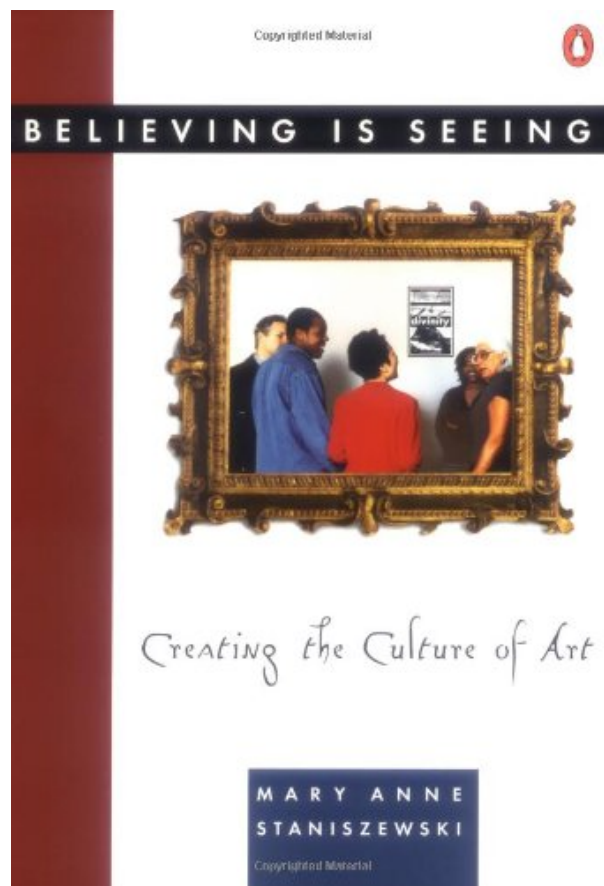


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Why are the paleolithic Venus of Willendorf, Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel frescoes, and Marcel Duchamp's ready-made urinal all considered works of art? Why, strictly speaking, is a Cindy Sherman photograph more "art-like" than a Da Vinci portrait? How did the painters and sculptors of the Renaissance see their creations? And who decides what art is today? In the tradition of Marshall McLuhan and John Berger, this learned and deliciously subversive book gives us a new way of seeing our artistic heritage. *Believing Is Seeing* is a work of multicultural scope and glittering intelligence that bridges the gulf between classical Japanese painting and the films of Spike Lee, between high theory and pop culture. Probing beyond the rhetorical surface of standard art histories and drawing on a panoramic array of illustrative material, Mary Anne Staniszewski throws a fresh light on individual works and the often mystifying criteria by which they are valued.

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- 320 pages

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Four Stars

By Amazon Customer

Still in the middle of reading, but so far it is giving me new ways of seeing.

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An Interesting Counterpoint to Traditional Art History

By A Customer

Mary Anne Staniszewski's *"Believing is Seeing"* is a clearly written, carefully illustrated, thought provoking overview of the meaning of "Art". Distilled from introductory lectures on contemporary art, culture and critical theory delivered at the Rhode Island School of Design more than a decade ago, *"Believing is Seeing"* provides a useful counterpoint to mainstream art history texts by challenging traditional, transhistorical views of aesthetic value.

Appropriately subtitled *"Creating the Culture of Art"*, Staniszewski's book demonstrates that Art is something "that has a specific history and belongs to a particular era." What our culture generally calls "Art" is an invention of the past two hundred years. Thus, modern culture has appropriated the paintings, frescoes, sculptures, and artifacts of earlier times and cultures (where they had historically specific meanings) and labelled them "Art". Modern culture applies this label even though the original creators of these representations and objects would not have regarded their creations as Art in the way we commonly use the

term.

The task of defining and identifying Art in contemporary Western society is largely a function of the institutional structures--the museums, galleries, auction houses, and publications--that create the culture of Art. In this way, Marcel Duchamp can mount a urinal on a pedestal and this plumbing fixture becomes "Art", acquires meaning and value, through validation by these institutional arbiters of the Art world. Rejecting essentialism, Staniszewski argues that aesthetic value and meaning are socially constructed, the products of a particular historical moment and culture. As individuals, we may not consider Duchamp's urinal anything more than that--a urinal--but that does not obviate the fact that cultural institutions have conferred (rightly or wrongly) some greater meaning (and value) on the object.

"Believing is Seeing" is not an important book; it is a book which, like its thesis, is the product of a particular historical moment and culture. It is, however, full of provocative and challenging ideas about how culture creates meaning and value. And for this reason alone, it is worth careful reading.

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Post-modernism finally makes sense!

By A Customer

From Michelangelo to Madonna, when it comes to making sense of art, Staniszewski explains it all.

Whether you are a student or just someone perplexed by the money, attitudes, or direction that the art world takes, I could not recommend a more readable yet comprehensive beginning.

Over half of the well-designed book is a panorama of cleverly chosen pictures, but the text is a clear and simply put construction of contemporary ideas of art history.

A term that is especially bandied about these days like a crowbar is post-modernism, but without much explanation. After reading this book, I am now a true believer (and hopefully a truer see-er).

It has been hard to keep this book out of the hands of friends. I may have to order a case to give out as gifts!

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