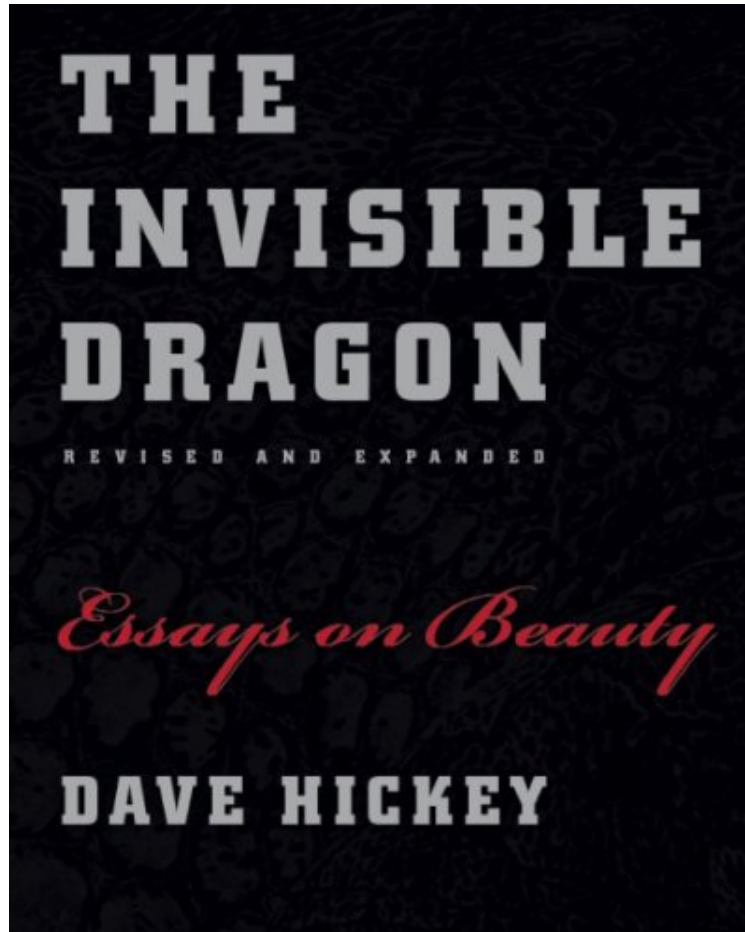


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## The Invisible Dragon: Essays on Beauty, Revised and Expanded

*Dave Hickey*

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**Dave Hickey : The Invisible Dragon: Essays on Beauty, Revised and Expanded** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Invisible Dragon: Essays on Beauty, Revised and Expanded:

10 of 10 people found the following review helpful. The Adam Smith of Art Criticism By Katya Cohen I fully understand David Hickey's impulse in writing these essays. The strongest essay being the one in which he reacts to the Academy's defense (or not) of Robert Rauschenberg during the culture wars of the 80's. I thought it was really incisive and a truly creative way of seeing things, and it gave me a lot to think about. As to his more general thoughts on Beauty, the essays themselves are cogent and in the abstract, if not in the particulars, convincing. Hickey is basically ranting against the "Academy" (or Art Establishment), and not because he sees it as colluding with the market, like some reviewer inferred, in fact, quite au contraire. In these essays Hickey defends the marketplace for being the ultimate arbiter, through democratic wrangling, of value, beauty, and meaning. Again, I do get the impulse behind this kind of thinking. It must be born of years of looking at too much uninspiring art sanctioned by the Academy due to its prescriptive value instead of that thing that good art can do, which is move us in ways that perhaps will always remain

essentially undefinable. And boy is there ever a lot of that crap out there passing for Art (and the word Art still implies "good", even after all these years since Greenberg). Hickey decries the Academy (in which he includes even what I find to be our no-real-lover-of-the-arts Government) for funding such art on the basis of it being "good for us" instead of "making us happy". And he does this by riffing on the Declaration of Independence and by quoting Thomas Paine. And again, I feel his pain; but I think his approach might be simplistic. In essence, Hickey calls for Beauty to be determined in the Forum, the laissez-faire marketplace. Given that in this day and age a lot of the art sanctioned by the Academy has precisely to do with investigating the deleterious effects of the market on the production of "true" art, I can see where he might have ruffled some feathers; and I smile at the thought of that. I love his attitude and his writing; and I viscerally feel what he is longing for, but his solution does not ring true. And I say this as a person who believes that markets work for the good of the people, most of the time; but even laissez-faire capitalism needs some regulation when decisions made according to its principles do more harm than good. The market alone has made as many mistakes about what is good art as the Academy has. Norman Rockwell is still crap, as is Thomas Kincaid. Unfettered democracy might produce what the people want, and Hickey has the right to slap the word "Beautiful" on the result; but I don't think it's that easy. That being said, the book is a good read and gets one really involved in determining and arguing one's own value system.<sup>2</sup> of 2 people found the following review helpful. A Nice Read, At Times By C. Hall While I did not agree with everything he presents, I do accept his main precept, concerning the importance of beauty (or any aesthetic, for that matter). Much of contemporary art has abandoned aesthetics, or at best, has made it secondary to a critical concept. I don't share his preference of illusionistic art over the flatness of modern art, but that is okay. That is a matter of taste. Concerning the language, it is strange that Hickey vacillates between being completely accessible to being completely opaque. At least the moments of accessibility are a pleasure to read.<sup>2</sup> of 2 people found the following review helpful. The dirty bomb of art theory, and that's a good thing. By Hunter Rauso This collection of Hickey's essays blew my mind wide open. The content is most appropriate for those who are under the impression that they have a firm idea of the place of beauty and meaning in contemporary art. The concepts that were explicated over the course of these five essays introduced cracks in just the right places in my theories of art to allow Hickey to drop sticks of dynamite down into their cores. Read every word with the care required of one handling a nuclear weapon.

The Invisible Dragon made a lot of noise for a little book When it was originally published in 1993 it was championed by artists for its forceful call for a reconsideration of beauty and savaged by more theoretically oriented critics who dismissed the very concept of beauty as naive, igniting a debate that has shown no sign of flagging. With this revised and expanded edition, Hickey is back to fan the flames. More manifesto than polite discussion, more call to action than criticism, The Invisible Dragon aims squarely at the hyper-institutionalism that, in Hickey's view, denies the real pleasures that draw us to art in the first place. Deploying the artworks of Warhol, Raphael, Caravaggio, and Mapplethorpe and the writings of Ruskin, Shakespeare, Deleuze, and Foucault, Hickey takes on museum culture, arid academicism, sclerotic politics, and more—all in the service of making readers rethink the nature of art. A new introduction provides a context for earlier essays—what Hickey calls his "intellectual temper tantrums." A new essay, "American Beauty," concludes the volume with a historical argument that is a rousing paean to the inherently democratic nature of attention to beauty. Written with a verve that is all too rare in serious criticism, this expanded and refurbished edition of The Invisible Dragon will be sure to captivate a new generation of readers, provoking the passionate reactions that are the hallmark of great criticism.

.com This is a pithy collection of essays on the nature, meaning, and destiny of beauty in the late 20th century. For such a slender volume (just 64 pages), the broad scope of these essays covers a lot of ground. Dave Hickey discusses the work of Raphael, Andy Warhol, Caravaggio, and Michel Foucault, traversing centuries of ideas about aesthetics, sexuality, religion, and culture. Hickey, a professor of art criticism and theory at the University of Nevada and the author of a book of short fiction, boldly ventures to compare Robert Mapplethorpe's X Portfolio to Shakespeare's Sonnets. A delight for the mind. From Publishers Weekly Modern art, say those in the know, isn't so much about beauty as it is about instruction. Art appreciation is considered, in our culture, a consequence of sophistication, taste and learning--the property of the learned elite, the rich and famous. Even for sympathetic contemporary art lovers, there is something terribly precious about the intense politicization that animates much contemporary artistic practice. But can beauty replace pedagogy in art? In essays on gender and beauty, Robert Mapplethorpe, art institutions and beauty's "vernacular," art critic and teacher Hickey prompts a consideration of aspects of the rhetoric of beauty in Western art. "The vernacular of beauty, in its democratic appeal, remains a potent instrument for change in this civilization," Hickey asserts. But he goes on to say that what stands in the way of change are the museums, universities, foundations and the like "mandated to kidnap an entire province of ongoing artistic endeavor from its purportedly dysfunctional parent culture," to dissect and neutralize the power of images. One could argue with Hickey that new mass art audiences' responses to beauty are helping change both art's institutional framework and its position in our culture. But Hickey is on to something: beauty's reemergence as a coveted value challenges the art professional's role as art

custodian. And from the standpoint of those who value democratic culture, this is all to the good. Illustrated. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc. "Dave Hickey's writing is exhilarating and deeply engaging. At its best, *Dragon* is both a time capsule of a period when dirty pictures could dismantle institutions and a provocation to reignite the conversation about the purpose of art." (Newsweek)"