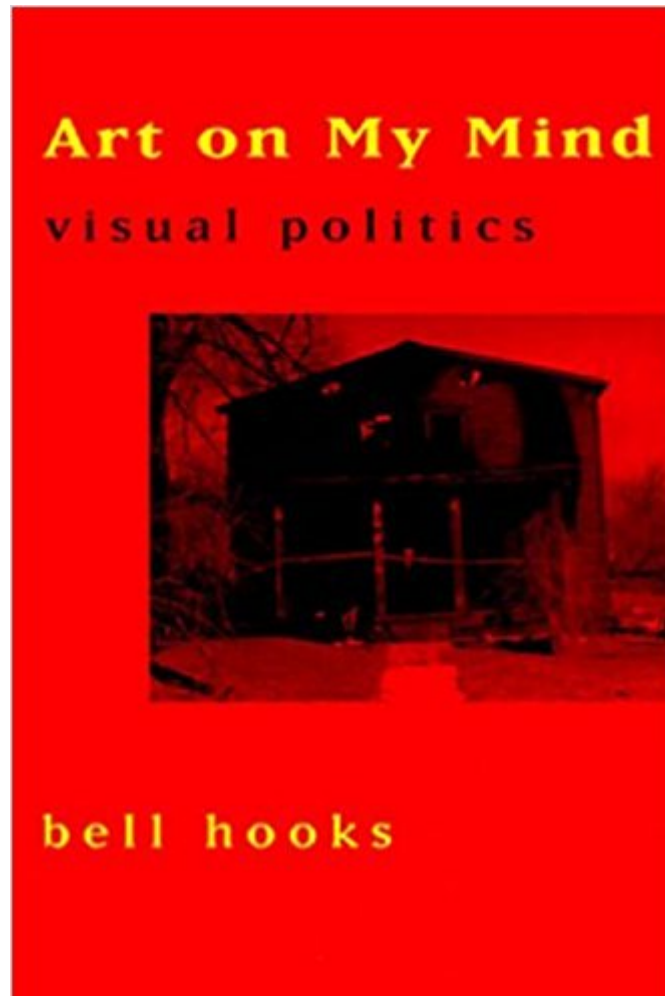




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# Art On My Mind: Visual Politics



## Synopsis

In *Art on My Mind*, bell hooks, a leading cultural critic, responds to the ongoing dialogues about producing, exhibiting, and criticizing art and aesthetics in an art world increasingly concerned with identity politics. Always concerned with the liberatory black struggle, hooks positions her writings on visual politics within the ever-present question of how art can be an empowering and revolutionary force within the black community.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A prolific critical writer, hooks has contributed a collection of essays on contemporary art and what she describes as the troubling relationship between the dominant white, male art world, its practices, protocols and biases, and the creative production of African American artists-particularly women-and others whose works grapple with issues of identity and social context. Decrying the lack of black critics writing on today's art, hooks provides a minute dissection of issues of race, gender and "cultural hegemony" in the works of the late Jean-Michel Basquiat; examines the historical impact of photography in black life and the trenchant intelligence and beauty of Carrie Mae Weems's photographs; and highlights important critical works by black art historian Sylvia Boone and black architect LaVerne Wells-Bowie. Hooks has a knack for balancing flat academic jargon with vivid language, illuminating the historical and psychoanalytic underpinnings of her topics while anticipating the visceral responses of a lay audience. Despite her generic invocations of the dominant, marginalizing Eurocentric patriarchy, etc., etc., her passionate and highly personal exploration of these and other issues (including a distressing account of her own illness and an

aestheticized betrayal by an artist friend) transforms academic abstractions into recognizable human patterns linking the everyday lives of Americans, black or white. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc.

In her first book about art and the "politics of the visual," hooks, a writer known for her clarifying views on feminism and black women, addresses the deplorable absence of discourse on black artists, especially by black critics. Why, she asks, has art played a minimal role in the lives of most African Americans? With a firm grasp of the racial and cultural climate in which black aesthetics must grow, hooks offers some astute answers to that question and holds out hope for change. She then hones her aesthetic in her adept interpretations of the work and impact of black artists, including Romare Bearden, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Alison Saar, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Carrie Mae Weems, Lorna Simpson, and Margo Humphreys. Hooks also discusses portrayals of black women and men in art and, in an essay on photography, how the "struggle over images" became part of the black liberation movement. Art matters, hooks assures us; it helps us forge our identities while forcing society to evolve from being exclusive to inclusive. As erudite and sophisticated as hooks is, she is also eminently readable, even exhilarating. Donna Seaman

This is a book of essays and a few interviews focusing on artists, primarily photographers who have made a name for themselves as African-American photographers. Hooks speaks about the challenges of being a black artist and the criticism that comes if one is not "black" enough in their art or if they are "too black" or seem to be too negative in their work. There are so many different disciplines that this book would provide insight into including revolutionary studies, black studies, art studies, sociology, and much more. A fairly easy read.

Thank YOu!

I like the story, pretty interesting,

hooks challenges all who reads this book find the importance in their own histories. She makes the reader aware of the lack of representation of African American artists as well as the lack of representation of minorities and women in art history. She looks at more than just the injustice of the whole system but also the importance of images in peoples lives.hooks has a very refreshing style of writing in that she is not afraid to allow the reader to enter her personal life. I felt as if I were

involved in a personal conversation with her.

This book is, at its best, thought-provoking, in that its discussions of art from an African-American feminist perspective employ a voice not often heard in the field. However, there are flaws to the work, in the opinion of this reviewer. First, not all of the works discussed are illustrated, which makes it difficult at times to perceive what the author is discussing. Second, while the essay chapters are strong, the "talking art with" chapters are less so: the artist featured in each chapter comes across as more of a foil to hooks's lengthy expositions. This, combined with an overuse of the term "palimpsest" throughout the book, lends a note of arrogance to the writing.

This is the one book that hooks has published that is genuinely interesting. It isn't a watershed of insights, but it does have some interesting pieces that provoke thought without her usual strident, oppressive tone, that tends to shut out discussion rather than encourage it. The book is not artfully written, but it is readable, and dips less into the usual repetition and redundancy of her other work.

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