

Arts & Humanities

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ABSTRACT (ENGLISH)

Styles represented range from the figurative to abstract, media from watercolor to spray paint, and thematic interests from the natural world and feminine spirituality to race and politics. The group discussed sexual equality, freedom, and experimentation in private, but as they gained notoriety and influence by the 1920s, self-expression among the new postwar generation became more public—even as homosexuality remained illegal. Throughout this collection, V shows the impact of that pain on her relationships with her mother, who did not acknowledge the abuse until later, and her connections with women throughout the world who are victims of sexual terrorism, live in poverty, and are denied access to quality medical care.

FULL TEXT

Fine Arts

***Great Women Painters*. Phaidon. Oct. 2022. 352p. ISBN 9781838663285. \$69.95. FINE ARTS**

This oversize companion to Phaidon's *Great Women Artists* surveys 300-plus female painters across five centuries and 60 countries, each one represented by a quality color reproduction and a paragraph of text. Styles represented range from the figurative to abstract, media from watercolor to spray paint, and thematic interests from the natural world and feminine spirituality to race and politics. The artists' visual vocabularies span the history of art. A discussion of each painting, occasional quotes by the artists, and relevant biographical details add context, reflection points, and some fascinating stories. The volume's alphabetical arrangement brings its own discoveries, juxtaposing distinct styles and periods, as seen, for example, in the paintings by Gwen John (1876–1939) and Claudette Johnson (b. 1959)—portraits strikingly different in style, palette, media, perspective, dimensions, and mood. Despite being underrepresented in histories, museums, and galleries, many of the early painters included were celebrated during their lifetimes. Others defied their families and the prevailing culture to pursue their art. As Jesse Mockran (b. 1981) notes, when it comes to "the construction of gender codes over time," art history is the place she sees "human history made visible." **VERDICT** A richly rewarding overview capturing the range, depth, and accomplishments of women painters, many of whom continue to be overlooked and undervalued.—**Daryl Grabarek**

Literature

***Strachey, Nino. Young Bloomsbury: The Generation That Redefined Love, Freedom, and Self-Expression in 1920s England*. Atria. Dec. 2022. 304p. ISBN 9781982164768. \$29. LIT**

The second-generation members of the legendary Bloomsbury Group take center stage in Strachey's (*Rooms of Their Own*) somewhat dizzying historical account. In the years before World War I, Virginia Woolf and her sister (the painter Vanessa Bell) joined a circle of artists and writers (including Lytton Strachey, to whom the author is related) in their Bloomsbury district home in central London. The group discussed sexual equality, freedom, and experimentation in private, but as they gained notoriety and influence by the 1920s, self-expression among the new postwar generation became more public—even as homosexuality remained illegal. At gender-blurring costume parties, queer young people found acceptance. These gatherings also rejuvenated the aging Bloomsbury set. The author was the last Strachey to grow up in her ancestral home of Sutton Court, and she draws on her family's history, archives, as well as papers in special collections to enhance her research. A much-needed list of "Dramatis Personae" is included to sort through these often-interconnected characters. **VERDICT** Bloomsbury Group devotees and readers of LGBTQ+ history will likely relish Strachey's unique perspective.—**Denise Miller**

***V. Reckoning: Writing into Existence*. Bloomsbury. Jan. 2023. 272p. ISBN 9781635579048. \$28. LIT**

The pandemic "stopped time and expanded it" for author V, formerly Eve Ensler (*The Vagina Monologues*), and gave her the opportunity to trace her obsessions and curiosities into a book of reckoning. The result is a compassionate collection of 45 essays, sermons, speeches, and poems detailing the Tony Award-winning playwright and activist's thoughts about everything from AIDS to access to abortion. The works are separated into themes, such as Mother Hunger, Femicide, and Grief, and surrounded by an introduction on lifesaving writing and an epilogue explaining V's chosen name. As a five-year-old child named Eve, she was molested and abused by her father. Throughout this collection, V shows the impact of that pain on her relationships with her mother, who did not acknowledge the abuse until later, and her connections with women throughout the world who are victims of sexual terrorism, live in poverty, and are denied access to quality medical care. Political opinions are prevalent, especially related to the patriarchy in government and its impact on women. **VERDICT** This is a fierce and empathetic look at the world and its many struggles.—**Joyce Sparrow**

Performing Arts

Kozma, Alicia. *The Cinema of Stephanie Rothman: Radical Acts in Filmmaking.* Univ. Pr. of Mississippi. Sept. 2022. 280p. ISBN 9781496841001. pap. \$30. FILM

This is deep dive into Stephanie Rothman's career as a director and oft-forgotten groundbreaking visionary of 1970s indie filmmaking illuminates the intersection of economic justice and progressive filmmaking. Readers intrigued by the retrospect of the second wave of exploitation in the 1970s and gender disparities will find Kozma's (dir., Indiana Univ. Cinema) analysis of Rothman fascinating. Among the films Rothman wrote and directed (mostly for Roger Corman) are *The Student Nurses*, *The Velvet Vampire*, and *Terminal Island*. The statistics alone are eye-opening: of the top 1,300 films between 2015 and 2019, only 6.8 percent were directed by women. This book about Rothman's films attempts to answer why those victimized by a male-dominated industry are held responsible for changing the same system that disregards their art and authority. While this book is perhaps too niche at times for general readers of feminist nonfiction, the highlighted films and history are likely to invoke introspection and women's empowerment. **VERDICT** This book sheds new light on the prevalent sexism in filmmaking, both in front of and behind the camera.—**Alana R. Quarles**

Waldron, Abigail. *Queer Screams: A History of LGBTQ+ Survival Through the Lens of American Horror Cinema.* McFarland. Aug. 2022. 237p. ISBN 9781476687421. pap. \$39.95. FILM

Waldron, a scholar and queer historian, sees the horror genre as a means of catharsis and reclamation for the community, although representation is still marginalized in the medium. The author shows how political and social events helped influence queer depictions on screen. Beginning in the 1930s, when sexuality could not be mentioned due to the Hays Code, openly gay director James Whale used subtle references to acknowledge gay characters in such films as *Frankenstein* and *Bride of Frankenstein*. The detriments effected by the Hays Code culminated in the 1950s when gay characters were frequently depicted as having mental defects or as a threat to society in such films as *Suddenly*, *Last Summer*. The topic of people who are transgender was explored by the introduction of the subject in Ed Wood's 1953 campy, ultra-low budget classic, *Glen or Glenda*, and in later films, such as 1960's *Psycho*, 1980's *Dressed To Kill*, and *Silence of the Lambs* in 1992. The 1980s brought slasher films to prominence, and queer characters were portrayed as offensive or comedic stereotypes. **VERDICT** This well-researched and thought-provoking analysis will be a welcome addition to film studies collections.—**Phillip Oliver**

Poetry

Xie, Jenny. *The Rupture Tense: Poems.* Graywolf. Sept. 2022. 120p. ISBN 9781644452011. pap. \$17. POETRY

Xie follows the National Book Award finalist *Eye Level* with a remarkable collection that uses the photography of Li Zhensheng to examine the awful excesses of the Chinese Cultural Revolution and the arduous process of absorbing memory in general. As Xie deftly describes him, Li was "a government-backed photojournalist...[who] made his own theater in cellulose nitrate.... For every propagandist photograph he published, he earned eight frames of film. The photographs that would never get approved." The 30,000 negatives he hid under his floorboards were finally developed four decades after he took them, and they show us "The brutalized. The hanged. The stoned. The lashed. The suicides. The betrayed. The paranoid. The disappeared. The executed" and elsewhere "eight stripped

trees matching eight individuals on their knees." In her sharply observed lines, where "memory-images spill over an unarticulated margin," Xie literally demands that we look at these prints as she does, fiercely and courageously, communicating shattering truths as she reveals the "friction from the future [that] lies in the folds." As she writes, Xie further elucidates the very act of taking pictures and the ultimate unknowability of what is past, even as she plunges into memory, taking the descent past "stale tropes.... Checkpoints of [her] own making." **VERDICT** An elegy for Xie's grandmother points out, "Nowhere goes clean through the static of decades without hitting a nerve," and Xie hits nerves throughout in stunning and evocative language. Highly recommended.—**Barbara Hoffert**

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