

# WHAT ART IS BookNews

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## ***What Art Is: The Esthetic Theory of Ayn Rand***

by Louis Torres & Michelle Marder Kamhi (Open Court, 2000) / paper and cloth, 523pp.

### **ABOUT THE BOOK**

Aimed at general readers as well as critics and scholars, *WHAT ART IS* challenges the prevailing critical view that something is art merely if a reputed artist or expert says it is. Part I introduces Rand's little-known theory of art in a critical, historical, and scientific context, and shows it to be consistent with a growing body of knowledge in such fields as cognitive psychology, neurology, and evolutionary science.

Part II applies Rand's theory to a debunking of the purported innovations of modernism and postmodernism—from “abstract art” and “Pop art” to such phenomena as “installation art,” “performance art,” “video art,” and “experimental” music, dance, and fiction. None of it, the authors argue, is *art* by any objective definition of the term. Nor is photography or architecture. *WHAT ART IS* ends with an examination of the public policy implications of Rand's theory for government and corporate support of the arts, art law, and arts education.

### **JACQUES BARZUN COMMENTS**

During an “In Depth” interview on C-SPAN in May 2001, the eminent cultural historian Jacques Barzun (author of the best-selling *From Dawn to Decadence*) cited *WHAT ART IS* as “a very interesting and thorough book” that had brought him to admire much of Rand's theory of art. He has also noted that it is “a splendid piece of work,” whose “research, reflection, and writing are worthy of all praise.” (See book website, listed below, for other remarks by Barzun.)

### **REVIEWS**

*Choice* (Association of College and Research Libraries, Spring 2001)

“A well-documented debunking of 20-century art and art theory. . . . Recommended for all academic levels and general readers.”

— *Richard E. Palmer, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy, MacMurray College*

*The Public Interest* (Spring 2001)

“Rich, opinionated . . . full of notes, asides, and second thoughts.”

— *Roger Kimball, Managing Editor, The New Criterion*

*The Art Book* (Journal of the Association of Art Historians, UK, September 2001)

“A balanced critical assessment of [Rand's] arguments.”

### **BOOK WEBSITE: [www.aristos.org](http://www.aristos.org)**

Includes an abstract, excerpts from the Introduction, chapter summaries, reviews, authors' responses, and more. See, also, the *Amazon.com* page for *WHAT ART IS* for an excerpt from Chapter 1, and the complete Index. (Search for page by author or full book title.)

# WWW.ARISTOS.ORG

## ***Aristos* (An Online Review of the Arts)**

### ***What Art Is: The Esthetic Theory of Ayn Rand* (Open Court, 2000)**

*Louis Torres & Michelle Marder Kamhi are co-editors of Aristos and co-authors of What Art Is.*

## ***Aristos***

*Aristos* was published as a print journal from 1982 to 1997, when the editors ceased [spacing?] publication in order to complete the writing of *What Art Is*. During that time the editor of *Magazines for Libraries* said that “*Aristos* is not just a passive, idealistic publication; it vigorously challenges modernist scholars and critics.” He further remarked that it was “a scholarly but gutsy little periodical that . . . argues an unfashionable thesis.” Jacques Barzun, then (as now) America’s most eminent cultural historian, wrote the editors to say that “reading *Aristos* has given me much pleasure and instruction.”

## ***What Art Is***

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### **REVIEWS**

*Art’s Prospect: The Challenge of Tradition in an Age of Celebrity* (2003)

“Rich, opinionated . . . full of notes, asides, and second thoughts.”

— Roger Kimball, *Managing Editor*, *The New Criterion*

*The Art Book* (Reviews Journal of the Association of Art Historians, UK, September 2001)

“A balanced critical assessment of [Ayn Rand’s] arguments.”

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### **BOOK WEBSITE**

Includes an abstract, excerpts from the Introduction, chapter summaries, reviews, authors’ responses, and more. The website also is home to *What Art Is Online*, which features short articles by the authors written after publication of the book in 2000 and prior to the launching of *Aristos* in 2003. (The complete Index may be viewed the book’s *Amazon.com* page.)

