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The Cultural Promise of the Aesthetic (Bloomsbury Studies in Philosophy)

By Monique Roelofs



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Aesthetic desire and distaste prime everyday life in surprising ways. *The Cultural Promise of the Aesthetic* casts much-needed light on the complex mix of meanings our aesthetic activities weave into cultural existence.

Anchoring aesthetic experience in our relationships with persons, places, and things, Monique Roelofs explores aesthetic life as a multimodal, socially embedded, corporeal endeavor. Highlighting notions of relationality, address, and promising, this compelling study shows these concepts at work in visions of beauty, ugliness, detail, nation, ignorance, and cultural boundary. Unexpected aesthetic pleasures and pains crop up in sites where passion, perception, rationality, and imagination go together but also are in conflict. Bonds between aesthetics and politics are forged and reforged.

Cross-disciplinary in outlook, and engaging the work of theorists and artists ranging from David Hume to Theodor W. Adorno, Frantz Fanon, Clarice Lispector, and Barbara Johnson, *The Cultural Promise of the Aesthetic* lays open the interpretive web that gives aesthetic agency its vast reach.



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- Sales Rank: #2507195 in Books
- Brand: Bloomsbury Academic
- Published on: 2015-05-21
- Released on: 2015-05-21
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.28" h x .85" w x 6.21" l, .99 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 288 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

“Monique Roelofs's *The Cultural Promise of the Aesthetic* is important because it analyzes the concepts of "address" (as a widespread social phenomenon and a carrier of meaning) and "aesthetic relationality" (relations with people mediate relations with things, and relations with things mediate relations with people) and the connection between them (i.e., modes of address constitute the muscle and joints of aesthetic relationality) in ways that restore the "promise" of aesthetics as a promise of culture. These concepts are vital in aesthetics but also in contemporary feminism, race theory, political theory, and other areas of cultural critique intersecting with aesthetics. Often these intersections are mostly negative and aesthetics has often been left out of the picture. But if we reconceive aesthetics as Roelofs proposes, we will recognize that it is needed for cultural critique and for culture itself – hence the promise of aesthetics. Using a variety of examples from (mostly) contemporary art, Roelofs makes these points clearly and develops the key concepts of address, relationality, and promise in inspired ways.” ?Michael Kelly, Professor of Philosophy, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, USA and Editor-in-Chief of the *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics* (2nd ed. forthcoming 2014)

About the Author

Monique Roelofs is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Hampshire College, USA.

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