



But Is It Art?: An Introduction to Art Theory

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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