



Art and Celebrity

John A. Walker

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The uneasy crossover between art and celebrity has been much discussed in recent years. Artists as celebrities is hardly a new phenomenon, but the growing cult of celebrity in contemporary culture is throwing up paradoxical ideas about the contradictions between 'high' art and mass appeal and blurring the already unstable boundaries between art, commodity and popular culture. This is a lively and accessible study of the phenomenon--the glitzy world where art and celebrity meet--informed by a fundamentally serious look at what happens when the 'serious' world of art collides with celebrity. Global culture is now dominated by celebrities, some of whom--like Madonna and Stallone--are art collectors and some--like Dennis Hopper and David Bowie--are spare-time artists. Walker explains how artists such as Warhol, Gavin Turk, Jeff Koons, Elizabeth Peyton and Alison Jackson contribute to, but also critique, the cult of celebrity by depicting film celebrities, rock stars and royalty in paintings and statues. Celebritisation has overtaken the art world too: Walker surveys 14 art stars of the twentieth century from Dali to Tracey Emin. He also reviews alternatives: the leftwing pantheon of figures such as Mao, Che Guevara and Rosa Luxemburg, and pictorial celebrations of the people. Finally, Walker considers the pros and cons of celebrityhood for artists and its effects on current art, and discusses the return of the hero in the wake of 11 September 2001. John A. Walker is the author of several Pluto titles. Until 1999, he was Reader in Art & Design History at Middlesex University. He continues to research, write and publish as a freelance art critic and art historian.

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