

Er, anyone for intersubjectivity?

Georgina Adam goes in search of hedonism



A Hedonist's Guide to Art edited by Laura K Jones

Filmer
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The latest *Hedonist's Guide* takes on a subject rather than a place, unlike most of the series, which has already "done" dozens of cities from Almaty to Tokyo.

The subject of this book, to be published later this month, is "Art" and the guide groups more than 90 essays by a cross-section of the (mainly British) art world – critics, curators and dealers. It is edited by journalist and writer Laura Jones, who has classified her subject into five chapters: Philosophy/Ideas; Life-styles of the Artists; The Art Itself; The Market; and Inner Workings.

The guide starts off, discouragingly perhaps to some, with a foreword by the collector/dealer Charles Saatchi himself, which is so über-cool, or perhaps such a piss-take, that it deserves to be reproduced in full:

*Dear Ms Jones,
Can't think of anything
interesting to contribute.
Sorry to be a dud.
Kind regards,
Charles Saatchi*

From then on things can really only get better. The contributors – some appear just once, others have a number of entries – are generally true to form. So for those inside the art world it will come as no surprise to see the cerebral curator Hans Ulrich Obrist penning the following passage:

"Depending on one's point of view, the virtual may be a new and liberating prosthesis of the body or it may threaten the body. Many visual artists today negotiate and mediate between these two staging encounters of non-mediated intersubjectivity."

My dictionary doesn't even recognise that last word but I bow to his superior knowledge. However his essay, "An Incomplete A-Z of the Internet", is far less unfathomable and more interesting than the above quote would suggest.

Culture Minister Ed Vaizey, on the eve of slashing art funding, toes the party line: "I want school-children to be exposed to the joy of creativity," he bleats, and, what's more, "I want ... to reaffirm Government's commitment to nurturing and supporting the arts, placing them at the centre of the responsi-

ble society we are building and to helping build a secure future for those cultural institutions who do so much to enhance Britain's standing around the world."

That gadfly of the contemporary art market, Ben Lewis, takes a predictably contrarian line, urging readers to "Buy what you hate"; dealer Mark Kelner is amusing about selling art to Russian oligarchs ("Consider a sex change if you're a girl"); Kenny Schachter doesn't pull any punches when recounting his life as a collector/curator/dealer ("Working with artists, I have nearly been stabbed to death, been shot at with a gun loaded with blanks ... and repeatedly had my life threatened by disgruntled emerging artists").

Artists such as Danny Chadwick recall spectacular benders in the early days of the Young British Artists; Sotheby's star auctioneer Tobias Meyer contributes a surprisingly candid anecdote about his youth; Anthony Haden Guest writes poems and sketches cartoons.

The guide has little of the hedonist about it, though, and inevitably the essays are uneven, some plonking, some clearly dashed off, others thoughtful. Which is probably a reflection, however fractured, of the art world today, with its diversity, excesses and occasional flashes of brilliance.