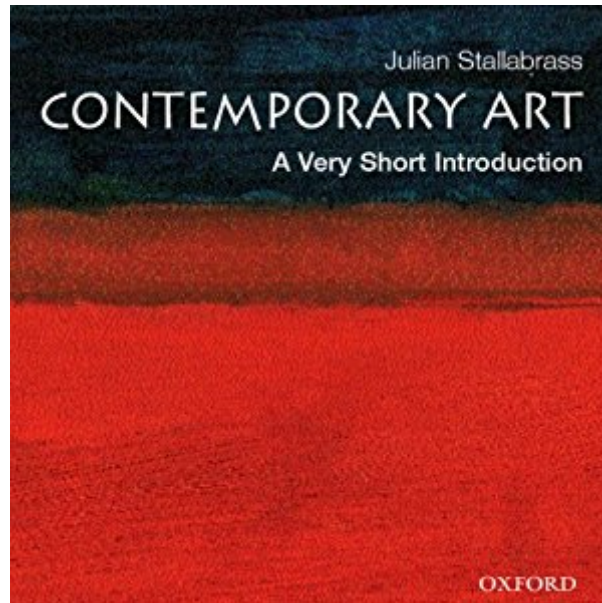


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# Contemporary Art: A Very Short Introduction



## Synopsis

Contemporary art has never been so popular - but what is 'contemporary' about contemporary art? What is its role today, and who is controlling its future? Bloody toy soldiers, gilded shopping carts, and embroidered tents. Contemporary art is supposed to be a realm of freedom where artists shock, break taboos, flout generally received ideas, and switch between confronting viewers with works of great emotional profundity and jaw-dropping triviality. But away from shock tactics in the gallery, there are many unanswered questions. Who is really running the art world? What effect has America's growing political and cultural dominance had on art? Julian Stallabrass takes us inside the international art world to answer these and other controversial questions, and to argue that behind contemporary art's variety and apparent unpredictability lies a grim uniformity. Its mysteries are all too easily explained, its depths much shallower than they seem. Contemporary art seeks to bamboozle its viewers while being the willing slave of business and government. This audiobook is your antidote and will change the way you see contemporary art. ABOUT THE SERIES: The Very Short Introductions series from Oxford University Press contains hundreds of titles in almost every subject area. These audiobooks are the perfect way to get ahead in a new subject quickly. Our expert authors combine facts, analysis, perspective, new ideas, and enthusiasm to make interesting and challenging topics highly listenable.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Strictly speaking this small text did not offer a very short introduction to contemporary art. What this

small text does offer is - some - introduction to contemporary art - and - Julian Stallabrass' view on the economic and political nature of contemporary art, the necessary "evils" of its relationship to fashion and money, and current trends in the art world. The blurb on the inside cover of the text is more accurate: "What is contemporary about contemporary art? What effect do politics and big business have on art? And who really runs the art world? ...an exploration of the global art scene". This is a well written and referenced work with biting but not bitter insights that struck this reader as more of a polemic investigation rather than an investigation into the nature of contemporary art. Once that agenda is understood, the reader is drawn to gaze through Stallabrass' intense eyeglass into the art world system as it stands presently, with contemporary art examined almost as a by-product of that system. The art biennale scene discussed in chapter two "New world order" benefits from the strongest scrutiny and offered this reader an observation that only one who tracks this global art scene could offer. This chapter highlights the idealistic desire to widen cultural horizons and the uncomfortable hypocrisy that can arise from that. "What I have sketched out here is the idea that the much-trumpeted diversity of the globalized art world may conceal other, newer uniformities." (p49) Stallabrass discusses contemporary art and makes some key observations about how artists address consumerism, mass production, and commodification in chapter three "Consuming culture".

Reading this book reminded me of a comment by C.S. Lewis, I believe, in "The Abolition of Man"--something to the effect of "What would you think if you sent your son to the dentist, and he came back with his cavities unfilled but his head stuffed full of the dentist's obiter dicta on the Baconian theory and bimetallism?" It reminds me, as well, of an article I read some years ago about a college professor of American literature who was supposed to be teaching a course in Hawthorne and Melville but filled it so full of the professor's own views on Marxism that the students eventually referred to the course as "Ho-thorne and Mao-ville." They would certainly recognize the same tendency in the present work. This book is, quite simply, mistitled. It is most certainly *\*not\** a very short introduction to contemporary art. An introduction to contemporary art would have covered the following topics: 1. What is meant by the phrase "contemporary art"? Does it mean simply all art produced in the last 10 years, or does it have a specific meaning, as "modern art" does? 2. What are some typical themes (e.g., sexuality, alienation, the cruelty of war), motifs, and forms (e.g., photography, sculpture, "found art," performance, etc.) of contemporary art? 3. Who are the major artists working in contemporary art? What are their similarities and differences? 4. Who are the major writers on contemporary art, whether journalists, academics, or others? What are their areas

of agreement or disagreement?5. How has contemporary art been received by society at large, and what influence, if any, does contemporary art seem to wield in society?6.

FIRST, THE BAD NEWS This book is a bit of a Marxist polemic on the cultural effects of capitalism. Now that's all well and good, as the corporatization of the universe is surely a dull thing, to be resisted by all. But why does Stallabrass have to take out his frustration on the reader? Chunks of the book read like typical post-modern analysis, with paragraph after paragraph prompting me to write WTF in the margins. Here's an example, taken out of context of course, but that should give you a sense of what I'm talking about..."Another way of ensuring that the distinction remains clear is to turn the gaze inward, as within a mirrored box, so that reflections assume an unwarranted significance, and artist's moves tend to be seen in relation to those of other artists, and rarely within the context of the outer world. Recursive games are played with predecessor's work, as with material drawn from mass culture" Now you might think you are smart than me, and can easily grasp the meaning. If so, then god bless your brain. As for me, even after having typed this directly from the text, I remain stunned at how obscure the writing is. And I love poetry, and can recite dozens of complex poems from memory, and can ferret out meanings and connections and allusions in the written word. I've always been good at that. But for some reason, I can't perform these mental gymnastics with this kind of writing. I suppose it's because he purports to describe complex, abstracted subject matter, but by employing what I consider typical post-modern style, and which I further consider to be totally inappropriate for communicating abstract ideas. I'm sure that those of you who do much reading in contemporary art and culture know exactly what I'm talking about...

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