GIORGIO VASARI OPENS HIS LIFE OF MICHELANGELO WITH A prophetic exordium, in which the Tuscans are pictured as a kind of chosen people and Michelangelo himself as a redeemer, sent by God, yielding though his example a knowledge to which the Tuscans aspire, but which otherwise would lie beyond their powers to achieve. Here is the famous passage:

While the best and most industrious artists were labouring, by the light of Giotto and his followers, to give the world examples of such power as the benignity of their stars and the varied character of their fantasies enabled them to command, and while desirous of imitating the perfection of Nature by the excellence of Art, they were struggling to attain that high comprehension which many call intelligence, and were universally toiling, but for the most part in vain, the Ruler of Heaven was pleased to turn the eyes of his clemency toward earth, and perceiving the fruitlessness of so many labours, the ardent studies pursued without any result, and the presumptuous self-sufficiency of men, which is farther from the truth than darkness is from light, he resolved, by way of delivering us from such great errors, to send to the world a spirit endowed with universality of power in earth art ... capable of showing by himself alone, what is the perfection of art....

The Tuscan genius has ever been raised high above all others, the men of that country displaying more zeal in study and more constancy in labour, than any other people of Italy, so did he resolve to confer the privilege of his birth on Florence ... as justly meriting that the perfections of every art should be exhibited to the world by one who should be her citizen. (III, 228)

Clearly modelled on the Christian epic, Vasari’s is a narrative of disclosure and revelation, stipulating the end of a history, defined by the cumulative effort to achieve a perfection artists are incapable of without the revelation through example of a divine intercessor, born, like a savior, in Florentine precincts: a Florentine among Florentines, as Christ was a human among humans. I employ the term "revelation" here as implying knowledge of the highest importance which we would be incapable of attaining through the common cognitive routines—induction, deduction, observation, testimony, experimentation, or, in the specific case of the visual arts, "making and matching," to use Gombrich’s expression. Artists, in Vasari’s account, now know what perfection is, and need no longer blindly seek it. Rather, they can, by emulating Michelangelo’s example, achieve perfection in their own work. The history of art, conceived of as the seeking of representational perfection, has concluded through divine intercession. All that remains is the refinement of skills.

Imagine, on the model of revelation, a vision granted to Giotto of Michelangelo’s Last Judgment. A voice calls out: “Is this what you are trying to do?” Vasari assumes that Giotto’s answer would unequivocally be “Yes” that he would instantly see not only that Michelangelo had achieved what Giotto himself aspired to, but that, in point of the art criticism that belonged to that project, Giotto’s personages were revealed as wooden, disproportionate to their architectural settings, and visually unconvincing. Of course, Giotto might well have thought differently, and if we could then imagine on what grounds he might have rejected the model of Michelangelo, we would have a very different understanding of Giotto’s art than the one we have now, which depends upon seeing him and Michelangelo as belonging to the same developmental history. Suppose, however, he were granted a vision of Les demoiselles d’Avignon, or Matisse’s Luxe, calme, et volupte. My counterfactual opinion is that Giotto would not have viewed these as art, or, if as art,
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When art as done by savages or madmen, or by individuals who had the ambition to paint well but unfortunately were at the wrong part of history to do much-like the Tuscans before the revelation of Michelangelo: captives of cognitive darkness. These were to become the fallback positions when Modernism challenged received views of art with precisely these works. Giotto would have had no impulse to emulate, to learn how to do what Matisse and Picasso were revealed to have done. Rather, he would see himself as having made immense progress beyond them, whoever they were and whenever they worked. It would be like Chinese art, had he had a vision of that. In his The Philosophy of History, Hegel writes that "The Chinese have not yet succeeded in representing the beautiful as beautiful; for in their painting shadow and perspective are wanting." With qualification, Giotto had both.

I think we might use this counterfactual story to make plain what belonging to the same history means, and at the same time what it would mean not to belong to the same history. So I would assume that white Giotto and Michelangelo belong to the same history, neither of them belongs with Matisse or Picasso, and that, if this assumption were true, then we would have an intuitive grasp of historical discontinuity. To belong to the same history would mean that earlier artists could achieve what later artists achieved, without the labor of searching for it, once they had the example. Vasari's image is that artists would have stumbled forever in the dark, without finding what they were looking for, and that Michelangelo showed them what it was. One might argue that Michelangelo appeared when the Tuscan art world was ready for him, and that he had in some measure internalized the history that intervened between Giotto and himself. Certainly we could not imagine him as a contemporary of Giotto, nor as coming immediately after Giotto in an historical sequence instead of the artists who did, like Masaccio. But we could imagine a counterfactual history in which artists were spared the search and could move directly and immediately to their goal as embodied in Michelangelo's towering work. Of course, a lot would have had to change for this to happen: Were there actually walls high enough to execute something like The Last Judgment in Giotto's time?

In any case, art after Michelangelo would be post-historical with respect to a history whose terminus is the Sistine Ceiling and The Last Judgment. There was a great deal of art made after that, so it was not as though the history of art had stopped, but rather had come to an internally defined end. It had moved from search to application, from looking for representational truth to working in the light of that truth. Beyond the figure of Jonah in the Sistine Ceiling, it was impossible to advance. Of course, artists were to become more adept than Michelangelo in certain ways: Tiepolo handled foreshortening with an ease and certitude Michelangelo would have envied, had he been granted a vision of Tiepolo's ceiling painting for Der Rezidens in Würzberg. But he would in no further sense have seen it as diminishing his achievement-and in any case he always complained that he was, after all, not a painter. Tiepolo would be entirely a post-historical artist with regard to that history, though three centuries further along: Michelangelo died in 1564-the year of Shakespeare's birth-and Tiepolo in 1770-six years before the American Revolution.

In that long post-historical evening, there were a great many changes in what artists were asked to do, so that in a way the history of art was the history of patronage. Mannerist art was a response to one set of briefs, the Baroque to another, Rococo to yet a third, and Neo-Classicism to a fourth. It would be inconceivable that these varying briefs could have been imposed on art if it were as it had been at the time of Giotto. Rather, this variety was a possibility only because the use of perspective, chiaroscuro, foreshortening, and the like no longer had to be struggled with. They could be mastered and used by everyone, and they defined what the curriculum of the workshop as art school should be.

This merits a further observation. Multiculturalism in art is today very much a political ideal, but it is an artistic ideal just because there is no such curriculum-nothing which qualifies artists to enter the world of commissions. Today, a Chinese artist might respond to Hegel that he has exceedingly provincial ideas of beauty as beauty. In the seventeenth century, on the other hand, Mandarins could see, as immediately and intuitively as Giotto is imagined here seeing Michelangelo, that the way a western artist used perspective was correct, and that their own history would have been different had the ancients the luck to see such models. But in their case, art was too embedded in practices they could not change in order to assimilate the perspective they now knew. That knowledge represented what they freely admitted they should have done, but which (unlike the case of Giotto and...
Michelangelo) it was too late to do. Art was differently implicated in their life and culture, and a deep transformation in the whole of their society would be required if it were to be accepted. They belonged to a different history entirely. But today the "should" would drop out of consideration. There is no art-educational curriculum. That is why multiculturalism is a valid ideal as it would or could not have been in 1770, or until the advent of Modernism, however we date that.

To the degree that anyone thought about the future of art, it would not have the form "Someday artists will..."-on the model of "Someday medicine will find a cure for cancer" or "Someday man will walk on the Moon"-but rather the form that the future would be in essential respects like the past, except perfect where it is now deficient. One could learn the meaning of the term "art" through induction over known instances, and could rank artworks in terms of their distance from Vasari's paradigms. In a way, the class of artworks had the structure of a species, with all con-specifics sharing the defining features, but with enough variation that connoisseurs could single the best out from the better, the way dog or pigeon breeders do in Darwin's best examples of artificial as against natural selection. These views loosely defined the visual arts through the long interval from Michelangelo and his peers—Raphael, Leonardo, and Titian—until the dawn of Modernism, at which time, for reasons it would be fascinating to discover, a discontinuity emerged in the class of artworks so sharp that even connoisseurs were uncertain whether it was art at all. The historically important painting of the mid-to-late nineteenth century did not seem to belong to the future of art as that would have been intelligible to someone at home in the Vasarian post-history. It was at times so discontinuous that one could not easily explain it with reference to the kind of grading which went with species-like variations. Modernist works seemed entirely off the scale. Nor could it be explained with respect to the principles of perfection it in fact counterexemplified. One would, as I have imaged on behalf of Giotto, rather have explanatory recourse to hoaxes or insanity, to mischief and mockery. This, as in science, was a way of saving the appearances, enabling the concept of art, together with the apparatus of connoisseurship, to remain intact. It was a way of "explaining away" whatever seemed to threaten the concept—an entirely creditable defensive measure, since the new work, if admitted under the concept, would inevitably entail revisions in the tacit schedule of necessary and sufficient conditions for something being an artwork. This of course is not to explain the need to preserve appearances in the case of art, or why, nearly a century after Matisse and Picasso, Modernist art has still to be explained away. Perhaps it is because we are supposed to be made in God's image, and God could not look like one of the Demoiselles. Or, if he could, we were not his images at all.

In 1873, Henry James published "The Madonna of the Future," a story about an artist I-but hardly James—would describe as post-historical. This is Theobald, an American working in Florence, and consumed by the ambition to paint a Madonna that would equal Raphael's *Madonna della Seggiola*. He had found a model, a beautiful young mother who embodied the qualities of feminine grace Raphael shows, and which Theobald wishes his own Madonna to possess. But instead of painting this woman, he devotes himself to the prolonged study of the painting he hopes to rival, seeking to discover what he refers to as "the secrets of the masters." These secrets would at best have an historical interest today, and would have been of incidental use in the history which succeeded the Vasarian history. James sees Theobald as ridiculous and at the same time tragic. He nevertheless entirely accepts Theobald's project of painting what the Narrator refers to as *The Madonna of the Future*, giving James his tide. That meant that James and Theobald belonged to the same moment of the same history: one could make valid art by re-creating valid art. So James could say that, if successful, Theobald's picture would embody the qualities that Raphael's painting embodied and hence be as good a painter as Raphael was. (Precisely such an inference governed Hans van Meegeren's decision to paint what everyone would believe was done by Vermeer.) Theobald once drew a picture of a child which could have passed for a Correggio, and it is striking to speculate that he would not have made a drawing which could have passed for a Giotto—that would either have been a deliberate archaism or a mark of not having learned properly to draw. So Theobald and Raphael belong to the same prolonged historical moment. The story now takes a turn: James's Narrator is intro-
duced to the woman in whom Theobald saw his Madonna inscribed, and he is shocked to discover she has grown coarse and stout and sexual, though what James calls les beaux restes can still be made out. Theobald has waited too long-waited twenty years too long in fact, during which his model went from youth to thickened middle age. He had studied painting too long to the detriment of depicting life. Stunned by this truth, he resolves to paint his masterpiece, which, he says, pointing to his head, is already created, needing only to be transcribed. In fact transcription is more of a problem than he envisioned, and when the Narrator seeks him out, Theobald is sitting before a blank canvas. Not long afterward he dies an operatic death, like Mina in La Bohème—what is the only way to end a story like this.

Let us conduct the same kind of historical experiment with Theobald as we did with Giotto. We might imagine someone appointed in 1973 as chief curator of the Museum of Monochromy, in, let us say, Cincinnati. He enters Theobald's studio at the moment when, all passion spent, the artist sits listlessly before a canvas which James describes as "a mere dead blank, cracked and discolored by time"—an object which emblematizes as dramatic a failure as Fremincourt's painting in Balzac's Le Chef d'oeuvre inconnu. And indeed the canvas is to the curator's eyes a chef d'oeuvre inconnu. "It is," he tells Theobald, "a masterpiece." And he assures him that he is astonishingly ahead of his time. That the history of the all-white painting, which includes Rodchenko, Malevich, Rauschenberg, and Ryman, begins with him. "Has it a title?" he asks. Theobald replies: "It has been referred to as 'The Madonna of the Future.'" "Brilliant!" the Curator responds. "What a comment the dust and cracks make on the future of religion! It belongs in my museum! You will be celebrated!" This "Ghost of Art Worlds Future," as a curator, will have brought some slides—of Malevich, Rodchenko, Malevich, Rauschenberg, and Ryman, begins with him. "Has it a title?" he asks. Theobald replies: "It has been referred to as 'The Madonna of the Future.'" "Brilliant!" the Curator responds. "What a comment the dust and cracks make on the future of religion! It belongs in my museum! You will be celebrated!" This "Ghost of Art Worlds Future," as a curator, will have brought some slides—of Malevich, Rodchenko, Malevich, Rauschenberg, Ryman. The slides are pretty much all alike, and each resembles Theobald's blank canvas about as much as they resemble one another. Theobald would have no choice but to regard the curator as mad. But if he has a philosophical imagination, he might say this: It does not follow from those blank canvases being artworks, together with the resemblance function between their work and my blank canvas, that this blank canvas is an artwork. And it will occur to him that it almost immediately must follow that one cannot tell artworks from other things on the basis of observation, induction, and like cognitive practices, which served in the art world he knew. At a more human level, he would continue to count himself a failure, even if the site of his failure would be regarded in the future as an artwork. That would not be a future he would wish to be part of: He wants to be the Raphael of the future, and achieve a work in every particular the peer of the Madonna della Seggiola. It is no consolation that there will be works which resemble something he has not relevantly touched. Still, the Ghost of Art Worlds Future will have planted a question. The question is: What is an artwork? That is not a question which could interestingly arise in the reign of Vasari.

"What is an artwork?" became part of every artwork belonging to the Modernist era, and each such artwork advanced itself as a kind of answer: Anche io sono pittura. It is because artworks could be enfrianchised only through an analysis of art that it would be correct to say, as Clement Greenberg famously did, that the mark of Modernist painting was self-critique: "The essence of Modernism lies, as I see it, in the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline from itself." Greenberg saw this as a search for what was "unique and irreducible in each particular art," and hence for a perfection quite different from what Vasari imagined. Modernism, in virtue of this ascent to self-consciousness, marks a new kind of historical reality, and not just a new historical reality. Modernism contrasts, in virtue of this self-consciousness, with everything that went before, and does so, in virtue of self-consciousness, in ways in which the various stages and movements of the tradition did not differ one from another. In some way paintings themselves became objects rather than ways of showing objects. It is not surprising—it was to have been expected—that as Modernism advanced, more and more of the art that had not been considered part of the history of art was admitted as art—folk art, primitive art, oriental art, the art of "outsiders"—simply because it was no longer considered important that these arts look as if they fit into the Vasarian narrative. This induced an increasingly radical heterogeneity into the extension of the term "artwork." And it raised questions for each tentative definition of art, just because none of the ways in which these objects differed from one another could belong to the definition. If it belonged to the definition, one or the other of the differing works could not belong to the term's extension. So the answer had to be
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universal and complete, which is by and large what Hegel meant by Absolute Knowledge. And, in a singularly important way, the answer had to lie outside history, as having to be compatible with whatever art there was or would be, in any possible world in which there was art at all. It would in particular have to explain why a blank canvas from 1873 and a blank canvas from 1973, otherwise entirely alike, differed in that one could not be an artwork, though the other is one. This I regard as the central question of the philosophy of art. It is scarcely a question that could have arisen for the doomed Neo-Raphaelian winter Theobald. It is after all the mark of history that the future is not disposed in the present, barring visitors from the future. One might have been able to imagine, at some earlier moment in Vasarian history, that there would be a time in the future when artists could create works so like reality that no one can tell the difference. But they would not know how to generalize upon their own representational strategies to know how—which is why 7asari counted Michelangelo's coming as a revelation.

3

The first stirrings of Modernism, of course, could be seen by 1873. If we think of the consignment of Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* to the Salon des Réuses as the first event in Modernism's history, that history was but ten years old when James published his story. The First Impressionist Exhibition was held in (nota bene) the studio of the photographer Nadar in 1874. In 1876 there was a famous encounter between the critic Ruskin and the painter Whistler (which James reported on in *The Nation*). Whistler insisted that *Nocturne in Black and Gold. The Falling Rocket* was a painting, while Ruskin dismissed it as "flinging a pot of paint in the public's face." Compared to what Ruskin admired, it could hardly have been accepted as art. Compared to Pollock or even to Bacon, who talked about throwing paint at the canvas—it is pretty tame. But the quarrel was over what everyone thought they knew. The history of Modernism was the history of scandals as one after the other, works of art bumped some cherished criterion out of the definition of art. The first two thirds of the twentieth century saw the end of this history, when works of art began to appear that resembled quite ordinary things—like soup cans and Brillo boxes—far more than they resembled what would have been counted works of art in the age either of Giotto or of Theobald.

It is this moment of closure that I refer to as The End of Art. As with Michelangelo, beyond whom, on the Vasarian narrative, one could not advance, there would be no going beyond the Brillo box in the history of artistic self-consciousness, since the class of artworks includes *Brillo Box* but seemed to exclude Brillo boxes which look exactly like them. With the breakthrough it was plain that one cannot hope to base a definition of art on what meets the eye. Warhol's achievement would be reenacted in the history of Appropriation—Warhol himself was appropriated by Mike Bidlo and by others—but in no sense could any of this be regarded as an advance beyond Warhol. Since the motives for Appropriation are many, The End of Art does not mean that art will not be made. It means the closure of a history, not the termination of a practice.

I want to pause and reflect upon the kind of concept the concept of art is. Logicians distinguish between what they term the intension of a concept, and the concept's extension. The extension of a concept (or a term) will be all and only those things that fall under the concept—the robins and sparrows and ducks if the concept is "bird." The intension comprises all the conditions deemed necessary for something to be classed as a bird-wingedness, oviparousness, and the like. Everything in the extension must, through meeting these criteria, resemble the rest. Whatever the difference between ducks and sparrows, both of them are birds. The history of Modernism, by adding disjunctively to the extension of the concept "artwork," tended to bump from the intension one or another condition—and when that happened, things became candidates for art that would not have been before. The intension of "artwork" is transhistorical: it specifies the invariant condition for something being art in every world in which there is art at all. But the extension of the concept is entirely historical in the sense that Theobald's canvas could not have been an artwork in 1873 though something just like it could already have preceded a century later. Indeed, the possibility was realized in a few years after Theobald's death, albeit as a spoof by the artist Alphonse Allais, who, in 1879, printed a blank white rectangle with the joky title *Premiere communion de jeunes filles chlorotiques par un temps*
Chlorosis is a disease due to iron deficiency, leaving the skin greenish (it is called "greensickness" in the vernacular), and "chlor" means "green"—think of chlorophyll. "Albino" would have served Allais's purpose better, since he clearly intended a picture of abnormally white-skinned girls in white communion frocks in white snow. He did an all-black picture as well: Combat denegres dans une cave pendant la nuit. Both, however are pictures, and though the difference between one of them and Theobald's blank canvas could have been invisible, it is no less profound for that. It is a picture of an all-white world, whereas the blank canvas is not a picture at all (including not a picture of nothing), however great the resemblances (let them be arbitrarily close). The blank canvas can become an artwork only with the advent of abstraction, which bumped "is a picture" from the concept of the visual arts. And in that, startling as it may seem, the concept of visuality itself was bumped from the concept of the visual arts, even if the extension of the concept was filled with objects of visual beauty and interest. What delayed the advent of Absolute Knowledge in the case of art is that, for historical reasons, certain features of objects in the extension were believed to form part of the intension of the concept, when in fact they lay outside the essence of art entirely.* Even if there were no conceptual analogue, it is valuable to see in what ways the concept of art is different from such concepts as "bird," with which the old logic texts concerned themselves. This would explain why the history of Modernism differs from the Vasarian history as well. Giotto could have made great strides in approaching Michelangelo by studying the future great man's secrets, just as Theobald did in studying the secrets of Raphael. But Modernism is conceptual. Its history is the history of adding to the extension of art and at the same time modifying its intension until it becomes plain with the fullness of self-consciousness that there is no way a work of art cannot appear—that anything can be a work of art, the question now being what must be true of it for this to be true.

This way of seeing the problem did not disclose itself all at once. But there is a marked difference between Modernism's approach and that of the art which in a way put an end to Modernism. Modernism's was a pursuit of essence, of what art solely and truly is, hence of a kind of pure art, very much as if the art which resulted was like an alchemical precipitate, from which impurities had all been purged. This suggests a Grail-like narrative, in the framework of which the all-white painting might have been regarded as the climax—the work beyond which it was impossible to go. It was precisely in those terms that Aleksandr Rodchenko painted what he proclaimed as the last painting possible, using three monochrome panels of pure red, pure yellow, and pure blue. That done, painting was done, and artists were liberated to enter into life, as Rodchenko himself did in the 1920s and 1930s. I heard Robert Colescott explain his reasons for making comic paintings of blacks, namely that Ryman had gone as far as one could go with his all-white paintings, and that in consequence a history was over with. There is, I think, a logical flaw in this agenda, namely that though the all-white painting could be considered art and be considered pure—it would not follow that it was pure art—art in a pure state. That is because white is at best a metaphor for purity. The essence of art must be possessed by every work of art, ever the least pure-like Colescott's cartoon masterpieces.

The other and succeeding strategy was to put pressure on the intension of the concept by advancing something as art which violated some accepted criterion, and to see what happens. Wittgenstein talks about a chess-player who puts a paper hat on a king, which of course, whatever meaning it has for him, means nothing under the rules of chess. So you can really take it off without anything happening. In the 1960s and beyond, it was discovered how many paper hats there were in art. They were thought to be part of the meaning of art when in fact they were subsidiary properties of certain works of art of surprisingly local interest. I think of Warhol as having followed this line of investigation with greater conceptual imagination than anyone else, erasing false criteria at every step, until it began to be appreciated that there was nothing that could not be art. But that was happening everywhere at that time in the arts—in dance, in theater, in music. Since anything could heart,
ie question arose why everything wasn’t art. What made the difference between what was and what was not? A number of fairly bad answers were given. One would be that whatever an artist says is a work of art is through fact a work of art, period. Or—this is the Institutional Theory of Art—whatever an art world decrees is a work of art is one through that declaration. This makes the history of art a series of proclamations, which leaves the problem of why Theobald’s blank canvas was not an artwork in 1873 a mere matter of his not declaring it to be one. And that seems to leave a great deal of the picture. It seems simply unacceptable that the members of the class of artworks have only the fact that someone called them art to license their being in the class at all. But what then can they have in common if there are no limits on what can be an artwork... especially if two things can look entirely alike but only one of them be an artwork? That question is philosophical, and when I speak of the end of art I mean specifically that progress from this point on is philosophical progress, progress in the analysis of the concept. It is not that art has turned into philosophy as much as that the history of art has moved onto a philosophical plane. Art-making may go on and on. But so far as self-understanding is concerned, I do not believe we can take us further.

I might only add that the history could not have attained this point by philosophical reflection alone. It has been entirely internal to the history of art, and the progress to artistic self-consciousness has emerged through the grid of philosophy in action which the history of Modernism has been. Philosophers could not have imagined a situation like the present one in which, with qualification, anything goes.

What does it take to be an artwork in what I term Post-History? I want to concentrate on an interesting example that should make the problem vivid, and that shows to what degree art-making has been penetrated by philosophy. This was an installation by an artist with the surprising name (in fact a pseudonym) L. A. Angelmaker, in the Momenta Art gallery in Brooklyn. The work has a title—“Bad Penny: For Museum Purchase Only.” And it consists of articles of antique furniture which were either not considered works of art, because they were works of craft instead—or were works of art only because they were made at a time when the line between art and craft was not considered firm. These articles in any case had once been in the decorative arts galleries of museums, and had subsequently been deaccessioned. But through Angelmaker’s intervention they constitute works of contemporary art, or are in any case integral to a work of art which would not have been possible as art in an earlier moment, and certainly not under Modernism. Whatever else we can say about them, their being art now has nothing greatly to do with an artist or a group of artworlders transforming them into art by saying simply “Be thou art.” One of Angelmaker’s objects is a French Henry 11-style walnut extension table, incorporating Renaissance elements. It was given to the Metropolitan Museum of Art by J. P. Morgan in 1916. The other object is described as “A French Provincial Late Renaissance Walnut Armoire, early 17th Century.” Both are handsome pieces of furniture that anyone would love to live with, but I am interested in them through the fact that they are offered as art today in a different way from any perspective under which they might have been viewed as art before. The items of furniture were, as said, “deaccessioned” by museums, and offered at auction to a public which doubtless bid on them as luxurious articles of use. Angelmaker is offering to resell the furniture to museums as contemporary works by dint of their participation in his project.” So the seventeenth-century armoire is transformed into a late-twentieth-century piece of art, as part of a complex performance. The artist is attempting “to disrupt the flow of objects from public collections into private ownership.” In any case, the art criticism of Angelmaker’s project is obviously vastly different from the art criticism of the pieces of furniture as such, with reference to the patina of the wood, the design of doors, the cabinetry. In becoming art, the articles of furniture retain those now irrelevant properties, which form no part of their status as art in the late twentieth century.

I regard this work as a deeply post-historical object in that it could not, unlike Michelangelo’s work—or a blank canvas—be imagined as of use in showing what earlier artists in their respective histories were trying to do, since they culminated those histories. Nor can we imagine some later work showing what Angelmaker really aspired to achieve. Angelmaker’s work generates no subsequent history, at least not as art. This is the mark of contem-
porary art, in which each work has only its own history. But that is to say
that contemporary art has no mark, which is the external side of the slogan
that anything can be art. Beyond that it is clear that Bad Penny's status as art
has nothing to do with its maker merely declaring it to be art. Its being art
instead is implicated in its conceptual complexity, its purpose, and its means.
One might notice in passing that one would have to view antique furniture as
part of the material of the artist, like paint and plaster. The materials of the
artist are as diverse as the class of artworks themselves, since anything is sub-
ject to having its identity transformed by someone who sees how to use it in
a work. The art supply store would then have to carry everything. Their in-
ventory would have to be as rich as the inventory of life.

I want to conclude with one further example. The sculptor Tom
MacAnulty recently completed a commission he had received from a monas-
tic order in Indiana, to make an altar for their church. The brothers had
been struck by the magnificent Ottonian altar in Aachen, from just after the
time of Charlemagne, and wanted something exactly like that, though not an
imitation of it. This left the artist a great deal of room when it came to the
gilded bronze panels, which decorated the four sides of the altar (the frame
would be built by a monk gifted in cabinetry). It was a wonderful commis-
sion, and involved a great deal of discussion as well as careful reading of the
Bible, but at the same time it left MacAnulty uncomfortable. What business,
he wanted to know, has a modern sculptor working on an Ottonian altar? I
told him that a modern sculptor would have had no business producing such
a work. But it was perfectly all right for a contemporary artist to do so. For an
object not deeply different from an eighth-century altar can be a work of
contemporary art. His work may enter into subsequent history in many
ways: he may go on to execute other liturgical commission, he may start a
trend in which non-liturgical artists find satisfaction in liturgical art. But this
is not a master narrative. To say that the work is post-historical is merely to
stress that. If we think of everything actual and possible as art laterally—that
is, the art being made all across the art world at a given time—then it must
be clear that the heterogeneity today is of so high a degree, the media so in-
terpenetrate one another, and the purposes are so diffuse, that a next lateral
cut will be strictly unpredictable. All that one can predict is that there will be
no narrative direction. And that is what I mean by the end of art. It is per-
haps part of the cunning of reason that the end of art closely coincides with
the end of the millennium!

When I first wrote about this concept, I was somewhat depressed. I con-
cluded my text by saying that it had been an immense privilege to have lived
in history. I wrote that as a New Yorker who had lived through so many
changes, each surprising and yet each developing what went before. So one
went to exhibitions to try to determine where art was heading. I felt about
that history, in truth, as I did about analytical philosophy, which had also
seemed to be moving inevitably toward certain ends. But now I have grown
reconciled to the unlimited lateral diversity of art. I marvel at the imagina-
tiveness of artists in finding ways to convey meanings by the most untradi-
tional of means. The art world is a model of a pluralistic society, in which all
disfiguring barriers and boundaries have been thrown down. (For what it is
worth, I have no use for pluralism in philosophy.)

Hegel's final speech in the course of lectures he delivered at Jena in 1806
could be describing this moment in the history of art:

We find ourselves in an important epoch, in a fermentation, in which
Spirit has made a leap forward, has gone beyond its previous concrete
form and acquired a new one. The whole mass of ideas and concepts
that have been current until now, the very bonds of the world, are
dissolved and collapsing into themselves like a vision in a dream. A new
emergence of Spirit is at hand; philosophy must be the first to
recognize it, while others, resisting impotently, adhere to the past ...
But philosophy, in recognizing it as what is eternal, must pay homage
to it.

From that tremendous perspective, the liberation of a life beyond history
might be experienced as exhilarating.