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The Melancholy Art: (Essays in the Arts)

Michael Ann Holly

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Melancholy is not only about sadness, despair, and loss. As Renaissance artists and philosophers acknowledged long ago, it can engender a certain kind of creativity born from a deep awareness of the mutability of life and the inevitable cycle of birth and death. Drawing on psychoanalysis, philosophy, and the intellectual history of the history of art, *The Melancholy Art* explores the unique connections between melancholy and the art historian's craft.

Though the objects art historians study are materially present in our world, the worlds from which they come are forever lost to time. In this eloquent and inspiring book, Michael Ann Holly traces how this disjunction courses through the history of art and shows how it can give rise to melancholic sentiments in historians who write about art. She confronts pivotal and vexing questions in her discipline: Why do art historians write in the first place? What kinds of psychic exchanges occur between art objects and those who write about them? What institutional and personal needs does art history serve? What is lost in historical writing about art?

The Melancholy Art looks at how melancholy suffuses the work of some of the twentieth century's most powerful and poetic writers on the history of art, including Alois Riegl, Franz Wickhoff, Adrian Stokes, Michael Baxandall, Meyer Schapiro, and Jacques Derrida. A disarmingly personal meditation by one of our most distinguished art historians, this book explains why to write about art is to share in a kind of intertwined pleasure and loss that is the very essence of melancholy.

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