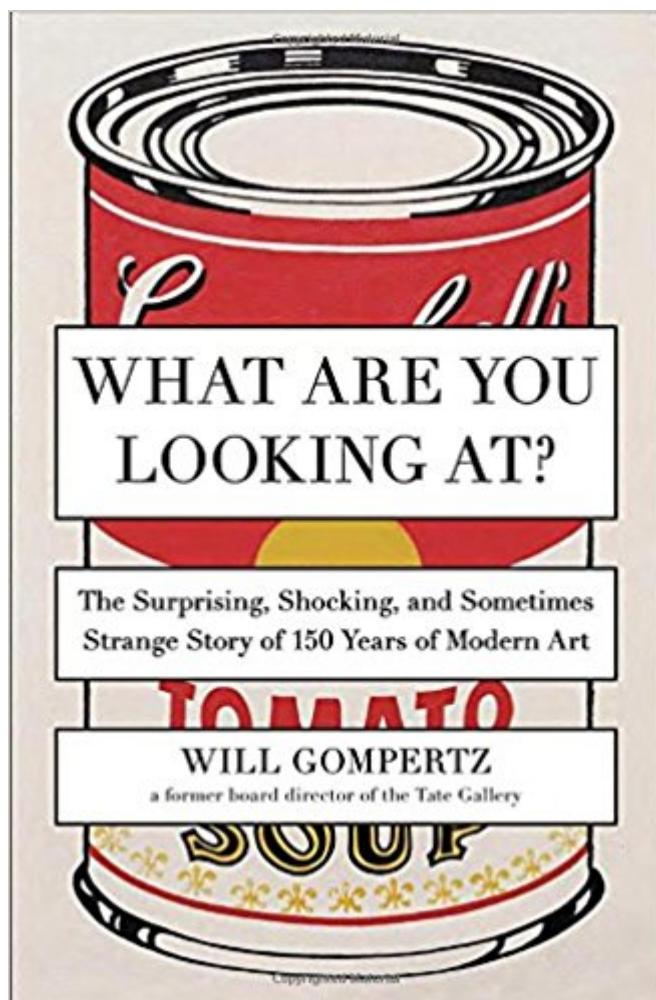


The book was found

What Are You Looking At?: The Surprising, Shocking, And Sometimes Strange Story Of 150 Years Of Modern Art



Synopsis

In the tradition of *Eats, Shoots & Leaves*, art history with a sense of humor

Every year, millions of museum and gallery visitors ponder the modern art on display and secretly ask themselves, "Is this art?" A former director at London's Tate Gallery and now the BBC arts editor, Will Gompertz made it his mission to bring modern art's exciting history alive for everyone, explaining why an unmade bed or a pickled shark can be art—and why a five-year-old couldn't really do it. Rich with extraordinary tales and anecdotes, *What Are You Looking At?* entertains as it arms readers with the knowledge to truly understand and enjoy what it is they're looking at.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review Gompertz succeeds in his stated mission to take a "personal, informative, anecdotal, and accessible" approach to defining the full spectrum of modern art movements, beginning with impressionism, by portraying the instigating artists and explaining what they were up to and why. A former director of the Tate in London, and currently the arts editor at the BBC, Gompertz is adept at elucidating complex aesthetic ideas and artistic techniques and linking revolutionary art movements to social upheaval (war, communism, the Holocaust) and scientific and technological developments (quantum physics, television, the atom bomb). He revels in the creative, multidisciplinary synergy surrounding such key figures as Monet, Picasso, de Kooning, and Warhol. And he daringly takes a novelist's approach to such foundational acts as Duchamp's purchase of a urinal in New York City in 1917 to create a "readymade" sculpture that embodied the pivotal realization that if an artist says

something is a work of art, it is. Gompertz adeptly divides each broad movement into its intriguing subgroups and includes many more artists, critics, and dealers than the usual suspects. His dissections of performance and conceptual art are uniquely clarifying, and he even coins a keenly apt term for such current provocateurs as Damien Hirst and Jeff Koons: the "entrepreneurialists." • A deeply enlightening and buoyant history of modern art and beyond. --Donna Seaman --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Gompertz has an uncanny knack for making difficult art (and ideas) easy. A lively, witty account of the major moments and movements of the past 150 years. • Associated Press "An insightful love letter to modern art and an irreverent rejection of the notion that its pleasures are reserved for a chosen few." Each [chapter] hums with engaging history and entertaining anecdotes, cheeky asides and accessible, illuminating criticism. • NPR "Gompertz is determined to dispel the layman's fear of the modern art world and those who inhabit it." *What Are You Looking At?*, which comes out this week, does a very good job of this. • replacing isolating esotericism with witty and chatty commentary. • Interview "A deeply enlightening and buoyant history of modern art and beyond." • Booklist (starred review) "[A] highly lucid, lively, and buoyantly composed history" while his tone is breezy and conversational, [Gompertz] astutely and often wittily describes the core of every movement and its key artists. • Publishers Weekly

When Gompertz lets his personality show and the anecdotes flow, his prose and this book floats and flies; when he pauses at times for drier academic asides (or to simply fill in a historical gap where he has little interest or passion), it slows. As a whole, this book is a terrific and informative survey of the history of (Western) modern art, albeit with some extremely well-written sections especially at the bookends (Impressionism and the last two decades) and some that are unclear, rushed or dragged out (Dadaism, Fauvism). One shortcoming in this one (and frankly most work): almost no representation by non Western artists (except for political showman Ai Weiwei of course...)

I used this to explain much of modern art history to my ten year old before a trip to MOMA. This was extremely helpful, especially when used with *Understanding Modern Art (An Usborne Introduction)* by Cook, J. (Cook's book was excellent, and a good place to start) and *What Are You Looking At?*:

The Surprising, Shocking, and Sometimes Strange Story of 150 Years of Modern Art by Gompertz and ...isms: Understanding Modern Art ... by Sam Phillips. These three books can be very helpful and made our trip to MOMA very successful and enjoyable.

Gompertz is a knowledgeable and entertaining writer. WAYLA offers a very coherent explanation of the puzzle of modern art --why works with very little technical virtuosity would be so well regarded, including why collectors and museums would pay such absurd prices. I learned a lot from this book. It introduced me to some art and some artists that I really enjoy. It confirmed some of my cynical presumptions about the art business but it also opened my mind.

I really enjoyed this book; it was informative without being pretentious, as many art history books can be. The author very clearly charts the evolution of modern art from Impressionism forward, in everyday terms and language that everyone can understand (no boring Artspeak). It was fun, amusing and really kept my interest. I would highly recommend it to anyone with an interest in art.

Excellent fun read now adopted by Docents Meadows Museum

A tutorial on modern art by a British expert, written in a breezy, conversational style. I think that the author, Will Gompertz, does a nice job of informing the reader of the various courses the stream of art in Europe and America have taken over the flow of the last 150 years, especially to and through Minimalism. The last few chapters were more of a struggle for me as the ever enthusiastic Mr. Gompertz runs through a few of the highly publicized artists of recent years, attempting to convince the reader that their works (for example, those of Damien Hirst, Tracey Emin, and Jeff Koons) are worth the immense media attention and the millions showered on them by a few wealthy collectors. I remain unconvinced. As I am of his choice of the clunky word "Entrepreneurialism" to describe the hodgepodge created by Mr. Gompertz' selection of artists from the last few decades.

As a high school art teacher, this was such a fun read. I've always enjoyed reading the back stories of the contemporary art world, and this book didn't disappoint. Made lots of highlights to share with my students. If you are interested in understanding how today's art became such a mad collection, this is for you. I am going to highly recommend this for my AP Studio Art students. (I will need a disclaimer though for high school age. A few topics and sections might be considered "too adult" by some.)

This is a must for anyone interested in art. I am so glad I bought it as it will be something I shall utilize over and over. I've recommended it to many people.

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