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Asking The Audience: Participatory Art In 1980s New York



Synopsis

The 1980s was a critical decade in shaping today's art production. While newly visible work concerned with power and identity hinted at a shift toward multiculturalism, the '80s were also a time of social conservatism that resulted in substantial changes in arts funding. In *Asking the Audience*, Adair Rounthwaite uses this context to analyze the rising popularity of audience participation in American art during this important decade. Rounthwaite explores two seminal and interrelated art projects sponsored by the Dia Art Foundation in New York: *Group Material's Democracy* and *Martha Rosler's If You Lived Here*. These projects married issues of social activism—such as homelessness and the AIDS crisis—with various forms of public participation, setting the precedent for the high-profile participatory practices currently dominating global contemporary art. Rounthwaite draws on diverse archival images, audio recordings, and more than thirty new interviews to analyze the live affective dynamics to which the projects gave rise. Seeking to foreground the audience experience in understanding the social context of participatory art, she argues that affect is key to the audience's ability to exercise agency within the participatory artwork. From artists and audiences to institutions, funders, and critics, *Asking the Audience* traces the networks that participatory art creates between various agents, demonstrating how, since the 1980s, leftist political engagement has become a cornerstone of the institutionalized consumption of contemporary art.

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Customer Reviews

"Asking the Audience provides an invaluable foundation for understanding the emergence of

institutionalized social art practice over the past fifteen years. Adair Rounthwaite's detailed discussion of the role of pedagogy and education also provides important grounding of these projects in broader intellectual trends during the 1980s and early 90s."â Grant Kester, University of California, San Diego

Adair Rounthwaite is assistant professor of art history at the University of Washington in Seattle. She has published essays on a range of topics in contemporary global art history in journals such as *Representations*, *Camera Obscura*, *Art Journal*, and *Third Text*.

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