Morley

Writing on the Wall

Word and Image in Modern Art

From the cut-up Cubist collages of Picasso to the monumental filmic narratives of Fiona Banner, and from the schoolboy subversion of Magritte to the demotic scrawl of Cy Twombly, the use of words is one of the defining features of modern art. Indeed, with many contemporary works, only those without text are remarkable. Exploring the strange, unsettling, and often humorous results when words escape their traditional confines and inhabit artworks, this book is the first sustained consideration of the manifold infiltrations of the written word into the visual arts from the nineteenth century to the present day. Simon Morley traces the growing bond between word and image, explaining how artists have harnessed the resulting tension to form identities, challenge authority, and make sense of a world in constant change. Writing on the Wall discusses familiar movements from the Impressionists to the present day, focusing on many works of modern art such as Dada nonsense words, Surrealist painting-poems, Constructivist typographies, oriental calligraphy, postwar gestural painting, and much more. As he considers these works, Morley reveals how artists have responded to an environment increasingly saturated with words, and also asks how the mass media have adopted and adapted artistic devices in propaganda, typography, and advertising. The book ends with a look at current developments in the world of hypertext, where word and image have at last found an essential unity.

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