

# robert hughes the shock of the new

**Robert Hughes The Shock of the New** is a seminal work that explores the evolution of modern art and its impact on contemporary culture. Written by the Australian art critic and historian Robert Hughes, this influential book serves as both a critical examination and a celebration of the radical changes that took place in the art world from the late 19th century to the late 20th century. Hughes' engaging prose and insightful analysis make it a must-read for anyone interested in understanding the complexities of modern art and its societal implications.

## The Context of Modern Art

To appreciate the significance of "The Shock of the New," it is essential to understand the cultural and historical context in which modern art emerged. The late 19th and early 20th centuries were marked by rapid changes in technology, society, and politics. This period saw the rise of industrialization, the questioning of traditional values, and the emergence of new ideas in philosophy and science.

## The Birth of Modernism

Modernism emerged as a response to these shifts, characterized by a break from traditional aesthetics and the exploration of new forms of expression. Some key movements within modernism included:

- Impressionism
- Cubism
- Surrealism
- Abstract Expressionism

Each of these movements contributed to a reevaluation of what art could be, challenging preconceived notions and inviting viewers to engage with art on a deeper level.

## Overview of "The Shock of the New"

Published in 1980, "The Shock of the New" is based on a television documentary series that Hughes created for the BBC. The book encapsulates the themes and ideas presented in the series while delving deeper into the narratives surrounding modern art.

## Structure and Themes

"The Shock of the New" is divided into several chapters, each focusing on different aspects of modern art. Some of the central themes explored in the book include:

1. **Innovation and Change:** Hughes emphasizes how modern artists sought to innovate and break away from established norms.
2. **The Role of the Artist:** The book discusses the evolving role of the artist in society, portraying them as both a creator and a commentator on contemporary life.
3. **Art and Politics:** Hughes draws connections between art and the political landscape, examining how artists responded to the tumultuous events of their time.
4. **Globalization of Art:** The book addresses the impact of globalization on art, highlighting how modernism transcended geographic boundaries.

## Key Artists and Movements Discussed

One of the strengths of "The Shock of the New" is its detailed examination of various artists and movements that have shaped modern art. Hughes provides in-depth analyses of significant figures, including:

### Pablo Picasso

Picasso is often regarded as one of the most influential artists of the 20th century. Hughes explores Picasso's role in the development of Cubism and how his innovative approach to form and perspective challenged traditional artistic conventions.

### Jackson Pollock

Hughes delves into Pollock's revolutionary drip painting technique, which marked a significant departure from previous methods of painting. Pollock's work is presented as a reflection of the chaotic nature of modern life, encapsulating the existential struggles of the post-war era.

### Andy Warhol

Warhol's contributions to the Pop Art movement are also a focal point in "The Shock of the New." Hughes discusses Warhol's use of commercial imagery and his commentary on consumer culture, illustrating how his work blurred the lines between high art and popular culture.

# The Impact of "The Shock of the New"

Since its publication, "The Shock of the New" has had a profound impact on the way modern art is perceived and studied. Hughes' ability to articulate complex ideas in an accessible manner has made the book a staple in art education.

## Influence on Art Criticism

Hughes' work has influenced a generation of art critics and historians, encouraging a more nuanced understanding of modern art. His emphasis on the connection between art and the broader cultural context has paved the way for new approaches to art criticism.

## Relevance Today

Despite being published over four decades ago, "The Shock of the New" remains relevant in today's art discourse. As contemporary art continues to evolve, Hughes' insights into the nature of innovation and the role of the artist resonate with current trends and challenges within the art world.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, Robert Hughes' "The Shock of the New" is a landmark work that provides a comprehensive exploration of modern art and its implications for society. Through his engaging narrative and critical lens, Hughes invites readers to reflect on the transformative power of art and its capacity to provoke thought, challenge norms, and inspire change. Whether you are an art enthusiast, a student, or simply curious about the evolution of artistic expression, "The Shock of the New" offers valuable insights that continue to resonate in the contemporary art landscape. By delving into the complexities of modern art, Hughes not only enriches our understanding but also encourages us to appreciate the ongoing dialogue between art and the world around us.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What is 'The Shock of the New' about?

The Shock of the New is a documentary series by Robert Hughes that explores the development of modern art from the late 19th century to the mid-20th century, analyzing its impact on culture and society.

### Who is Robert Hughes?

Robert Hughes was an Australian-born art critic, historian, and television documentary maker, known for his insightful commentary on modern art and culture.

## **What are some key themes discussed in 'The Shock of the New'?**

Key themes include the evolution of modern art, the relationship between art and society, the role of technology in artistic expression, and the tension between tradition and innovation.

## **How did 'The Shock of the New' impact public perception of modern art?**

The series made modern art more accessible to the general public, demystifying complex concepts and encouraging viewers to appreciate contemporary works in a broader cultural context.

## **What artistic movements are covered in 'The Shock of the New'?**

The series covers various movements, including Impressionism, Cubism, Surrealism, Abstract Expressionism, and Pop Art, highlighting their significance and contributions to modern art.

## **In what year was 'The Shock of the New' first aired?**

The Shock of the New was first aired in 1980 on the BBC, and it has since become a seminal work in the study of modern art.

## **What is the format of 'The Shock of the New'?**

The Shock of the New is structured as an eight-part television documentary series, combining visual art analysis with commentary by Robert Hughes and interviews with artists and critics.

## **Why is 'The Shock of the New' considered a significant work?**

It is considered significant for its critical insights, engaging narrative style, and ability to connect art movements with broader historical and cultural trends, making it a foundational text for art education.

## **What legacy did Robert Hughes leave behind with 'The Shock of the New'?**

Robert Hughes left a legacy of passionate advocacy for the arts, encouraging critical discourse and fostering a deeper understanding of modern art's relevance and impact on society.

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