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But Is It Art?: An Introduction To Art Theory



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Synopsis

From Andy Warhol’s Brillo boxes to provocative dung-splattered madonnas, in today’s art world many strange, even shocking, things are put on display. This often leads exasperated viewers to exclaim--is this really art? In this invaluable primer on aesthetics, Freeland explains why innovation and controversy are so highly valued in art, weaving together philosophy and art theory with many engrossing examples. Writing clearly and perceptively, she explores the cultural meanings of art in different contexts, and highlights the continuities of tradition that stretch from modern, often sensational, works back to the ancient halls of the Parthenon, to the medieval cathedral of Chartres, and to African nkisi nkondi fetish statues. She explores the difficulties of interpretation, examines recent scientific research into the ways the brain perceives art, and looks to the still-emerging worlds of art on the web, video art, art museum CD-ROMS, and much more. In addition, Freeland guides us through the various theorists of art, from Aristotle and Kant to Baudrillard. Lastly, throughout this nuanced account of theories, artists, and works, Freeland provides us with a rich understanding of how cultural significance is captured in a physical medium, and why challenging our perceptions is, and always has been, central to the whole endeavor. It is instructive to recall that Henri Matisse himself was originally derided as a "wild beast." To horrified critics, his bold colors and distorted forms were outrageous. A century later, what was once shocking is now considered beautiful. And that, writes Freeland, is art.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A survey of everything from aesthetic theory to digital imaging, and of everyone from Goya to

Damien Hirst, is packed into seven fast-break chapters here. Freeland (The Naked and the Undead), a philosophy professor at the University of Houston, is familiar enough with the impenetrable artspeak and rhetoric surrounding such issues as identity politics, censorship and public funding not to be intimidated by them; her cut-to-the-chase approach to such critical minefields as the use of bodily fluids in art produces clear and often pungent analyses. Chapters on gender, money and the marketplace, and on the uses and abuses of "primitive" motifs in contemporary art making are models of judicious clarity. And the chapters on the science of perception and the digital revolution display Freeland's equal ease with the vocabularies of scientific research. She can also be tart in her thumb-nail assessments of works (some shown in eight color and 24 b&w plates): '80s painter and filmmaker David Salle "relies on numbingly familiar imagery

"I know of no work that moves so swiftly and with so sure a footing through the battle zones of art and society today."--Arthur C. Danto"Profoundly refreshing and satisfying.... Freeland's energetic and engaging voice breezily guides the reader, while employing an astonishing array of examples to illuminate and activate her explications."--Don Bacigalupi, Director, San Diego Museum of Art"A vibrant study of a complex and contentious field of artistic endeavor and enquiry.... Lucid and thought-provoking."--Murray Smith, University of Kent"Freeland provides a unique and inclusive view of the past by discussing it from the vantage point of contemporary art."--Lucy R. Lippard, author of Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America

I am very pleased with my purchase of But Is It Art? The book was in great shape, as advertised, and I am so glad that it was both very affordable and easy to purchase. Cynthia Freeman, the author, makes the concept of art, from a culturally educated perspective, refreshingly accessible. As she writes to bring the reader along on her logical and interesting journey, it becomes understandable that this is what any form of art is: the creator's journey. Thus, Ms. Freeman succeeds at either introducing or reintroducing the idea that art remains, however strange or even horrific that it gets, an invitation to relate to aspects of reality through creative means.

I had to get this for a graduate course and was surprised by how much fun this book is to actually read. I made lots of notes in it and carried on lots of conversations. A great book about controversialÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â art.

Loved the book.

I am using this book to teach a college art theory class. It is interesting, informative, and written well.

I am learning art for the first time, by reading this book, it gives the history of art and how some artistes choose the type of art that they like and how it fit into their personality and work.

Had to have this book for "Intro to the Arts" class as a required class for my BSN. While I do not understand much about the Arts, this book is helpful for the class.

Freeland's easy prose and organizational structure make this book a quick, fun, and insightful read into art-historical-philosophies with a brief look at Classical Greeks like Plato and Aristotle, a good look at the works of Kant, and a survey of contemporary philosophers and art critics book-ended and interspersed with looks at artworks and just enough context to make sense of their place in the timeline.

A short, breezy, swift tour of the philosophy of art from the Greeks to modern time. It starts out a bit dry but then picks up speed to give the novice a high level overview of how the critical and popular conceptions of art have changed over the centuries. Sort of fun.

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