



Why Paint Cats: The Ethics of Feline Aesthetics

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WHY PAINT CATS ruffled fur in 2002 with its scholarly study of a controversial art movement that treats cats as canvas. Those seminal books in feline aesthetics are now offered in new pocket-size editions filled with the best from each volume, making purrfect gifts for cat lovers and art lovers alike. Reviews "A collection of the world's most fabulously decorated felines." -National Examiner

Why Paint Cats: The Ethics of Feline Aesthetics Details

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Author : Burton Silver , Heather Busch

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From Reader Review Why Paint Cats: The Ethics of Feline Aesthetics for online ebook

Cecily Erker says

First of all, I thought this book was ridiculous when I first looked at it. Why would people spend time and money painting cats? Then I looked through it and saw that they had made some pretty cool paintings, and the cats didn't look like they were in pain or pissed off. Give this to the crazy cat lady in your life.

Kate says

i give it five for entertainment value.

Bladestryke says

Wow. This little book is so longwinded. I think it uses long words just to sound pretentious bringing this book down. If you have a degree in art the book might be more enjoyable. Otherwise just get it fir the pictures. And as a cat person I'm not to keen on using them as the canvas I'd prefer to keep them on the canvas.

Pam says

What a wild book. I was astounded by how these cats were transformed. Some of the paintings were a little creepy, but all in all it was very cool. The cats are not being harmed so I say paint away.

Cara says

I first thought this was just a bunch of photos of painted cats, but it turns out that it's much more scholarly than I realized. The photos are accompanied by exploration of various aspects of the ethics and philosophy of cat painting. It also raises some interesting questions like, are cats aware of their color?

Addendum:

After reading some other reviews of this book and doing a little research, I am now aware that this book is a spoof and the "photos" are computer-generated. Bizarre! It has a bibliography and footnotes and everything. I don't feel too bad though since several book reviewers were also operating under the assumption that this was legitimate. I'm sad that there aren't actually amazing artists who paint cats. I guess all the philosophical and ethical arguments still apply to animals in general, but it seems kind of pointless in a way since it's not real...

Jason Hullinger says

amazing and hilarious book

jenna says

Now, compared to Silver's "Dancing with Cats", I did not find this book as funny, however I still highly recommend reading it for a laugh. As a therapist I was especially taken by Egypto-Feline Deification Infusion Training (EDIT for short), a therapeutic model sweeping Arizona in which Egyptian rituals with painted cats are used to work out trauma and anxiety (yes, you read that right), i.e. Mary had a problem with her fertility so naturally...

"Exercises included crouching over Casper [the cat painted to be Thoth, the god of the moon:] and gently pressing her stomach down on him until he brought her symbolic release by creeping out between her legs."

Among the other strange and hilarious this-shit-actually-exists realizations, is the strong ethical component integrated into cat painting. The PAINTING MUST BENEFIT THE CAT. This fact is repeated and examined throughout the book philosophically, wherein we learn about the groups R.A.C.E.S.T. (Raise Awareness of Cats Extra-Sensory Traits) and C.R.O.K. (Cats Rule OK).

Here are some more snippets to whet your appetite for this book:

"Getting it Off: When Cat Painting Goes Wrong"

"When folks see a smiley cat that looks like a feline member of a minstrel show...their first reaction is to say, 'oh how cute' and then they realize that they've just stereotyped the cat in the same limiting way that black people were caricatured by the Minstrels."

"...despite the obvious high standard of the work [it's a tabby painted as a clown:], it's name ["Der Hanswurst", which means 'hand-sausage:'], plus the explicit nature of the installation, created a wave of public disapproval when Max appeared in a Bremen gallery playing on a carpet littered with electric dildos. The media savaged the the work as degrading to cats while the critics loved everything about it."

I initially thought I was getting "Why Cats Paint" and did a double take when I realized that this book was actually about rich people who pay a college education's worth of money to have people paint their cats, for stupid reasons (could you conceive of a reasonable excuse for painting a cat?).

Due to the excessive amount paid for this service, I'm more offended than amused. While the cats do look very cool and the art is beautiful, I found the whole matter truly repulsive in it's bourgeois frivolity.

Peter Tillman says

Let's start with the cover [click on image to enlarge] :

"The Unimaginable Florescence of Feline Fluttering," 2002. Vegetable dye on Aristotle, Persian. Artist:

Flavia Venezia, New York

"...An earlier work, "Tortellini per sempre," 2000, which featured an intricate web of delicate pasta patterns on a Cream Toninese... was awarded the H.B. Saeed Mohammed Al Paganbani Prize for Decorated Food, in the mistaken belief that Italians eat cats."

Next, let's have a look at an illustration purporting to represent painted cats on postage stamps from the "independent African territory of Ayuba" . A quick Google check confirms that there is no such place (Ayuba is a common family name in Nigeria), and that Things are Not What They Seem.

No matter, as Heather Busch's manipulated photographs are luscious, funny, and really, truly Amazing. Astounding. Fantastic! I can just about guarantee laugh-out-loud moments in the Painted Cat gallery (which is beautifully reproduced). The text is absolutely deadpan, and really, you want to believe in these cats! The book has a sort of hallucinatory shimmer -- you won't know, and likely will never know, whether cats can really be painted...

But perhaps we can judge from the readers comment page [no longer online, alas], which has such complaints as this, from an aspiring cat-painter:

"Unfortunately, trying to carefully control and paint two very willful and in the end very angry cats was an experience akin to swimming freestyle through a very large and thick tangle of blackberry while having buckets of dye thrown at you..."

-- amongst the emails from cat-lovers aghast at the very idea of painting a puss. But we must remember whose page this is, lest we go adrift again betwixt fantasy and reality...

So, folks, don't try to paint your cats at home -- leave it to the professionals! Professional Photoshop artists, that is, or so is my reluctant belief.

Let's hope Burton Silver and Heather Busch put together a traveling exhibit of their wonderful photos. In the meanwhile, we shall have to make do with their remarkably entertaining books, which include *Why Cats Paint* (1994, still my favorite) and *Dancing With Cats* (1999, astonishingly silly). Do check them out, for even more cat laughs and inspired tomfoolery. Not to be missed.

Review first published at SF Site in 2003. Lightly edited, 2018.

Tiffany says

I got this book as a Christmas gift. It was a joke, because my family thinks that I may end up being a crazy cat lady. But the book is stunning. The photographs are amazing, and each cat is really truly a work of art.

Tara says

All cats deserve to be painted. Paint away, cat owners. Paint away.

Kathleen Dixon says

The only thing I didn't like about this book is the huge quantity of very, very funny satire. It's too much to read quickly, but I had to get it back to the library unfortunately.

The Wikipedia article says that a lot of people didn't realise that this book is not REAL. Apparently there were many who were trying to find out where they could get hold of the artists and have their own cats painted, and there were others who got all up-tight about the ethics of painting cats. But it's a joke!

The over-the-top art reviews are very funny. I'm doing a paper at University right now on Contemporary Visual Art, and so I'm reading quite a few exhibition reviews, and the authors of this book have got the tone just right - the sometimes terribly pretentious critics in the world of the arts are mocked wonderfully.

But also, the "artwork" is really quite beautiful. Ah, what one can do with PhotoShop.

Jennifer B. says

Lovely pictures. It was hard to get the cats to stay still for me to recreate the ideas within, however.

Brian says

Why NOT paint cats? When you have ten grand burning a hole in your pocket and a cat that can sit still for a painting, this book will give you some great ideas from those trailblazers who have gone boldly before you. The Charlie Chaplin painted on the hindquarters of a cat using its a-hole as the bowtie is the Sistine Chapel of feline artistry.

Brenda ??? says

[I totally believed this.....
but found out years later it was a hoax or experiment to see reactions.
Oh wellI still like it. (hide spoiler)]

Dani says

If you are in need of a WTF moment, I recommend picking this book up. As the title suggests, this book is all about painting cats. Seriously. And the people featured in this book take their art form very seriously...I just wonder how the cats feel about it...

