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Hans Richter: Activism, Modernism, and the Avant-Garde. Edited by Stephen C. Foster

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Hans Richter: Activism, Modernism, and the Avant-Garde.**Edited by Stephen C. Foster**

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The delineation between purity of expressive artistic vision and partiality of political ideologies has emerged as something of a methodological norm, not least in relation to the creators of early graphic abstract film. Until now. In a lucid and rigorous book edited by Stephen Foster, the pioneering work of Hans Richter is presented in a refreshingly inclusive context which succeeds in illuminating numerous previously underestimated aspects of his artistic endeavour and ideological principles. Indeed, as the contributors to the book specifically attest, both the artistic and the ideological were essentially reciprocal agents within Richter's idiosyncratic sphere of vision which permeated an expansive range of creative movements including expressionism, Dada, Constructivism, and Surrealism. Whereas certain other analyses have attempted to encapsulate creative idiosyncrasy within reductive interpretations of social and ideological functionality, Foster's work is particularly impressive in the manner in which Richter's visionary creations are never subsumed by the weight of extant historiographic ideologies of the era. An intriguing revisionist approach allows the contributors to reassess Richter's influence as a key factor in the directions taken in a range of early avant-garde projects and their manner of involvement in a modernist concept of proactive artistic politicization. What emerges from this approach is a reinvigorated interpretation of Hans Richter as not only a creative political activist, but one whose artistic endeavours stand as evidence of an authentic quest to alter the nature of socio-political experience and related processes of ideological configuration. The specific contributions to the book are chronologically clustered around key periods in the artist's life, including those of expressionism and Dadaism, Richter's crucial role in Constructivism at an international level, as well as the political activism prevalent in his film work in the 1930s spurred with anti-Nazi urgency. Certainly, this book suggests there are not many names etched upon the collective consciousness of early twentieth-century fine art whose impacts upon key movements were as expansive as those of Hans Richter. Outstanding as an exemplar of the focused aims of modernism as a fusion of cultural and ideological catalysts, Richter can now be recast as a major player upon the once shadowy stage of artistic activism. Intensively researched, extensively illustrated, and finely constructed, Stephen Foster's timeless anthology will prove invaluable not only as a guide to those interested in film, the avant-garde, modernism, and ideology, but also as a paradigm of analytic methodology.

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