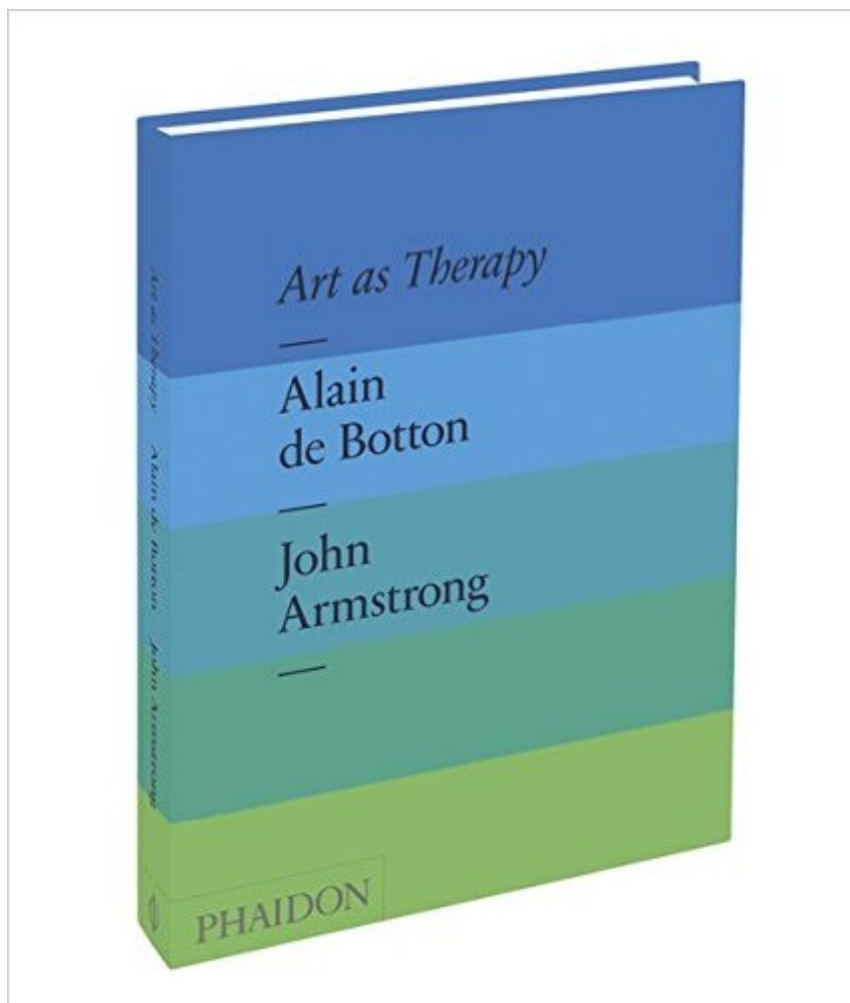


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# Art As Therapy



## Synopsis

"What is art's purpose? In this engaging, lively, and controversial new book, bestselling philosopher Alain de Botton and art historian John Armstrong propose a new way of looking at familiar masterpieces, suggesting that they can be useful, relevant, and "above all else" therapeutic for their viewers. De Botton argues that certain great works offer clues on managing the tensions and confusions of everyday life. Chapters on Love, Nature, Money, and Politics outline how art can help with these common difficulties "for example, Vermeer's *Girl Reading a Letter* helps us focus on what we want to be loved for; Serra's *Fernando Pessoa* reminds us of the importance of dignity in suffering; and Manet's *Bunch of Asparagus* teaches us how to preserve and value our long-term partners. *Art as Therapy* offers an unconventional perspective, demonstrating how art can guide us, console us, and help us better understand ourselves."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

As an artistic production in its own right, this book is lovely. The illustrations are remarkable. Even the structure is thought-provoking, and the early sections, each devoted to an analysis of the ways in which art can transcend its nominal subjects and acquire a personal relevance to the individual viewing it (or, in the case of architecture, inhabiting it) were intriguing). But that's when the book's analysis started falling apart for me, since that's where de Botton moves away from an understanding and awareness that the relationship between a person and an individual piece of art is always going to be just that: individual. Especially when we're talking about "art as therapy". The way I respond to Monet's Giverny paintings may be the way that someone else reacts to, say, a

Vermeer interior, or a Ming vase -- or even something utterly unexpected, like a vibrant Kandinsky. de Botton, in contrast, implies that there is a way we as a society can somehow guide a viewer to have a certain kind of epiphany by looking at a certain kind of work of art. I'm with de Botton in suggesting that that kind of visceral, thoughtful, emotional reaction occurs -- and should be encouraged -- but part ways with him in suggesting that we, as a society, should somehow be guiding people as to what they should be thinking in response to certain works of art by showcasing them in galleries devoted to kinds of emotions (loss, friendship, etc.), commissioning work to help us understand grief, etc. Consider one example that de Botton offers up: that of the central panel of a 15th century triptych that once belonged to Isabella of Castile. It features Jesus, resurrected, visiting the Virgin Mary.

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