



# Critical Realism in Contemporary Art: Around Allan Sekula's Photography (Lieven Gevaert Series)

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"Critical realism is a way of seeking to understand the social reality by critically 'making notes' of it. . . . As scratches of reality, Sekula's photographs and films leave their traces in our minds. They encourage, yes, even force reflection, and through that, slow changes can probably become a reality, certainly at the level of the individual."?from the Introduction, "A Note on Critical Realism Today"

The American photographer Allan Sekula teaches at the California Institute of the Arts. His oeuvre features a number of unique characteristics that instigate a strong plea for art to become once more critically engaged. Sekula's iconography rediscovered the theme of labor and his photographs, on the verge between art and documentary, reflect on the possibility that visual art might again deliver an "act of criticism." In the art world, for several decades now, realism has been relegated to the museum of premodern styles and devices, and the idea of social commitment in art has become confused; even when contemporary art carries a strong political message, it often does so in a way that masks the message within a tangle of conceptual devices and abstractions.

Sekula's photography has triggered intense debate about the ways in which art can take a critical position on social questions without succumbing to a plainspoken or partisan stance. In *Critical Realism in Contemporary Art*, leading theorists of art use Sekula's work as a starting point for wide-ranging discussions of technology, history, and society as they are reflected in today's photographic practice.

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