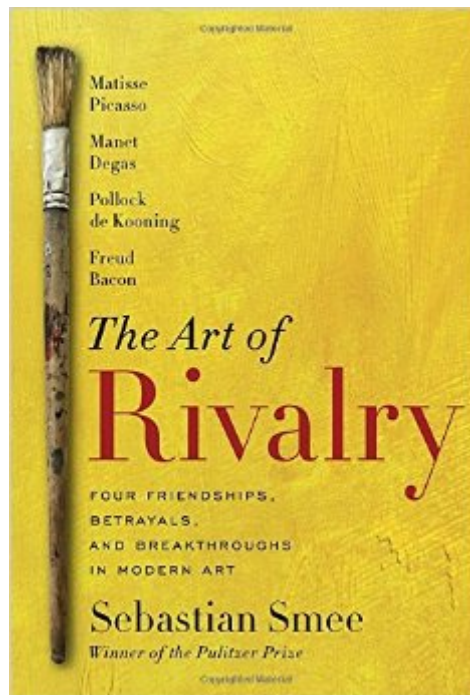


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# The Art Of Rivalry: Four Friendships, Betrayals, And Breakthroughs In Modern Art



## Synopsis

Pulitzer Prize-winning art critic Sebastian Smee tells the fascinating story of four pairs of artists—Manet and Degas, Picasso and Matisse, Pollock and de Kooning, Freud and Bacon—whose fraught, competitive friendships spurred them to new creative heights. Rivalry is at the heart of some of the most famous and fruitful relationships in history. The *Art of Rivalry* follows eight celebrated artists, each linked to a counterpart by friendship, admiration, envy, and ambition. All eight are household names today. But to achieve what they did, each needed the influence of a contemporary—one who was equally ambitious but possessed sharply contrasting strengths and weaknesses. Edouard Manet and Edgar Degas were close associates whose personal bond frayed after Degas painted a portrait of Manet and his wife. Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso swapped paintings, ideas, and influences as they jostled for the support of collectors like Leo and Gertrude Stein and vied for the leadership of a new avant-garde. Jackson Pollock's uninhibited style of "action painting" triggered a breakthrough in the work of his older rival, Willem de Kooning. After Pollock's sudden death in a car crash, de Kooning assumed Pollock's mantle and became romantically involved with his late friend's mistress. Lucian Freud and Francis Bacon met in the early 1950s, when Bacon was being hailed as Britain's most exciting new painter and Freud was working in relative obscurity. Their intense but asymmetrical friendship came to a head when Freud painted a portrait of Bacon, which was later stolen. Each of these relationships culminated in an early flashpoint, a rupture in a budding intimacy that was both a betrayal and a trigger for great innovation. Writing with the same exuberant wit and psychological insight that earned him a Pulitzer Prize for art criticism, Sebastian Smee explores here the way that coming into one's own as an artist—finding one's voice—almost always involves willfully breaking away from some intimate expectations of who you are or ought to be. Praise for *The Art of Rivalry* "Gripping . . . Mr. Smee's skills as a critic are evident throughout. He is persuasive and vivid. . . . The *Art of Rivalry* is rooted in a closely observed theory, but it roams in a way geared to nonspecialist readers, part mini-biographies, part broader art history. . . . You leave this book both nourished and hungry for more about the art, its creators and patrons, and the relationships that seed the ground for moments spent at the canvas." —*The New York Times* "With novella-like detail and incisiveness [Sebastian Smee] opens up the worlds of four pairs of renowned artists. . . . Each of his portraits is a biographical gem, deftly taking social milieus, family backgrounds, and the art controversies of the day into account. . . . Smee's vivid, agile prose is especially good at evoking the temperaments of the personalities involved. . . . The *Art of Rivalry* is a pure, informative delight, written with canny authority." —*The Boston Globe* "Perceptive . . . Smee is onto something important. His book

may bring us as close as weâ™ll ever get to understanding the connections between these bristly bonds and brilliance.â•â”The Christian Science Monitor âœIn this intriguing work of art history and psychology, The Boston Globeâ™s art critic looks at the competitive friendships of Matisse and Picasso, Manet and Degas, Pollock and de Kooning, and Freud and Bacon. All four relationships illuminate the creative processâ”both its imaginative breakthroughs and its frustrating blocks.â•â”Newsday

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Artistic pairs are actually quite common throughout history. There is something about shared artistic visions that reflect a particular age that gives the phenomenon an increasing likelihood. It is a relatively common experience throughout music history, for example, with pairs of composers often the leading musical artists of their age. Examples are Bach and Handel, Haydn and Mozart, Chopin and Liszt, Verdi and Wagner, Debussy and Ravel. The Art of Rivalry discusses four friendships that highlight eight artists: Manet and Degas, Picasso and Matisse, Pollock and de Kooning, Freud and Bacon. The book’s basic premise is that these highly competitive, combative friendships spurred these artists on to greater creativity, functioning like an artistic bullpen in which high-tension emotions and the interchange of ideas fostered their creative process. I would suggest that what really drives this creativity is something akin to a similarity of artistic genius in close proximity, inevitably bouncing ideas off each other during their social interactions, and not who’s drinking where and who’s dating who’s ex. One should also never underestimate the power of greed and

envy as each artist witnesses the success (or failure) of their alleged "friends". No one, especially artists with fragile, easily bruised egos, likes to be left behind in the station when the gravy train rolls out. The Art of Rivalry highlights the portmanteau "frenemies", which joins the words bromance and Brexit as overused expressions I could live without. The Art of Rivalry is an interesting look at the all-too-human aspects of artistic creativity.

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