



# Reductionism in Art and Brain Science: Bridging the Two Cultures

*Eric R Kandel*

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## **Reductionism in Art and Brain Science: Bridging the Two Cultures** Eric R Kandel

Can science and art find common ground? Are scientific and artistic quests mutually exclusive? In this new book, neuroscientist Eric Kandel, whose interests span the fields of science and art, explores how reductionism—the distillation of larger scientific or aesthetic concepts into smaller, more tractable ideas—has been used by scientists and artists alike to pursue their respective truths. Their common use of reductionist strategies demonstrates how science can inform the way we experience a work of art and seek to understand its meaning. Kandel draws on his Nobel Prize-winning work studying the neurobiological underpinnings of learning and memory in the humble sea slug, whose simple brain helps illuminate the complex workings of higher animal minds. He extends these findings to the complexities of human perception, which uses bottom-up sensory and top-down cognitive functions to perceive the world and to appreciate and understand works of art.

At the heart of this book is an elegant elucidation of the pivotal contribution of reductionism to modern art's extraordinary evolution and to its role in a monumental shift in artistic perspective. Reductionism was a driving force in the transition from figurative art to the first explorations of abstract art in the works of Turner, Monet, Kandinsky, Schoenberg, and Mondrian. Kandel explains how the New York School of Pollock, de Kooning, Rothko, Louis, Turrell, and Flavin arrived at their particular forms of abstract expressionism in the postwar era, and concludes with Katz, Warhol, Close, and Sandback, who built upon the advances of the New York School to reimagine figurative and minimal art. Featuring captivating drawings of the brain alongside full-color reproductions of modern art masterpieces, this book brings science and art into closer relation.

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