

From Egyptian Digs to Expressionist Dribbles

by James R. Mellow



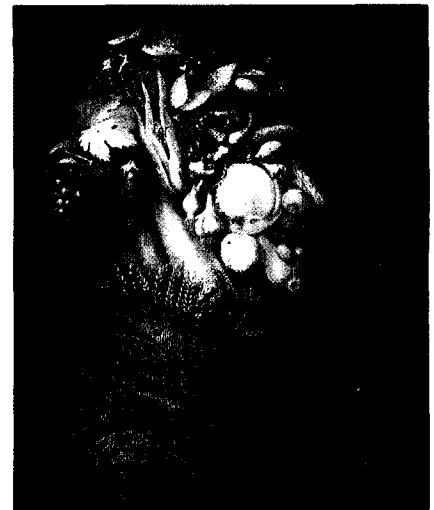
From *The Gold of Tutankhamen*

IF ANY EVIDENCE were needed that the "heroic" years of the New York School have irrevocably entered art history, one of the season's most expensive and extensive art books, the four-volume *Jackson Pollock*, edited by Francis Valentine O'Connor and Eugene Victor Thaw (Yale, \$250), should settle the question. A *catalogue raisonné* (the official notice that an artist's vital signs are cold and classifiable), this scholarly project devotes two volumes to the paintings of the Abstract Expressionist artist who shocked the art world with his huge splashed-and-poured oil paintings, then created an international reputation for himself—and for American art—in the decade before his death, at 44, in 1956. A third volume covers Pollock's drawings; the fourth is devoted to ceramics, sculpture, miscellaneous works, and a documentary chronology of the artist's life all the more poignant for being bluntly factual.

For the general reader who can afford it, *Jackson Pollock* offers a more comprehensive survey of his work than even the largest museum retrospective could provide. It details the brisk progress of Pollock's painting from the rural-Americana landscapes—inspired by Thomas Hart Benton, Pollock's early mentor—to the "breakthrough" can-

vases of 1946–47, with their skeins of dribbled and splattered color that at first seemed a release from reality, but in time proved to be only another aspect of that calligraphy of the self which became the focus of Pollock's work. ("Every good artist paints what he is," he remarked in a late interview.) Surprisingly, the range of the work is narrower and more intense than expected, with a recurrent doubling back to figurative elements, as if for self-renewal, once Pollock had achieved the double-edged fame and notoriety that seem to be more hazardous than neglect for American artists, writers, and actors. And there is the mute testimony of the fatal creative impasse of the master's last two years—only five major canvases and some scattered drawings produced—when the artist tried to unravel the problems of identity through psychoanalysis before his career was cut short in a speeding Oldsmobile.

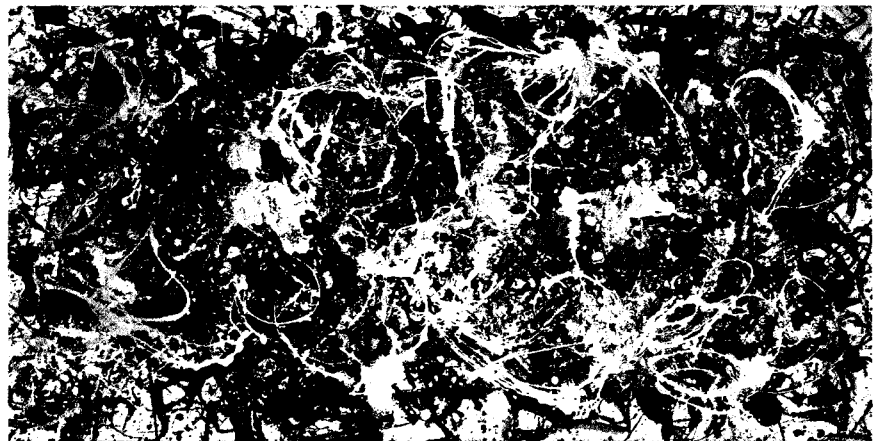
It is one of the virtues of *Modern Art*, by Jean Clay (Vendome/Viking, \$40), that the author's scenario of the progress of modern art does not lead straight from the Ecole de Paris to the New York School. Clay, a professor of art history at the University of Paris, takes a wide-ranging European view of modern art, although he covers only the three decades from the death of Van Gogh in 1890 to the end of World War I. Clay is rigorously formalistic in his approach. The text is organized around specific problems—the autonomy of color, the use of distortion, the suggestion of motion. Occasionally, the style runs into esoteric thickets, but the ideas are nearly always provocative. The real value of the book is visual: The format is generous and the illustrations are beautifully reproduced and intelligently selected. Readers jaundiced by the usual monuments of modern art—the all-too-familiar masterpieces by Picasso, Braque, Matisse, *et al.*—will welcome the selection of out-of-the-



From *Arcimboldo the Magnificent*

way works and less familiar artists. Clay pays a good deal of attention to the decadent and not-so-decadent Symbolists—Delville, Khnopff, Segantini, Previati, Schwabe—most of whom seldom turn up in discussions of modern trends. One of the real surprises is Giovanni Boldini, usually regarded as a flashy, Belle Epoque society portraitist. Boldini's painting of an ibis in convulsive motion and his strangely explosive studio-view could easily pass for something as up-to-date (and as old-fashioned, too) as the pictures of Francis Bacon. Boldini seems ripe for a revival; Clay's choice of his works reminds us that it is as much the function of a good art history to restore a forgotten reputation as it is to consign a contemporary one to a mausoleum.

For reasons that are among the minor vagaries of art history, James McNeill Whistler has never been considered a major influence on modern trends. Contemporary art historians have gone as far afield as Turner to find precursors for Kandinsky or the American Abstract Expressionists. The late Impressionist water-lily paintings of Monet are



From *Jackson Pollock*

proposed as having influenced the latter-day Abstract Impressionists. Whistler's work has never been thought of in such terms. Yet Whistler was a renegade in his time; the stodgy English critic John Ruskin dismissed him as an impudent "coxcomb" who dared to ask "two hundred guineas for flinging a pot of paint into the public's face." Whistler's controversial near-abstract "Nocturne: The Falling Rocket," with its splattered light and trailing color, certainly has some surface relationships with the work of Pollock; but, so far as I know, most contemporary critics do not seriously entertain the idea of a connection between the two.

James McNeill Whistler, by Hilary Taylor (Putnam's, \$22.50), does not examine those issues. It is, instead, a thorough and serviceable academic monograph on an artist who started out as an *enfant terrible* and ended up—without regrets—as an establishmentarian. Miss Taylor devotes considerable attention to the Whistler-Ruskin trial in which the artist sued the critic for libel and was awarded one farthing in damages, one of the notable 19th-century confrontations between an artist and his public. Whistler, who had a gift for wit and invective, moved in the most influential social circles. Late in life, he had a devoted following of younger artists in London and Paris (among the latter, Giovanni Boldini). He was innovative, yet he seems to have been at the wrong place in the wrong time, for he never influenced the course of modern art. There is little justice in art history. It was Cézanne, suspicious, reclusive, provincial—a stubborn bourgeois from Provence—who became the unlikely father of modern art.

Cézanne, by Lionello Venturi (Skira/Rizzoli, \$50), has all the éclat of those large, lavishly illustrated volumes that Skira first produced after World War II, initiating the current boom in expensive art books. The text is a superb and lucid essay by the Italian art historian who produced the first Cézanne catalog in 1936. Written in 1961, just before Venturi's death, it offers a revisionist view of Cézanne's reputation among his contemporaries, the most knowledgeable of whom, it appears, were far more discerning about Cézanne's importance than one had supposed. As one of his admirers, Paul Sérusier, prophesied: "If, as I venture to hope, a tradition is to spring from our time, it is from Cézanne that it will spring." Venturi's tribute is a corrective to the popular image of Cézanne as a crabbed and eccentric painter who stumbled into modernity. His book is a complex and authoritative portrait of an artist who understood his

role and tenaciously stuck to it. "An era of new art is in the making," Cézanne predicted in a letter to a friend. No one should have known better; he brought it into being.

Tutankhamen fever is still in the epidemic stage. *The Gold of Tutankhamen*, by Kamal El Mallakh and Arnold C. Brackman (Newsweek Books, \$49.95), is the latest bit of evidence between covers. This handsomely produced volume aims at offering the best of two worlds: It carries a wide range of glossy color reproductions of the ceremonial objects and royal treasures, and dispenses with the usual fusty art-history text, providing instead a racy and literate narrative of one of the great archaeological finds of the century.

Everyone, presumably, wants to be an archeologist—without the dust, danger, and incredible frustrations, of course—and the rapidly paced Brackman text will certainly give the reader a sense of the excitement felt on that day in November 1922, when Howard Carter broke through the sealed door and caught a sudden glimpse of golden thrones, jeweled chariots, and the incredible luxury and refinement of Egyptian civilization some 3,200 years before. I suspect, however, that the price of this volume will be too high for those who want only a good read and pretty pictures, and the text not important enough for those who want certified culture with their books.

The light fantastic: *Arcimboldo the Marvelous*, by André Pieyre de Mandiargues (Abrams, \$28.50), is a haute-couture item among the season's art books. The pages are basic black, the type pearly white, and the full-page illustrations and details gorgeously rouged. Arcimboldo, a 16th-century Italian artist, served as portrait painter for the Habsburg court, master of festivals and masquerades, and, probably, curator for the royal collections of art and oddities assembled by Maximilian II and Rudolf II. He is remembered, however, for his bizarre painted portraits, cunningly contrived from arrangements of fruits, flowers, vegetables, fish, and fowl—seemingly the work of a greengrocer or fishmonger gone mad with art. The metaphors are literal; cheeks are made of ripe apples or peaches, lips are not merely rosy, but rosebuds. The text, a 124-page causerie, is as fruity and florid as the subject itself, studded with nuggets of information and interpretation. A book for the acquired taste. ●

James R. Mellow, a freelance writer and art critic, is completing a biography of Nathaniel Hawthorne.

NEW

Fascinating insights into well-known people and their motivation . . .

Love lives of the famous

A physician's reflections

Robert B. Greenblatt

B.A., M.D., C.M. (McGill)
Docteur Honoris Causa (Bordeaux)
Professor Emeritus, Department of Endocrinology,
Medical College of Georgia,
Augusta

Is there a link between human sexuality and material ambition? Do the same drives that encourage men to seek power and position also motivate their sexual behavior? Dr. Greenblatt, an eminent endocrinologist who has pioneered many developments in hormonal therapy, believes that there is. In this series of delicate and sensitive essays he suggests possible links between some men's public actions and their private lives. These vignettes provide glimpses of insight into possible motives for human behavior that only a physician with a specialist's experience of the interplay between hormones and sexuality could suggest. Subjects include the Biblical David and Solomon, King James I of England, Napoleon, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Adolph Hitler, Joseph Stalin, and many more.

135 pages/illustrated/1978/\$7.50

Lippincott

J.B. Lippincott Company
East Washington Square
Philadelphia, Pa. 19105

Please send me ____ copy(ies) of
Love Lives of the Famous @ \$7.50 each.

Name _____

Address _____

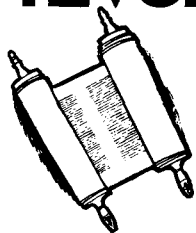
City _____

State _____ Zip _____

- ☐ Payment enclosed
(save postage & handling)
☐ Charge & bill me
(plus postage & handling)

SR-11/23/78

A HIDDEN REVOLUTION



*The
Pharisees'
Search
for the
Kingdom
Within*

An ancient scholarly puzzle begins to take shape as Ellis Rivkin's meticulous scholarship and years of research set the pieces in place.

The appearance of the Pharisees at a crucial time in history for Judaism, Christianity, and western civilization has long been a mystery. Who were they? What did they believe? Dr. Rivkin's radical theory will be widely read and debated, but *cannot* be ignored by anyone wishing to responsibly discuss this revolutionary scholar class from a Jewish, Christian, or secular perspective. \$12.95

abingdon

at your local bookstore

ENLARGED, UP-TO-DATE EDITION

The book that cracks the new political prose

Who put the GLITCH in the BIG ENCHILADA's THREE-MARTINI LUNCH? When was the WHISTLE-BLOWER caught between a ROCK AND A HARD PLACE? William Safire knows, as he tells you in this lively, accurate, and much larger edition of his landmark *The New Language of Politics*, the first book to stop STONEWALLING on the meaning of the words used in Washington. "Fascinating, funny and above all, useful."

—THEODORE H. WHITE



SAFIRE'S POLITICAL DICTIONARY

Photo: New York Times

\$15.95, now at your bookstore

RANDOM HOUSE



Lime-Lighted Photography Books

by Owen Edwards

THERE'S A particularly absorbent spot in the Great Quagmire of Ephemeral Culture reserved for photography books. Into one's life they come, perfectly tailored, self-assured, as welcome as entertaining and well-informed dinner guests. For a week or two they hold forth with élan, and then, suddenly, they run out of charm. Then it is off the coffee table and onto the extra-large (bottom) shelf of the bookcase, where they languish until a change of house or apartment returns them momentarily to light and they end up in humble circumstances at used-book stores.

Photographs are unpredictable. Fifty remarkable prints on the walls of a museum do not always make 50 equally remarkable pages in a book. What was vibrant at first hand can seem embalmed between the covers of a book. The pictures in Ansel Adams and Andre Kertesz monographs look like preserved corpses when compared to the original prints—mysteriously, the reproductions have none of the original's face-to-face energy; the books of fine photographers can lie flat and soulless for reasons no one can understand.

Conversely, pictures that don't seem at all wonderful as single images can

take on new vigor when placed together on pages. Something as odd and seemingly offhand as Peter Beard's and Allistair Graham's *Eyelids of Morning*, with its endless grisly studies of dead crocodiles and grim Lake Rudolf vistas, or as unsung as Richard Avedon's theatrical exposition of Andre Gregory's 1973 *Alice in Wonderland* production, or as youthful and unpretentious as Lar-tigue's *Diary of a Century*, can stay alive and inviting for years.

The safest bet for Christmas, I suppose, is to buy what you like and hope that by the time the daffodils are unfurling, you or your friends will still like what you bought. This year, at least, there is a lot to start with.

Happily for those who love to read as well as look, the New York Graphic Society has brought out a paperback reprint of Aperture's illustrated biography of *Edward Weston* (\$13.95) by Ben Maddow. Although I have never much liked Weston's pictures, or him (as I divine him from his own writing), Ben Maddow limns beautifully what it was that made the photographer see as he did. When I knew Maddow briefly in Los Angeles, he played the harpsichord, and he brings that instrument's clear architectonics to his writing. Maddow begins his life of Weston thus: "He was pure, one is told, and therefore poor; or even vice versa. But there is considerable testimony—his own—that he wanted to be neither." And so on, memorably, for the next 122 pages. An essential book.

In praise of women, his abiding subject matter, Richard Avedon is inimita-



From *Edward Weston*