



★ **Old in Art School: A Memoir of Starting Over**

Nell Painter

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After a successful career as an academic and historian, Nell Painter decided to go to art school. For Painter, art equates to pleasure, and the pleasure is visceral—it frees and connects mind and body in a way she couldn't find elsewhere. However, because her decision coincided with retirement, there's a wholly surprising element to the arrangement: "Now what I took as *me* seemed almost inconsequential as my essence shriveled to my age. This was something new."

In *Old in Art School*, Painter makes a prism of her experience, breaking the invisible monolith of art into a distinct, personal refraction. She adeptly captures the complexity of her transition from historian to artist, folding in a survey of twentieth- to twenty-first-century art history, the practical and identity challenges of creative work, and the tension that exists between the artist, art-making, and the marketplace.

Painter is a personality par excellence; forthright, erudite, and perfectly profane, her voice entralls. She bestows titled affiliations on various people in her life from "Dear Husband Glenn" to "Teacher Hanneline," describes the world in glorious colors of paint (Branch Brook Park is a "late-summer chromium oxide green, later, burnt-umber bare"), and addresses the powerful specter of abstraction, from "An Artist" to "The Art World." And she achieves all this while citing historical sources, invoking Beyoncé, delivering insightful critique, and finding thrilling new configurations for curse words.

Filled with immense insight and presence, Painter's memoir confronts a variety of issues and what it means to shoulder those burdens in the pursuit of art. Essential reading, *Old in Art School* resists simplification. It insists on abundance with Derrida's certainty that "there's no beyond the frame; everything, whether you think it belongs in the picture or not, brings meaning to the image."

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