



# The Viz

Changes in The Role of The  
American Art Critic: What It  
Means to Be an Art Critic in  
the 21st Century

## ABSTRACT

This issue will focus on a close reading of critiques by several art critics in order to provide a glimpse at how the role of art critics has changed, along with a description of their function in the 21st century. In this text, the reader will encounter quotes from the cited critiques, which have been annotated, in order to visually display the differences in the approach to art criticism from different time frames. Clement Greenberg's critique was selected for this issue to display the noticeable contrast in the methods of criticism of the 20th century to the 21st century. Roberta Smith's critique was also selected to inform the audience of what art criticism was just prior to the 21st century in order to show how the role of the art critic started to shift roles. Jerry Saltz and Jacquelyn Gleisner were selected because Jerry is the most well known critic of contemporary art and Jacquelyn is also an active critic in 2019, and both critics have experience with what the "new" art critic's role is.

# A Brief Statement About Each Art Critic

Clement Greenberg- recognized as one of the most, if not the most, prominent art critics of all time. He was known for his aggressive and harsh criticism.

Roberta Smith- recognized as one of the most decorated and respected art critics of the contemporary era. She is arguably the most well known female art critic of the 21st century.

Jerry Saltz- recognized for his controversy in his reviews and he is also known for making vocal what he believes to be true. He is also one of the most popular art critics of the contemporary era and of all time.

Jacquelyn Gleisner- she is an art critic currently working in 2019.

Pictures of the Critics  
Mentioned In This Issue



Clement Greenberg

Roberta  
Smith



Pictures of the Critics  
Mentioned In This Issue



Jerry Saltz

Jacquelyn  
Gleisner



## Section 1: Overview

The big name of art criticism in the mid 20th century was Clement Greenberg and he was known for having loud opinions on specific artists. In this section, the reader will recognize a shift in the style of criticism from the middle to the end of the 20th century. Roberta Smith's critique does well at displaying what art criticism started to shift towards just prior to the 21st. That style is directed towards constructive feedback.

## Clement Greenberg: His Critique On Jackson Pollock's First Exhibition

A short synopsis of Pollock's show: Pollock's first exhibition relied heavily on surrealist influence. Lots of dripping and random movements with the brush is displayed on his pieces in this show. He was also influenced by Pablo Picasso (Guggenheim).

# Clement Greenberg: His Critique On Jackson Pollock's First Exhibition



Jackson Pollock's "SheWolf" from his first exhibition in Guggenheim Museum, 1943.

Jackson Pollock's "Moon Woman" from his first exhibition in Guggenheim Museum



## Clement Greenberg: His Critique On Jackson Pollock's First Exhibition

Greenberg said this in his review of Pollock's first exhibition: "In his search for style he is liable to relapse into an influence, but if the times are propitious, it won't be for long."

\*In this final statement of Greenberg's review, he ended with a claim about what the future will hold for Pollock if he continues to keep up with the work he displayed in his first exhibition. Since Greenberg did not end with any suggestions with how to improve, it is liable to inference that Pollock felt attacked by that statement and that Greenberg's review must of worried Pollock. Therefore, Greenberg took on the critic style of proposing a vague yet powerful claim about Pollock's show. He often made claims as such to convey his high stature as an art critic.

Roberta Smith: Her  
Critique On  
"Metropolitan Lives: The  
Ashcan Artists and Their  
New York"

A brief synopsis of this show: This show was in New York in 1996 and the pieces in this show displayed different scenes, subjects, and people within New York (Smith). The gallery set up started with more lighthearted paintings like Sloan's "Pigeons", and then moves to a section called "The Changing City", which displays "excavation" was, and then ended with a section called "Ethnic Neighborhoods and Urban Types" which showcases paintings related to Robert Henry's "Willie Gee."



Robert Henri, "Willie Gee", 1904,  
displayed in the exhibit  
"Metropolitan Lives: The Ashcan  
Artists and Their New York"



John Sloan's "Pigeons"

Roberta Smith: Her  
Critique On  
"Metropolitan Lives: The  
Ashcan Artists and Their  
New York"

"More material relating directly to the artists, especially more examples of their own sketches and illustrations, would have helped cement the bridge between art and life more convincingly, just as more pictures and stronger examples would have better withstood the onslaught of ancillary material" (Smith).

\* The repetition of the words "more" and "would" both emphasize a suggestive tone. Therefore, Smith's feedback has revealed her role to be a constructive as well as an thoughtful critic. This perspective is a significant shift from Greenberg's authoritative stance on artists. Specifically, Smith is emphasizing in this critique that art criticism should reflect serious contemplation over the show and not bashing on a specific artist. This model of constructive criticism carries over into the art critiques of the 21st century.

## Section 2: Overview

In the 20th century, we understand that art reviews were critical in shaping the reputation of an art critic because newspaper articles and news channels were the main source for public information. On the other hand in the 21st century, there are many more platforms for art critics to utilize in order to share their ideas and perspectives. In this section of the issue, the audience will understand that an art critic has more responsibilities to fulfill in the 21st century: such as to discuss larger national and global issues in art, and to start being active in the issues that concern them.

## Jerry Saltz: Video Analysis

A brief synopsis of this video: it is called *Jim Carrey and Jerry Saltz on Art and Activism*, and the main topic of discussion is what the artist's role looks like in terms of also being an activist; and another topic in the video describes what it means to be an artist in 2019.



## Jerry Saltz: Video Analysis

Saltz and Carrey discussed that Saltz won a Pulitzer Prize for one of his articles, and that the article, "...bridged the gap" between art and text with his words (Carrey).

\* This quote from Carrey discusses a different type of role for the art critic in 2019. In a sense, Saltz has proposed that the goal of all art critics should be to display ideas within their reviews in such a fluid fashion that the words almost become an art form on the page. Therefore, another goal of the art critic in the 21st century is to display complex, nuanced thinking about certain exhibitions and artists.

## Jerry Saltz: Video Analysis

Jim Carrey made this comment about his Twitter account, "...if you start talking about politics or whatever, you are going to lose half of your audience. (I say lose um!" Saltz says in reply "Amen! Amen!" (0:11:20-0:11:32)

\* Saltz said "Amen" in reply to Carrey, therefore, he has made known his outward support for all artists who display the issues they are activists for in their work and/or on social media. This emphasizes that activism has a high level of importance for art critics in 2019 because Jerry Saltz, arguably the most recognized contemporary art critic, has left an example in this video for other art critics of his time to follow, as well as for future art critics to practice.

## An Interview With Jacquelyn Gleisner

A portion of Jacquelyn's response to my first interview question which is: "What is the role of an art critic today?" :

"They describe, analyze, and provide the context for specific works of art. They also compare works, making note of how these works may connect to broader societal issues and concerns."

\* She notes criticism in a similar way to Saltz does in his videos in terms of noting "broader social issues". Therefore, with the difference in accessibility to information in the 21st century, along with different concerns society has in the 21st century than in the 20th century, the role of the art critic has taken on more responsibilities since Greenberg's era. One of the new responsibilities of art critics, as described in this quote, is to come to understand how society can be tied into an art show. In the 21st century, that role is critical to practice in an accurate manner.

## An Interview With Jacquelyn Gleisner

A portion of Jacquelyn's response to my second interview question which is: " How has this role (of an art critic) evolved since the time of Clement Greenberg?" :

"Critics remain servants of the public, but the field has expanded, especially with the advent of the Internet."

\* This quote by Gleisner can be directly related back to Jerry's video analysis section. He is an example of what many art critics are doing to gain attention, which is using multiple platforms towards his advantage. Also, as mentioned in the quote, Jerry is still remains a servant to the public through his critiques, but also he is a servant through his activist role.

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