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Seventy-nine Short Essays On Design



Synopsis

Seventy-nine Short Essays on Design brings together the best of designer Michael Bierut's critical writing serious or humorous, flattering or biting, but always on the mark. Bierut is widely considered the finest observer on design writing today. Covering topics as diverse as Twyla Tharp and ITC Garamond, Bierut's intelligent and accessible texts pull design culture into crisp focus. He touches on classics, like Massimo Vignelli and the cover of The Catcher in the Rye, as well as newcomers, like McSweeney's Quarterly Concern and color-coded terrorism alert levels. Along the way Nabakov's Pale Fire; Eero Saarinen; the paper clip; Celebration, Florida; the planet Saturn; the ClearRx pill bottle; and paper architecture all fall under his pen. His experience as a design practitioner informs his writing and gives it truth. In Seventy-nine Short Essays on Design, designers and nondesigners alike can share and revel in his insights.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

What an annoying, disappointing waste of money "Seventy-nine Short Essays on Design" by Michael Bierut turned out to be! Nearly all of the 79 essays are smug, self-congratulatory pap dressed up as profound insight. In their original context the essays would have been targeted at a specific readership and perhaps those readers liked this stuff and were used to it. But when published as a collection, specialist "occupational" essays like these reach far broader audiences who may find the material and style not to their taste - if not downright silly. Individually, the essays might be worth casually browsing if you have run out of soup can labels; but as a collection read

through as a normal book they reveal their shallow superficiality only too graphically. Frankly, after reading the first five essays I already felt cheated. Take the essay "How to Become Famous", for example. It is basically semi-humorous, insider nonsense that includes exhortations like "when in doubt, make it big. If still in doubt, make it red." OK, that's worth a knowing chuckle the first time you read it, but the humour palls after reading endless injunctions in the same vein. Here's another example of the pretentious claptrap sprinkled throughout the book: "our traditional conception of graphic design history reduces what is actually a complex and ever-shifting melange of incident and influence to a falsely organised canon of images." Some of the essays (eg essays 6, 7 and 11) are abbreviated book reviews; but book reviews used as a platform for the essayist to expound his own ideas. In fact, many of the essays seem to be more about their author, the pronoun "I" appears early and frequently, rather than about the subjects themselves.

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