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## **The Invisible Dragon, 30th Anniversary Edition** **Essays on Beauty and Other Matters, by Dave Hickey**

**An expanded edition of Dave Hickey's controversial and exquisitely written apologia for beauty—championed by artists and reviled by academicians—as powerful as ever 30 years on**

The 30th Anniversary Edition includes:

- Four Essays on Beauty (originally published in 1993)
- Profile of Dolly Parton, written 50 years ago
- Elegiac tribute to comedian Richard Pryor
- Listener's guide to art by Ed Ruscha
- Review of John Rechy's experimental gay novel *Numbers*
- Personal essay on the art of writing

*The Invisible Dragon* provoked adulation and scandal upon its initial release in 1993. The book's famously cantankerous author and bard of late twentieth-century American life, Dave Hickey (1938–2021), ignited a firestorm around the role of beauty in art and politics. Hickey regularly traveled around the country from his home in Las Vegas, Nevada to address adoring crowds of students. He was anointed a MacArthur Foundation "genius." The accolades provided him newfound fame in the popular press, where he widely became known as the "beauty guy."

The 30th Anniversary Edition brings back into print *Dragon's* canonical four essays on beauty. The edition intersperses five previously uncollected essays among the original four. The shuffling of essays is designed to give readers freedom to create new narratives out of what Hickey called his "fugitive critiques." The additional texts were chosen to capture the breadth of Hickey's interests and to jog out of mind the moribund interpretations of *Dragon* that have lingered over the years.

The collection opens with Hickey's 1974 profile of Dolly Parton, written at a pivotal moment in Dolly's career. It concludes with his appreciation of Richard Pryor, written near the end of the stand-up comic's life. The most telling addition to the new edition may be Hickey's 1969 review

of John Rechy's experimental gay novel *Numbers*. The essay foreshadows many of Hickey's arguments about art and beauty that would come to fruition in *Dragon* and later writings.

An afterword by Hickey's friend and editor Gary Kornblau recounts the experience of working with Hickey and situates *Dragon's* creation squarely within the traumatic context of the AIDS plague. Kornblau paints a picture of Hickey as a brash, heterosexual West Texan whose writing has a queer sensibility often lost beneath Hickey's heterodox reputation. In commemoration of the late writer, Kornblau reimagines *The Invisible Dragon* as a queer manifesto that rejuvenates beauty and rediscovers joy in a world suffering from mass death.

Hickey's coupling of Caravaggio's 1601 *Incredulity of St. Thomas* and Robert Mapplethorpe's *Lou, NYC* still has the ability to shock. His gloss on art by Bellini, Velázquez, Raphael, and others provides urgent lessons for contemporary art and gender politics. His prescient diagnosis of what he coins the "therapeutic institution" newly resonates in today's fraught culture wars. Throughout, Hickey draws attention to the ways in which artists create a "proliferation of beauties" to combat the continued institutional and commercial control over the Beautiful that haunts our lives.

"Love me, admire me, bow down before me, pay me for what I am—beautiful."

### **The Invisible Dragon: Essays on Beauty and Other Matters**

Edited and With an Afterword by Gary Kornblau

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*Life As We Know It*, an album of songs written by Dave Hickey, is being released concurrently with *Dragon's* 30th Anniversary Edition. The album is available as a digital download, in limited-edition vinyl, and on all major streaming services.

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