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Utopia and Dissent: Art, Poetry, and Politics in California

Richard Cndida Smith

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Richard Cndida Smith : Utopia and Dissent: Art, Poetry, and Politics in California before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Utopia and Dissent: Art, Poetry, and Politics in California:

A landmark study of California's visual arts and poetry, 1925 to 1975, Utopia and Dissent demonstrates the profound influence this regional culture had on American art and thought. Combining intellectual and cultural history, it traces the spread of ideas developed in California's pre-World War II bohemian enclaves to mainstream America, where they became a major current of 1950s and 1960s counterculturalism. The provincial nature of California's prewar arts institutions, Richard Cndida Smith shows, fostered an aesthetics stressing personal expression and the exploration of life's mysteries through creativity. These ideas found expression in the beat generation's soul-searching and informed a decade-long debate about conformity. When America exploded with sociopolitical protest in the 1960s, California quickly became a countercultural focal point for a nation redefining itself. People unfamiliar with the California avant-garde's actual works readily absorbed their ideas as they crossed the line into popular culture. Cndida Smith introduces the major figures in California's visual arts and poetry movements: postsurrealists Helen Lundberg and Lorser Feitelson; writers Kenneth Rexroth, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and Wallace Berman; Vietnam War-era poets Gary Snyder and Denise Levertov. Unequaled in scope or depth of scholarship, this book will inform discussions of

twentieth-century American arts, literature, and history for many years.

From Publishers Weekly Painters, writers and poets in California's postwar avant-garde, among them Kenneth Rexroth, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Gary Snyder and Denise Levertov, promoted the truth of subjective experience over all forms of collective authority. How their emphasis on personal freedom, nonconformity and irrationality filtered into the 1960s counterculture and the wider realm of public discourse is the theme of this rich, kinetic study enhanced by 59 art reproductions and photos. Candida Smith, assistant professor of history at the University of Michigan, highlights postsurrealist painters Helen Lundeberg and Lorser Feitelson; Michael McClure's frankly sexual dramas; Wallace Berman's "cool" assemblages, paintings and collages; Robert Duncan's plunge into kabbalism; the Beats' embrace of bohemian masculinity; and Snyder's quest to make the family and domestic relations the basis of global reorganization. He maintains that many California artists, by separating private experience from the public order, limited the potential impact of their utopian visions. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal In this cerebral depiction of the art and poetry emanating from California between 1925 and 1975, historian Smith avoids the big picture in favor of focusing on the details of the struggles that individual artists and writers have with their own creative identities. In so doing, he has produced a unique collection of individual portraits of persons not discussed in other histories. By sampling these personal stories, Smith has also mapped the process by which California was transformed from a provincial backwater state into one of the dominant centers of the avant-garde. He shows that the insular nature of the pre-war art communities paradoxically encouraged a receptiveness to new theories that the more entrenched "schools" tended to shun. Thus, the groundwork was laid for the later, more widespread cultural rebellion embodied by the Beats of the 1950s and the counterculture of the 1960s. While this is a fine graduate-level account of West Coast art, the definitive popular history is yet to be written. For large academic collections. Douglas F. Smith, Oakland P.L., Cal. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc. "A unique collection of individual portraits of persons not discussed in other histories. By sampling these personal stories, Smith has also mapped the process by which California was transformed from a provincial backwater state into one of the dominant centers of the avant-garde."--"Library Journal