could to encourage the gentleman to explain. Small children were dashing around yelling, "flic, flic, flic."

"Officer, I was painting her picture, sitting here in the park..."

"In the outdoors, monsieur?"

"Yes, yes, here in the park, with these other gentlemen..."

"It looks as if they are having a picnic."

"Yes, of course, that was the picture."

"You were painting a picture? Of a picnic?" The police officer tipped back his kepi, and looked sceptical.

"Yes."

"In the open air?"

"Yes."

"And the young lady wandered off."

"Disappeared."

"As you say, disappeared. I don't understand though why she should have disappeared. Perhaps she just remembered that there was something she had to do? Perhaps she met a friend? Perhaps she will return soon? You know what girls can be like monsieur? Why do you think that she didn't just wander off?"

"Officer, the girl was naked."

"Naked, monsieur?"

"Naked officer. That is why I do not think she 'just wandered off'."

“Why were you painting a naked girl at a picnic with these men?”

“That is not the point officer, the point is that the girl is missing and without the girl I cannot continue my painting.”

“Do not fear, monsieur. If you can rely on the Parisian gendarmerie to do one thing, it is to find a naked girl in a park.”

The F-111

Janine Schenk was putting the finishing touches to her latest work, "SL". She pulled the protective goggles from her eyes but left the filter mask in place as she peered intently at the painting's minute details. A short blast from the air brush added a tiny highlight at the corner of the classic dished top of a 1972 Mercedes 350 SL. Each tiny flaw in the original's paint job was reproduced in the painting. Every tiny fleck of rust in the chrome could be seen in the picture. Every detail was perfect, super-real in every respect.

She looked across at the print of 'The F-111' that hung on the wall of her studio and back at her own work. Rosenquist would approve, she thought.

Then the window came in.

Janine threw herself to the floor as bright blue splodges from a series of paint balls spat themselves across the picture. She gasped in horror as the stream of paint ball splatters edged across the floor of her studio, snaking towards her own leg and slamming painfully into her thigh.

Then there was the acrid smell of burning turpentine and linseed oil as a bottle with a flaming rag at its neck burst the other window, showering glass and flaming liquid all around Janine. She screamed as she leapt to her feet and fled the burning room.

The building was well ablaze by the time the fire service arrived. Janine sat beside the road, sobbing with relief that she was still alive and with pain at the loss of her work. She stared at the bright blue stain of the paint ball on the thigh of her overall. She looked up at the fresh graffiti sprayed in the same blue paint across the wall that faced her studio. One word. "Pollock".

Damn, she thought, it's the Abstract Expressionists. That is going to mean trouble.

Bridge Over A Pool With Water Lilies

They found the girl from the picnic hanging in a cocoon of rope beneath a Japanese bridge in a garden in Giverny, 80 kilometres away from where she had disappeared. She was alive, still naked, shivering in the cold, suspended inches from the surface of the water and the lilies that covered it. Wrapped in a knotted harness of Shibari complexity she span slowly as the gendarmes tried to pull her to safety.

Spray painted on the walkway of the bridge, bright crimson letters spelled out: "Impressionists – It's time you saw the light." and "Manet? Monet? What's The Difference? Money!"

The Inspector of Police stared at the scene. It was clear that this was more than some petty criminal at work. He didn't trust these artists. So emotional. So lacking in precise thought. Perhaps it was some feud between factions. The Academié would have to be involved. More artists! He thought irritably. There was one man that could be relied on to look into this, though, even if he too was an artist. He would have to talk to Breughel.

Two of his officers had got a punt and were manoeuvring it under the bridge. The girl was squealing as they tried to lower her into the punt. In time they succeeded. Someone tossed a blanket from the bank to help keep the girl warm as they brought her ashore. Removing the girl from the ropes that bound her took an hour; each knot had been intricately tied.

The girl wouldn't return to the park. The painting remained unfinished.

Manet felt discouraged. Seurat joked with him, trying to improve his mood. "Surely you knew that impressionism would be no picnic."

Blue Poles : Number 11, 1952

“Pollock?” Pieter Breughel was taking the opportunity to gather as much evidence as he could from the witnesses to the firebombing of Schenk’s studio. Janine was his first port of call.

“That’s right,” said Janine. “The one word. It must be the abstract expressionists.”

“You believe it is the work of them alone?” the quiet Dutchman quizzed the girl. She’d found somewhere else to work. She was sitting cross legged on the floor, her spray mask pushed down around her neck, her goggles up on the top of her head, a smudge of paint across her right cheek. Her paint stained overalls were unzipped slightly at the front. It was clear that she had fallen out of bed and pulled them on without bothering with underwear. He was finding it difficult to keep his mind on the job in hand. The air brush compressor was still humming behind her. She was drinking tea from a thick pottery mug. Funny, the Dutchman thought, I’ve never thought of an artist taking a tea break.

“How can I know?” she said. “Abstraction still has many adherents.”

“These expressionists are too few. There must be others. Cubists perhaps? Futurists? Maybe, at worst, a grand coalition of modernists.”

“Could they hope to defeat the traditional? Surely they realise that the cause of abstraction is lost; that representational art is all that matters? Even the surrealists have embraced Dali again.”

“Perhaps, perhaps not. The Déjeuner kidnapping points to those who resent the early representational roots of impressionism, don’t you think?”

“Yes, I see what you mean. But has your own work been attacked? Surely they would see you as a leader for tradition?”

“They may think that the day of the Flemish painters is gone; that we have lost our influence. I surmise that they only attacked Manet because his work remains representational in every respect even though others from his group have more in common with the modernists. Today representational art is the province of the pre-Raphaelites and super-realists like yourself.”

The door burst open. A man with expansive sideburns and wild eyes swept in. “It is intolerable, intolerable!” he exclaimed.

More trouble, Janine thought. What brings Rossetti here?

“She has gone. It is the work of the modernists, I am sure. They know I cannot work without my model.”

“Your model?”

“Lizzie. My model and my muse. I left her only for a moment. I am painting her as Guinevere.”

The phone rang, the Dutchman picked it up. “This is Breughel,” he said. “I see.... Yes, he is here. ... Of course. ... We will be there at once.” He put the phone down. “That was the police,” he said. “Outside the National Gallery, a grey box has appeared on the vacant plinth. They want us to advise them.”

“Advise them! Pa!” Rossetti spat. “They have their own Critics, do they not? Can they not recognise cubism when they see it?”

“Perhaps, but they thought we should attend. They thought you should be there.”

“Why?”

“It is what is written on the box – ‘Medievalists!’ it says ‘Can You Not Think Outside The Box?’ – That is why they think you should see it.”

The three made their way to Trafalgar Square. There, on the plinth, was the featureless grey box. Perhaps a metre and a half on each side; it perched atop the stone plinth, more enigmatic than the sculpted stone on which it sat. The wording was formed from letters stencilled on as if the cube was some form of packing crate.

The police parted the crowds to allow the Dutchman and the others through. He peered at the cube. “Break it open,” he called.

Two officers leapt onto the plinth. With crow bars they levered up the top of the box, sending splintering wood in all directions. “There is a girl inside,” one of them called.

“I am not surprised,” said the Dutchman. They watched as the helpless woman was pulled from the box. It was Lizzie Siddal, still dressed in the costume of Guinevere but bound with straps and silenced with an elaborately embroidered length of cloth.

Freed from her bonds, she fell sobbing into Rossetti’s arms.

The Abduction of Rebecca

Janine had been standing in front of the picture for almost half an hour. It was a rare opportunity to see one of Delacroix's greatest works. She had wanted something to take her mind off the events at the studio and the exhibition was achieving all she had hoped for. On loan from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the picture dominated the room in which it hung. In spite of its muddy muted tones, it managed to convey the violence and desperation of the kidnapping vividly.

Janine looked closely at the way in which the artist had rendered the scene, the way in which the helpless girl lay, apparently unconscious, across the back of the horse in the grip of her dark skinned abductor, the energy and animation in the abductor's horse. It was fascinating.

She heard a man's voice behind her. "Good morning, Miss Schenk," it said, quietly and politely. "Please don't turn around and please don't make any sudden move. If you wish for no harm to come to yourself or to this picture, please move to the exit to your right." As if to emphasise the risk to herself and the painting, she felt the prick of a knife blade against her arm. She did as she had been asked.

The exit led from the gallery into a deserted corridor. Janine heard the door slam behind her and almost at once felt herself grabbed. She tried to cry out but before she could a sweet, sickly-smelling pad was clamped over her nose and mouth. The more she struggled, the quicker she inhaled whatever it was on the pad and she felt herself slipping into unconsciousness.

Her last recollection was of her knees buckling beneath her as she slid to the hard wooden floor of the corridor and dark oblivion.

The Ambassadors

“Do you have any reason to suppose that the attacks will cease?” said Sir Lionel Bates, the Chief Curator of the Tate Gallery as he sat beside his opposite number from the National Gallery and three of the joint trustees. They peered across the table at their guest.

Lord Quimby, Andrew Vallance, Simon Shan and Brian Seward all seemed impatient to hear what the Flemish painter had to say.

Pieter Breughel coughed and shrugged his shoulders. He looked past his audience at Holbein's Ambassadors hanging on the wall behind them. That skull looks all wrong to me, he thought. What he said was, “It seems unlikely. They have yet to state their aims but disruption of the representational schools seems to be their objective. Your colleagues at the Louvre have had no problems?”

“No. Nor at the Petit Palais, it seems..”

“I thought that would be the case. It is only artists, Manet, Rosetti and a few others, that have suffered so far.”

“Can you rule out the risk of attacks on our own collections?” The voice was that of Andrew Vallance, a well known art journalist and critic, one of the independent trustees of the Tate and National Gallery Collections.

“No, but I do not think it likely on the basis of what we have seen so far. Their aim appears to be to disrupt the work of artists rather than to attack their completed works. They may change their tactics of course. I would advise you to look to your security, especially at the Tate. Your change of policy, turning your back on the abstract, may place you more at risk.” Breughel thought back to the public incineration of much of the Turner Bequest. Even with his orthodox views Pieter had found it hard to approve of that, found it hard to watch the crowds cheering as the canvases crackled and spat in the flames. Destruction of art, even decadent art was something he found difficult to countenance and Breughel had never really worked out whether Turner had been pursuing abstraction or had simply been losing his sight. Lord Quimby who had overseen the bonfires personally looked uncomfortable. “What have you done to address the security situation generally?” Pieter continued.

“We had a group of special forces troops carry out a sweep of Tate Modern at Bankside.” Bates responded. “It has been closed for a long time but the modernists still see it as a totem of their corrupt vision for art.”

Seward interrupted, “Amphibious forces landed from the Thames. Others landed on the roof and abseiled down into the Turbine Hall.”

“And?” Breughel was irritated by the unnecessary detail.

“A few dissident groups holed up in some of the galleries. There was a little blood. The survivors are in custody but they haven't said anything to assist us yet.”

Breughel was not surprised. The attacks were something new; existing groups would have been kept in the dark. There was no need to involve them in carrying them out so why tell them about the planning?

Breughel got to his feet. "I will do what I can," he said. "But I can make no promises." The two curators shook him by the hand. The three men left the others made their way towards the portico that gave onto Trafalgar Square.

Breughel looked up, puzzled as they passed one of the gallery's paintings. "I wouldn't have thought pop art was the sort of painting exhibited here," he said.

"No, not our thing at all. Far too close to the abstract," said the curator of the National Gallery. "Why?"

"Perhaps you could explain this, then," Breughel said, pointing at the collage hanging between Raphael's 'The Madonna of the Pinks' and Titian's 'Bacchus and Ariadne'.

"This is not our picture!" the curator exclaimed, seeming to see the work for the first time.

Pieter Breughel looked more closely at it. The picture was made up of a series of words and letters cut from magazines and newspapers. "Where is Schenk?" they said, "Can you save her from reality?" and "Embrace the abstract or Schenk will embrace the void." He peered at the label on the frame. "The fate of the super realist artist?" the title said. There was no indication of the name of the artist responsible, the work wasn't signed. Breughel sighed. He wasn't surprised but some of the artists he knew would have been stupid enough to do so.

"Schenk?" the curator of the National Gallery enquired. "Janine Schenk? Her studio was firebombed, wasn't it?"

"Yes," said Breughel. "But now I fear something more sinister may have occurred."

Breughel was peering closely at the frame of the picture. He plucked something from the gap between the gilded gesso frame and the canvas. "What's that?" said Vallance. He, Seward and Shan had followed them out. "A clue?"

"Perhaps," said Pieter. "It is some sort of seed. A sunflower, I think."

"Well," said Vallance, "I think we all know who that points to."

The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian in a Field

Janine awoke. She could see herself in a mirror on the far side of the room. She was tied bizarrely to an artist's easel. Her arms were pulled back behind her and fixed to the top bar of the easel. Her hands dangled limply but to her left wrist was tied a bunch of brushes, to her right a paint stained pallet. Her mouth was stuffed with a cloth that tasted disgusting and stank of turpentine and oil paint. She was naked from the waist up but her sex was covered with a loin cloth. Immediately at her feet, pointing terrifyingly towards her belly, was a large crossbow, its bolt sitting menacingly in place, its string drawn and cocked.

She stood still, terrified to move in case she dislodged the crossbow and triggered it in some way. She looked out across the room. Arranged around its edge were dozens of small clay figurines. Their limbless forms, featureless apart from their socket like eyes, only six inches or so high, had a sinister air. Each had been positioned so as to seem as though they were apparently staring, sightlessly, at her.

Her shoulders and elbows ached from taking her weight as she had hung from the easel. Now conscious, she tried to ease herself upwards to lessen the pain from the ropes. She tried shaking her head to see if she could dislodge the cloth in her mouth. She couldn't.

As she lifted her head she was blinded by a camera's flash. Once, twice, three times the flash went off. Dazzled by the flash, Janine blinked and then saw a tall man in a ski mask staring at her as he lowered his camera.

"Miss Schenk," the man said. "You should appreciate this. What could be more super-real than photography.

"Goart goo ough arng?" grunted Janine through her gag. "Egg ee o!"

"How interesting," the man responded. "I had never previously realised that the gag is, of course, a means for producing an abstraction of speech. It seems that even you realists can contribute to our understanding of the abstract. How wonderful! But in answer to your question what I want is to keep you here for a while. And you can be assured that I have no intention at all of letting you go."

Janine scowled at the man. He smiled back. "There, you see, perfect understanding of abstract speech. It goes to prove that the prejudices of the realists about the comprehension of abstraction are unfounded." He came closer to her, reached out and toyed with one of her naked breasts, deriving evident pleasure from the act and from Janine's response. He chuckled. Janine growled and tried to struggle against the ropes that held her tied to the easel. "Careful," the man said. "That crossbow bolt is not an abstract concept."

Hatstand

After finding the sunflower seed, Pieter had tried talking to Vin Gogh. It hadn't been fruitful. Vincent, the poor man, wasn't well. Pieter found it hard to believe that he was involved in this. The sunflower seed was almost certainly a diversion, a vegetarian red herring. In any case he hardly expected the modernists to be so obvious, letting people understand what they were on about was hardly a big thing for them, he thought, permitting himself a moment's cynicism about the abstract movements.

Now he found himself in unfamiliar surroundings. Jones and Blake were not his normal choice of dining companions. He looked to his right. A largely naked woman stood with her hands held out to either side, palms upwards, balancing his own hat on one, and Blake's cap on the other. Jones's work verged on the abstract at times. Blake, for all his enthusiasm for the pre-Raphaelites, still seemed to yearn for the questionable objectives of the pop-art school. Over on the other side of the bar Caravaggio and Georges De La Tour were playing cards. Breughel looked at them warily. They were both notorious cheats. They probably had enough cards hidden about their persons to make another two decks. It could only be a matter of time before a fight started.

Pieter's attention returned to his Jones and Blake. Jones was complaining, while looking at the girl that was holding Breughel's hat. "It is so hard to get the materials," he said. "Now I have to make do with a real woman."

Blake gave him a sympathetic grunt, but he'd never found it a problem to find the things he needed for his work, even if it meant scouring garage sales.

Breughel began the conversation. "I'm looking for a girl," he said.

Jones nodded his head towards his hatstand. "She gets off at ten," he said.

Pieter shook his head. "A specific girl," he said. "Janine Schenk, the super-realist. She is missing. Not seen since she set off to view the Delacroix retrospective. There is someone on the other side who knows where she is."

"The other side?"

"A modernist." Blake and Jones looked uncomfortable. "Gentlemen, I understand your reservations. Your own art has come close to being proscribed."

"My current work conforms entirely to the Ministry's directives," Jones muttered. He gestured to the woman hatstand. "What could be more realistic than that?"

"As indeed does mine," Blake concurred.

"Of course, of course. Freedom of expression has become so difficult in these times. But you still have your contacts. Those that have been less ready to accept that abstraction is a

degenerate form of art. All I am seeking is some help. Blake, you are still meeting with others of the Brotherhood of Ruralists, I am sure."

"But they are all realists. Everyone. Representational artists like myself."

"And you Jones, your occasional liaisons with Emin? I suspect they still continue."

"She and I share certain tastes."

"Outside the studio, as I understand it." Breughel raised his eyebrows.

"That is hardly relevant. I don't believe the Ministry of Art has yet ventured into the area of personal relationships," Jones blustered.

Breughel was satisfied that he had disturbed the two of them sufficiently. He felt sure that they or their contacts would know something about this. Now he just had to wait. "Gentlemen," he said, getting to his feet. "Please be sure to let me know if you hear anything of Miss Schenk. I know the Ministry will be most pleased to hear that you have cooperated." He grabbed his hat from the hand of Jones's woman. She looked disappointed that he was paying the hat more attention than her.

Perseus and Andromeda

The photograph had been posted through the door of his London flat. Breughel had torn open the blank, white envelop to see the trussed and gagged form of Janine staring out at him. The peril she was in from the drawn and cocked crossbow was obvious.

Scrawled across the photograph it said, "Will Miss Schenk get the point of abstraction?" There were no demands. No other clues.

Brueghel took out his lens and examined the picture closely. These optics were becoming invaluable, he felt. Even Holbein was using them to help with perspective according to Hockney. Pieter studied every detail. He noted down his thoughts on the curious clay figures, the splodges of paint on the palette that dangled from Janine's left wrist and the dome of the church through the barred window behind her.

The picture was the first of a series, each with a caption taunting Breughel and the Trustees.

The second showed Janine tied to a stake, a cross wedged in her cleavage. A reasonable facsimile of the Jan Styka picture of Jean D'Arc, Breughel thought but the church in the background was definitely not Rouen Cathedral. The kidnapper's scribbled words this time spelled out, "Overturn the heresy of representational art! Restore the abstract! Release the cubist interneers!"

At least we now have some demands, Breughel thought.

He had spoken again to Jones and Blake. They were clearly worried but had discovered nothing. Breughel wasn't entirely surprised. He had his own ideas. He was beginning to build up a picture of who might be behind this. You didn't spend as long as he had watching Flemish low life without having some appreciation of the darker corners of the human soul.

The third photograph arrived while Lord Quimby was interviewing Breughel about his progress. "Perseus and Andromeda," said Quimby as Pieter showed it to him..

Breughel nodded in agreement looking at the picture which showed Janine naked and in chains against a rock. "Yes," said Pieter, "though in the version by Vasari, I don't think that Perseus was wearing a ski mask and to the best of my recollections he was unchaining the girl rather than adding to her fetters."

Quimby looked at the scene. Even the background seemed to reflect the original picture although of course it showed the bars of Janine's prison rather than the coast of Ethiopia, the Nereids and the sea monster.

"Our protagonist is a knowledgeable man," Breughel said. "The painting by Rubens is better known but Miss Schenk's rather slim body is better suited to the Vasari pose."

Lord Quimby turned the picture over. On the back were more, handwritten demands. "Re-open MOMA! Release Braque!" He looked at Pieter. "These demands are impossible to respond to," he said. "You know that we cannot dismantle all that has been done to suppress modernism simply to satisfy this lunatic."

"Of course, Lord Quimby," Breughel responded. "I would not recommend conceding. Besides, I think I can identify where Miss Schenk is being held."

Quimby looked delighted if surprised. "Wonderful," he said. "What will you do now?"

Breughel got to his feet. "I need to talk to some friends," he said. "We needn't worry the authorities. I'll let you know when things have been progressed."

Lord Quimby nodded. "Very well," he said, "We depend on your judgement." Shaking Breughel's hand he took his leave.

The Night Watch

Breughel looked at the group of artists assembled in his room. "Thank you for coming, gentlemen," he said. "Your help is appreciated."

Jan Vermeer looked up. "Huh," he said. "It is the least we could do. One of my own models was attacked. You met her. Attractive girl. Looks a lot like Scarlett Johansson. Had a blue headscarf on when you came over; likes pearls. She saw the attackers off though."

Pieter remembered the girl. He'd thought the painting had shown promise although he'd felt that "Girl In A Blue Headscarf" was a rotten title for a picture.

Frans Hals and Peter de Hooch added their grunts of support.

Breughel outlined the mission. He had identified the building where Janine was being held from the churches in the background of the photographs. That was the good thing about Wren's churches, the spires were all fairly distinctive. It hadn't been hard to triangulate where the pictures had been taken, given the view of St Clement Danes. It was a rough area these days. He expected trouble. The team was armed.

It was dark. Breughel's team assembled in the courtyard. Vermeer lobbed a stun grenade through the window. In the wake of the detonation, Hals and de Hooch burst through the door. Splintered wood showered the corridor beyond. Three armed guards were recovering from the concussion of the grenade but gathered themselves enough to begin returning the team's fire. One of the guards caught a bullet and sank down, blood oozing from a chest wound. His weapon scattered across the floor away from him. The other two fell back along the corridor, trading bullet for bullet as they turned the corner at the far end. Pieter's team pushed forward slowly. The returning fire stopped. A curious calm spread through the smoke filled corridor.

Then came two distinctive coughs from a silenced pistol. Breughel realised at once what had occurred. "Forward," he urged. "Quickly."

The team reached the end of the corridor. As they turned the corner they saw the remaining two guards slumped on the floor, evidently dead. From the neat single bullet hole in the head of each, Pieter knew that his team hadn't been the cause. The door out to the rear of the building was swinging loose. They ran towards it and reached it just in time to see the tail lights of a speeding car leaving the yard.

Pieter, following the team, heard Vermeer cursing at the realisation that their quarry had escaped.

Then there was the muffled grunt. Pieter turned to the door to his right. "Break it down," he shouted.

De Hooch smashed his gun butt against the door lock. The door swung open. Behind it sat the helpless, captive, Janine.

A Woman Drinking with Two Men and a Serving Woman

Breughel was back once more in the board room of the National Gallery. Vallance, Bates, Quimby and the others were there.

They've had the floor cleaned, Pieter thought. All those black and white tiles. De Hooch would approve although hanging one of his pictures in this room as well made your eyes cross.

Vallance was arguing with Bates as Pieter and the others arrived. "Of course I should review it," he was almost shouting, gesticulating wildly at the De Hooch. "Just because it's only a picture of four people in a room doesn't mean it doesn't need explaining!"

Bates tried to calm him as he saw the others. "I see you succeeded in rescuing Schenk?" Bates stated obviously; Janine and Jan Vermeer were sitting alongside Pieter. "Well done. I trust that you are well, Miss Schenk," he said.

"There was some violence," said Janine, "but I saw worse when I was working with Banksy. I am quite all right, thank you. I am just sorry I can give you no clues about the perpetrator. He wore a hood at all times."

"It was a shame that Miss Schenk's abductor seems to have kept himself masked. And a pity about those three guards," Vallance volunteered. "They could have provided useful clues. Perhaps even the identity of our opponent."

Breughel sat quietly for a moment. "Oh, but they have," he said.

Vallance looked puzzled. Bates leaned forward. "How so?" he said.

Breughel spoke slowly. "There are a number of indications. The testimony of the guards, is the confirming piece. I had wondered if the person behind this could be an artist. Attacks on models? Studios? Even the modernists use such things. There would be fear of reprisals. And the guards; that brutal execution, that callous disregard for life. No, this has not been done by an artist. Who had the motive?" Breughel stared around the room. His audience looked puzzled, shuffling their feet like schoolchildren confronted by a school master's rhetorical interrogation. Breughel, gathered himself up and continued. "Who else but a critic? What do the artists care? Apart from a few reactionaries they are happy to adopt a realist style – at least in public. But critics? Realism is all too easy isn't it? What need is there for critics if the public can understand art for themselves? The suppression of abstraction has made it harder for a critic to justify his existence, hasn't it? I had come to that conclusion already but now, Vallance, you have now confirmed my thoughts. It was a critic. In fact, Vallance, it was you! It had to be someone with access to the galleries here – how else would that pop-art collage demand have found its way onto the walls? Of course, you are familiar with the alleys behind Fleet Street because of your work with the London newspapers and that is where we rescued Miss Schenk from. And your own critical past has not been without controversy has it, Vallance? You were one of the opponents of the plans to roll back the tide of modernism."

"Ridiculous," Vallance blustered. He turned to his fellow trustees. "That was when I was at college. You cannot believe him! It's absurd; purely circumstantial evidence."

“Perhaps,” said Breughel, “but then maybe you can explain how you knew there were three guards? I had not provided that detail. Neither had any of my colleagues. But you would have known if you were there; if you had pulled the trigger that killed two of them. I think that will be good enough for the courts.”

“Damn you, Breughel,” Vallance yelled leaping to his feet. “You’ll not succeed in stopping the revival of abstraction.” He pulled a pistol from his jacket and levelled it at the head of the Flemish genre painter before waving it wildly around the room at the others.

There was a hiss. A stream of yellow ochre paint spread itself across Vallance’s face, blinding him. Breughel knocked Vallance’s hand upwards. The gun went off, its bullet lodging itself in the gallery’s ceiling. Vermeer wrestled the critic to the floor, locking his wrists in handcuffs. And dealing him a short kick to the ribs in order to discourage further resistance.

Breughel turned to Janine. “Thank you Miss Schenk, that was very quick thinking,” he said. Janine was returning the can of spray paint to her handbag.

“That’s all right, Pieter,” she said. “I never could stand fucking critics.”

<<<< THE END >>>>

A Selective Pictography

Some of the images that inspired Art for Art's Sake in the order that they appear....

- "Déjeuner Sur L'Herbe", Edouard Manet, 1863
<http://www.colby.edu/personal/a/ampaliye/FR252/manet20.jpg>
- "The F-111", James Rosenquist, 1965
<http://www.guggenheim.org/exhibitions/rosenquist/highlights3.html>
- "Bridge Over A Pool With Water Lillies", Claude Monet, 1900
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