

Hol Bulletin

February 08



A Singular Moment

READINGS ON GUSTAVE COURBET

This month, the exhibition *Gustave Courbet* opens at the [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#) (February 27 to May 18). The first retrospective of the artist in 30 years, it's a rare opportunity to see many of these works together and in the U.S.

A number of notable books on [Courbet](#) (1819-1877) have been published recently, including the unforgettably titled *The Most Arrogant Man in France*, by scholar Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, and last fall's *Courbet*, by Linda Nochlin. Nochlin, like Chu, is a longtime devotee of the artist and her new book collects forty years of her writing on him, making it perhaps as interesting as a portrait of a scholar as it is a portrait of the artist.

These recent books, along with the catalogue for the new exhibition, offer a multiplicity of examinations into specific aspects of Courbet's life and work. However, the general reader coming to the artist for the first time, might be interested in something a little more directed.

Two books that make great starting points into understanding Courbet are, somewhat ironically, more expensive and generally less available than other options. And from their heft -- in seriousness in one case and physical size in the other -- they might also be off-putting to the casual reader, but they needn't be.



The first is *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution*, by **T. J. Clark** (1982, Books on Demand, \$64.50, 9780783781655). First published in 1973, this is one of Clark's earliest works, and one of the most important ever written about the artist. It examines the short and remarkable period when, around the age of 30, Courbet created several of his greatest masterpieces. If you read about only one moment in Courbet's long and varied career, this is a good one. As Clark frames it: "Between October 1849 and the summer of 1850 Courbet painted the *Stonebreakers*, the *Burial at Ornans*, and the *Peasants of Flagey*. It was the most productive of his life; and in terms of sheer energy, acres of canvas covered with paint, few painters have come near it."

Clark examines this brief period through a myriad of perspectives: Courbet's artistic development up to this point; the social and political climate of the day; the artist's closest friends, allies and influences; and at the paintings themselves. With this approach, Clark persuasively demonstrates why this singular moment stands as such a critical one for the artist, and for every artist that followed him. This is the point at which Courbet made his indelible mark on art history.

Hol Art Books

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This Month in Dallas

The [College Art Association's annual conference](#) is in Dallas this month (Feb 20-23). Here's what to look for around town:

Dallas Museum of Art
[J. M. W. Turner](#)
Feb 10 - May 18

Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth
[Martin Puryear](#)
Feb 24 - May 18

Nasher Sculpture Center
[Woman: The Art of Gaston Lachaise](#)
through Feb 24

Kimbell Art Museum
[Picturing the Bible](#)
through Mar 30



Taking a much broader view, the other book is ***Letters of Gustave Courbet***, edited and translated by **Petra ten-Doesschate Chu** (1992, University Of Chicago Press, \$85, 9780226116532). Covering forty years in more than 600 pages, this collection of letters may not be for the faint of heart, but the rewards from reading it are sure. Luckily, getting over the mental hurdle of picking up and starting the book may be the hardest part. After only a few letters, Courbet's storytelling and highly personable tone capture the reader.

"To each his own: I am a painter and I make paintings. That is borne out by the fact that I have been painting again for two weeks despite the republic, which is not the government most favorable to artists (at least historically), we will see about this one. Everything was accepted at the Exhibition this year, which did not do that much for me as I would have been accepted anyhow and I would have been noticed more." -- a letter to his family, March 1848

For all Courbet's extraordinary brilliance, his letters ultimately paint a picture of a struggling artist, devoted family member, and passionate if flawed citizen. And whether for some, Courbet's poor grammar and often selfish concerns sully his larger artistic reputation, for others it surely gives him greater depth, warmth and humanity.

Other Books of Note:

- *Gustave Courbet*, Sylvain Amic, Kathryn Calley Galitz, Laurence des Cars, Dominique Lobstein, et al. (2008, Hatje Cantz, \$85, 9783775721097). Catalogue of the exhibition.
- *The Most Arrogant Man in France: Gustave Courbet and the Nineteenth-Century Media Culture*, Petra ten-Doesschate Chu (2007, Princeton University Press, \$45, 9780691126791)
- *Courbet*, Linda Nochlin (2007, Thames & Hudson, \$29.95, 9780500286760)

Recommended Biographies:

- *Courbet* (Art and Ideas series), James Henry Rubin (1997, Phaidon, \$19.95, 9780714831800)
- *Gustave Courbet: His Life and Art*, Jack Lindsay (1973, Harper and Row, Out of Print) -- **Though currently out of print, Lindsay's biography, which makes strong use of Courbet's letters and those of his contemporaries, is currently listed as a Hol Project Book. If you'd be interested in helping to publish it, you can [read more about the project and download a sample of the text](#) on our website.**

And don't miss John Golding's article "[The Born Rebel Artist](#)" in the current issue of *The New York Review of Books*.

Amon Carter Museum
[The Art of the American Snapshot, 1888-1978: From the Collection of Robert E. Jackson](#)

Feb 16 - Apr 27

The Dallas Contemporary
[Real Time](#)
live video virtual art via mobile phone
Feb 15 - May 10



And visit [Glasstire: Texas Visual Art Online](#) for the latest on gallery openings and other events.

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Museum Book Club

INSIDE THE WHITE CUBE, BRIAN O'DOHERTY

Inside the White Cube

The Ideology of the Gallery Space

Expanded Edition

by Brian O'Doherty

Last fall, the [Santa Monica Museum of Art](#) began a book club for its members. With a particular focus on making connections between art, literature, and living artists, the club's book selections are chosen by artists currently exhibiting at the museum. This month, with an exhibition by conceptual artist [Michael Asher](#) having just opened, the club is reading ***Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space***, by **Brian O'Doherty** (2000, University of California Press, \$19.95, 9780520220409). It's an inspired choice.

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Inside the White Cube is a seminal text, exploring the context of contemporary art display and its effect on art creation and spectatorship. After reading these provocative essays (three of which were first published in *ArtForum* in 1976 and still read as freshly now as they did then) you'll never look at the seemingly simple "white cube" space of an art gallery or museum the same again. And in fact, the same can be said of Michael Asher's new exhibition in Santa Monica.

As the [Los Angeles Times](#) describes it, "Asher decided to partially rebuild every temporary wall constructed at the museum since its 1998 move to Bergamot Station. The installation would be a sort of history of the museum's exhibitions -- without the art."

And that's what he's done. It's an exhibition of exhibition walls -- twenty years worth -- crisscrossing across the space and across one another. And where O'Doherty so perfectly first verbalized issues surrounding art display, Asher has now visualized it.

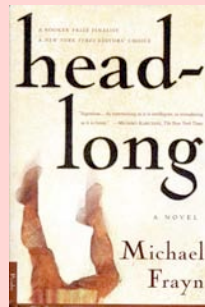
The club will be meeting February 12th to discuss Inside the White Cube. Visit the [SMMoA Book Club Blog](#) for more on the exhibition, the book, and future club picks.

Bruegel: An Imagined Work, and an Imagined Life

TWO NOVELS ON PETER BRUEGEL

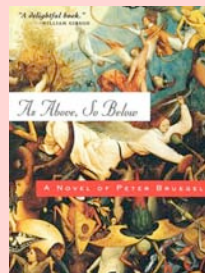
In [last month's bulletin](#), we featured works of fiction and poetry inspired by Mexican artist, Frida Kahlo. It wasn't surprising to find so many examples, after all Kahlo's life and work are in themselves quite poetic, and the autobiography inherent in her work naturally leads to a kind of storytelling.

What may be more surprising, is that we find a similar drive towards storytelling surrounding the life and work of Renaissance painter, [Peter Bruegel](#) (ca 1525-1569).



The first of our Bruegel novels is ***Headlong***, by **Michael Frayn** (2000, Picador, \$14, 9780312267469). A finalist for the Booker Prize, the book's narrator, a philosophy academic and amateur art historian, believes he's discovered a previously unknown Bruegel painting. The story that follows is "part detective story, part art history lesson, part cautionary tale" [*The New Yorker*]. As the narrator states in the opening pages:

"I have a discovery to report. Many of the world's great treasures are known to have been lost over the centuries. I believe I may have found one of them.... I could say nothing, and no one would ever know. But if I have any pretension to be a scholar--even to be a normally civilized human being--then I have an obligation to put my findings on record, so that my colleagues and successors, now and down the years, can evaluate them. And I must describe the tangled circumstances of this discovery of mine as fully honestly as I can.... Well, perhaps it's better to be known a fool or a rogue than not to be known at all."



Our second Bruegel novel, ***As Above, So Below***, by **Rudy Rucker** (2003, Forge Books, \$14.95, 9780765304049), is a novel of Bruegel's life. As the author points out in his acknowledgments, little is known about Bruegel's real life outside his surviving work and a few, brief, primary sources from his time. Here though, Rucker redraws and rediscovers that life, and what results is an enthralling and refreshingly bawdy



tale.

Interestingly, Rucker normally dwells well outside the art historical establishment. Indeed, he is best known for his books on mathematics and computer science. So, *As Above, So Below* comes from the freedom granted a talented amateur following his own deep, personal interests to their full and satisfying conclusion.

Other Bruegel Novels:

- *Bruegel: The Workshop of Dreams*, Claude-Henri Rocquet (1991, University of Chicago Press, \$24.95, 9780226723426)
- *Peter Bruegel, or Droll Peter*, Felix Timmermans (1930, Coward McCann, Out of Print)

Works by Bruegel:

The most extensive [collection of works by Bruegel](#) is at the Kunsthistorisches Museum, in Vienna. In the U.S.:

- [The Harvesters](#), 1565, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
- [The Wedding Dance](#), c. 1566, Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit
- [Parable of the Sower](#), 1557, Timken Museum of Art, San Diego

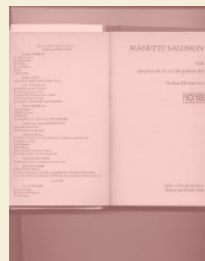
Art in Translation

FEATURED PROJECT BOOKS FROM HOL

In the last month, we've added a couple terrific translation opportunities to our ever-expanding list of Project Books.



In German: **Gerhard Richter, Maler, by Dietmar Elger**, Richter's former assistant and the current director of his archives. This is the only authorized biography of this extremely important contemporary artist, and it has never before been published in English. In fact, no complete, English language biography of the artist currently exists. [Read more about this project and download a sample of the text.](#)



In French: **Manette Salomon, by Edmund and Jules de Goncourt** is a classic novel about art and yet it too has never been translated into English. Some even say that it was the unwitting inspiration for Émile Zola's *The Masterpiece*, written just a few short years later and now widely available in English. [Read more about this project and download a sample of the text.](#)

These books need your help. If you are interested in working on one as a translator, editor, designer, publicist, or sponsor, read more about [how publishing at Hol works](#) and about [joining a project team](#).

Art in Film

DEGAS AND THE DANCE



This month, *The Dancer: Degas, Forain, and Toulouse-Lautrec* opens at the [Portland Art Museum](#) (February 2-May 11).

In 2002-03, the American Federation of Arts, the Detroit Institute of Arts, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art organized a similar exhibition, *Degas and the Dance*. A short, television-style docudrama, ***Degas and the Dance: The Man Behind the Easel***, directed by Mischa

Scorer (2004, Kock Lorber Films, \$24.98, ASIN: B0001BMLUU) is the product of that earlier exhibition and makes for a valuable

is the product of that earlier exhibition and makes for a valuable introduction to this newest incarnation.

While the dance works of Forain and, to a lesser extent, Lautrec will be less familiar to exhibition viewers, Degas' dancers have become dangerously lost in overexposure and cliché. But by answering some basic biographical questions about Degas' relationship to the ballet, and by pointing to some key devices and techniques within the artist's work, this film will help the museum-goer come to the familiar work with fresh eyes and enough new knowledge and understanding to move beyond the clichés.

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