Artworks as Attentional Engines: A Model for a Cognitive Neuroscience of Art
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I propose a model for integrating philosophy and neuroscience of art derived from Phillipe Schyn’s diagnostic recognition framework for categorization and object recognition and a biased competition theory of selective attention. The central claim of the model is that knowledge of the range of stylistic conventions and appreciative practices that define artworks in different genres, schools, historical periods, and other categories of art functions as a constitutive constraint on perception that drives attention to features diagnostic for, or sufficient to recover and recognize, the artistically salient formal, expressive, aesthetic, and semantic content of a work. I argue that this model has the theoretical resources to model the influence of historical knowledge and art critical conventions in our understanding and appreciation of artworks in a range of media and thereby resolves a standard Wittgensteinian objection to the relevance of psychological research to philosophy of art. I support this claim by sketching ways the model can be used to explain key aspects of our appreciative engagement with paintings, dance works, and pure music.