



Kant after Duchamp (October Books)

By Thierry de Duve

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Kant after Duchamp brings together eight essays around a central thesis with many implications for the history of avant-gardes. Although Duchamp's readymades broke with all previously known styles, de Duve observes that he made the logic of modernist art practice the subject matter of his work, a shift in aesthetic judgment that replaced the classical "this is beautiful" with "this is art." De Duve employs this shift (replacing the word "beauty" by the word "art") in a rereading of Kant's *Critique of Judgment* that reveals the hidden links between the radical experiments of Duchamp and the Dadaists and mainstream pictorial modernism.

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Editorial Review

Review

This is an excellent book. It is clear, careful, erudite, witty, and deep, tremendously illuminating and a pleasure to read. His command of the philosophical texts is particularly impressive. As an artist I quite naturally dismiss the question of whether something I produce is art or not as irrelevant. De Duve is the first to convince me of the importance and centrality of this question in the history of contemporary art, not only for critics and aestheticians, but for artists.

(Adrian Piper)

Kant after Duchamp is the very best example of the kind of multidisciplinary work that is essential to understanding our historical past and historical present. Even those art theorists and philosophers who disagree with de Duve will be moved to rethink the theoretical and historical foundations of their most cherished positions.

(Gregg M. Horowitz, Professor of Philosophy, Vanderbilt University)

Kantian aesthetics has long served as a legitimating force in modernism and is now the nemesis of postmodernism, but few people with de Duve's insightful grasp of art have written so intelligently about the role of Kantian aesthetic judgement in modernism and postmodernism. De Duve's archaeological analysis is urgent and perceptive, his writing is engaging and subtle, and the results are as imaginatively argued as they are philosophically inspiring. Art historians, philosophers, critical theorists, and everyone involved in art will find this book compelling, for it is, after all, their aesthetic judgement that is at issue here.

(Michael Kelly, Managing Editor of *The Journal of Philosophy*; Adjunct Associate Professor of Philosophy, Columbia University)

Thierry de Duve has sought, in this remarkable text, to understand why Marcel Duchamp was such a great artist.' A task that calls upon resources beyond those of art history, art criticism, and aesthetic analysis, of all which the author is master.... The tone is wry, urbane, informed, and urgent; and it is a tribute to his appreciation of the depth of his subject that he takes us further in our understanding than we have ever seen before, but leaves us with the sense that more remains to be said than anyone before had imagined.

(Arthur C. Danto, Johnsonian Professor Emeritus of Philosophy, Columbia University; and art critic, *The Nation*)

You don't have to agree with all of Thierry de Duve's premises and arguments (needless to say I don't) in order to recognize that he has written a remarkable book. The essays gathered in *Kant After Duchamp* mount the most formidable case yet made for Duchamp's importance, and what makes de Duve's achievement all the more unexpected is that this is done by way of an intense engagement with the writings of Duchamp's seeming opposite, the critic Clement Greenberg. A third constant presence in these pages is Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, which at once governs de Duve's understanding of Greenberg's "formalism" and is itself

brilliantly reinterpreted in the light of Duchamp's readymades. De Duve has always been an independent thinker. Now he has produced an indispensable book, a brilliant and learned "archaeology" of Duchampian modernism that is also a highly original contribution to philosophical aesthetics.

(Michael Fried, Herbert Boone Professor of Humanities, The Johns Hopkins University)

About the Author

Thierry de Duve is Director of Studies, Association de préfiguration de l'Ecole des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris.

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