

The New Criterion

Letter from Paris

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The literary stakes

by [Stephen Sartarelli](#)

Perhaps the most interesting development on the French cultural landscape of the last few years has been the crystallization of a kind of “opposition” to the reigning cultural norms, centered around an attempt to cast a critical eye, unobstructed by professional loyalties and interests, on the art and literature of the last three decades or so. Disgruntled with what they see as the low quality and the intellectual and aesthetic *laisser-aller* of much contemporary culture, and the apparent unwillingness of the art establishment and the cultural press to engage in any kind of open debate about it, a group of writers, many of them gathered around the intellectual review *Esprit*, have undertaken to analyze and debunk many of the basic premises of contemporary French culture and literature. For their efforts they have been tarbrushed variously as “philistine,” “elitist,” “pas ...

Stephen Sartarelli

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