



A House Divided: American Art since 1955

By Anne M. Wagner

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In this exhilarating book, Anne Middleton Wagner challenges readers to rethink the work of a range of post-World War II artists—Jasper Johns, Andy Warhol, Maya Lin, Bruce Nauman, and Agnes Martin among them—and thus to re-assess the relationship of art to politics and social life. The art of U.S. empire, she argues, is marked by deep dividedness. Painters and sculptors seemed entranced by American symbols, yet used them to enigmatic ends—exuberant, nightmarish, or both. Nor could postwar culture decide if it preserved sites devoted to productive withdrawal—for artists, the special zone called the studio—or simply maintained a margin where numbed subjects rehearsed the rites of vanished self-expression. This book charts the to-and-fro in recent American art between acknowledging the facts of nation and consumerism, and searching for meaningful models. And it shows that this process engages—even structures—national history and the citizen's self.

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Editorial Review

Review

“I found myself reading certain passages aloud, reveling in their conversational pace and cadence, their gentle wordplays and puns.”

(*Times Higher Education* 2012-05-24)

“The latter decades of the twentieth century were exciting, tumultuous years for the American art scene. . . . Anne Middleton Wagner captures a great deal of this tension and excitement in these pieces.”

(*Zeteo (Cuny)* 2012-04-30)

From the Inside Flap

“In this much-needed and courageous book, Anne Wagner lays down a gauntlet to all those interested in modern and contemporary art: to think anew about these works by canonic artists, and about the relationship of art to recent history and politics. Wagner presents an exhilarating and innovative set of closely worked historical arguments that are remarkably timely, and her lucid prose makes complex ideas and critical debates accessible to a broad audience.”—Briony Fer, Professor of History of Art, UCL

“In *A House Divided*, Anne Wagner takes on the so-called post-war era in American art and asks searching questions about what that term might mean now, amid cultural division and perpetual war. Far more than a sum of its parts, this collection of essays is essential reading on American artists' ‘post-war’ responses to nationalism, state violence, and the 1960s.”—Mignon Nixon, author of *Fantastic Reality: Louise Bourgeois and a Story of Modern Art*

About the Author

Anne Middleton Wagner is Class of 1936 Chair of Modern and Contemporary Art at the University of California, Berkeley and Henry Moore Foundation Research Curator at the Tate. She is the author of *Mother Stone: The Vitality of Modern British Sculpture* and *Three Artists (Three Women): Modernism and the Art of Hesse, Krasner, and O’Keeffe* (UC Press) among other books.

Users Review

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