

## **Noted in Brief**

### **En bref**

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I have left till last a mention of the "Cain and Abel" series illustrated here (Figure 1) with "Paradise Barred" (1969/70), by Edgar Tolson (b. 1904). This work, which one writer calls an "anachronism," seems to me a very parable of an American culture which collects and exhibits these objects of art. The primal pair (Tolson thinks, untheologically, that the "original sin" was the charmingly priapic coupling of the two — he knows nothing of the Fall as a disobedience to God) stand in their new clothing, with the snake at their heels, outside the picket fence of Paradise, which is guarded by a sternly vigilant angel against re-entry. The lovely little tree still droops its forbidden apples of self-knowledge; that terrible knowledge is to come, for the rest of the series shows the killing of Abel by Cain and concludes with the stiffly standing image of Cain, in awful clothes-peg *angst*, his whittled stare gazing into the present we all occupy. Anachronistic? Innocent? Childlike? The

technique may be all these things, but the reality is one for adults. Maybe this is the quality that kept these works out of the beautiful *Index*, and makes them fit icons for contemplation today.

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Jeff DYKES, *Fifty Great Western Illustrators*. Flagstaff, Arizona, Northland Press, 1976. 458 pp., illus., \$35.00.

One of the more valuable and unique titles devoted to American art to appear during the bicentennial year is Jeff Dykes' bibliographic checklist. This hefty and handsomely-made volume emerges as the result of over thirty years collating of bibliographic material by an avid collector and bookseller of Americana. Mr. Dykes, professing the historical as well as artistic relevance of the illustrator's craft, has chosen fifty of his favorite artists, which include both well-known names such as Frederic Remington, Peter Hurd, Newell Convers Wyeth, and less remembered sketchers of the "old west". The only artist of major importance omitted is Charles Marion Russell, Mr. Dykes bowing to Frederic Renner and Karl Yost's bibliography published in 1971 by the University of Nebraska Press.

For each of his chosen artists, Mr. Dykes offers entries in three categories: 1) catalogues from art exhibitions and galleries; 2) books and pamphlets either fully or partially illustrated by the artist

(only first editions); 3) material about the artist and his work. Although in the second category fall many entries that may contain only one illustration, Mr. Dykes hastens to admit that his listings do not include material that may have appeared in magazines. Here the prerogatives of the bibliophile intrude on the desires of the researcher for bibliographic completeness. Nevertheless, while Mr. Dykes' list may thus not be definitive (there are 1478 entries for Remington), they provide, in many cases, a more thorough catalogue than previously existed, and, in the whole, a valuable tool for future research.

Each artist has been represented by at least one illustration (there are thirteen rather washed-out colour plates), and the quality of work ranges from the merely competent (Nick Eggenhofer, Robert Elwell, Joseph E. N. Dufault) to the inspired (Alfred Jacob Miller, Frank E. Schoonover, Frederic Remington). Mr. Dykes would have increased the high value of his book had he provided some condensed biographic information for each of his illustrators.

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Brian ARNOTT, *Towards a New Theatre: Edward Gordon Craig & Hamlet*. Ottawa, The National Gallery of Canada, 1975. 62 pp., illus., \$5.00.

A shroud of romance and mystery still envelopes the life and work of Edward Gordon Craig, controversial theatre scene designer and theatre theoretician. The half century that has passed since his most active period of work, and the ten years since his death have done little to lift that cloud. In an attempt to bring to light the often debated significance of the man's work, Brian Arnott, a Craig devotee, gathered together an exhibit of drawings for the stage to be shown under the auspices of the National Gallery of Canada. Borrowing part of the title from Craig's own 1913 book, the exhibit lent its name to an accompanying illustrated catalogue and text by Arnott. Therein lies the problem: an exhibit created and a text written by a devotee who, as a result of his devotion, adds further to the obfuscation that already surrounds his idol.

The Edward Gordon Craig that emerges from the text is a romantic figure, a misunderstood prophet, a visionary whose time had not yet come, a man who raised a storm of controversy because of his "innovative" ideas. The catalogue's text serves to add to this tempest in a theatrical teapot. The author has brought devotion to his subject but not the necessary objectivity needed to place correctly the object of his attention in proper historical perspective. While Arnott mentions Serlio as a source of inspiration for Craig's "innovative" concepts, there is no mention of Sabbattini, whose use of columns on stage appear in a 1912 Craig stage design almost unaltered in appearance.

Living theatre demands a basis of reality and practicality; it requires a thorough understanding of possibilities and impossibilities, especially in design, which demands a high degree of technical expertise in addition to creativity. In good theatre practice, the sets should serve to complement the actor and aid in amplifying the text. Craig, son of Ellen Terry and for a time a youthful member of Henry Irving's company, brought to theatre a sense of size and physical and mental superiority that shrinks the actor to near insignificance. Craig's sets, which on paper seem to impose and to exude an atmosphere of grandeur, actually minimize the actor, overwhelm him, reduce his role on stage as the purveyor of the text, and, finally, alienate him from the set. The loss of the integrity of the actor's identity is not confined to Craig's vision of physical design; Craig's dramaturgical theory regarding the actor as *übermarionette* reinforces this apparently despotic attitude towards the theatre. There is an

almost "bunkerlike" quality to the sets in the drawings, more appropriate as a dais for Goebbels than for Hamlet in search of truth.

Long interested in *Hamlet* as a vehicle for his ideas, Craig finally found a stage in which to put them into practice: the Moscow Art Theatre under the directorship of Stanislavsky. Arnott makes little of the inevitable and dismal failure of the theories put to the test of theatrical reality. From the very beginning, the sets of the 1912 Moscow *Hamlet* had to be modified due to their "impracticality," an impracticality due to Craig's ignorance of mechanics and his apparent lack of interest in the pragmatics of theatre design. A glance at the hazy drawings which appear in the catalogue and a mental projection of them onto a stage will make it clear to any reader that Craig's ideas were not only "impractical" but also antithetical to a sense of the dignity of man that is part of the foundation of Western theatre.

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Clarence P. HORNUNG and Fridolf JOHNSON, *200 Years of American Graphic Art*. New York, George Braziller, 1976, 211 pp., illus., \$22.95.

Hornung and Johnson admit in their "Preface" that the "observance of this bicentennial occasion" provided the impetus for the present volume, but that "the restrictive conditions imposed by a tight time schedule" precluded the necessary "number of years for diligent research." Such a disclaimer offers small repentance for his poorly organized mulligatawny of material which the authors seem literally to have tossed together and which the publisher, known for a number of outstanding editions of medieval manuscripts and other art monographs, has so poorly slapped down on paper.

Taking "graphic arts" in its broadest context ("any... art which expresses ideas by means of lines, marks, or characters impressed or printed on a surface"), Hornung and Johnson proceed to reproduce a wee bit of everything that falls between Stephen Daye's *Whole Booke of Psalmes* (1640) and rock posters of the 1960's: bookplates, Arrow collar advertisements, liberty bond posters, *Collier's* covers, stock certificates, catalogue bills, trading cards, theatre playbills, book title pages, cereal box covers, photographic advertisements, a

Frasconi print, *et alia*. The layout of this cornucopia of diverse printed material is as random and unconnected as the chosen samples themselves, and the illustrations of all but the simplest line drawings are muddy and gray, hardly conducive to impressing the reader with the excellence of American graphic technology to which the authors allude.

No attempt has been made to present any historical, sociological, technological or aesthetic rationale for the choice of and change in style and content in the various tidbits passed like flashcards before the reader's eyes; no discussion of the evolution of media techniques is even hinted at. The

meager caption comments that do crowd the page bottoms offer only empty non-sequiturs ("Just as the New York School has led the way in abstract-expressionism, so also an important new direction in poster-making has been advanced in San Francisco.") or inflated platitudes ([Norman Rockwell] is a storyteller without peer, recording... those nostalgic situations known to each and every one of us — delicious bits of Americana that promise to live on in the hearts of all.").

The "selective bibliography" omits numerous major works in the field of graphic arts.

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