

Scott Burton: Collected Writings on Art and Performance, 1965–1975

reviewed by Amanda Hickok

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In *Scott Burton: Collected Writings on Art and Performance, 1965–1975*, David J. Getsy, professor of art history at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, has anthologized Burton's eclectic criticism of the '60s and '70s. Before Burton received recognition for his sculpture and public works, he was a prolific critic of art and performance, as well as a curator and editor for *ARTnews* and *Art in America*. His wide-ranging body of writing, which often champions positions thought to be antagonistic and advocates for underdogs, is united by a strong and consistent underlying philosophy—his belief that art should be accessible, personal, and affective, that it should challenge the elitism, exclusivity, and hierarchies that plague the art world in favor of producing subjective and eclectic emotional responses and direct connections with viewers. He sought to dissolve the boundaries between art and life, placing emphasis on temporal and performative works because they are subject to the same mortal span as the viewer and deny the impossible permanence of the object.

The first section of the book, "Beyond Minimalism," opens with Burton's first major article for *ARTnews* on Tony Smith (1966), an artist who influenced Burton greatly. Here, Burton also summarizes his antipathy toward Minimalism, noting that it "bears no traces of the hand," is "removed from the maker's psyche," and invites no participation on the part of the viewer. He preempts the emergence of Post-Minimalist art in emphasizing the difference between Smith's sculpture and Minimalist work—finality does not rest in the object itself but refers to something outside itself, to the viewer's response to metaphorical and emotional content.

In this first article, Burton also touches on temporality and theatics—two elements of great importance to him. Smith's sculptures have the drama of "conflict, intensification, climax, and release": Burton identifies temporality as a means to bridge the gap between artwork and viewer, between art and life—and as a factor essential in Post-Minimalist works, which use flux, chance, and unpredictability to move into the realm of the viewer, who can identify with their change, disintegration, and vulnerability.

The last section, "Sculpture as Theater: Performance Art Statements," shows how Burton sought to exemplify the importance of temporality in his own performance works. The "Street Works" series, for instance, addressed madness, criminality, and the classic anxiety dream-walking nude in public, drugging himself to sleep on a cot during *Street Works IV* at the Architectural League—blurring boundaries not only between art and life, but between reality, dreams, and anxieties, thus further narrowing the gap between the artist's psyche and that of the viewer. In 1970, Burton first presented *Behavior Tableaux* at the University of Iowa (later performed at the Whitney, the Guggenheim, and elsewhere). This series of stylized, slow-motion, everyday movements and gestures carefully framed the everyday as art. In *Lecture on Self* (1973), Burton explained the theoretical context of his performance work, that performance is essentially "sculpture as theater" in which the artist initiates a relationship with the viewer; the piece is affected both by temporality and theatrical elements (rising tension, climax, resolution).

Getsy—who offers astute commentary and guidance for the reader in the form of editor's notes and an introduction—has collected a set of

early writings that demonstrate Burton's influential position as artist-critic. Burton was deeply immersed in the art world, and by advocating for various viewpoints and artists, he continually challenged presuppositions about art, serving to break down existing hierarchies and invite discussion about the nature of art and its personal and cultural impact. He then took it into his own hands to create the kind of art he thought was necessary. Part of the significance of this collection is that it demonstrates the importance of the artist-critic, who, by making art and situating it in the larger cultural climate, can advocate for and stimulate meaningful change. The other part lies in the subject of Burton's advocacy—the convergence of art and life and equality of artist, work, and viewer.