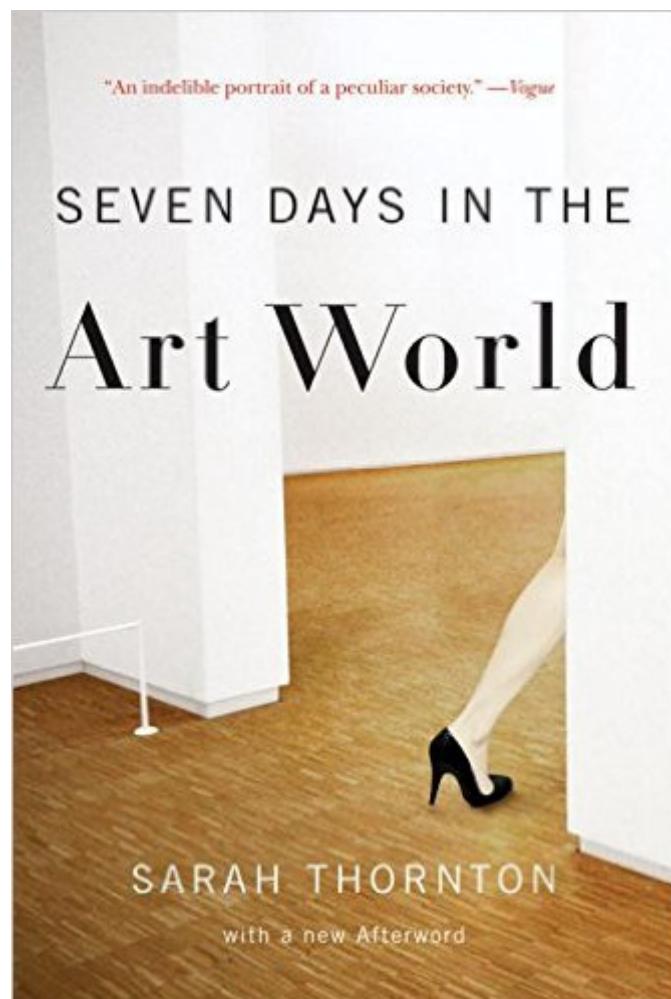


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Seven Days In The Art World



Synopsis

Named one of the best art books of 2008 by The New York Times and The Sunday Times [London]: "An indelible portrait of a peculiar society." •Vogue Sarah Thornton's vivid ethnography •an international hit, now available in fifteen translations •reveals the inner workings of the sophisticated subcultures that make up the contemporary art world. In a series of day-in-the-life narratives set in New York, Los Angeles, London, Basel, Venice, and Tokyo, "Seven Days in the Art World" explores the dynamics of creativity, taste, status, money, and the search for meaning in life. 8 illustrations

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I asked two people about this book before reading it. A woman who worked at Sotheby's said it amounts to gossipy beach reading for a future gallery intern. The other, who is an arts journalist herself, said it was great. It certainly offers a snapshot overview of key practices within the art world. However, the author lacks any sense of analytical distance that could offer true insight, this coupled with a tinge of self-absorption that lets the reader know just how "in" she actually is, when that doesn't really need to be a subject. (For example, she refers to Robert Storr, previous director of the Museum of Modern Art, as "Rob" Storr" and then waxes poetic about how much she enjoyed swimming in an exclusive pool at a 5 star hotel in Venice.) The book concludes with her explanation of "ethnography" and her chosen research methods, which seems to lend academic authority to the work, yet remains unconvincing. The book is basically a thrilling tale of the lives of precious elites who are extremely interesting and beyond the reach of plebs like you (but not her). However, as a

practicing artist in NYC, I found aspects of the book that treated the artist's side of art world disappointing. For example, I've been through and conducted many an academic critique. Thornton's treatment of the art critique hardly deals with the art at all or what was said about it, and simply narrates in detail the mood of the room, how people shuffle about, etc. I guess the crit she visited was simply that boring, but I've been in many when people breakdown, some cry, some argue, get nasty and go into hysterics. Her crit was dull. Another chapter, the most disappointing, was the "the studio visit.

This is, hands-down, the single best guide for outsiders to the inner life of the art world, from the fledgling artists hoping to make their mark to the affluent collectors and the dealers, curators and advisors who surround them. Her structure is carefully chosen and works beautifully -- breaking the art world down into seven parts, each devoted to a specific group or dimension (the auction, the studio visit, the art fair, etc.), she sheds light on the characters and issues that arise in the context of each. There is enough overlap to make this structure function -- for instance, we encounter gallerists Jeff Poe and Tim Blum first at ArtBasel, then rejoin them as part of her chapter on visiting Takashi Murakami's studio(s), where Poe and Blum discuss an upcoming retrospective with the artist and museum curators. To me, the most intriguing and enlightening part of this structure was the way it shifted, from one chapter to the next, from a view of the art from the outside (the perspective of the collector or the critic, say) to the inside (the creative process itself.) So, a chapter about the "crit" process at CalArts is followed immediately by one about the vast artworld schmoozefest that is ArtBasel (with the NetJets booth and the omnipresent champagne). Thornton has an eye for that kind of telling detail that only the best journalists possess and a knack for knowing (most of the time) how to use it best. For instance, in the studio visit chapter, she spots the passports of Blum and Poe are crammed full of visas and entry and exit stamps -- not just a random observation but one that reflects the global nature of the art market itself, which requires its participants to dash from visiting a collector in Russia to an art fair in London and on to visit a studio in Beijing.

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