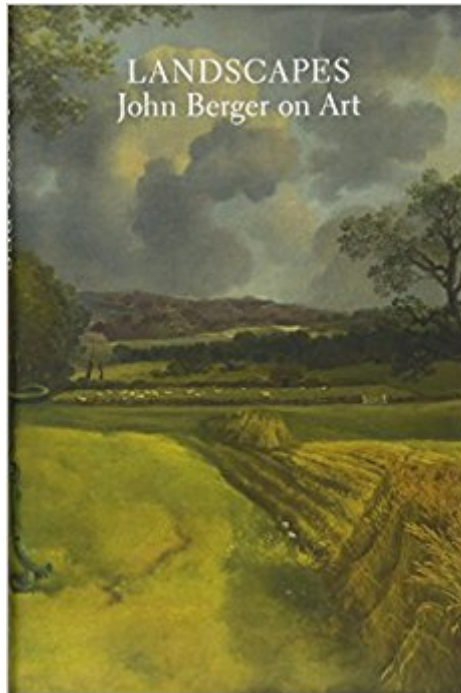




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Landscapes: John Berger On Art



Synopsis

A major new work from the world's leading writer on art, *Landscapes*, the companion volume to John Berger's highly acclaimed *Portraits*, explores what art tells us about ourselves. "Berger's work is an invitation to reimagine; to see in different ways," writes Tom Overton in the introduction to this volume. As a master storyteller and thinker John Berger challenges readers to rethink their every assumption about the role of creativity in our lives. In this brilliant collection of diverse pieces—essays, short stories, poems, translations—which spans a lifetime's engagement with art, John Berger reveals how he came to his own unique way of seeing. He pays homage to the writers and thinkers who influenced him, such as Walter Benjamin, Rosa Luxemburg and Bertolt Brecht. His expansive perspective takes in artistic movements and individual artists—from the Renaissance to the present—while never neglecting the social and political context of their creation. Berger pushes at the limits of art writing, demonstrating beautifully how his artist's eye makes him a storyteller in these essays, rather than a critic. With "landscape" as an animating, liberating metaphor rather than a rigid definition, this collection surveys the aesthetic landscapes that have informed, challenged and nourished John Berger's understanding of the world. *Landscapes*—alongside *Portraits*—completes a tour through the history of art that will be an intellectual benchmark for many years to come.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“Essential” reminds us that all good writing comes only from good (that is, patient, attentive, loving) looking. • Andrew Marr, New Statesman

“Berger’s prose manifests an ethics of the committed gaze, a great sympathy for the human animal in pain and a great anger for the political conditions that extend that pain unnecessarily. As he wrote recently: ‘What has prompted me to write over the years is the hunch that something needs to be told and that if I don’t try to tell it, it risks not being told.’ The humbleness of the word ‘hunch’ in that statement tells you all you need to know.” • John Douglas Millar, Frieze

“Essential reading not just for our political moment but outside it. He was a monument, a world of his own; at the same time, his thinking and his art which are the same thing address themselves at once to the past, the present, and the future.” • “Life has more light and colour after an encounter with Berger.” • Art Newspaper

“Berger is a masterful observer, a trait that lends his writing a profound element of artistry: these essays read like sketched studies of an as-yet-painted masterwork. These worldly essays are timeless, inspiring works of critical observation.” • Kirkus

Praise for John Berger: “John Berger teaches us how to think, how to feel how to stare at things until we see what we thought wasn’t there. But above all, he teaches us how to love in the face of adversity. He is a master.” • Arundhati Roy, author of *The God of Small Things*

“I admire and love John Berger’s books. Not since Lawrence has there been a writer who offers such attentiveness to the sensual world with responsiveness to the imperatives of conscience. He is a wonderful artist and thinker.” • Susan Sontag

“One of the most influential intellectuals of our time.” • Sean O’Hagan, Observer

“Berger is a writer one demands to know more about an intriguing and powerful mind and talent.” • New York Times

Storyteller, novelist, essayist, screenwriter, dramatist and critic, John Berger is one of the most internationally influential writers of the last fifty years. His many books include *Ways of Seeing*, the fiction trilogy *Into Their Labours*, *Here Is Where We Meet*, the Booker Prize winning novel *G*, *Hold Everything Dear*, the Man Booker long-listed *From A to X* and *A Seventh Man*. Tom Overton catalogued John Berger’s archive at the British Library. He has curated exhibitions at King’s Cultural Institute, Somerset House and the Whitechapel Gallery, and his writing has been published by the LRB blog, New Statesman, Apollo, White Review, Various Small Fires, Tate, the British Council and others.

This is a collection of essays by John Berger that have been previously published over the duration of his lifetime. It has been collected and edited by Tom Overton, who has cataloged John Berger's archive at the British Library. These essays were chosen to describe Berger's attitudes and relationship with art. Most of the essays are just a few pages long and span his entire lifetime. As a collection, they serve as an autobiographical account of this influential and prolific writer. Essentially, this is a message about noticing details and the elements of story and the expression of art. Of being able to describe environment and the story behind it, developing its history. One of my favorites is a short little essay collected in a small chapter called Ten Dispatches about Place. In it he describes the landscape of a group of four burros with so much clarity that it seems like it was painted on canvas. So many of the articles and stories in this collection evoke imagery in this way. Because 's listing does not note the contents of the collection, I have provided the following as a courtesy to those who may be seeking specific information.:

Part 1: Redrawing the Maps

1. Krakow
2. To Take Paper, to Draw
3. The Basis of All Painting and Sculpture is Drawing
4. Frederick Antal - A Personal Tribute
5. An Address to Danish Worker Actors on the Art of Observation, Translated by Anya Bostock and John Berger
6. Revolutionary Undoing: On Max Raphael's The Demands of Art
7. Antiquarian and Revolutionary: Walter Benjamin
8. The Storyteller
9. Ernst Fischer: A Philosopher and Death
10. Gabriel Garcia Marquez: The Secretary of Death Reads it Back
11. Roland Barthes: Inside the Mask
12. Following on a Joycean Tide
13. A Gift for Rosa Luxemburg
14. The Ideal Critic and the Fighting Critic

Part 2: Terrain

15. The Clarity of the Renaissance
16. A View of Delft
17. The Dilemma of the Romantics
18. The Victorian Conscience
19. The Moment of Cubism
20. Parade and the Beginning of Surrealism
21. Judgement on Paris
22. Soviet Aesthetic
23. The Biennale
24. Art and Property Now
25. No More Portraits
26. The Historical Function of the Museum
27. The Work of Art
28. 1968/1979 Preface to Permanent Red (1960)
29. Historical Afterword to the Into Their Labours Trilogy
30. The White Bird
31. The Soul and the Operator
32. The Third Week of August, 1991
33. Ten Dispatches about Place (June 2005)
34. Stones (Palestine, June 2003)
35. Meanwhile

Acknowledgements

(Review based on paperback ARC not the hardback--no way to evaluate price of HB or final appearance as a result) I ordered this without any familiarity with John Berger. I saw he was described as a Marxist art critic and that he'd written several other books about art, including the similarly named "Portraits". That book, apparently is a look at the history of art with some inspiration for the journey coming from portraits. Unfortunately, reading about it, I was dismayed that the

portraits were not actually shown in the book, other than as small black and white reproductions. I thought, "If a book about art history through landscape painting doesn't show the actual colors, etc. to get an idea of the original, I will be very dissatisfied with the book." How can you write about the history of art through landscape painting and not show the paintings? Imo, really, you shouldn't do that. So when this copy came--6x9", small format to show paintings--I was relieved to see there are NO paintings reproduced in here, not as black and white photos or otherwise. This is a collection of essays, a "landscape" of Berger's thoughts on his life, people, ideas that have influenced him, writing/authors he liked and disliked and, of course, art. (I don't understand the reviewer who said it combines drawings and text. Believe me, there are essays here, and not drawings. It's a book of essays, with thoughts about many things, many aspects of art both written and visual--but there are no pictures and it would seem very odd if there were.) I began, dutifully, with the introduction by Tom Overton. It prepared me for a book of criticism and was not an easy read. It reminded me how many years it's been since I read much literary criticism. (It also reminded me that I haven't missed it.) I prepared myself for Berger's work to be more of the same. Surprise! From the first words of his first chapter, I had a pleasant surprise--John Berger's a good writer who uses fiction techniques (including a narrative, anecdotes, vivid descriptions, characterization) in his essays. It turns out that Berger was a painter and writer until he was thirty and, in the years that followed, concentrated on writing--both fiction and non-fiction, in the latter becoming particularly well known as a critic. Don't be put off by the introduction by someone else. Berger himself is a very good writer. These essays are interesting, scattershot through the years now collected together here, rather than being written as chapters to develop a topic or theme for a cohesively-themed book. I liked this actually, because it offered variety in both topic and tone. It's kind of a landscape--bits and pieces of different things to observe whether important people (good and bad) influencing his life (e.g. an important childhood friend, his overbearing father, a friend's suicide). He spends time with writers who influenced him (Joyce, Barthes, Marquez and others) and how, though always in a kind of "I'm telling you a story" narrative rather than a preachy one. A lot is about literature, but he writes about art and artists, too (Picasso & Braque, some from the Renaissance, the Romantics, others). Also travels and people he has met in the course of them. As a photographer, I enjoyed the chapter "No More Portraits". To my surprise, I also enjoyed some of the quirky essay topics like "The Historical Function of the Museum". It sounds dry, but he took on the modern curators in a way that will antagonize them (but was fun to read--and may even be true). There's a lot to get out of this book that may send you looking up more about a person or topic (Rosa Luxemburg, Walter Benjamin, Berthold Brecht. He identifies himself as a Marxist but has many critical reflections on Soviet art--not a cliché). All in

all, a well written collection of essays that could propel any interested person in a variety of directions as a result of the reading..

Outstanding reading by one the best art critics of the 20th and 21st centuries

John Berger always gives sustenance of the highest order.

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