
After Art is the second book to appear in Princeton University Press’s POINT series, which publishes “extended essays” on contemporary architecture. Author David Joselit is currently the Carnegie Professor of the History of Art at Yale University, where his focus is modern art and culture. He developed this book from a series of three lectures, entitled “States of Form,” which he gave at NYU as the Kirk Varnedoe Professor at the Institute of Fine Arts in 2010. The title comes from the epigraph, a quote from Andy Warhol: “Business art is the step that comes after Art.” What follows is Joselit’s attempt to build a new framework for understanding the place of art as a visible commodity in the globally networked age of Google.

The volume may be slim, but Joselit’s reach is expansive. Knowledgably situated in the Western academy, he synthesizes economics, politics, and aesthetics through four sections: “Image Explosion,” “Populations,” “Formats,” and “Power.” Joselit illustrates art’s essential place in the global economy, while attempting to redefine what art is under the “Epistemology of Search.” This concept, owing partial credit to Chris Anderson’s The Long Tail, offers a means of navigating the problems of the oft-lamented profusion of images, and the proliferation of art in particular. Rather than focusing solely on new media or net art, Joselit gives examples of cultural production—architecture, conceptual art—that show fluid movement between art objects and their contexts.

The concise format allows the author to move quickly between ideas, referencing a broad range of artists, theorists, and museum professionals to describe concepts. Works by Sherrie Levine and Matthew Barney illustrate the “social lives of images,” while Rem Koolhaas’ Content illustrates the shift in emphasis from medium to format. Tania Bruguera’s Generic Capitalism and the Guggenheim Bilbao are used to describe types of cultural contact, and Ai Weiwei’s Fairytale is given as a hopeful expression of the global power of contemporary art. Joselit incorporates thorny issues of cultural property, from the Elgin Marbles to Creative Commons, and concludes by problematizing the museum as cultural mouthpiece. While After Art seems to describe the rupture of the art world as we know it in the West, “after posits continuity and reverberation rather than rupture” (91).

This short read addresses contemporary questions about cultural heritage and may appeal to scholars interested in architecture, museum and information studies, new media, and critical theory. Featuring a cloth-bound paperback cover, with color reproductions of installation and architectural views throughout, the book also contains graphics designed by Geoff Kaplan. Includes notes and references.

Annie Sollinger, MSIS, Volunteer, Fine Arts Library, University of Texas at Austin
annie.sollinger@gmail.com