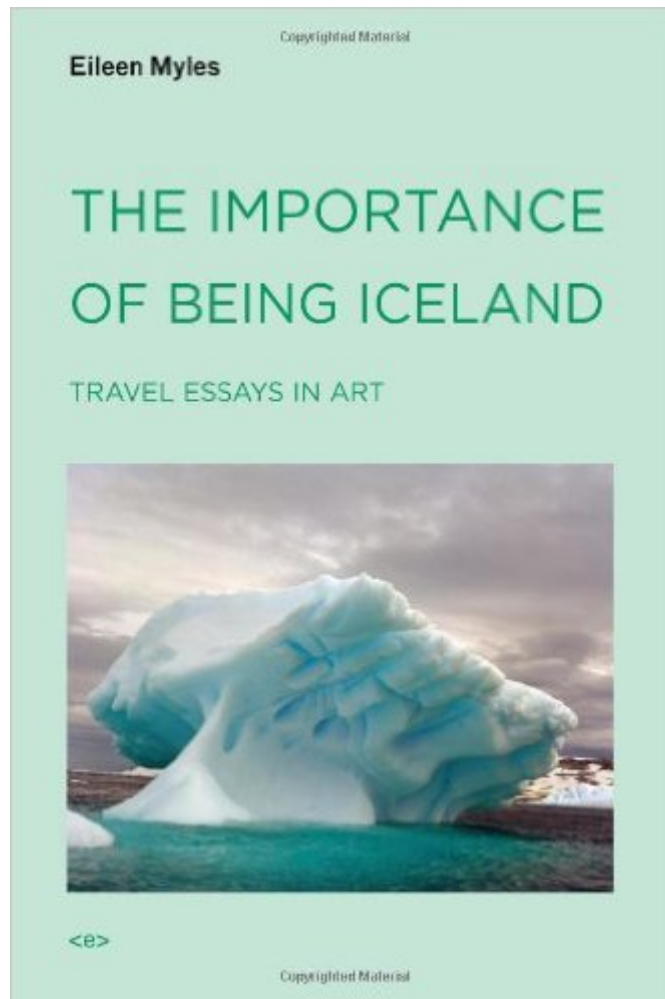


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The Importance Of Being Iceland: Travel Essays In Art (Semiotext(e) / Active Agents)



Synopsis

Poet and post-punk heroine Eileen Myles has always operated in the art, writing, and queer performance scenes as a kind of observant flaneur. Like Baudelaire's gentleman stroller, Myles travels the city--wandering on garbage-strewn New York streets in the heat of summer, drifting through the antiseptic malls of La Jolla, and riding in the van with Sister Spit--seeing it with a poet's eye for detail and with the consciousness that writing about art and culture has always been a social gesture. Culled by the poet from twenty years of art writing, the essays in *The Importance of Being Iceland* make a lush document of her--and our--lives in these contemporary crowds. Framed by Myles's account of her travels in Iceland, these essays posit inbetweenness as the most vital position from which to perceive culture as a whole, and a fluidity in national identity as the best model for writing and thinking about art and culture. The essays include fresh takes on Thoreau's Cape Cod walk, working class speech, James Schulyer and Björk, queer Russia and Robert Smithson; how-tos on writing an avant-garde poem and driving a battered Japanese car that resembles a menopausal body; and opinions on such widely ranging subjects as filmmaker Sadie Benning, actor Daniel Day-Lewis, Ted Berrigan's Sonnets, and flossing.

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Customer Reviews

In an odd way, I could see myself in many of the essays in this collection. Like me, Eileen Myles has been exposed to all walks of life and has tried many new, sometimes surprising things. Obviously at

my young age my understanding of the world and outlook is much more simple and immature than Eileen's, but her very real description of all her ventures is refreshing to a simple person like myself. If I was ever to become a writer this is the kind of writing I think I would enjoy most. I also enjoyed the variety of essays- from travel pieces to encounters with friends and family and lovers. One of my favorite lines to read was the first line of Everyday Barf- "I don't mind today, but the everyday makes me barf" (Myles 163). In Everyday Barf, Eileen essentially describes various situations in which she has experienced barfing. But the first line is very true- today is just fine and yesterday was fine and tomorrow will probably be fine, but everyday for the rest of my life sounds like a lot of work. To look at things on a large, infinite scale is a lot more sickening than focusing on tasks at hand. Another essay I enjoyed was Sarah's Smoke- I mostly enjoyed the ending. Sarah tells Eileen she never has smoked, but that it looks great. Eileen describes that "she laughs at a vice untried" (Myles 89). I have more of an understanding about addiction and various vices than most would suspect- so I thought this line was endearing in a way. Sarah doesn't smoke, but she knows she would love it if she tried it. The essay that struck me the most as a whole was "Live Through That?!" in which Eileen discusses life through flossing. Eileen flosses her teeth to avoid losing them like her dad did before his early death.

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