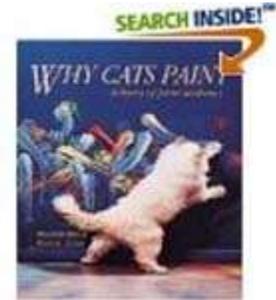


Among the Funniest Books Ever Written

Why Cats Paint: A Theory of Feline Aesthetics
by Heather Busch and Burton Silver

Review by Shannon Roy, Continuing Education Coordinator

Why Cats Paint has become something of a cult classic among cat lovers in the years since it was published. Of course, it isn't possible to claim too much for cats among real cat nuts. But it has also become something of a cult classic among artists and those who work in the fine arts field. The exaggerated art jargon makes them howl with delight.



Why Cats Paint is a very funny book and the more one reads, the funnier it gets. And yet, it would be a mistake to think that the authors aren't making a serious point. They are. Cat Art is indeed an international field. The fact that it is totally off the wall only strengthens its appeal to its aficionados. This book celebrates not only delicious comedy, but wonder and mystery as well.

After chapters that explore the historical perspective and the theories of feline marking behavior, the authors get into serious art criticism of famous cat artists including the portrait painter, the spontaneous reductionist, the formal expansionist, the abstract expressionist, the romantic ruralist, the neo-synthesist, the elemental fragmentist, the trans-expressionist and the psychometric impressionist.

This review, accorded to a French feline, is typical. “Her work emits a luminosity that cries out with exhilaration, mystery and revelation. Her many colors and directions allow us to glimpse the inner feline reality. There can be little doubt that the relaxed warmth and lush abundance of Provence worked its magic on Minnie, as did a certain British Silver Shorthair named Pierre, who shares her new home. He doesn't paint, but with one of their kittens selling in Japan for \$20,000, he hardly needs to.”

The skeptical question, “Do cats PAINT or just randomly mark?” is sometimes debatable, but sometimes not. Some of the paintings are patterns, graceful and lovely. The placement of color, relative to what cats view and what cats paint, is obviously not accidental. The work of Smokey, a New Zealand Romantic Ruralist, is especially convincing. He also requests the placement of his paints with urine markings, which seems a very fine touch.

The final chapter, “Other Forms of Artistic Expression,” is hilarious, but somewhat less convincing. My favorite line is: “Clyde interacts with his sister's sculpture, allowing his whole body to become implicated in its heavily nuanced form.” Since Clyde is an Abyssinian and the

chair is in two shades of brown, the result is undoubtedly effective.

My special connection with cats is my own and not obviously hereditary. But my mother was an artist and I like to think I have inherited a reasonably flexible aesthetic sense. However, classic litter tray patterns, no matter how graceful, and the placement of dead rodents, no matter how artistic, are not art forms I should care to live with.