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New Book Debunks “Contemporary Art” and the “Experts” Who Defend It

The gurus of contemporary culture hold that virtually anything can qualify as art—from an all-black painting to a pickled shark. Many art lovers reject such “art.” The just-released title *Who Says That’s Art? argues that those ordinary people are right and the presumed experts are mistaken.*

NEW YORK, NY, November 14, 2014 -- Today’s critics and curators accept virtually anything as “art”—from an all-black or all-white painting to a dead shark in a tank of formaldehyde. *Who Says That’s Art? A Commonsense View of the Visual Arts* (Pro Arte Books, ISBN 978-0-9906057-0-6) challenges that open-ended view. The book’s author, independent scholar and critic Michelle Marder Kamhi, argues that ordinary people who reject such “art” are absolutely right and the alleged experts are profoundly mistaken.

Kirkus Reviews calls *Who Says That’s Art?* “forceful and persuasive”---“impressive” in its scholarship, yet “accessible” for non-specialists. *Midwest Book Review* notes that “Kamhi’s scrutiny is unerring. . . . providing non-specialists with a scholarly yet accessible account that not only explains how to distinguish genuine art but also promises to enhance its appreciation.”

Kamhi argues that “pseudo artists” dominate today’s artworld with twentieth-century inventions such as *installation art* and *conceptual art*—which the public largely detests—while talented painters and sculptors who are creating genuine art that the public would appreciate are ignored by the cultural establishment. How did this come about? What false ideas about the nature of art and artists have led to it? And what can be done to reverse the situation? These are among the questions she deals with in *Who Says That’s Art?* Drawing on evidence ranging from anthropology to recent findings of neuroscience, she offers a vigorous yet readily understandable defense of the public’s commonsense view of art.

Who Says That’s Art? systematically debunks the myths that rule today’s artworld. “The most absurd and destructive of these myths,” Kamhi says, “is the nearly godlike status granted to Marcel Duchamp [1887–1968]. The artworld claims that his ‘readymades’ decisively altered our understanding of the nature of art, thereby legitimizing such inventions as ‘installation art’ and ‘conceptual art.’”

The “readymade” most frequently cited as altering the course of art history was entitled *Fountain*. According to Duchamp’s biographers, the piece was an ordinary urinal that he purchased from a plumbing supply showroom, signed “R. Mutt 1917,” and submitted for inclusion in an unjuried exhibition being planned by a group of artists he belonged to. When

fellow members suspected a prank, they refused to exhibit it, and Duchamp resigned from the group in mock protest.

“That mere prank,” says Kamhi, “has been absurdly inflated into an event of momentous significance in the postmodernist artworld—which reveres Duchamp as its hero-king. My book aims, in part, to serve as the intellectual wrecking ball to topple him from his ill-deserved throne.”

Another artworld myth challenged by Kamhi in *Who Says That's Art?* is the idea that “abstract art” was a breakthrough in the history of art. Unlike the vast majority of critics, she argues that the abstract movement—beginning with early modernists such as Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944) and Piet Mondrian (1872–1944)—was sadly misguided and ultimately failed, because it rendered art unintelligible.

Throughout *Who Says That's Art?* Kamhi contrasts praiseworthy works of painting, sculpture, and graphic art with the “pseudo art” dominating the contemporary artworld. She also shows how the realms of art education, journalism, collecting, and museum trusteeship have contributed, directly or indirectly, to the promotion of pseudo art in today’s culture. The book concludes with suggestions on what can be done to restore sanity to today’s artworld.

The relevance of *Who Says That's Art?* extends well beyond the United States, because the false assumptions that drive the American artworld are largely shared abroad.

As observed by John Nutt, a painter and art educator in the U.K.,

“If like most people you are confused by the extremes of ‘contemporary art,’ this book is a must read. Kamhi applies a lifetime of experience to the task of clarifying the murky realm of artworld theory. Concisely addressing and clarifying all the main issues, she shows why much contemporary work shouldn’t qualify as art at all. In addition, she provides a sound basis for appreciating real art, both new and old.”

Who Says That's Art? is widely available in a fully indexed quality-paperback edition, as well as in formats for all e-book readers.

To request a review copy of *Who Says That's Art?* write to Pro Arte Books <pab@mmkamhi.com>, indicating the publication in which your review will appear. To schedule an interview with the author, write to her at <mmk@mmkamhi.com> or phone 917-816-4556.

About the Author:



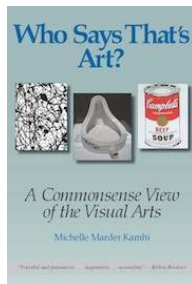
Michelle Marder Kamhi is an independent scholar and critic. Since 1992 she has co-edited the arts journal *Aristos*. She also co-authored *What Art Is: The Esthetic Theory of Ayn Rand* (Open Court, 2000)—praised by the American Library Association’s *Choice* magazine for its “well-documented . . . debunking of twentieth-century art . . . and art theory,” and lauded by the eminent cultural historian Jacques Barzun for its “breadth and depth.”

A graduate of Barnard College, Kamhi earned an M. A. in Art History

at Hunter College of the City University of New York. Prior to her association with *Aristos* (which began in 1984), she had been an editor at Columbia University Press, where she worked on titles in its distinguished Records of Civilization series—and was active as a freelance writer and editor for many years.

Kamhi is a member of the American Society for Aesthetics, the National Art Education Association, and the National Association of Scholars. Articles by her have appeared in the *Wall Street Journal*, *Arts Education Policy Review*, *Art Education*, and the *Journal of Ayn Rand Studies*, among other publications.

About the Book in Brief:



Today's artworld experts accept virtually anything as art. But many art lovers roundly reject the “cutting-edge” inventions that fill museums and galleries of “contemporary art” worldwide.

Who Says That's Art? explains why their view is right and the would-be experts are wrong. Drawing on evidence ranging from anthropology to recent findings of neuroscience, it offers a vigorous yet readily understandable defense of the public's commonsense view of art. It also provides fresh insight into genuine art across the wide spectrum of art history.

In addition, the author shows how the realms of art education, journalism, criticism, collecting, and museum trusteeship have all contributed, directly or indirectly, to the promotion of pseudo art in today's culture. Moreover, she suggests steps that can be taken to reverse this lamentable trend.

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