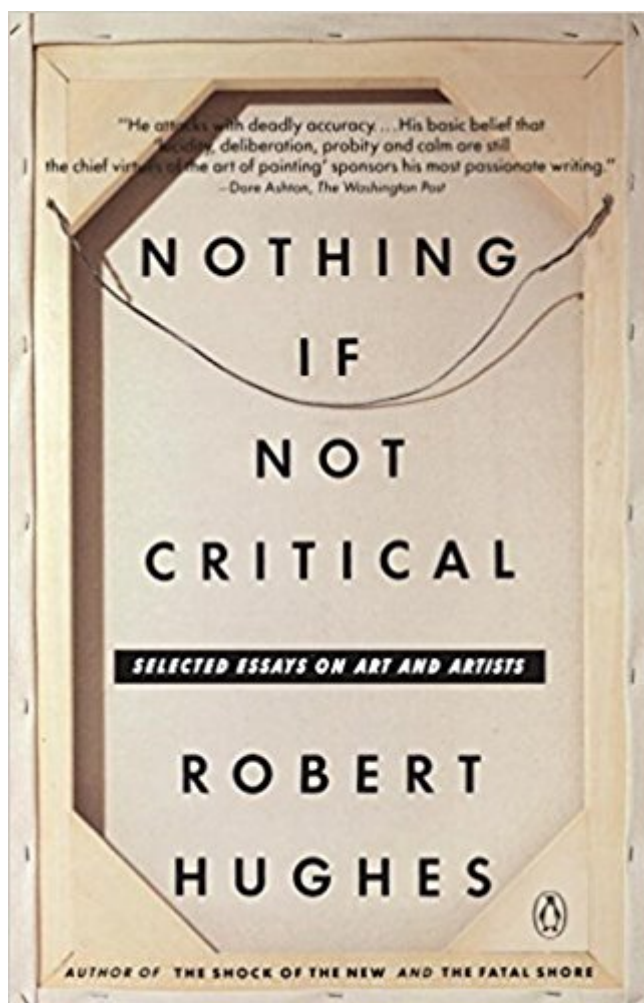


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# Nothing If Not Critical: Selected Essays On Art And Artists



## 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

Time's art critic assesses four centuries of Western art. Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc.

This collection brings together over 90 essays, many of which have already appeared in major journals. Hughes considers the Masters, 19th-century art and artists, the Modernist spirit, American and European painters, and contemporary artists in prose that is historically informative, understandable, witty, and often opinionated. Perhaps most interesting is Hughes's introduction, a recognition and partial analysis of New York City's decline as the center of the art world. This well-written, thought-provoking collection will appeal to most who find art and the art world important and entertaining. Previewed in Prepub Alert, LJ 4/1/90.- Jean Keleher, Wally Findlay Galleries, Chicago Copyright 1990 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

wide-ranging reviews, dated to the 80's but mostly of lasting quality. sometimes felt like I was going back to my SAT Verbal test, but it's always good to learn new words and he kept me on my toes - also a big reason I love Kindle, so easy to look these up. he sensitised me more to the presence of money in the art market, and his take on contemporary art representing "the Academy" rings so true with me. he's simply hard to beat in his extreme erudition, taste, and ability to bring out concepts and nuances of art.

I originally read this book when it first came out and--for obscure reasons--decided to re-read it recently. More than 30 years later, you cannot avoid the thought that Hughes has by far the best staying-power...not to mention a depth of intellect, knowledge, understanding-- of any of the critics of that era. Or any other. He had the mental chops not to be intimidated by art's pretensions and intimidations--a perfect anti-snob, as only an Australian can be. He is deeply missed.

You may disagree with Hughes (I bristled at his dismissal of Chagall as "kitschy") but you won't be

bored. In fact, his comments are brief, just a couple of pages, but offer novel insights. Example: His essay on Gauguin's search for the primitive-- ie: his transplant to Tahiti, in fact had its roots much earlier in his career during his years in Brittany. He is persuasive in tracing this particular connection. In addition, he does not spoon-feed the information, he demands some background knowledge, but then makes incisive comments that reward the effort of grasping his points. After stumbling on to the book in the library, I decided to buy it. A definite keeper.

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 unwearied tribunal of the dead.") Intelligent evaluation of the work produced by emerging artists became supplanted by hype. And it's easier to hype a work - and charge outrageous prices for it - if you unmoor it from any serious critical evaluation of what the work is actually achieving. He's right; it does seem like a very far way from Pollock and deKooning to Basquiat and Koons, and not necessarily progress. Some of the more memorable longer pieces include his take on Warhol's affectless self-promotion, and his dismantling of Baudrillard's bombastic drivel on the essence of America. There's an informative essay on art and money that shows how escalating art prices remove art from the public because museums can't afford to bid against private collectors for major pieces, and because the insurance costs on major works make comprehensive retrospectives fiendishly difficult to assemble. Denied

access to visceral experience of a sculpture or painting, aesthetic consensus is increasingly derived from reproduced rather than actual objects. This makes the art world more vulnerable to brilliant promoters like Warhol or clever packagers like Hirsch. As Hughes puts it, "the art world looks more like the fashion industry than itself. . ."There's a wonderful essay on Goya that traces the connection between Goya's artistic output and his life experiences. Goya's career was in essence a long grapple with one of our central conundrums: do the failings of humankind derive from bad laws and bad rulers, or is there something fundamentally flawed at the core of human nature? To which Goya, having made his way up through the realms of craft, ambition, political maneuvering, fame, liberal ideals, illness and dashed dreams, would have replied, and did reply, yes. Over two centuries later, we haven't moved past where he was, which is why Goya's work still retains its immediacy and power to move us. Hughes is an entertaining writer and a discerning critic. Some of his takes on the "contemporary" scene have been dated by events of the past three decades, but his grasp of the past is powerful and sure. His trained eye and sense of history help to ground an art world prone to drift skyward propelled only by its own hot air.

really the most respected and well informed art critic - sad he has passed but read this and revel in the glorious writing this man produces to enlighten us with the world of great artists

It's critical yet inspiring! Not every essay tells the truth but it makes you think from a new perspective.

Finally someone who can see through all the noise. His clear, extremely learned, sarcastic and humorous voice is just great to hear and read. He has little patience for the pretentious and the pompous. The best essays I have ever read on art.

Robert Hughes book is the most complete review of the painters world, from renaissance to contemporary art. It is excellent !

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