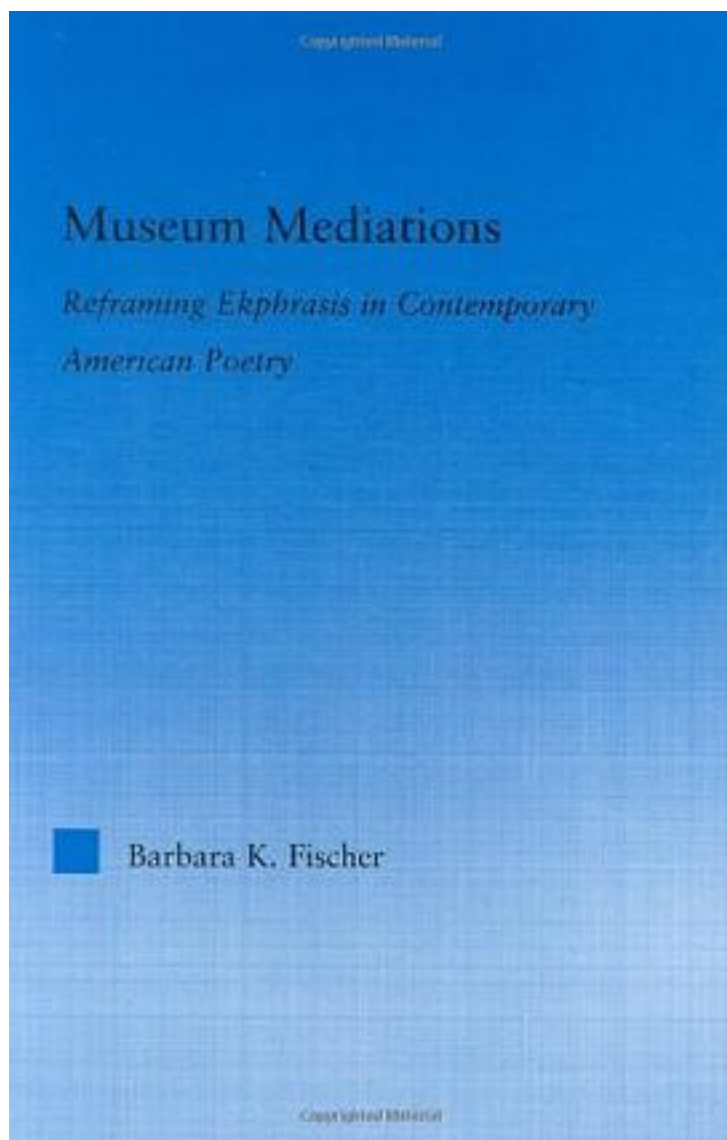


Museum Mediations



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This interdisciplinary study participates in the ongoing critical conversation about postwar American poetry and visual culture, while advancing that field into the arena of the museum. Turning to contemporary poems about the visual arts that foreground and interrogate a museum setting, the book demonstrates the particular importance of the museum as a cultural site that is both inspiration and provocation for poets. The study uniquely bridges the "dual canon" in contemporary poetry (and calls the lyric/avant-garde distinction into question) by analyzing museum-sponsored anthologies as well as poems by John Ashbery, Richard Howard, Kenneth Koch, Kathleen Fraser, Cole Swensen, Anne Carson, and others. Through these case studies of poets with diverse affiliations, the author shows that the boom in ekphrasis in the past 20 years is not only an aesthetic but a critical phenomenon, a way that poets have come to terms with the critical dilemmas of our moment. Highlighting the importance of poets' "peripheral vision" - awareness of the institutional conditions that frame encounters with art - the author contends that a museum visit becomes a forum for questioning oppositions that have preoccupied literary criticism for the past 50 years: homage and innovation, modernism and postmodernism, subjectivity and collectivity. The study shows that ekphrasis becomes a strategy for negotiating these impasses - a mode of political inquiry, a meditation on canonization, a venue for comic appraisal of institutionalization, and a means of "site-specific" feminist revision - in a vital synthesis of critique, perspicacity, and pleasure.

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