

BOOK REVIEWS

GENERAL

Art of Engagement: Visual Politics in California and Beyond by Peter Selz with an essay by Susan Landauer (Berkeley, Univ. of California Press, 2005, \$60.00 cloth, \$29.95 paper) takes the first comprehensive look at the key role of California's art and artists in politics and culture since 1945. Tracing the remarkably fertile confluence of political agitation and passionately engaged art, Peter Selz leads readers on a journey that begins with the Nazi death camps and moves through the Bay Area's Free Speech Movement of 1964, the birth of Beat and hippie countercultures, the Chicano labor movement in the San Joaquin Valley, the beginning of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, and some of the most radical manifestations of the women's movement, gay liberation, Red Power, and environmental activism. Artists' responses to critical issues such as censorship and capital punishment are also highlighted. Right up to the present post-9/11 responses and the War in Iraq.

Represented are Robert Arneson, Hans Burkhardt, Caja, Enrique Chagoya, Judy Chicago, Lynn Foulkes, Rupert Garcia, Helen & Newton Harrison, Wally Hedrick, Suzanne Lacy, Hung Liu, Peter Saul, Miriam Schairo, Allan Sekula, Mark di Suvero, Masami Teraoka, and Carrie Mae Weems. With 120 color illustrations, 80 black and white photographs, *Art of Engagement* showcases many types of media, including photographs, found objects, drawings and prints, murals, painting, sculpture, ceramics, installations, performance art, and collage. Readers will come away from the book with a new perspective on the significant role California has played in generating political art and also how the state has stimulated politically engaged art throughout the world.

Selz is an indomitable force who has steadfastly maintained that California is a dynamic that must be considered in the light of the politics of art and far beyond. Selected bibliography, index

Drawing from Life: The Journal as Art, edited by Jennifer New (New York, Princeton Architectural Press, 2005, \$25.00 paper) features the journals of Lynda Barry, Carol Beckwith, David Byrne, John Clapp, Mike Figgis, Steven Holl, Maira Kalman, Christopher Leitch, Robert ParkeHarrison, Denyse Schmidt and dozens more. As a curator of diary shows, especially those of men, I recommend this book highly.

In this age of confession and making public that which usually was considered private, the fiber optics of visual artists who keep journals as the fodder from which they glean their creative life. They keep their journals close, because one never knows when a striking image or a quick thought may invade those pages.

In Joan Didion's "On Keeping a Notebook," she says a journal has no use for anyone except its keeper; who else would care about an overheard conversation or an epiphany of a sunset? I think journals like drawings are the closest you can get to an artist's intentions besides a conversation or interview.

In Jennifer New's preface and her lengthy introduction she is concerned with a historical context to these intimate, unpolished works which tell us who we really are. These books of obsessive wonder filled to their borders with drawings, sketches, watercolors, graphs, charts, lists, collages, portraits and photographs are the foundation of biography, of personality dissection, and of just plain great compulsive creativity.

Printed on gridded graph paper, the beauty of the "messes" make for a wonderful collection of journal pages. Jennifer See was the author of **Dan Eldon: The Art of Life** which also influenced me about men's diaries and the counterpoint to diaries and journals being the purview of only girls and women. But the best predecessor to these journal pages is **Roland Penrose's Scrapbook**, which is the most beautiful artist book I know.

Seeing the Unspeakable: The Art of Kara Walker by Gwendolyn Dubois Shaw (Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2005, \$21.95 paperback) documents one of the youngest recipients of a MacArthur "Genius" grant. Kara Walker, an African American Art, is best known for her iconic, often life-size, black and white silhouetted figures, arranged in unsettling scenes on gallery walls. These visually arresting narratives draw viewers into a dialogue about the dynamics of race, slavery, and violence in both antebellum South and contemporary culture.

Walker's work has been featured in exhibits around the world, as well as at the Museum of Modern Art, the Guggenheim and the Whitney. At the same time, her ideologically provocative images have drawn vociferous criticism from several senior African American artists, and a number of her pieces have been pulled from exhibits amid protests against their representations.

Shaw examines Walker striking silhouettes, evocative gouache drawings, and dynamic prints, analyzing four of Walker's pieces: *The End of Uncle Tom and the Grand Allegorical Tableau of Eva in Heaven*, *John Brown, A Means to an End*, and *Cut*. She reviews Walker's life and career, and contextualizes her art within the history of African American visual culture and in relation to the work of contemporary artists including Faith Ringgold, Carrie Mae Weems, and Michael Ray Charles.

By de-sentimentalizing images of slavery and racial stereotypes, Walker deliberately challenges viewers' sensibilities, which Shaw explains. What Shaw portrays is a contemporary artist who questions, not just accepts, the ideas and strategies of social responsibility that her parents' generation fought to establish during the civil rights era. Racism rears its ugly head, and Walker forces us to see that. Includes 44 illustrations (10 in color)

MONOGRAPHS

Arturo Herrera: You Go First (New York, DAP, 2005, \$40.00 hardback) shows a masterful and whimsical presentation of contemporary collage with nearly 100 works incorporating found and commissioned images from animated films, Audubon bird drawings and illustrated fairy tales.

Cartoons meet Surrealism by way of Abstract Expressions in Herrera's multi-layered body of work, which winds its way through specific stages of abstraction. Herrera is a subversive collagist, combining paper and gouache to found materials. He can go directly from an image from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, creating an abstract wall work. Includes an essay by Friedrich Meschede. Biography, selected bibliography.

REPRINTS

Full Bloom: The Art & Life of Georgia O'Keeffe by Hunter Drohojowska-Philp (New York, W.W. Norton, 2005, paper) is the paperback edition of a new study of the artist, revealed by new material, new interviews, and allows the writer to contextualize O'Keeffe's paintings, so that the artist's triumphs and losses, her need to explore and define her surroundings, and her emblematic themes are clearly and carefully delineated in a new way. \$19.95

PHOTOGRAPHY

Scenes from Alfred Stieglitz's New York Succession by Jay Bochner (Cambridge, MIT Press, 2005, \$39.95 cloth) studies the importance of Stieglitz in the avant-

garde in America; through his gallery, his magazine, and his mentoring, he was the first promoter of modern art in the United States. He persuaded museums and critics to accept photography as fine art.

Jay Bochner gives context to Stieglitz's role by choosing particular moments in times and looking at the deep cultural and historical context of these moments. Some chapters revolve about a single photograph, almost like an archaeological dig to construct the anatomy, namely the circle of writers and artists around Stieglitz. Organized around key cultural moments, comparisons, and collisions, each chapter works like a camera—zooming in on a few scenes or photographs and unlocking them to open up the world behind the picture.

Bochner gives us a detailed look at why Stieglitz liked to photograph New York City in snowstorms, and how the writer Steven Crane came to write a prose sketch of the same figures in the same storms that Stieglitz photographed. To look at the photo and read the text at the same time is illuminating—as if to read the essence of an age. In addition, in later chapters, Bochner reconstructs modern exhibitions organized by Stieglitz and his contemporaries. Using installation shots, Bochner uncovers their logic. By reporting on the poetry, music, dance and theater events taking place at the same time, he gives a close reading of Greenwich Village. This is a refreshing and convincing new chapter in the history of Stieglitz and thus, the history of modern photography in the United States. It's a great read.

Antiquity & Photography: Early Views of Ancient Mediterranean Sites by Claire L. Lyons, John K. Papadopoulos, Lindsey S. Stewart, and Andrew Szegedy-Maszak (Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum, 2005, \$65.00 hardback) lavishly reproduces some of the earliest photography of ancient sites in the Mediterranean region taken in the period 1840-1880. Largely because of the invention of daguerreotype and calotype processes, scholarly and aesthetic approaches to the past fundamentally changed. In such a way, scientists could document and study ancient architecture, artifacts, and language. In addition, photographers who came to the region saw themselves as artists using the new medium to capture what had only been left to draughtsmen or painters. The early photographs of the Roman Forum, Acropolis in Athens, and the pyramids of Giza have made these sites a part of our shared cultural experience, fixing them in our minds as places of historic and mythic significance.

The illustrations are gathered from the Getty Museum and the Getty Research Institute (there are 124 color

and 6 black-and-white illustrations) as well as essays on the growth of archaeology as a scientific discipline and its increasing reliance on photographic documentation. Biographical essays explore the careers of William H James Stillman and Joseph-Philibert Girault de Prangey.

EXHIBITION CATALOGS

Ecstasy: In and About Altered States, ed. by Paul Schimmel and Lisa Mark (Cambridge, MIT Press, 2005, \$39.95 cloth) acts as an intersection in which structures of human consciousness meet a range of contemporary art practices. To see this exhibition is more important than reading about it, since it involves surprises, questions, suggestions of alternative ways of ordering experience, through installation, painting, sculpture and new media. The exhibition closes on 20 February at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles and will not travel.

Two trajectories of contemporary inquiry into surrealism's fixation with altered states of consciousness involve the tradition of artists attempting to capture metaphysical conditions in representational form, i.e. pill paintings of Fred Tomaselli, Charles Ray's photographic self portrait, and Franz Ackermann's recent *Mental Maps*; the other trajectory explores the notion of phenomenological experience through works that play on disjunctions in scale, or disrupt our means for spatial orientation, i.e. Carsten Holler's *Upside Down Mushroom Room*, or Roxy Paine's *Psilocybe Cubensis Field*. The artists come from all over the world and create an exciting exhibition. The catalog is the documentation, beautifully designed by Michael Worthington and contains 150 color and 10 black and white illustrations. Includes selected exhibition histories of all the artists and bibliographies, as well as a Literary Supplement with contributions by Ernst Junger, Gottfried Benn, Walter Benjamin, Henri Michaux and Anonymous.

Betye Saar: Extending the Frozen Moment by James Christen Steward, Sean Ulmer, Lowery Stokes Sims, Richard Candida Smith, Deborah Willis and Kellie Jones (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2005, \$39.95 cloth) documents the exhibition of forty years of work of this renowned powerful figure in the redefinition of African American art. Over these forty years, she has injected African American visual histories into mainstream visual culture by blending spiritual, political, and cultural iconography to create complex works with university impact.

Saar is a storyteller, one of the best, with an appreciation of materials which bear with them

memories, history, myth and imagination. She has made the viewer confront the issue of race and the history of race in the United States, well before most artists of her generation. But even though the work is political, she has invested the work with a spiritual and cross-cultural awareness, showing how complex humanity is, although always hidden by stereotypes which conceal this act.

Dealing with nostalgia, memory and history, Saar invests found photographs and objects in her assemblages with profound meaning, that "frozen moment" that serves as a medium to invest her work with political, social and cultural messages. Thus, to use the photograph as a lens to survey the career of this remarkable artist offers fresh perspectives on contemporary art, feminism, and American culture and politics from the 1960s and 1970s to our present time.

Includes artist's chronology, selected bibliography, index as well as notes. The show travels from University of Michigan Museum of Art to Norton Museum, West Palm Beach, FL, and then to the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia. The book is exquisitely designed by Jeff Wincapaw.



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