

The New Criterion

Features

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A conversation with Philippe de Montebello

by [Hilton Kramer](#)

The director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art talks with TNC

Editor's note: This summer, Hilton Kramer, accompanied by The New Criterion's Executive Editor, David Yezzi, interviewed the director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Philippe de Montebello, in his office overlooking Central Park in Manhattan.

THE NEW CRITERION: You are coming up on your thirtieth anniversary as director of the Metropolitan Museum. Clearly, the museum world has changed dramatically during your tenure. What would you say is the most pronounced difference between when you began and now?

PHILIPPE DE MONTEBELLO: Well, I was appointed in May of 1977, and I would have to say it's a different world, to the point that, knowing everything I know, were I offered the job again I'm not sure I would take it. Let me look at it on two levels: the degree to which it has become bure ...

Hilton Kramer is the editor and publisher of *The New Criterion*, which he founded with the late Samuel Lipman in 1982. Since 1987, he has also been the art critic for the weekly *New York Observer*, and for many years has written the "Critic's Notebook" column in *Art & Antiques* magazine. His "Media Watch" column was published weekly in *The New York Post* from 1993 to November 1997. Mr. Kramer was born in Gloucester, Massachusetts, in 1928. He studied at Syracuse University (B.A., 1950), and in the graduate schools of Columbia University, Harvard University, Indiana University (School of Letters), and the New School for Social Research. He has served on the faculties of Indiana University, Bennington College, the University of Colorado, and Yale University. He has lectured widely at museums and universities in this country and abroad. He began publishing literary criticism in 1950, art criticism in 1953. Over the years he has contributed to *Commentary*, *The New Republic*, *National Review*, *The New York Review of Books*, *The American Scholar*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Atlantic*, *The American Spectator*, *Partisan Review*, *Modern Painters*, *The Boston Globe*, the *London Times Literary Supplement*, and the *London Sunday Telegraph*. Mr. Kramer has been the editor of *Arts Magazine*, and the art critic of *The Nation*. In 1965 he joined the staff of *The New York Times* as art news editor. He was appointed chief art critic of the *Times* in 1973, and remained in that position until he resigned in 1982 to become the editor of *The New Criterion*. Mr. Kramer is the author of two volumes of criticism--*The Age of the Avant-Garde* (1973) and *The Revenge of the Philistines* (1985)--and of critical monographs on the art of Milton Avery, Gaston Lachaise, and Richard Lindner. He is the editor of *The New Criterion Reader* (1988), and co-editor (with Roger Kimball) of *Against the Grain: The New Criterion on Art and Intellect at the End of the Twentieth Century* (1995), *The Future of the European Past* (1997). Mr. Kramer's most recent book, *The Twilight of the Intellectuals: Culture*

and Politics in the Era of the Cold War, was published by Ivan R. Dee in April 1999. He is currently at work on *Abstract Art: A Cultural History*. Mr. Kramer serves on the board of trustees of the New York Studio School.

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