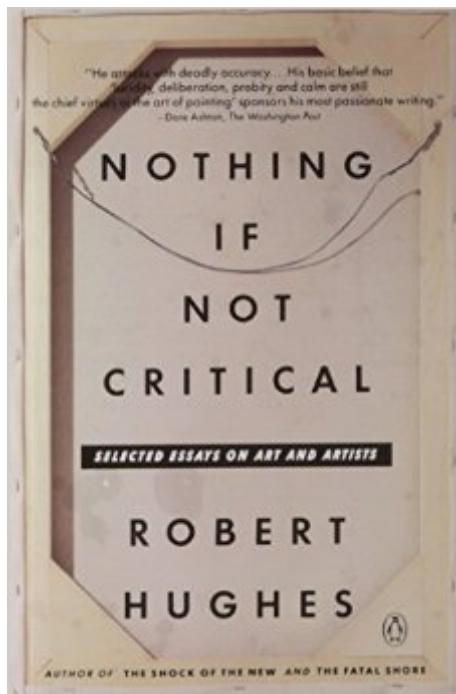


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Nothing If Not Critical: Selected Essays On Art And Artists



Synopsis

From Holbein to Hockney, from Norman Rockwell to Pablo Picasso, from sixteenth-century Rome to 1980s SoHo, Robert Hughes looks with love, loathing, warmth, wit and authority at a wide range of art and artists, good, bad, past and present. As art critic for Time magazine, internationally acclaimed for his study of modern art, *The Shock of the New*, he is perhaps America's most widely read and admired writer on art. In this book: nearly a hundred of his finest essays on the subject. For the realism of Thomas Eakins to the Soviet satirists Komar and Melamid, from Watteau to Willem de Kooning to Susan Rothenberg, here is Hughes' astute, vivid and uninhibited "on dozens of famous and not-so-famous artists." He observes that Caravaggio was "one of the hinges of art history; there was art before him and art after him, and they were not the same"; he remarks that Julian Schnabel's "work is to painting what Stallone's is to acting"; he calls John Constable's *Wivenhoe Park* "almost the last word on Eden-as-Property"; he notes how "distorted traces of [Jackson] Pollock lie like genes in art-world careers that, one might have thought, had nothing to do with his." He knows how Norman Rockwell made a chicken stand still long enough to be painted, and what Degas said about success (some kinds are indistinguishable from panic). Phrasemaker par excellence, Hughes is at the same time an incisive and profound critic, not only of particular artists, but also of the social context in which art exists and is traded. His fresh perceptions of such figures as Andy Warhol and the French writer Jean Baudrillard are matched in brilliance by his pungent discussions of the art market "its inflated prices and reputations, its damage to the public domain of culture." There is a superb essay on Bernard Berenson, and another on the strange, tangled case of the Mark Rothko estate. And as a finale, Hughes gives us "The SoHoiad," the mock-epic satire that so amused and annoyed the art world in the mid-1980s. A meteor of a book that enlightens, startles, stimulates and entertains.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This collection of magazine reviews and essays, first published in 1990, serves as a short course in the development of American and European art over the last few centuries. The eye is keen, the mind is thoroughly grounded in art history and tradition, and the writing is lucid and provocative. Hughes wrote the magazine pieces while working as the art critic for Time Magazine. They tend to be triggered by major exhibitions of modern artists or major retrospectives of dead ones. Hughes always starts from the work, and deals with the constricted space of the magazine format by isolating something essential about an artist: DeKooning's draftsmanship; Hopper's despair held in abeyance; Pissarro's decency; Pollock as aesthete instead of wild cowboy; the mismatch between Rothko's intellectual aims and artistic strategies. Sandwiched between whiskey ads and the pimping of NBC's new sitcom, Hughes' magazine reviews demonstrate an admirable ability to dissect major paintings and analyze artists without talking down to Time's mass audience. The longer essays first appeared in venues such as The New York Review of Books and The New Republic. In these pieces, Hughes lets his critical and rhetorical capabilities off the leash. The opening essay gives us Hughes' take on the 1980s New York art scene, which Hughes saw as a "low, dishonest decade," for several interrelated reasons. First, the art being produced did not serve or surpass the modernist tradition that preceded it; for Hughes, all serious art must grapple with what came before it, and figure out how to move beyond it. ("An artist's every action is judged by an unwearying tribunal of the dead.") Intelligent evaluation of the work produced by emerging artists became supplanted by hype.

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