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<https://www.wsj.com/articles/holiday-gift-books-review-2021-art-artists-painting-sculpture-11637291528>

BOOKSHELF

Holiday Gift Books 2021: Art

Visual celebrations of a great American sculptor, a magician of the still life, a Japanese master of the woodblock print and more books to delight the eye and inspire the creative spirit.

By Lance Esplund

Nov. 18, 2021 10:12 pm ET

“David Smith” (1906-1965), the poet Frank O’Hara wrote, “was considered by many to be the finest sculptor North America has produced.” The critic Clement Greenberg asserted that Smith was “the best sculptor of his generation,” an artist whose works “could stand in Donatello’s company.” Now, with the arrival of the definitive three-volume “David Smith Sculpture: A Catalogue Raisonné, 1932-1965,” readers can grasp the astonishing breadth of Smith’s inimitable achievement—a wellspring for sculptors and art lovers alike.

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David Smith Sculpture: A Catalogue Raisonné, 1932-1965

By Christopher Lyon,
Susan J. Cooke et al.
Estate of David Smith
1360 pages



Edited by Christopher Lyon, with essays by Mr. Lyon, Marc-Christian Roussel, Michael Brenson and Sarah Hamill (and impassioned forewords by Smith’s daughters, Rebecca and Candida Smith), this sumptuous box set boasts nearly 1,850 illustrations (including Smith’s paintings, drawings and his photographs of his sculptures). It handily replaces Rosalind Krauss’s 1977 catalogue raisonné.

Inspired by Cubism, Constructivism and the hierarchical frontality of ancient Egyptian sculpture, Smith did away with the traditional cast-bronze monolith. Starting in the junkyard, from scratch, he welded together industrial scraps into elegant, freestanding, metaphoric abstract totems, figures and landscapes—lyrical drawings in space that

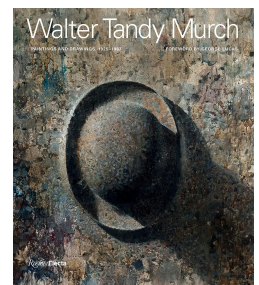
construct volume out of void. The first entirely chronological survey, this critical catalog, a thorough, generously illustrated journey through Smith's remarkable oeuvre, is a fitting tribute to an American master—an opportunity for readers to judge for themselves.

The quotidian meets mysticism in the still-life paintings of the American artist Walter Tandy Murch (1907-1967). Conjure in your mind's eye some strange amalgam of Chardin, Albert Pinkham Ryder, Giorgio Morandi and Giorgio de Chirico. Murch's still-life objects—a mail scale; a lightbulb and potatoes; the naked works of a clock; a row of eggs—sit marooned or drift mysteriously amid impressionistic fields suggesting, in turns, pitted rockface and miasma. Murch's solemn objects evoke relics arrested in amber, ethnographic dioramas, altars, icons, summoned memories. Although surreal and steeped in old-master glazes, they elude nostalgia and eccentricity.

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Walter Tandy Murch: Paintings and Drawings, 1925-1967

By Robert Storr,
Winslow Myers and
Judy Collischan
Rizzoli
320 pages



Though relatively unsung today, Murch was a prominent midcentury figure in the Betty Parsons Gallery stable—alongside Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock, Agnes Martin and Ellsworth Kelly. Fans include filmmaker George Lucas, who wrote the foreword to “Walter Tandy Murch: Paintings and Drawings, 1925-1967,” the first comprehensive monograph on Murch. Mr. Lucas first encountered Murch through his extensive work as a commercial illustrator of mechanical devices for magazines such as Scientific American and Fortune—which fed Murch's paintings, and vice versa. This overdue monograph is certain to renew interest in Murch, who painted, he said, “not to deceive the eye, rather to strike a chord inside, deep inside one.”

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Hokusai: 36 Views of Mount Fuji

By Andreas Marks
Taschen
224 pages



“Hokusai: 36 Views of Mount Fuji,” by East Asian scholar Andreas Marks, may seem extravagant, but although you can’t readily hang it on the wall, it transcends the category “book” to become a work of art in its own right. I’m talking book-as-treasure-chest—as museum-in-a-box. An XXL-format edition limited to 6,000 numbered copies, “Hokusai” is too precious and unwieldy for your coffee table. It’s an oversized luxury item that you store in a cabinet, with which you make an appointment, for which you don white gloves.



WSJ NEWSLETTER

Notes on the News

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“Hokusai” reproduces the complete set of 46 “Views” (Hokusai later added 10 to the original 36), at actual size, alongside 114 color variations. Encased in a nested, hinged, cloth-covered box, the book is printed in beautiful inks on uncut paper and sewn together with “Japanese binding.” The box’s cover displays a gripping detail of “Under the Wave off Kanagawa” (also known as “The Great Wave”)—Japan’s “Mona Lisa.” The book’s cover—emblazoned with an enlarged detail of “Red Fuji,” on silken paper—has a golden shimmer. Inside, Hokusai’s ukiyo-e woodblock prints snap with remarkable fidelity and velvety richness. Lines are crisp, clear. Blues are atmospheric. Darks feel smoky, luxuriant. Historically informative and succinctly written, it brings you extremely close to the experience of Hokusai’s original 19th-century homage to Japan’s cities, people, countryside and, of course, its highest and most famous peak.

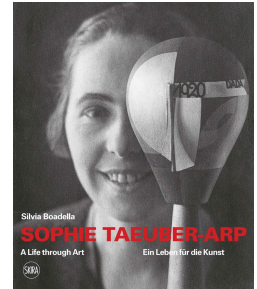
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Sophie Taeuber-Arp: A Life through Art

By Silvia Boadella

Skira

221 pages



The Swiss abstractionist Sophie Taeuber-Arp (1889-1943) is enjoying a well-deserved shining moment. An innovative painter, muralist, dancer, choreographer, sculptor and interior architect, Taeuber-Arp also created stained-glass windows, tapestries and graphic and stage design. She's being honored with a touring retrospective that has already appeared in Basel and London and opens Nov. 21 at New York's Museum of Modern Art. Among recent books on Taeuber-Arp (the wife of the French-German artist Hans, or Jean, Arp) are Bettina Kauffmann and Medea Hoch's monograph "Sophie Taeuber-Arp" (Abrams, 96 pages, \$25); an insightful, tender memoir by Taeuber-Arp's grandniece, Silvia Boadella, "Sophie Taeuber-Arp: A Life Through Art;" and MoMA's excellent exhibition catalog "Sophie Taeuber-Arp: Living Abstraction."

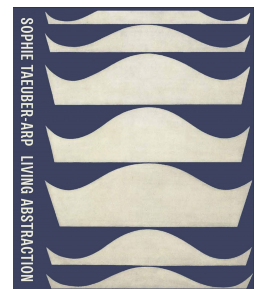
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Sophie Taeuber-Arp: Living Abstraction

By Anne Umland and
Walburga Krupp, Eds.

MoMA

352 pages



The MoMA catalog, edited by Anne Umland and Walburga Krupp with Charlotte Healy, includes essays by various authors tracing Taeuber-Arp's wide-ranging career—prematurely ended by her accidental death from carbon monoxide poisoning. Here are Taeuber-Arp's Dadaist sculpted heads and polychromed puppets, her ebullient bas-relief tondos, her exquisite beadwork, rugs, furniture, paintings, jewelry and stained glass. This celebration of Taeuber-Arp's life and astounding, multidisciplinary oeuvre unfolds not like a monograph of a modern artist but as a sweeping account of the Modernist movement.

If you've visited museums, churches or cathedrals, you've undoubtedly encountered whole or dismembered parts of Christian altarpieces—those works of painting and sculpture, especially of the Virgin, Christ, apostles and saints, set above and behind the altar. Altarpieces—depicting individual figures, scenes or narratives, in single or multiple compartments—aid in Christian devotion and contemplation and date back at least to the early 13th century. They were most prevalent during the Renaissance, when most every artist, major or minor, created at least one altarpiece for one of the thousands of altars throughout Italy.

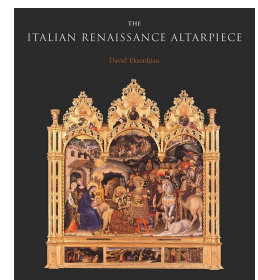
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The Italian Renaissance Altarpiece: Between Icon and Narrative

By David Ekserdjian

Yale

496 pages



“The Italian Renaissance Altarpiece: Between Icon and Narrative,” by Renaissance scholar David Ekserdjian, is the first in-depth study of the genre. It chronologically and thematically takes us from the proto-Renaissance altarpieces of Bonaventura Berlinghieri and Duccio up through Titian’s triumphant “Assumption of the Virgin” (1518) and Caravaggio’s ultra-naturalistic “Seven Works of Mercy” (1606-07). Along the way, Mr. Ekserdjian nimbly addresses styles, patrons, artists and history, as well as the three key categories of the Renaissance altarpiece: icons, narratives and mysteries. And he teaches how to read altarpieces, including their predellas, or related supporting panels. The book is beautifully illustrated with 250 plates; you’ll savor both image and text.

—*Mr. Esplund, the author of “The Art of Looking,” writes about art for the Journal.*

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