



# What Are You Looking At?: The Surprising, Shocking, and Sometimes Strange Story of 150 Years of Modern Art

By Will Gompertz

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In the tradition of *Eats, Shoots & Leaves*, art history with a sense of humor

Every year, millions of museum and gallery visitors ponder the modern art on display and secretly ask themselves, "Is this art?" A former director at London's Tate Gallery and now the BBC arts editor, Will Gompertz made it his mission to bring modern art's exciting history alive for everyone, explaining why an unmade bed or a pickled shark can be art—and why a five-year-old couldn't really do it. Rich with extraordinary tales and anecdotes, *What Are You Looking At?* entertains as it arms readers with the knowledge to truly understand and enjoy what it is they're looking at.

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### Editorial Review

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**\*Starred Review\*** Gompertz succeeds in his stated mission to take a “personal, informative, anecdotal, and accessible” approach to defining the full spectrum of modern art movements, beginning with impressionism, by portraying the instigating artists and explaining what they were up to and why. A former director of the Tate in London, and currently the arts editor at the BBC, Gompertz is adept at elucidating complex aesthetic ideas and artistic techniques and linking revolutionary art movements to social upheaval (war, communism, the Holocaust) and scientific and technological developments (quantum physics, television, the atom bomb). He revels in the creative, multidisciplinary synergy surrounding such key figures as Monet, Picasso, de Kooning, and Warhol. And he daringly takes a novelist’s approach to such foundational acts as Duchamp’s purchase of a urinal in New York City in 1917 to create a “readymade” sculpture that embodied the pivotal realization that if an artist says something is a work of art, it is. Gompertz adeptly divides each broad movement into its intriguing subgroups and includes many more artists, critics, and dealers than the usual suspects. His dissections of performance and conceptual art are uniquely clarifying, and he even coins a keenly apt term for such current provocateurs as Damien Hirst and Jeff Koons: the “entrepreneurialists.” A deeply enlightening and buoyant history of modern art and beyond. --Donna Seaman

### Review

“Gompertz has an uncanny knack for making difficult art (and ideas) easy...A lively, witty account of the major moments and movements of the past 150 years.”—*Associated Press*

“An insightful love letter to modern art and an irreverent rejection of the notion that its pleasures are reserved for a chosen few... Each [chapter] hums with engaging history and entertaining anecdotes, cheeky asides and accessible, illuminating criticism.”—NPR

“Gompertz is determined to dispel the layman's fear of the modern art world and those who inhabit it. What Are You Looking At?, which comes out this week, does a very good job of this—replacing isolating esotericism with witty and chatty commentary.”—*Interview*

“A deeply enlightening and buoyant history of modern art and beyond.”—*Booklist* (starred review)

“[A] highly lucid, lively, and buoyantly composed history...while his tone is breezy and conversational, [Gompertz] astutely and often wittily describes the core of every movement and its key artists.”—*Publishers Weekly*

### About the Author

**Will Gompertz** writes, presents, and produces programs about the arts for the BBC. He lives in Oxford, England.

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