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Why Is That Art?: Aesthetics and Criticism of Contemporary Art

Terry Barrett

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Why Is That Art? addresses common questions that viewers raise about contemporary art: Why is *that* art? Why is it in an *art museum*? *Who says* it's art? If *I* did this, would it be art? Why is it *good*? Covering a broad, diverse, and engaging sampling of works--abstract and representational painting, monumental sculpture, performance art, video installations, films, and photographs--author Terry Barrett responds to these questions using three sources: the artists who created the works, philosophers of art, and art critics. Introducing students to a variety of established theories of art, he presents the traditional sets of criteria of Realism, Expressionism, and Formalism, which are in turn updated by recent sources of Poststructuralism. Barrett applies each of these theories to challenging works of contemporary art, pointing out the strengths and weaknesses of each mode of interpretation. He encourages students to consider many criteria when evaluating an artwork, to critically examine judgments made by others, and to make informed judgments of their own.
Ideal for courses in aesthetics, art theory, art criticism, and the philosophy of art, *Why Is That Art*? is organized chronologically according to the history of aesthetics. It features sixty-seven illustrations (twenty-six in a full-color insert), discusses a wide range of American and European artists, and includes an exceptional overview of postmodern pluralism. This unique book will provide students with a newfound appreciation for contemporary art, scholarship, and reasoned argumentation, giving them the confidence to join the fascinating discourse on contemporary art.

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