



The Art of Cruelty: A Reckoning

By Maggie Nelson

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A fresh new voice in art and cultural criticism takes on the day's most pressing questions about representations of violence in art.

Today both reality and entertainment crowd our fields of vision with brutal imagery. The pervasiveness of images of torture, horror, and war has all but demolished the twentieth-century hope that such imagery might shock us into a less alienated state, or aid in the creation of a just social order. What to do now? When to look, when to turn away?

Genre-busting author Maggie Nelson brilliantly navigates this contemporary predicament, with an eye to the question of whether or not focusing on representations of cruelty makes us cruel. In a journey through high and low culture (Kafka to reality TV), the visual to the verbal (Paul McCarthy to Brian Evenson), and the apolitical to the political (Francis Bacon to Kara Walker), Nelson offers a model of how one might balance strong ethical convictions with an equally strong appreciation for work that tests the limits of taste, taboo, and permissibility.

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Editorial Review

Review

An important and frequently surprising book... could be read as the foundation for a post-avant-garde aesthetics... Nelson, who is also a poet, is such a graceful writer that I...just sat back and enjoyed the show.
— Laura Kipnis (New York Times Book Review)

[Nelson's] critiques of individual artists are delightfully fierce without being mean spirited... Fascinating and bracingly intelligent...The Art of Cruelty's prose is often gorgeous. — Troy Jollimore (Boston Globe)

A lean-forward experience, and in its most transcendent moments, reading it can feel like having the best conversation of your life. — Rachel Syme (NPR Books)

I hope that critics, and aspiring critics, and those who are interested in the relationship between art and ethics, read [The Art of Cruelty]. — Susie Linfield (New Republic)

About the Author

Maggie Nelson, a MacArthur Fellowship recipient, is the author of several books of poetry, autobiography, and criticism. She teaches at CalArts and lives in Los Angeles, California.

Users Review

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