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Portraits



Synopsis

A major new book from one of the world's leading writers and art critics John Berger, one of the world's most celebrated art writers, takes us through centuries of drawing and painting, revealing his lifelong fascination with a diverse cast of artists. In *Portraits*, Berger grounds the artists in their historical milieu in revolutionary ways, whether enlarging on the prehistoric paintings of the Chauvet caves or Cy Twombly's linguistic and pictorial play. In penetrating and singular prose, Berger presents entirely new ways of thinking about artists both canonized and obscure, from Rembrandt to Henry Moore, Jackson Pollock to Picasso. Throughout, Berger maintains the essential connection between politics, art and the wider study of culture. The result is an illuminating walk through many centuries of visual culture, from one of the contemporary world's most incisive critical voices.

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Customer Reviews

Editors' Choice • *New York Times* "John Berger teaches us how to think, how to feel, how to stare at things till we see what we thought wasn't there. But above all he teaches us how to love in the face of adversity. He is a master." • *Arundhati Roy*, author of *The God of Small Things* "A volume whose breadth and depth bring it close to a definitive self-portrait of one of Britain's most original thinkers." • *Financial Times* "Shows the 88-year-old British art critic at his bristling best." • *Wall Street Journal* "Unruly attentiveness animates a lifetime's engagement with artists like Rembrandt, Goya, Henry Moore and

bones.Ã¢Â•Ã¢â••Brooklyn Rail Ã¢Â“This insistence upon unearthing for the present viewer the hidden labor of the artist, when coupled with his own technical knowledge of painterly art, delivers BergerÃ¢â•„¢s essays from the tedium of much art criticism.Ã¢Â•Ã¢â••Robert Minto, Open Letters Monthly Ã¢Â“A vast and nourishing compendium Ã¢Â•Ã¢â••Life has more light and colour after an encounter with Berger.Ã¢Â•Ã¢â••TheÃ¢Â•Ã¢â••The Art Newspaper

Storyteller, novelist, essayist, screenwriter, dramatist and critic, John Berger (1926Ã¢â•œ2017) was one of the most internationally influential writers of the last fifty years. His many books include *Ways of Seeing*; the fiction trilogy *Into Their Labours*; *Here Is Where We Meet*; the Booker PrizeÃ¢â•œwinning novel *G*; *Hold Everything Dear*; the Man BookerÃ¢â•œlonglisted *From A to X*; and *A Seventh Man*. Tom Overton catalogued John BergerÃ¢â•„¢s archive at the British Library as part of an Arts and Humanities Research CouncilÃ¢â•œfunded Collaborative Doctoral Award with KingÃ¢â•„¢s College London, and edited this book as a Henry Moore Institute Research Fellow and a Fellow of the Centre for Life-Writing Research at KCL. He has curated exhibitions at KingÃ¢â•„¢s Cultural Institute, Somerset House and the Whitechapel Gallery, and his writing has been published by the New Statesman, Apollo, White Review, Various Small Fires, Tate, the British Council and others. He is working on BergerÃ¢â•„¢s biography and a book on migration and archives.

John Berger has an artistÃ¢Â•Ã¢â••Ã¢â•œs heart. He writes like a storyteller - exploring a selected group of artists he has pulled from previous articles? (Maybe his personal favorites) He breaks down the artist and the art into manageable pieces and profiles the artist from his intellectual brain in a creative way. This is not an Art History book but Berger's knowledgeable understanding of each artist mixed with his travels... It's not a read from beginning to end - You browse and read... ItÃ¢Â•Ã¢â••Ã¢â•œs an excellent book for artists or those interested in art...

Each essay combines an insightful appreciation of a work of art with Berger's insights into life in our day. For example, in his discussion of the Fayum Portrait Painters of the 1st to 3rd centuries, Berger contrasts the "confident, expansive culture" of the time with our own in which "The future has been, for the moment, downsized, and the past is being made redundant."

Hardback did not arrive as expected. It is not like the pictures on . I would have bought the paperback if I hadn't been somewhat persuaded by the lovely looking Verso cover with a burlap

looking texture. Instead, the book arrived in a regularly hardback. It is decent quality but now what I expected. Starts because of the book's content, but I am disappointed it was not the Verso cover I expected.

Adore John Berger and read and reread all of his books. Always a treasure to encounter John Berger again.

The book as the seller indicated is Uncorrected Page Proofs, and thus collectible. Perfect!

Brilliant writing!

PORTRAITS is admittedly a dense piece of writing. In over five hundred pages, art critic and storyteller John Berger takes us through thousands of years of art history, closely examining such diverse talents as ancient cave painters, classic greats, and modern masters. Berger covers the expected artists (Rembrandt, Cezanne, Monet, van Gogh, and Picasso), as well as many I had never heard of (Basquiat, Broughton, Hambling, and Noel). In all, there are 74 artists explored in this book, and Berger is intimately connected with every one of them. This isn't so much a volume of art history as it is a journey into Berger's soul as he waxes poetic about color, texture, and the many ways art communicates. As Tom Overton writes in the introduction, "this book constructs a history of art that is not about distinction, but about connection; not just between artists, but between artists and us." I was surprised at how much of this book reads as a series of stories, stories about Berger's own life as well as the world of the artists he explores. And Berger's view of art and artists is uniquely his own. Of ancient cave paintings in Chauvet, he writes, "Deep in the cave, which meant deep in the earth, there was everything: wind, water, fire, faraway places, the dead, thunder, pain, paths, animals, light, the unborn." They were there in the rock to be called to. Of Goya, he writes, "Goya's genius as a graphic artist was that of a commentator . . . he was much more interested in events than states of mind." Of Cezanne's use of the color black, he writes, "It's a black like no other in painting." And of Pollack, he writes: "The suicide of an art is a strange idea." These are enigmatic comments that Berger explores through intense analysis, personal vignettes, and clever anecdotes. Reading this, I felt I

knew Berger ÅfÂçÃ ª ¬Ã ª œ and I felt I knew the artists he was revealing to us. My only complaint is the quality of the pictures in this book. All of the paintings are reproduced in black-and-white, which I at first assumed was because the book I was reading was an Advanced ReaderÅfÂçÃ ª ¬Ã ª „çs Copy (ARCs are presented as ÅfÂçÃ ª ¬Ã ª Å“uncorrected proofs, ÅfÂçÃ ª ¬Ã ª • which seldom include color illustrations). But Berger is clear in his preface that the decision to use black-and-white illustrations was intentional. As he puts it, ÅfÂçÃ ª ¬Ã ª “This is because glossy colour reproductions in the consumerist world of today tend to reduce what they show to items in a luxury brochure for millionaires. Whereas black and white reproductions are simple memoranda. ÅfÂçÃ ª ¬Ã ª • The illustrations in this book are really superfluous, since they are difficult to see and do little to compliment BergerÅfÂçÃ ª ¬Ã ª „çs expert prose. ItÅfÂçÃ ª ¬Ã ª „çs easy enough to go online to take a closer look at the works Berger references, but I wonder why the black-and-white illustrations are included at all. But for readers interested in art, art history, or the stories behind the creative spirit, PORTRAITS is a wonderful book. Just be aware that this is not one of those coffee table art books with gorgeous glossy color prints ÅfÂçÃ ª ¬Ã ª œ itÅfÂçÃ ª ¬Ã ª „çs not ÅfÂçÃ ª ¬Ã ª Å“a luxury brochure for millionaires. ÅfÂçÃ ª ¬Ã ª • No, itÅfÂçÃ ª ¬Ã ª „çs an intellectual, very personal, and often very spiritual look at creativity and human expression. I highly recommend it.

On the issue of B/W versus Color reproduction: It's irrelevant, given the physical dimensions of the book. Even a color reproduction would be difficult to discern. However, simply Google the piece in question on your smart phone or iPad or computer and use it as a companion to Berger's explication.

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