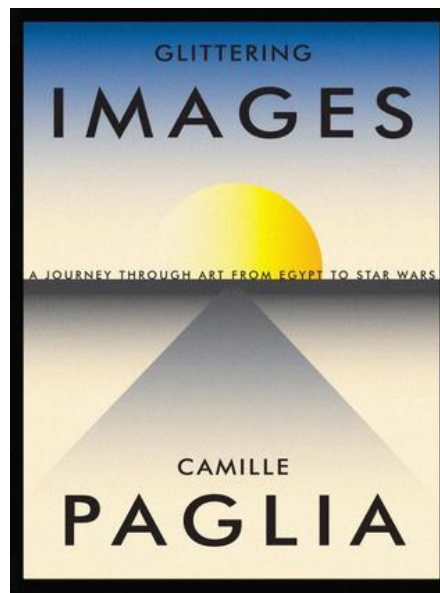




Glittering Images: A Journey Through Art from Egypt to Star Wars

Camille Paglia

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From the best-selling author of *Sexual Personae* and *Break, Blow, Burn* and one of our most acclaimed cultural critics, here is an enthralling journey through Western art's defining moments, from the ancient Egyptian tomb of Queen Nefertari to George Lucas's volcano planet duel in *Revenge of the Sith*.

America's premier intellectual provocateur returns to the subject that brought her fame, the great themes of Western art. Passionately argued, brilliantly written, and filled with Paglia's trademark audacity, *Glittering Images* takes us on a tour through more than two dozen seminal images, some famous and some obscure or unknown—paintings, sculptures, architectural styles, performance pieces, and digital art that have defined and transformed our visual world. She combines close analysis with background information that situates each artist and image within its historical context—from the stone idols of the Cyclades to an elegant French rococo interior to Jackson Pollock's abstract *Green Silver* to Renée Cox's daring performance piece *Chillin' with Liberty*. And in a stunning conclusion, she declares that the avant-garde tradition is dead and that digital pioneer George Lucas is the world's greatest living artist. Written with energy, erudition, and wit, *Glittering Images* is destined to change the way we think about our high-tech visual environment.

Glittering Images: A Journey Through Art from Egypt to Star Wars Details

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From Reader Review Glittering Images: A Journey Through Art from Egypt to Star Wars for online ebook

Matt says

Ahhh Camille...Miss Paglia, if you're nasty, Professor Paglia if you're delinquent...

I don't know all that much when it comes to art, to be honest. I know enough maybe to be conversant in it but not for very long. The good rule of thumb, I find, when you're going through a topic you're not super-versed on is to be guided by someone whose work you know well. At least, that way you can separate the gold from the dross, the inquisitiveness from the prejudices, the rants from the chamber music.

With Paglia, at least I know what I'm getting, what I'm in for. I have always loved her work, even when she is being deliberately outre or just plain gobsmackingly outrageous. The thing is, behind all the bravura and the score-settling there beats the heart of an aesthete and a spunky, well-versed, take-no-prisoners, fast talking Italian gal from upstate New York. I love her for her passion, her razor-sharp judgments and her brisk, lucid, consistently insistent prose style.

Here, she lets herself loose on some of her favorite or at least most interesting works of art from ancient days to...er...George Lucas. One of her stated goals for this book is to try and revitalize art criticism for a new generation. No attention paid in under-funded schools, no quarter given by revanchist Right-wing voices blathering on talk radio, no time or patience in your average media-addled 20-something's brain, no vigor or humility from (what she considers to be) a desiccated, sulky, pretentious coterie of artists...what's a lonely aesthete to do?

Well, pull yourself up a seat beside professor Paglia and let her put on her curator hat and guide you through some of the most interesting- and, more important, interestingly explained- works of art the human race has ever scratched or fashioned or blotted for your viewing pleasure.

The book itself is pretty sharp, too- nicely firm, embossed pages, clear and generous presentations of the works themselves. It fits easily in the hand and is much less cumbersome than a lot of the other art books that one finds kicking around used book stores or basement apartments. This was all part of the design, according to Paglia, and it was well worth the effort.

Her critical eye is as sharp as ever- always in touch with historical or cultural trends, lively and detailed and very much in keeping with the Talmudic style of interpretation. Paglia guides you through your viewing experience bit by bit, always wrapping up her insights with a pointed, evocative, well-considered apercu.

I do have to call her out on her over-bearing insistence that George Lucas is the greatest living artist, though. I get it- popular appeal is no guarantee of hackery, and the Star Wars franchise is damn near timeless, etc...but c'mon! The Revenge of the Sith? That's the best the art world can do? Nah. Not buying it.

Paglia delights in spectacle, rich coloration and takes a refreshingly childlike joy in big explosions and ornate expressionism...all that's cool, no question, but...a statement that grand(iose) can't help but reek of provocation for provocation's sake. Much more helpful to the reader and the art community as a whole to either find another pop(ular) source of vision or champion an artist who could use the exposure, not to mention the payday.

Polishing Lucas's throne will not do when you've just come off a stimulating, accessible, incisive and

enlivening survey of Donatello, Titian, Manet, Picasso, Pollock, Magritte, and so on.

She was really kind and attentive and pleased to meet me, when I met her. My copy is autographed, which was worth the priciness of the package on a rather dire budget. She did, after all, sort of change my life...

Back when I was knee high to Jimmy Page, I used to read pretty much nothing other than guitar magazines. I'm not super-musical, other than a burning desire to hear everything I can from any genre I can, but I can fake it on a six-string as well as I need to. For some reason, people constantly assume I'm a musician but that's neither here nor there.

Anyway, Guitar World was doing one of their perennial 'Stairway To Heaven' issues (I mean, honestly, good tune and all that, but AGAIN?) and they included a little subsection that had a nicely done line-for-line breakdown of the lyrics by you-know-who. I read it about a 100 times, and I swear it got me thinking about this poetry and fiction stuff in a way I never had before. Made it cool, I suppose, or at least less rote or forbiddingly academic. Plus, it took the art of literary interpretation and analysis and applied it to a popular song- who'dathunkit?

I told her about that, pretty much word-for-word, and she lit up when she heard it. I told her about a book I was (am!) writing about comparing different writers and different musicians and how literature can enhance music as well as the other way around. She loved it, she seemed genuinely interested, and she did that sort of neck-snap thing that some women do when they want to make a sassy point and said "I'm going to bring that up more often"- it was a real nice moment, sort of a just-between-you-and-me, conspiratorial wink.

I asked if I could communicate with her at all and she indicated how it could be done, asking for the proper spelling of my name and such. I tried to follow up with the event coordinator but due to the randomness of such a thing and my own tentativeness and cold feet, it was not to be. Ah, me. Still, it was worth it for the story.

Viva Camille!

Daniel (Attack of the Books!) Burton says

Over the years, I've run into Camille Paglia's essays at unexpected times, and I seem to always come away thoughtful and, occasionally, amused. Clearly coming from a perspective distant from my own, politically and culturally a member of East Coast academia, I never the less found her insights and way of putting things provocative.

When I heard that her newest book argued that George Lucas was one of greatest, if not the greatest, of modern artists, I was intrigued. First off, because I've been a Star Wars fan since I was a child making light sabers out of wrapping paper tubes. And second, because I've occasionally, like many other fans, wondered if Lucas had lost his way with the Prequels.

How does an art critic find Lucas, who has turned Star Wars into one of the most profitable franchises in history, to be an artist?

Of course, I was intrigued.

Paglia's Glittering Images: A Journey Through Art from Egypt to Star Wars is a survey of art through

history, with each entry a selection of an era. Paglia describes the piece of art, starting in the bronze era and passing through ancient Greece, the middle ages, the Renaissance, and so on. Each entry is two to three pages long and provides background and narrative, analysis and context for the work. The writing is fluid, colorful, and, like I had found in Paglia before, intriguing.

I'm not an art critic, let alone an art historian. At best, I can appreciate a few pieces of well known art. What I found in Paglia was an informative survey of art through the ages. In the introduction Paglia argues that what we are losing in our quest to get to the top of the education ladder is an appreciation of what art has brought us to where we are.

It's fascinating reading, even if there are a few pieces of art from the modern era looked--to me--more like spatters of paint than art.

I recommend it, whether you are an experienced art critic or a novice, as I am.

And Lucas? I'll let you discover on your own why Paglia thinks he is today's greatest living artist.

Lindsey says

Camille Paglia has had a great influence on me ever since I stumbled across a used copy of "Sex, Art and American Culture" in high school. I'm pretty sure she saved me from a narrow, feminist way of thinking with that book. Then "Break, Blow, Burn" taught me how to read poetry, something you think I would have picked up after graduating from a liberal arts college.

After five years, she has finally published "Glittering Images," written in short, easily accessible essays that force the reader to examine art more closely and put the artwork in cultural context for greater understanding. Paglia chose 29 pieces of art, each meant as an introduction to a major style. It has definitely kindled an interest in visual arts for me, and I'm sure I'll revisit the book constantly. Particularly enlightening are the essays on Manet, Lempicka and Eleanor Antin.

As a side note, if you have a chance to see Paglia speak, don't miss it! She is sharp-tongued and hilarious and insightful.

Mike says

Exceedingly basic and fairly uninteresting. The fight scene between Vadar and Obi-Wan is somehow art? Come on.

Nick Ziegler says

Paglia makes a solid attempt at providing a suitable *raison d'être* for the art book in our era -- in an "age of

vertigo," wherein "mass media are a bewitching wilderness," Paglia reasonably asserts that "we must relearn how to see." However, this is not *The Work of Art in the Age of Digital Reproduction*, and Paglia is no Walter Benjamin. Despite this somewhat promising introduction, which soon devolves into a curious and surprising curmudgery about how film is better than digital and painting is dead (surprising because of her later endorsement of insipid newness, like Antin's "100 Boots"), this is nothing more than a bland set of short essays that reads like a greatest hits of undergraduate textbooks, with slightly narrower focus given the one-work-at-a-time format. Paglia declines to provide any sort of citations or bibliography, because listing her sources "would take another volume." Probably more accurately, it would reveal a lack of any serious archival research or review of the literature; which is fine, but admitting it would undermine her high-minded pretense.

In the introduction she also explicitly aligns herself against a straw-man version of Marxist criticism, which "reduces art to ideology," and aligns herself with "the great tradition of German philology." She also counts herself among the devotees of Panofsky's iconology, and presumably she hopes to bring a many-layered analysis of this sort to bear on the works she has chosen. Unfortunately, each chapter reads like a more-or-less competent (as in, some are and some are not) magazine piece. She writes well on Manet, on Pollock, on a few others. There is some creativity of choice -- Lempicka is an interesting inclusion, and the Grosz drawing she chose definitely merits particular attention. On the other hand, she's clearly out of her element discussing ancient and Byzantine art, and she chooses some mediocre Italian Renaissance and Mannerist painters to the exclusion of anything from Northern art until van Dyck -- himself not terribly interesting. If the task is to learn to see, I think Van Eyck or Breugel are far more instructive than Bronzino, or even Titian. And if you can't bear to let the Italians go, for god sakes skip the Rococo.

Her selections of and chapters on Antin and Cox barely merit serious consideration -- they read as lists of silly things people did when they couldn't think of anything meaningful to do but still wanted to be artists. However, more provocative than any "happening," or Cox's ninety-nine hour photoshop job that is less sophisticated than your average LOLcat is Paglia's declaration that Lucas is the greatest living artist. In Paglia's attempt to teach us how to see anew, we are informed that after transferring to USC, "Lucas was bitten by the filmmaking bug." Gripping stuff.

What becomes clear reading Paglia's chapter is that she is a fangirl who is slightly abashed that she is compelled to sing the praises of Star Wars so publicly, so she has to place it in a lineage to which it doesn't belong in order to imbue it with significance. So we are informed that Lucas' aerial battles are "significant works of modern kinetic art whose ancestry is in Marcel Duchamp's readymades and Alexander Calder's mobiles." No, they're not. The opening battle of *Revenge of the Sith* "cuts optical pathways that are as graceful and abstract as the weightless skeins in a drip painting by Jackson Pollock." Sure, if that's the analogy you want to use, but why so invested in namedropping canonical artists? Why not just say it's fast and elegant and you like it, especially when it's playing in a loud theater?

It's unclear exactly why the lava battle of *Revenge of the Sith* is the greatest artwork of our time. Sometimes Paglia's case rests on the newness of it's composite prop-digital production. But if newness is the criteria, I refer you again to LOLcats. In her introduction, Paglia warns that while "[her] postwar generation could play with pop because we had solid primary-school education, geared to the fundamentals of history and humanities..." and therefore, presumably, were solidly constituted subjects who could withstand a wry performance of relativism and gleeful wallowing in consumerist excess, nowadays we ain't built that way, and we desperately need to construct meaning, not tear it down. Yet her case for Lucas' greatness rests more on how pretty the red lava is than on any great meaning the work has. Perhaps she aims at a virtuosic erasure of the division between high and low art, but as she herself points out that division is already gone. What persists is her need to justify the some-people-still-think-it's-low art by reference to the it's-safely-considered-high art. Despite the general thrust of her opening manifesto, Paglia seems incapable of treating Star Wars as the art object it is: one that entertains the masses, gives them an alternate world to inhabit, sells a lot of things, is ripe for parody, inspires people to dress up, and so on. Whatever it is, it is completely

different than anything Jacques-Louis David or Bernini could pull off. And whatever it is, Paglia fails to account for it, or fails to even perceive the challenge that this presents to her narrative of a succession of art objects, all somehow in dialogue with one another (whether intentionally or not).

Tony says

I've never read Camille Paglia before, so I was unaware of the fuss. There are rumors of controversy, or at least of controversial utterances. Some of it is definitional apparently, like this nugget on the Goodreads author page for Paglia:

She has been variously called the "feminist that other feminists love to hate," a "post-feminist feminist," one of the world's top 100 intellectuals by the UK's Prospect Magazine, and by her own description "a feminist bisexual egomaniac."

I'm reminded that Jerry Jeff Walker calls himself "a hairy-ass hillbilly", which is funnier and, to my mind, equally profound.

Which is to say, I don't know anything about post-feminist feminists or who they hate. What I do know, after reading *Glittering Images*, is that Paglia has a great eye for art and knowledge of art history. Reading this is like having a personal tour of art history, from antiquity to today, by a patient, enthusiastic, brilliant teacher.

This book is lovingly produced, the pictured works in very high quality. The attendant essays are instructive, even if I wasn't always seeing what she was seeing. She takes us from the Tomb of Nefertari, the Porch of Maidens, the Book of Kells, through the usual suspects (Titian, Manet, Monet, Picasso and Pollock), and on to the Symbolists, Surrealism, Art Deco, Pop and Performance Art. She ends with George Lucas' *Star Wars*. You don't have to agree with her theory of art evolution to be entertained and the better for the journey.

If for nothing else, this book should be read for the paragraph that begins: *Penises have proved troublesome in Western art*. To which I would add, *And not only there*. This allows Paglia to utter the phrase "the unruly adult penis presents the artist with knotty challenges." I've now learned that in Greek art and culture, "a small penis was valued as a mark of intellect; a large penis was thought comical and animalistic." Just saying.

Highly recommended.

Thanks again to Goodreads, as this was another Giveaway winner!

David says

Camille Paglia's "Glittering Images" is a well-written, thoroughly researched, thoughtful introduction to western art. In the introduction of the book, she bemoans "The current cafeteria-style curriculum" found in even some of America's best colleges and universities. Instead, she argues for a common core reminiscent of E.D. Hirsch's "cultural literacy" or the Allan Bloom's emphasis on the classics. As she said in her recent book talk at the Louisville Public Library, she values and prefers a chronological approach to studying the humanities. In this book, she takes the reader on a survey of western art going from the ancient Egyptians to George Lucas and *Star Wars*.

Since this book was written for a general audience, there are no footnotes and few citations. Although the chapters are short, Paglia packs an amazing amount of information in each one. As usual she is just as engaging and witty as she was in "Sexual Personae" and "Vamps & Tramps." She combines scholarship with a social conscience.

I highly recommend this book to both those who know little about western art and those who would like a good refresher course. Now, I only wish she would publish an amended book that would have color plates of the many works of art that she mentions. This is a good read.

John Fredrickson says

Paglia's books always impress through the display of vast erudition - this is no exception.

In a series of short essays that each use one piece of art as a focal point, Paglia sweeps through the history of art in various forms, introducing the chosen artist, the predominant culture of the time, and some of the context in which the art was received. She also draws attention to some of the features and symbolism that is used within the artistic piece, while pointing out details and techniques that are used. Some of the choices of artists (e.g., Grosz, Antin) seem somewhat out-of-place in a book that contains artists such as Titian; one gets the sense that the author enjoys pushing boundaries.

Nick Black says

like most things involving art, this book left me flummoxed. as a reasonably well-adjusted male of thirty-three years, i worry about a great many things. castration isn't one of them, yet that word shows up four distinct times in this slideshow-styled review (i.e. about four pages of commentary for each still) of thirty works, with an emphasis on the past two centuries. my appreciation for the works and writeups varied (I was delighted to be introduced to Tamara de Lempicka's Art Deco *Portrait of Doctor Boucard*, 1928; Renee Cox's 1998 *Chillin' With Liberty* was less impressive; Andy Warhol remains a king of frippery, best remembered for his patronage of the Velvet Underground, and inclusion of 1962's *Marilyn Diptych* made me grunt with irritation). sometimes paglia found things i didn't see, but could admit; sometimes she seems plainly wrong (if *Doctor Boucard* is truly holding a "blood-red vial", the hardback's color reproduction is a sad state of affairs); sometimes she's spot-on and made me sit up with wonder at what i'd missed.

her Introduction is provocative, but a tendency towards sweeping statements and indictments without data or even examples turned me off.

ordered after reading Simon Doonan's *Slate* article, "Why the Art World Is So Loathsome: Eight theories."

Bryan says

Reading this book brought home how terrible visual arts education is in our public school system. I'm

guessing that due to our Protestant heritage -- with its emphasis on the written word -- we focus almost exclusively on written artistic works while visual art and music fall by the wayside. In my public K-12 education, I had zero -- ZERO -- instruction in art history. It wasn't until I got to college and on a whim took Introduction to Western Art, taught by Dr. Pat Craig at CSU Fullerton, that an entire new world opened up to me. It was the best college class I ever took.

In the introduction, Paglia says one of her goals is to open up visual art to the conservatives she hears routinely denouncing it on talk radio. In France and Italy, everyone believes that art belongs to them; why shouldn't that be the case here? In a series of short essays, she writes in clear, accessible language about the history of the work and provides her own commentary. It's a great template for a blog and I hope people are inspired by her example to do it themselves.

As for the essays themselves, am I always persuaded by her conclusions? No, certainly not, but that's beside the point. I want to discuss art with people who are passionately engaged, regardless of whether I like the same things as them. Paglia shows how it's done.

Ann says

My new favorite non-fiction book of the year! One isn't just dazzled by Paglia's scholarship, but also illuminated by the broad spectrum of art works she focuses on. Show-offy academia at its best; the slick pages glitter. Borrowed it from the library; I'd like to own this book.

the gift says

this book is an excellent overview of the history of art, and even if you disagree with some assertions, she is never less than compelling, educated, original and challenging in her arguments. did not enjoy art history much when I had to take it at u- but here it is fascinating, particularly in the range of modern art, art from the 19th century through the wider net of the twentieth, up to her championing of Revenge of the Sith and George Lucas's films as current great art...

this is an overview, as such the evolution of art and the changing roles, politics, the immediate and personal to the metaphysical pretence of various art, and it is fascinating to read it all in one book that does not cripple the bearer under the weight. but then, the reproductions require size, and are excellent here. that art can be seen to be freeing itself from museums, from powerful collectors, from patrons, the church or the wealthy, to suffusing the way we live it, is an encouraging narrative. on the one, there has never been so much art accessible, so much art made, so much art experienced every day in our postmodern world. on the other, as she argues in her introduction, there continues together a lamentable dearth of educated public appreciation or support of the arts...

in a way, whether you need to see again the artwork examined to see what she mentions, or if the title is enough, or the artist's name is enough, can be indicative of the power of chosen work. and Star Wars? doubt that anyone who has seen it ever need see it again, to remember the power of that climactic light sabre duel over the volcanic rivers of Revenge...

Clementine says

I loved the introduction, and was hoping more of the rest of the book... She arbitrarily selected 29 artworks to cover thousands years of Art... but the artworks were well located in their historical and stylish contexts. It's a great book to have an overview of art history, even though I had to read it with Google open to check the mentioned artworks... And what a disappointing end... George Lucas "supreme artist" of the 21st century... Seriously??

Hadrian says

Some 29 essays providing an introduction to art.

The big gripe a lot of people will inevitably have with this is that a lot will be left out - could you imagine the difficulty of trying to introduce somebody to literature with only 29 books? Still, it's a very respectable introduction and cross-section of European and North American art, and the author's opinions are very ... fiery, to put it mildly.

My only (minor) criticism is her choice of Star Wars Episode III to represent modern pop cinema. If you had to pick something from Star Wars, IV or V are better.

Emmanuel Rojas says

Read if you already read Gombrich's "The Story of Art" and you've got nothing better to do. Good for the pretentious Star Wars fan and discovering a few overlooked pieces of art.
