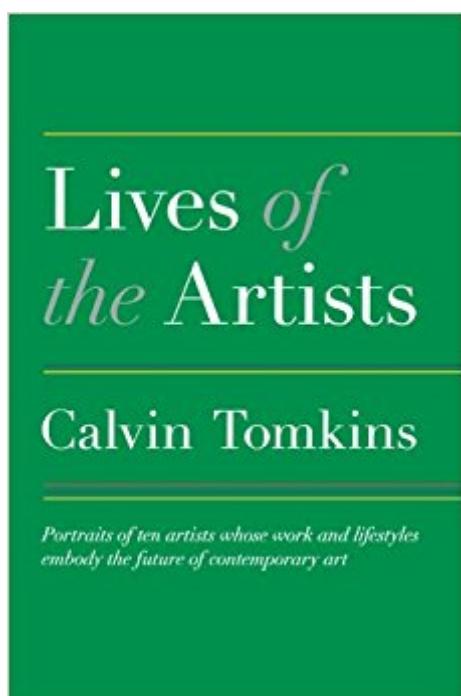


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# Lives Of The Artists: Portraits Of Ten Artists Whose Work And Lifestyles Embody The Future Of Contemporary Art



## Synopsis

"Brilliantly illuminating . . . This latter-day Vasari puts his dry wit and keen eye to work in fashioning enduring portraits of ten contemporary-art stars, tracing the fruits of creative genius back to their strange roots." •Vogue For more than four decades Calvin Tomkins's incisive profiles in *The New Yorker* have given readers the most satisfying reports on contemporary art and artists available in any language. In *Lives of the Artists* ten major artists are captured in Tomkins's cool and ironic style to record the new directions art is taking during these days of limitless freedom. With the decline of formal technique and rigorous training, art has become, among other things, an approach to living. As Tomkins says, "the lives of contemporary artists are today so integral to what they make that the two cannot be considered in isolation." Among the artists profiled are Jeff Koons and Damien Hirst, the reigning heirs of deliberately outrageous art; Matthew Barney of the pregenital obsessions; Cindy Sherman, who manages multiple transformations as she disappears into her own work; and Julian Schnabel, who has forged a second career as an award-winning film director. Whatever the choice, the making of art remains among the most demanding jobs on earth.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. In these biographical essays on 10 of the most interesting contemporary artists, Tomkins's access is astonishing, as when he dines with Jasper Johns and his wife in their Caribbean home in St. Martin, watches John Currin paint or receives revealing gifts from Maurizio Cattelan (he loves giving odd presents to his friends.... His gifts to my wife include a large

three-dimensional display ad for Oscar Mayer franks...). A deft biographer, Tomkins (Duchamp) gives a lesson in his craft: how to balance present with past, the specific with the general, personality with context, features with flawsâ "all in the space of 20 pages. Tomkins is a ruthless observer. On Cindy Sherman watching a slasher movie, he writes: She slides down in her seat like a teenager, knees pulled up, and giggles at the gory parts and the in jokes.... He is also a generous critic of the cult of artistic personality, so that Julian Schnabel's ego appears charming and Richard Serra's notorious anger seems a measure of his dedication to his work. Books that trade on content that originally appeared in the *New Yorker* have become a small industry, but not all are as intimate as this one. (Nov.) Copyright Â© Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Tomkins, author of an outstanding biography of Duchamp, assembles a guide to the age of anything-is-art out ofÂ 10 of his incandescent *New Yorker* profiles. Reveling in the long tradition of parsing artistsâ " lives launched in 1550 with Giorgio Vasariâ "s *Lives of the Most Eminent Artists, Painters, and Sculptors of Italy*, Tomkins has chosen his â œeminentâ • artists wisely. The earliest essay is his 1999 piece on the perpetually controversialÂ Damien Hirst, which is undiminished by the intervening years and briskly updated, as are each of the other equally memorable portraits, including the 2008 piece onÂ John Currin and his evocative uniting of Old Master techniques and twenty-first-century oddities. Tomkins is equally intrigued with the many faces of Cindy Sherman, painter Julian Schnabelâ "s metamorphosis into a Cannes-anointed film director,Â Richard Serraâ "s flintiness, the confounding contrast between Matthew Barneyâ "sÂ oh-goshness and the baroque bizarre ness of his films, and James Turrellâ "s austere and ambitious desert quest. With inquiries into Jasper Johns, Jeff Koons, and Maurizio Cattelan rounding out this smartÂ book, Tomkins covers the art spectrum withÂ panache. --Donna Seaman --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I am a general reader and a general lover of the visual arts, who often finds contemporary conceptual art difficult to keep up with. I turn to books like *Lives of the Artists* in an attempt to keep current and for interesting conversation. *Lives of the Artists*, with its emphasis on the artists' lives rather than art genres and trends makes it more interesting conversation than edification, but that's okay. Tomkins, art critic for *The New Yorker*, had years of articles from which to choose, and he chose biography as his organizing theme, a la Giorgio Vasari, of the movers and shakers in the contemporary international art world. His selection skews to the most controversial, provocative

and/or innovative: Jasper Johns, Maurizio Cattelan, Cindy Sherman, Damien Hirst, Jeff Koons, James Turrell, Julian Schnabel, John Currin, Richard Serra and Matthew Barney. Tomkins does a good job of introducing the artist in a current scene, before cutting to the back story to scribe the arc of career, inspiration and critical reaction. This mostly works, though the first profile in the collection, of Damien Hirst, had the ring of a VH1 "Behind the Music" rock star story. Tomkins provides updates on each career, current as of 2008 when this book was prepared. Alas, there are no illustrations, no images of the subjects' work or of them. One thing I could not help but notice about the collection: though the author notes in his preface that there are thousands of working artists living and producing in New York City alone, and he had years of his own profiles to select from, he chose a line-up that is starkly white, and with the exception of Cindy Sherman, male. Women mostly appear as bit players in these stories, as girlfriends, wives, muses, studio assistants and, in a couple of instances, "porno" subjects. Is this representative of the world of art right now? It feels more like the night before the women's and civil rights movements injected a more inclusive diversity into our cultural reflection.

I love this book. A great look at wildly different artists who have made their mark in Western culture and, thanks to Calvin Tomkins, in me. Interesting, intimate, personal but never fawning or self-conscious. One really big complaint though...not the writing but eBook technology: why is "performance" always spelled "per for mance?" Many other words were consistently mangled. Several sections were marred by this kind sloppy formatting that I seriously doubt was seen in the "analog" version. I think I deserve my money back. I'm sure if I submitted a manuscript with these kind of errors to , I'd be laughed out of a contract. Fix it!

Capsule reviews of the lives and works ten important artists. No pics, which a critic quoted on the back cover claims to be an advantage. Yeah, yeah -- none of those distracting images! With the internet that's not a big disadvantage, but it's certainly more distracting to get up and google than to turn the page. Written in a breezy, well-informed style which I generally like -- I've read a number of Tomkins' books -- but several non sequiturs slipped by his editor. I occasionally got the feeling that the text had been dictated, with minimal revisions. But lots of good facts and impressions, from an author who has spent, in some cases, decades getting to know his subjects.

I love this writer. He has a bit of everything, intelligent, but not pretentious. Insightful and just enough juice. He has a sense of the times and ART. I LOVED Living Well is the Best Revenge, How

can you not love that Title. I use it all the time to get through difficult times. This is a tremendous read, RICH and extremely resourceful. The subjects are all intelligent, successful human beings, a great study and the work is brilliantly portrayed, VIVID. Tompkins is an extremely visual writer. Brilliant. This is also an important piece of work for the Arts. Its a testament to the times of the artwork and the lives of the artists. Great Work.

Tompkins gets to know the artists, he visits their homes and studios, he parties with them and meets their significant others. He is not judgemental. He doesn't offer his opinions and for the duration of his essays I felt as if I had a window into the thought process and lives of the artists. This book is well worth reading if one is interested in art, especially contemporary art, and want to know about the artists who create it. It is readable, well written and fun.

Great profiles of contemporary artists by the New York writer Calvin Tompkins. By combining biography, personal interviews and insights into the craft of each artist, Tompkins leaves the reader feeling as if she had been there as well. Like their work or not, Tompkins helps you to understand it.

Something of a back stage view of many of the hero's of this days art and no doubt the sight to today given to future generations. Excellent.

I can never get enough of Calvin Tompkins insightful unpretentious journeys into the art world. So please give me more.

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