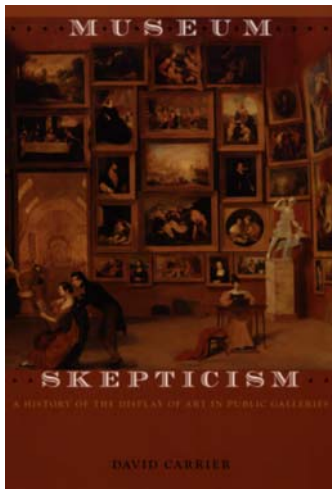


Museum Skepticism: A History of the Display of Art in Public Galleries / David Carrier.—Durham, NC: Duke University Press, June 2006.--328 p.: ill.--ISBN 0-8233-3694-4 (pa., alk. paper): \$22.95 (pa.).



David Carrier, professor at Case Western Reserve University and the Cleveland Institute of Art, was trained as a philosopher and art historian, but the clarity of exposition that one associates with philosophers has often been absent from his writings (e.g., *Principles of Art History Writing* [University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991]; "Art History" in *Critical Terms for Art History* edited by Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff [Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003]). His research, lecturing, and publishing interests have ranged widely, including Baudelaire's art criticism, Poussin's paintings, and the aesthetics of comics, as well as the work of contemporary artists, such as Kaneda, Poons, Rabinowitch, Scully, and Stokes.

For the last twenty years, Carrier has been asking himself not only what the art museum is and has been, but also what it might become, for he sees it as an institution that is undergoing a radical transformation in terms of its

public role. Art museums must now discover ways of making high art relevant to contemporary lives and do so with an eye toward mass entertainment. He writes about the importance of understanding the roles of collectors, curators, and museum architects and includes five case studies of how a handful of museums or major collections came into existence through the efforts of key individuals: Baron Dominique Vivant Denon and The Louvre; Bernard Berenson and the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum; Ernest Fenollosa and the Japanese art collection at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Albert C. Barnes and The Barnes Foundation; and Richard Meier and the contemporary art collection at the Getty Museum.

In the acknowledgments of this book, Carrier reveals that he did not publish on this topic until he felt that he had satisfactorily clarified his ideas and that such clarification of thought was lacking in some of his other writings. His primary contention is that the inception and development of the public art museum since the time of the French Revolution depended on democratic discussion, debate, and growth, but that exchange peaked and has now leveled off. His argument is informed by the thinking of current museum skeptics, who do not see the museum as a viable institution. Carrier acknowledges their viewpoints, but expresses a different perspective, without being polemical.

This is an informative book, packed with provocative ideas and informed by substantial research by a scholar familiar with the bibliography of museology and the history of collecting. It is enjoyable to read, well produced, and very reasonably priced.

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