



Smithsonian American Art Museum

Routine Extremism: Ad Reinhardt and Modern Art

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This project explores the unique and overlooked oeuvre of American artist Ad Reinhardt (1913–1967). I focus on what the artist called “routine extremism,” a term buried in his notes that refers to a code of living that would unite aesthetic ritual and everyday routine, political responsibility and artistic detachment. This dissertation will define the substance and effects of Reinhardt’s practice in its various aspects: his cartoon and essay interventions in the public press (chapter 1), his material process of painting and its perceptual and conservation difficulty (chapter 2), his treatment of time in his “ultimate” abstract paintings (chapter 3), his multinational didacticism and its photographic means (chapter 4), and his posthumous influence for artists as various as Carl Andre and Andy Warhol in the late 1960s and 70s (chapter 5). In so doing, my thesis will not only elucidate and interrogate the work of a misunderstood but major figure, it will also show how Reinhardt’s “routine extremism,” and our understanding of it, reevaluate art and history in the twentieth century, forwarding a theory of modernism both practicable and radical all at once.