

# Contents

## INTRODUCTION

- 1 There is no single 'best' way to write about art 9
- 2 'International Art English' 12
- 3 Anyone can learn to write competently about art 17

## SECTION ONE

### The Job Why Write about Contemporary Art? 18

- 1 Explaining v. evaluating 20
- 2 Art-words and artworks 24
- 3 Artist/dealer/curator/critic/blogger/'Kunstworker'/journalist/historian 26
- 4 Out of the blue: where art-criticism came from 31
- 5 Art-writing *sans frontières* 40

## SECTION TWO

### The Practice How to Write About Contemporary Art 42

- 1 'Fear is the root of bad writing' 43
  - > *The first time you write about art* 44
  - > *'The baker's family who have just won the big lottery prize'* 46
  - > *The three jobs of communicative art-writing* 49

- 2 **How to substantiate your ideas** 53
- > *Provide factual or historical evidence* 54
  - > *Extract visual evidence* 57
  - > *Pay attention* 60
  - > *Follow your thinking* 62
- 3 **The audience: grounding specialists and non-specialists** 65
- 4 **Practical 'how-to's** 68
- > *Be specific* 69
  - > *Do not 'explain' a dense, abstract idea with another dense, abstract idea* 71
  - > *Load your text with solid nouns* 74
  - > *Adjectives: pick one* 76
  - > *Gorge on the wildest variety of strong, active verbs* 79
  - > *'The road to hell is paved with adverbs.'* 81
  - > *Order information logically* 83
  - > *Organize your thoughts into complete paragraphs* 87
  - > *Avoid lists* 90
  - > *Avoid jargon* 91
  - > *When in doubt, tell a story* 92
  - > *When still in doubt, make a comparison* 99
  - > *Simile and metaphor: use with caution* 101
  - > *Final tips* 103

## SECTION THREE

### The Ropes How to Write Contemporary Art Formats 106

- 1 **How to write an academic essay** 107
- > *Getting started* 107
  - > *The research question* 110
  - > *Structure* 112
  - > *'Do's and 'don't's* 116
  - > *Further tips* 119

- 2 **'Explaining' texts** 126
- > *How to write a short news article* 126
  - > *How to write a short descriptive text* 130
  - > *How to write a press release* 145
  - > *How to write an auction catalogue entry* 153
- 3 **'Evaluating' texts** 163
- > *How to write an exhibition review for a magazine or blog* 163
  - > *How to write a review for a newspaper* 176
  - > *How to write a book review* 179
  - > *How to write op-ed art journalism* 182
  - > *How to write a catalogue essay or magazine article* 189
- 4 **How to write an artist's statement** 210
- > *The ten most common pitfalls (and how to avoid them)* 211
  - > *How to write about a single artwork* 217
- 5 **Writing formats compared: one artist, many writers** 220

## CONCLUSION

**How to read about contemporary art** 235

**Notes** 236

## RESOURCES

**Rules of grammar (and when to break them)** 243

**Beginning a contemporary art library** 250

**Bibliography and e-sources** 253

**List of Source Texts** 256

**List of figures** 259

**Index** 261