

# John Berger

## Quotes

*Men, Art, Drawing, Artist, Photography, People, World, Past, Envy, Animal, Events, Reality, Mean, Naked, Order, Writing, Space, May, Memories, Choices*

The past grows gradually around one, like a placenta for dying.

~John Berger

We never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves.

~John Berger

That we find a crystal or a poppy beautiful means that we are less alone, that we are more deeply inserted into existence than the course of a single life would lead us to believe.

~John Berger

We only see what we look at. To look is an act of choice.

~John Berger

The poverty of our century is unlike that of any other. It is not, as poverty was before, the result of natural scarcity, but of a set of priorities imposed upon the rest of the world by the rich.

~John Berger

Nakedness reveals itself. Nudity is placed on display. The nude is condemned to never being naked. Nudity is a form of dress.

~John Berger

To be desired is perhaps the closest anybody in this life can reach to feeling immortal.

~John Berger

Paris, I believe, is a man in his twenties in love with an older woman.

~John Berger

Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at.

~John Berger

The past is the one thing we are not prisoners of. We can do with the past exactly what we wish. What we can't do is to change its consequences.

~John Berger

The human imagination... has great difficulty in living strictly within the confines of a materialist practice or philosophy. It dreams, like a dog in its basket, of hares in the open.

~John Berger

Do you know the legend about cicadas? They say they are the souls of poets who cannot keep quiet because, when they were alive, they never wrote the poems they wanted to.

~John Berger

When we read a story, we inhabit it. The covers of the book are like a roof and four walls.

~John Berger

Emigration, forced or chosen, across national frontiers or from village to metropolis, is the quintessential experience of our time.

~John Berger

All creation is in the art of seeing.

~John Berger

Fanaticism comes from any form of chosen blindness accompanying the pursuit of a single dogma.

~John Berger

At times failure is very necessary for the artist. It reminds him that failure is not the ultimate disaster. And this reminder liberates him from the mean fussing of perfectionism.

~John Berger

Every painted image of something is also about the absence of the real thing. All painting is about the presence of absence.

~John Berger

Every city has a sex and age which have nothing to do with demography.

~John Berger

Never chain your dogs together with sausages. One must accustom one's self to be bored.

~John Berger

Glamour cannot exist without personal social envy being a common and widespread emotion.

~John Berger

What makes photography a strange invention is that its primary raw materials are light and time.

~John Berger

Oil painting did to appearances what capital did to social relations. It reduced everything to the equality of objects. Everything became exchangeable because everything became a commodity.

~John Berger

We who draw do so not only to make something observed visible to others, but also to accompany something invisible to its incalculable destination

~John Berger

Modern thought has transferred the spectral character of Death to the notion of time itself. Time has become Death triumphant over all.

~John Berger

You can plan events, but if they go according to your plan they are not events.

~John Berger

Ours is the century of enforced travel of disappearances. The century of people helplessly seeing others, who were close to them, disappear over the horizon.

~John Berger

Today the discredit of words is very great.

~John Berger

All weddings are similar, but every marriage is different.

~John Berger

The zoo cannot but disappoint.

~John Berger

The opposite of love is not to hate but to separate. If love and hate have something in common it is because, in both cases, their energy is that of bringing and holding together

~John Berger

Publicity is the life of this culture - in so far as without publicity capitalism could not survive - and at the same time publicity is its dream.

~John Berger

Autobiography begins with a sense of being alone. It is an orphan form.

~John Berger

It can happen that a book, unlike its authors, grows younger as the years pass.

~John Berger

Nothing in the nature around us is evil. This needs to be repeated since one of the human ways of talking oneself into inhuman acts is to cite the supposed cruelty of nature.

~John Berger

The camera relieves us of the burden of memory.

~John Berger

For the artist, drawing is discovery. And that is not just a slick phrase; it is quite literally true.

~John Berger

The animal has secrets which, unlike the secrets of caves, mountains, seas are specifically addressed to man.

~John Berger

It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it

~John Berger

A man's presence suggests what he is capable of doing to you or for you. By contrast, a woman's presence... defines what can and cannot be done to her.

~John Berger

Compassion has no place in the natural order of the world which operates on the basis of necessity. Compassion opposes this order and is therefore best thought of as being in some way supernatural.

~John Berger

Post-modernism has cut off the present from all futures. The daily

media add to this by cutting off the past. Which means that critical opinion is often orphaned in the present.

~John Berger

What do drawings mean to me? I really don't know. The activity absorbs me. I forget everything else in a way that I don't think happens with any other activity.

~John Berger

To be naked is to be oneself. To be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet not recognised for oneself.

~John Berger

Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak.

~John Berger

The media network has its idols, but its principal idol is its own style which generates an aura of winning and leaves the rest in darkness. It recognizes neither pity nor pitilessness.

~John Berger

One can say of language that it is potentially the only human home, the only dwelling place that cannot be hostile to man.

~John Berger

It is not usually possible in a poem or a story to make the relationship between particular and universal fully explicit. Those who try to do so end up writing parables.

~John Berger

What is saved in the cinema when it achieves art is a spontaneous continuity with all mankind.

~John Berger

The camera relieves us of the burden of memory. It surveys us like God, and it surveys for us. Yet no other god has been so cynical, for the camera records in order to forget.

~John Berger

If everything that existed were continually being photographed, every photograph would become meaningless.

~John Berger

Every authentic poem contributes to the labour of poetry... to bring together what life has separated or violence has torn apart.

~John Berger

A cigarette is a breathing space. It makes a parenthesis. The time of a cigarette is a parenthesis, and if it is shared, you are both in that parenthesis. Its like a proscenium arch for a dialogue.

~John Berger

Common-sense is part of the home-made ideology of those who have been deprived of fundamental learning, of those who have been kept ignorant.

~John Berger

Drawing is a way of coming upon the connection between things, just like metaphor in poetry reconnects what has become separated.

~John Berger

I use charcoal a lot. Partly because it has such a fantastic range but also because it is very easy to erase. For me, drawing is a lot to do with taking out, with returning to the white of the paper.

~John Berger

All publicity works upon anxiety.

~John Berger



If the public photograph contributes to a memory, it is to the memory of an unknowable and total stranger.

~John Berger

Words are so often used in the opposite sense, as a screen of diversion. It's the struggle towards truthfulness which is the same whether one is writing a poem, a novel or an argument.

~John Berger

Without ethics man has no future. This is to say mankind without them cannot be itself. Ethics determine choices and actions and suggest difficult priorities.

~John Berger

In the average European oil painting of the nude the principal protagonist is never painted. He is the spectator in front of the picture and he is presumed to be a man.

~John Berger

Never again shall a single story be told as though it were the only one.

~John Berger

Whenever the intensity of looking reaches a certain degree, one becomes aware of an equally intense energy coming towards one through the appearance of whatever it is one is scrutinizing.

~John Berger

Painting is something that you need to do, if not every day, then certainly most days. It is almost like being a pianist: if you stop, you lose something.

~John Berger

I wanted to write about looking at the world, so it's more about helping people, or persuading people, to see what is around us; both the

marvellous and the terrible.

~John Berger

Advertising is not merely an assembly of competing messages; it is a language itself which is always being used to make the same general proposal

~John Berger

Protest and anger practically always derives from hope, and the shouting out against injustice is always in the hope of those injustices being somewhat corrected and a little more justice established.

~John Berger

Ever since the Greek tragedies, artists have, from time to time, asked themselves how they might influence ongoing political events.

~John Berger

The true content of a photograph is invisible, for it derives from a play, not with form, but with time.

~John Berger

Between the experience of living a normal life at this moment on the planet and the public narratives being offered to give a sense to that life, the empty space, the gap, is enormous.

~John Berger

The publicity image steals her love of herself as she is, and offers it back to her for the price of the product.

~John Berger

Photography, because it stops the flow of life, is always flirting with death.

~John Berger

So time doesn't count, and place does?' I said this to tease her. When I was a man, I liked teasing her and she went along with it, consenting, for it reminded us both of a sadness that had passed.

~John Berger

We live in a dominant culture of ceaseless Departure and Progress that has so far lasted two or three centuries.

~John Berger

'Fahrenheit 9/11' is astounding. Not so much as a film - although it is cunning and moving - but as an event.

~John Berger

The autobiographical doesn't interest me. I could think of few things less interesting than rooting about in my life.

~John Berger

A drawing is an autobiographical record of one's discovery of an event - either seen, remembered or imagined. A 'finished' work is an attempt to construct an event in itself.

~John Berger

To be naked is to be oneself.

~John Berger

History always constitutes the relation between a present and its past. Consequently fear of the present leads to mystification of the past

~John Berger

To remain innocent may also be. to remain ignorant.

~John Berger

[O]ften art has judged the judges, pleaded revenge to the innocent and shown to the future what the past suffered, so that it has never been

forgotten. . . .

~John Berger

Propaganda requires a permanent network of communication so that it can systematically stifle reflection with emotive or utopian slogans. Its pace is usually fast.

~John Berger

Hair is associated with sexual power. With passion. The woman's sexual passion needs to be minimized, so that the spectator may feel that he has the monopoly on such passion

~John Berger

Your lips, beloved, are like a honeycomb: honey and milk are under the tongue. And the smell of your clothes is like the smell of my home.

~John Berger

Hope is a contraband passed from hand to hand and story to story.

~John Berger

The envied are like bureaucrats; the more impersonal they are, the greater the illusion (for themselves and for others) of their power.

~John Berger

What any true painting touches is an absence - an absence of which without the painting, we might be unaware. And that would be our loss.

~John Berger

If every event which occurred could be given a name, there would be no need for stories.

~John Berger

We can become anything. That is why injustice is impossible here. There may be the accident of birth, there is no accident of death.

Nothing forces us to remain what we were.

~John Berger

The contradiction in perspective was that it structured all images of reality to address a single spectator who, unlike God, could only be in one place at a time.

~John Berger

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