

**THE  
GLOBAL  
ART  
COMPASS**



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ART  
COMPASS**



**● NEW  
DIRECTIONS  
IN 21<sup>ST</sup>-  
CENTURY  
ART**

**ALISTAIR  
HICKS**



**YAPI KREDİ YAYINLARI**

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**The Global Art Compass - New Directions in 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Art**  
**Alistair Hicks**

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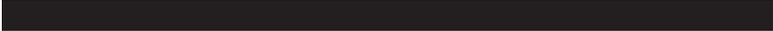
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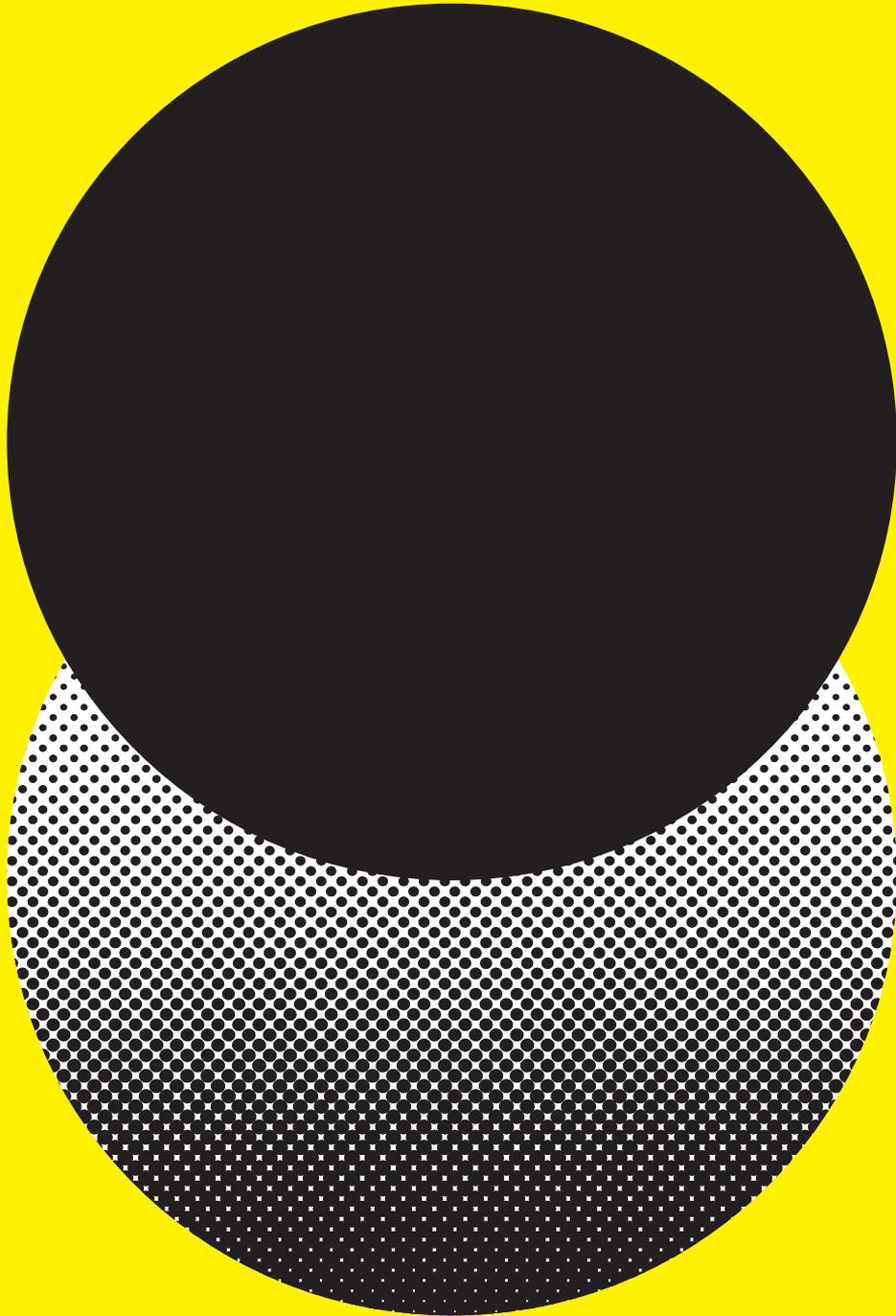
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## PREFACE

She did not return my gaze, but it did not matter. I knew immediately that I had been looking for her all my life. On the street I might have missed her. She was not what I considered ‘my type’. She was not a blonde. She did not have blue eyes; indeed, I could not make them out. I half-remembered some old wives’ tale about failure to recall eye colour being a sign of love. One ear seemed small, the other elephantine. I could not see her legs. There was no bosom. I had never seen such proportions. Her giraffe neck jutted forward. Her nose was long but did not look big, as it linked with strong eyebrows and lips that promised a kiss to any passing god or any stray, hormone-filled teenager who could somehow steal one.

When, at the age of seventeen, I saw *Nefertiti* in Berlin, I instantly knew she was from another world, but as I walked around her glass case I recognized in her things that were missing from my life.<sup>1</sup> I was a two-timer, as I had just fallen in love with my first true girlfriend, but I could not resist the Egyptian queen. I fell for her and gradually realized that I loved art.

These personal confessions will get worse before they get better. I want you to understand your guide’s prejudices and bigotry so that together we can celebrate artists’ freedom to give us new visions of the world, no matter where they are located, no matter where they are positioned in the ‘market’. The aim of this book is to encourage people to activate their own innate bearings to the exciting developments in the art world.

Post-colonialism is a main theme among artists, which makes it relevant that I am the grandson of British imperialists. I don’t



share my grandparents' opinions, but I was born in their London house. My comments on how artists deal with the legacy of colonialism – whether it is British, Russian, Spanish or American – are built on a knowledge of the past seen at least partly from this perspective. Some might say I have over-compensated – certainly Grandmama would. Others will maintain that I am totally incapable of understanding the present because of my ancestors – generations of servants to the British Raj. I can vividly recall an argument, when I was about ten, between my paternal grandfather, who had served in the British army in India and Egypt and through two wars, and my father, a modern professional soldier. 'The trouble with you,' my grandfather said accusingly, 'is you don't believe in the Empire.'

What would Edward Said, whose definition of Orientalism hovers over so much art, have made of my adolescent encounter with the exotic Egyptian queen? Certainly I was attracted to her 'otherness' as I had never experienced beauty along those lines. She led me into another world. I had been conditioned to fall in love with her: I had enjoyed the 'standard privileged' classical education, sent away at the age of eight to an all-boys boarding school. After nine years of being segregated from women, I came across my dream escape route on a pedestal in a

**Thutmose  
Nefertiti**

New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty,  
c. 1340 BC, limestone, gypsum,  
crystal and wax, 50 x 17 x 40 cm  
(19 7/8 x 6 3/4 x 15 3/8 in.).

This limestone sculpture of the Egyptian queen Nefertiti was made by her court sculptor, Thutmose, over three thousand years ago. Her beauty converted me to art.

darkened room. Her face glowed under the spotlights. My memory fibs, telling me she was as gold as Tutankhamen. On a school outing as a fourteen-year-old I had queued up to see Tut's blockbuster exhibition at the British Museum, but it had been a mere fifteen-second wonder.

*Nefertiti* still has me enthralled, but at the time I thought two other events from that Berlin weekend more significant. A month earlier I had finished school for good. A friend had come to join me in Germany to celebrate our release into the world and we were determined that hot-house Berlin would show us a good time. I thought I was an adult, but when a woman with cropped hair in a strip club caught my eye, I was like a rabbit caught in the headlights. She knew I was shocked to the core and that she had me hooked. I hated myself for being there. My guilt was not a patch on Søren Kierkegaard's total self-disgust after his student visit to a brothel, just a niggling echo, but I did not want to be there.

This book is about rejection and repulsion as well as discovery. I never actually had to say no to the stripper, but we find our bearings as much by negative experiences as by positive ones. The preference for *Nefertiti* rather than the lady in the club was practically made for me, but if I had been better looking or richer my life might have gone in a different direction. One cannot be a good collector without being open to new ideas and sensations, but one of the hardest lessons to learn is how to say no.

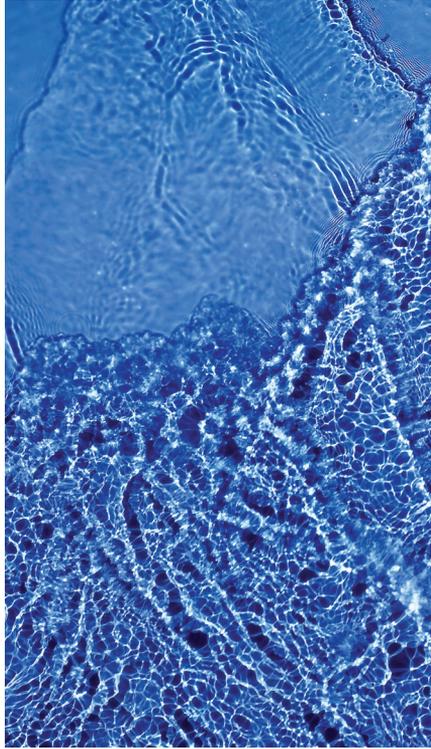
*Nefertiti* did not instantly transform my life, but a year later my girlfriend's mother, remembering my infatuation with the goddess of the elongated neck, advised me to take an art history course at St Andrew's University. Lectures started at 10 a.m., which meant I usually only just managed to get my dozy head into the hall to gaze in reverie at the daily dose of new slides. My professor, John Steer, had the mannerisms of a matador, so it was difficult to sleep as he constantly prodded us into life and made us plan a summer trip to Italy. My addiction to art was confirmed over those rainy few days in Florence. At night the water ran through our tent in the campsite behind Piazzale Michelangelo, but during the day we charged around the grid of cobbled streets to see masterpiece after masterpiece. My art compass had kicked in. As I hurtled through those narrow streets, I was propelled by

some internal satellite navigation. I had a new north and south, based on my thirst both for harmony and its opposite: the need to stir up the chaotic imbalance within me. My poor friends learned not to get in the way of my quest for my next art fix.

My conversion to contemporary art came three years later at the hands of two artists, Ann Bergson (b. 1928, Sweden) and her husband, Conrad 'Dick' Romyn (1915–2007). Ann is a cousin of the French philosopher Henri Bergson, whose theories on multiplicity have influenced many of today's artists through Gilles Deleuze, who in turn made philosophy much more fluid and generous to our differences. Taken to Dick and Ann's home and studio near Hampton Court on the edge of London by their daughter, I entered a different world. Sat in the candlelight round their refectory table on many a long evening, they told me what they had gained by becoming artists and what they had given up, and they described the world from their astute perspective. I learned that however carefully I trod up the stairs into their picture-packed attic studio, it was always an invasion. I was bound to make mistakes in their world, but it made me feel very alive.

Artists and writers have been the main influence on my life with one exception: my wife, Rebecca. When we married, she was working for Marlborough Fine Art, so she introduced me to my heroes: Francis Bacon, Frank Auerbach and R. B. Kitaj. This led to my first book, *The School of London*.<sup>2</sup> We also started buying art together, which I assumed would be a very different process from buying on my own. Yet the only major disagreement was over our first purchase. We agreed on the artist, Andrzej Jackowski (b. 1947, England), but I won through on the particular work. Its title, *Love's Journeys* (1983), may have helped. Ever since then we have agreed far more times than we have disagreed. Buying with someone else teaches one quickly that the appreciation of art is not a one-way relationship. Now that art is primarily used as a tourist attraction, there is a danger of giving ourselves imaginary suitcase stickers as we tick off exhibitions, paintings and installations. Yet art offers a lifelong affair, as mine with *Nefertiti* (and Rebecca) shows.

I have to declare a vested interest, as my wife runs a gallery and represents several artists whom I count among my closest friends.



**Susan Derges**  
***Recycling Lucifer's***  
***Fall 6*** (detail)  
2008, dye destruction composite  
print, 170 x 61 cm (66% x 24 in.).  
Derges uses the patterns of  
water as a metaphor for the  
way we think and feel.

I wish to mention one, as her work helped reorientate me. Before I came across the photograms of Susan Derges (b. 1956, England), I had a tendency to dismiss photography as a lesser art form than painting and sculpture. I was first attracted to her studies of water. Then I heard how she made her work, how she was tired of looking at her surroundings through a lens, so she returned to the basics of photography and simply passed light through a stream at night to get a direct print of the current. As I have been writing this book, I have started thinking about these same works in a different way, as the redefinition and orientation of the self in relation to society. Derges's process is scientific, a method of documenting nature, but although she has a modest view of the self, her deeper subject matter is human thought. The way the water flows is a metaphor for the way we think and feel. Her recent work involves more interference with the purity of process: she is constantly adjusting the balance between internal and external, body and intellect. She lets this friction ask the fundamental questions about how we fit into the universe.

For the last fifteen years I have worked for Deutsche Bank as a curator and adviser. My job has effectively turned me into a human art compass. I am meant to locate art, but also to help others relate to it. Perhaps the first serious preparation came in



that trip to Berlin in 1974. For not only did *Nefertiti* convert me to art. My father had also arranged for an American colonel to take my schoolfriend and me along the Berlin Wall. It was a truly disorientating experience, for as we passed mile after mile of fortifications, barbed wire and desolate no man's land, the colonel showed us albums of photographs of Berlin at the beginning of the twentieth century. The bustling centre of civilization in the photos contrasted starkly with the weeds coming out of the once well-trodden cobblestones along the Wall. It was a savage lesson in the cost of war and division, the horror of boundaries.

Friedhelm Hütte, the Global Head of Art at Deutsche Bank, first employed me to help him write a catalogue of the Bank's collection in London twenty years after I first visited Berlin, but those memories gave me an early insight into German art.<sup>3</sup> Most collectors don't have to justify their purchases to anyone more terrifying than their families – not that I am underestimating that restraint – but the art team at Deutsche Bank have to justify every action to global and regional committees, to their managers and, ultimately and most importantly of all according to the Bank's philosophy, the staff. This book is largely about the relationship between my ever-changing 'self' and others, as witnessed by a conversation I had very recently with a friend who works at Deutsche Bank, Preeti Udas.

We were standing in front of *12 Harmonics* (2011) by Keith Tyson. 'Tell me!' Preeti said, 'Why I should like this?' This was part of a continuous dialogue in which she complains that her brain takes her to a certain point with art and then dumps her unceremoniously. I had thought that *12 Harmonics*, which is about the harmonic series and many other systems that govern our lives, would be a perfect painting for her, as it has so many possible explanations, but none totally convinced her. Indeed, Tyson would not want her to be convinced by a single explanation. 'I have been reading Heidegger about the rejection of

**Keith Tyson**

***Studies for the 12 Harmonics (in 12 parts)*** (detail)

2008-10, mixed media on watercolour paper, 12 parts, 95.1 x 85.1 cm (37½ x 33½ in.) each.

For Tyson, maths is just a way of seeing patterns in the world.

words in getting to the essence of things,' Preeti continued. 'Apparently, the true nature/thingness of things can only be experienced away from verbal/intellectual analysis. I have an awful feeling that they are ruling me out!' Hopefully this book will comfort her, as a considerable number of the artists included are influenced by Deleuze, Heidegger and Henri Bergson. Their philosophical legacy is witnessed again and again as artists wrestle to make art that reflects an open and more diverse society, one that encourages multiple explanations, running side by side. There is a desperate need to have time to think rather than just acquire knowledge. This combines with the contrasting acceptance that a single 'truth' is not enough.

Expectation is a killer. 'Why should I like this?' *The Global Art Compass* is not trying to answer this question, but rather seeks to encourage you to use artists to help you understand yourself and those around you. I don't read much philosophy anymore, unless I am led to it by an artist's work. We used to steer our path using the stars. I use the artists as my stars: I am more of an Ann Bergsonian than an Henri Bergsonian.

No one needed an art compass in the past. Instead we had Goethe, Ruskin and Greenberg, who not only told everyone what to think, but also had the power and gall to dictate to artists themselves.<sup>4</sup> Artists have rebelled. They no longer have to follow one prevailing theory or head to any particular city: for the first time ever they can make their careers without moving to a major art centre. New York, London, Paris, Berlin and Beijing are great places to make art, but none of them has a stranglehold on creativity. We all should be following the artists' examples: we should not let any single curator, critic or dealer monopolize our view of what is happening. This book aims to let its readers steer their own way with the aid of the flickering light from the stars of the art world, the artists themselves. Ultimately we can't do much better than heed Ernst Gombrich's sixty-year-old advice: beware of seeing what you expect to see. The title of his 1950 classic, *The Story of Art*, may anachronistically appear to be limiting as it implies a single line of thought. *The Global Art Compass* is riddled with competing stories, but I gladly repeat Gombrich's opening salvo: 'There really is no such thing as Art. There are only artists.'<sup>5</sup>

