

THE
END *of* ART

In *The End of Art* Donald Kuspit argues that art is over because it has lost its aesthetic import. Art has been replaced by “postart,” a term invented by Alan Kaprow, as a new visual category that elevates the banal over the enigmatic, the scatological over the sacred, cleverness over creativity. Tracing the demise of aesthetic experience to the works and theory of Marcel Duchamp and Barnett Newman, Kuspit argues that devaluation is inseparable from the entropic character of modern art, and that anti-aesthetic postmodern art is its final state. In contrast to modern art, which expressed the universal human unconscious, postmodern art degenerates into an expression of narrow ideological interests. In reaction to the emptiness and stagnancy of postart, Kuspit signals the aesthetic and human future that lies with the New Old Masters. A sweeping and incisive overview of the development of art throughout the twentieth century, *The End of Art* points the way to the future for the visual arts.

Donald Kuspit is one of America’s most distinguished art critics. Winner of the prestigious Frank Jewett Mather Award for Distinction in Art Criticism, given by the College Art Association, he is a Contributing Editor to *Artforum*, *Sculpture*, *New Art Examiner*, and *Tema Celeste* magazines, as well as Editor of *Art Criticism*. Professor of Art History and Philosophy at the State University of New York, Stony Brook, he also holds honorary degrees from Davidson College, the San Francisco Institute of Arts, and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and he has been the A. D. White Professor-at-Large at Cornell University. Dr. Kuspit has received fellowships from the Ford Foundation, Fulbright Commission, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Guggenheim Foundation. He is the author and editor of hundreds of articles and books, most recently *The Rebirth of Painting in the Late 20th Century* and *Psychostrategies of Avant-Garde Art*.

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DONALD KUSPIT

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As always, in intellectual gratitude to Beatrice Rehl.



1. Damien Hirst, *Home Sweet Home*, executed 1996. Porcelain, 8.3 inches round. Private collection. Courtesy of Mark Borghi Fine Art Inc.

The unprecedented proliferation of art, the ease with which formerly esoteric or repellent art-forms are accepted, the fascinating conjunction of popular and commercial art with what used to be called advanced art – these circumstances do not support the old belief that art fosters a personal autonomy.

Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*¹

Whoever produces kitsch . . . is not to be evaluated by aesthetic measures but is ethically depraved; he is a criminal who wills radical evil.

Hermann Broch, “Evil in the Value System of Art”²

Some of the same people who profess to be repelled by the monotonous rows of identical human dwellings in so-called subdivisions, seem to admire rows of identical boxes in art galleries.

Rudolf Amheim, *Entropy and Art*³

An installation that the popular and pricey British artist Damien Hirst assembled in the window of a Mayfair gallery on Tuesday was dismantled and discarded the same night by a cleaning man who said he thought it was garbage.

The work – a collection of half-full coffee cups, ashtrays with cigarette butts, empty beer bottles, a paint-smearred palette, an easel, a ladder, paintbrushes, candy wrappers and newspaper pages strewn about the floor – was the centerpiece of an exhibition of limited-edition art that the Eyestorm Gallery showed off at a V.I.P. preopening party. . . .

Mr. Hirst, 35, the best known member of a generation of conceptual artists known as the Young British Artists, had put it together and signed off on it, and Heidi Reitmaier, head of special projects for

the gallery, put its sales value at “six figures” or hundreds of thousands of dollars. “It’s an original Damien Hirst,” she explained.

... The cleaning man, Emmanuel Asare, 54, told *The Evening Standard*: “As soon as I clapped eyes on it, I sighed because there was so much mess. It didn’t look much like art to me. So I cleared it all in bin bags, and I dumped it.”

... Far from being upset by the mix-up, Mr. Hirst greeted the news as “hysterically funny,” Ms. Reitmaier said. . . . “since his art is all about the relationship between art and the everyday, he laughed harder than anyone else.”

Warren Hoge, “Art Imitates Life, Perhaps Too Closely”⁴

How many of us would seriously place Rauschenberg besides Rembrandt, Cage besides Bach? Stepping into a museum or a concert hall we enter an aesthetic church, a sublime and rather chilly necropolis, stretching back across time, where Leonardo and Van Gogh, Palestrina and Beethoven join frozen hands. Part of this attitude is an often almost religious reverence and respect, but also a certain indifference. We sense that what truly matters lies elsewhere. What needs preserving does so precisely because it has lost its place in our world and must therefore be given a special place – often at great expense.

Karsten Harries, “Hegel on the Future of Art”⁵

I don’t believe in cinema as a means of expression. It could be, later perhaps; but, like photography, it doesn’t go much further than a mechanical way of making something. It can’t compete with art. If art continues to exist. . . .

Marcel Duchamp, “I Live the Life of a Waiter”⁶

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2 (LEFT). Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn, *Self-Portrait*, 1658. Oil on canvas, 129 × 101 cm. The Frick Collection, New York. 3 (RIGHT). Robert Rauschenberg, *Bed*, 1955. Combine painting: oil and pencil on pillow, quilt and sheet on wood supports, 6'3 $\frac{3}{4}$ " × 31 $\frac{1}{2}$ " × 8". Gift of Leo Castelli in honor of Alfred H. Barr, Jr. The Museum of Modern Art. VAGA, NY.