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Jean Lipman and Helen M. Franc, Introduction by John I.H. Baur, *Bright Stars: American Painting and Sculpture since 1776.* New York, E.P. Dutton, 1976. 150 illus., $40.25

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With this general stylistic background established, Tatum proceeds to discuss two of the major sources of information for his study: early insurance surveys and Samuel Powel's ledger. By comparing insurance surveys made at different times, the author is able to establish the probable appearance of the exterior and interior of the house as it was built by the Stedmans and the general nature of the changes made to the structure by the Powels. Additional information on the renovations by Powel is contained in the ledger. It reveals, for instance, that Robert Smith, a noted carpenter-builder of the period, was under contract for major renovations. This suggests to Tatum that Smith might well have been the initial builder of the house.

Preliminaries completed, Tatum begins his detailed investigation of the structure with an analysis of the plan and elevation (Fig. 1). With respect to the red brick front of the three-storey, three-bay structure, the author observes that "in essence, all of the foregoing features were duplicated in varying scale and quality on the façades of hundreds of Philadelphia houses in the eighteenth century." It is at this juncture that Tatum addresses himself to the severe exterior of the Philadelphia town house. His contention is that the restraint of the façade is less a reflection of Quaker influence than a conscious reliance on contemporary domestic architectural modes in London — a reliance, Tatum infers, that would have been regarded as both agreeable and appropriate by men of affairs such as Samuel Powel.

Tatum next investigates in detail the various rooms and parts of the Powel House. The common thread is the consideration of what is original (built by Stedman), what was renovated (changed by Powel), and what has been restored (particularly those restorations made by Fiske Kimball and Louis Duhring in the early twentieth century). Tatum explores the original uses of the various rooms and parts of the house, and wherever possible he draws upon historic evidence to support his interpretations of usages. For example, in discussing the most handsome room, the large front chamber on the second floor, he writes that it was probably here that John Adams ate the lavish meal he vividly describes in his diary under the date of 8 September 1774:

> Dined at Mr. Powells, . . . A most sinfull Feast again! Every Thing which could delight the Eye, or allure the Taste, Curds and Creams, Jellies, Sweet meats of various sorts, 20 sorts of Tarts, fools, Trifles, floating Islands, whipped Sillabubs etc., etc. — Parmesan Cheese, Punch, Wine, Porter, Beer.

Tatum also comments upon the furnishings of the town house, noting that because no detailed inventory was taken at the time of Samuel Powel's death (1793), there is no way of ascertaining either the full extent of the furnishings or their probable arrangement in the house. The author also mentions that the garden, as presently developed, is conjectural, although it "may well capture something of the spirit of the original."

George B. Tatum's excellent study of the Powel House concludes with a "Reappraisal" in which he points out that part of the importance of the town house lies in the fact that it is fairly typical of its class. Tatum further suggests that the structure is important as an example of the process of restoration and preservation. He argues "that, like any other restoration, the Powel House is not only a monument to the period that first built it, but also in some degree to the period that preserved it." Tatum concludes his reappraisal with a plea for preservationists and planners alike to consider the validity of the gradual evolution of neighbourhoods through time, and to protect, as a consequence, the best of each period, whether it be from the eighteenth or the nineteenth century.

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JEAN LIPMAN and HELEN M. FRANC. Introduction by JOHN I.H. BAUR. *Bright Stars: American Painting and Sculpture since 1776*. New York, E.P. Dutton, 1976. 150 illus., $40.25.

Bright Stars is essentially a book of colour plates with accompanying commentaries. The 150 plates present what the authors call "outstanding examples" of the painting and sculpture produced in the United States over the last 200 years. Each object reproduced is discussed in a brief commentary. The authors also provide a preface in which they state their intentions, one of which is to "look hard and critically" at the given examples. An illustrated introduction by John Baur gives an overview of American art since 1776, and a short survey of pre-Revolutionary painting illustrated with a number of black-and-white plates sets the stage.

The flavour of the opening pages of *Bright Stars* tends towards good-naturedness and patriotic self-congratulation, but when the authors get down to business, which they do very quickly, the writing is lucid, informed, and informative. The commentaries provide the reader with a background for the production of the work and an explanation of the subject matter. Despite a greater inclusion of folk art than is customary, the choice of works coincides with general expectations and, if predictable, is agreeably acceptable. The colour plates are good and the book is pleasant to look at. Given its numerous virtues, however, the book as a whole poses some problems.

The book is not a survey, we are told. The criterion for selection is the quality of the individual object, not the reputation of the artist. This is the new approach which Baur describes as "pragmatic, non-historical and aesthetic"; but the book cannot, of course, avoid being an historical survey when the arrangement of objects is made chronologically and the individual entries refer to preceding and succeeding ones as part of an ongoing continuum. The authors also tacitly admit as much by including Baur's survey introduction to help the reader tie things together into an historical fabric. The book then becomes an historical survey on two levels: first in terms of the highly condensed and abstracted introduction, and secondly in terms of the succession of plates which point out the highlights or "the places worth a special visit" (the authors parallel their "star" idea to that of the *Guide Michelin*).

As a textbook, *Bright Stars* is not adequate. Baur's survey is too cursory and the plate material too limited. The commentaries themselves, because of their lack of full

continuity, are not the sort of material which can be read through from cover to cover with ease. They seem best dipped into in a desultory fashion.

For the layman, Baur's text poses a further problem. His essay condenses much historical material and represents a succinct analysis of the basic achievements in the development of American art. But however well it may be done, it is the sort of routine writing, like that of encyclopaedia articles, produced to fulfil a commissioned need. It is comprehensive and includes the necessary information, but is not really instructive nor useful to the lay reader because it assumes knowledge rather than giving access to it. The handle it offers is too illusory because it is too abstracted and too distant from the heart of the subject matter.

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WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART. *200 Years of American Sculpture*. Boston, David R. Godine, 1976. 332 pp., over 500 illus., $35.00.

The Whitney Museum's Bicentennial project was a massive exhibition of two centuries of American sculpture. This book, the catalogue of that exhibition, is an appropriately ambitious undertaking. It has 64 colour and almost 500 black-and-white plates, essays by seven authors, a useful general bibliography, and biographies of 140 artists, complete with bibliographies for each. It is almost an encyclopaedia of American sculpture.

An especially desirable feature is the inclusion of sections on aboriginal art and folk art written respectively by Norman Feder and Tom Armstrong, Director of the Museum. However, while the art itself adds a great deal to the aesthetic calibre of the book, Feder's article is inadequate. He has little sense of history as reconstruction and so presents almost pure chronology unilluminated by controversy; for example, his blithe categorization of the potlatch as a validation of inherited prerogatives ignores a lengthy debate going back to Boas.[1] This example is only symptomatic of his general neglect of the cultural base of aboriginal art. Feder concludes with the observation that little American aboriginal sculpture is now being produced, but he does not undertake to explain why the revival of aboriginal art so conspicuous in Canada has not also occurred with equal breadth in the United States.

Armstrong's argument is that "folk art may yet be recognized as the outstanding achievement in American art in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries." The advantage of the folk artist was his ignorance of the hierarchies prevailing within the official "high" art. Its vitality influenced Laurent, Nadelman, Calder, and others, and survives in contemporary "grass-roots" art. Such an

[1] For a collection of differing opinions, see Tom McFeat, *Indians of the North Pacific Coast* (Greenwich, Conn., 1961).

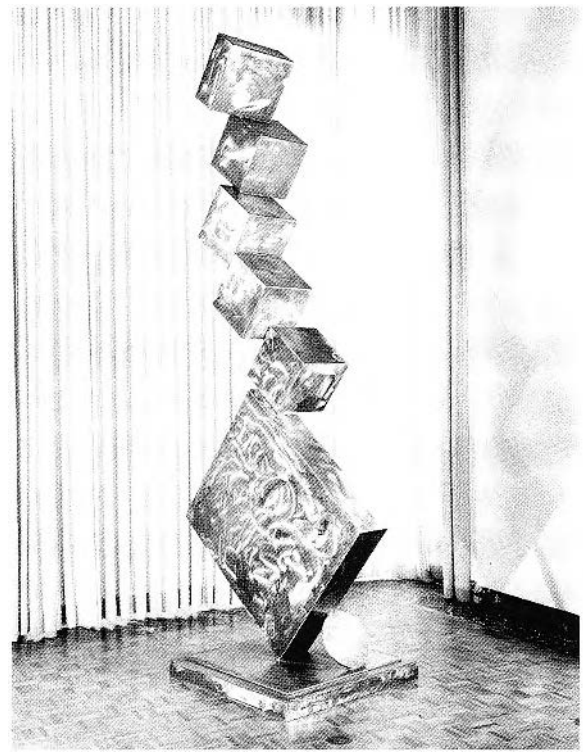

FIGURE 1. David Smith, *Cubi I*. From *200 Years of American Sculpture*.

important genre might have had earlier and greater attention from historians had they not been deterred by the particular historical problems it imposes.

Wayne Craven and Daniel Robbins have contributed sound studies of the evolving rôle of art in society during the periods from 1776 to 1900 and from the 1890s to the 1930s. Sculpture as high art was scarcely known in Revolutionary America. The first sculptors were usually former craftsmen working in a literary, indeed academic, mode. For sculpture to grow more accomplished, autonomous, and truly indigenous required important changes in American society and art patronage. Paradoxically, one of these changes was the abandonment of claims to having developed an American style. Even as late as the 1930s, "modern sculpture was still being denied the independence and isolation of the modern easel picture."

Essays by Rosalind Krauss and Whitney Museum curators Barbara Haskell and Marcia Tucker discuss the more independent and diverse sculpture of recent decades. All three essays are fundamentally unsatisfactory.

Krauss's essay is based on the questionable assumption that "technical invention does function as an early-warning system to alert us to the probability that a new kind of content is . . . suggesting new processes by which to express it." Smith (Fig. 1), Calder, and Cornell, with their welded steel, motorized movement, and assemblage of found objects have, she believes, shared concerns which "derive from a recognition of the Unconscious." "Smith's response to the Unconscious was to turn the forces of consciousness against it — to create a formal language of prohibition that would acknowledge the fact of unconscious desire, while at the same time aborting it." Calder's "wish