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9.5 Theses on Art and Class

Ben Davis. Haymarket (Consortium, dist.), \$16 trade paper (224p) ISBN 978-1-60846-268-1



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In this provocative essay collection, Artinfo executive editor Davis's thesis makes the relentless theoretical debates over art and politics seem tangential. "There are no formal or aesthetic solutions to the political and economic dilemmas that art faces—only political and economic solutions," he writes. An old-fashioned Marxist, Davis examines class and inequality to address problems that bedevil contemporary art (the distortions effected by scandalous amounts of cash, for instance), problems that he claims are also those of society at large. Davis is an intellectually clearheaded critic dishing out some tough truths, often backed up with statistics, to the rarefied "art world." For example, he attributes the underrepresentation of female artists in galleries and collections to the gender pay gap and the absence of an "activist-oriented women's rights movement." He condemns what he aptly calls "aesthetic politics" as a delusion and an "excuse not to be engaged in the difficult, ugly business of organizing." His claim that visual art is essentially a form of "middle-class labor" dispels the lofty romance that obscures the social position of artists. The book reframes the production and sale of art in tough terms, which is why the collection's centerpiece, "9.5 Theses on Art and Class," should be required reading for art professionals. In this first book, Davis proves himself a critic to be reckoned with. (July)

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