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The Painted Word



Synopsis

"America's nerviest journalist" (Newsweek) trains his satirical eye on Modern Art in this "masterpiece" (The Washington Post) Wolfe's style has never been more dazzling, his wit never more keen. He addresses the scope of Modern Art, from its founding days as Abstract Expressionism through its transformations to Pop, Op, Minimal, and Conceptual. The Painted Word is Tom Wolfe "at his most clever, amusing, and irreverent" (San Francisco Chronicle).

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Well, here we go - time to criticize a culture critic. Try saying that three times fast. Anyone who knows anything about Tom Wolfe will know exactly what to expect from this 1975 exploration of the 1950-1970 Art World. Considering that he's always on the lookout for something funny to say, he does quite a good job, probably because the Art World is apparently a pretty funny place. Then again, that's always true of any insular group that develops its own vocabulary and learns to take itself too seriously. According to Wolfe, that judgment applies equally to the artists, their critics, and the small world of collectors that support them both. He uses as an example the following cycle: Jackson Pollack and Willem de Kooning paint a few pictures using mere blobs of paint. At about the same time, Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg conclude in their columns that painting must naturally go in the direction of increased "flatness" to fulfill its destiny (and they do, in fact, write in such semi-apocalyptic terms). To illustrate their point, Greenberg and Rosenberg talk up Pollack and de Kooning. Art patrons in Milan, Rome, Paris and New York read the columns and get interested in Pollack and de Kooning. Thus encouraged, these artists paint even flatter paintings,

Greenberg and Rosenberg chat them up even more in their columns, the Art World gets more excited, and round and round we go until a guy named Leo Steinberg smashes into the cycle. He declares that they've got it all wrong, the true "flatness" exists in the Pop Art of Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, and the whole thing starts all over again. Only with even more feverish declarations of theoretical orthodoxy this time.

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