

# Hol Bulletin

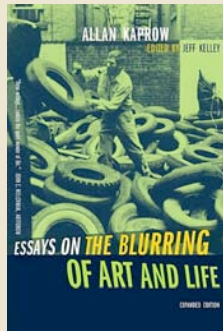
## March 08



## Experience/Participation/Art

### UNDERSTANDING ALLAN KAPROW

Later this month, *Allan Kaprow--Art as Life* opens at the [Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles](#) (March 23-June 30). While [Allan Kaprow](#) is perhaps best known as the father of Happenings--a temporal and participatory art form from the late 50s and early 60s--he was also a prolific and astute arts writer.



***Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*** (2003, University of California Press, \$25.95, 9780520240797) is the artist's collected writings. It is a captivating look into the issues and that drove Kaprow and much of the art world around him. His seminal 1958 essay, *The Legacy of Jackson Pollock* opens the book and offers us a beginning understanding of Kaprow's approach to art.

Opening the short essay with a look back to the years surrounding [Jackson Pollock's](#) death, Kaprow elegizes upon the painter's radical artistic achievement and, like many of his own contemporaries, grapples with its ultimate implications.

"What we have [in Pollock's work], then, is art that tends to lose itself out of bounds, tends to fill our world with itself..." And so, Kaprow posits, if Pollock's art filled our world with itself, then perhaps the next step is that our world fills art with itself.

"Pollock, as I see him, left us at the point where we must become preoccupied with and even dazzled by the space and objects of our everyday life, either our bodies, clothes, rooms, or, if need be, the vastness of Forty-second Street."

Indeed, many artists had already begun looking to the everyday in earnest: [Jasper Johns](#) was appropriating the most banal of imagery in his target, number and flag paintings ([Flag, 1954-55](#)); and in his Combines, [Robert Rauschenberg](#) was incorporating the actual objects into his canvases ([Bed, 1955](#)). A few short years later [Roy Lichtenstein](#) would look to the funny pages and [Andy Warhol](#) to homemaking and celebrity culture.

While Kaprow believed as the others did that the keys to a post-Pollock art lied in the everyday, for his own art the mere objects of the everyday weren't enough. As editor Jeff Kelley points out in his introduction to *Essays on the Blurring of Life and Art*, Kaprow was operating from another influence in addition to Pollock's -- one that came more than twenty years earlier.



In the early 1930s, American philosopher John Dewey gave a series of lectures at Harvard which grew into the book, *Art as Experience* (2005,

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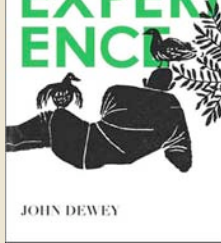
## Exhibition Openings

**Washington DC**  
[Color as Field: American Painting, 1950-1975](#)  
Feb 29 - May 26  
Smithsonian American Art Museum

**Chicago**  
[Ed Ruscha and Photography](#)  
Mar 1 - Jun 1  
The Art Institute of Chicago

**San Francisco**  
[Annie Leibovitz: A Photographer's Life, 1990-2005](#)  
Mar 1 - May 25  
Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

**Washington DC**  
[In the Forest of Fontainebleau: Painters and Photographers from Corot to Monet](#)



Perigee, \$14.95, 9780399531972). One of the most widely-read works on aesthetics from the twentieth century, *Art as Experience* continues to resonate with scholars across disciplines as well as with the general reader. Working from Kaprow's own copy of the book, Kelly explores Dewey's position and its critical influence on the artist.

To put it simply, Dewey comes to equate art with the experience of living. As we have seen, many artists after Pollock make the same equation and in fact, come to see experience as best embodied in the objects of the everyday. So they begin incorporating those objects into their work in a number of unquestionably successful ways. However, as Kelly sums it up for us, Kaprow takes a different turn:

"If a central theme runs through Kaprow's essays, it is that art is a participatory experience. In defining art as experience, Dewey attempted to locate the sources of esthetics in everyday life. In defining experience as participation, Kaprow pushed Dewey's philosophy--and extended his own measures of meaningful experience--into the experimental context of social and psychological interaction..."

So, where other artists see experience embodied in the *objects of the everyday*, Kaprow sees experience embodied in *participation with the everyday*. For him, art is participation.

And that's it. While Kaprow's participatory approach to art -- with all of its performance, collaboration, experimentation, temporality, randomness, and yes, use of everyday materials -- may seem radically different from the art of his contemporaries, we can now see that it's firmly rooted in the same simple legacy and belief. Art as experience.

#### Catalogue to the Exhibition:

· *Allan Kaprow--Art as Life*, Eva Meyer-Herman, Andrew Perchuk, and Stephanie Rosenthal eds. (2008, Getty Publications, \$55, 9780892368907)

Mar 2 - Jun 8  
National Gallery of Art

#### Houston

[Pompeii: Tales from an Eruption](#)  
Mar 2 - Jun 22  
Museum of Fine Arts,  
Houston

#### Detroit

[Life's Pleasures: The Ashcan Artists' Brush with Leisure, 1895-1925](#)  
Mar 2 - May 25  
The Detroit Institute of  
Arts

#### New York

[Whitney Biennial](#)  
Mar 6 - Jun 1  
Whitney Museum

#### Los Angeles

[California Video](#)  
Mar 15 - Jun 8  
Getty Museum of Art

#### Los Angeles

[Allan Kaprow--Art as Life](#)  
Mar 23 - Jun 30  
Museum of  
Contemporary Art

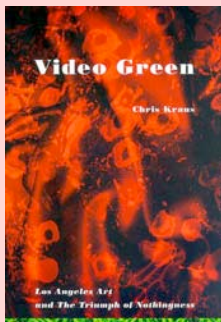
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## Fresh Voices

### CHRIS KRAUS & SAUL ANTON

This past December, Chris Kraus was awarded the prestigious [Frank Jewett Mather Award for Art Criticism](#) from the College Art Association. Working across genres and subjects, Kraus has written a number of books of fiction and non-fiction, numerous shorter pieces for art and culture magazines, and is also a filmmaker. And though cited by CAA as a visual arts writer, other academic circles might just as easily lay claim to her characteristically uncategorizable talent.

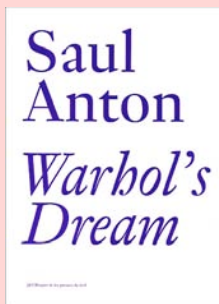


**Video Green: Los Angeles Art and the Triumph of Nothingness** (2004, Semiotext(e), \$14.95, 9781584350224) is billed by the publisher as Kraus's look at the Los Angeles art scene from her unabashedly skeptical perspective as a teacher at [Art Center College of Design](#). This straightforward description, however, is somewhat misleading as Kraus writes just as much about art in New York; her various boyfriends, acquaintances and artist and ex-husband Sylvère Lotringer; and her particular interest in sadomasochism and domination/submission fetishes.

But the descriptive deceit is only on the surface. In the end, it is actually through the lenses of this multiplicity of "other" areas that

we piece together the picture the book purports to paint -- that of "Los Angeles Art and the Triumph of Nothingness". This deft play with content and meaning does nothing if not confirm Kraus's place as one of the most interesting visual arts writers now working -- slightly edgy, highly personal, and happily, fruitfully, meandering.

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If his first published book is any indication, Saul Anton will undoubtedly prove as talented and original a writer as the only more experienced Kraus. In an approach to art historical writing that is at once both radically new and historically grounded, Anton's freshman effort, **Warhol's Dream** (2007, les presses du réel/JRP|Ringier, \$22, 9783905770353) takes the form of an imagined dialogue between artists [Andy Warhol](#) and [Robert Smithson](#).

A word of warning to would-be imitators: what makes Anton's approach so successful here is that it operates at levels below the surface novelty of form and fiction. Careful consideration lies behind behind Anton's use of the dialogue. It is reflective of Warhol's own dialogue writings, rooted in Denis Diderot's Salon dialogues, and reminiscent (in many ways) of Beckett's play, *Waiting for Godot*. These and numerous other possible connections give the words of the story a richer meaning than they would have were they rewritten into a more common essay form.

And as for the words themselves -- the fictionalized voices of two great American artists -- they too go further than being simply fictitious creations. Indeed, they are born from the artists' own writings. In particular, Anton directly cites and successfully takes cues from **The Philosophy of Andy Warhol : (From A to B and Back Again)** (1977, Harvest Books, \$14, 9780156717205) and **Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings** (1996, University of California Press, \$34.95, 9780520203853).

Caveats about novelty aside, it is the novelty of this brazenly imagined book that will get many to read it in the first place -- Many who might not otherwise take the concerted effort Anton does in exploring the seemingly unlikely collusion of these two powerhouses of American art.

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Kraus and Anton are both unquestionably intelligent. Instead of lording that intelligence over others, or perhaps worse, choosing to share it only with the select few that might understand it at its most unfiltered, each writes with an originality and humility that makes their work an entertaining and rewarding joy to read.

Appropriately, at least one facet of their unique approach to arts writing is captured by Anton's own fictionalized Robert Smithson:

*Criticism doesn't just show art. It shows how to see it.... If I were the editor of an art magazine, there would be no images. Art writing is already guilty of acting as if it were television, bringing what is far away close. Instead, I would worry about how to preserve the distance between language and things. So long as art writing is just describing, it hasn't said anything, a disservice that artists should take as an insult.*

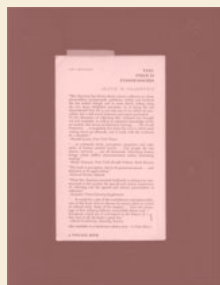
No insult here.

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Because most of our early project books have been previously published and then gone out of print, we can republish works that people already like. Take for example, these *New York Times* favorites:



***The Proud Possessors*, by Aline Saarinen:** "[Saarinen] has demonstrated that she is not only one of our ablest art journalists, but a deft social historian and expert portraitist.... [The story of American art collecting] could, of course, be told more thoroughly than Mrs. Saarinen has done it, but it is most unlikely that it could be told more entertainingly, with better grace, or with less of the condescension that so often characterizes the work of historians of taste."

--*The New York Times*, November 9, 1958. [Read more about this project and download a sample of the text.](#)



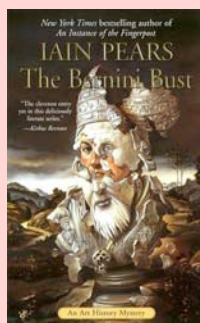
***This is the Hour*, by Lion Feuchtwanger:** "When a competent novelist chooses for his subject a great and turbulent painter who lived in a dramatic age; when he surrounds him with a gallery of vivid contemporaries; when he entwines their lives with the life of his hero and his life with theirs, it is highly probable that he will produce an intense, exciting book.... Such is the achievement of Lion Feuchtwanger in his thirteenth and most recent novel, *This is the*

*Hour* -- the June selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club." --*The New York Times*, May 20, 1951. [Read more about this project and download a sample of the text.](#)

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## The Secreted World

### THE ART MYSTERIES OF IAIN PEARS



Running in a not-so-quiet torrent under the traditional world of art historical writing is a guiltily-entertaining and surprisingly extensive world of art mysteries. Iain Pears, is one of this diverting sub-genre's most prolific authors.

The bulk of Pears's forays into art mysteries are with a series of seven books based around the character Johnathan Argyll, a smart, slightly clumsy but well-intentioned art scholar and sometimes dealer. In at least the first three books, Argyll meets up with Flavia di Stefano and General Bottando of the Italian police's art squad, for some good ol' fashioned, old master hijinks.

Though the series probably need not be read in order, the first are ***The Raphael Affair*** (1998, Berkley, \$6.99, 9780425166130) ***The Titian Committee*** (1999, Berkley, \$6.99, 9780425168950), and ***The Bernini Bust*** (out of print). Each includes attempted or realized art theft, cunning and not-so-cunning art forgery, and of course, healthy doses of murder

not so cunning art forgery, and of course, healthy doses of murder and deceit.

For the art-obsessed, while you might think the first one or two are merely enjoyable romps, be careful, by the third you may well find yourself secretly caring what happens to our intrepid characters. Will Jonathan and Flavia get together? Will Bottando be able to keep his art squad together and funded despite unceasing pressure from the Italian government? Will curators, museum directors, dealers and academics alike continue to kill, lie and cheat over daubs of paint on canvas?

And for the the art novice? It wouldn't be surprising to hear that a Pears reader paused a little longer at that [Titian](#) in the permanent collection, or actually read the wall label by that [Raphael](#). Granted, their thoughts might quickly turn away from thoughts of Renaissance studio practices to those of art theft, forgery and the murder of a mysterious curator... but we all have to start somewhere.

#### **The Other Jonathan Argyll Art Mysteries:**

- *The Last Judgement*, Iain Pears (Hardcover only: 1995, Scribner, \$21, 9781572830011)
- *Giotto's Hand*, Iain Pears (out of print)
- *Death and Restoration*, Iain Pears (2000, Berkley, \$6.50, 9780006498759)
- *The Immaculate Deception*, Iain Pears (2005, Scribner, \$13.00, 9780743272414)

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