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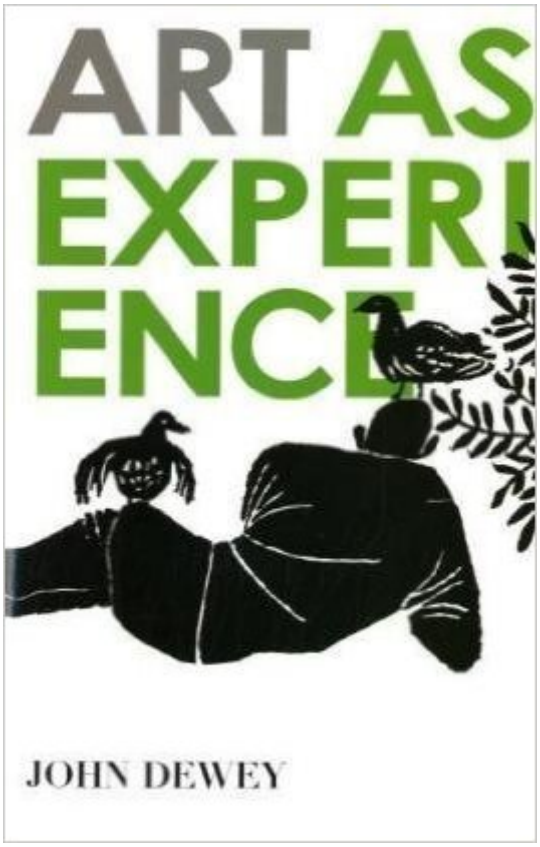
Art As Experience



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Synopsis

Based on John Dewey’s lectures on esthetics, delivered as the first William James Lecturer at Harvard in 1932, Art as Experience has grown to be considered internationally as the most distinguished work ever written by an American on the formal structure and characteristic effects of all the arts: architecture, sculpture, painting, music, and literature.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

John Dewey was an American philosopher of the late 19th and 20th century best known for his espousal of a "pragmatic" philosophy and progressive political ideas, but he also wrote about Art. Art as Experience is not a book per se, but rather a rewriting of a series of lectures he gave on the "philosophy of art" at Harvard in 1931. Dewey’s pragmatic philosophy emphasizing social relations between humans was hugely influential in social sciences like sociology, where he clearly inspired writers like Erving Goffman and anthropology (see Roy Rappaport) His influence has been less notable in the field of aesthetics and art theory, and that’s a shame, because in my mind, Art as Experience is the best book about the role of Art in human experience ever written. Art as Experience starts from the observation that there can be no Art without an Audience- the two are intertwined because humans are social creatures and none of us exist in isolation. This statement about the nature of Art stands in direct contradiction to the two main schools of art philosophy: Classicism, which holds that Beauty is an objective truth that exists outside the experience of any single person and Romanticism, which postulates that the Artist stands alone in the world, without reference to his human environment. Much of the argument of Art as Experience takes the form of

the language philosophy strategy of being extremely precise about the terms being used. This gives the actual text of Art as Experience a tedious feel, even as the ideas expressed dance and sparkle with the light of discovery. Dewey works his way through defining, having an experience, the act of expression, the expressive object, substance and form, etc. I won't lie- it's dry. Boring even.

Are there times in your life that are dull and dreary, a mechanical, mindless shuffling from one tedious task to another? According to American philosopher John Dewey (1859-1952), such moments in anybodyâ ™s life lack aesthetic quality. He writes in Art and Experience, â œThe enemies of the aesthetic are neither the practical nor the intellectual. They are the humdrum; slackness of loose ends; submission to convention in practice and intellectual procedure.â • We may ask, by Deweyâ ™s reckoning, what will be needed to have an aesthetic experience? And when will an aesthetic experience be deemed artistic? As a way of answering these questions, we can take a look at the following example:A woman is sitting on a bench in a city park. She listens to the children playing on a nearby playground, she feels the sun on her skin, she watches attentively as people walk to and fro. She feels connected to everyone and everything; life has such fullness and she will remember this afternoon in the park for a long time. Then, after about an hour of this very rich experience, she takes out his flute and starts playing. Since she is a world-class flutist, her wonderful music attracts a number of people who stand around and listen to her play. After playing several pieces, she nods her head and puts away her flute. The small crowd applauds and walks off.Dewey would say the womanâ ™s first experience of sitting in silence, fully present and awake to the richness of what life offers, has a certain completeness and aesthetic quality. Her second experience of playing the flute and sharing her music is an extension and intensification of the first experience.

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