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Creativity: Unconventional Wisdom from 20 Accomplished Minds

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In Review

Creativity: Unconventional Wisdom from 20 Accomplished Minds

Meyers, H., & Gerstman, R. (Eds.) (2007). *Creativity: Unconventional wisdom from 20 accomplished minds*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 236 pp. ISBN 978-0-23000-134-3. \$55.95.

The editors of this book say in their introduction that their aim is to let a diverse group of creative people speak for themselves about where their ideas come from, what motivates them, and how they became creative. Each of the twenty chapters is an extended interview with a creative person, without the questions.

The twenty subjects include authors, artists, architects, directors, industrial designers, a composer, a museum director, and two entrepreneurs. Readers will recognize many of their names, including David Halberstam, Edward Albee, Erica Jong, James Rosenquist, Milton Glaser, Chuck Close, Daniel Liebeskind, Julie Taymor, Spike Lee, and Marvin Hamlisch.

The reader who is interested in one or more of these twenty people may find something valuable in their thoughts about how they create. James Rosenquist, for example, tells us how his early years as a billboard painter taught him how to lay out a design on a sheet of paper and scale it up to giant proportions, a technique that he still uses in his paintings. Edward Albee talks about how his plays begin as ideas that emerge from his unconscious. Steve Wozniak recalls how he solved some computing problems in a simpler and more elegant way than anyone had thought of before.

All of the interviewees were apparently asked what creativity is and what makes someone creative. Unfortunately, when creative people speak about creativity in the abstract, they seem to produce more cliché than insight. The creative person sees the world differently, must believe in herself, and must be unafraid to break the rules, we are told, sometimes at length. When the interviewees talk about their life stories or their techniques, they can be revealing, but as theorists they disappoint.

The book could have benefitted from some connection to the psychological research on creativity, if only in the introduction. Instead, we have twenty accomplished people talking past one another. It is not clear why these twenty were chosen, rather than representatives of other groups. The editors, cofounders of an industrial design firm, might have been better advised to have interviewed twenty industrial designers, or twenty accomplished people in some other discrete field.

In addition, the question of whether creativity in the arts is the same as creativity in business goes unexplored. So does creativity in science, for no stated reason. The book does not delve into whether and how solitary creativity differs from working within a corporation or institution, or how the demands of the market affect creative work. Issues such as these lurk in the background, but are not

brought into focus. As it is, then, the book is a hodgepodge, of value mainly to the reader who is interested in one of its subjects.

The book is attractively designed and is illustrated with 93 well-chosen photographs.

Reviewer: Hal Grossman
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