



Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism

T. J. Clark, Timothy J. Clark

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In this intense and far-reaching book, acclaimed art historian T. J. Clark offers a new vision of the art of the past two centuries, focusing on moments when art responded directly in extreme terms to the ongoing disaster called "modernity". Modernism, Clark argues, was an extreme answer to an extreme condition - the one Max Weber summed up as "the disenchantment of the world". Clark focuses on instances of maximum stress, when the movement revealed its true nature. The book begins with Jacques-Louis David, painting at the height of the Terror in 1793, then leaps forward to Pissarro a hundred years later, struggling to picture Two Young Peasant Women in a way that agreed with his anarchist politics. Next, the author turns in succession to Cezanne's paintings of the Grand Baigneuses and their coincidence in time (and maybe intention) with Freud's launching of psychoanalysis; to Picasso's Cubism, and to avant-garde art after the Russian Revolution. Clark concludes with a reading of Jackson Pollock's tragic version of abstraction and suggests a new set of terms to describe avant-garde art - perhaps in its final flowering - in America after 1945. Shifting between broad, speculative history and intense analysis of specific works, Clark not only transfigures our usual understanding of modern art, he also launches a new set of proposals about modernity itself.

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