



How to See: Looking, Talking, and Thinking about Art

David Salle

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How does art *work*? How does it move us, inform us, challenge us? Internationally renowned painter David Salle's incisive essay collection illuminates the work of many of the most influential artists of the twentieth century. Engaging with a wide range of Salle's friends and contemporaries—from painters to conceptual artists such as Jeff Koons, John Baldessari, Roy Lichtenstein, and Alex Katz, among others—*How to See* explores not only the multilayered personalities of the artists themselves but also the distinctive character of their oeuvres.

Salle writes with humor and verve, replacing the jargon of art theory with precise and evocative descriptions that help the reader develop a personal and intuitive engagement with art. The result: a master class on how to see with an artist's eye.

How to See: Looking, Talking, and Thinking about Art Details

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From Reader Review How to See: Looking, Talking, and Thinking about Art for online ebook

Kathleen says

This book is apparently a collection of Salle's essays and critiques on modern art. If you are not familiar with modern art and the artists that he has chosen to critique, it can be rather mind-numbing. The book needs more pictures along with the essays to fully understand his points. I found myself having to search the internet to view paintings he mentioned many times. So it felt more like a research project than an easy, enjoyable read. Also the book isn't really organized so well, I thought, probably because some of his essays don't fit well with others.

When I finished this book, I thought "meh". But a few weeks later, as I write these comments, I must admit that I have thought about his observations and insights. I'm looking forward to seeing the Picabia exhibit at the MOMA, and I'll probably reread that chapter before going.

Ric Dragon says

Great book of essays. Many underlinings.

Tomas Ramanauskas says

Salle is here to free us from the dictatum of curators, art researchers and critics and he will provide us with a crucial soothing piece of advise on observing art. It goes:

"Forget what you think you know about historical movements or generational tendencies or meanings - generalizations of any sort. Ask only: What does this work make me feel? And, What do I find myself thinking about?"

Liberating, isn't it? This is no cure, of course, but an instigation to look wider, to be guided by feelings rather than descriptors in a white rectangle underneath the art work, to be proud of not knowing, to trust your sentence.

"How to see" is a well written stroll in the imaginary museum of an artist searching for the ways to explain what moves him personally and finding some answers even for us, the uneducated admirers.

Bernie Michalik says

It assumes you know something of modern art but it's worth reading with your computer nearby to look up references. You'll learn so much about modern art by the time you are done.

Kåre says

Skøn bog af en af de bedste kunstnere. Jeg har levet med bogen igennem 14 dage, hvor jeg har læst og kigget på reproduktioner på nettet af de nævnte kunstnere.

Salle skriver levende om kunst og kunstnere, som han interesserer sig for. Han er en generøs kritiker, som stort set ikke skriver om uinteressant kunst, men kun om kunst, han begejstres af eller som han næsten begejstres af.

Ved ikke, om hans tilgang til at skrive om kunst adskiller sig så meget for kunsthistorikere. Der er vel ikke så meget historisk kontekst og mere process og direkte kiggen på værkerne.

Dejligt at læse en kunstner, som ikke er ond på andre kunstnere, men som hovedsagligt er imponeret og glad for andre kunstneres præstationer.

Deanna-marie says

perhaps a 3.5, as with a book of past essays and lectures, some are stronger than others. stand outside for me were essays on polke and schultz (interesting reading since my first exposure to her was the controversy of her emitt till painting) and acconci. I also love Alex Katz so to read about his work from the perspective of a friend was a treat for me

M. says

I won this book in a contest and I LOVED it. Easy to read. Highly recommended, especially if you love art and don't know why!

Lisa says

I picked up this book to learn more about line, form, light, and color to analyze artwork. I don't care for commentary and straight opinion. But this collection of reviews offers little information about interpreting art. The few author descriptions of the art include depicting color and line but the book has no color plates to help understand what he means. After a while, searching online to find images wasn't worth the effort. The reviews are out of context and not very useful without the works, which is especially a problem with the performing arts. His primary purpose seems to name drop. The author has no reason to refer to Roy and Andy except to make himself an insider and that distracts from the essay. He doesn't teach the reader how to see at all.

Anonymous says

This book is not very good.... and is not about "How to See." It's mostly a compilations of articles that David Salle wrote for various publications which has been crammed into some kind of structure about "How to Give Form an Idea" "Being An Artist" "Art in the World" and "Pedagogy and Polemics." The articles in the book hardly address these themes or "Looking, Talking, and Thinking about Art." This book is mostly David

Salle telling us various things, mostly just describing works of art and he hardly shows us anything, certainly not showing us "how to see" as the title suggests.

This book might be a good intro for people who want an Art 101 of names and artists to know about, but aside from that the book was rather bland to me, written like how art is presented on NPR. I appreciate that it's not snobby and academic but overall it's rather flat, unenergetic, and delivers no revelations either. The train of his thought is very flimsy, whimsical, and almost random; and it usually goes nowhere. A chapter might start off with an interesting premise, and then doesn't even go on to discuss that topic. He probably imagines it does, illustrated by the artists he chooses to discuss but the connections are vague. (Example: "Painting is one of the few things in life for which youth holds no advantage." This could be a very intriguing topic - what it means to age as an artist, but he abandons the topic in about four sentences to talk about two specific older artists, and the work they made as an "older" person - but he talks about the way they depict edges in their paintings, hardly going into "Old Guys Painting" - as the chapter is called).

Almost every chapter reads the same - Salle describes art and how it looks, similar to reading a music review of an album. This never interested me - why do I need to hear someone describe what a song sounds like? I can just go hear the music. His descriptions are quite plain and about what the work contains, and makes a lot of well rounded, educated comparisons, but it's all rather safe and simple. Each chapter also is an opportunity for him to drop an anecdote about how he knew that artist (and of course, his acquaintance qualifies him even more to write about the subject). He repeats himself endlessly about themes that are very basic "inside energy" of a painting -- I don't know... I didn't get anything out of reading this. His personal "taste" seems entirely based on knowing all of the things he is "supposed" to know as an artist and producer/consumer of culture, rather than that of passionate interest. Thus my interest and excitement was hardly stirred at all.

This book should have just been called "David Salle: Collected Writings" and be directed towards people who like art and maybe make it but lack a basic foundation of knowing about many artists. Otherwise - this book will not teach you about "How to See" or provide any insight or depth into how to make artwork. Maybe it could show you how to write about art in an "earnest" way -- but please! Don't mimic his writing style. It doesn't achieve much.

Jessica Baran says

Surprisingly unlikeable.

Claude Lingen says

Salle's book is an erudite personal consideration of Post Conceptual Art painting and is rather disdainful of Conceptual Art. He considers intention (intentionality) overrated. "When I hear an artist utter the words "This work is about..." it makes my heart sink".

(Pg. 255-256). In addition, he does not agree with much of contemporary Installation Art or Presentation Art.

If you are a painter this book will bolster many of your ideas, if you work in contemporary multi media, conceptual oriented fields, you will not find any consolation. Nevertheless, it will give you an insight into what's on the minds of many painters today.

Carolyn Halliday says

Disappointing to me. It was no more illuminating about one critic's experience with an art work than any other review of an artist's work. Overall it had interesting information and comments but the title is very misleading. It did not inform how to see, look, talk, or think about art. It shares the author's opinions about the artists whose work he discusses. Salle had a personal relationship with many of the artists which adds personal intrigue. It covers a narrow selection of highly successful (mostly) men.

Sophie Fields says

There were about 3-4 essays I truly enjoyed and found helpful to read as an artist. Otherwise I'd skip this book or make sure to skim for best content. It's not a cover to cover book. Blah

Anna C says

What the book advertises itself as: A user-friendly guide to aesthetics. An instruction manual for non-artists or amateur artists on how to actually *look* at a painting and grasp what it's doing. Prose that is, to quote the back of the book, full of "humor and verve," free of "the jargon of art theory."

What the book actually is: A collection of overwrought essays on modern artists from 30 years ago that Salle knows personally and is good buddies with. Over-written, florid prose. Inaccessible to anyone who isn't already intimately familiar with the trends of modern art, especially the New York School. And a particular gripe: long, detailed descriptions of paintings you don't actually get to see. There are a few low-quality black and white reproductions at the start of every chapter, but you'll spend half your time on this book just Googling all of Salle's references and name drops.

There were some interesting bits I did highlight and copy down for later. And I also really appreciated Salle's critique of intentionality. However, all the bits I enjoyed were in the introduction and conclusion. The essays themselves didn't do anything for me, and all my margin notes are talking back to Salle about how out of touch and elitist his commentary sounds.

Read it next to your computer.

Or just read the introduction in the bookstore.

Or better yet, don't read it at all.

Stacey says

Aw, what to say, what to say...

Correct me if I'm wrong but, as I understood it, this was supposed to be a book to help non-artists SEE art, and feel part of the country club. As a painter I can tell you there is no way this book will change anything for people who don't already know the art of the past five or six decades. In fact, once you get past some very intelligent and spot-on comments (which, though I should have known better, is how I got lured in but which is by no means an indicator of what awaits), you'll see it's just more us-and-THEM for non-artists and more Those-Guys-Again?! for the rest of us.

David Salle got very famous making lame but sincere paintings. In *How to See* (or 2. to 1. How 3. See) he goes into great detail about his number one art hero (Sigmar Polke... sweet baby Jesus...) and he speaks lovingly about the work of all his close personal friends - most of whom are/were equally lame and famous or maybe just a tad overrated but not totally sucky (Katz being the one notable exception... Don't know about Armitage but it really is time to move on, isn't it?). When, of all the brilliant films Salle chose to discuss, he picked (oh God, here it comes) *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*, directed by former king daddy of the Art mag cover boys (and presumed art legend), Julien Schnabel (not lame but definitely WAY overrated), you know everything you're reading is biased by personal friendships. If none of these people were pals who would have been left out? Who else might have been included?

I never liked Salle's work (I HATE Polke) and don't care for most of the artists he's serving up here but... Salle always comes off as such a nice guy I really WANT to like what he does. But I can't. Moreover, I was really surprised by the attachment to the old clique (STILL so insecure? After all these years?). Maybe there are readers who know Salle's work who will get something out of this. SOMEONE likes his stuff. But it's not a book for anyone who knows nothing about art or for anyone who isn't impressed. I really tried but just couldn't. DNF, sorry.
