



Kings and Connoisseurs

Jonathan Brown

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Old master paintings are now considered to be the most valuable and prestigious of the visual arts, and the best examples command the highest prices of any luxury commodity. In this series of lectures Jonathan Brown tells in vivid detail the story of the rise of painting to this exalted status. The result is an exciting narrative of greed and passion, played out against a background of international politics and intrigue. This book, which is an essay in cultural and art history, is completed by a postscript showing why important old master paintings have now virtually disappeared from the art market.

The transformation of painting from an inexpensive to a costly art form reached a crucial stage in the royal courts of Europe in the seventeenth century, where rulers and aristocrats assembled huge collections, often in short periods of time. Brown traces this process in Madrid, Paris, London, and Brussels, beginning with the dispersal of the great English collections in the aftermath of the Civil War, including those of Charles I, the Earl of Arundel, and the Dukes of Buckingham and Hamilton. Hundreds of great pictures were all at once available to continental collectors and were acquired by Cardinal Jules Mazarin, Louis XIV of France, Archduke Leopold William of Austria, and Philip IV of Spain, as well as lesser-known collectors, including Everhard Jabach and Luis de Haro. Through comparative analysis of collecting and collectors at these courts, Brown explains the formation of new attitudes toward pictures, as well as the mechanisms that supported the enterprise of collecting, including the emergence of the art dealer, the development of connoisseurship, and the publication of sumptuous picture books of various collections.

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