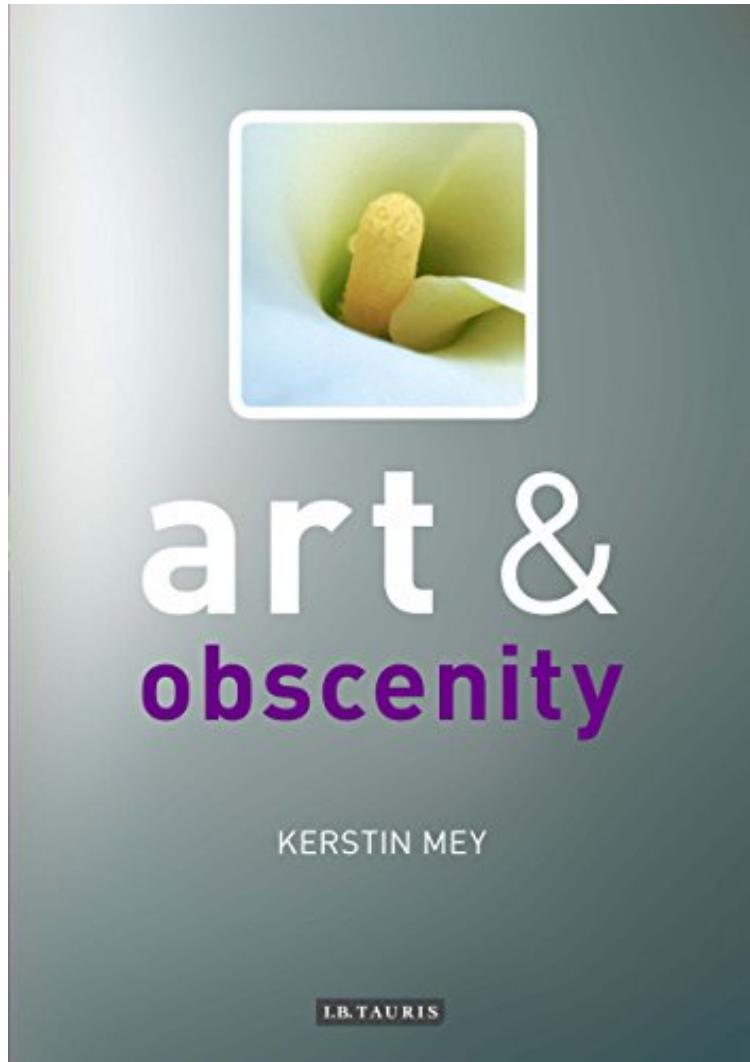


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## Art and Obscenity (Art and Series)

*Kerstin Mey*  
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**Kerstin Mey : Art and Obscenity (Art and Series)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Art and Obscenity (Art and Series):

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Lucid work with pertinent theoretical and material examplesBy Hugh JapeFrom the outset, I should warn the reader that I actually read this book in 2008. I was scooting past this title, on this site, the other day and noticed that there was no review so thought I'd chip one in... I have given it another browse though, so my review should be somewhat accurate, if a little patchy.Mey begins by problematising the concept of 'obscenity', highlighting the distinct ways in which particular discourses enable obscenity to be conceptualised. Mey relates the concept of obscenity to taboo and pornography, suggesting that they occupy a similar space in cultural production and reception (whilst retaining some distinction between the concepts), but that this space

is essentially fluid and necessarily rubs against art. After signalling the importance of taboo in the introductory chapter, Mey moves into a discussion of transgression, referring to the Vienna Action Group, Pierre Monlinier, Judy Chicago, and Yayoi Kasuma, among others. Freudian ideas about fetishism (via Laura Mulvey) emphasise the centrality of gender to the act of transgression. Unsurprisingly, the body features as a key concept in this chapter (which is probably an understatement as I think that all obscenity shares an intimate connection to the body). The theme of the body continues in the following chapter, which is about abjection. If the previous chapter was about pushing the body to its limits then this chapter is about the body pushed beyond its limits, to the point of corruption, of expulsion. Kristeva is featured heavily here, contextualised by Lacan, Butler and Foster. Lynda Nead also gets a mention, which seems quite appropriate, given her earlier work, which covered similar ground: *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* IG also recommend that title but probably won't give it a separate review, considering you can get a sufficient idea from the reviews that are currently displayed. The next chapter is about violent images. I found this to be a bit of a departure from the earlier chapters. Don't misunderstand me. It's a thoughtful and well researched piece. It's just that the following chapter addresses the corpse and seems to flow more naturally from the chapter on abjection. However, Bataille is used purposefully in both of these chapters and I accept the flow, as it stands, on that basis. At this juncture in the book, the author begins to address obscenity in more innovative ways. These chapters include one on anti-normative acts and one on camp/kitsch. In between these, there lies a chapter on the documentary tradition. I think this may have been better on the other side of kitsch, next to the chapter on 'Know Thyself'. The stuff on antinormative acts and camp/kitsch could potentially be useful for someone wanting to think about how obscenity can be understood from the vantage point of queer theory. The last two chapters approach the question of obscenity in the digital age. This work is very pertinent. The first chapter concerns the use of digital technologies in art installations whereas the second focuses upon online art. Unfortunately for anyone who's reading this, relying on a consistent evaluation, I ran out of creative steam half way through this endeavour and so my review has become exceedingly superficial. With that in mind, I shall now say this: The text features reproductions of artists like Hans Bellmer, the Chapman Bros., Andy Warhol, Damien Hirst, Robert Mapplethorpe, Pierre et Gilles, Jan Saudek, Sue Fox, Natacha Merritt, Annie Sprinkle and Amanda Coogan. The reproductions could be a little larger but they do serve their purpose insofar as they supplement the insightful thesis that Mey runs through. Mey presents a clear argument, well supported by references and a considered approach of the boundaries of art (paying some attention to literature and 'new' media). This book should help the reader consider the boundaries between art, obscenity, pornography; highlighting the contingent character, and the overlapping aesthetics, of these categories. Recommended.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. What the F%\$ is ArtBy S. LivingstonNice review of both what is considered obscene and why and then an its relationship to art. Little repetitive, but over all pretty good. Could go into more depth about our fascination with obscenity, but overall good.

Explicit material is more widely available in the internet age than ever before, yet the concept of 'obscenity'; remains as difficult to pin down as it is to approach without bias: notions of what is 'obscenity'; shift with societies'; shifting mores, and our responses to explicit or disturbing material can be highly subjective. In this intelligent and sensitive book, Kerstin Mey grapples with the work of twentieth-century artists practising at the edges of acceptability, from Hans Bellmer through to Nobuyoshi Araki, from Robert Mapplethorpe to Annie Sprinkle, and from Hermann Nitsch to Paul McCarthy. Mey refuses sweeping statements and 'high art'; responses, arguing with dexterity that some works, regardless of their 'high art'; context, remain deeply problematic, whilst others are both groundbreaking and liberating.

**About the Author** Kerstin Mey is Chair in Fine Art and leads the research area 'Art and its Location' in the Interface: Centre for Research in Art, Technologies and Design project at the University of Ulster. She is General Editor of the Transcript series published by the School of Fine Art, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, University of Dundee, in association with Manchester University Press.