



## **New Art City: Manhattan at Mid-Century**

*Jed Perl*

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## **New Art City: Manhattan at Mid-Century** Jed Perl

A fascinating, panoramic exploration of art and culture in mid-twentieth-century New York City from one of our most important and influential art critics.

"New Art City" takes us from the solitude of the artist's studio to the uproarious bars where artists gathered, from the ramshackle bohemian neighborhoods of downtown Manhattan to the Midtown streets where steel-and-glass skyscrapers were rising and art galleries were proliferating. We encounter a kaleidoscopic range of artists. There are legendary figures-Jackson Pollock, David Smith, Willem de Kooning, Joseph Cornell, Andy Warhol, and Donald Judd-as well as still undervalued ones, such as the galvanic teacher Hans Hofmann, the lyric expressionist Joan Mitchell, the adventuresome realist Fairfield Porter, and the eccentric thinker John Graham. We encounter, too, the writers, critics, patrons, and hangers-on who rounded out the artists' world. Jed Perl helps us see what the artists were creating and understand how they confronted an exploding art audience. And he makes clear how the economic boom of the late 1950s and the increasingly enthusiastic response to Abstract Expressionism ushered in the rapacious art world of the 1960s and the theatricality of Pop Art.

Artists drew strength from the dizzying onslaught of Manhattan, and produced a tidal wave of new forms. These included Hofmann's brazen flourishes of color; Pollock's quicksilver skeins of paint unfurling panoramic arabesques; and the crushed, jagged, turning-back-on-itself calligraphy of de Kooning's gnomic alphabets. And there was much more: Burgoyne Diller's levitating rectangles; Nell Blaine's explosive renderings of quotidian scenes; Ellsworth Kelly's extraordinary simplifications, suggesting sails or semaphores.

A brilliant tapestry of social history, biographical portraiture, and criticism, "New Art City" illuminates a revolutionary, unprecedented time and place in American culture.

## **New Art City: Manhattan at Mid-Century Details**

Date : Published October 4th 2005 by Alfred A. Knopf (first published June 1st 1997)

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Author : Jed Perl

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## From Reader Review New Art City: Manhattan at Mid-Century for online ebook

### Aaron VanAlstine says

Very interesting but a little dense. The author is clearly in love with his subject, though. Hence the almost excruciating detail.

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### Gabriel says

I've read over half of this book. The first quarter or so I read in less than a week, and absolutely loved it. However, the author eventually starts talking about individual artists in an unconnected manner. These artists are discussed merely through individualized analysis of individual works. I began to lose interest and didn't feel like I was gaining anything. It was a struggle to keep reading it. Hopefully, if I ever finish it off, the work will become more cohesive and didactic.

Update: Finally picked up and finished this. It had moments that were very good and deeply enriched my understanding of this period. At other times it was just sheer fluff, and suitable only for scanning. Ultimately, the good outweighs the bad.

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### Writerlibrarian says

Which was amazing and so full of things. My copy is a rainbow of highlights passages. Hit my "I can't stop reading and making notes" button. For art lovers with minimal understanding of the era and knowledge of the major players. It's a springboard to other readings. Well written and engaging. This is not a dry academic non fiction but the 100 pages and more notes and bibliography will warm the cold heart of academic readers. I know it did mine.

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### Rhonda says

i think i don't want to know about the personal lives of artists. it diminishes the enjoyment of the artwork to know about their ego-maniacal tendencies & i find their little demons and petty habits/feuds tiresome.

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### Tommy Kaj says

Jed Perl examines the "American moment" in modern art - the artists and movements around abstract expressionisms rise in New York. Gathering in a wide variety of personalities, the account is somewhat biased (a burning hate for Pop and all things Duchamp pervades the book) but all the more readable for it. Lifting up some more obscure artists and downplaying the role of the most prominent, "New Art City" lives up to the double meaning in its name - showing a fresh view of the art scene in and around the city from the late 30s to the minimalism of the 60s - without the overpowering shadow of Pollock.

### **Kathryn Roth says**

About the contemporary art movement in New York in the 50's and 60's. This movement led the way for artists such as Andy Warhol and, current artist, David Hockney.

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### **Shannon says**

Excellent, but not quick reading. I think I'll buy this one.

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### **Holbrook says**

If Jed Perl used the word "dialectic" one more time I was going to scream. Incrdebily interesting topic not very interestingly conveyed.

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### **Ben says**

Very thorough and well-written discussion of the New York art scene from the late 40s through the mid 60s. It basically starts with Hans Hofmann and runs through Donald Judd. The only real disappointment is the fact that the images are all B&W, and generally pretty small. Perl gives a great sense not just of the artwork and why it was important, but also of the social scene and the connections of NYC artists to scenes in Europe and other parts of America. Lots of original research went into this book, so even if you are familiar with the artists there will be new anecdotes and insights to enjoy.

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### **orelia says**

So I really shoulnd't give this book a rating until I finish it. This is one of those books that I started about a year ago, yet have not finished. Luckily it is not owned by the esteemed the Free Library of Philadelphia, so I am not collecting large fees on this book. From what I have read so far I have gained a larger understanding of the 1950's New York arts scene beyond the megalomaniacs including Pollack and DeKooning. I particularly enjoy the chapter on Buckminster Fuller, designer of the geodesic dome.

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### **Peter Law says**

Yes, a fascinating time and Perl knows his stuff backwards and forwards and has the passion to go with it. But it's (overly) long, IMO. I found swathes of it dry reading and skipped paragraphs and pages, something I rarely do. That said, the chapters on Joseph Cornell and on the history of the creation/building of MoMA are gems of essays in and of themselves.

Some head-scratching omissions as well. Most glaring for me was how one could write a 400-page book on this time and subject and not once, even in passing, mention Cy Twombly.

Perhaps a must for art historians. For the general, interested public, perhaps not.

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### **Karie says**

Oh, the good old days.....

Great stories of Hoffman, Pollock and the (abstract expressionist) gang during the golden age of art...New York in the 1930's, 40's and 50's.

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### **Vincent says**

Find it a little troublesome as to who he is including in our future history. All are pretty obvious, thank god for the few lesser known artists that make the book a more interesting read.

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### **Phil says**

The most interesting thing about this book is its dust jacket: sleek and translucent in a wax-papery way, New Art City is exciting to the touch.

Just don't open it. Jed Perl seems to think that Art began and ended in midcentury NYC; his implicit self-importance and verbosity made me feel like an asshole for even liking art at all -- not, I assume, the intended affect.

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### **Ruth Charchian says**

I would have rated this book a 5 because the depth and breadth of the knowledge of the Jed Perl is at the level far beyond Ph.d. If this is not a text book, it should be one for students learning how modern art emerged and poised NYC as an artistic peer city to Paris. His descriptions of the art scene in NYC during the 1940s through the 1970s is unparalleled. He describes the emergence of "The Club" "Cedar Tavern," and "Black Mountain College" where every late afternoon and evening artists of all stripes gathered to listen to speakers or debate life and philosophy as they relate to their own art. The cream rose to the top: Hans Hoffman, Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Gorkey, James Graham and many, many others strived to create their own unique interpretations of life through their abstract expressionism art, collage art, welded art, etc..

Perl is the art critic for "New Republic." His credentials are impeccable. The book, however, is dense and packed with detail. It is not for the disinterested reader.

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