



Form as Revolt: Carl Einstein and the Ground of Modern Art (Signale: Modern German Letters, Cultures, and Thought)

By Sebastian Zeidler

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The German writer and art critic Carl Einstein (1885–1940) has long been acknowledged as an important figure in the history of modern art, and yet he is often sidelined as an enigma. In *Form as Revolt* Sebastian Zeidler recovers Einstein's multifaceted career, offering the first comprehensive intellectual biography of Einstein in English.

Einstein first emerged as a writer of experimental prose through his involvement with the anarchist journal *Die Aktion*. After a few limited forays into art criticism, he burst onto the art scene in 1915 with his book *Negro Sculpture*, at once a formalist intervention into the contemporary theory and practice of European sculpture and a manifesto for the sophistication of African art. Einstein would go on to publish seminal texts on the cubist paintings of Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso. His contributions to the surrealist magazine *Documents* (which Einstein cofounded with Georges Bataille), including writings on Picasso and Paul Klee, remain unsurpassed in their depth and complexity.

In a series of close visual analyses—illustrated with major works by Braque, Picasso, and Klee—Zeidler retrieves the theoretical resources that Einstein brought to bear on their art. *Form as Revolt* shows us that to rediscover Einstein's art criticism is to see the work of great modernist artists anew through the eyes of one of the most gifted left-wing formalists of the twentieth century.

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Editorial Review

Review

"With *Form as Revolt*, Sebastian Zeidler offers a learned, eloquent, and extremely rigorous account of Einstein's intellectual career and the ways that it illuminates crucial modernist artifacts and texts. Zeidler paints Carl Einstein as a fascinating, dynamic, often hermetic figure whose seminal writings are central not only to art history but to intellectual history and German literary studies as well."²Christopher D. Johnson, The Warburg Institute, University of London

"Sebastian Zeidler has a unique capacity to bring philosophical thought to bear on modern art. The result is not only the most comprehensive study on Carl Einstein in English but also a thoroughly fresh account of cubism."³David Joselit, Distinguished Professor, Graduate Center, CUNY

"One of the most brilliant, idiosyncratic, and elusive thinkers of the last century, Carl Einstein has remained on the margins of academic discourse until now. Fortunately, however, his work appears at last to be poised for its belated reception, and there is no doubt that Sebastian Zeidler's ambitious book will play an important role in this rediscovery. Rigorously erudite yet remarkably readable, *Form as Revolt* encompasses a biography and oeuvre that thwart easy synopsis while simultaneously generating profound insights into the cultural history and intellectual landscape of the early twentieth century more generally."⁴Devin Fore, Princeton University

About the Author

Sebastian Zeidler is Associate Professor of the History of Art at Yale University.

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