



## American Visions: The Epic History of Art in America

By Robert Hughes

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Writing with all the brilliance, authority, and pungent wit that have distinguished his art criticism for *Time* magazine and his greatly acclaimed study of modern art, **The Shock of the New**, Robert Hughes now addresses his largest subject: the history of art in America.

The intense relationship between the American people and their surroundings has been the source of a rich artistic tradition. **American Visions** is a consistently revealing demonstration of the many ways in which artists have expressed this pervasive connection. In nine eloquent chapters, which span the whole range of events, movements, and personalities of more than three centuries, Robert Hughes shows us the myriad associations between the unique society that is America and the art it has produced:

"O My America, My New Founde Land" explores the churches, religious art, and artifacts of the Spanish invaders of the Southwest and the Puritans of New England; the austere esthetic of the Amish, the Quakers, and the Shakers; and the Anglophilic culture of Virginia.

"The Republic of Virtue" sets forth the ideals of neo-classicism as interpreted in the paintings of Benjamin West, John Singleton Copley, and the Peale family, and in the public architecture of Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Latrobe, and Charles Bulfinch.

"The Wilderness and the West" discusses the work of landscape painters such as Thomas Cole, Frederick Church, and the Luminists, who viewed the natural world as "the fingerprint of God's creation," and of those who recorded America's westward expansion--George Caleb Bingham, Albert Bierstadt, and Frederic Remington--and the accompanying shift in the perception of the Indian, from noble savage to outright demon.

"American Renaissance" describes the opulent era that followed the Civil War, a cultural flowering expressed in the sculpture of Augustus Saint-Gaudens; the paintings of John Singer Sargent, Mary Cassatt, and Childe Hassam; the Newport cottages of the super-rich; and the beaux-arts buildings of Stanford White and his

partners.

"The Gritty Cities" looks at the post-Civil War years from another perspective: cast-iron cityscapes, the architecture of Louis Henri Sullivan, and the new realism of Thomas Eakins, Winslow Homer, the trompe-l'oeil painters, and the Ashcan School.

"Early Modernism" introduces the first American avant garde: the painters Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley, Joseph Stella, Charles Demuth, Charles Sheeler, and Georgia O'Keeffe, and the premier architect of his time, Frank Lloyd Wright.

"Streamlines and Breadlines" surveys the boom years, when skyscrapers and Art Deco were all the rage . . . and the bust years that followed, when painters such as Edward Hopper, Stuart Davis, Thomas Hart Benton, Diego Rivera, and Jacob Lawrence showed Americans "the way we live now."

"The Empire of Signs" examines the American hegemony after World War II, when the Abstract Expressionists (Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Mark Rothko, et al.) ruled the artistic roost, until they were dethroned by Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, the Pop artists, and Andy Warhol, while individualists such as David Smith and Joseph Cornell marched to their own music.

"The Age of Anxiety" considers recent events: the return of figurative art and the appearance of minimal and conceptual art; the speculative mania of the 1980s, which led to scandalous auction practices and inflated reputations; and the trends and issues of art in the 90s.

Lavishly illustrated and packed with biographies, anecdotes, astute and stimulating critical commentary, and sharp social history, **American Visions** was originally published in association with a new eight-part PBS television series. Robert Hughes has called it "a love letter to America." This superb volume, which encompasses and enlarges upon the series, is an incomparably entertaining and insightful contemplation of its splendid subject.

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### **American Visions: The Epic History of Art in America By Robert Hughes Bibliography**

- Sales Rank: #580716 in Books
- Published on: 1999-11-09
- Released on: 1999-11-09
- Ingredients: Example Ingredients
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 10.00" h x 1.70" w x 7.70" l, 4.72 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 648 pages



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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

Australian-born art critic Robert Hughes, author of the highly acclaimed study of modern art, *The Shock of the New* has made his home in the United States for the last 20 years. His latest undertaking, which he calls "a love letter to America," is his most massive: a 350-year history of art in America. Published in association with an eight-part PBS series of the same name, this is no scholarly text. With the same voracious wit and opinionated brilliance that have characterized his criticism for *Time* magazine, this tour-de-force spans three centuries of events, movements, and personalities that have shaped American society and its art. The reproductions are outstanding; 323 out of 365 are in rich, vivid color. Infinitely entertaining and perceptive, this superb book makes readers feel as if they have discovered a truer, hidden America. It seems certain to become one of the most important works in the art-historical canon.

#### From Library Journal

Art critic for *Time* magazine and an influential author (e.g., *The Culture of Complaint*, LJ 3/15/93), Hughes has written an indispensable guide, covering the sweep of art and architecture in America from the earliest Spanish works in New Mexico to contemporary art done in the late 1990s. All media are covered, as are the American incarnations of important movements such as Cubism, Impressionism, Minimalism, and more. Though Hughes has strong opinions on the relative importance of most artists or works in their oeuvre, his critiques are well founded, and he never simply omits an artist. A major flaw is the lack of footnotes and a bibliography, though, writes Hughes, this was purposely done in emulation of Kenneth Clark's *Civilization* and Jacob Bronowski's *The Ascent of Man*. Ultimately, this is an excellent introduction to art in America for the novice and will provide a handy reference for more advanced researchers. Written as the companion to a PBS series, this title is sure to be in demand. Highly recommended for all libraries.

-?Martin R. Kalfatovic, *Smithsonian Inst. Libs.*, Washington, D.C.

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#### From [Booklist](#)

It has been 16 years since Hughes' book and PBS series *The Shock of the New* (1981); now he has returned to that winning combination with this equally sensational history of American art. Determined to answer the question, "What can we say about Americans from the things and images they have made?" Hughes has orchestrated a spectacular integration of facts, observations, and insights in this ambitious, lively, and gloriously illustrated volume. Equally conversant in aesthetics, biography, and history, and utterly fascinated by personality, Hughes charts the evolution not only of American art but also of the American character. Careful to embrace the West as well as the East, Hughes defies convention by beginning his colorful chronicle not in New England but in Florida and the Southwest, and not with the British but with the Spanish. New York, of course, is the focus of much of the book, but the Southwest connection remains vital as Hughes discusses white artists' depictions of Plains Indians and, in the modern era, the work of Georgia O'Keeffe. The contrast between the influence of nature and of the city on American art is the fulcrum of Hughes' entire narrative as he offers vivid portraits of Thomas Cole, Winslow Homer, and Arthur Dove as well as Thomas Eakins, George Bellows, and Edward Hopper, who captured both worlds. Hughes' descriptions of paintings are luscious and his analyses of sculptural works are exceptional, but it is his vision of American art as a great chain of inspiration and discovery--forged artist by artist, image by image--that infuses his history with drama and excitement. The PBS series airs this spring. *Donna Seaman*

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