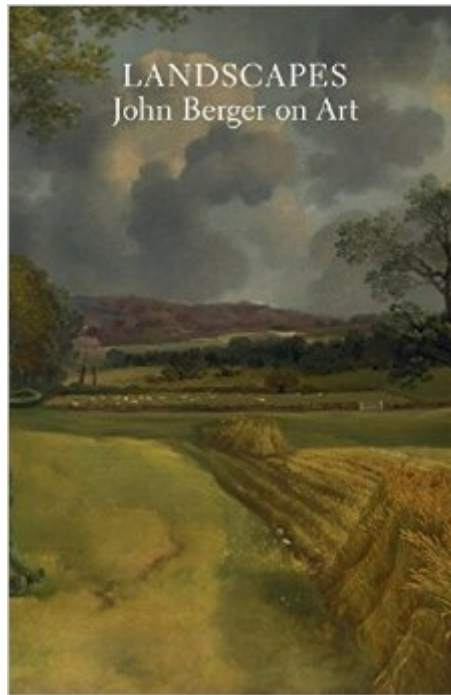


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Landscapes: John Berger On Art



Synopsis

A major new work from the world's leading writer on art. With *Portraits*, world-renowned art writer John Berger took us on a captivating journey through centuries of art, situating each artist in the proper political and historical contexts. In *Landscapes*, a narrative of Berger's own journey emerges. Through his penetrating engagement with the writers and artists who shaped his own thought, Walter Benjamin, Rosa Luxemburg and Bertolt Brecht among them, *Landscapes* allows us to understand how Berger came to his own way of seeing. As always, Berger pushes at the limits of art writing, demonstrating beautifully how his painter's eyes lead him to refer to himself only as a storyteller. A landscape is, to John Berger, like a portrait, an animating, liberating metaphor rather than a rigid definition. It's a term, too, that reminds us that there is more here than simply the backdrop or "by-work" of a portrait. *Landscapes* offers a tour of the history of art, but not as you know it.

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Customer Reviews

I feel quite deficient when looking at paintings. No training in art; no wise mentor who has befriended me. I only have a rudimentary idea of what to consider. And of the varying fields of endeavor, I find art to be the hardest nut to crack on one's own. Books on electrical wiring, for example, are comprehensible and instructive. Art criticism, on the other hand, is so often pretentious, and deliberately opaque | and there is this nagging suspicion the critic is just putting us on. Berger himself, in his critic of art museum curators, rebukes them for their elitist attitude towards

the unwashed masses who view the art displayed. Nonetheless, I keep trying, and so when Vine offered me this collection of essays, I decided to try one more time. John Berger was born 1926, and won the Booker Prize in 1972 for *Ways of Seeing: Based on the BBC Television Series*. This is a collection of 36 essays, described by editor Tom Overton as: "offer(ing) a tour of the history of art, but not as you know it." Which may be a major understatement. It seemed to me that around 10 essays had absolutely nothing to do with art, as I know it, but rather involved the fall of the Berlin Wall, the subsequent transformations in Eastern Europe, the stones of Palestine, and a theory of the peasant class, to name a few. The lead essay involves the author's youthful relationship with a New Zealander, Ken, and their involvement with Krakow, Poland. "On Art" as the subtitle indicates? Hum! Absolutely the most frustrating part for me was the absence of a date indicating when the essay was written. They seemed to have been grabbed from a bottom drawer, willy-nilly.

(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 essay, 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 its been since I read much literary criticism.

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 biography 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 Maps1. Krakow2. To Take Paper, to Draw3. The Basis of All Painting and Sculpture is Drawing4. Frederick Antal - A Personal Tribute5. An Address to Danish Worker Actors on the Art of Observation, Translated by Anya Bostock and John Berger6. Revolutionary Undoing: On Max Raphael's The Demands of Art7. Antiquarian and Revolutionary: Walter Benjamin8. The Storyteller9. Ernst Fischer: A Philosopher and Death10. Gabriel Garcia Marquez: The Secretary of Death Reads it Back11.

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