

FOREWORD EXTRACT

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A NEW DICTIONARY OF

ART

/ ed Robert Good /

one word
3000 definitions



THE noted philosopher and fare-dodger of the 1930s, C.E.M. Joad, would always begin an answer to a question with the words 'It all depends on what you mean by...'. Defining your terms before entering into a discussion is thought to be a necessary part of making progress, and this need to define terms explains the popularity of subject dictionaries. This is particularly so when it comes to the arts, discussion of which employs confusing terms from 'abstraction' to 'zeitgeist'. Indeed, in a book that is a significant milestone in the history of thought on the subject, Clive Bell wrote that 'either all works of visual art have some common quality, or when we speak of 'works of art' we gibber' (Bell, 1987/1914:7). Finding this common quality, this essence of art, is the Holy Grail of philosophical aesthetics.

Thus Robert Good's *A New Dictionary of Art* follows in a great tradition of helpful reference books for the tidy minded. Except, of course, it doesn't. Rather than defining terms, it has over 3,000 entries for a single term - 'art' - each presented with meticulous scholarly apparatus. The various definitions from noted philosophers are offered (Bell's first appears on page 159 with a variant on page 184 - some definitions, including those listed here, appear in multiple entries each with a slightly different emphasis and so nicely adding a further layer of complexity). There are current contenders at definition from the likes of George Dickie (p.1), Arthur Danto (p.207), Jerrold Levinson (p.227), and Robert Stecker (p.60). However, these are overwhelmed by other definitions, pillaged from all manner of gibbering, including academic tomes, chat-rooms, and ordinary conversation. The serious point, if one wanted to dredge up a serious point in the face of all this wanton frivolity, is that there really, really is no hope at all in coming up with a definition that will capture all uses of this rattlebag of a term. It is an overwhelming proof from a plethora of fact.



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