



THE WIT COLLECTION: ART HISTORY JOKES 5

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One or two of the jokes that follow may be a little esoteric, so here are a few hints for readers who are not necessarily versed in the British world of art history. [Hans Coper](#) was a remarkable, modern ceramicist, whose [Brancusian](#) bowls would not have met with the approval of arch(itecture) traditionalist, the late [Dr. David Watkin](#), who was one of this gag-writer's mentors when he studied History of Art at Cambridge. Lastly, the Rossetti joke presupposes a knowledge of Cockney rhyming slang, e.g., "What a load of Jackson Pollocks" (i.e., rubbish) and "Brahms and Liszt" (inebriated). Any further explanations would seem otiose.

A celebrated Anglo-German studio potter was showing off a lovely vase to a customer when - no! - he dropped it on the floor.

Beholding the smithereens, the customer said "That's shattering!"

But the potter's reaction was perfectly calm, even smiling: **"Stay cool! I'm a Coper!"**



Hans Coper, *Bottle*, ca. 1958.

What did her great friend say to comfort Lucie Rie when she had just smashed a vase in the studio?
"You need Hans!" [Her reply: **"Max Bygraves? No thanks!"**]

Which French 19th century sculptor had a notoriously bad temper?
David d'Angers, who sometimes veered on Rude.

What did a Royalist critic say of the Marseillaise?

Very Rude – she shouldn't be pointing!

Visitor to the 1844 Royal Academy: "Ah, it's called Rain, Steam and Speed! **What a brilliant Turner phrase!**"

What did Rossetti say when his fellow Pre-Raphaelite annoyed him?

"You stupid Holman Hunt!"



Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Ecce Ancilla Domini*, 1850.

Who was the eminent, high camp 18th century art connoisseur who uncannily anticipated Pop Art?
Sir Horace Warhol.

What did the mugger say to James Tissot?
"Watch out!"

Edwin Landseer was a mental wreck. He told his shrink in a horse voice: **"Oh deer! I've been dogged by the cattiness of pig-headed critics!"**

What did David Watkin scathingly call Pevsner?
Sir Knickerless.

How did Sir Nikolaus Pevsner summarise a High Victorian Gothic railway station he intensely disliked?
Cancer of the Pancras. Terminal.

What was Sir Herbert Read's intellectual response towards a Merz installation by Kurt Schwitters?
What a load of rubbish!

Q. What do you think of the Guggenheim building?

A. **All Wright I suppose, but it cuts corners...**

*Dr Mark Stocker is a former academic and art curator who lives in New Zealand. Besides his jokes, he has 230 marginally more serious publications, many of which are on Victorian public monuments, numismatics and New Zealand art. His book **When Britain Went Decimal: The Coinage of 1971** will be published by the Royal Mint in 2021.*

The [*featured image*](#) shows, "**Three Men with a Woman Holding a Cat,**" attributed to Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo, ca. 16th century.

