

# MODERN ART AND THE DEATH OF A CULTURE

H.R. ROOKMAAKER



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This disturbing but illuminating classic is a brilliant perspective on the cultural turmoil of the radical sixties and its impact on today's world, especially as reflected in the art of the time. Rookmaaker's enduring analysis looks at modern art in a broad historical, social, and philosophical context, laying bare the despair and nihilism that pervade our era. He also shows the role Christian artists can play in proclaiming truth through their work.

Rookmaaker's brilliant articulation of faith and scholarship is insightful and inspiring. The book moves freely and with a sense of urgency between the worlds of high culture, popular art and music, and Christian faith.

This reissue makes his foundational work available to a new generation.

*"A landmark book in the story of contemporary Christians in the arts."* --Os Guinness, author of *The American Hour*

## Modern Art & Death of a Culture Details

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Author : Hans R. Rookmaaker

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# From Reader Review Modern Art & Death of a Culture for online ebook

## Felipe Barnabé says

Muito bom!

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## Ann says

New insights to understand how abstract art and what followed changed our culture. Are you old enough to remember the total change in artist's renditions into meaningless "stuff" made of rusted iron and the like, setting outside our buildings? In contrast, remember the realistic and beautiful art/sculptures of famous people we admired, as previously observed. Follows, detail the dates and the artists that were most responsible for that change and the thought behind it.

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## Abrahamus says

Originally published almost forty years ago, this work has certainly lost none of its relevance for those seeking an understanding of the forces behind the downward trajectory of both western art and western culture over the course of the last three centuries or so. This assertion in itself might seem a rather odd one to most folks—didn't the problems (for both art and culture) really start during the 20th century? Actually, no.

Rookmaaker argues quite persuasively that the seeds of nihilism and despair were actually sown during the "Enlightenment" period of the 18th century and the obvious problems which began to manifest themselves in the 20th century were the resultant harvest. The intervening 19th century may be viewed as a period during which these matters were working themselves out and during which much art that might be deemed "beautiful" was still being produced, but the problems were there nonetheless, and with increasing clarity, as a mere scratch to the surface reveals.

Beginning *in medias res*, with the medieval period (it isn't really necessary to go back further in time to prove his point), Rookmaaker demonstrates that there was a time when physical and spiritual realities coexisted comfortably and formed a seamless whole, both in the thoughts and lives of people and on the painted canvas. This view persisted, remarkably in some respects, even through the Renaissance and Reformation periods.

It was the Enlightenment, with its dogged insistence upon rationality and empiricism as the only standards for gauging "reality", which drove the seemingly irrevocable wedge between the natural and the supernatural. Artists (and everyone else, for that matter) since that time have come under increasing pressure to choose between the two. The predominant approach has been to reject the latter in favor of the former, resulting in a growing crescendo of meaninglessness and despondency. Certain movements (Romanticism and certain enclaves of Christian art) have sought the opposite approach of asserting the supernatural over the natural, but with limited success, largely because at heart they have continued to accept the fundamental dualism of the Enlightenment view.

My only reason for not rating the book more highly is that, although Rookmaaker's insights are keen, I find his style a bit exacting, and the increasingly depressing nature of the material begins to weigh down on you after a while. (I actually started this book a good while back and had to take an extended break about two-thirds of the way through before finishing.) There's great stuff toward the end though, so don't fail to persevere if you encounter the same difficulties!

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### **Kenny Robertson says**

A fascinating walk through the development of philosophical ideas from the Renaissance to the 1970s as seen through art. Raises challenging questions about the purpose and significance of art and how Christian artists and the church should respond.

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### **Douglas Wilson says**

Really good.

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### **Seph says**

A scholarly approach to art as a barometer of culture. Rookmaaker, a trained art critic and dear friend to Francis Schaeffer, explores how the cultural shift in epistemology affects art.

If you are not familiar with art history, it is helpful to have Google at hand as you are reading so you can view the pieces Rookmaaker discusses.

This is a good read.

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### **Mark Gring says**

I am about half way through this text. It is a wonderful overview about the development and directions in the arts that have led us to where we are now. My daughter is an art major and has gone through several art history classes. This book is giving me some points of connection, as a non-art historian, for talking with my daughter. Even if I did not have a daughter studying art, though, this book would be an important one to read.

As many others have said, if you want to find out where your culture is headed...study the arts. The artists lead years before the philosophers take a stand and even more years ahead of where the general culture will eventually go. If we want to transform our culture, we need to transform the arts. Another easy-to-read text from Rookmaaker. It is engaging, challenging, eye-opening, and worth every minute of my reading time.

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### **Mark Nenadov says**

This is a great treatment of modern art, the role of Christians in the arts, and the development of the arts over history. Han, carefully and compellingly shows how ideas and worldviews are worked out in art. This book does require careful, slow reading. Especially if you are not already exposed to a lot of information about art history. This will challenge you and give you a much deeper perception of what art is, what it means, and how it reflects ideas.

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### **Richardson says**

Um grito profético pela verdadeira arte

Rookmaaker não escreve. Ele grita. Brada aos quatro cantos da terra, por onde se pode ouvir - ou pra quem tem ouvidos. Com uma riqueza cultural ímpar, que o leigo e o estudioso podem maravilhar-se, Rookmaaker traz à tona o que muito tem se perdido. Narrando, passo a passo, a vitória da arte moderna e da cultura sem Deus, e evocando aos cristãos que desembainhem suas espadas (ou pincéis) e tragam de volta à arte a humanidade, a liberdade, os valores, a beleza, a justiça, a verdade.

Nenhum fio fica sem nó. Escreve sobre obras como quem estivesse pintando uma. É uma verdadeira e bela obra, na qual podemos ver aspectos existenciais, históricos, filosóficos e até espirituais da morte cultural em que estamos vivendo - ou mesmo colaborando. Ele traz a problemática, muito bem desenvolvida e explicada, desde o seu início. Além disso, mostra a necessidade de uma resposta cristã e como torná-la possível. Nenhum artista cristão deveria deixar de ler este livro de importância até mesmo profética. Não porque contém apenas palavras de um homem sábio, mas porque fundamentam-se na Palavra do Divino e Soberano Deus, Senhor da Criação e da arte.

Por fim, ler este livro ajuda muito a introduzir o leitor na reflexão sobre fé e arte e como agir de maneira cristã neste meio. É uma leitura tão importante quanto necessária, que além de tudo isso, é altamente prazerosa.

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### **Jeremy says**

Modern/religious response here.

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### **Janice says**

I just finishing rereading this book for my 11th grade Omnibus class and found it just as vital as it was the first time I read it in the 70's. Rookmaacher explains modern art to the common man. He really helps to put some things of our postmodern culture in historical perspective. A must read for any Christian who wants to understand the thinking behind the arts of today.

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### **Mary says**

I have read through this little gem twice and used it in lectures. This is a critique from a Christian perspective

of the roots of Modernism. "If God is dead, art is dying, man is dying." p.132 Good detail on Romanticism, Positivism, Nihilism and the art associated.

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### **Andrew says**

this review first appeared on [<http://intraspace.blogspot.com>]

looking on the title page of my copy of this book, i see i have dated it 1998 - which means that it's taken me almost 10 years to get around to reading it. the daunting and critical-sounding title made me wonder if i wanted to. i'm glad i did.

the field of christianity and the arts is beginning to grow these days (both academically and in practice), but 30 years ago most christians didn't want to touch modern art with a ten-foot barge pole. into that gap stepped francis schaeffer and his friend hans rookmaaker (a jazz critic and art historian). 'modern art and the death of a culture' was rookmaaker's major work in this area, and the lack of other writing by christians on this subject at the time makes his book a seminal masterpiece.

the book was published in 1970, just as modern art was climaxing - by that year, virtually everything that you could do in art (barring technological developments) had been done. this of course included some extreme and freaky work, but even at the less extreme end, people (especially the majority of christians) found contemporary art to be distasteful and abhorrent - many of them were still 'coming to terms' with modern art that had come out in 1910 (some of them still are).

rookmaaker's masterstroke was engaging with the art world rather than condemning it. in this book he heavily critiques modern art, but he mines out what he believes is essentially at the heart of the apparent destructiveness of it - a sense of loss and despair. and again, rather than condemning this fact, rookmaaker examines that this is the natural result of the process of humanism and the enlightenment. and so, he says, modern art accurately represents where western society has come to as a result of the enlightenment framework. he doesn't dislike modern art at all - he simply wants it to have more hope and beauty.

he argues that bourgeois niceness is not the answer - it is equally as bad, if not worse, than the negative elements of modern art. instead he challenges christians to meet the modern world where it is, and offer alternatives.

there is so much in this book, that i couldn't possibly summarise it all here - in fact what i have just written is really only my take on what rookmaaker is saying.

for me, what i found interesting was examining rookmaaker's predictions about the future as he saw it in 1970. i'm not an expert in this, but i think some of rookmaaker's predictions have come true, and on the other hand, i feel that the art world has stepped back from the precipice it was on the edge of in 1970. the main reason is that there is nothingness over the edge. and so the art world has struck camp 100 metres or so from the edge, and stretches back from there. if this is true, then we can see what modern art accomplished as being a true revolution, complete with violence and harm but in the end creating significant freedom.

the other great thing about the book is the challenge it lays down for christians - the challenge, as i have said, not to retreat into bourgeois niceness but to get out there and engage. i believe there is now a definite christian arts movement under way - i can see it gathering momentum even since the late 90s when i was at

university - and i think rookmaaker would have approved. but his challenge still rings true and relevant.

for it's on-going relevancy and its historical importance, i think 'modern art and the death of a culture' should forever remain a crucial text in the tradition of christian cultural study and practice.

highly recommended.

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### **Julie says**

Read. This. Book.

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### **Ross Leavitt says**

Rookmaaker takes Francis Schaeffer's perspective on culture and applies it to art in a technical, yet understandable way. He shows how, specifically, various false philosophies have influenced art from medieval times, through the counter-reformation, the Enlightenment, romanticism, and especially our modern secular humanism.

As a musician, I think Rookmaaker's approach is exactly what the music world needs. His book should serve as an inspiration to future authors who will give us a nuanced and holistic perspective on how different styles of music reflect true and false philosophies.

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