

## Books for Christmas Giving

by Anne Hollander

In the face of crippling high paper costs and the threat of general depression, publishers continue to offer elaborate and expensive picture books to the public, who must now pay more than ever for these undeniably beautiful possessions. Some publishers have rather honorably seen to it that the subject matter and its treatment reach a commensurately higher standard of excellence, to match the beauty of the bookmaking and its elevated cost; others have not, and the public must consequently often suffer from not getting its money's worth.

One rather good new effort in the Harry N. Abrams series on world architecture is *Ancient Architecture: Mesopotamia, Egypt, Crete, Greece*, by Seton Lloyd, Hans Wolfgang Müller, and Roland Martin (Abrams, \$35.00). The three learned authors of the three separate sections are British, German, and French, and the general editor, who wrote the introduction, is Italian; one must assume that they all wrote in English because no translator is identified. The first section deals with the ancient Near East, the second with Egypt, and the third with the whole scope of ancient Greek architecture, be-

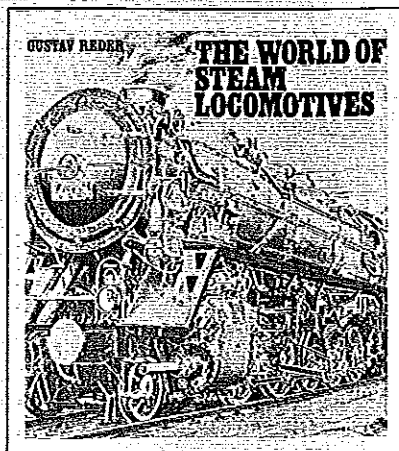
ginning with the Minoan and Mycenaean civilizations and ending with Hellenistic Greece. Almost every monument in this book is shown photographed from many angles and distances, and there are delicate linecuts of admirable clarity, giving elevations, plans, and views of reconstructions. No ravishing color plates interrupt the flow of instructive demonstration. Most of the pictures were taken by Pepi Merisio and Bruno Balestrini, who are to be highly praised for combining such profusion with such elegance and clarity. The texts are similarly clear, sober, and factual. Since a huge span of time and space is under discussion, to say nothing of an enormous wealth of material, a high density of responsible information is properly called for and, indeed, amply provided by this book, including a very useful synoptic table showing how all these civilizations overlapped in time.

After a look at some of the most ancient monuments of Western civilization, it is difficult to superimpose the scope and beauty of Chinese art on one's awareness of history. *China Today and Her Ancient Treasures*, by Joan Lebold Cohen and Jerome Alan Cohen (Abrams, \$22.50 until December 31, \$25.00 thereafter), is another excellent offering at a reasonable price. Both authors are scholars, one of Oriental art history and one of law (he is director of East Asian Legal Studies at Harvard), and this learned and energetic collaboration shows how much an enlightened spirit can really do for the advancement of understanding. The text is essentially a

history of China, told from the complex point of view necessary for the modern student. Because China's official history is now being revised as it is being lived, the account of it must tactfully allow both for the facts and for all contemporary and subsequent versions of them. The present and past must somehow be viewed simultaneously for a proper idea of the truth about China. The Cohens have given a comprehensively accurate, illustrated description, with the additional valuable force of strong personal commitment behind it. The color photographs, all taken by Joan Lebold Cohen, show the interrelationship of the landscape and people of modern China and the extraordinary monuments of her ancient heritage. The illustrations illuminate the text, partly because they have been placed in correct conjunction with what is being said, and partly because an informative caption accompanies each one. The intelligent, informed zeal of this couple makes this a valuable book: They love knowing about China, and they want others to have that profitable pleasure.

A very different but equally encompassing view of a cultural heritage is offered in *Art Treasures of Yugoslavia*, edited and with an introduction by Oto Bihalji-Merin (Abrams, \$45.00). The publishers are still keeping quality in line with price in this huge book, which includes 19 essays, addresses, and lectures, each by a different art historian, on every aspect of art in Yugoslavia from pre-historic to modern times. The museums of Yugoslavia contain treasures of Greek and Roman antiquity, and Byzantine

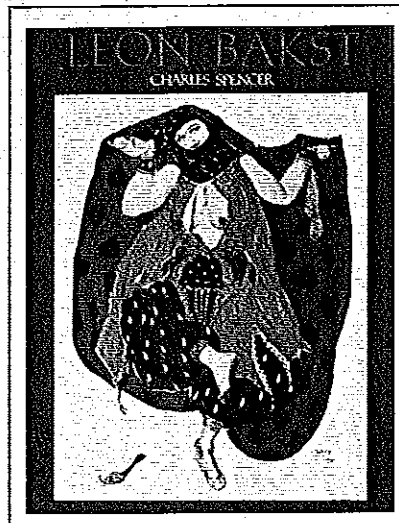
Anne Hollander is at work on a book about the clothed form in art.



and Romanesque painting and mosaic, equal to any of the more famous collections in Greek and Italian museums. This book is a revelation of beauties hitherto neglected except for style and genre. Each section dealing with a different art-historical subject has its own bibliography and a map showing the particular area of Yugoslavia in which its principal monuments are to be found.

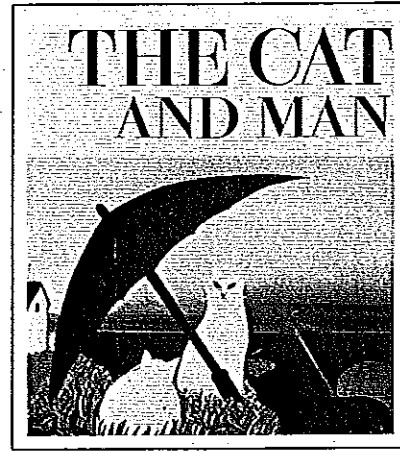
*In Italy*, by Roloff Beny, text and anthology by Anthony Thwaite and Peter Porter (Harper & Row, \$40.00), is a very different kind of celebration of a country's beauties. This book offers instant experience—travel, education, and reading, and the responses to a combination of them, most properly meditated upon and absorbed for a lifetime, are here condensed and offered like a capsule with water, all for \$40 and an hour or so of time. The gentlemen who have compiled this volume are undoubtedly of considerable cultivation themselves, out of which come bits of literature, consisting of quotations from great authors on the various parts of Italy that Mr. Beny has photographed. The photographs are, in fact, far too baroque and extraordinary to give any idea of how Italy really looks, but they are each worthy of gasps, some unbelieving. Gore Vidal has written a refined little essay at the end, wittily invoking what the pictures show nothing of—the gradual destruction of Italy's treasures through her neglect and abuse of them—so that after gazing in wonder (with appropriate exclamations and meditations provided by the likes of Goethe and Walter Pater), we are left with the appropriately ironical attitude.

Perhaps the most famous "treasure"



of Italy is further revealed in *The Unknown Leonardo*, edited by Ladislao Reti (McGraw-Hill, \$34.95 until December 31, \$39.95 thereafter). This large but compact and absorbing book was compiled to explain the importance of the recently rediscovered *Madrid Codices*, two of Leonardo's notebooks that had lain buried in the Madrid Library for centuries. Ten essays by Leonardo scholars of various nationalities attempt to place the contents of these two notebooks in the context of the artist's other works and writings, so that the reader may have an extremely dense and intense view of Leonardo's mind at work. Thousands of his sketches, plans, and diagrams, from both the famous and the "new" notebooks, are reproduced together with explanatory captions; interspersed with these are pictures of relevant historical figures, buildings, other people's works both scientific and artistic, and models of Leonardo's inventions. The book looks as if it is presenting the works of a whole culture, not of one man. The essays deal with all of Leonardo's different but clearly related absorptions, such as military architecture, hydraulics, machinery, weapons, and painting. Excerpts from his own writings on all these matters are reproduced and translated, and there is a time-line showing how he fits into his epoch, as well as the accomplishments of its other men of genius. To become fully aware of Leonardo da Vinci is still an overwhelming discovery; this book is a very thorough introduction.

A very dignified display case for the work of a great artist is *Albrecht Dürer: The Landscape Watercolours*, by Walter



Koschatzky (St. Martin's Press, \$45.00). The author is the director of prints and drawings at the Albertina in Vienna, where a number of Dürer's most famous drawings are hung. These paintings, however, of which about 30 exist, are far less well known and far more amazing than the justly beloved bunny rabbit and praying hands. They are all landscapes done only with brush and watercolors, painted directly from nature; they were all painted between 1494 and 1500, a time when no other artist in Western history had ever thought of doing such a thing. They are not even typical of Dürer himself, who seems to have used them as an experimental kind of note-taking, not considering them finished works suitable for the public. Landscape in Dürer's time was not considered a separate subject for artists, who were expected to use it only in connection with figures for narrative or allegorical purposes. These fresh and immediate impressions of sheds, barns, cliffs, and rivers are miracles, not only of art but also of the history of art. The book reproduces every one still in existence with a rather solemn essay on the facing page. One or two plates seem blurry, but most are exquisite, and there is an excellent scholarly apparatus at the back.

Almost a century earlier, between about 1404 and 1409 in south-central France, the three Limbourg brothers were showing how they, too, were innovators, even in the conventional task of illuminating a Book of Hours. *The Belles Heures of Jean, Duke of Berry*, by Milard Meiss and Elizabeth H. Beatson (Braziller, \$45.00 until December 31, \$50.00 thereafter), reproduces in actual size the complete book, which was a much-expanded and elaborate version of

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the customary sort of book for private devotions. The authors have provided learned commentary on each illumination and on the sophisticated contribution these particular artists made to the history of painting. There is also a small essay at the back, written by John Plummer, about the physical makeup of the original manuscript, which is in the Cloisters in New York City. This is a beautiful picture book of modest size and very delicate subject matter; the miniatures must be studied slowly, since they invite and hold the eye with an extreme refinement of appeal, despite the violent and bloody martyrdoms depicted in some of them.

Another medieval manuscript, perhaps the most famous of its time, is *The Book of Kells* (Knopf, \$55.00 until December 31, \$65.00 thereafter). This is another complete reproduction in correct size and full color of a great work of manuscript illumination, with a study of the manuscript by Françoise Henry. The original, dating from the late eighth century and now in Trinity College, Dublin, consists essentially of the four Gospels in Latin and some preliminary pages containing canon-tables, lists of names, summaries, and prefaces; the illumination consists not only of illustrative pictures but also of a series of vivid lacertine decorations interwoven with and forming part of the beautiful calligraphy. The style of this art is entirely different from the early-fifteenth-century delicacy of the *Belles Heures*. It is linear and sinewy, related to Middle Eastern and Asian decorative art, using leaf patterns, fish and animal forms, and interlaced spiralling bands in a style characteristic of early Celtic and Saxon art as well. Each page of this book is packed with details, some of which are enlarged separately for closer study, and there is a thorough historical essay with black-and-white illustrations of related material. The bookmaking in these two medieval reproductions is irreproachably austere but nevertheless elegant.

In *The Graphic Work of Alphonse Mucha*, edited by Jiri Mucha, Marina Henderson, and Aaron Scharf (St. Martin's Press, \$40.00), we encounter an artist whose work indeed seems to owe much to *The Book of Kells*. A similar interlace of plant and animal forms in pale, multicolored density adorns these otherwise essentially frivolous images. Born in 1860, Mucha was a Czech illus-

trator who worked first in Munich and then in Paris at the end of the nineteenth century, creating posters in a style that crystallized what is meant by the term Art Nouveau. While the posters of Steinlen and Toulouse-Lautrec were taken seriously as art, Mucha's were more fashionably appealing. His characteristically languid females in exotic dress eventually also graced menus, programs, and calendars as well as soap, cigarette, and biscuit wrappings. They remain fascinating, their easy charm sometimes secretly preferable to the lofty challenge of serious art. The book is simple and straightforward, with an introductory essay and plates, some in color.

Mucha's contemporary and an artist of more profound influence despite the official frivolity of his concern is introduced in *Leon Bakst*, by Charles Spencer (St. Martin's Press, \$40.00). Bakst became famous as the set and costume designer for the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, which electrified the cultivated Parisian world of 1909, not only with the artistry of Nijinsky and Karsavina but also with Bakst's vivid and exotic décors and costumes. The impact of this cultural event cannot now be calculated except in a ghostly way, as one can still see the theatrical results of that moment working their way through the modern dance, musical comedy, and the movies. Bakst invented a look of gaudy theatrical display, energized by a combination of French sexual verve and a refined Slavic barbarism, which was at the time also being expressed in music by Stravinsky and in movement by Fokine under the guiding genius of Diaghilev. The text and pictures are interwoven in this artistic biography; the magnificent costume designs are well worth the price themselves, but there are also many photographs, early works, cartoons, and portraits.

Picasso was also associated with the Ballet Russe after its establishment as a Parisian institution, but his gifts and energies soon removed him from the theater to the largest possible stage of artistic life. His personality over the great length of his life became perhaps even more legendary than his art, at least for a great many who cared more about the texture of any life than about the works of any genius. A recent steady flow of books about the marvel of Picasso the man has sprung into existence, of which a new example is *Forever*

## Books

*Picasso, An Intimate Look at His Last Years*, by Roberto Otero (Abrams, \$20.00). The author of this memoir is a late-in-life friend of the artist and a filmmaker, as the flow of the book strongly suggests. The book was conceived as a documentary film and, indeed, reads like one; it is full of conversations and encounters with friends, packing arrangements for an exhibit, attendance at a bullfight, and domestic scenes. Hundreds of candid photographs accompany these descriptions, and the elderly Picasso's personal manner is certainly strongly evoked. But after all, we are not his friends, and we should not intrude. His pictures are really our business, but all this is not.

A real picture-book bargain this year is *A Doré Gallery* (Arco, \$15.00). This book reproduces, at least in part, a large two-volume edition of Doré's illustrations published in 1870, when his fame and influence were at their height. Also reproduced is that edition's introduction, in which he is described as "the representative artist of France"—an interesting thought at a time when Manet,

Degas, and Renoir were already hard at work. The book gives a representative group, with no modern commentary or historical evaluation, of selected illustrations from (among others) Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the Bible, Dante, *Don Quixote*, and La Fontaine's *Fables*. A brief description of what is happening is given at the bottom of each plate, and the real value of the book is in the dose it offers of Doré's graphic vision—mysterious and gloomy, but academic and literal, sentimental and somehow satisfying in the manner of an old silent movie.

A graphic artist as characteristic of his own time as Doré was of his is the subject and author of *Storyteller Without Words: The Wood Engravings of Lynd Ward*, with text by the artist (Abrams, \$25.00). This book is essentially an explanation and a demonstration of the power and importance of woodcut and wood engravings—as adapted to the techniques of a rather slick modernism—the nineteenth-century medium of Doré and Tenniel in which this artist-author still flourishes. Ward's most famous works were created in the Thirties in the form of novels in pictures: *God's Man*, *Mad Man's Drum*, *Vertigo*, and others. Most of these dramatically reflect contemporary social problems in terms of the spiritual torments of a particular protagonist. The style is characteristic of the decade, using smooth, long-limbed bodies, divided into muscular sections, expressing strong feeling in a series of dramatic poses that very much resemble those simultaneously being conceived by the practitioners of the early modern dance. The figures even wear the same neutral-looking, clinging garments. Lynd Ward describes the genesis of these works in the slightly pompous text, and besides various greeting cards and bookplates, he includes some lovely individual prints done in the recent past.

Poster art has a separate history, although, as we have seen, serious artists have lent their talents to the genre. *The Poster in History*, by Max Gallo (American Heritage, \$17.95 until December 31, \$22.50 thereafter), is authored by a French historian of journalistic, rather than scholarly, accomplishments who has no art-historical background to speak of. The posters illustrating the book date from 1789 to 1970; they are divided into sections corresponding to historical periods that represent successive eras of

social change in which poster art reflected prevailing attitudes. The text, translated from the French, describes this process but omits any stylistic commentary on the posters, which is a pity, since the style is an integral part of the poster's message. Some early ones are even obviously incorrectly dated, in view of the evidence of dress and other details in them. These errors are perhaps supposed to be redressed by the inclusion of a diffuse essay by Carlo Arturo Quintavalle on the development of poster art, illustrated mainly by small black-and-white examples of still other posters. This book is a somewhat sloppy treatment of a subject that is much in need of study. One would have liked to have seen it responsibly done.

Another slightly off-putting book is *The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden* (Abrams, \$40.00). Among the thousand illustrations in this huge volume are six essays, some better than others, by different art critics who survey the successive 15-year periods, from around 1850 to the present, represented in Mr. Hirshhorn's collection of art. A collection of this size (of which this book, crammed full as it is, only gives a portion) seems rather like an accumulation that represents a variety of tastes, such as one finds, for instance, in the Vatican. Considered as the acquisitions of one man, it looks somewhat hysterically formed, particularly since the works span only about 100 years in time. The collection, now peculiarly housed on the Mall in Washington, is indeed dazzling, especially the immense amount of excellent European sculpture. The paintings are mostly American, beginning with a beautiful Bierstadt and ending with the likes of Lichtenstein. In between lies an extraordinary range of pictures, including both unfamiliar but obvious masterpieces and works of distressing banality. There is a catalog, but only of the works reproduced (not the entire museum), which seems a bit less than useful.

For those whose interest in the modern world is not confined to art, there is *The World of Steam Locomotives*, by Gustav Rieder (Putnam, \$40.00). This wonderful book has been translated from the German, and it has the intelligent thoroughness we associate with all kinds of German learning. The author was a railroad engineer but is now devoting himself to expertise in this complex



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realm. This is not a superficial, journalistic treatment of an attractive subject but a very serious history, and it is written in a lively manner. Mr. Reder begins in 1804, with the necessity for inventing some kind of efficient engine for hauling coal carts out of mines, and ends in about 1960, with the demise of the whole era of the steam locomotive. The locomotive is, the author concludes, already part of the romantic past, with a history in which our whole civilization was for a time involved. This book seems trustworthy as a reliable text for the general reader to consult on the subject, and for the confirmed enthusiast, there are tables of technical data about all the illustrations, as well as a lengthy bibliography.

A more difficult and elusive subject must be treated in a more gingerly fashion, as we see from *The Cat and Man*, by Gillette Grilhe (Putnam, \$27.50). This is another book of cat lore rather than strictly a history, a picture book, or a guide for owners. There is a little of all three, as well as a selection of famous literary bits about cats sandwiched between the artistic and cultural survey and the list of standard breeds. It is annoying that some pictures are dated and some not, particularly when a remark about the fifteenth century occurs in the caption for a Goya print, and it is unfortunate to find John de Critz's portrait of Henry Wriothesley entitled the "Count of Southampton." Nevertheless, the ravishing photographs of cats in the last section alone are worth the price. There is, unfortunately, no list of illustrations.

THE COMING BICENTENNIAL has already inspired a good deal of early Americana. One useful example is the new *Atlas of the American Revolution*, edited by Kenneth Nebenzahl, text by Don Higginbotham (Rand McNally, \$35.00). Most of these 54 maps were drawn by eyewitnesses to the occurrences they record, usually as the means of explaining the events of the war to those at a distance. Most of them were engraved and published in London during that period, having originally been made in America by British military engineers, and they were evidently much sought after by the British government, military, and public alike. Large maps of the theater of war, small diagrams of battles, street maps of towns, and plans of naval engagements are all beautifully repro-

duced in this volume; but the historical text has been illustrated with insufficiently identified prints and engravings, many of them idiotically printed in mauve or blue or pink instead of black-and-white, presumably to give some unnecessary sprightliness to the page. The essay is excellent, however, as are all the explanations of the remarkable maps.

Another Bicentennial-oriented volume is *The Exploration of North America 1630-1776*, by W. P. Cummings, S. E. Hillier, D. B. Quinn, and G. Williams (Putnam, \$30.00). The maps in this dense book are mostly unreadably small and dim, but other illustrations are clear and wonderfully numerous, and every one is fully identified. This section of our early history follows a previous treatment of the explorations up to 1630, but an introductory essay provides sufficient background for a reader beginning with this volume. The historical text is divided into chapters dealing with separate geographical areas, and each of these is followed by selections from contemporary writers about the same material—again, each selection scrupulously identified. The maps and pictures of people and places are interspersed with contemporary drawings of animals, botanical specimens, and artifacts, some in color. The real value of this book is not its beauty, however, but its beautifully organized (by British historians), responsibly presented information.

As a grand culmination of the current celebrations of the American past comes *The World of George Washington*, by Richard M. Ketchum (American Heritage, \$25.00 until December 31, \$35.00 thereafter). This is a biography, illustrated entirely by paintings, maps, prints, and facsimile documents in existence during Washington's lifetime. The idea behind this volume was to demythologize Washington and show him as a believable man rising to the greatness thrust upon him by circumstances. The book is dignified, large-size, and very chastely printed with wide margins and decorously arranged illustrations, which are grouped together in between chapters of the text. They are given lengthy explanatory captions. Best are the documents in Washington's own hand, which are movingly clear to read and simply expressed. The flavor of the whole enterprise is enthusiastic but restrained, as befits the story of a very real but quite unromantic hero. □

## MALCOLM S. FORBES


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