



The Finger: A Handbook

Angus Trumble

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FROM THE AUTHOR OF *A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SMILE*, A COMPLETE INDEX OF THE DIGIT

In this collision between art and science, history and pop culture, the acclaimed art historian Angus Trumble examines the finger from every possible angle. His inquiries into its representation in art take us from Buddhist statues in Kyoto to the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, from cave art to Picasso's *Guernica*, from Van Dyck's and Rubens's winning ways with gloves to the longstanding French taste for tapering digits. But Trumble also asks intriguing questions about the finger in general: How do fingers work, and why do most of us have five on each hand? Why do we bite our nails?

This witty, odd, and fascinating book is filled with diverse anecdotes about the silent language of gesture, the game of love, the spinning of balls, superstitions relating to the severed fingers of thieves, and systems of computation that were used on wharves and in shops, markets, granaries, and warehouses throughout the ancient Roman world. Side by side with historical discussions of rings and gloves and nail polish are meditations on the finger's essential role in writing, speech, sports, crime, law, sex, worship, memory, scratching politely at eighteenth-century French doors (instead of crudely knocking), or merely satisfying an itch—and, of course, in the eponymous show of contempt.

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