



COURTESY OF THE MINT MUSEUM (CHARLOTTE, NC)  
MUSEUM BOOK CLUB GUIDE

# Seven Days in the Art World

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*"In a series of chapters, Sarah Thornton investigates the drama of a Christie's auction, the workings in Takashi Murakami's studios, the elite at the Basel Art Fair, the eccentricities of Artforum magazine, the competition behind an important art prize, life in a notorious art-school seminar, and the wonderland of the Venice Biennale. She reveals the new dynamics of creativity, taste, status, money, and the search for meaning in life. A judicious and juicy account of the institutions that have the power to shape art history, based on hundreds of interviews with high-profile players, Thornton's entertaining ethnography will change the way you look at contemporary culture.." Page numbers refer to the 2009, Norton paperback edition.*

**1.** Of the seven chapters or days (auction, crit, fair, prize, magazine, studio visit, biennale) in *Seven Days in the Art World* which one did you find the most interesting? Why? Did you find any of the chapters hard to read? Why?

**2.** Of the seven chapters, which one did you learn the most? What did you learn that you didn't know before?

**3.** At the end of the book, Thornton answers seven questions. Let's discuss some:

Should student-artists think about the art world or ignore it?

Who is responsible for the success of an artist?

How do you know when outlandish work is art and when it is nonsense?

**4.** After reading *Seven Days in the Art World*, has your opinion about contemporary art changed? How? For better or worse?

**5.** On page 54, David Hickey is one of the few teachers that reject the group crit. Hickey is not alone in thinking that there is undue pressure on artists to verbalize. Many believe that artists shouldn't be obliged to explain their work. What do you think? Should artist or museums try to explain work? Do you read didactic labels before or after you look at the art?

**6.** On page 88, Mera and Don Rubell are talking about meeting the artist before buying their work. Don added, "We meet the vast variety of artists, because when you're acquiring young work, you can't judge it by the art alone. You have to judge it by the character of the person making it." And Mera elaborated: "Occasionally meeting an artist destroys the art. You almost don't trust it. You think what you're seeing in the work is an accident." What do you make of these statements? Do you have to like an artist personally before buying their work?

**7.** On page 110, the video artist Phil Collins, when asked about the Turner Prize nomination, states, "It took me a week to accept the nomination. I had to think hard about the joys and threats of exposure." What do you think he means? Is it better for an artist not to receive such big prizes? Is it a double-edged sword? How?

**8.** On page 203, Paul Schimmel, Curator at MOCA LA, states, "I've never found choosing a controversial artist to be anything but the right choice. If there is already absolute consensus, if there is nothing you can do in terms of illumination, why do it?" Do you agree with this statement? Is there absolute consensus about any artist?