

## GAGOSIAN

The New York Times

### The Best Art Books of 2018

*The Times's art critics select some of their favorite art books and books related to art of the year.*

Roberta Smith, Holland Cotter and Jason Farago



*Eric Helgas for The New York Times*

From a catalog that sheds new light on black models of mid-19th-century French painting to a collection of mid-1980s art criticism by the novelist and playwright Gary Indiana, the best art books of the past year provided a balm for turbulent times. Below, the New York Times's art critics choose some of their favorites. — Nicole Herrington, Weekend Arts editor

#### **Roberta Smith**

The histories of art are always in motion if you look hard enough. This year it didn't take much looking to see waves being made by several books and catalogs that delved deeper into familiar areas or pioneered new ones, adding some euphoria to our blighted moment.



Among Roberta Smith's picks are, from left: "Posing Modernity: The Black Model From Manet to Matisse to Today"; "Between Worlds: The Art of Bill Traylor"; and "Hairy Who? 1966-1969," open to three works by Karl Wirsum. © Eric Helgas for The New York Times

**‘BETWEEN WORLDS: THE ART OF BILL TRAYLOR’** By Leslie Umberger (*Smithsonian American Art Museum in association with Princeton University Press*). The most thrilling book of the year is the catalog to the Smithsonian American Art Museum’s great Traylor exhibition. (On view in Washington, D.C., through March 17.) Starting with a rigorous introduction by the artist Kerry James Marshall, the book combines the formidable research and lively writing of the show’s curator, Ms. Umberger, and it does more than detail as never before the achievement of this singular artist, who was born a slave. She also sets a new art-historical standard, undermining the romantic myth of the outsider as unknowable miracle worker by examining Traylor’s achievement in stunning detail. Moving from the lives of his enslaved parents to the posthumous success of his art, she demonstrates how Traylor’s elegant images distill not only form but also the realities of black life in the South.

**‘HILMA AF KLINT: PAINTINGS FOR THE FUTURE’** Edited by Tracey Bashkoff (*Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum*). The catalog to this extraordinary exhibition at the Guggenheim (running through April 23) similarly fleshes out the Swedish artist Hilma af Klint (1862-1944). Academically-trained but also mystically-inclined, af Klint is now considered as the first European to make the abstract paintings of early Modernism. She did so several years before the male artists usually credited for its invention, with a boldness of scale and color that would be matched only by the Abstract Expressionists several decades later. In words and pictures this volume follows her closely as she considers abstraction’s many possibilities.

**‘POSING MODERNITY: THE BLACK MODEL FROM MANET AND MATISSE TO TODAY’** By Denise Murrell (*Yale University Press in association with the Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University*). Two decades ago, few areas of art history seemed as exhausted, if not overstudied as late-19th-century French painting. But new ideas and approaches change everything. Thus we have “Posing Modernity” — the catalog to the exhibition (through Feb. 10) at the Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery — both by Ms. Murrell. She delves into the black models who posed for Parisian painters; the black women depicted by the artists of the Harlem Renaissance; and the black body as a subject for contemporary artists, some of them black women themselves. The dots are connected in a new way.

**‘HAIRY WHO? 1966-1969’** Edited by *Thea Liberty Nichols, Mark Pascale and Ann Goldstein* (Yale University Press). With its quizzical title, this substantial catalog, like its exhibition (through Jan. 6) at the Art Institute of Chicago, sorts out who was and was not Hairy Who, those six subversive Chicago artists who exhibited together under its rubric for four short years mostly at the Hyde Park Art Center. Led by Karl Wirsum and Jim Nutt, they wreaked havoc with various norms of art, society and gallery presentation. As their ranks expanded to include Roger Brown, Christina Ramberg and Ed Paschke, their cohort became known as the Chicago Imagists and the rest is finally, after an unconscionable delay, beginning to be history.



*Elaine de Kooning's "Juarez," 1958. It's among the works by the artist featured in the book "Ninth Street Women." © Elaine de Kooning Trust, via The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation/Art Resource, NY*

**‘NINTH STREET WOMEN: LEE KRASNER, ELAINE DE KOONING, GRACE HARTIGAN, JOAN MITCHELL AND HELEN FRANKENTHALER: FIVE PAINTERS AND THE MOVEMENT THAT CHANGED MODERN ART’** By *Mary Gabriel* (Little, Brown and Company). At nearly 1,000 pages, Ms. Gabriel’s book teems with details that are almost always fascinating even when not essential. It resembles five biographies woven together against a background populated mostly by men: Abstract Expressionist painters, critics, dealers and curators. But these five women, intermittently friends, persisted and, each in her own way, triumphed. Their combined narrative has an inspiring force and some nugget of information on nearly every page. (Read the book review.)

**‘THE COLLECTOR: THE STORY OF SERGEI SHCHUKIN AND HIS LOST MASTERPIECES’** By *Natalya Semenova with André Delocque; translated by Anthony Roberts* (Yale University Press). The French avant-garde paintings assembled by the Russian collector Sergei Shchukin in the early 1900s were exhibited in the West, specifically Paris, for the first time two years ago. Now comes the complex story of Shchukin as an alternately fearless and anxious collector; a successful textile merchant; and a doting husband and father. It is recounted by Ms. Semenova, a longtime Shchukin scholar, with Mr. Delocque, the collector’s grandson. Both collector and collection survived the Russian Revolution, but not together. The book shows the interiors of Shchukin’s Moscow palace lined with paintings (by van Gogh, Gauguin, Matisse and Picasso) whose vivid (digitalized) colors against the grisaille rooms still shock.

**‘FLASH: THE MAKING OF WEEGEE THE FAMOUS’** By *Christopher Bonanos* (Henry Holt & Company). By current standards, the street photographer Arthur Fellig, better known as Weegee, might be considered a kind of performance artist: elbowing his way to the front of the

more sensational scenes of New York night life, snapping pictures in his indelible noir style and developing them in the trunk of his car — so as to rush his product to the dailies ahead of the pack. His ambition, self-invention and neuroses are all detailed in this sharp biography by Mr. Bonanos, who clearly admires the artist, sees the unsavory aspects of the man and knows old New York as well as anyone too young to have lived through it.

**‘GOODBYE TO TENTH STREET: A NOVEL’** *By Irving Sandler (Pleasure Boat Studio).* Anyone drawn to postwar New York’s art scene that centered in part on East 10th Street should read the last book of Mr. Sandler, the art historian and critic extraordinaire who died in June. He was there in the late 1950s and early ’60s taking notes while the Abstract Expressionists made history, and he became known for his meticulous accounts of their saga. But here he offers a roman à clef filled with the unverified gossip, overheard conversations, and rumors of nooners and backbiting that were unsuitable to fact-based history (though a few historical figures occupy the margins). The tale — from charged studio visits to nasty exchanges at the Cedar Bar — has its own sad, sordid, unsurprising truth.

**‘RICHARD PRINCE: HIGH TIMES’** *Edited by Richard Prince (Gagosian).* This eccentric volume is a kind of artist’s book/self-portrait masquerading as an exhibition catalog. Like its show, it is unusually revealing, providing well-rounded views of a complex artist who generally aims to irritate and frequently succeeds. It not only reflects Mr. Prince’s talents for drawing and painting, but also other activities that feed his consummately American art as editor, writer, connoisseur of postwar music and literature and collector of ’60s ephemera. The book contains facsimiles of such items, like a postcard that Jimi Hendrix sent to his own father while touring England.

## Holland Cotter

It was a rough year in the real world: demagoguery, xenophobia, racial violence, killer weather, left-on-left slugfests, internet blah-blah-blah. These books helped me to sort things out and change things up.



*Holland Cotter’s picks include, clockwise from top right: “Gary Indiana: Vile Days”; “Murals of Tibet”; “Decoding Mimbres Painting”; and “Bruce Nauman: Disappearing Acts,” open to a still of “Study vii” from “Contrapposto Studies, i through vii.”*

© Bruce Nauman/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York and Sperone Westwater, via The Museum of Modern Art, New York;  
Eric Helgas for The New York Times

**‘AGENTS OF FAITH: VOTIVE OBJECTS IN TIME AND PLACE’** Edited by Ittai Weinryb (*Bard Graduate Center Gallery, New York*). One of the great gifts of global consciousness has been to remind Western secular culture that some art has power beyond the aesthetic. And that power is what this book, the catalog for a show at Bard Graduate Center Gallery in Manhattan (through Jan. 6), is about. It brings together objects of spiritual significance from Africa, Asia, Latin America, medieval Europe and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington. Each item was designed to seal a vow, ask for help or give thanks for an answered prayer. Together they demonstrate that art is alive and interactive. A second remarkable book, also new this year, “Heaven on Earth: Painting and the Life to Come” by the veteran art historian T. J. Clark (Thames & Hudson), makes a similar point about art’s transformative pull. You don’t have to be religious to get it. You just have to have faith in the force of belief.

**‘WHITEWALLING: ART, RACE & PROTEST IN 3 ACTS’** By Aruna D’Souza (*Badlands Unlimited*). This year we were increasingly being told, by some on both the political right and the political left, that identity politics is a Problem, the cause of the divisiveness of the times. So what are we supposed to do? Gather at our local diner and chat our troubles away? And why is that not a realistic solution? Because if you’re nonwhite (and/or female, and/or do not subscribe to conventional gender distinctions) the price of accommodation is too steep, in terms of safety, sanity and economics. That is the point of this trenchant book, written in response to the heated debate over an appropriated image — and history — of blackness in the last Whitney Biennial. (Read the book review.)

**‘DECODING MIMBRES PAINTING: ANCIENT CERAMICS OF THE AMERICAN SOUTHWEST’** By Tony Berlant and Evan Maurer (*DelMonico Books*). Centuries ago, Native American people in the Mimbres Valley of New Mexico produced fantastic pottery painted with human and animal forms and what appear to be geometric patterns. For a 2018 exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the artist Tony Berlant and the art historian Evan Maurer, took a long, imaginative look at these patterns and concluded that they aren’t abstract at all. They depict real things: hallucinogenic flowering plants and a species of moth known to pollinate them. Suddenly, a ritual-intensive culture comes to life, and a trippy art is trippier than we ever guessed. The curatorial sleuth work, illustrated with fabulous Mimbres bowls, is detailed in the show’s magical catalog.

**‘GARY INDIANA: VILE DAYS: THE VILLAGE VOICE ART COLUMNS 1985-1988’** (Semiotext(e)). In the mid-1980s, the New York novelist and playwright Gary Indiana assumed a short but potent stint as senior art critic for *The Village Voice*, at a time — “one brief, scuzzy moment” he calls it — when the art market was boiling over and the AIDS epidemic was at full throttle. He brought to criticism a sardonic eye and a slicing voice, and held the art world’s feet to the fire in a way nobody else did. I read him faithfully during those years, and was glad to read him again in scuzzy 2018.



*An interior view of Lina Bo Bardi's Teatro Gregório de Matos, in Salvador, Brazil (1986-1987), showing a theater bar area with the hole-window in the background. © Zeuler R. Lima*

**‘LINA BO BARDI’** By Zeuler R.M. de A. Lima (*Yale University Press*). One problem with being a die-hard starchitecture fan is that you sometimes have to go a distance to see work of a designer you love — all the way to São Paulo, Brazil, in the case of the revolutionary Lina Bo Bardi. But it’s worth every mile to experience her 1950 hilltop Glass House; her Pompeia factory-turned-public leisure center; and her monumental São Paulo Museum of Art with its “crystal easel” installation. Alternatively, you can now stay home and get a wide-angle view of the Bo Bardi herself in a fine 2013 critical biography being released in paperback this winter. She’s a slippery subject; but her impulse to punch holes in confining walls of all kinds was emphatic and deep-seated, and is more than welcome right now.

**‘CURATORIAL ACTIVISM: TOWARDS AN ETHICS OF CURATING’** By Maura Reilly (*Thames & Hudson*). Parlous political times call for out-of-the-box museum thinking, which is what Ms. Reilly both documents and demands in this how-to handbook for lining up art and real life. To this end, Ms. Reilly, founding curator of the Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum, revisits key exhibitions of contemporary art, from 1976 to the present, that have tackled issues of race, class, sexuality and gender, and plots a path to a future of institutional truth-telling.

**‘BRUCE NAUMAN: DISAPPEARING ACTS’** By Kathy Halbreich, et al. (*The Museum of Modern Art*). One of the year’s outstanding museum shows came with a superb book. The show’s lead curator, Ms. Halbreich, as is her custom, brings an involved, probing, personal tone to the catalog’s anchoring essay. Other contributions by artists (Ralph Lemon, Glenn Ligon, Rachel Harrison) and art historians (Suzanne Hudson, Liz Kotz, Catherine Lord) demonstrate the breadth and depth of Mr. Nauman’s continuing reach, and reveal a moral subtlety and tenderness in his art, that have not always been acknowledged in past assessments.

**‘DEANA LAWSON: AN APERTURE MONOGRAPH’** With an essay by Zadie Smith (*Aperture*). The photographer Deana Lawson is one of a growing number of contemporary artists intent on positioning the black body where it has rarely been welcome before, namely in the mainstream of contemporary art. In a visual version of creative nonfiction, she places people she barely knows in domestic settings that she arranged like stage sets. Her sitters seem to be at home, but something’s off. You sense hidden dramas waiting to unfold; tensions ticking away. This brilliant book of 40 photographs is a group portrait of a new version of difference she is discovering and inventing. (Read an article about the artist.)

**‘WE SHALL OVERCOME: PRESS PHOTOGRAPHS OF NASHVILLE DURING THE CIVIL RIGHTS ERA’** Edited by Kathryn E. Delmez, with a foreword by Representative John Lewis (Frist Art Museum in association with Vanderbilt University Press, Nashville). In the 1960s, Birmingham, Ala., and Memphis became known as landmark sites in the civil rights struggle. Nashville, some 200 miles from both cities and home to the historically black Fisk University, had its struggles too, less widely broadcast but scrupulously recorded by the local press. This book, the catalog of an exhibition at Frist Art Museum in Nashville, captures a decade of everyday bravery and trauma as recorded in photographs, drawn from city archives, by Nashville photojournalists. (Read an Opinion piece about the exhibition.)

**‘MURALS OF TIBET’** By Thomas Laird, et al. (Taschen). The big splurge. In the 1970s, while still in his teens, the American photographer and writer Thomas C. Laird first traveled to the Himalayas. He settled in Kathmandu, Nepal, and eventually went on to Tibet, where he made life-size digital photographs of centuries-old mural cycles in Buddhist monasteries. The photographs have been reproduced in a jumbo-size Collector’s Edition of 998 copies, each of which includes six fold-outs of complete murals and comes with a 528-page guide and a bookstand designed by the Pritzker Prize-winning architect Shigeru Ban. Price for a total, staggering ensemble: \$12,000. I can’t begin to think what the Buddha might say about such extravagance, but His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama has given it his blessing, personally signing each copy of the Collector’s Edition.

## Jason Farago

Keeping up with art worldwide means taking a lot of flights; reading books, at least, is less carbon-intensive. This year the publications that impressed me most came from Italy and Poland, South Africa and East Asia; all testify to how art can surmount borders when politicians seem determined to fortify them.



Among Jason Farago's picks are, from left: "The Chiaroscuro Woodcut in Renaissance Italy," "Giuseppe Penone: The Inner Life of Forms" and "Chinese Movie Magazines." © Eric Helgas for The New York Times

**‘MASAHISA FUKASE’** Edited by Tomo Kosuga (Éditions Xavier Barral). A virtuoso of obsession and abandonment, Fukase was one of the signal photographers of postwar Japan. This 400-page volume introduces English-speaking audiences to Fukase’s art — from grainy Tokyo reportage and witty staged family portraits to his magnum opus, “Ravens,” an otherworldly conjuring of black birds and snow haunted by the memory of his ex-wife and his childhood in northern Japan. In 1992, a blitzed Fukase fell down the stairs of his favorite Tokyo bar; he lapsed

into a coma and never recovered. Until his death in 2012 his photos were largely inaccessible, and this book is still missing some important works, as Fukase's ex-wife refused to provide necessary image rights. Even so, it's a landmark — a first step, though not the last, in the rediscovery of one of the greatest artists of the 20th century. (Read more about this and some of the year's other best photography books.)

**'GIUSEPPE PENONE: THE INNER LIFE OF FORMS'** *Edited by Carlos Basualdo (Gagosian).* This box set, as unpretentiously refined as the Arte Povera artist's sculptures, comprises a book of essays (by the archaeologist Salvatore Settis, the curator Emily Braun, and others) and a dozen stapled pamphlets that each highlight a theme or series. The pamphlet "Trees" includes captivating sketches and studio views for Mr. Penone's large sculptures of trunks stripped to their heartwood; the one featuring "Reversing One's Eyes," his 1970 photograph of himself wearing mirrored contact lenses, also includes forgotten alternate versions and freshly translated poems. As hopes for climate preservation grow fainter, I find myself ever more attached to Mr. Penone's art; this publication is an evidence locker of how nature and the man-made became indistinct.

**'THE LOVE OF PAINTING: GENEALOGY OF A SUCCESS MEDIUM'** *By Isabelle Graw (Sternberg Press).* For too long, the response to the provocation that painting "died" in the 1960s was nonengagement: of course painting is alive and well, so why bother with a proper rebuttal? It's time that we defend painting explicitly, with as much theoretical force as the skeptics — as Ms. Graw, the co-founder of Germany's venerable magazine *Texte zur Kunst*, does in this winning book. The essays here, on artists from Manet to the young New Yorker Avery Singer, propose that paintings convey "vitalistic fantasies," or imagined impressions of their creators; interviews with Jutta Koether, Wade Guyton and Charline von Heyl further her argument for painting's lifelikeness. What emerges is a validation that, in Ms. Graw's words, "painting and conceptual art are not, as was once assumed, polar opposites; rather, they are directly related to each other."

**'ATLAS OF BRUTALIST ARCHITECTURE'** *Edited by Virginia McLeod and Clare Churly (Phaidon).* As hulking and imposing as the buildings it surveys, this book weighs seven and a half pounds, and its cover is flecked with abrasive sandpaper. It collates images of more than 850 concrete buildings from the 1960s onward, stretching past Brutalism's monuments — Paul Rudolph's headquarters for the Yale architecture school, the Barbican apartments in London — to massive concrete buildings from West Africa to Southeast Asia. Newcomers will discover the global influence of brutalism, that final age of civic architectural ambition; true believers can use it to prepare years of concrete-coated vacations.

**'ZANELE MUHOLI: SOMNYAMA NGONYAMA, HAIL THE DARK LIONESSE'** *By Zanele Muholi and Renée Mussai (Phaidon).* The South African photographer — or "visual activist," as she calls herself — was still quite young when she won global recognition for "Faces and Phases," her series of portraits of black lesbians and transgender people. Since then she has turned the camera on herself, and this lush book gathers years of Ms. Muholi's self-portraits, shot in black-and-white and at such high contrast that her skin takes on the sheen of obsidian. (Bravo to the printers at Ofset Yapimevi in Istanbul, who have reproduced her photographs with stunning tonal richness.) Often she drapes her clothes or hair with everyday props, from clothespins to paper clips, yet they are never comic; they are ferociously impressive affirmations of an artist determined to speak for herself.



**‘RENÉ D’HARNONCOURT AND THE ART OF INSTALLATION’** *By Michelle Elligott (The Museum of Modern Art).* MoMA’s second director, who served from 1949 to 1967, was also one of its boldest exhibition designers — and his interests stretched well beyond modern art. This enlightening archival volume revives more than a dozen of d’Harnoncourt’s exhibitions, including “Timeless Aspects of Modern Art” (1948-49), in which a Romanesque crucifix and an Egyptian fertility goddess appeared under spotlights in darkened galleries; “The Art of the Asmat” (1962), which showcased New Guinean sculpture in a temporary pavilion in MoMA’s sculpture garden; and a renowned 1967 Picasso sculpture show, where the artist’s busts sat on piles of bricks. Installation shots appear here with d’Harnoncourt’s hand-drawn floor plans and directorial doodles, not to mention some tough reviews from The Times.

**‘THE CHIAROSCURO WOODCUT IN RENAISSANCE ITALY’** *By Naoko Takahatake (Los Angeles County Museum of Art/DelMonico Books).* In Venice five centuries ago, the artist Ugo da Carpi codified a new printmaking technique: If you coated two or more woodblocks with lighter and darker inks, and then stamped them on a single sheet, you could create arresting multicolored prints with uncommon depths. More than 100 such chiaroscuro prints, including ones after Raphael, Titian and Parmigianino, were on view earlier this year at LACMA and are at the National Gallery of Art in Washington through Jan. 20 — and in the show’s catalog, Ms. Takahatake shows step-by-step how Italian artists made these rich prints. This is an authoritative volume, and a handsome one too, laid out with spare elegance by Green Dragon Office of Los Angeles and printed on caress-inviting matte stock.

**‘CHINESE MOVIE MAGAZINES: FROM CHARLIE CHAPLIN TO CHAIRMAN MAO 1921-1951’** *By Paul Fonoroff (University of California Press).* An engrossing book assembles hundreds of covers from independent cinema publications — some as ambitious as Cahiers du Cinéma but most as dishy as Confidential — that emerged in movie-loving China between the 1920s and the first years of Communism. Silent-era movie magazines made use of painted covers and radically inventive Chinese typography, while wartime magazines promoted both patriotic pictures and escapist schmaltz. Shanghai’s megastars Butterfly Wu and Ruan Lingyu appear on dozens of front pages, but one other cover girl suggests what’s to come: Jiang Qing, the actress later known as Madame Mao.

**‘FLIGHTS’** *By Olga Tokarczuk (Riverhead).* The best novel I read this year — a centuries-spanning constellation of lives spent in transit — is also a museum world tour. Ms. Tokarczuk, Poland’s most celebrated living writer, examines her themes of motion and stasis both in art institutions, including the Louvre and St. Petersburg’s Kunstkamera, as well as at anatomical museums like the Mütter Museum in Philadelphia, where the remains of the sick and the dead float in formaldehyde. “Fluidity, mobility, illusoriness — these are precisely the qualities that make us civilized,” Ms. Tokarczuk writes. One proof of that is how many of us are now on the move in the service of art.