

But Is It Art?: An Introduction to Art Theory

By Cynthia Freeland

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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.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly
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"; the sainted political artist Hans Haacke is "preachy and boring." But her interest is at all times on explicating issues rather than on rendering facile judgments. If the book suffers from trying to do too much in too small a space, its ambition and usefulness amply justify Freeland's project on its own terms.

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Review

"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*

About the Author

Cynthia Freeland is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Houston, Texas. Her books include *The Naked and the Undead: Evil and the Appeal of Horror, Feminist Interpretations of Aristotle*, and *Philosophy*

and Film.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Nellie Kim:

Now a day folks who Living in the era just where everything reachable by interact with the internet and the resources inside can be true or not demand people to be aware of each information they get. How people have to be smart in getting any information nowadays? Of course the reply is reading a book. Reading a book can help folks out of this uncertainty Information specially this But Is It Art?: An Introduction to Art Theory book since this book offers you rich data and knowledge. Of course the info in this book hundred per-cent guarantees there is no doubt in it you may already know.

Jeannine Ricks:

A lot of people always spent their particular free time to vacation or even go to the outside with them loved ones or their friend. Were you aware? Many a lot of people spent many people free time just watching TV, or perhaps playing video games all day long. If you need to try to find a new activity that is look different you can read a book. It is really fun for you personally. If you enjoy the book you read you can spent all day every day to reading a guide. The book But Is It Art?: An Introduction to Art Theory it is extremely good to read. There are a lot of people who recommended this book. These were enjoying reading this book. In case you did not have enough space to develop this book you can buy often the e-book. You can m0ore quickly to read this book from your smart phone. The price is not too expensive but this book possesses high quality.

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