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**Important note:** This is a final draft and differs from the definitive version, which is published in **British Journal of Aesthetics**, 47 (2007): 97-99. I have been assured by the University of Auckland's research office that if they have made this publicly available then it does not violate the publisher's copyright rules.

Robert L. SOLSO *The Psychology of Art and the Evolution of the Conscious Brain* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), ix + 278. £29.95.

This is a work on the evolutionary psychology and cognitive neuroscience of pictorial depiction, focusing on figurative and abstract pictures rather than landscapes. In it, the author considers what type of conscious brain guided the hand that created the art that first appeared on earth many years ago. The book is pitched at the level of students; the humor is undergraduate and the use of references is sparing. A strong feature is the quality and quantity of illustrations, including 22 color plates. As well as reproductions of paintings, these show the history of human evolutionary development, the nature of visual perception, the structure of the brain, PET scans of the brain's regional activation under different perceptual conditions, and so on.

The book comprises an introduction and eight chapters. The first four of these deal with the rise of consciousness, evolution, vision, and the brain, and art's connection with these. Other chapters consider the face and its recognition, illusions, perspective, and schemata, which are the mental frameworks of memories, knowledge, and interests that dictate how we approach what we perceive, including artworks.

According to the author's definition, anything natural or manmade is art, so long as it is experienced by humans as aesthetic and as representational and/or symbolic (15). Obviously, this approach counts many quotidian objects and some aspects of nature as artworks. Drawn fashion advertisements will qualify alongside works of fine art, though it is mostly the latter that are discussed. And it assumes that cave paintings and non-Western decorative artifacts are art. By framing the topic as broadly as this, the author is in no position to consider controversies about art's scope or about what if anything distinguishes art representations from other kinds, such as the fashion advertisements just mentioned. Meanwhile, the key notion of the aesthetic is addressed only at the book's close. Our ancestors'

reactions of pleasure and disgust to aspects of their environment were evolutionarily selected for their survival value, but gradually the stimuli that elicited them acquired secondary valences, becoming "beautiful" or "ugly", not just pleasing or repulsive. Early art showed pleasant things. Meanwhile, survival enjoins us not only to focus on what is familiar and pleasing, but also to be curious about the exotic, so we get pleasure from irregular or non-representational art as well from realistic depictions of appealing scenes (256). In addition, and here Solso becomes lyrical and mystical, art can furnish "Level 3" experiences that go beyond the grasp of featural and semantic matters to a state that is more a feeling than a cognition. "It cannot be explained, but when attained cannot be confused. It is the intense wisdom of art, its captivating beauty, its penetrating philosophy. It is what makes direct contact with the biological archetypes of the old-brained creatures we all are ... It is 'as if' the *painting* understood you and was reading your mind" (258).

The first five chapters contain long discussions of the evolutionary development of the visual system and the brain. These summaries are clear and concise, though they cover material that will be familiar to most non-novices. The issues raised are then applied in discussions of particular artworks. In most cases, the artworks are used to illustrate the neuro-perceptual principles and processes rather than to reveal what is distinctive to them as art. Indeed, it makes little difference to the account that the examples are of representations, as against the actual scenes represented. The later considerations of illusion and perspective are more clearly focused on some techniques of depiction, however, and Solso does consider how artists sometimes depart from the principles of realistic vanishing-point perspective to achieve artistically powerful effects. He characterizes depictions as illusions, however, but that is because he regards all perceptions as illusions because they are filtered through a cognitive prism shaped by the viewer's interests and experiences. Solso thinks the function of perception is to make important things salient, to identify wholes from fragmentary clues, and to separate subject from ground, but then characterizes the outcome of the processes that achieve these ends as one of distortion.

Most of the book's discussion is about how we perceive and process perceptual data about the world, and it is claimed of realistic pictures that they succeed in engaging the same systems through mimicry and illusion, but that leaves us with an account of representation that is questionable at

best, as Wollheim explained and Goodman problematised. In this account, there is none of the subtlety found in philosophical discussions of pictorial depiction by Schier, Danto, Walton, Lopes, or Hopkins, who, like Wollheim and Goodman, are not mentioned.

It is perhaps not surprising that Solso contributes little to our understanding of art as such, given that he repeatedly stresses the subjectivity and non-communicability of perceptual experience both of art and in general (7, 12, 23, 27, 35, 69, 77, 150, 176, 226-8, 233, 248). The following is typical: "Because individual perceptual-cognitive experiences differ for each of us, specific interpretations of art are subjective" (150). We share the same basic perceptual systems and processes, and we have enough background in common to agree in the broadest terms about what is pictured, but what we make of this is necessarily filtered through individually distinctive schemata shaped by our individual histories, proclivities, and genetic dispositions. Chapter 8 is devoted to the discussion of these personal schemata. According to Solso, abstract paintings are artistic Rorschach tests (253, see also 12) and realistic ones always idealize or distort (250). Such ideas inevitably undermine the possibility of interpersonally significant evaluations or disputes about artistic meaning and value.

In evolutionary terms, Solso regards art as a spin-off (66, 67, 85, 149, 255-6). The brain did not evolve to understand Picasso (67), but Picasso showed us what was inside us (256). Our perceptual and cognitive systems evolved to meet adaptive needs, such as distinguishing ripe from unripe berries (to mention a much-repeated example). Our interest in art comes as a non-adaptive bonus. At no stage does Solso mention or debate the option that the making and consumption of art became adaptive in its turn, so views such as Miller's and Dissanayake's are not cited. Indeed, just as this book provides no inkling as to philosophical disputes about the nature of representation and what hangs on this for art, it remains silent about most of the theories and debates among evolutionary psychologists and their kin about the place of art within evolution.

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