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Simon Knell

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GALLERIES

THE ART OF MAKING NATIONS

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Simon Knell : National Galleries before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised National Galleries:

Are national galleries different from other kinds of art gallery or museum? What value is there for the nation in a collection of international masterpieces? How are national galleries involved in the construction national art? National Galleries is the first book to undertake a panoramic view of a type of national institution ndash; which are sometimes called national museums of fine art ndash; that is now found in almost every nation on earth. Adopting a richly

illustrated, globally inclusive, comparative view, Simon Knell argues that national galleries should not be understood as 'great galleries' but as peculiar sites where art is made to perform in acts of nation building. A book that fundamentally rewrites the history of these institutions and encourages the reader to dispense with elitist views of their worth, Knell reveals an unseen geography and a rich complexity of performance. He considers the ways the national galleries entangle art and nation, and the differing trajectories and purposes of international and national art. Exploring galleries, artists and artworks from around the world, *National Galleries* is an argument about how we think about and study these institutions. Privileging the situatedness of each national gallery performance, and valuing localism over universalism, Knell looks particularly at how national art is constructed and represented. He ends with examples that show the mutability of national art and by questioning the necessity of art nationalism.

"The book is a welcome contribution to the project of 'making strangers'; the naturalized cultural forms, practices and assumptions associated with national galleries. In an eminently readable and engaging compendium of thematic perspectives and critical accounts, Knell reveals some of the vast and usually unremarked differences between national galleries. Through a comparative framework he attends sensitively to their situated peculiarities and to their political contexts and roles, providing new insights into the ways in which interrelated ideas of art and the nation have historically been constructed in the institutional remit, rhetoric, collections and space of museums. Achieving a uniquely wide and comparative perspective only available to the near-constant traveller, Knell has provided a landmark study for the understanding of national galleries." Christopher Whitehead, Professor of Museology, Newcastle University, UK "A welcome survey of the development and meaning of national galleries of art beyond the familiar institutional histories of western Europe and the United States of America." Professor Helen Rees Leahy, University of Manchester "Covering a broad range of histories and institutions, Knell tackles the subject of national galleries with clarity and aplomb. The text is supported by 41 black-and-white images and 15 color plates, many taken by the author, a thorough index, and ample notes... Useful to those interested in museum studies, collecting histories, national identity, material and cultural heritage, and related fields in the fine arts. Summing Up: Recommended" J. Decker, CHOICE "About the Author Simon Knell is Professor of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester's School of Museum Studies, UK.