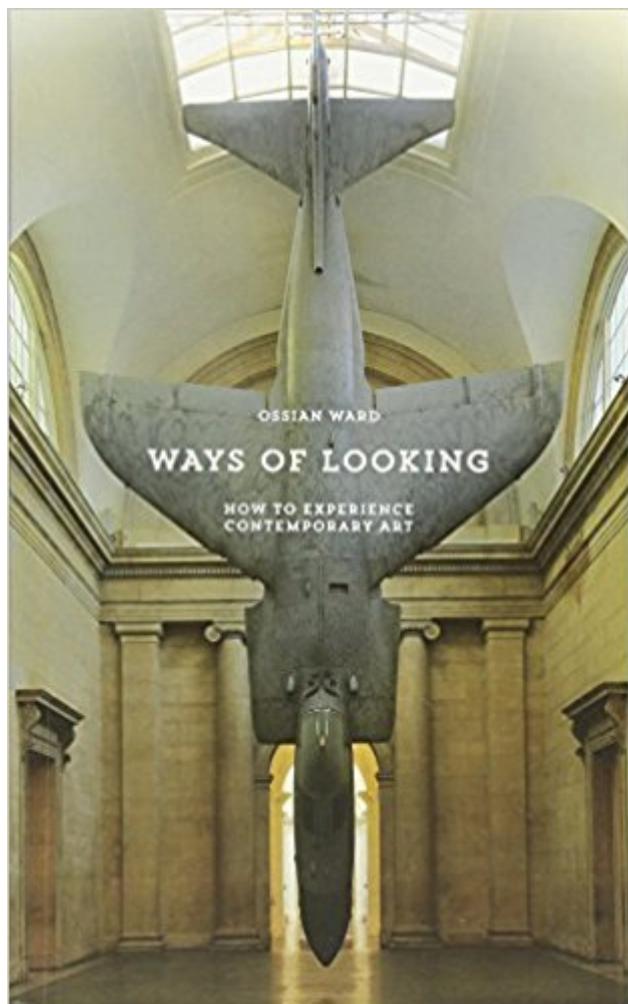


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# Ways Of Looking: How To Experience Contemporary Art



## Synopsis

Art has changed. Today's works of art may have no obvious focal point. Traditional artistic media no longer do what we expect of them. The styles and movements that characterized art production prior to the twenty-first century no longer exist. This book provides a straightforward guide to understanding contemporary art based on the concept of the *tabula rasa* — a clean slate and a fresh mind. Ossian Ward presents a six-step program that gives readers new ways of looking at some of the most challenging art being produced today. Since artists increasingly work across traditional media and genres, Ward has developed an alternative classification system for contemporary practice such as 'Art as Entertainment', 'Art as Confrontation', 'Art as Joke' -- categories that help to make sense of otherwise obscure-seeming works. There are also 20 'Spotlight' features which guide readers through encounters with key works. Ultimately, the message is that any encounter with a challenging work of contemporary art need not be intimidating or alienating but rather a dramatic, sensually rewarding, and thought-provoking experience.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"An instruction manual for the modern aesthete" - *Wallpaper\** "This great little book provides signposts for a journey rich in colour and imagination" - *World of Interiors* "The perfect contemporary gallery companion - clever, practical and (thankfully) free of loaded art-world terminology" - *Vogue*

Ossian Ward is Head of Content at the Lisson Gallery. He was chief art critic and visual arts editor at *Time Out London* and previously served as editor at *Art Review*, and *V&A Magazine*. The author

of many magazine and newspaper articles, he has also written catalogue essays on numerous contemporary artists.

Concise and easy to read without being condescending or oversimplified, this is the best introduction to looking at contemporary art I've come across in years and I'll be using it as a required text in teaching my college-level art history classes. Ward's "TABULA" method for approaching unfamiliar works of art actually works for all genres and periods (whether contemporary or not), and is helpful even for audiences who are already comfortable with looking at and talking about art. The book itself is profusely illustrated and beautifully designed throughout and at considerably less than the cost of an adult admission to MoMA, an excellent value for the price.

This is a great book. It refreshingly states what is out front, "Ways of looking..." It doesn't do what most art books do: imply a solution. Ward doesn't attempt to co-opt the field and provide definitive formulas for "How to ... Art ...". He simply presents works and explains how he sees them and then justifies his claim, but he frequently reminds the reader that this is only one way of seeing the works. He no doubt favors his approach, which he presents enthusiastically and playfully, but he stops short of arrogance. Refreshing in a field filled with such dogmatic pedantry. This is a fun one to read.

Easy read. Clear. Down to earth. I teach high school art and was a fine art major in college. I know lots about pre-1990s art. This was an excellent introduction to what makes contemporary art tick. Excellent explanation of specific artists and their work. Talks about how the art makes one feel, its place in the world, what the artist is communicating, etc. Divided into categories that help sort it all out. I highly recommend this book.

Helpful for me when looking at very contemporary artwork. Provides a useful framework for approaching challenging pieces.

Kind of predictable,

good condition!

Ossian Ward's sumptuously illustrated book is definitely not one to squander on an eReading experience - go wood book, you will not regret itWard, who was Time Out London's Art Critic is absolutely passionate about Contemporary Art, and is keen, clear and generous in sharing his passion and knowledge in ways that help the interested but possibly intimidated and don't know where to start layperson. Starting with the idea of approaching each artwork as a *tabula rasa*, from the viewer's perspective, he suggest 6 ways of coming into relationship with a piece - taking Time; staying with the Associations which arise (which of course can only happen if you give a piece time); looking at the Background the artist comes from - country, culture, influences; coming to Understand the message, intention of the piece; Look again; and finally, at this point, Assess. I really like the way Ward's writing helps the viewer into a kind of relationship with a piece of art, and into self-as-well-as-artwork reflection. Having set out his suggested protocols, he then breaks down Contemporary Art into seven major categories, and walks the reader through several examples of each type, and often includes a couple of pieces of work by each artist, in order to underscore a back-story and background for that artist. He finishes each chapter by taking a couple of works within the category as an example under the spotlight of close scrutiny. The chapters/categories are, Art as : Entertainment; Confrontation; Event (Performance Art); Message; Joke ; Spectacle; MeditationSomething 'clicked' for me in the description of one particular work in the Event section, and the photograph illustrating it. Marina Abramovich is a Serbian performance artist, many of whose works have involved her publicly harming and mutilating herself in some way, or allowing and also offering the audience the choice to approach her in whatever way they wanted to relate to her. Yes, her Background, and her country's history of course gives a certain context - are we shocked, yes, did we become immured and deadened to the complex violence showing on our TV screens from that region, yes. In a retrospective of her 40 year career at New York's MOMA, she staged a piece which ran for 3 months, where daily, for 7 hours, she sat, without moving, in a chair facing a table, with an empty chair the other side of her. Event visitors were free/invited to take the chair opposite her. Other observers watched the two watching each other. The photo shows Abramovich in a long red robe, like some high priestess. She sits erect, as though hewn from stone. The deep flowing red gown - red for passion, blood, potency - but whose blood - is Abramovich the one who sheds the blood, or is she the one who is wounded. Inevitably the table and the chairs' positioning, and the seated pair (an audience member has taken the chair) this looks like some sort of confessional - but, again, who is (silently) confessing, who is hearing, what is being heard. The intense, neutral presence of Abramovich becomes like a therapist holding a space which allows the other to bring themselves into presence - and, by all accounts there have been some extreme reactions from

those who 'took the other chair'. That particular image has had powerful resonances for me, and it feels as if working slowly through Ward's lavishly illustrated text is making me see, look, in a changed way. Which after all is what art, ancient and modern, seeks to do! recommend this most strongly. Particularly considering the price of this wonderful book - Ward is practically giving it away, crammed as it is with such a visual feast! I was lucky enough to receive this from Vine UK as a copy for review.

This review applies to any book that assumes it can explain how to experience art. Art is often intentionally sublime, intangible, & complex. The author is claiming to know the artist's intention of the viewer's perception. Which is why I'd rather the book be called, "My Ways of Looking...." There aren't rules for how to experience art, since it is highly subjective. Do we have books called "How to Listen to Music," or "How to Watch a Movie?" These are things that you just experience. Trust your own judgement on the work, do not refer to someone else's experience or you may cheat yourself out of your own. Art is the one thing in the world that can truly be anything. The beauty of this is that art movements are fluid & continually challenged, broken down, rejected, lauded, destroyed and reborn. Applying grossly simplified categories to artworks detract from the spirit in which it was made. The danger is missing the point. A naive reaction to art is natural, just as valid & important as the most seasoned collector's. The implication that art is something so exclusionary that only the intelligentsia can understand it is a classicist notion. -One that says that you must perceive it in their way to be "correct." Clean slate? All your knowledge, thoughts, feelings, & memories are not unwanted impediments to the experience. You may pretend to unknow or unfeel things in an attempt to be a blank screen. But it will be an attempt to turn an honest subjective experience into an apathetic objective one.

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