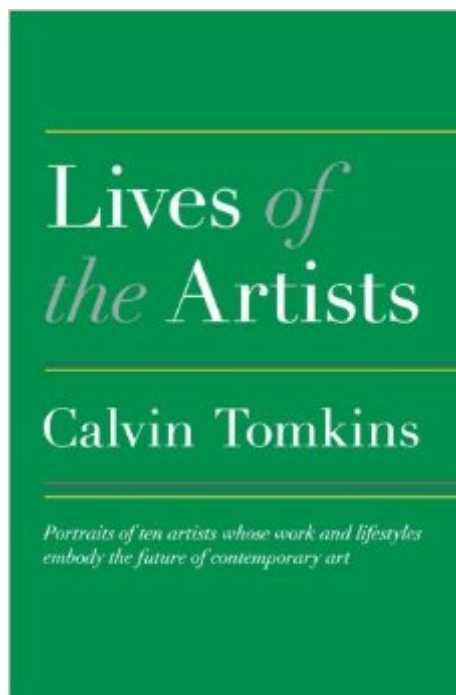


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Lives Of The Artists: Portraits Of Ten Artists Whose Work And Lifestyles Embody The Future Of Contemporary Art



Synopsis

"Brilliantly illuminating . . . This latter-day Vasari puts his dry wit and keen eye to work in fashioning enduring portraits of ten contemporary-art stars, tracing the fruits of creative genius back to their strange roots."—Vogue

For more than four decades Calvin Tomkins's incisive profiles in *The New Yorker* have given readers the most satisfying reports on contemporary art and artists available in any language. In *Lives of the Artists* ten major artists are captured in Tomkins's cool and ironic style to record the new directions art is taking during these days of limitless freedom. With the decline of formal technique and rigorous training, art has become, among other things, an approach to living. As Tomkins says, "the lives of contemporary artists are today so integral to what they make that the two cannot be considered in isolation." Among the artists profiled are Jeff Koons and Damien Hirst, the reigning heirs of deliberately outrageous art; Matthew Barney of the pregenital obsessions; Cindy Sherman, who manages multiple transformations as she disappears into her own work; and Julian Schnabel, who has forged a second career as an award-winning film director. Whatever the choice, the making of art remains among the most demanding jobs on earth.

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Customer Reviews

It's hard to understand a lot of the contemporary art in museums and galleries. You can't just look at it and say "I like it", instead you have to learn about the concept behind it. You have to read the "owner's manual" to really get at what the art is about. The hard part is finding explanations about the art that make sense. Much of what is written is pretentious and painful to read. I've given up

trying to read "artist statements". The solution is to find the people who know how to write about art; people like Peter Schjeldahl, David Hickey and Calvin Tomkins. For my birthday this year I was given Calvin Tomkins's new book "Lives of the Artists" and I highly recommend it. He writes: "Formalist art critics used to say that the life of the artist was irrelevant to an understanding of his or her work. This may be so for certain critics, but ever since 1550, when Giorgio Vasari published the first edition of his "Lives of the Most Eminent Architects, Painters, and Sculptors of Italy" (the title I shamefully swipe here), biography has informed our understanding of art. In my experience, the lives of contemporary artists are so integral to what they make that the two cannot be considered in isolation." Each chapter in the book is devoted to a major living artist: Damien Hirst, Cindy Sherman, Julian Schnabel, Richard Serra, James Turrell, Matthew Barney, Maurizio Cattelan, Jasper Johns, Jeff Koons, John Currin. To get the flavor of his writing, consider the opening paragraph: "Making art is both harder and easier than it used to be. The radical changes in art and society that were set in motion during the early years of the twentieth century gave rise to a new kind of artist, whose first obligation was to invent or discover a new self. Tradition, skill, rigorous training, formal knowledge: All the old requirements fall away or become optional. Art, it seemed, could be whatever artists decided it was, and there were no restrictions on the new methods and materials - from video to verbal constructs to raw nature and urban detritus - that they could use. The limitless freedom of the modern artist has been an unending burden. If art can be anything, where do you begin?" Calvin Tomkins wrote another book that I liked even better: Duchamp: A Biography. Duchamp is central to the birth of much of what is contemporary art today.

I loved this book! I actually thought it was going to be short biographies of Old Master artists, so I was surprised to find essays about the contemporary art world. The artists portrayed here are all modern (and living) conceptual and/or abstract artists. The current "hot" artists like Damien Hirst are here, as well as the older members of the modern art movement, like Jasper Johns. I don't follow the modern art scene that closely, so this was all refreshing and new for me. I was familiar with some of the names in the book, but not with all of the artwork described. Tomkins clearly loves art and appreciates artists, and is able to write in a clear, lucid manner about the artworks themselves. None of that crazy "artspeak" jargon that I've read in some of the modern art magazines. He followed the artists around to get his material, and clearly spent quite a bit of time with all of them. After reading each chapter, I felt compelled to look for art by those particular artists, and he really piqued my interest in them. I had heard of and seen artwork by a couple of the artists in the book, but hadn't been impressed by it previously, but the way that Tomkins explains the art and lets the

artist explain the motives behind their work, it made me want to look at the art again with a new perspective. If you are unfamiliar with the modern art world or are interested in learning about contemporary art, this book would be a perfect introduction to a few of the top names out there today. It's in-depth and beautifully written.

I love this writer. He has a bit of everything, intelligent, but not pretentious. Insightful and just enough juice. He has a sense of the times and ART. I LOVED Living Well is the Best Revenge, How can you not love that Title. I use it all the time to get through difficult times. This is a tremendous read, RICH and extremely resourceful. The subjects are all intelligent, successful human beings, a great study and the work is brilliantly portrayed, VIVID. Tomkins is an extremely visual writer. Brilliant. This is also an important piece of work for the Arts. It's a testament to the times of the artwork and the lives of the artists. Great Work.

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