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National Galleries

Simon Knell

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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 – which are sometimes called national museums of fine art – 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.

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