
In April of 1978, art critic Amy Goldin died of cancer, with a Manny Farber essay for Art in America yet to be published. She was 52. She had been an artist and ghostwriter of sermons and academic theses before commencing her thirteen years in art criticism. Editor (artist) Robert Kushner seeks to honor that brief and remarkable career in this collection of essays.

The book consists of twenty-six pieces previously published in major art periodicals, arranged chronologically and covering a variety of topics – Dadaism, Islamic art, decoration, public art. Interspersed are contributions by nine editors, artists, and art critics that reflect on Goldin’s contributions to the field of art criticism. They often serve to introduce the subsequent essay by Goldin, and the format works well.

Academically, Goldin had studied philosophy in addition to studio art, and her writing reflects the philosopher’s apt requirement that a term be examined before it is employed. This quality allows Goldin’s audience to enter each essay without any prerequisites, and just as importantly, it forces a means of approaching each body of work on its own terms -- critically, but with respect to and for what each exhibition, artist, or movement is attempting to accomplish. The writing is clever and witty, sharp with occasional frustrations aimed at the art discourses in play.

Particularly charming are the two previously unpublished essays, presumably from Goldin’s personal papers, one on rugs and the other titled “Why I Think Art Doesn’t Concern Individuals: Or The Different Between an Audience and a Bunch of Individuals,” in which she discusses how to have an appropriate conversation with a work of art.

Illustrations accompany many essays, and a complete bibliography of Goldin’s art criticism is included. There is no index to the text, limiting some of its usefulness as a research tool. Also omitted are any brief biographical notes about the critics, editors, and artists who contributed essays to the book.

The book is recommended for collections in academic, museum, and public libraries. In addition, it should be considered for sophisticated train-reading and for non-fiction book groups where it would be sure to generate lively discussion on the role of the art critic and how we view art.

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