

# BOOK REVIEWS

## REFERENCE

**Pioneers of Modern Typography** by Herbert Spencer, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MIT Press, 2004, original paperback, \$29.95) is the standard guide to the avant-garde origins of modern graphic design and typography, from El Lissitzky, Rodchenko, and Moholy-Nagy to Heartfield, Zwart, Schwitters and Tschichold. With 161 illustrations, covering everything from posters to magazine covers to Apollinaire's "figurative poetry", this revised edition, follows the revised and redesigned edition of 1983.

## GENERAL

**Understanding Me: Lectures and Interviews** by Marshall McLuhan, ed. By Stephanie McLuhan and David Staines (Cambridge, MIT Press, 2004, \$27.95 cloth) is a collection of 19 previously unpublished lectures and interviews either by or with Marshall McLuhan. These are intimate, accessible, informal spoken words by a man who gave us "hot" and "cool" media, "the medium is the message", "the global village" and popularized other memorable terms including "feedback" and "iconic."

He was prophetic in foreseeing the personal computer when computers were lumbering, unwieldy machines; he foresaw the changes wrought by digital technology well before any of his contemporaries, and in fact we are still catching up to McLuhan forty years after the publication of *Understanding Media*.

These are direct transcriptions from the original audio, film or videotape of McLuhan's actual appearances, so these are what McLuhan spoke as an accessible public man. A highlight for Umbrella readers is "The Medium is the Message (1966), The Future of the Book (1972), Art as Survival in the Electric Age (1973) and Man and Media (1979), among so many others. McLuhan comes across as outrageous, funny, perplexing, stimulating and provocative. How we need him now! You can now have him. Foreword is by Tom Wolfe. A must!

**Sculptural Codes** by Susan Hefuna (Heidelberg, Germany, Kehrer Verlag, 2004, \$36.00 cloth) accompanies a traveling exhibition of this Egyptian-German artist who explores the respective cultures' characteristics and contrasts. Using photographs, drawings, installations and video, the artist works with cultural codes and offers new insights into each of them.

Navigating between different cultures and various media, Hefuna questions identity as such. To her, digitally altered images of so-called *Mashrabiya*s (distinctive type of wood carving particular to the Arab East, mainly used for windows behind which women would not be seen from the outside, a grid or ornamentally designed carving which obfuscates a direct image of anything behind it) can serve as a means to define gender specific spaces and spiritual concepts hidden behind the visible reality. Hefuna, however, always includes a female figure or something recognizable in her images. In an interview in the book, she cites the fact that she has always been attracted to the abstract form of structures—that of molecules, DNA or modules, so that she sees in her drawings, which are inspired by the shape of the *mashrabiya* from old Cairo, the molecular structure, especially in the joins where the lines cross each other.

The book includes several essays, the interview with Hefuna, a biography, bibliography and 80 color illustrations. The text is bilingual (German-English). Distributed by Consortium Books.

**Licht und Klang (Light and Sound)** by Hans Peter Kuhn (Heidelberg, Kehrer Verlag, 2004, \$40 hardback) documents this remarkable artist who uses light and sound installations, previously presented in museums and gallery spaces worldwide, but which has now developed into large-scale outdoor works since the 1990s. Kuhn uses the big gesture enveloping landscapes and urban architecture and tying them to the tradition of American land art. His theatrical mode is based on his background in theater, collaborating on many occasions with Robert Wilson, with whom he won the Golden Lion of the Venice Biennale for the installation *Memory/Loss* (1991).

Known for his spectacular light shows and utterly aesthetic indoor installations, the documentation is high quality photographs by Gerhard Kassner with accolades voiced by Robert Wilson and Daniel Libeskind. The book, thanks to our new digital world, is accompanied by an audio CD which contains sound compositions of dance and theater works as well as radio plays and installations from 1988 to 1999. Includes chronology. Distributed by Consortium.

**Ed Ruscha: The Drawn Word** with essay by Olivier Berggruen (Vero Beach, Windsor Press, 2004, \$50 paper) is a collection of Ruscha's work on paper, from his gunpowder drawings of the 60s and 70s through

his more recent work from the 90s. The artist's treatments of language, of signs and words, has influenced a whole generation over the last 40 years. He delicately uses a variety of media from gunpowder to pastel, from floor polish to ivy which shows a master at work. And "Mr. L.A." shows an affinity to an American environment with references to Hollywood, to music (e.g. Nashville), to American idiomatic language (punk, kooks) and always in bold, often monosyllabic style of communication. The catalog also reflects Ruscha's layout grids in reference to Ruscha's interest in commercial design, and phonetic translations of each of Ruscha's words to emphasize the important of sound in their choosing.

This is a stunning publication, reflective of a considerable desire on the part of the press and all those involved in this catalog that everything should be perfect. It is perfect with a bio and description of all works included. A real contribution with 34 color and two black and white illustrations. The exhibition will open at the Whitney Museum of American Art in July 2004. Distributed by d.a.p.

**Baroness Elsa: Gender, Dada, and Everyday Modernity, a cultural biography** by Irene Gammel (Cambridge, MIT Press, 2004, \$21.95 paper) is a biography of the "mother of Dada" and the first to reach America. As an innovator in poetic form and an early creator of junk sculpture, "the Baroness" was best known for her sexually charged, often controversial performances. Many thought she was crazed, others thought she was a genius. The editor Margaret Anderson called her "perhaps the only figure of our generation who deserves the epithet extraordinary." Yet despite her great notoriety and influence, until recently her story and work have been little known outside the circle of modernist scholars.

Baroness Elsa (1874-1927) is viewed in this volume in the context of female dada and the historical battles fought by women in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. She strode through the streets of Berlin, Munich, New York, and Paris wearing such adornments as a tomato can bra, teaspoon earrings, and black lipstick, erasing the boundaries between art and life, between the everyday and the outrageous, between the creative and the dangerous. She was ahead of her time in creating objects before the Dadaists of the teens and twenties, her sound and visual poetry were far more daring than the male modernists of her time, and her performances prefigured feminist body art and performance art by nearly 50 years!

It is hard to invent such a woman, but she was indeed real. She was indeed precursor to Hannah

Wilke scarring her body with bubblegum and Carolee Schneemann extracting a scroll from her vagina. Elsa used her body as a canvas even during the time when legs were covered and long before feminist performance artists took up her innovations 50 years later.

She relied a great deal upon her patron, Berenice Abbott, who turned her over to Djuna Barnes whom she courted with umbrella paintings, etc. as indicated in a chapter entitled "Courting Djuna". With 78 illustrations and a hefty number of pages of notes, a selected but long bibliography and index, this is a fascinating biography, one which adds a new chapter in the history of Dada and in 20<sup>th</sup> century art history!

**Alighiero e Boetti: Shaman-Showman** by Annemarie Sauzeau Boetti (Köln, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther Konig, 2004, \$31.00 softback, dist. by d.a.p.) is both a private testimony and a critical study, written by the woman who was Boetti's companion during the first 20, and most decisive, years of his career. It is also an album of photographs and drawings, many of them never before published.

This is a personal memoir, a heartfelt memoir, and a journey of the woman who lived with the double-named man, the shaman/showman, using words, images, events, times and places. Alighiero's artistic output spanned 30 years from 1964 through Conceptualism with a delightful playfulness, but also with powerful philosophical and geopolitical intuitions that only now fully reveal their prophetic nature like "11" his magic number.

Sauzeau Boetti is an art critic, journalist, essayist, and co-author with her ex-husband, of the seminal **Classifying: The Thousand Longest Rivers in the World** (1977). I was at the launch of that book in Bologna, and it was an amazing event. So was the artist, wired and eccentric, nervous and intelligent, and most of the time stoned. But he was important not only in Italian art history but in 20<sup>th</sup> century art history. Sauzeau Boetti was responsible for organizing various exhibitions and catalogs on his work, in particular his first retrospective, held in 1996 in Torino. She is the founding member of the Alighiero Boetti Archive in Rome. 152 black and white illustrations. Distributed by d.a.p. \$31.00 from [www.artbook.com](http://www.artbook.com)

**Had Gadya: The Only Kid** (facsimile of El Lissitzky's Edition of 1919), edited by Arnold J. Band with an introduction by Nancy Perloff (Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute, 2004, dates to a little-known period early in his career when he immersed himself in the Jewish cultural renaissance that flourished in

Russia from roughly 1912 to the early 1920s. Signed with his Hebrew given name, this volume with its wraparound cover, colorful lithographic montages, and stylized use of Yiddish and Aramaic words - celebrates Lissitzky's interest in Jewish folk traditions while looking forward to the dynamic graphic and typographic designs for which he is best remembered. This near-scale facsimile, including the rarely seen cover, allows readers to experience Lissitzky's *Had gadya* as originally envisioned. It is accompanied here by Nancy Perloff's discussion of the work's cultural and artistic contexts, Band's English translation of Lissitzky's Yiddish version of the song, sections on Lissitzky's Yiddish version of the song, sections on his iconography and vocabulary, and lyrics set to music.

**Unrepentant Ego: The Self-Portraits of Lucas Samaras** by Marla Prather, with an essay by Donald Kuspit (New York, Abrams, 2004, \$65.00) shows the artist's 40-year obsession with his own image, since self-depiction is arguably the driving force of Lucas Samaras' life's work. This is the first book to focus on his self-portraiture and accompanies the major exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Since this is a book about the visual presentation of a Self, then it would seem rational to start with a visual chronology of that life from Macedonia, Greece in 1936 to his wartime experiences as a boy with Italian occupation of Kastoria. He thought that "war is fantastic for children because you're able to witness dramatic events." In 1948 he emigrates with his mother to the U.S. and then Rutgers and Kaprow and George Segal and Happenings and so much more. Talk about being born at the right time and being in New York at the right time. With 300 full color illustrations and 50 black and white with four fold-outs, this is a book for the ages. Donald Kuspit writes an illuminating analysis of the artist's self-portraiture entitled "The Aesthetics of Trauma" and Marla Prather surveys Samaras's career from the late 1950s to the present, tracing his self-portraits in various mediums, including drawing, photography, boxes, mirrored environments, and film. Selected bibliography, and index.

**Vanessa Beecroft: Performances, 1993-2003** (Torino, Skira, 2004, \$75.00 hardback) is a stunning picture book of the work of an artist who has identified the female images as the subject of her research, and who examines questions and obsessions related to the body, beauty, and identity.

This is the catalog (and it's very heavy) to her current retrospective at the Castello di Rivoli, featuring 52 of the artist's performances held over the past 10

years. Numbered consecutively, the performances are intended to be perceived as a whole, making up a single work examining stereotypes, multiplicity, and the violence related to the culture of the image. Beecroft's early work includes acquaintances and people recruited from the street, chosen on the basis of their resemblance to precise female typologies—and focuses on food-related and behavioral disorders. Color schemes play a dominant role in each piece and reference the history of painting and cinema.

After finding people in schools or by chance in the early performances, she now uses professional models and close friends, as well as make-up artists and hair stylists. Many of the women are naked, yet made up with cosmetics to emphasize their pictorial qualities. Each performance is documented, as well as drawings, polaroids, and videos that Beecroft uses to extend her events. There is an interview with the artist by Marcella Beccaria, and essays by Germano Celant, Jeffrey Deitch, Thomas Kellein, and Greg Durkin. There is a history, exhibition checklist, biography, chronology and selected bibliography. If you're squeamish about nudity, this book is not for you. And if you really want to do aerobics, this book might be just the thing!

**Constance DeJong: Metal** by Arden Reed (Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 2003, \$45.00 hardcover) provides a retrospective pictorial and textual account of DeJong's artistic career over the past 25 years.

DeJong is sensitive to metal, which she employs not as a tool but for its own sake. Her work is poetic, made of steel and copper and of stain and patina, while she explores the boundaries between sculpture and painting. Her metal at once is heavy and weightless, just as her works are simultaneously mysterious and hard-edged.

DeJong's partner in this presentation is Arden Reed who captures the essence of DeJong's work in early 200 color photographs with accompanying descriptions. The photographs are so beautifully reproduced that you want to touch the surface of the page to be sure that the tactile qualities you see are really only in a photograph. The photographs make this book a treasure. An interview with DeJong conducted by Gus Blaisdell adds the artist's voice to this beautiful presentation.

Many of the works are not heavy sculptures, but in fact, copper drawings, steel drawings, light drawings, rods, nitrate paintings, and so much more. A chronology, bibliography and list of work concludes this stunning volume.

Sandler, Irving. *A Sweeper-Up After Artists: A Memoir*. New York and London: Thames and Hudson. 2003. 384 pp. \$29.95 hardcover.

A euphonious title does not a welcome book make – and vice versa. Irving Sandler could not have come up with a less sonorous name for his memoir than *A Sweeper-Up After Artists*. But, then, Sandler didn't really come up with the title; his colleague Frank O'Hara did, in one of his poems, calling his friend Irving (and by extension himself) a "balayeur des artistes." *Comme toujours*, it sounds better in French.

But, however clunky, and too humble, *Sweeper-Up* is a spot-on description of the role Sandler, and O'Hara, and the whole second generation of Abstract Expressionist critics in New York, saw for themselves. Awed by the accomplishments of their predecessors, in art and in criticism, and yet not wanting to freeze the ethos and aesthetic of their immediate forefathers (and too-occasional-mothers) into academicizing aspic, this generation of writers, like their art-making contemporaries, sought to forge ahead with the ab-ex adventure to see where it led – and, if necessary, lead it away from rote. Sandler is not shy about claiming his proper place in this dynamic, but he is modest about its breadth. Most anyone who would choose to read this memoir knows Sandler as the first to write a comprehensive history of Abstract Expressionism and its repercussions (and, indeed, would turn to *Sweeper-Up* precisely for the back story). But Sandler reminds us of his crucial function far less often, and more offhandedly, than one would expect, or even countenance.

But that's Irving, an historian and a journalist, not an ideologue or a politician. He is content to be there, the fly on the wall, buzzing loudly only when asked, or when irked by the pretensions of some mosquito. He does not write himself out of the history – he reminds us succinctly what a critical champion he was for second-generation and post-ab ex artists such as Alex Katz, Al Held, and Philip Pearlstein, and what curatorial and advisory authority he wielded especially in the 1960s and 1970s – but the memoir is less about what he *did* than what he *witnessed*.

And, lest this make *Sweeper-Up* sound like an exercise in name-dropping, much less a tell-all record of past scandal, rest assured that Sandler's self-effacement is only part of his larger discretion. He doesn't pull his punches. He admits avoiding the Cedar Bar when Pollock was there, for instance, as Jack the Dripper could turn quickly from Jack the Tippler to Jack the Ripper; and he does not hide his frustration with and disdain for certain of his acquaintances, especially critical colleagues (notably,

among others, Clement Greenberg and Rosalind Krauss). But he records his attitudes as if they were simply more observations, feelings he remembers rather than harbors, and saves his ink for more positive, or at least more interesting, recollections.

*A Sweeper-Up After Artists* (please, anybody out there have a more elegant translation for "balayeur"?) is indeed the back story to *The Triumph of Abstract Expressionism*, no more no less, the crisp, no-nonsense tone of the landmark history leavened here with affection, enthusiasm, and fond recall of youthful exploration and passion. It's not a biopic in the making, but it is essential to any that are to be made of the time and place. (Not surprisingly, if a bit hastily, Sandler is dismissive of the movie *Pollock*.) As importantly, *Sweeper-Up* provides the close-in Irving-eye behind his subsequent histories, *The New York School*, *American Art of the 1960s*, and *Art of the Post-Modern Era*, reiterating Sandler's abiding interest and frequent delight in the artists and –isms that succeeded Abstract Expressionism. He "got" Pop before most of his 10<sup>th</sup> Street pals, championed minimalism, delighted in Fluxus, and his enthusiasm for such developments as performance and video art has not been hampered by any need to "defend painting." (If anything, he was annoyed rather than encouraged by the "return to painting" of the early '80s).

Sandler's Achilles heel, if it can be considered a weakness in the context, is his Newyorkocentrism. He is not dismissive of art being done elsewhere, in the 1950s any more than the 1990s, but admits to a relative unfamiliarity with it. He has spent most summers in England over the last several decades, and has made numerous forays into the London scene, but to judge from his report in *Sweeper-Up*, he clearly feels himself less than fully competent to evaluate it with the depth and thoroughness he brings to his New York observations. Methinks he doth defer too much; and I would have welcomed some sort of at-least glancing take on other places he's been, whether Paris or Japan or Venice or California.

If the memoir suffers overall from anything, then, it's Sandler's self-confinement, a mark not of any intellectual timidity, but of an ego smaller than its bearer deserves. The absence of chest-thumping is welcome, even refreshing, but I could easily have tolerated a bit more arrogance had it allowed that much more extensive observation. From my long collegial friendship with Sandler, I know he has even more to report. Maybe an anthology of his reviews and articles would do the trick. In the meantime, Irving, we still hardly know ye.

– Peter Frank

**Writing on the Wall: Word and Image in Modern Art** by Simon Morley (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2003, \$49.95) covers everything from the Cubist collages of Picasso to the signs of Gillian Wearing, from the schoolboy subversion of Magritte to the demotic scrawl of Cy Twombly, showing how the use of the words has pervaded modern art. Ruscha comes to mind, whose words have wings and yet stay down to earth. The exceptions for some are those without text. Morley traces the growing bond between word and image, explaining how artists have harnessed the resulting tension to form identities, challenge authority, and make sense of a world in constant flux.

Starting with the Impressionists to the present day, Morley focuses on many works of modern art such as Dada nonsense words, Surrealist painting-poems, Constructivist typographies, oriental calligraphy, Neo-Dada words (intermedia), Pop Words, conceptual words (from Weiner to Finlay), postwar gestural painting, to hypertext and beyond. Includes bibliography and index. This is *not* a picture book, but an incisive text about the subject enhanced with illustrations. This is a stimulating book, one which crosses disciplines, crosses movements, and tells a new kind of art history.

Morley is an artist, curator and lecturer, and teaches at the Sothbey's Institute of Art in London and has exhibited internationally.

#### PHOTOGRAPHY

**Postcards Home** by Ingrid Pollard (London, Autograph, 2004, dist. by Consortium in the US and by Turnaround in London) is a new series of books from Autograph (the Association of Black Photographers in association with Chris Boot), surveying the work of major contemporary photographers. Pollard began her career in photography working in community arts. She first came to public attention in 1987 with the series "Pastoral Interlude" addressing the experience of black people in the landscape of Wordsworth's Lake District and other iconographic English sites.

Using a combination of nineteenth century and contemporary photographic techniques, her work combines a questioning of the appreciation of the beauty of England with questions into post-colonial identity. She juxtaposes images with objects she has collected which are oftentimes kitsch, souvenirs, triggers for commentary which oftentimes becomes the title of the page. Her color has a distant hand-colored feeling to the photographs as if they were old-fashioned 19<sup>th</sup> century images, but she wakes you up with commentary that is cutting, alive and

demonstrates an awareness of the problems of society. From watermelon to kinky hair, from reality to psychic fantasies, Pollard grabs the eye and shakes the mind. She uses her own experiences, but her photos are open, frank and politically aware, tough with a sense of humor. \$29.95 hardcover

**Building with Light: The International History of Architectural Photography** by Robert Elwall (London, Merrell Publishers, 2004, \$59.95) is a compelling history of architectural photography from its beginnings in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to today's digital age. Since our first and sometimes only impression of great buildings is via a photography, Eric de Maré described photography as "building with light". Among the photographers included in the more than 250 duotone and color illustrations are John Ruskin, Eugene Atget, Alfred Steiglitz, Eric de Maré, John Maltby, Thomas Ruff, Hélène Binet, Julius Schulman, Ezra Stoller, Charles Sheeler and many others.

In the discussions of the development of architectural photography and some of its key themes, we see how architectural photography initially relied on pre-photographic modes of architectural rendering; the gradual emergence of a specific aesthetic and the growth of specialist firms documenting the 19<sup>th</sup>-century building boom; the influence of photography during this period on both architectural theory and practice; the impact of the invention of half-tone reproduction; the influence of the "New Photography" during the inter-war years and the significance of this period in establishing the camera as the undisputed mediator of architecture; the role of photography in the spread of Modernism; the impact of color photography during the 1970s and 1980s; and today's digital revolution. The images are stunning, drawn from collections throughout the world, and the book's thesis will appeal to architects and photographic buffs everywhere. Notes, select bibliography, index.

**The Artist Observed: Photographs** by Sidney B. Felsen (Santa Fe, Twin Palms, 2003, \$60.00) is a remarkable album of portraits of artists at Gemini who while making prints and multiples were photographed by co-owner Sid Felsen. A master photographer who sensed the creative act in each of his subjects from Sam Francis, Claes Oldenburg, Ken Price, Ed Kienholz, Ed Ruscha, Richard Serra, David Hockney, Roy Lichtenstein, Jonathan Borofsky, Philip Guston and so many more. The creative act seemed to be completed by the photographer, Felsen. This is a large-size volume, an album of black and white portraits of the panoply of 20<sup>th</sup> century artists who have made history not only in their designated medium but

also with the multiples and prints they made at Gemini. An essay by Constance Glenn completes this sumptuous volume.

**Evidence** by Larry Sultan & Mike Mandel, with essays by Sandra Phillips and Robert Forth (New York, d.a.p., 2004, \$50.00 hardback) resurrects a nearly impossible book to find which was originally published in 1977, when the photographers Sultan and Mandel sifted through thousands of photographs in the Bechtel Corporation, the Beverly Hills Police Department, the Jet Propulsion Laboratories, the U.S. Department of the Interior, Stanford Research Institute and a hundred other corporations, American government agencies, and educational, medical and technical institutions, looking for photographs that were made and used as transparent documents and purely objective instruments—as evidence, in short.

Selecting 50 of the best, they printed these images with the care you would expect to find in a high-quality art photography book (for 1977), publishing them in a simple, limited-edition volume titled *Evidence*. The concept for the book was clear: select photographs intended to be used as objective evidence and show that it is never that simple.

Now an undisputed classic in the photo world, considered a seminal harbinger of conceptual photography, *Evidence* is being published in this new edition to recognize the project's continued relevance, and contains a facsimile copy of the original book plus a newly commissioned scholarly essay by Phillips of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. There is also a new spread of images and a group of black-and-white illustrations selected by the artists from an archive of photographs that were not included in the original book. 25 black and white and 61 duotones.

Remembering the signing part at *Artworks*, the bookstore I co-owned with partners, we all selected our "favorite" photos in the original book. Each of the artists signed the book and there was quite a line of collectors. The price was minimal compared to today's prices, and we considered it an "artist book". Today, the photo world covets this book. And with this new tribute book, the photo world in its new generation will covet this book as well. None of the photos have titles, attributions, but they are uncanny. They get under your skin, into your psyche, and you keep wondering why these photos were taken, for what reason, what are they documenting, but they are amazing photographs! You must buy this if you have the original, and if you don't, you must buy this, because the tradition continues—it is still an outstanding book.

Included is a history of the production of Mandel and of Sultan. Sandra Phillips tells us the influence of this book with Richard Prince, Sherrie Levine, Heiferman and Kismaric who all have been given permission to examine the archive in search of the aesthetic—any archive. Buy it, you'll be stunned and amazed.

## EXHIBIT CATALOGS

*Arc of an Idea: Chasing the Invisible, A 35-Year Survey of works by Eugenia Butler* traces the career of the Los Angeles-based conceptual artist known for her language-based works during the 1960s and 1970s. She now uses those earlier strategies to make more object-oriented work. Dealing with perception as a set of ideas as well as a physical attribute, her art embodies the study of this as a scientific phenomenon. As her works combine scientific as well as aesthetic concerns, it is often obtuse and not always that visually charged. Given its limitations, language art was an important component of aesthetic conceptualism a generation ago, and this exhibition clarifies Butler's contribution to that movement, while also juxtaposing it with the more visual and gestural work she is making now.

The exhibition catalog which documents her work and which was held at Otis College of Art from 6 September - 13 December 2003 is beautifully designed with both color and black-and-white images as well as a biography, selected bibliography, works in the exhibition. The design of the catalog intersperses autobiographical statements and statements by conceptual artists with the insightful essay of Anne Ayres, curator of the show and former director of the Ben Maltz Gallery at Otis. She gives context to the work of Eugenia Butler, as does Barry Sander's poetic outpouring of his understanding as a philosophy professor of Butler's work. An important catalog for contemporary art libraries, collections, and connoisseurs. \$15.00 from Ben Maltz Gallery, Otis College of Art & Design, 9045 Lincoln Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90045.

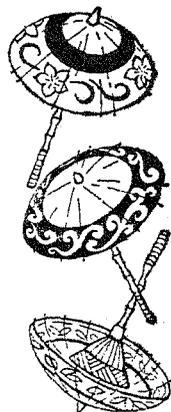
**Roth Time: A Dieter Roth Retrospective** with essays by Dirk Dobke, Theodora Vischer and Bernadette Walter (New York, Museum of Modern Art/Baden, Switzerland, Lars Muller, 2003, \$45 clothbound) documents the work of sculptor, poet, diarist, graphic designer, pioneer artist's bookmaker, performer, publisher, musician, and most of all, provocateur, Dieter Roth, who has long been beloved as an artist's artist, an artist whose work and life are one and the same. Known for his mistrust of all art institutions

and commercial galleries—he once referred to museums as funeral homes—he was also known for his generosity to friends, his collaborative spirit and for including his family in his art making. He also had a cunning sense of humor. Much to the frustration of any gallery that tries to exhibit his work (supposedly, none more than once), Roth thumbed his nose at those who valued high purpose and permanence in art.

Constantly trying to undo his art education, he would set up systems that discouraged the conventional and the consistent: he drew with both hands at once, preserved the discarded and reveled in the transitory. Grease stains, mold formations, insect borings, and rotting cheese or chocolate were just some of the materials he used, both out of a fascination with their painterly, textural aspects and for their innate ability to make time visible and play to chance. “More is better,” he once said, and more there always was. Roth never stopped working, and he believed that everything could be art, from his sketch pad to the table he sat at to the telephone he talked on to his friend’s kitchen (the kitchen was later sold to a museum).

Touted as “the first exhibition ever to offer access to the *entire* range of this prolific artist’s work,” the exhibition it represents does not include the artist books for which he was a pioneer. The books were his signature, for they traveled well into the arms of collectors, connoisseurs, friends and dilettantes. Whose choice was this? Probably those who want to drive the market up for the other works, which are now of greater worth after his death, which was on 5 June 1998. But many of the books are documented in the catalog, which has 350 color and other black and white and duotones.

With more than 700 items in the exhibition checklisted, exhibition history, bibliography, this is a reference tool for the decades, a revelation for those ignorant of this artist, and a celebration for those of us who loved this artist for all those qualities that he possessed to make him the true artist’s artist.



## Contributions to Umbrella Museum

Anna Banana, Chuck and Judy Goodstein, Marilyn Dammann, Lilian Bell, Claire Isaacs, Claire Satin, Picasso Gaglione, Sas Colby, Johan van Geluwe, Guy Bleus, Charlton Burch, Beth Bachenheimer, Lise Patt, Johan van Geluwe, Janet Nolan, Johanne Todd

## UMBRELLA NEWS

Dear Diary: (from the NY Times)

A close friend, Es, a regular commuter, related the following subway experience: On a rain-drenched morning, the crowded subway ride from Queens to Manhattan was made all the more irritating by the persistent bumping her posterior was receiving from a fellow commuter. Having endured this all-too-familiar assault, she turned around, identified the likely perpetrator and gave him a look that could kill.

On reaching her stop she proceeded toward the exit, only to be followed by the continued bumping in the rear. Swiftly turning around, she prepared to blast the offender verbally, but no one was there. Only then did she reach behind her to find a small umbrella that had become hooked to her overcoat belt during the morning crush. She continued on her way to work with her "assailant" in hand, wondering what the innocent victim of her deadly gaze must have thought. Joe Bachner

• On the front page of the 8 January issue of the *New York Times* was a photograph of umbrellas, the item most commonly lost—and the least reclaimed—at the Lost and Found Center in Tokyo. It was subtitled as “Japanese Honesty.”

• An article in the *New York Times* for 21 March featured P. Diddy’s valet and personal assistant, Farnsworth Bentley, who always carries an umbrella as a trademark. His real name is Derek Watkins.

• The Volvo Y.C.C. to be shown at the New York International Auto Show in April in Geneva is special because it is created entirely by women. Nine women designed and built this concept car, where an umbrella bin in the Y.C.C.’s door frame is complemented by storage spaces between the front seats.