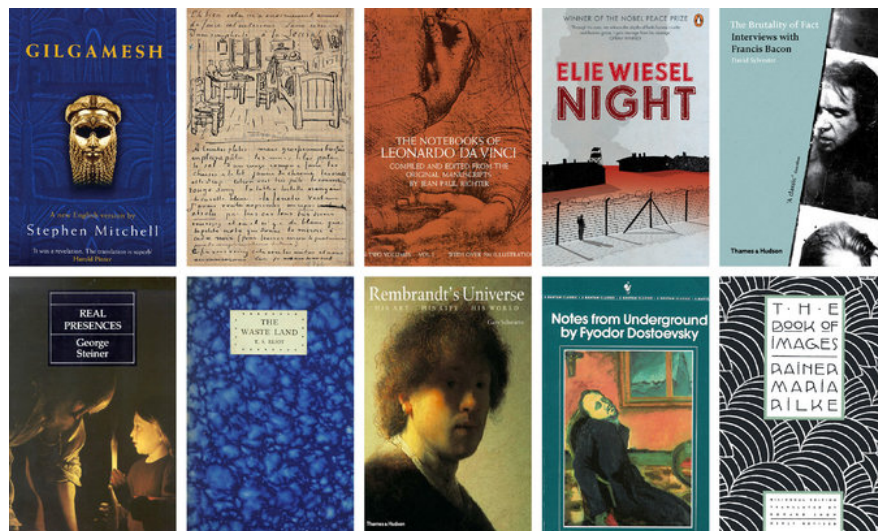


## GAGOSIAN GALLERY



### My 10 Favorite Books: Jenny Saville

Jenny Saville



*For his bookshop and website One Grand Books, the editor Aaron Hicklin asked people to name the 10 books they'd take with them if they were marooned on a desert island. The next in the series is the artist Jenny Saville, who shares her list exclusively with T.*

#### **“Notes From Underground,” Fyodor Dostoevsky**

This book is brilliant. It's an unflinching unveiling of the truths of our human nature. Like Beckett, this is a series of rants and musings of a self-destructive, neurotic, irritable and very amusing city dweller. He's trapped in his own toothache, liver troubles and his procrastinations over authority with his servant. His contradictions deal with fundamental questions that great art offers.

#### **“The Notebooks of Leonardo Da Vinci: Complete and Illustrated,” Leonardo Da Vinci**

You think that you work hard at being a rigorous and curious artist? Look at these collected notes and papers and here is measure for your purpose. The depth of his investigative eye and ambition is astonishing. You've got to look, to record, to examine the world through direct

experience, to imagine a future. I also love that he struggled to finish anything, which at least gives me some comfort as I suffer from the same malaise.

### **“The Waste Land,” T. S. Eliot**

“A heap of broken images.” “The Waste Land” was one of the first poems I read that gave me the shock of recognition that great poets offer. “Withered stumps of time,” “I will show you fear in a handful of dust,” “these fragments I have shored against my ruins.” I even like the obscurity of parts of the poem that have unraveled throughout my life when reading other books and ancient myths. It’s a modern epic from ancient history.

### **“The Book of Images,” Rainer Maria Rilke**

I’ve mixed colors, painted and drawn with many lines of Rilke’s poetry circulating in my head — lines like, “and there were even bits of eternity in my intestines,” from “The Song of the Suicide.” I’ve made several bodies of work in recent years thinking about visualizing the line, “And one sees to the bottom of time.” Rilke’s “The Book of Images” and “Duino Elegies” are great companions. It’s the visceral, intense and mysterious quality to his words that hang in the air around my studio. “To work is to live without dying” was Rilke’s motto.

### **“The Brutality of Fact: Interviews With Francis Bacon,” David Sylvester**

This series of conversations between the painter Francis Bacon and the writer David Sylvester shaped my thinking about art and creativity, and I’ve read it over and over. The words are precise, profound and relevant. Reading what Bacon says about the game of painting in the face of film and photography helped me navigate a way to make figurative painting today. Every time I read them I feel energized and compelled to paint.

### **“Rembrandt’s Universe: His Art, His Life, His World,” Gary Schwartz**

My whole list would probably be full of painting books if I were to be marooned on an island for real. Actually, because of the weight of art books, I’d probably go through my studio and collect together all the images I’ve ripped out of painting books over the years and take them in a folder. But if I had to take one artist, it would be Rembrandt, and this book, “Rembrandt’s Universe,” has the largest collection of his works included, and I’ve ripped out multiple pages from it.

### **“Vincent Van Gogh: The Letters,” edited by Nienke Bakker, Leo Jansen and Hans Luijten**

This is a set of six volumes and it’s expensive — but worth it for life. Van Gogh’s letters, along with the letters of Cezanne, are always inspirational to read. His pursuit of reality is thrilling, his lack of confidence, fears, doubts, excitement, his passion for nature and intensity when he talks about color, and the future of art drive you and help you accept your follies as an artist. And he did it all in such a short period of time.

### **“The Epic of Gilgamesh”**

I enjoy reading epic stories from ancient history and in recent years have been reading abridged versions aloud to my kids. This epic poem was found on a series of ancient tablets from Mesopotamia written down over 4,000 years ago, and involves the central character Gilgamesh,

an excessive and oppressive leader, and his arduous journey in pursuit of the secrets of immortality. His character evolves through his personal voyage towards accepting death, and you encounter so many tales that you recognize from history.

### **“Real Presences,” George Steiner**

If I were to choose a teacher, it would be George Steiner. As well as reading his books, I watch his interviews on YouTube and his references always lead you somewhere interesting — whether it’s a piece of music, a debate about the human need for tragedy, a passage from Shakespeare or Montaigne. He’s into High Art and couldn’t be described as a trendy theorist. But in this book he pushes you to think about what gives art its fundamental qualities. “Real Presences” is an expanded essay that asks the question: *Is making art a wager on the existence of God?*

### **“Night,” Elie Wiesel**

I read this recently — it’s a small and significant book. It’s the autobiographical account of a teenage boy who journeys through the Nazi death camps with his father, desperately clinging to life and each other when humanity has become perversely distorted. It’s almost beyond human and beyond language. When I read it, I wondered how someone would interpret this story if they dug it up in ancient ruins centuries from now. Could it be true? What are we capable of in terms of cruelty and survival?