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Sex, Art, and American Culture: Essays

By Camille Paglia



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A collection of twenty of Paglia's out-spoken essays on contemporary issues in America's ongoing cultural debate such as Anita Hill, Robert Mapplethorpe, the beauty myth, and the decline of education in America.



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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Provocative cultural critic Paglia (*Sexual Personae*) here offers 21 previously published essays and interviews that celebrate pop culture while trashing feminism and academic theory. Her paeans to Madonna, tributes to Elizabeth Taylor and Marlon Brando, and discussions of rock music and bodybuilding include attacks on the prudery of old guard establishment feminists, while her reviews of scholarly works on cross-dressing and gay history trumpet Paglia's contention that today's intellectuals refuse to acknowledge the dark, immutable powers of sexual drive. Reverence for these powers led Paglia to take her controversial stand, fully documented here, against sympathy for victims of date rape. Paglia lacks the subtlety and decorum of the very scholars--from Freud and Jung to Leslie Fiedler--whom she claims as her forerunners; she instead resembles the rock stars whom she so venerates, stripped of their capacity for self-mockery. Yet for all their faults, her essays engage with an ambitious range of art and ideas, her invocation of primal sexuality adding a missing element to critical debates. While she should be taken with a truckful of road salt, Paglia should not be ignored. Author tour.

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From Library Journal

Paglia (humanities, Univ. of the Arts), the controversial author of *Sexual Personae* (Yale Univ. Pr., 1990), here offers 12 recent essays on popular culture, sexuality, feminism, and educational reform. All but three of these impassioned diatribes were previously published, including her brazen attack on humanities education ("Junk Bonds and Corporate Raiders"), the Newsweek article in which she dismisses the phenomenon of date rape, and her New York Times essay on Madonna as a feminist. Paglia's vehemence and fearless expression of unpopular opinions are refreshing yet often maddening, as when she lapses into unsupported generalizations (battered women stay with their husbands "because the sex is very hot"), absurd enthusiasms (she "worships" television), or self-aggrandizing egotism ("before feminism was, Paglia was!"). Furthermore, the new material is repetitive ("The MIT Lecture") or disappointing ("East and West," a choppy set of Paglia's course notes). Paglia is never boring, however, and cannot fail to challenge and ignite readers. Recommended for informed readers.

- *Ellen Finnie Duranceau, MIT Lib.*

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From the Inside Flap

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